

The Jesuit Refugee Service is present in 45 countries.

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The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is present in 45 countries and takes care of more than 700 thousand people. This was said by Father Thomas Smolich, international director of the Jesuit Refugee Service, who spoke this morning, at the Encounters organized by the European Confederation of former pupils of the Jesuits, at the LUMSA University in Rome. The theme of the meeting, which started last Wednesday is: "Global Migration and refugee crisis. It 'time to contemplate and act ". The goal is to promote a greater commitment of the alumni of the Jesuits in helping the migrants. Tomorrow they will have an audience with the Pope, who has always dedicated great attention to the plight of those fleeing from poverty and violence: a total of over 65 million people worldwide. Debora Donnini interviewed Father Smolich:

R. - The situation of migrants and refugees is a serious and an "incredible situation" due to their quantity. Pope Francis has referred a lot about the need of the Christian community to help these people in need. I think that the European continent and the whole world should respond to this situation, this crisis. The Jesuit Refugee Service works in 45 countries, where it provides education, food, accompaniment in faith and, also, after-trauma and psychological aid.

Q. - This meeting aims to create the possibility of a gathering between the Jesuit Refugee Service, and the European Confederation of former Alumni of the Jesuits, to promote knowledge of this subject ...

R. - I think the alumni, thanks to their experience gained in schools and Jesuit universities, already have the ability to see the situation from an Ignatian perspective. After this gathering, there will be more opportunities to help, because the alumni participate in events in favor of refugees.

D. - Therefore, there are even more people who take care of the refugees...

R. - Yes, because of the existence of offices of the Jesuit Refugee Service in almost all European countries, there are many possibilities that the alumni help in Europe.

Q. - There are two important issues when it comes to refugees and migrants: one is welcoming them in European countries; the other is to help people in their places of origin, creating jobs...

R. - I think it is important that Europe offers more welcoming to refugees, also, education. And that education is essential to a future that is better than the past!

The meeting organized in Rome by the European Confederation of Alumni of the Jesuits is centered, in fact, in the issue of refugees. This is confirmed by the head of the European Confederation himself, José-Enrique Rebés, interviewed by Debora Donnini:

R. – What we first did was to organize these European Encounter of Jesuit Alumni, where what we do is analyze, observe and act - which is a bit 'the motto of the Congress - on all the problems involving refugees and migrants arriving in Europe. So, we are in the first phase of divulgation of these issues among the alumni. We also signed an agreement with the Jesuit Service for Refugees, to spread in all alumni associations of the Jesuits in Europe, all the activities that the Jesuit Refugee Service does, so that former pupils are aware of all the issues, about how the Service is helping on them, and then, that they can work as volunteers, make donations or, in some way, do more.

D. - More than 700,000 people received help in the world by the Jesuit Refugee Service ...

R. – Exactly! Yes, they are many people around the world. It 'clear that here in Europe we only see the drama of the refugees crossing the Mediterranean from southern countries and the Middle East countries. We must, however, think that around the world there are hundreds of thousands of refugees, to which the media do not pay as much attention than to those who are crossing now through Europe, but who are suffering in the same way. Thousands of people who die each year. Only in the Mediterranean it is estimated that 6000 people died yearly in the recent years. And this year, we have already exceeded the figure of 6000. It is estimated that at the end of the year there will be more dead, while crossing the Mediterranean, and many are children, families. In addition, all those who are in refugee camps in Europe or outside Europe, particularly in Turkey or in countries bordering the European Union, are trying to move to the European Union, simply to find a life bit safe and dignified.

Q. - You as former pupil of the Jesuits in Europe have responded to the Pope who has spoken of refugees as "flesh of Christ" and asked with great vigor to the Church to help and welcome them. Yours is a response to this invitation from the Pope?

R. - Certainly, it is an answer. Moreover, in this first phase of dissemination, what we want is to continue to work together in each European country with the Jesuit Refugee Service, in all the activities that it carries on, even continuous education. Tomorrow we will be received by the Pope, because for him it is important to the whole issue and the plight of refugees. We are very happy for him to receive us and the truth is that, we feel he is very close to us!