



The Holy See

**VIDEO MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 35th ANNIVERSARY OF THE CENTRO ASTALLI
RUN BY THE JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE**

19 April 2016

Beloved Refugees, Dear Volunteers, Workers and Friends of Centro Astalli,

In this Year of Mercy, we are celebrating 35 years of the Jesuit Refugee Service in Italy, an activity that has been first and foremost a journey together, as one people. This is beautiful and just!

We must continue with courage: *“I was a stranger and you welcomed me”* (cf. Mt 25:35).

I was a stranger... Each one of you, the refugees who knock at our doors, bears the face of God, is the flesh of Christ. Your experience of sorrow and hope reminds us that we are all strangers and pilgrims on this Earth, generously welcomed by someone and by no merit of our own. Whoever, like you, has fled his homeland for reasons of oppression, war, nature disfigured by pollution and desertification, or the unjust distribution of natural resources: this is the brother with whom to share bread, home and life. Too many times have we failed to welcome you! Forgive the closedness and indifference of our societies who fear the change in life and mentality that your presence requires. Though treated as a burden, a problem, a cost, you are really a gift. You are witnesses to how *our kind and merciful God* can transform the evil and injustice which you suffer into a good for all. For every one of you can be a bridge that unites distant peoples, that makes possible the encounter between diverse cultures and religions, a way to rediscover our common humanity.

... and you welcomed me. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Yes, the Centro Astalli is a concrete and daily example of this welcome born from the prophetic vision of Fr Pedro Arrupe, the refugee centre in Asia, which was his “swan song”. Thank you all, women and men, lay people

and religious, workers and volunteers, because you show by your deeds that if we journey together the road is less intimidating.

I encourage you to continue. Thirty-five years is only the beginning of a journey that is becoming ever more necessary, the only way for a reconciled coexistence. May you always be witnesses to the beauty of encounter. May you help our society to hear the voice of refugees.

Continue to walk bravely at their side, accompany them and let yourselves be guided by them as well: refugees know the ways that lead to peace because they know the acrid odour of war.