

"Angels for the forgotten"

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On 8 December 2022, Fatima found herself on the Geo Barents rescue vessel. She was exhausted, along with her three children. She was already in her ninth month.

At 11.31 a.m. that day, after seven hours of labour, she gave birth to Ali, who weighed 3.5 kilos.

The day before, Fatima and her three children, along with 90 other people, were on a different boat, adrift and at risk of sinking.

The rescue crew of the Geo Barents came to their aid. Along-side Fatima was another woman who was also in her ninth month of pregnancy.

All the rescued people including the newly-born Ali, remained for several days on the boat waiting for a country to offer them a safe harbour where they could regain their strength.



Assistance to Ali. Presse office Médecins Sans Frontières

I think of these two pregnant women, accompanied by their children, driven to leave their land, their shelter, their families and to risk their own lives trying to reach a land of peace for them and their loved ones. We also know that in order to reach these "lucky" ships they would have had to sell everything they had, and suffered all kinds of humiliations and abuses on the way, at the hands of all those who do business in the misery of others. And as if that were not enough, when they are finally rescued, nobody wants to receive them. Another slap in the face of inhumanity. "We don't want them" is the message. Nor does all that they have suffered count when they are finally informed that they are not worthy of being received in a land that could offer them peace and the possibility of a more peaceful life. I confess that I am pained and ashamed of the degree of inhumanity that we are capable of. At the same time, these two women encourage me not to lose hope in human beings, to see the courage of those who risk everything they are and have for their loved ones, and the dedication of those rescue teams to try to save some lives in that vast cemetery that are the routes of the Mediterranean Sea.

On 9 December 2022, Congolese gynaecologist and 2018 Nobel Peace Prize winner Denis Mukwege was received by Pope Francis. Mukwege has spent a large part of his medical service in the Nord-Kivu area - in the north-east of the Democratic Republic of Congo - at the border with Rwanda. A war has been raging there for more than 25 years. Among other things, Rwandan troops attack villages, murder civilians of all ages and rape women. And

the motives are not tribal disputes. They are economic motives. The area is home to the largest reserves of minerals, including coltan, which is used to make mobile phones and computers, and cobalt, which is used to make batteries. While frightened populations are leaving the area, others are taking advantage of the situation to extract the minerals. Once again, the lucrative business of a few is carried out at the expense of the misery of multitudes and for years. And this war is one of those forgotten wars that we know exist, but nobody talks about, except for a voice like that of Denis Mukwege's who speaks on behalf of the forgotten and humiliated. He asks: Why are there some wars that we know so much about and others that are not even mentioned? More than 6 million have died in this war. Why are some dead considered to be more worthy than others who are not even mentioned or remembered? Faced with such "humanism of variable geometry" - which Mukwege denounces - this doctor and Protestant pastor is committed to a "Church that is at the side of the suffering man and woman".

When Jesus was born, nothing distinguished him from any other child born in those days. He was even more invisible because his parents were passing through a city that was not theirs and were staying in a stable. It was the angel of the Lord who drew this fact out of anonymity and announced it to those who do not frequent the temple, to the shepherds. He announced tidings of great joy to them: Jesus, the one awaited, appears in the form of a child wrapped in swaddling clothes, whom they will find in a stable.

Messengers for those to whom nobody speaks, to the forgotten, messengers who announce good news. At the beginning of this coming year, we could propose to be a little like those **angels** who rescue lives, who help to give birth to the hope of the poor, who heal the wounds of women and children who have been abused or who report on those forgotten lives or wars. And may our life and our word be Good News for them and may our houses be shelters of humanity for those who find themselves homeless in our streets and cities, with no other baggage than their sufferings on their backs.

Faternally

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