

Speech Kees Zevenbergen, Unveiling of the refugee monument at 'Church of Our Saviour'.

Sunday 25 April 2021

Good morning dear friends,

On behalf of Cordaid a very warm welcome to the unveiling ceremony of the statue to commemorate the many 'unknown refugees' – those who have fled misery in their own countries and who died whilst trying to reach safety.

As you may know, Cordaid is a Dutch international development organisation, and we provide humanitarian relief and development assistance in the most fragile countries and regions of this world. Countries in and out of conflict, with people fleeing war, violence and persecution.

People like Fatim, Oumar and their four children, who fled Sudan and were among the 110 people that drowned last September, when their boat collapsed close to Sabratha off the coast of Libya. Only 9 people could be saved by a local fisherman.

Or people like Nohom Mehari and Kidus Yohannes from Ethiopia, who were among 12 young men that drowned when their boat was pushed back to Libya by the Maltese and Italian coast guards a year ago. Young people with dreams, hopes and aspirations. People like you and me, loved by the same creator.

According to the United Nations, since 2014 more than 20,000 migrants and refugees have died at sea while trying to reach Europe from Africa, making the Central Mediterranean the most dangerous migration route in the world. Many others died 'in transit', somewhere in Africa, before even reaching the Mediterranean.

Cordaid thanks Father Sjaak de Boer for taking the initiative for this monument for all the refugees and migrants, often unknown, that died in their attempts to reach Europe. A continent that, in the words of Pope Francis, should welcome, protect, promote and integrate migrants and refugees. An approach quite different from the current 'Fortress Europe' policies that have resulted in so many thousands of tragedies.

Cordaid hopes this monument will bring people of all corners and faiths together in mourning the deceased, remembering their souls, but also to call on the responsible authorities for migration policies that are safe and humane. Let this monument be both a place for commemoration and a call to action!

Thank you.