

How an Egyptian Sheikh is saving tortured refugees held by traffickers in the Sinai



(Vatican Radio, 24 May 2013) Mohammed Ali Hassan Awwad is an Egyptian Sheikh who has saved the lives of hundreds of refugees who had been kidnapped and tortured by people traffickers in the Sinai desert. During a visit to Radio Vatican Sheikh Mohammed described the terrible ordeal of these refugees, the vast majority of whom are Eritrean Christians.

Below is the text of the report by Susy Hodges:

"The kidnap and torture of refugees by people traffickers in Egypt's Sinai desert has been going on for years but according to the UN is one of the most un-reported humanitarian crises in the world. Each year, tens of thousands of refugees from eastern Africa make the perilous journey to Egypt where many of them fall into the hands of unscrupulous people traffickers in the Sinai who detain them in appalling conditions, torture them and demand ransom money from their families. But now thanks to the courageous efforts of the Egyptian human rights activist Sheikh Mohammad and his associates, this brutal trade in innocent human beings has been reduced by 70 percent. During his visit to Vatican Radio Sheikh Mohammed described how these traffickers operate and the torture they practice on their victims.

"He says the traffickers would often ask for as much as 30 to 40 thousand dollars in ransom money for their release. Their strategy was to get a refugee to ring up their parents to ask them to pay the ransom and at that point the traffickers would set fire to plastic objects and burn the refugees with the drops of molten plastic in order that their screams of pain would pressurize the parents to pay up. Sheikh Mohammed said another common torture method was to chain a group of refugees together on the floor, pour water over them and then electrocute the water.

Even small children are being held by these traffickers and like the adults are often starved and ill- treated or have seen their mothers being raped by their captors. Sheikh Mohammed has been shot at and had arsonists try to burn down his house but has not flinched from his campaign to try to rescue and care for the refugees. Since he began his work, around 500 refugees have been saved by him. The vast majority of the refugees are fleeing from repression in Eritrea and about 90 percent of these Eritreans are Christians."

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/05/24/how_an_egyptian_sheikh_is_saving_tortured_refugees_held_b/en1-695219
Vatican Radio website