**Immigration/EU: Clandestine Immigrants the ‘Slaves of Modern Times’**

By Ricardo Bordalo (text) and Omar Camilo (photos) - Lusa Agency

Dakar, Oct. 8 (Lusa) – Joseph N’Diaye, the curator of the House of Slaves on Gore Island, Senegal, considers the current wave of clandestine immigration to Europe from the West African coast to be “the slavery of modern times.”

N’Diaye, recognized as a “living archive” and the author of several books on the subject, tells Lusa in Gore about the “deep sadness” he feels in detecting a “clear parallel” between slavery and clandestine immigration.

“There are thousands of youths, without any job training, without family, without any certainty about what awaits them, without security, who depart in fragile boats, dying by the hundreds on the voyage to Europe,” N’Diaye says.

For this historian and curator of the House of Slaves, a fortress built by the Dutch in the 18th century, which served as a quarantine camp for “thousands and thousands of African women, men and children” taken by force to Europe and the Americas, “the difference between the two slaveries is that in modern times it arises as an option.”

When one seeks to define slavery, terms such as suffering, death, disease or humiliation are recurrent, but they are the same words that may be used to describe today’s slavery, according to Joseph N’Diaye.

As in the past, the “new slaves,” even though “slaves by choice,” don’t know what they will find, “don’t know if they will arrive, if they will die, many don’t even know how to swim, their pirogues (dugout canoes) are certainly fragile and insecure, they face hunger and thirst,” he says.

“I fell a deep sadness when people tell me about this phenomenon of clandestine immigration, and, when I go abroad to conferences on slavery, the last one in Algiers (the capital of Algeria), I don’t tire of reminding those who listen to me that what we are witnessing is a repetition of history,” he stresses.

Noting that “the times are different, the situations different, though with a similar content,” he recalls that many of the departing youths are “equally exploited, often mistreated and humiliated because they have no job training and are obliged to accept everything under any condition.”

From the so-called “Door of No Return,” which links the House of Slaves to the sea and through which thousands of slaves boarded ships headed to the Americas and Europe from Gore Island, less than 20 minutes by boat from Dakar, one can see some of the fishing villages and beaches near the Senegalese capital from where clandestine immigrants part today for the Canary Islands.

On the same beaches in view of the Door of No Return, one finds dozens of pirogues lying idle amid the sand due to a lack of fishermen because these were among the first waves of the Senegalese and African exodus to Europe.

Today, those parting in search of the European “paradise” are essentially youths from the interior of Senegal and neighboring countries, like Mali, Guinea-Conakry or Guinea-Bissau.

The European Union has activated a vigilance system (Frontex), using air, sea and land components, along the coasts of Mauritania and Senegal with the aid of these two countries to try to staunch the African exodus.

Spain and France are investing 20 million euros and 2.5 million euros, respectively, in a job creation program in Senegal to provide youths with an alternative to immigration.

They also sponsor awareness campaigns to alert against the dangers of clandestine immigration.

Despite the efforts to stop this “new slavery,” which could lead to the rise of new global realities, Joseph N’Diaye forecasts that it will only come to an end when “there no longer is poverty in so many, many countries while in other quarters people live in wealth.”

The first Europeans to occupy Gore Island, where Lusa spoke to Joseph N’Diaye, were Portuguese, who arrived in 1444 and named the place Ilha da Palma, or palm island.

Gore was later occupied successively by the English and the Dutch. The French then took over and ruled Senegal up to independence on April 4, 1960.

Today the island is an UNESCO World Heritage site.

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