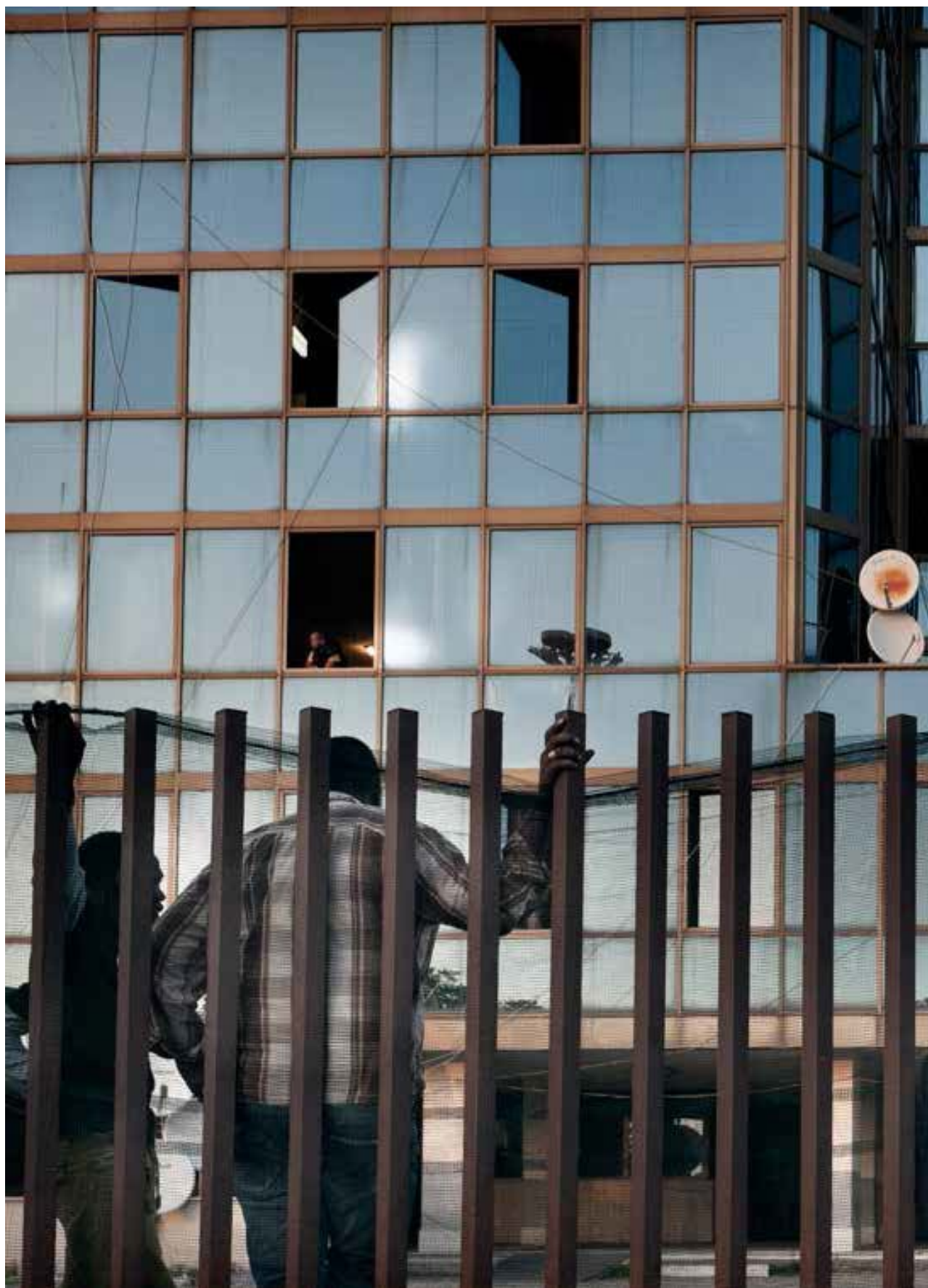


Palazzo Selam: the invisible city

hensa deqi hedertena

REPORT
June 2014









Cittadini del Mondo is an independent, non-profit, voluntary organisation whose aim is to oppose any form of social discrimination and exclusion, and to promote equal treatment for first and second generation immigrants. Since 2006 the Association has run a social and medical help desk at Selam Palace, a building on the southern outskirts of Rome inhabited by approximately 1,200 political refugees. Every Thursday evening from 7 pm to 10.30 the Association's volunteers offer medical assistance and advice on how to access public health and other social services to which they have right of access.

To the Horn of Africa, where we have never been.

To the residents of Selam, who for the past eight years have both brightened our lives and exhausted us, whose stories, ways of doing things, grumpiness and smiles have both astonished us and opened our minds.

To all those who have shared and continue to share our Thursday evenings.

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Cover photograph

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Data

The data presented in this report refer exclusively to the residents of Selam Palace, and is based on questionnaires completed anonymously during the Thursday evening help desk run by Cittadini del Mondo.

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Heartfelt thanks to Open Society Foundations for providing the means and support needed to tell here, for the first time, the story of our involvement in Selam Palace.

Many thanks to all the residents of Selam and especially to the various internal and successive committees with whom we have worked for years in efforts to render it finally visible to everyone.

Table of Contents

Summary	8
Preface	11
An alternative to the street	13
How the squat began	13
The building	15
Residency in via Arrigo Cavaglieri 8	17
The population: an analysis of the data	20
Integration on the margins: access to social services	22
The National Health Service	22
The story of B	24
Social services	25
School	25
The story of G	26
Work	26
Questura	27
The story of D	27
Italian at Selam Palace	28
Ill-health and poverty	29
Factors affecting the health of Selam residents	29
Health problems observed in patients attending the Cittadini del Mondo help-desk	30
Factors affecting medical treatment and the doctor-patient relationship	33
Preventative health measures as a strategy for integration	35
The migrant emergency and Selam	36
April-May 2014: General analysis of new arrivals data	38
Conclusions	39
Contributions	41
The main legal problems, contribution of A Buon Diritto Onlus	41
Contribution of Filiberto Zavarese, Legal Clinic	43
The Seventh Municipality meets Selam Palace, contribution of Susanna Fantino, President of the Seventh Municipality	44
Contribution of Andrea de Bonis, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	46

Summary

Selam Palace is an occupied building on the southern outskirts of Rome. Almost all of its approximately 1,200 inhabitants are holders of some form of protection under international law who have lived in Rome for five years or more without being welcomed or integrated into the city; in Selam Palace they have found a home.

For the past eight years Cittadini del Mondo has been running a medical and social help desk at Selam, and for years has followed the fortunes and misfortunes of the building. Thanks to the testimony of its residents, this report reconstructs the strange history of an occupation that was first legal, then illegal and finally totally abandoned along with the building itself that over the years has become ever more derelict.

For the inhabitants of Selam Palace the fact that they have been totally abandoned by the authorities has meant among other things that they are unable to establish right of residence in their place of actual domicile, and therefore cannot access nearby public services, such as schools and medical services. Thanks to the work of Cittadini del Mondo and UNHCR, and just 6 years after the occupation, this *impasse* was resolved; but the recent Lupi Decree, which denies right of residence in illegally occupied buildings, has taken us back to square one.

All those who have come to the help desk have done so because they are unable to access public services unless an association acts as intermediary. And yet 76% of those Cittadini nel Mondo helps have been living in Italy for over five years. When they do try to access public services, many of them are misunderstood; officials seem unable to comprehend complex situations. The fact that the inhabitants of Selam have to use services provided by a different municipality because they are not entitled to them in the municipality in which they live, means that they have to make many journeys across the city.

None of those helped by Cittadini del Mondo has managed to become a real part of the social fabric of the city in which they have lived for years; as a result staying closed within Selam Palace is the only way they have of feeling at home.

Yet this building was not built to be lived in, and over the years it has been modified over and over again to create new rooms and mini-apartments, a process that has rendered it increasingly unsafe. Repeated waves of new arrivals have resulted in overcrowding and put its sanitary facilities under enormous pressure. The Association's doctors have found that many health problems are being exacerbated by living conditions in the building, and by the difficulty of gaining access to and communicating with the public health services. The worst cases are chronic diseases that are not followed up consistently, and psychological disorders that are generally not considered worth continuous clinical monitoring.

Despite this alarming situation, made worse in recent months by hundreds of new arrivals on the Italian coast, Selam Palace remains invisible to the city's institutions. Far from the centre of Rome,

and indeed from the nearest residential quarter, its very existence has been easy to ignore. Residents have told us that they feel like *hedertena* – invisible ghosts.

We hope that as a result of this report Selam Palace will no longer be ignored, and that those who live there will no longer be left to their own devices.

Cittadini del Mondo asks:

- that the competent authorities make a serious attempt to negotiate with Enarsco, the owners of the building, for the assignment of Selam Palace to the community which has lived there for the past eight years;
- that, once the question of residence has been resolved, the social services of the Seventh Municipal District of Rome recognise the number of political refugees on its territory and take effective measures for integrating them;
- that the Roma B ASL make its services accessible to migrants, offering a translation and interpreting service, reinforcing essential services in sectors such as mental health, setting up an advisory service and surgery for STPs (non-Italian nationals temporarily present on Italian territory);
- that Selam Palace be rendered less isolated from the rest of the city and from its district, by improving public transport and decentralising essential services, such as Italian language courses;
- that, in co-management with the inhabitants of Selam, plans be drawn up and put into effect for a canteen in or near the building ;
- that Rome City Council draw up and put into effect a plan for receiving refugees which does more than provide emergency services on first arrival: a plan including measures for integrating refugees into the city as a whole and preventing other Selam Palaces from proliferating on its territory.



Preface

Luigi Manconi

President of the Italian Parliamentary Committee for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights

In July 2013 I and a group of Italian M.P.s visited Selam Palace, an occupied building on the outskirts of Rome which takes its name from the Aramaic word for 'peace'. At the moment of writing the building is inhabited by over 1,000 people from the Horn of Africa, many of them holders of some form of international protection on Italian territory. Some are refugees as defined by the 1951 Geneva Convention as a person persecuted in his/her country of origin for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or for his/her political opinions.

The main problem shared by all the inhabitants of Selam Palace is that of officially certifying that they live there. Since the building was first occupied, in 2006, the number of residents has grown so dramatically that last summer the Commissioner for Human Rights for the Council of Europe, Nils Muiznieks, went there to see for himself how Italy treats its refugees. In his final report Muiznieks openly criticised the social exclusion of seekers of international protection, and the terrible condition of our "uneven and patchy" reception facilities. In an interview published in the *Financial Times* he stated that "800 people live in conditions of total abandon, with one bathroom for every 250 people, and without help of any kind. There is no satisfactory system of social protection and integration and many political refugees and asylum seekers, even when they meet residence requirements, end up living in conditions of extreme exclusion. Living conditions at Selam Palace also constitute a serious, on-going emergency which has shaken public opinion to the extent that the President of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, made special mention of it in his New Year's Message.

One cannot but agree with the President's concern, especially when one remembers that, even though the dramatic living conditions at Selam Palace and in similar settlements are self-evident, the state system for receiving refugees is patently inefficient. Investment in reception projects aimed to make refugees self-supporting remain very inadequate. The SPRAR programme for the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees has been enlarged five times since 2012 to the point that today it is intended to cater for 13,000 people - but without any corresponding increase in resources. The programme was devised to offer not merely food and lodging in centres but also integration services. User numbers are published annually, and testify to the positive effects the programme has had on the lives of migrants, and on society in general. Investing in initial reception facilities means reducing the risk of people subsequently living outside the law. At the very start of reception refugees must be given the chance to tell the story of their flight, the reasons which induced them to seek refuge in our country. Reception enables them to regain their health and energy and invest in a future for themselves. If no such opportunity is offered, the consequences may be dire. There have been numerous examples of integration programmes which have failed precisely because no account has been taken of the needs of people trying to come to grips with a country of which they know nothing. The contradictions, difficulties and hopes created by situations of this kind are all clearly visible in Salem Palace and its like. The Cittadini del Mondo Association has for years been running at Selam a social and medical help desk offering medical treatment and advice on access to local health and social services. The building runs itself through an internal committee of eight residents, two for each ethnic group present in the building. Life in Selam is difficult and depends on delicate, peaceful balances that are maintained thanks to the cultural backgrounds shared by its residents. But the conditions in which these refugees live are unacceptable. Hygiene facilities are totally inadequate.

The building has no hot water or heating. To wash, residents have to heat water on the gas rings they use for cooking. It follows inevitably that respiratory and skin conditions, from dermatitis to scabies, occur, as do stress-related gastroenterological problems. There are those who still suffer from shock caused by war, by torture, and by sea-crossings. There are those who need psychiatric treatment but are not always able to ask for it. Public services are totally absent. And little or nothing is being done to guarantee the inhabitants of Selam Palace any form of social integration, help in searching for jobs, access to services or citizens' rights.

The situation at Selam Palace cruelly reflects our country's failure with respect to refugees. Italy has indeed proved singularly ungenerous in terms of the numbers of refugees it hosts - equivalent to one tenth of those taken in by Germany. If one also takes into account the differences between the two countries, and especially the effects of German reunification, the gap is even wider, and all the more shocking if we take account of the lessons we should be learning from our history. During the Fascist dictatorship numerous opponents of the regime fled abroad. These refugees and 'illegals' were variously welcomed by democratic governments, or persecuted by hostile regimes. Sandro Pertini, the Rosselli brothers, Gaetano Salvemini and Bruno Buozzi, Leo Valiani and Giorgio Amendola, as well as thousands and thousands of nameless Italians: politically, socially and psychologically they were very different from those now fleeing Somalia or Afghanistan, but in other ways they resemble them closely.

Nowadays we tend to misunderstand, distort and even more frequently deny the memory of that political emigration. This may be one of the reasons why Italy remains so closed and insensitive towards those who are now in turn being persecuted and forced to flee their countries because of their ideas or their ethnic, religious or political identities.

An Alternative to the Street

Question to a person who has just received refugee status and is leaving a reception centre for asylum seekers for the last time

Question: *And now where will you go?*

Reply: *Italy's a big country!*

Selam Palace, a building near the suburb known as the Romanina on the south side of the city of Rome, has been a squat since 2006. Its occupants are not ordinary citizens or migrants, but people entitled to protection under international law, that is people whose status as political refugees has been recognised or who have been granted subsidiary protected status. If they have fled their countries of origin, for the most part in the Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan) it is for grave reasons: war, political or religious persecution, famine and other causes that have made it impossible to continue to live in peace in their own countries. These people need to be protected, welcomed and given the chance to become part of the country of arrival and begin to re-build a decent life for themselves.

As things are at the moment in Italy, the process of integrating refugees goes no further than a brief period in a reception centre. Once forced migrants have arrived on Italian territory and applied for asylum they are taken to one of the reception centres for asylum seekers (Centri d'Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo – CARA) where they remain until their applications have been processed by the territorial committee; once entitlement to international protection has been granted there is no provision for integration and many of them end up living on the street.

The reception centres that do exist in Rome have waiting lists months long, and very few accept families; at best stays are limited to a maximum of one year. Of the people helped by Cittadini del Mondo at Selam Palace, 73% stated that they had never received accommodation of any kind in Rome.

For many refugees from Africa, Selam Palace represents the only concrete alternative to the street.

How the squat began

As a squat Selam Palace came into being when another famous Roman squat, Hotel Africa, was cleared in 2006. Four hundred people living there in smaller groups occupied other buildings on the outskirts of Rome; the result was the San Basilio centre in via Scorticabove, now inhabited by about 120 Sudanese, and Selam Palace.

Initially 250 people moved into what is now known as Selam Palace, which had previously housed the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Rome Tor Vergata. They were immediately cleared out and taken to a big tent that formed a makeshift reception centre, but they protested

vigorously and the authorities were forced to offer alternative accommodation on the top two floors of Selam Palace; the rest of the building was walled up.



As part of the Rome (migrant views and memories) Project, new Italian citizens were asked which part of the city best represented them. Bahar, who lives in Selam, chose Termini Station because "I've spent a lot of time there. I go past it 2-3 hours a day. I meet people at Termini. When I need things I go to Termini. I wanted it photographed from the via Giolitti entrance. It's beautiful."

The inhabitants of the Palace tried to begin a self-management project - contacting volunteer architects to draw up plans for the work to be done; but internal divisions among the different groups of occupants held up the process, and since the building had not been designed for residential use, project costs were beyond the financial resources of the local council.

The City Council then tried to find alternatives for the residents, and after a visit to the Palace by the Minister for Welfare, Ferrero, funds were assigned for transferring them to new reception centres. But when permission for a delegation of residents to visit those centres was denied, the inhabitants refused to leave; the buses for the transfer arrived only to find the inhabitants chained to the Palace.

After this episode, which took place in 2007, the occupation became illegal. The City Council stopped paying for utilities or concerning itself in any way with Selam. From this point on the building began to deteriorate structurally; in the meantime new groups of people continued to arrive, bringing the number of occupants to its present around 1,200.



Tor Vergata University signs in Selam Palace

The building

Selam Palace at via Arrigo Cavaglieri 8 is an enormous, nine-floor glass building. Now known as Selam Palace, it once housed the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Rome Tor Vergata.

When the building was first occupied, the City authorities walled up most of the staircases leaving access only to the top two floors; but within a few years the inhabitants had knocked down the plaster walls to make new mini-apartments. Any nook or cranny out of which it is possible to make a room has now been used by the residents, so that the original layout of the building is practically unrecognisable.

Because the building was not designed for residential use but for offices and classrooms, its sanitary services have never been sufficient or suitable for such a large, permanent population: there were no showers, no kitchen sinks, no connections for washing machines.

Over time the inhabitants have installed these fittings, but as a consequence the piping and drains have become seriously over-stretched.

Of the original six columns of toilet facilities, four consisted of two small lobbies and two toilets each, the other two lobbies and four toilets. Originally therefore each floor had sixteen toilets, making a total of 128 for the whole building.

Since then washbasins and some washing-machines have been installed in the lobbies. Some W.C.s have been transformed into 'Turkish' style toilets, others into showers and even bedrooms. There are today only 55 toilets, 36 showers and 37 lobbies, facilities totally insufficient for the present residents of Selam. Essentially there is one toilet for every 19 people, and one shower for every 33.

The situation has now become extremely serious and dangerous; of the six columns three are leaking from the fifth floor onto those below, resulting in short circuits and causing plaster and even rubble to crumble.



The building is in a dangerous condition and receives no maintenance. There are frequent floods and even fires.

Residency in via Arrigo Cavaglieri 8

A person's residence is the place in which he or she habitually lives. This is extremely important in Italy for people who wish to integrate into the local community because it allows you to register with the health service (SSN) and to access social services. Holders of protection status also require residence to be able to complete the bureaucratic procedures involved in applying for work permits, political asylum status, family reunification and renewals of status.

When Selam was first occupied and there was still some dialogue between the inhabitants and the city and municipal councils, about 350 people were able to obtain residence permits at Via Arrigo Cavaglieri 8; but once the occupation became illegal and relations with the authorities were broken off, most of these residence permits were cancelled.

The only alternative for the tenants of Selam was to apply for so-called virtual addresses, that is fictional residence whose only function is to allow those of no fixed abode to access basic public services. The virtual addresses are Via Astalli 14, Via Dandolo 10 and Via Giolitti 225, all in the First Municipal District, which is very far from the place where the residents of Selam Palace actually live.

Since that time the inhabitants of Selam Palace have not been allowed to use the services available in the area in which they in fact live; they can neither register with the local health services nor get their children admitted to a nearby school, as the right to attend a school depends on the municipality of residence.

The most worrying aspect of all this is the reason given by the municipal registry office for refusing applications by Selam inhabitants to register as resident at their real address: via Arrigo Cavaglieri is a right of way for motor vehicles.

It was only in February 2012, after five years of insistence by the inhabitants and by Cittadini del Mondo, that the question of residence at via Arrigo Cavaglieri 8 was re-opened and dialogue resumed with the municipal registry office.

But it was to take a great deal more time to arrive at an effective solution to the problem: first each internal living unit had to be numbered for the registration/residence applications, inspectors from the *Nucleo Assistenza Emarginati* (NAE - support for excluded persons unit) had to check each unit and within 60 days confirm the inspection in a report to the registry office.

A way had to be found of reconciling these bureaucratic requirements with the inhabitants' habit of continually putting up dividing walls or creating new mini-apartments that changed unit numbering. At last, however, each inhabitant was given a unit number, and a porter service was set up to accompany the inspectors during their checks and notices of completed inspections were delivered directly to the persons concerned. As a result, the frequent rejection of applications because people could not be found ended but cavils over the numbering of units continued to hold up registration/residence permit applications.

At this point a spokesman for Selam inhabitants together with Cittadini del Mondo asked for a meeting with the local councillor responsible for social policy to discuss simpler solutions to the registration problem, such as that used in other Roman squats where the inhabitants merely furnish the registry office with a list of those who live there. The councillor refused to even meet the delegation.



Form for each building resident, showing the floor of residence and the unit number and numbered and unnumbered rooms in the building to enable inspection of residence to take place.

During the same period a representative of UNHCR, Andrea De Bonis, decided to take up the residence question and together with Cittadini del Mondo asked the councillor once again for a meeting; this time a date for a meeting was fixed, but no spokesperson for Selam and no member of the Association was invited. The meeting did not take place without the attendance of the interested parties.

A year later, in March 2013, after repeated meetings between the NAE and with the inhabitants of Selam, it was agreed that a register be compiled with the names of all the tenants and to give each resident a card showing his/her name, the floor on which he/she lived and his/her unit number.

Despite this further attempt to match the numbering of the units with the NAE inspections, the issue of residence permits remained a problem because of the unit numbering system and it was not until May and yet another meeting with the registry office taking place that it was laid down that the best method of numbering the units was to use the system used for hotel rooms (first floor 101, 102 etc.; second floor 201, etc.).

Residential addresses assigned to Selam Palace residents:

Virtually resident	46%
Via Arrigo Cavaglieri	22%
Other parts of Rome	10%
Other cities	15%
No residence	7%

The inhabitants of Selam were again forced to add to their residence applications and fill in new forms and registers – but at last the process was simplified. And yet to date only 17% of those helped by Cittadini del Mondo has managed to obtain residency at Selam; the rest have had to make do with fictitious addresses in the First Municipal District.

Now, a year later, all these efforts have again been threatened by the Lupi Decree on squats, as a result of which the issuing of residence permits has again been blocked until details have been given of how the Decree is to be applied.

The population – an analysis of the data

Persons attending the Cittadini del Mondo medical and social help desk between January 2013 and April 2014: 680

72% Men
28% Women

Nationality	M	F	
Eritrea	330	106	64%
Ethiopia	70	60	19%
Somalia	41	25	10%
Sudan	48		7%
Tot.	489	191	

Age:

18-30	38%		
31-40	43%		
>40	19%		

Main legal status of those helped:

Subsidiary protection	57%
Political refugees	25%
Humanitarian Protection	5%
Other permits (employment permits.; asylum seekers; family members)	6%
Without permit	5%
Long term residence permits	2%

Time in Italy:

<u>Years in Italy:</u>
76% >5 years
21% 1-5 years
3% <1 year

73% declared that they had received no previous form of settlement.

Women and children:

51% of women assisted are supporting children under the age of 18

12% were pregnant at the time of asking Cittadini nel Mondo for information.

42% of the women with children under five turned to Cittadini nel Mondo in connection with their children's medical problems.

Integration on the Margins: access to social services

Beneficiaries of international protection have the same rights to public services as any Italian citizen. Selam inhabitants are almost all holders of some form of international protection, and 73% have lived in Italy for over 5 years. Yet over half of those now living in the building are excluded from using these services because they do not understand them, and because they are themselves not understood.

Very few public offices have a cultural mediator; at best a mediator is present only sporadically. The people running the offices do not know the procedure for dealing with holders of international protection; for example, none of the local health offices (ASL), except that of the First Municipal District, realise that the receipt given to asylum seekers is an identity card, because it shows only the holder's name and not also his/her photograph.

The total lack of any reception policy, together with these continual difficulties with access to local public services, prevent political refugees becoming part of society and results in their permanent exclusion. It is only the human factor and the actions of individuals and of associations acting as intermediaries between users and local services that fill these huge lacunae in Italian reception.

The National Health Service

35% of our patients live permanently at Selam Palace. Of those attending Cittadini del Mondo help desk who were not registered with the national health service, 32% had medical cards which were out of date, 14% had cards valid for medical services in other cities, and of these more than half did not understand the importance of a medical card.

This apparent carelessness about gaining access to the national health system is caused mainly by patients' ignorance about their right to health care, and also by the bureaucratic and physical difficulties that beneficiaries of international protection encounter in registering with the national health service, which often make them so discouraged that only in an emergency do they seek medical treatment.

Registration with the national health service takes place at the local health offices (ASL) of the area in which a person is resident according to his or her identity card, and for a large number of those living at Selam Palace that means a virtual residence (Via degli Astalli, Via Giolitti, Via Dandolo). As already explained, these addresses are all in the First Municipal District of Rome and the ASL for that district is ASL Rome A in via Luzatti 8, in the centre of the city.

These fictional addresses enable a beneficiary of international protection who has arrived in Rome to obviate the initial problem of lack of domicile, and ensure that he or she can obtain immediate access to health services.

At a later stage, however, the problem with obtaining a residence permit for the place where they actually live, Selam Palace, is a real obstacle to access to health services. Although Selam cannot be

considered a permanent home, it has offered many a stable solution over time and will probably continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Hence the need to recognise it as the official residence of thousands of beneficiaries of international protection.

People registered with ASLs other than those in their municipality of actual residence find it difficult to access national health services first and foremost because of the distances involved.

Moreover the use of fictional addresses prevents ASL RM B, the local health office responsible for the Romanina area from recognising the presence on its territory of a huge population of refugees, and thus from making its services available to those beneficiaries of international protection. The fact that the inhabitants of Selam Palace do not officially exist on its territory is in effect used by the ASL RM B as an excuse not to update its healthcare services to bring them more into line with the needs of the large number of immigrants living in the area.

Even those who do have medical cards and have understood the importance of basic health care come up against the complexities of the organisation of local health service: language difficulties created by the absence of cultural mediators and bureaucratic problems. The system for booking appointments by telephone for instance, RECUP, calls for quite a good knowledge of Italian, but employs no interpreters or multilingual operators.

In addition, through the RECUP number 803333 one can make appointments at only 40% of the clinics in the area. Patients therefore find themselves forced to 'migrate' from one hospital to another to book examinations; as one can imagine for patients from Selam this is especially difficult.

The lack of cultural mediators is certainly one of the main obstacles to accessing health services experienced by inhabitants of Selam, as no ASL or hospital is required to have them. This constitutes an especially acute problem in surgeries, in mother and child clinics, in mental health departments and in cancer treatment centres, where the presence of cultural mediators should be considered not an optional extra but a basic necessity.

It follows from this that registration with the national health service and access to healthcare (in the first place a general practitioner) by people who are registered with it are not seen by the inhabitants of Selam as indispensable but as services to which one turns only in moments of necessity. Preventative measures, treatment of minor illnesses, routine examinations are not considered really necessary. Patients thus frequently neglect the signs and symptoms of illness for as long as they can, and when they can no longer put up with them, rather than going to a general practitioner usually turn to the health service they find easiest to understand and to access, the emergency services; as a result the pathology becomes worse and the emergency services risk being severely over-stretched. This sporadic, hit-and-miss use of health services dictated by urgent necessity constitutes a violation of the right to healthcare

The story of B.

B. is an Eritrean woman of about 45. She was one of the first inhabitants of Selam Palace, was a member of the committee which organised the occupation - not an easy position for a woman to fill – and managed to obtain a residence permit for Via Arrigo Cavaglieri 8 before the occupation became illegal. Even though she has been living in Italy since 1995, her knowledge of the language is limited because she has never managed to integrate and has remained almost wholly confined to the community of Selam Palace. When the occupation was declared illegal she lost her residence permit, and had to resort to the use of a virtual address. Soon after she lost her residence permit for the area in which she actually lived, B became ill and was forced to register with ASL Rome A, and go to the general practitioner assigned. Her poor knowledge of Italian prevented her from fully understanding how ill she neglected the instructions given her by her G.P. on the basis of his examinations. As a result B. failed to keep appointments for urgent tests, and then made repeat appointments. This considerably delayed diagnosis, which was unfortunately that of systemic tuberculosis, a form of tuberculosis which affects both lungs and bones. Because she was by now registered as resident in the First Municipality, she was unable to get even the financial help available to buy an orthopaedic corset. (In fact the First Municipality, so over-whelmed with applications for help from beneficiaries of international protection, was unable to satisfy all of them and could only partially fulfil their requirements.) Unable to work, with no financial support and in continuous pain, for two years B's only source of help was the Cittadini del Mondo Association, which wholly took on an extremely complex situation and entirely replaced the public system. Luckily, when it again became possible to obtain registration/ a residence permit at Via Arrigo Cavaglieri 8, B. managed to change municipality. She was then reimbursed for the cost of the orthopaedic corset, began receiving six-monthly financial assistance and, through the efforts of her social worker and Cittadini del Mondo, food parcels. Unfortunately she has been unable to obtain accommodation suitable to a person in her condition; B lives on the seventh floor of Selam Palace, which has no lift, and this remains the only possible roof over her head.

Social services

Social services are those services which the State provides to safeguard the welfare of the most vulnerable sections of the population. More than a quarter of the population of Selam Palace is composed of women with dependent children. In most cases these are single-parent families where the only parent is the mother who, having small children to care for full time, is unable to work. 51% of the women helped by Cittadini del Mondo have dependent children and no source of income. These families must have assigned social workers to safeguard the welfare of the minors concerned.

However, families which have been unable to register as resident in the municipality of actual domicile and possess only fictitious addresses, are forced to turn for the help they need to the First Municipality which, overburdened with applications as it is, cannot guarantee assistance to all of them. Over the years the social workers of the two municipalities concerned have begun an informal form of collaboration which, while complicated, has enabled them to follow up and monitor these families, apply for schooling/family allowances and provide hot meals if a state of indigence is declared as a result of illness. In these cases too, however, reception procedures have lost sight of rights, and it is only by the good will of the social workers themselves that these families receive any protection.

School

For Selam families with children, the procedures for registering them at schools has been anything but easy. Registration with nursery schools and pre-schools must take place in the municipality of residence, and for those who still reside officially in the First Municipality the only way to gain access to a school close to where they actually live is by obtaining a certificate of social disadvantage, which permits schooling in a different municipality; these certificates are issued by social workers who do so on their own responsibility, and therefore only out of good will.

This year even those families who have been lucky enough obtain to a residence permit for the municipality where they actually live have encountered another obstacle to registering their children at schools, namely compulsory registration online, a procedure that is unfortunately impossible for Selam residents, who have no access to internet and a poor understanding of Italian. Of the 51% of women with dependent children who are helped by the Association, 25% asked the Association to help register their children for pre-school.

Once registered at a school yet another obstacle arises: the compilation of the ISEE application form for free school meals. Normally only women look after children, but because children take their fathers' surnames, fathers need to be present when the application is completed. If the father cannot be traced and the situation is irregular, in theory there is no way that a child can obtain free school meals.

It is therefore once again only thanks to the good will of the social workers of the municipal meals service and of the school secretaries, who have included these children within the scope of a directive

devised to cover children from ROMA families, that Selam children have been able to eat at school canteens.

The Story of G.

G. is 32 years old, and Ethiopian. She has been living in Selam Palace since 2009, has two girls aged 5 and 7, and for the most part looks after them by herself, even though her husband is in Italy. Her husband has not renewed his residence permit, suffers from grave psychological as well as economic problems, and is unable to remain always with his the family and given them continuous support. The family has obtained a residence permit at via Arrigo Cavaglieri 8 however, and thus been able to register their daughters, M and R, at a pre-school near Selam. G. cannot afford to pay for their school meals. By filling in the ISEE form she would be able to apply for free meals. But there is an obstacle. The girls bear the father's surname, and his tax code must appear on the form. Their father, however, has lost his papers and the ISEE application was therefore rejected.

At the request of Cittadini del Mondo, a social worker managed to include their names among the children covered by provisions for ROMA children and as a result the two children have been able to eat at the school canteen.

Work

60% of the inhabitants of Selam Palace are unemployed; only 7% have legal work contracts. The rest undertake casual labour. The office whose task it is to help people find work in the area is the Centro Impiego Territoriale (territorial jobs centre), where people may register as unemployed. This centre, which is very near Selam, and is therefore used mainly by foreigners, has no interpreting service, which makes it impossible for them to write a CV or consult the list of jobs on offer.

Employed with a contract	25%
Employed but without a legal work contract	10%
Unemployed	65%

Questura (police station)

Over the past year Cittadini del Mondo has accompanied 62 people to the Questura in via Teofilo Patini in order to help them apply for asylum, to renew residence permits or make applications for family reunion.

Apart from communication problems (interpreters are only sporadically present), the documents issued often contain inaccurate personal details. A letter missing from a name or a mistake in a date of birth on a document can preclude access to other services. In order to prove that an applicant is *bona fide*, he or she must present a certificate issued by his/her nation of origin or issued by his/her own embassy: but a political refugee cannot safely go to his or her embassy.

The people we help often therefore prefer to make do with documents containing errors, a solution which works – until they have to renew their residence permits or apply for family reunion.

The story of D.

D. is a man of about 40 from Ethiopia. In his country he was a judge. He was forced to seek asylum in Italy in 2005 after passing a guilty verdict on a soldier who had participated in the violent suppression of student demonstrations.

D. obtained political asylum in Italy; immediately after receiving refugee status he arrived at Selam and in the space of a year found work with a cleaning service.

In 2012 he was contacted by his wife and daughter, who had in the meantime managed to reach the United States and were living in Georgia, where they too had political refugee status. D. then applied for permission to join them but as his surname contained one letter more than his daughter's the application was blocked. Only after a year and much form-filling did D manage to leave and finally join his family.

One year of stress and uncertainty made D lose 10 kilos and affected him so much that he had to take tranquillizers, something he had never done even after his traumatic flight from Ethiopia.



A Cittadini del Mondo volunteer gives Italian lessons to a Selam resident

Italian at Selam Palace

Rome has a number of area centres for adult education (CTPs), which offer Italian language lessons and courses preparing for middle school diplomas, which is the first school qualification in Italy.

CTPs are State schools and therefore the certificates they issue are valid official documents. The courses last from October to June.

There is also a network of schools for migrants, “Rete scuole migranti”, which covers all the Italian language courses for foreigners offered by volunteers and by State schools. Some CTPs charge 20-30 euros per course, others are free for refugees and certain other categories.

Cittadini del Mondo advises all those who attend its social and medical and education help desk to register with a CTP in order to learn Italian or to study for a middle school diploma, thus resolving the biggest shortcoming in the Italian reception system. Approximately 20 people showed an interest and even went to the schools to ask for information, but various factors, such as the cost of transport, the distance of these schools from those attended by their children, and incompatibility between course times and working hours have prevented them from attending.

Since January Cittadini del Mondo has been running at Selam an Italian language course which is attended by a group of people mostly over the age of 30 who have lived in Italy for over five years. Many younger women also expressed an interest in following classes but were unable to do so because they had no-one with whom to leave their children. Knowledge of the language is essential if a person is to integrate in the country in which he or she lives, and should be a priority during reception. Yet of those attending Cittadini del Mondo help desks only 23% has good command of Italian, even though most have been in Italy for over five years.

III-health and poverty

In its efforts to look after the health of the inhabitants of Selam Palace, Cittadini del Mondo has frequently come up against public opinion, which believes that political refugees carry exotic, infectious diseases.

However, the diseases Cittadini del Mondo comes across most frequently among patients who attend its health help desk are the same as those that most commonly affect the population of Italy as a whole. At Selam Palace, however, these problems are exacerbated and aggravated by the hygiene and sanitary conditions, the lack of preventative measures, early diagnosis and treatment, as well as problems deriving from the conditions under which they have travelled to Italy and which have not been treated, pathologies linked to heavy work often made worse by exploitation and lack of protection, and in addition diseases caused by stress, somatic illnesses, and psychiatric conditions.

With the exception of the problems caused by the conditions under which refugees travel to Italy, the factors that determine health are the same as those that affect any population in a state of extreme poverty.

Factors affecting the health of Selam residents

The main factors that aggravate the existing health problems of beneficiaries of international protection living in Selam Palace and that cause new ones to develop derive from the living conditions at Selam Palace. As already explained, hygienic and sanitary facilities at the Palace are very poor; **the number of toilet and washing facilities is below the minimum standard for a refugee camp** (at the moment of writing there is one W.C. or 'Turkish-style' toilet for every 19 people, and one shower for every 33). This situation is particularly important given the high frequency of gastroenterological problems among the inhabitants of Selam. It is certainly not advisable to drink the tap water in the building. Since this is a squat we have never checked whether the water is safe to drink and no public authority has ever proposed doing so, but professionals in the field who have seen the state of the pipes and taps advise against drinking it. There is also significant reason to fear contamination with sewage; over-crowding has forced people to improvise toilet facilities, and this hugely favours the transmission of pathogens.

Eating disorders cause malnutrition and obesity to an equal degree. Malnutrition affects mainly patients recently arrived in Italy. Obesity is often a consequence of lack of information about food and a change of eating habits. Junk food is more attractive and cheaper than healthier foods.

Precarious working conditions also affect the health of Selam Palace residents in various ways.

It is obvious that people working illegally cannot care for their health properly as they are in continual fear of being sacked. It is less obvious however that even people who are legally employed tend to neglect their health, either because they are uninformed or misinformed (for example they do not know about medical certificates), or because of harassment. Most of the patients we meet work in jobs that are physically demanding, such as labouring or portering, and suffer from bone and joint

problems which are caused or exacerbated by these kinds of work. Bone and joint problems also affect patients, such as street sellers, who are on their feet all day; these patients are also often subject to haemorrhoids and anal fissures.



These are common diseases made worse by hygienic and sanitary conditions and by the lack of prevention, early diagnosis and treatment.

As detailed above, the difficulty Selam Palace residents have in accessing sanitary facilities is one of the principal obstacles they have to keeping healthy.

Health problems observed in patients attending the Cittadini del Mondo help-desk

The volunteers working with Cittadini del Mondo have identified the health problems most frequently affecting the inhabitants of Selam as common illnesses which are exacerbated by hygienic and sanitary conditions, by the lack of preventative measures, of early diagnosis and treatment, by untreated problems deriving from the conditions under which people migrate, or linked to heavy work, exploitation or lack of protection; and finally stress, somatic conditions and mental health problems.

- *Gastro-enterological problems.* Very many of those who live at Selam get their meals at canteens located in different parts of Rome, all of them far away. They are thus forced to pass long periods without food, which contributes to the development of gastro-enterological problems such as gastric and duodenal ulcers. Constipation and other defecatory disturbances are very frequent; the inadequacy of the water supply is a huge factor here. Irritable colon syndrome, notoriously associated with somatization and anxiety, are very common. Poor eating habits and excessive fat consumption contribute to the development of gallstones and liver steatosis.

Illness of the digestive system	24%
Illness of the respiratory system	18%
Skin and sub-cutaneous conditions	17%
Problems affecting bones, muscles and connective tissue	14%
Mental health problems	11%
Infectious illness and parasites	9%
Complications during pregnancy, childbirth and the post-natal phase	7% (22% of the total women treated, 7% of total patients)

Pathologies found in patients attending the Cittadini del Mondo helpdesk

- *Respiratory illnesses of varying degrees of seriousness (allergic rhinitis, pharyngitis, laryngitis, bronchitis, asthma, pneumonia).* Selam Palace is cold in winter and stiflingly hot in summer; the building is poorly aired, damp, and filled with fumes from stagnant pools of water caused by leaking pipes on all floors. These factors, as well as poor education in matters of hygiene, all help to make simple health problems worse, often rendering them chronic and sometimes leading to serious pulmonary complications. It is only due to constant monitoring on the part of health workers that in recent years hospitalisation has not always been necessary.
- *Skin diseases:* contact dermatitis, boils, mycosis, scabies, syphilis, gonorrhoea, urethritis, condyloma, all mainly due to the inability of maintaining even minimum levels of hygiene. The incidence of stress-related alopecia has been found to be well above the norm. The diagnosis of skin conditions has proved difficult for dermatologists unable to recognise lesions on dark skin.
- *Osteo-articular problems:* arthralgia due to poor bedding, often improvised on the floor without mattresses, or camp beds that have mesh but no slats, or on old and misshapen mattresses; poor nutrition, lack of health care during childhood and heavy work have exacerbated scoliosis and kyphosis; if neglected these conditions can lead to herniated disks. The same working conditions can also bring about osteo-articular traumas; we also frequently come across the after-effects of fractures which occurred in the country of origin and were never set, or set incorrectly.
- *Psychiatric and neurological conditions.* As one can imagine, uncomfortable living conditions and traumatic journeys, separation from loved ones and disillusionment as to expectations formed at the time of leaving countries of origin often provoke depression and anxiety. To this one must add the inadequacy of mental health and psychiatric services in the capital. Psychiatric consultations at an

ASL are impossible since there are no cultural mediators. There is in any case very little professional expertise in problems of this type.

- *Infectious diseases (other than those already described):* pulmonary and osseous tuberculosis, intestinal parasites caused by protozoa and helminths HIV, hepatitis A and C, malaria. The much-feared incidence of tuberculosis is met with much less frequently than would seem from the alarmist publicity in the media; but we have come across – in people resident in Italy for some time - cases of sometimes very treatment-resistant strains of extra-pulmonary tuberculosis which are difficult to diagnose; we have also come across forms of granulomatous lung infections caused by non-tubercular micro bacteria. Only in the last year have we encountered several cases of osseous tuberculosis; two of these patients suffered fractures of the vertebrae which had serious social consequences and threatened their livelihoods. Obligated for more than a year to wear orthopaedic corsets, for which they were not reimbursed by the health service, and confined to total bedrest for the whole of this time, they were unable to work while receiving no financial support and living in a building which has no lift.

- *Gynaecological conditions:* mycosis, ovarian cysts, irregular menstrual cycles, problems during pregnancy, voluntary abortions and – rarely - sterility. Difficult, stressful and traumatic living conditions contribute to stress-related disturbances of the menstrual cycle; sterility, though not frequent, is felt to be a very serious problem and financial circumstances make it impossible to undertake tests or look for solutions. Abortions are unfortunately very common, although they have recently been diminishing. We have found that, mainly due to the absence of cultural mediators and lack of information, Selam inhabitants who have undergone abortions for health reasons do not use contraception and therefore expose themselves to the risk of repeat abortions. For a brief period the ASL RM B implemented a policy of inserting coils at abortions, but this good practice has since ceased.

Often language problems, organisational problems and lack of health education or of financial and social support during pregnancy cause serious problems that can lead to prenatal problems going undiagnosed, underweight babies and post-natal complications. A very common example of this is the failure to use after-childbirth medication for the treatment of uterine atony and to prevent postpartum haemorrhages. Also very frequent are mastopathies caused by inappropriate breast-feeding due to lack of advice or assistance.

- *Neo-natal and paediatric diseases.* Although many infants and children are brought to the help desk, we unfortunately do not have a paediatrician on our team. The main child health problems treated are however infectious diseases, especially viral diseases; we also monitor physical and psychological development. We have observed many learning difficulties caused by problems learning Italian since children do not begin to learn Italian until they start school, and at home continue to speak their mother tongue.

- *Sight problems:* short sightedness, pterygium and squints. The high cost of glasses often prevents people with eye problems correcting them properly; patients often try to solve the problem by

buying whatever glasses they think they need without prescriptions. Pterygium is also very common; incidence of this is known to be high in people suffering from malnutrition, or who have suffered from malnutrition in the past, or who have been exposed to prolonged atmospheric pollution. Conjunctivitis, chalazia and inflammation of the sebaceous glands at the base of the eyelashes are all exacerbated and rendered highly infectious by lack of basic health education.

- *Dental problems.* It is well-known that the public health service offers little in the way of dental care. It is difficult to even get to see a dentist, so that dental problems are rarely treated and in almost the totality of cases extraction is necessary. Partial or complete edentulism is very common and as there is no possibility of obtaining an implant or dentures, loss of teeth often leads to gastro-enterological problems.
- *Urinary, prostate and potency problems:* cystitis and prostatitis are very common, the lack of proper hygiene in the building certainly constituting a high risk factor. Impotence is frequent, and invariably the cause has been found to be psychological rather than organic. Syphilis, gonorrhoea, and other venereal diseases are quite common, probably due to the high cost of condoms.

Factors affecting medical treatment and the doctor-patient relationship

On the basis of years of experience, the Association has developed a distinctive approach to the treatment of foreign patients, and follows special procedures when diagnosing and treating medical conditions.

Of crucial importance is the interview between doctor and patient and the collection of medical history, which must take account of language difficulties and cultural differences: different understandings of health and sickness, different ways of describing symptoms, different ways of life. A classic example of this is in the prescribing of tests and visits to specialists. Patients are disorientated by the complexities of the Italian health service; they need to be given detailed instructions as to how to gain access to healthcare, to specialists and diagnostic tests. Another delicate moment is that in which treatment is prescribed. It is not enough to simply tell the patient what he or she must do; instructions must be written down carefully, clearly and legibly (in block capitals), must include details of medication prescribed and dosage, the diagnoses, and the next appointment must be clearly written down.

We have often noticed that many migrants tend to give up in the face of the complexities of medical treatment; the psychological after-effects of what they have gone through sometimes prevent them from coping with illness and taking care of themselves.

COGNOME E NOME DELL'ASSISTITO (E DELLA OSA PRESCRITTORE) _____
 VIA DEGLI ASTALLI, 14/A 00100 ROMA
 INDIRIZZO (OVE PRESCRITTO DALLA REGIONE) _____

**SERVIZIO SANITARIO NAZIONALE
 REGIONE LAZIO**

NON ESENTE **E 0 2** **R** **FIRMA AUTOCERTIFICATA**

VISITA DERMATOLOGICA

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NUMERO CONFEZIONI / PRESTAZIONI **DATA**

CODICE **NUMERO** **CODICE** **NUMERO** **CODICE** **NUMERO**

DATA SPECULAZIONE / TIMBRO STRUTTURA EROGATA

599936 RMB/4
Dott.ssa
D'Angelo Donatella
TIMBRO E FIRMA DEL MEDICO

Translation of a prescription

To conclude, those we meet at our Selam Palace help desk are by definition 'itinerant' patients. Journeys which began when they left their country of origin will often continue within Europe as required by the Dublin Agreement and in the Schengen Convention. The mobile nature of the lives of holders of international protection is important from the medical point of view. It is difficult to follow their clinical histories, for example to find out about past treatment for chronic conditions, or to monitor recovery after surgical operations. They often move rapidly from one European country to another, and as a result many specialists' reports and diagnostic test results are lost. It is also impossible to find out what medical treatment or vaccinations they have received in their country of origin. We often write notes intended for European doctors because a patient was preparing to leave; this is a practice that should perhaps be adopted by all doctors who come across patients who are holders of international protection. It would then be possible to create a sort of 'medical passport' from which doctors could reconstruct a patient's clinical history wherever he or she happened to be. Medical treatment would then be more effective, and the enormous waste of financial resources caused by having to repeat tests and specialist visits would be reduced; above all, the health of political refugees would benefit.

Preventative health measures as a strategy for integration

On 17 May 2014 Cittadini del Mondo organised at Selam Palace a day for the prevention of hypertension and diabetes; the Association had also planned to dedicate three further days on preventative healthcare, one of which was to be on women's health. The aim was to dedicate days to specific health issues, just as for Italians, on the grounds that proper health education is one way of integrating foreigners into Italian culture. In the course of the day 76 people had their blood pressure measured and were tested for symptoms of diabetes.

Unfortunately, because of the huge numbers arriving across the Mediterranean, the building was already full to overflowing and the emergency period had already begun. The day therefore saw us performing not just ordinary examinations but also examining people for other problems, mainly relating to the effects of their journeys and living conditions. The other preventative healthcare days had to be suspended because the Association's medical team continues to be wholly occupied in dealing with the new arrivals.

The migrant emergency and Selam

The recent arrivals of African migrants on the coast of Italy has meant that Selam Palace now houses not only 1200 refugees but also the migrants who have just arrived, or rather come ashore, in Italy and are just passing through this country.

In October 2013 the Association helped around 120 people who had just arrived in Italy, mainly from Eritrea, and had managed to avoid being identified at the frontier so that they were therefore free to continue their journey to other European countries, evading the Dublin regulations. By November 2013 none of these people were left in Selam.

In April 2014, the arrival of fine weather also saw the arrival of the first migrants on the Italian coast and on 15 April the first buses disgorged over 200 people outside the building. Since then more buses have arrived every week, bringing hundreds of new arrivals.

The number of people in transit is clearly up on last year and many of them have told us that the trip they buy in Libya to Italy also includes the bus to Selam. 96% of the people we examined said they had been in Italy for under 5 days, most said for 2-3 days, and that they had arrived at Selam just 24 hours after coming ashore in Italy.

After a few days a few people are able to travel on but most are so weak that they cannot leave immediately. Many have run out of money and need to get more before travelling on. Most have friends and relations in Selam who help them contact co-nationals who want to go to Europe, and once they have recovered their strength and have collected the information they need, they leave. Of the 50 people who arrive every week, on average only 20 leave.

The building is bulging at the seams and now houses around 2000 people.

With great generosity, Selam Palace continues to offer hospitality to people in transit. At the start they were allowed to fill up the empty rooms in the building but now the huge number of new arrivals and the contagion they carry means that people in transit are housed in the garage and only women travelling alone with children are allowed to stay on the floors above.

At the start of the emergency the basement was full of rubbish accumulated over the years and abandoned cars. Cittadini del Mondo continued to press the authorities to ask the Rome rubbish collection service (AMA) to increase the collection from Selam since the entire building only had 4 large rubbish bins.



The building is bulging at the seams and now houses around 2000 people

Another health and hygiene problem was the lack of showers and toilets in the basement. As we have said, the permanent residents share 1 WC or Turkish-style toilet per 19 people and one shower per 33 people, and have refused to allow the new arrivals to use the few facilities that are available, in part because they are concerned and frightened by the physical condition of their temporary co-nationals. They have therefore fitted two WCs in the basement.

Since the new arrivals have avoided identification on arrival, they have received no reception facilities before arriving at Selam Palace, have not been seen by a doctor or received new clothes. Cittadini del Mondo has therefore found people still covered in sea salt, whose clothes and skin are marked and burned by boat fuel.

The skin of 80% of the new arrivals has been destroyed, almost always by infectious diseases they have had for months without treatment - especially scabies. Lesions are impetiginized by layers of bacterial infection and further damaged by a lack of hygiene and chemical pollutants, such as petrol, or simply by salt.

75% of new arrivals are physically debilitated and generally malnourished, which helps the spread of far more serious and dangerous infectious diseases. 40% have lesions received during the voyage: fractures, ulcerated lesions and trauma.

On 9 May Cittadini del Mondo, realising the need for concerted help from all institutions and more associations, organised a meeting at the VII Municipality of Rome, to be attended by everyone who in recent years has helped Selam. The meeting was attended by local Roman associations, church bodies and municipal representatives. The collection of essential items was begun and many

contributions were received. Thanks to the commitment shown by all we are dealing with the emergency.

We have now cleared the drains and set up a container with 8 showers and one WC. Piping, bathroom equipment and sewers worth 8000 euro have been donated for the bathrooms. Many medicines have been donated, including the very expensive medicines for treating scabies, plus clothing, underwear, soap, towels, toothbrushes, toothpaste, sheets and mattresses. AMA has collected all the rubbish from the Palace, filling 18 containers and every day a new one is brought to the building and emptied in the evening. The funds have been found to refurbish the garage and to set up new, washable camp beds and to clean and organise the room in which clinics are held.

This is the first time in 8 years that something is being done for Selam, but all the work is being done by volunteers, associations and religious charities. As usual the big institutions in our capital city have continued to ignore the situation, even though they have been properly informed of it.

And for Selam's residents, both new and old, it is only voluntary organisations that are protecting their rights.

Conclusions

The data in this report was collected and processing last year during Cittadini del Mondo's work in Selam Palace. The most concerning part of this report is that 95% of the people assisted by the Association's volunteers are holders of some form of international protection, and 76% of them have been living in Italy for over 5 years, 21% for over one year and only 3% for less than a year. The data shows that political refugees are not being integrated into Italian society and that there are no policies for tier-two reception to integrate migrants gradually into society.

Cittadini del Mondo's work directing and supporting Selam residents to and with the local services they need to begin integration - firstly the ASL's so that they can register with the public health services - has led us to conclude that Rome's services are not yet ready or able to cope with political refugees. None of the local services considered in this report offers interpreting services able to deal with this kind of user. The bureaucracy often does not provide for complicated family situations, meaning that important applications are frozen, preventing access to essential services (e.g. free school meals). Finally, public service staff are not trained to deal with this type of request and stupid errors often prevent political refugees obtaining services (e.g. because asylum seekers' application receipts are not recognised as identity documents).

Many migrants still cannot get residence permits for the place where they actually live and are forced to use fictitious addresses that however tie them to Municipal District I and therefore to local services very far from where they actually live, creating problems particularly if they need to use the social services or go to school. This also prevents other municipalities from identifying how many refugees they effectively have in their area, using this is as the main justification for not operating reception and integration services for migrants or for services that meet the basic requirements of their residents.

Most Selam residents find leaving the building a problem. They have difficulty being understood, need to pay for buses and the metro, have to find their way among the services supplied to a city of around 5 million inhabitants, and are clearly unable to exercise their rights easily. Selam may be crumbling but it offers the only community in which they feel understood and helped. Within its walls lives a population that does its best to deal with its problems together and has therefore created and continues to maintain a balance in which everyone helps each other and there is a sense of solidarity among people who are all in the same situation and come from the same part of Africa

After years working in Selam Palace, Cittadini del Mondo believes that real integration means allowing the residents to live in and use the municipality in which they actually reside and allowing them to use basic local public services, like the health service. This is the only kind of policy that will stop the continuous travelling that is the life of any Selam Palace resident.

Cittadini del Mondo recommends and hopes that:

- the competent authorities will make a serious effort to begin negotiations with Enasarco, which owns the building, to give the building permanently to the community that has been living in it for eight years;
- once the residence problem has been resolved, the public services of Municipal District VII will take account of the number of political refugees living in its area and introduce real policies for their integration;
- ASL Roma B will make its services accessible to migrants by providing interpreters and more basic services, such as mental health services, surgeries and specialist services for STPs (foreigners temporarily present);
- Selam Palace will become less isolated from the rest of the city and the district thanks to more public transport in the area and the decentralisation of some basic services, such as Italian language classes;
- a project will be created to set up a canteen near or inside the building, to be co-managed by Selam residents;
- Rome City Council will introduce a reception plan that will cover not only initial reception but also integration across the region, to prevent new Selam Palaces being created.

At present we appear to be going in the opposite direction to our recommendations. The Lupi Decree, for example, by preventing residence permits to be given for squats will prevent huge numbers of migrants from registering in the place where they actually live, marginalising them even more within their own districts and forcing them to wander around Rome to obtain basic services such as schooling or a GP.

Finally, Selam has for months been facing a health crisis caused by the arrival of hundreds of migrants who are in transit. Selam has generously opened its doors to them but yet again its residents have found themselves alone, abandoned by the authorities. The only support it receives is from the associations and religious charities who have responded to the call sent out by Cittadini del Mondo.

When we asked the residents to suggest a title for the report, Desale, an Eritrean on the committee made a suggestion in Tigrinya: *hensa deqi hedertena*, the building of invisible ghosts!

Contributions

The Main Legal Problems

Contribution of A Buon Diritto Onlus

Soccorso legale is one of the services offered by *A Buon Diritto Onlus*, which is made up of a team of asylum law experts (lawyers, magistrates, legal staff) as well as social and intercultural mediators. The information and advice service offered by “*Soccorso legale*” consist of legal help desks, one held in the multicultural library run by the Cittadini del Mondo Association in Quadraro (Seventh Municipal District), the other in the Città dell’Altra Economia in Testaccio (First Municipal District).

The Quadraro help desk opened in October 2013, but the two associations have been working together for about two years. Most of those who have come to us at the library come from Selam Palace. The problems about which they consult our lawyers regard the territorial commission (*Commissione Territoriale*) and appeals against its decisions the procedure to be followed when the deadline for an appeal has passed, procedures for renewing and issuing residence permits; mistakes in personal details on residence permits, and family reunion. In connection with these specific questions the generic difficulties encountered by asylum seekers and refugees in Rome and in Italy as a whole have come to light. One of these is the length of time taken to issue and renew residence permits and the problems involved in fulfilling the requirements for renewal. One of these is that a valid residence address is needed to renew a residence permit, and another is the domicile address required when applying to the police for asylum status. The tenants of Selam Palace have found themselves in difficulties as regards both domicile and residence. For many years, like most refugees living in Rome, they asked the Centro Astalli or the Comunità di Sant’Egidio to allow them to elect their addresses as their domiciles. This practice has given rise to numerous problems because the numbers officially resident in the two facilities became so enormous that administrators became unable to cope and ended up by cancelling them from the municipal registers. In addition, the people officially resident at those addresses could very often not be found, even if required to pick up their post. Residents at a particular address are, moreover, entitled to use the services provided by the municipality, social services, for instance, and nursery schools. But because of the massive concentration of residents in the area, these services were overwhelmed with applications and the staff were unable to respond to their needs. The fact that residence permits have been conceded to some of the families living in Selam Palace has resulted in an even greater distribution of applications for services among the various municipalities of the city. Since a few months ago our Association too has been authorised to permit the election of domicile at Città dell’Altra Economia. We have been doing this primarily for people living at Selam Palace and at another facility we are closely involved with, the “Tendone degli afghani”.

Another set of problems has emerged regards healthcare; in some cases applications have been made to the Questura (police) for residence permits for medical purposes, and on occasions residence permits for humanitarian reasons have been issued.

We have also been asked by refugees who came to our help desk at the Cittadini del Mondo's library to give advice on matters regarding criminal, civil and employment law. We have helped with suits for debt, employment disputes, separation and child custody.

The help most commonly asked for is with transferring files from one Questura to another. Many of the people we help have obtained their first documents from a Questura other than that of Rome. The problem arises when the document comes up for renewal and residence is required in order to determine which Questura is responsible for dealing with the process. This problem has often been overcome by applying for residence in one of the two facilities already mentioned, thus obviating the need for people to go the place where the first document was issued, with which they usually no longer have any ties. This created the risk of them being unable to renew their residence permits.

It is when the holder of refugee status or subsidiary protection loses his or her residence permit and applies for a duplicate, that the matter of residence becomes critical. Applications for duplicates must be made at the original Questura, and it is not always easy to go there. In such cases too the solution could be to change residence, but residence in a new municipality cannot be applied for unless one is in possession of the original document. A refugee of Sudanese origin living at Selam Palace actually had to deal with these problems at a time when he was suffering from osseous tuberculosis and was in the care of a well-known Roman hospital. The treatment prescribed included the use of an orthopaedic corset to sustain his spinal column. When this man came to see us the medical reports made it very clear that he must avoid physical strain of any kind. Apart from anything else, not having any of his original documents he had no medical card, and for the time being was unable to access health services. The only way he could obtain treatment was as an STP (Foreigner temporarily present). The Questura to which he was supposed to apply for a renewal of his permit was that of Ragusa; initially we completed the application forms for renewing a residence permit on asylum grounds and sent them to Ragusa by post. We then sent by fax a medical certificate so that the procedure could be completed in Rome. No reply was ever received, and neither was the person in question offered an appointment so as to avoid making a useless journey. For fear of wasting the efforts made so far, Mr Ali bought a train ticket for Sicily and went to the Questura. Faced with a young man who had undertaken a long and exhausting train journey in very poor state of health, the person in charge expressed her readiness and personally took charge of his application. The outcome was successful; it took a year, but this Sudanese gentleman finally obtained a copy of his original residence permit.

Armed with this, he was able to change his residence to Rome and apply to the Questura here to renew his residence permit.

A story with a happy ending, one might say, but one which involved huge amounts of effort. And this is just one example among very many of how integration can prove a mirage, and of the lengths a foreigner has to go to exercise his or her basic rights.

Contribution of Filiberto Zavarese, Legal Clinic

From February to June 2013 the “Laboratorio di Teoria e Pratica dei Diritti” (Laboratory on the theory and practise of rights”) worked actively with Cittadini del Mondo at Selam Palace. What was initially the screening of legal status was quickly transformed into a temporary help desk offering consultancy and legal advice for migrants residing in the building in Romanina.

Over these four months, 50 people came to us asking for help mainly with the following problems:

- renewing residence permits for international protection (refugee or subsidiary protection status);
- applications for citizenship on grounds of residence;
- applications for travel documents for the children of holders of international protection;
- criminal law and employment law questions.

Two different approaches to dealing with these matters were followed. In the first place, the person was given the information he or she needed in order to solve his or her problem for him or herself; secondly and where necessary, those running the help desk intervened directly.

The Seventh Municipality Meets Selam Palance

Contribution of Susana Fantino, President of the Seventh Municipal District

For the whole of my life, both private and public, I have always had a special concern for fundamental human rights and the defence of those rights.

This concern has been helped by the fact that I have two nationalities: I am Argentinian in that I was born in Argentina, and Italian in that my parents came from Italy and I have lived here for over forty years. I have always fought for the cause of freedom and against any form of racial discrimination.

Thanks to the many years I spent working in international co-operation programmes, I have also come to know Africa, its beauty and its problems: a continent that has been impoverished by war, speculation and colonisation by the West.

For all these reasons, right from the start of my mandate as President of the Seventh Municipal District, I have followed carefully the situation at Selam Palace in via Arrigo Cavaglieri, in the Romanina area of our municipality, a building occupied by about 1,200 political refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection from the Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan).

These migrant citizens, the people of Selam Palace, have been denied dignity, the right to mount a defence and a decent state of health, all of which require commitment, both civil and political to overcome this unacceptable suffering and to respect their fundamental human rights.

With this in view, I immediately invited the Mayor of Rome, Ignazio Marino, to accompany me to see Selam. This because the new city administration has made it a point of policy to make Rome a capital city of welcome in a country which has not been not welcoming and whose only concrete answer to peoples in flight from countries where hunger and violence make life impossible has been a brutal one: rejection by force.

With the cooperation of the Cittadini del Mondo association, which has been dealing with these problems for years, I have now been able to re-open a dialogue between the Municipality and the Selam Palace Committee, which is composed of representatives of the four ethnic groups living there.

My first concern has been to try to resolve one of the gravest problems, that of residence, which determines access to social services and the public health services offered by the area health offices (ASL). Collaboration on this with Cittadini del Mondo has been essential as, in addition to offering medical treatment, the Association runs a social help desk giving advice on access to services.

Together with this and other associations working in the area we have also taken a series of initiatives for sharing and opening up lines of contact between the local inhabitants and residents of the building: during the two-month vaccination campaign, for instance, we sponsored "Selam a Colori", a series of workshops for children and young people, with arts, music and sports activities.

We also sponsored a theatre workshop that produced a show organised by Associazione Archimandrita and the director, Gianluca Riggi. After a series of meetings at Selam Palace, the actors and actresses told their stories in "Fuori confine" in a context far from the one in which they live.

In spite of many difficulties, I have succeeded in getting the Seventh Municipality to promote negotiations with institutions and associations to find jointly-agreed solutions to the precarious and degrading conditions in which large numbers of adults, young people and children, many born in Italy, live.

The situation at Selam has now become particularly critical. As a result of the recent landings, its population has doubled. The Associazione Cittadini del Mondo is facing a medical emergency, and notwithstanding its constant, daily commitment, it is struggling to deal with it. We need help, medicines, bathrooms, drinking water. We need real, concrete solutions.

But more than this is needed. We must do better to ensure acceptable living conditions for all these people. We must show a light in the darkness. It is for this reason that I support wholeheartedly the initiative to be held in our area on the occasion of World Refugee Day, 20 June: an important occasion on which to call attention to a situation which is a real part of us and of our Municipality. If we do not determinedly act to change it, it will be a disgrace to the city of Rome and to Italy as a whole.

Contribution of Andrea De Bonis , United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has for some time collaborated fruitfully with “Cittadini del Mondo”, supporting its work in protecting and assisting beneficiaries of international protection living in Selam Palace. Over the past eighteen months we have organised several joint initiatives aimed, on the one hand, at sensitising institutions to living conditions in this particular building and to those of refugees in Italy as a whole, and on the other hand at finding immediate solutions to the worst of the emergencies that afflict the people at Selam.

The UNHCR is therefore pleased to accept this invitation to help reflect on the theme of the integration of beneficiaries of international protection.

The UNHCR holds that *“The integration of refugees is a dynamic and multifaceted two-way process which requires efforts by all parties concerned, including a preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and meet the needs of a diverse population. The process of integration is complex and gradual, comprising distinct but inter-related legal, economic, social and cultural dimensions, all of which are important for refugees’ ability to integrate successfully as fully included members of society”*¹

The process of integrating refugees is more complex and difficult than that of integrating the citizens of other third countries² - for a number of reasons: the causes that forced the refugee to leave his or her country, forced separation from family members, psychological and physical problem resulting from the violence to which refugees are sometimes subjected in their countries of origin or during their journeys. The UNHCR holds therefore that the process of integrating beneficiaries of international protection needs to be sustained through a series of specific measures. Only if integrated will refugees be able to make the important contributions to their host societies that their skills and previous experience allow.

In the view of the UNHCR it is in the area of integration of the beneficiaries of international protection that the Italian asylum system shows its most critical aspects. This is due to several different factors, among which are certainly the present major economic crisis and Italian government's measures for combatting its effects by limiting spending on social services. There are, however, also factors which have nothing to do with the economic situation but which are specifically related to the asylum system as a whole and the laws which regulate it.

In theory in Italy beneficiaries of international protection are recognised as having the same rights of access to social services as Italian citizens. In practice access is often impeded by bureaucratic obstacles, and by the real living conditions in which refugees find themselves. Italian law does not give them any right to a period of reception, except while applying for asylum status; once that status

¹ UNHCR Executive Committee, *Conclusion on Local Integration*, No. 104 (LVI) – 2005, preamble and para.. k.

² UNHCR, *A new beginning. Refugee integration in Europe*, September 2013.

has been recognised there is no provision for an initial phase of integration. This means that, except for the few who manage to obtain a place in a SPRAR reception centres, where numbers are very limited, most refugees converge on big, metropolitan cities in the hope of receiving help and finding a job. In the majority of cases, they have no means of subsistence and find themselves living in sub-standard and over-crowded living conditions like those at Selam Palace.

The data collected and presented in this report highlights the worrying state of health of those who live at Selam Palace, almost all of whom are beneficiaries of international or humanitarian protection. Their health problems are undoubtedly due in many cases to the conditions under which they are forced to live. Striking, for instance, is the high incidence of psychiatric problems, clear indicators of the concerning hardship in which these refugees live. The situation is even more shocking when one considers how long the inhabitants have lived in the building; about one third of those helped by the Association have been there for more than five years.

It is also important to underline that over the past year conditions at the building have deteriorated, largely due to the ever-growing number of people who have recently landed on the coasts of southern Italy, and who stay at Selam for varying lengths of time on their way to northern Europe.

The UNHCR has expressed its concerns about the living conditions of refugees in Italy, and about the lack of any real programme of integration.³ It has therefore asked the Italian government to include in its decrees transposing important European directives measures to support a programme of social integration⁴. With legislative decree number 18 of 21st February 2014 transposing European directive 2011/95/EU on the status of beneficiaries of international protection and on what that status actually entails, some important measures on integration were introduced. Residence permits for beneficiaries of subsidiary international protection, for example, were extended to five years, like those for refugees, and the two types of status were brought into line as regards the more lenient rules permitting family members to join kin with refugee status. In addition, it was established that every two years a national programme of integration measures for beneficiaries of international protection be drawn up, and that the Minister of Health would adopt guidelines on measures for taking care of victims of torture and serious violence.

These changes will certainly bring improvements into the lives of refugees and make it easier to plan what to do for them in the immediate future. The UNHCR, however, believes that, if situations like that at Selam Palace are not to be recreated in future, and if solutions for people living in squats are to be found, plans must also be drawn up for concrete action in support of integration: in the first place, once entitlement to protection has been recognised, there needs to be guaranteed minimum reception period in which to provide support in finding work and independent accommodation.

³ UNHCR, *UNHCR Recommendations on Important Aspects of Refugee Protection in Italy*, July 2013.

⁴ UNHCR, *UNHCR note on Directive 2011/95/EU of the Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (recast)*, September 2013.

During the legislative transition process relative to the E.U. directive mentioned above, the UNHCR was in constant dialogue with the Italian government and parliament. Of special significance during this phase was a visit to Selam Palace by a delegation of Italian M.P.s and senators of various political affiliations together with the President of the Seventh Municipal District, Susi Fantino. This purpose of this visit, which was sponsored by the Commission and organised in partnership with Cittadini del Mondo and the Selam Palace Committee, was intended to bring home to Italian parliamentarians the real conditions in which many refugees live, and to give the latter a chance to talk directly about their problems and expectations for the future.

This initiative was one of several taken by the U.N. High Commission for Refugees in the course of the last two years of which the aim was to sensitise institutions to conditions at Selam Palace. In the process the Commission, together with Cittadini del Mondo, has been working towards agreement with the municipal district concerned on a solution to the problem of registering residence for the inhabitants of the building. On the eve of the local elections of May 2013 the UNHCR also sent a letter to all the candidates for the position of mayor calling on them to make a serious commitment to finding better solutions to the problems of refugees living in abandoned buildings. As a result the newly-elected mayor Marino made a visit to Selam Palace in September 2013.

It is the hope of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees that solutions can be found which will bring significant improvements in the living conditions of the refugees at Selam Palace, and that this report can make a useful contribution to overcoming the obstacles those refugees meet on their road to independence and integration.



Muno, her dream is to be an actress









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