

LATEST NEWS # 422, June 29, 2007

The following news concerns Austria.

Latest News items are also available to read on the UBS web site. Please go to:
http://biblesociety.org/latestnews/index_latestnews.html

Bible Society helps Austrians to love the strangers in their midst

AUSTRIA — Songs of praise in many different languages filled Bible Centre in Vienna as people from a range of cultural backgrounds gathered there at the invitation of the Austrian Bible Society to mark World Refugee Day. For the Society, which has an active ministry to refugees, this event offered a valuable opportunity to raise awareness among ordinary Austrians of the plight of refugees in their midst.

On June 19, the eve of World Refugee Day (see *What is World Refugee Day?* below), the Society joined with members of the Fellowship of Christian Refugees to host a special evening for supporters of Bible work. Through food, conversation, prayer and song, the guests were given an opportunity to gain a better understanding of what it means to be a refugee.



Nana Couffie, founder of the Fellowship of Christian Refugees, shared his story before a time of singing accompanied by drums. Fleeing the civil war in his native Côte d'Ivoire, he arrived in 2003 in Traiskirchen, Austria's main refugee hostel. He and his wife Sita lived there for 11 months. During this time, enduring very harsh conditions, he came to faith.

"A refugee knows nothing about his future," he told the guests. "I found great comfort in the stories of refugees in the Old Testament."

The response of the Austrian Christians who attended this event was very positive, according to General Secretary Dr Jutta Henner.

"One lady who had frequently criticised the Bible Society for working with the 'drug dealers and thieves' said, 'The refugees I have talked to this evening are wonderful Christians. Thank you for inviting me'.

"Many other people told me that this was the first time that they had really talked to Africans and that their perceptions of refugees had now changed. The refugees also said that they felt that Austrians were listening to them for the first time. Everybody wanted us to hold another event like this!"

For earlier stories about the Austrian Bible Society's work with refugees, see Latest News 414 and World Report 369/2, 404/13 and 406/27.

What is World Refugee Day?

In December 2000, the United Nations General Assembly voted that, with effect from 2001, World Refugee Day would be celebrated on June 20 every year. It is part of efforts by the UN Refugee Agency to highlight the plight of refugees, to encourage people to share responsibility for helping refugees and to raise funds for work such as repatriation.

Additional information can be found at www.un.org/depts/dhl/refugee/

Many churches also mark World Refugee Sunday on the Sunday before or after June 20. The Refugee Highway Partnership (www.refugeehighway.net), on which UBS Migrant Ministry Consultant Dr Graham Hutt is the UBS representative, makes available a range of resources to assist them in raising awareness of and praying for refugees.

Photo (Austrian Bible Society):

AUT07DJ-7: Some of the people who attended the events held at Bible Centre in Vienna by the Austrian Bible Society to mark World Refugee Day on June 20, 2007.

For further information please contact comms@ubs-wsc.org