

NEIGHING FOR THE PLANET THE *BLACK BASAGLIA* FROM BENIN PRESENTING AFRICAN EXPERIENCES AGAINST EXCLUSION

By Xi Fang

On August 22 in the KIP Pavilion start a series of events connected to the project *Neighing for the Planet* brought to Expo by *Marco Cavallo*. The blue horse in 1973 symbolically broke the walls of the local mental hospital in Trieste where started the change of the Law 180 which determined the closure of asylums in Italy.

The inaugural event has been held with the presence of *Black Basaglia*, Grégoire Ahongbonon who talked about his experience of releasing people with mental illness from real chains in Benin. In many countries of Western Africa, mentally ill persons are often isolated from others and abandoned, without appropriate assistance.

Grégoire Ahongbonon, a mechanic from Benin moved by deep faith and indignation, decided to devote his life to people with mental problems, giving them back the dignity of human beings. He has founded a prayer group dedicated to these people, which, in several years of time, became the Association *Saint Camille de Lellis* which features a hospital inside dedicated to hosting mental patients.

For years, Grégoire Ahongbonon and his group have been travelling around Africa, trying to convince the families and the village heads to take care of these people suffering of mental illness. When they succeeded, the patients are taken to psychiatrists, offered a good living environment and taught to become active. In many cases they became the persons to care other mental patients, others returned to their village in a changed status.

In 2010, more than 20 000 persons have made use of the accommodation service offered by the centres founded by Grégoire Ahongbonon. Now, the mission of Ahongbonon is to open a new cure house in Togo where hundreds of patients are still abandoned, including children and women.



In Italy, the Nobel International Association of Solidarity of San Vito al Torre (Udine) collaborates with these activities in Africa and Grégoire Aghongbonon has also been awarded as honorary citizen of Zocca (Emilia Romagna Region).

Since its arrival in the Expo 2015 on 8 July, *Marco Cavallo* has been divulgating its message of teaching the people about freedom, respect and rights for everyone. Events related to the Project *Neighing for the Planet* will continue in September and October in the KIP Pavilion, in collaboration with the Social Agricultural Cooperative Clarabella of Corte Franca, Mental Health Department of Iseo and the Art Village of San Severo.

On 10 October 2015, there will be a World Day of Mental Health with Marco Cavallo and its friends at Expo.

Neighing for the Planet is a project organized by KIP International School, World Mental Health Permanent Conference Franco Basaglia, the Department of Mental Health of Trieste, with the support of the Department of Culture of the Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia and by the private company Domitalia.

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