

Italy churchmen plead for aid in 'Triangle of Death'

January 5 2014



Postcards displayed in Caivano, southern Italy, on November 14, 2013 show mothers with pictures of their children who died from cancer in the zone between Naples and Caserta

A cardinal and bishops in Italy's so-called "Triangle of Death" have called for urgent action to tackle toxic mafia dumps blamed for rising cancer rates near Naples.

"Act quickly. We urge the authorities to intervene and be decisive, to

stop the spread of worry, fears and ills," Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe, Archbishop of Naples, wrote in an open appeal to Italian President Giorgio Napolitano, along with bishops from the affected areas.

The local Camorra crime syndicate has been burning and secretly burying millions of tonnes of waste in the Campania countryside for decades but the extent of the problem has only recently been revealed—sparking furious protests from citizens who insist the government take action.

"As necessary and important as the few measures taken have been, what other action to take is still being debated," said the letter, sent to Napolitano on Friday and published by Italian media websites on Saturday.

In December, Prime Minister Enrico Letta's coalition government passed a decree to make burning rubbish illegal. But campaigners say enough is not being done to identify and clean up poisoned water sources and agricultural land in the Naples and Caserta regions.

According to environmentalist group Legambiente, some 10 million tonnes of industrial waste from across Italy and farther afield was buried in the area between 1991 and 2013.



A poster in St. Paul's church in the southern Italian town of Caivano on November 14, 2013, announces a protest in Naples over illegal waste polluting the zone between Naples and Caserta

The Pascale National Tumour Institute says the number of tumours in women in the area has risen by 40 percent and those in men by 47 percent, and local cemeteries have sections for the growing number of child victims.

Denouncing a "true humanitarian drama", the signatories called for a clean-up operation, health controls and the segregation of toxic land.

"Too many are paying the price for the arrogance, insolence, incivility, greed and stupidity of criminals who, without a care even for their own children, have not hesitated to sell their land to people as dishonest as they, poisoning it with highly toxic and dangerous garbage," the letter said.

According to La Repubblica daily, Napolitano on Friday promised local priest and campaigner Maurizio Patriciello to do more on the issue and provide some form of "compensation for the victims" in the future.

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