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## Letter from the Director



When I met him and his family that night, he was anxious and worried for himself and his family, for their immediate future. They moved to Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia trusting the information from a friend who moved to this city. In Medan, he was told, they will get better financial assistance and access for their case. As it turned out, life is far more difficult there as they are not familiar with the area, and they do not know many people here. They are suffering from the new policy, of an international organization supporting asylum seekers and refugees, to stop assistance for new cases effective from March 15, 2018. He went to Medan and got registered there just a day or two after they effectively stop assistance for new cases. As they have been living in a nun's convent, they are wondering until when they can stay and received financial assistance for their lives. Hundreds of other refugees and asylum seekers are camping outside detention centers in Indonesia just to get registered and then be eligible for assistance.

In the US, the new policy is separating children from their parents. In Europe, many countries refused to let boats with refugees and migrants sailing in their ports. The message we receive is clear: no more opened border especially for those running from conflict, violence and hardships.

Meanwhile, a woman I met in an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camp in Kachin State, Myanmar, recounted her desire to return to her village of origin as living in IDP camps forced her to be aid dependent and has to change her way to make a living. From farmer, she had to become a merchant. The war between the Burmese government army and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) escalated these last few months. As the Burmese army launched series of attacks against KIA's stronghold, thousands of people fled their villages to safe places mostly near Myitkyina town, the capital city of Kachin State. It is hard to know whether the war will stop. That woman's desire has to face a tough bitter reality of power struggle manifested in the form of a violent conflict.

Fortifying borders with harsher policies would need more scrutiny in terms of what actually most of us have done to stop conflicts, wars and violence. Supporting regime changes by force may result in the chaos and influx of refugees from war-torn countries. We must not forget that before closing our borders and our hearts.

Fr Bambang A. Sipayung SJ, Regional Director

## Philippines: Muslim and Christian Women Peace Advocates Come Together in Lanao del Norte



Muslim and Christian women advocates listen attentively to the sharing of IRD's staff in North Cotabato

North Cotabato, 29 June 2018 - In the Philippines, the island of Mindanao has been the theater of centuries of conflict between Muslims and Christians resulting in mutual distrust and prejudice. Muslims commonly have looked at Christians as land grabbers. Christians have branded Muslims as criminals.

In Lanao del Norte, a city on the island of Mindanao, Philippine Jesuit Refugee Service (PJRS) created Women Advocates for Peace (WAP). Moro (Muslim population) and non-Moro Women were chosen to be peace builders in their respective communities. Unfortunately, WAP's mission was hampered by the innate distrust and prejudice that continued to exist among the women.

This distrust was addressed in December, 2017 during an exchange visit in North Cotabato. The highlight of the visit was a presentation by Inter Religious Dialogue personnel and volunteers. The WAP then had the opportunity to reflect and share, to broaden their network and knowledge on peacebuilding. WAPs listened to peace builders about their experiences and their untiring commitment for peacebuilding.

As a result of the presentation, the WAP learned how Muslims and non-Muslims can work together to resolve conflict and to build peace in their communities.

The WAP shared their feelings honestly for the first time. One of the Christian WAP said that she was hurt by the reactions of her Muslim colleagues upon entering a church in North Cotabato. She added that in her community, her Muslim neighbors do not have reservations about entering churches or about Christians entering mosques. In response, Muslim members of WAP apologized. They said that they were not used to seeing churches since their communities are entirely Muslim. As a result of this sharing, Muslim and Christian WAP reconciled and understood each other. The exchange visit taught the WAP to address their innate prejudices and biases towards each other.

Ronald Lida, project Director of PJRS said, "Before the exchange, the WAP were not openly engaging with each other. A lot of reservations remained because of cultural and religious differences. Reflecting together and exchanging views was a good way to break the imaginary wall that was dividing the members of the WAP."

## World Refugee Day: 4 Words to Open the World



20 June 2018, Worldwide - Pope Francis has urged the global community to adopt a shared response to the global refugee situation that may be articulated in four words: welcome, protect, promote and integrate. This World Refugee Day, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and Entreculturas are building upon Pope Francis's words to advocate for refugee education with the campaign *4 Words to Open the World*.

In countries such as Lebanon, South Sudan, Chad, and the Central African Republic, JRS and Entreculturas give concrete expression to these four words in our service to forcibly displaced persons, particularly through educational projects. With programmes ranging from formal to informal education, and early childhood schooling to teacher-training, we provide education that meets the needs and inspires the hope of refugees.

### Welcome, Protect, Promote and Integrate

Education plays a critical role in sustaining, and sometimes even saving, lives. In emergencies as well as in protracted situations, where refugees are displaced for long periods of time, entire generations can be lost because of a lack of education.

"I really like going to school," says Ali, a Syrian refugee attending one of our schools in Lebanon. "I don't want to leave it. My only hope for the future is being able to read and write."

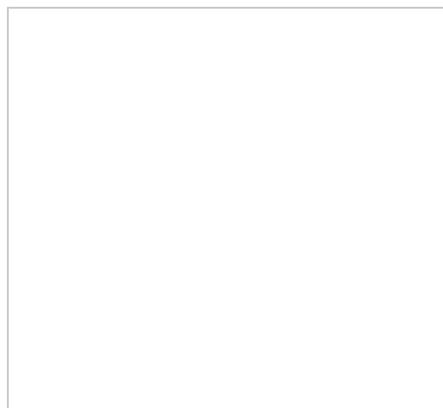
Schools are safe places where children can bond with their peers, thrive after trauma, and regain a sense of normalcy and stability despite their displacement. Education is a way to monitor and foster their safety and wellbeing. Attending school protect children from being exposed to risks such as labour and sexual exploitation, military recruitment, and early marriage.

Access to early childhood and primary education is particularly important because this is the foundation for a lifelong learning process. Education is essential for displaced children to develop the tools necessary to fulfil their potential, and contribute to the growth and stability of their communities.

Nevertheless, refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than children in non-refugee situations. Only 50 per cent of refugee children have access to primary school compared to 91 per cent of children around the world. There is an urgent need to increase refugee children's access to schooling.

With *4 Words to Open the World*, JRS and Entreculturas urge state authorities and the global community to increase their efforts to provide access to education for refugee children, so that they may feel *welcomed*, have their skills and talents *promoted*, know they are *protected*, and be prepared to *integrate* into their host communities.

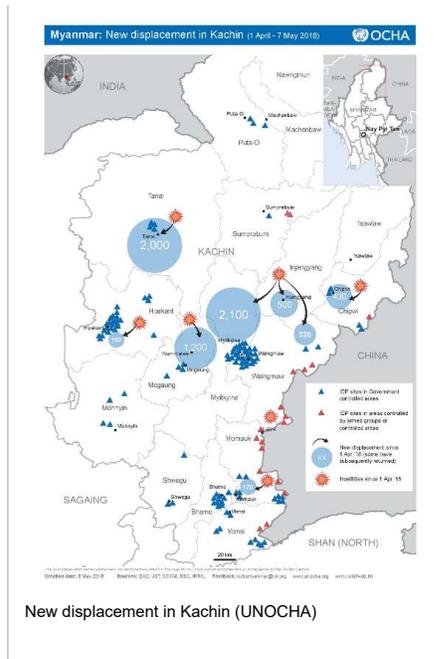
## Myanmar: Conflicts on the Rise in Kachin State



Since December 2017, conflicts between the Burmese Army and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) have intensified in many parts of Kachin State.

Due to heavy mortar shelling and airstrikes by the Burmese Army, thousands of civilians, mostly women and children, have fled their villages. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reports that in April alone, more than 6,800 people were displaced.

In May, 130 people from HlaingNaungHku village were evacuated by government authorities. Church organizations along with Church leaders also rescued 260 persons from AwngLawt.



However, more than 1,000 civilians remain trapped in the AwngLawt war zone since April 11, 2018. Local churches, non-profit organizations, some government departments, the Myanmar Red Cross and private donors continue to respond to the influx of new Internally Displaced Populations (IDP) by offering shelter and food.

The IDP, especially pregnant women, children and elderly, are in desperate need of food.

Moreover, parents who have had to flee their homes are also concerned about their children's education. It is unclear whether displaced children, who were enrolled in schools in non-government controlled area, will be allowed to attend government schools in the areas where they now reside.

### An elusive peace?

In Myitkyina, on April 30, 2018, about 5,000 people, including religious and civil society leaders and youth, protested in the streets. They demanded that the government rescue civilians trapped in the war zones. Kachin Public Youth also released a statement calling on the government to both save civilians and take responsibility for the conflicts in the affected communities. The group vowed to hold demonstrations until the government acts. On May 2, additional organizations called for the immediate cessation of hostilities, protection of civilians, and humanitarian access to evacuation in Kachin and northern Shan states.

Despite the peace process between the Myanmar Union Government and various ethnic groups, the situation in Kachin State has deteriorated. The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) is not a signatory to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). The ceasefire between the Burmese Army and the KIA was broken in 2011. Since then, there have been seven years of conflict in Kachin State. More than 100,000 IDPs are now living in camps throughout Kachin State.

### Asia Pacific: JRS welcomes new Regional Director



Bangkok, 27 April 2018 – The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is pleased to announce that Mr Louie Bacomo has been appointed as the new Regional Director of Asia Pacific. Mr Bacomo will assume the role on the 1st of June 2018, following the end of the term of Fr Bambang A. Sipayung SJ as Regional Director.

Mr Bacomo first started working with JRS in Cambodia in 1997 where he stayed for two years. In 2010 Mr Bacomo returned to JRS as the Regional Programmes Officer for the Asia Pacific region, during which he helped establish programmes in the southern Philippines and Myanmar. Since February 2016, he has been working as the International Programmes Coordinator at JRS's International Office in Rome, Italy.

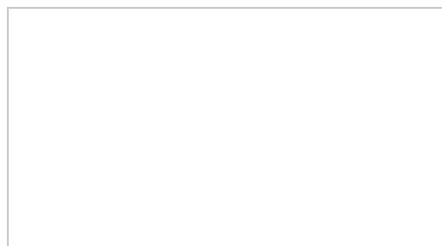
Mr Bacomo has an MA in Sustainable International Development (SID) from the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University in the U.S., and a BA in Sociology from Xavier

University in the Philippines.

He has worked in Cambodia, Thailand, Belize, and the U.S. with government agencies, NGOs, grassroots communities, and universities addressing issues related to environmental protection, education, and forcible displacement.

Announcing the appointment, JRS International Director, Fr Thomas H Smolich SJ, says, "Louie Bacomo brings extensive experience from JRS and other INGOs to this position. We are grateful for his taking on this important role, and I know the staff, partners, and beneficiaries of JRS Asia Pacific look forward to his return."

### Myanmar: Children as agents of peace



Loikow, 2nd April 2018 - Myanmar has been a battleground for decades. A long civil war has displaced more than 640,000 people within Myanmar. In Kayah State, the war has internally displaced more than 34,000 persons. 12,100 refugees remain in two camps in the Mae Hong Son province of Thailand bordering Myanmar.



Mariano, Education Officer, explains a peace education game to the nursery crowd. (Fr Aloysius Bi/JRS)

Myanmar has limited resources and services. Refugees returning from Thailand may accentuate scarcity in underserved communities and exacerbate intra-community conflicts. In Kayah State, remote areas have very limited international presence and rely largely on local churches and national non-governmental organizations for humanitarian assistance.

Within this context, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) supports educational empowerment and builds peace and reconciliation across ethnic, tribal, and religious communities. JRS aims to promote common understanding and mutual trust between potential host communities in Kayah State and returning internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees.

In 2017, JRS facilitated several sessions about peace building for teachers and other JRS key partners in Myanmar. These sessions focused on understanding levels of conflict and exploring ways of peaceful living within the family and larger community. This was

accomplished through activities that included focus group discussion, brainstorming, storytelling, games and role-plays.

Since most participants had direct experience living in and working with the communities that have been experiencing conflicts for decades, participants learned from one another through the activities. Sharing their own real stories was particularly powerful. Discussions included conflicts related to religious and ethnic minorities, schools and communities, and land issues.

In continuation of these sessions, JRS launched The Peace Education Project in Myanmar in November 2017. The Project addresses challenges faced by potential host communities, internally displaced persons, and returning refugees by promoting peaceful coexistence between all parties.

The Peace Education Project targets students in community schools and IDPs in camps in Myanmar. Peace education training workshops will be provided in Kayah and Kachin States at all levels: adults, adolescents, and children. Training workshops are planned to occur at four IDP camps in 2018 in Myitkyina, in Kachin State, and at two nursery schools in Loikaw, in Kayah State.

Fr. Aloysius Bi undertook his first experience as a peace education teacher in a nursery school in Loikaw in November 2017. Mariano, Education Officer in Loikaw, accompanied Fr. Bi and helped by translating peace education games.

"I have conducted numerous seminars, but the one at a nursery school in Loikow was certainly the most challenging," says Fr. Bi. "The kids were between two and four years old. However, to adjust oneself to the world of others and to speak a language which others can understand is a way to start building peace. Given their ages, I tried games that were not conceptual, but related to their life experiences, such as drawing, learning from animals, and sharing chocolate. Through these games, they personally experienced different dynamics of peace and violence. Their willingness to share resulted in peace and harmony. Peace and harmony were greatly encouraged and cultivated during the session. This is a crucial goal of peace education."

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