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Jesuit Refugee Service Indonesia

Accompany, Serve and Advocate the Cause of Forcibly Displaced People

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Hospitality as Remedy

*Hospitality is like welcoming a stranger in our house
we have just built for someone we love*

Indro Suprobo

“

Conflicts and armed violence in many parts of the world have caused millions of deaths and people seeking refuge. Quite often innocent children and ordinary people have to bear incomprehensible sufferings or even get killed. Many parents feel their hearts completely broken watching their children snatched away by the atrocities of wars. A lot of children are forced to experience loneliness and alienation because they have lost their fathers or mothers who have embraced them with care and love. These unnecessary miseries and deaths unarguably leave deep wounds. The refugees have been compelled to abandon their villages along with their anguish and wounded hearts. Their only hope is just to discover a new peaceful life and brighter future.

The refugees are keen to see their life experiences be listened to with full attention. Telling us about their life, these displaced people want to pass on some humanitarian messages that shall motivate us to take actions for the creation of peace and justice in a simple but concrete way. These messages would reach their targets if we are prepared to kindly receive the refugees. Adolfo Nicolás SJ defines hospitality as a ray of humanitarian value that recognizes one's rights, not because he or she is part of our family, community, race or faith, but solely because he or she is the same human creature as us who deserve proper reception and honour.¹

Hospitality is like welcoming a stranger in our house we have just built for someone we love.² With our cordiality, the refugees who are guests in our country are welcomed as lovable guests and friends. The warm welcome encourages and revives their spirit of life which was once dimmed. It is here, they, who have constantly suffered in their venture for a safe life, at last discover an environment which may re-ignite their spirit to stand up again as persons with real dignity. Kindness rekindles mutual trust and respect which lead the “host” and the “welcomed guest” to knowing each other better.



Zainuddin is meeting a Refugee at the Detention Center
Photo by Enggal

It is in this environment that the JRS is experiencing some blessed periods to receive the refugees and learning that all the refugees are in need to recover their dignity.

Hospitality toward strangers like the refugees is the actual form of *detachment* from all *inordinate attachments*, which have barred a person from meeting another person with all his or her personal uniqueness. Among the *inordinate attachments* are distrustful and insecure feelings as well as tendencies to stereotype against other people and to regard strangers as menacing “enemies”. Hospitality makes way for self-emptying to enable the growth of peace.

To many cultures and religions, hospitality is one of their basic values. In Islam *Surah An Nisaa'* orders the Muslim followers to show kindness to their relatives, orphans, strangers and travellers (*ibnu sabil*) [4:36].³ One of the Christian traditions states “.. and hospitality do not forget; for by this some, being not aware of it, have entertained angels.” [St Paul's *Letters to the Hebrew* 13:2] Even God in the tradition

¹ See also <http://www.unhcr.org/4a9645646.pdf>

² Letter from Father General Adolfo Nicolás SJ to the JRS dated 14 November 2010 on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of JRS
2 JRS Working Paper, *Welcoming the Stranger: Hospitality*

of Christianity identifies Himself as a stranger who is inviting our hospitality: “.. I was a stranger and you invited me in”[Matthew 25:35]. *Taittiriya Upanishad* in Hinduism declares that hospitality is like welcoming a guest as a Divine creature. In the Jewish teachings, hospitality (*hakhnasat orchim*) toward a guest or a stranger is an obligation.⁴ In addition, there is a principle encouraging the followers of Judaism to accept any strangers whom they have previously treated as their enemies as their new comrades (*Eizehu Gibur M'ha'giburim*).⁵

4 JRS Working Paper, *Welcoming the Stranger: Hospitality*

5 Arik Ascherman, "Does Judaism Teach Universal Human Rights?", in Kelly James Clark, *Abraham's Children, Liberty and Tolerance in an Age of Religious Conflict*, Yale University Press, 2012, pages 46-47

The world which suffers due to wars, conflicts, suspicious feelings and stereotyping judgements – all resulting in the plight of refugees – requires hospitality as a remedy. We do hope that JRS’s direct, concrete and modest advocacy, service and support for the refugees be able to serve as a token of hospitality that heals the wounds. The ray of hospitality may hopefully melt the social freeze among the refugee-rejecting community and make a number of breakthroughs in some important chambers where political policies toward the refugees are made.

The First Encounter, The Precious Lesson

Saefudin Amsa

“

Everything can be taken from a man but one thing, the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way

”

Viktor Frankl



An Officer is observing a cell at Detention Center
Photo by Enggal

“Hey you. Come here!” I heard a loud voice calling while I still had a conversation with several immigration officers. I decided to find where was that voice was coming from. I saw someone waving his hand from afar, a man behind the iron bars.

“Me?” I placed my hand on my chest as a sign.

“Yes, you. Come here please.” I walked fast towards him, a young man with a friendly face who then gave his hand.

“I’ve never seen you before. Are you from the immigration office or UNHCR?” he asked while shaking my hand warmly.

“No, I am not from either of them. I am from JRS,” I introduced myself. He looked at me from within a small room, along with him there were about ten other people. Some of them seemed to enjoy a card game while some others read the Holy Koran or were asleep.

To be honest I don’t know where to start. That day was my first day to work in Pasuruan,

East Java. I didn't expect that I would meet these detainees - whom previously I have only known from articles or photos. Finally we talked for a while. His name is Abdullah. He confessed that he comes from Afghanistan and moved to Pakistan with his mother and sister at age two, but the unstable security situation made him leave his family there.

"You know, I didn't come here for food. I came for freedom and peace. But you know what they have done to me." He pointed his finger to the officers who walked around to distribute books, foods, among other things.

"So what do you do while staying in here?" I asked. I imagined how he spent the day in such a small crowded room.

"Me?" He laughed freely. "*I dream. Every morning, afternoon, and evening. I always dream.*" His profile was calm and expressed neither sadness nor anxiety at all. He seemed to accept the tough situation around him. Sometimes when he laughed smoke of a cigarette was coming out from his mouth. Meanwhile, two of the detainees argued intensely. Seeing my concerned face, Abdullah explained that disputes and arguments have become an ordinary condition there. Many of his friends feel stressed because they are continually being locked inside the room. "*Every human has their own right. So does an animal. We are human. They shouldn't lock us in here,*" he continued.

"You must understand that living in this world needs two things. First, equality. If every person consider the other as equal to him, then there will be no war like in my country." Life has been giving him much more lessons than school has, I thought. "*Second, freedom. If people are free, they will be happy.*" I stunned listening to him. It felt like I don't need to meet *Thich Nhat Hanh*, the Vietnamese Zen Guru, if I just want to hear the words which he often quotes; The amount of happiness you experience depends on the amount of freedom in your heart.

Abdullah told me many things while I was rather quiet and listened. There are many precious lessons I learned from our conversation. At the time we

said goodbye, he still had sufficient time to give me this last one, "*God bless you, may you have success in your work,*" he said.

"Thank you. But I am not here as an officer. I am here as your friend," I answered. Being new it was my intention to become familiar with people and build trust. But actually not all of these aspects should be explained.

"No, you're not. I've seen it from your perspective. You come here for work," he smiled.

I ask myself. How often do we fail to do this? To see things from someone else's point of view, not just stand self-importantly on the pile of our own arguments and experiences?

What did I mean when I said 'I come here as your friend'? I meant to explain that I am here as a person to meet Abdullah and the other detainees as equals, to be with them and learn about what they have experienced, to explore the human side of those who are forced to leave their homeland to save their life. I hoped to treat them with dignity, provide space for empathy to live and share with them.

I came to do more than just a job, giving food and drinks, but to understand them, their motives, their strength which lead them here, receiving them not primarily as detainee, asylum seeker or refugee but as a fellow human being.



What would it feel like if I were you?
Looking into the narrow and restricted space detainees are forced to live in
Photo by Enggal

Stop Detention of Children!

Silvester Gultom

"We had no choice but to secretly leave our house. My wife is still left behind in Sri Lanka. We are afraid that they will try to abduct and kill us. I'm most afraid of them abducting my son from school, so I fled with my child," Magedara, 50 year old father of Lavindra opens his testimony. To live in an immigration detention center (Rudenim) is a challenging experience for Lavindra. *"It is not a pleasant place to live in. I can't go to school and there is no space to play. The food here is not good and I miss sleeping next to my mama."*

"My son misses his mother. Every day he says he wants to go home to be with his mother. He wants to go to school with his friends again. I just hope he will be able to see his mother soon, even if it is in this detention center," says Magedara.

The story about the flight of Lavindra and his father is just one of many. Innocent children have had to leave their homes and friends to run away, losing not only important years of education but their dreams about a better future. Facing threats of persecution and serious human rights abuses with no protection from the authorities, parents are left with a trauma making them reluctant to ever return. Forced to flee they started an odyssey full of hardships often leave them stranded in a crowded immigration detention center.

Lavindra is not the only child living in the detention center. There is Mohammad from Myanmar, 7 years old, the 8 year old Ra'idadah from Srilanka and 30 more children held here. They are stranded here missing their families and friends back home, longing to be in school. Learning mathematics or drawing pictures seems like a memory from far away. There are many wishes and dreams locked away in the immigration detention center.

Living in detention for the asylum seeking children is a nightmare they never imagined. The detention center with the capacity of sheltering up to 100 persons is now occupied by 258 persons from various countries and cultures. Many detainees who aren't lucky enough to get a space in the limited



An Unaccompanied Minor at Detention Center.

Photo by Silvester

rooms have no other choice but to use alleys, floors and any place that offers some shelter from the rain and the heat of the sun as their makeshift homes. And a wide range of problems subsequently emerge due to this condition – from the availability of water and sanitation, over finding a place to keep ones belongings, to washing and drying clothes simple things become a challenge due to limited bathrooms and drinking water. It is here, in a confined environment where hygiene is deteriorating that those children live, play, watch television and have to mingle with hundreds of mostly adult men – a condition full of likely hazards for a child.

The detention of children in an immigration detention center is not the only reality in Indonesia. In a number of countries children have been going through the same experience. *The International Detention Coalition (IDC)*, a network of non-profit institutions, which focuses its work on the protection for refugees' and asylum seekers' rights in immigration detention centers, has since conducted various activities to press governments to stop putting children into immigration detention, as those children in detention are very vulnerable affecting their development, physical or psychological health. IDC expresses concern in particular for the many children that are not accompanied by any of their parents or relatives leaving them vulnerable to sexual abuse and experiencing a lack of proper health care as well as educational services.

The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Art 22(1) states "States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which

the said States are Parties." As Indonesia is party to this convention, releasing children from immigration detention centers to friendlier appropriate places is a first step to ensuring their rights are upheld. It is an unquestionable obligation: *Stop the detention of children right now!!*

For further information visit <http://www.idcoalition.org>

Lesson about Hope

Pius Marmanta

A few months ago the faces of asylum seekers I visited were full of frustration and without hope. Complaints about the long waiting time were common during my visits to their homes. Uncertainty dominating their days, away from their families, prohibited to work in order to support themselves, and with no significant things to do, every day must feel the same for asylum seekers. Often I heard myself saying "*We need to be patient and never give up hope*" after looking into sad faces.

But then something changed. Their facial expressions became livelier once we started to plan joint activities on a regular basis. Organizing and taking part in soccer games for example turned out to be a good means to release tension and lift people up from boredom and the repeating questions about the outcome of their asylum claims.

"Thank you brother. I am happy we do this," said one asylum seeker from Ethiopia. *"Yes, thank you. We should do this more often, brother,"* joined another in.

Their faces now seemed enthusiastic, happy, and joyful. It did not matter where one was from. During the game everyone was the same here, running and sweating. We planned to meet and play regularly three times a month. To have one hour to look forward to during the long waiting time in which one could stop thinking about those loved ones left behind in violence and threats meant a lot to my friends from Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, and Congo.



Refugees and Asylum Seekers are playing soccer.

"Brother, here is my friend. Please help him. He is sick. He needs medicine," said one asylum seeker from Somalia introducing me to his friend after one of the games. The soccer game soon became a place to meet others. A place to sit down and discuss on how to help those who needed urgent help and a chance for those in need to make themselves heard and known to people in a similar situation.

Who would have thought that a simple game of soccer would teach me about hope, solidarity and empowerment. I learned that asylum seekers are resourceful and by planning, discussing and mutually helping each other they can be empowered and more resilient towards the challenges they face.

Turning vulnerabilities into ones strength, sharing and preserving hope in companionship with each other can become a powerful force to overcoming the challenges in a world of uncertainties. The "*Thank you brother*" echoes in my ears as I see them returning to their houses with a smile on their face. It is a smile of hope.

Dreams in the Land of Hope

JRS Team Ambon



The area of relocation at Waai, the land of hope. Photo by JRS Team Ambon

"Why would they come here every day?" thought Usi Kos in the first days of JRS's visits at the warehouse turned makeshift shelter at Vitas Barito. *"I thought Ms. Ning and Mr. Edi are teachers because they liked to gather the children,"* she continued with a laugh.

Usi Kos belongs to one of 29 refugee families living in an old warehouse that is unfit for tenancy. The Vitas Barito warehouse, located in the city of Passo, Ambon, is dire, dark, without air circulation. Under a leaking tin roof each family here lives in a room partitioned by plywood. The plastered cement floor has holes; the wooden beams holding the roof seem fragile. Access to clean water here is minimal and disposing of used water a challenge. Living in an old warehouse over years is certainly not what any of the families dreamed of.

Before living Vitas Barito, Usi Kos's family had to migrate repeatedly after fleeing the conflict that erupted in Kariu, Haruku, on February 14, 1999. The dream and greatest hope of the displaced people here is to one day have a decent and healthy home. JRS, present in the midst of them, tried to

*I hope in Waai later,
my family and I can build a house,
cultivate gardens and
raise chickens*

help the displaced people to achieve their dreams of a safe place to stay by searching and securing the ownership of land for the families in the village of Waai. After land titles are secured they can begin to build a house and a new home.

Usi Kos said she learned many new things during the last year spent together with JRS. *"I am very grateful that JRS came to Vitas Barito. My family*

now owns land in Waai. I will take best care of what JRS has helped to realize for me and my family. I do not know how to thank JRS” said Usi Kos.

“I hope in Waai later, my family and I can build a house, cultivate gardens and raise chickens,” said Usi Kos. “I also want to have a small kiosk in Waai” she added excited.

Usi Kos’s story is only one of many encountered by JRS providing services and companionship during 2012 in Vitas Barito. Her story bares the hope of many other Internally Displaced People still scattered in the corners of Ambon Island and Maluku. For many of them it is still a long way to achieve a real durable solution.

JRS lessons learned during its presence with Internally Displaced People in Vitas Barito have been presented in a Focus Group Discussion of Decision Makers on February 18, 2013 and will be published in a case study soon. Stakeholders including local government representatives, representatives of the Regional Council in Maluku, Local NGOs, the National Human Rights Commission Maluku and members of displaced communities were present to express their concerns about the conditions of long term Internally Displaced Persons in Ambon and identify opportunities that can inspire future solutions. For JRS, these discussions also were a sign of commitment, of those attending that day, to continue to care and accompany displaced communities until they achieved a durable solution.

Berkat Tuhan par katong samua...!!
May God bless us all....!!!

(Mia,Oni, Ning)



The Vitas Barito warehouse that is unfit for tenancy.

Photo by JRS Team Ambon

EDITORIAL

Editorial Responsibility
Th. A. Maswan Susinto, SJ

Editors
Lars Stenger
Indro Suprobo

Articles Submitted by
Indro Suprobo
Saefudin Amsa
Silvester Gultom
Pius Marmanta
JRS Team Ambon

Translator
Citra Ayi Safitri
F. Prayoga

JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE INDONESIA

Gg. Cabe DP III No.9
Puren, Pringwulung, Condong Catur
Depok, Sleman
Yogyakarta 55283
INDONESIA

Phone/Fax: +62 274 517405
email: indonesia@jrs.or.id
website: www.jrs.or.id

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refuge@jrs.or.id

