

Edition: June 2013

# REFUGE

Jesuit Refugee Service Indonesia

Accompany, Serve and Advocate the Cause of Forcibly Displaced People

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# Under God's Wings of Protection

Indro Suprobo



JRS staf congratulating a detainee at Nauruz celebration



A detainee visiting his friends in other cell

“ *He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge, you will not fear the terror of night* ”

This verse from Psalm 91:4-5 on God's protection does give empowerment to and becomes a reality in the life of Refugees and Asylum Seekers on the Cipayung, West Java, highlands. What the Psalm author is convinced of is also experienced by the Asylum Seekers, who have forcefully fled their homes, villages and their loved ones to acquire a peaceful life they have been dreaming.

It is Otang Sukarna<sup>1</sup>, a 50 year old resident of a village on the hills of Cipayung, West Java, who sincerely put this Psalm in the daily life. He is just a modest villager who befriends the Refugees and Asylum Seekers. By simple but real ways, he motivates his fellow village residents, mothers and children to show kindness and friendliness to the Refugees and Asylum Seekers living nearby. This honest and sincere friendship and mutually supportive attitude makes up the real kindness and also protection that gives them the feeling of security.

While in other places the Refugees and Asylum Seekers have to face rejection, suspicion, negative stigma, expulsion and isolation, Otang Sukarna and his fellow villagers, in contrast, offer their modest but comfortable shelters for their stay, friendly and passionate relationship, useful joint activities and real helps that boost their spirit.

*"These immigrants are good persons. They're not criminals or people who incite trouble. They have come here just to discover peace as their countries are in chaos,"* says Otang to express

<sup>1</sup> It is not a real name

his understanding. Although he has never read any documents on Refugees, he is able to explain his understanding on this issue with a modest but communicative formulation which all residents of the village would easily understand and accept.

## Emphatic Awareness

Otang Sukarna has his own basic reason to be kind and friendly towards the Refugees and Asylum Seekers. *"They are people, who, like us, have children. They are facing hardship like I am. So, we should be kind and help them. Even, whenever we could, we should protect them as we and they are just the same human beings,"* he explains. Immersing oneself, understanding and allowing oneself to be touched by others' experiences is an exercise of emphatic awareness. This awareness creates a concrete involvement.

When the mass media report about the rejection and expulsion of the Asylum Seekers, Otang Sukarna and the local Village Head opt to go around the village to give them some encouragement. *"I'm going around with the Lurah (village head) to meet them one by one and try to convince them and the rented house owners that they should not be afraid, because this village has been secured of its peaceful condition"* he explains enthusiastically. Even the Lurah restates his assurance of protection, *"If someday some parties from outside come here to disturb their lives, ask them (Refugees) to move to my house. I will myself give them protection,"* he adds quoting the Village Head.

## Sharing

Otang Sukarna has an effective but simple way to more closely bonding the friendship between his fellow villagers and the Asylum Seekers. The daily life is the key. *"I often invite them to attend wedding parties and funerals. Some of them even take part in carrying the coffin to the cemetery,"* he says. Their presence and involvement in the locals' activities is a sign, tool and proof of their willingness to be part of the society. This has made their ties closer



and friendlier. They become part of the village and no more strangers. *"Due to the extremely close relationship, one of the immigrants has been persuaded by a family to marry a local and become one of its members,"* adds Otang.

Religious celebrations, too, are used as tools to share. On the 10 Muharram (Assyura) the villagers and Asylum Seekers hold a joint religious ceremony. *"The village head donates a sheep for the event. And they are very thankful."*

During the early time of the influx of Asylum Seekers, English lessons for children are held for some time. Through this activity the villagers and the Asylum Seekers could learn from each other. The local children learn English while the Asylum Seekers

learn how to live the local daily, routine life. *"Yes, in the past a lot of our children took part in the English class. Almost three class rooms were always full of students."*

Thanks to the close ties, it is no strange if in some road corners and eating kiosks we can hear laughs and chats of the Asylum Seekers and villagers killing their times of rest. Otang Sukarna and residents of the Cipayung hills are like God's wings that give the Asylum Seekers kindness, protection and security. Through them God fully shelters the Refugees and Asylum Seekers with His wings. \*\*\*

## When Differences Disappear...

Saefudin Amsa

**H**eld in Immigration Detention Centers the fate of Asylum Seekers and Refugees is not much different from that of criminals. They are confined behind iron bars, deprived of their freedom of movement, limited contact to loved ones and with a lack of activities. This situation may last for years without any sign of when this would end. After all, Asylum Seekers and Refugees have not committed any criminal acts. They are just following their hearts in search for freedom, safety, friendship and dignity. In midst of the extremely limited situation in detention, a small and modest experience can cherish freedom, compassion, friendship and dignity.

Wisnu Bawana, a staff at one of 13 Indonesian Immigration Detention Center (IDC) is startled when a ball hits his face. He looks around trying to find who has thrown the ball at him. A young detainee just teasingly smiles in front of him. Suspecting that the teenage detainee might be the one having thrown the ball at him, Wisnu chases him. Zaidan, the young detainee, just gives him a big smile and runs away, laughing.

The story may have ended differently if this would have happened in the IDC. But luckily this 'incident' happens at a swimming pool in a recreational area. In this clean, blue water of the pool the detainees, guards and several immigration officers are cheerfully playing water-polo.



A Refugee expressing his discontent through a painting on the wall of his cell

The teams a combination of detainees and immigration officers seem to care little about who wins. Most of them just enjoy the game by jokingly throwing the ball at their contenders. The atmosphere is relaxed and joyful. No more officers with wide reaching authority, no more security guards with suspicious looking eyes and no more detainees with their sad and depressed looking faces in this playground. Everyone is playing and enjoying the event, becoming *Homo Ludens*, human-beings who play for fun and joy. It seems that all people in this place are returning to their childhood time, when they play only for one desire: Joy.

That bright Saturday is a day that makes these 20 IDC detainees happy. Accompanied by a number of immigration officers, they enjoy the chance to leave the high walls, iron bars and barbed wires for a few hours. This recreational activity was suggested by the IDC office, which shared its idea with the JRS and IOM. Through a number of coordinating meetings, the IDC office finally gives its recommendation and approval to this activity.

In some of the meetings the IDC office says that this first recreation activity would be treated as an experiment. If all runs well, according to the security procedures,

without any detainees trying to escape, the IDC would recommend that this kind of activity should be made routine. But, if any of the detainees try to exploit and misuse this opportunity to escape from the centre there will be no more recreation such as this one.

Thank God, all fears were proven wrong. Results instead were cheerfulness and friendliness with differences disappearing between the IDC staff and detainees. Not only do the detainees and officers jokingly play water polo, they also play together at some other sections of the swimming pool area. The immigration officers do not feel awkward to carry a rubber canoe along with the detainees, climb on the sliding tower and slide down splashing into the pool together with them. They also play human-train, sitting in a row, their hands holding whoever sits in front, hysterically but joyfully shouting when passing through the bends of the slide. The security guards, who first have been standing at different points in the area, carefully watching the detainees, could not withstand the 'temptation' and join the group, jumping into the refreshing, blue swimming pool. No more watchers and watched! All of them, no exception, have one only desire: Joy!

After a friendly lunch, one of the detainees gives a speech of gratitude to the IDC, JRS and IOM for the opportunity they have given to him and his friends that day. Other detainees show their thankfulness by hugging the officers and staff members of the immigration detention center who respond with warm gestures. On the way



Refugees enjoy their freedom at water park

home, the detainees are also given another 'surprise' - they are not taken back straight away, but invited to drive around to enjoy the view of the highlands and take photos with the IDC officers.

On the way back to the IDC, Haidar says that even if he and his friends have to return to their locked cells, he admits that today is a very special day for him and others. *"Forget detention. Forget everything. Today is a wonderful day"*. That day the joy and happiness have destroyed the obstructing divide. We do hope that Indonesia's laws will increasingly allow for the dismantling of the iron bars in the life of Asylum Seekers and Refugees.\*\*\*

## A Life Changing Experience

Paulus Enggal

**A**ccess to computers and knowing how to use them has become a basic need for work and education, this is also true for Refugees awaiting resettlement to a third country in Indonesia. But JRS classes have not only impacted Refugee's lives.

*"Mr. Mohammad, you can make a new folder by right click, move to 'New', choose 'Folder',"* said Herman, who teaches computer for Refugee community in Sewon. *"Like this?"* asks Mohammad. *"Yes like that. After clicking on 'Folder' you can type any name you want, for example type 'Freedom',"* added Herman. *"Oh yeah ... yeah ... good ... good,"* said Mohammad after looking satisfied at the result of his work on the notebook screen. Mohammad is one of the fast learners under the 30 Refugees learning the basics

about the use of computers. Not all in his class learn as fast as the former Kung Fu teacher training as many as 800 youth back in Pakistan. *"Well there was really a need to learn from scratch,"* said Yoga, one of the classroom assistants. *"Some people have never used a computer before. To hold a mouse with shaky hands makes it difficult to place the cursor and often a click turns easily into clicking two or three times"* said the trained English teacher who is studying at Sanata Dharma University. Today's computer class is attended by five Refugees due to the limited computers available. A few minutes later every single one of them is focused at the screen of the



Vicent, volunteer to JRS Indonesia

laptop trying to include a excel summation formula. Every now and then they called the JRS teachers when encountering a difficulty. The atmosphere is quiet and very focused, so very different the English conversation class just a few hours ago.

*“Now do you want to play a game?”* asked Adi the English teacher leading the English class earlier that day. Sitting in the multi function building Refugees were asked to participate in an English spelling bee. *“Mr Abbas, please give me one word starting with T,”* started Adi. Abbas, sitting in the corner of the room looks confused before trying to answer. *“Eh .... ‘think’,”* he said. *“How do you spell it?”* asks Adi. *“I do not know,”* Abbas replied quickly. Suddenly laughter fills the room.

The classes held in hamlet Pandes, Panggunharjo, Sewon are not just a place of learning new skills, but provide a space where the Refugees are received as a human being with dignity, a friend. *“Here we hope to provide a friendly meeting space for the men forced to leave their home. Coming from various nations having experienced conflict and persecution we aim to create an environment free of fear and discrimination, a school of life, to inspire anyone who wants to build a brotherhood,”* said Lino, coordinator of the project.

*“At first I was scared when I met them,”* said Anastasia Vicent, one of the volunteers with JRS. This student of Faculty of Law of a University in Yogyakarta did not know what to think about meeting the men from Afghanistan. Taliban, terrorism and suicide bombers were all what one heard in the media about the country and its people. *“But after getting to know them, that all turns out to be wrong. They are so different from what I imagined,”* she added. Much of the negative picture about asylum seekers was formed by news coverage and even by her own lectures. *“In the past, I read about illegal immigrants, I immediately looked at them is criminals. It seemed ok to put them into a prison,”* she remembers. The experience of three months teaching and listening to the stories of Mohammad, Mahmoud, Abdullah, Abbas, Hassan and their friends in Sewon, opens the heart and mind. *“I often can not say anything after I heard their experiences. These were accounts I heard never before. Even on campus a professor of international law tends to blame the Refugees,”* added Vicent. She now feels accepted like a part of family by the Refugees.

*“My encounter with Refugees added to my happiness. Every Monday, Wednesday, Friday, I am looking forward, to meet with them, hear about their experiences and hopes. There are always things that open my eyes,”* she added. The encounter



with Refugees changed many things in her. *“I now know and understand Refugees better. Now that I know their story from their own point of view,”* she explained. Meeting those who had to leave their loved ones in their homeland without certainty about what the future might bring, leaving behind all what defined oneself, anything that was established in life. *“I was touched by their situation. They are strong, still want to wait, though they do not know for how long,”* she said. *“I cannot imagine if I was in a situation like them,”* she added.

*“God, thank you for everything you have blessed me with this year especially one thing, my Sewon family, a sweet life-changing blessing. I’m highly grateful,”* she wrote on her facebook page when looking back at the many things that were shared by those who are now part of the 754 Refugees awaiting resettlement in Indonesia. *“Because I am not too good in teaching I try to be a friend for anyone. And this friendship changed me,”* she said. *“I became more patient, do not complain or get angry quickly when facing difficulties, because what I have to face is just so much lighter than what Refugees have to overcome,”* she reflects. It was a life changing experience, an experience that has and will change her life. *“I now have the desire to study human rights, I want to help them. Even though Indonesia does not want to receive them at least there has to be a system that is more humane,”* she said hopeful. Her experience inspired a lot of people, at least family and friends. *“Younger students in my faculty are interested and want to experience what we experienced”.*

Computers are magnificent tools for the realization of our dreams, but no machine can replace the human spark of spirit, compassion, love, and understanding.\*\*\*



# A Dream of Cinderella's Dress

Fransisca Asmiarsi

**B**eing involved in an association fighting for democracy, resisting or protesting against discrimination is dangerous in some countries. For those involved the threat of possible detention, torture or even death is real. Fleeing the country is for some the only option to ensure safety. Most of the Asylum Seekers currently living in Cisarua, Bogor, have after sometimes years of waiting, at last gained the status of a 'Refugee' from the UNHCR. During these waiting times Asylum Seekers hold on to opportunities for activities and their dreams of a better future.

*"I want to be a designer. I will make my own clothes"* says Ibsituu, an Asylum Seeker staying at Cipayung, Cisarua. Since April, Ibsituu has enthusiastically taken part in the sewing class facilitated by JRS Bogor and the FMM (Fransiscan Missionaries of Mary) Sisters Community. He is happy with this sewing class that he joined as the first of all his friends. *"She's the quickest in learning how to sew and stitch"*, says Ibu Ani, teaching sewing to Asylum Seekers.

The atmosphere of the Sewing Class became warmer after the Asylum Seekers got to know each other and started communicating more openly with each other. Apparently, it's not only the Asylum Seekers who are enthusiastic about the classes, trainers and teachers too seem to never grow tired in teaching the Asylum Seekers different ways of sewing. Sometimes everyone gets so enthusiastic that even the lunch gets postponed as one is too busy to learn and practice.

The conversations during the sewing lesson are friendly and cheerful. Language barriers and cultural



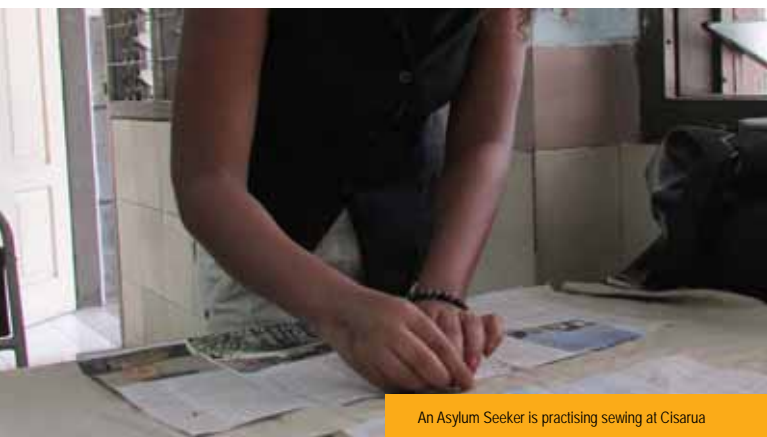
An Asylum Seeker is practising sewing at Cisarua

differences are overcome and making space for enjoying the company of new friends and discovering new ways of communicating.

*"Now I know the Ethiopian words for 'waist, arm and shoulder",* says Ibu Ani. *"It's very difficult to explain a thing without knowing someone's language. I just ask the words and write them down in my book so I can remember these particular words,"* adds Ibu Ani smiling. Ibu Ani has been particularly impressed with one of the Asylum Seekers, Gudetu, and her progress using the sewing machine. *"First she found it hard to synchronize her legs and hands when operating the sewing machine. But she has been relentless in trying and trying until she mastered it,"* says Ibu Ani, laughing.

Seven of the Asylum Seekers JRS is currently supporting meet each other every Tuesday and Thursday in the sewing class. One of them is Reyhaneh an Asylum Seeker from Iran. She is just 18 years of age. *"I want to meet other people. I will get bored easily when I only stay at home. If I come here twice a week, I can meet new people and also can learn how to sew. I will make a long dress like 'Cinderella's' dress,"* says Reyhaneh with a bright smile. To her, 'overcoming boredom' has become very important while awaiting the outcome of her asylum claim, which she submitted along with her sister and mother.

The sewing class is not solely a place to learn new skills but it is a chance to meet each other, become good friends in a safe and kind environment, sharing the experience of learning new skills together is empowering. Here one is free to laugh, celebrate ones' own and others small successes and gain new inspiration for dreams. After times of loss and grief the feeling of being weak and vulnerable can be left behind and hope is nurtured for a life in dignity and creativity. \*\*\*



An Asylum Seeker is practising sewing at Cisarua

# JRS Indonesia Accompaniment to Refugees and Asylum Seekers 2013

Lars Stenger

## Urban Refugees and Asylum Seekers:

### 1. Outreach Urban Asylum Seeker in Cisarua Bogor

- During the first months of 2013 the JRS team in Cisarua Bogor continued to receive many requests for support from vulnerable Asylum Seekers living in the community. The requests and needs are bigger than what the project can respond to. We have currently a waiting list prioritizing people most vulnerable, including women and children with special and emergency needs – mental and physical health concerns, and severe livelihood and housing needs
- *“Many Asylum Seekers asking for information and advice in regards to their Refugee Status Determination process but there are only very few individuals that can provide this information. JRS works together with young lawyers from SUAKA – Indonesian Civil Society Network for Refugee Protection - to ensure Asylum Seekers questions can be answered. More support is needed to enable Refugees to state their fear clearly and truthfully,”* stated Fransisca Asmiarsi, Information & Advocacy Officer at JRS Outreach to Urban Asylum Seekers project. *“During the first months of 2013 JRS and SUAKA assisted 48 Asylum Seekers in understanding the UNHCR process and criteria. We hope more people can join us in assisting Asylum Seekers to get the protection they need,”* added Asmiarsi.



Asmiarsi explaining the RSD process to an Asylum Seeker from Sudan



Lino Sanjaya, JRS Team Leader of Sewon Project

### 2. Refugee community, in Sewon-Bantul, Yogyakarta

- The majority of the Refugees accompanied by JRS during 2012 have received their visa for resettlement to Australia and can finally start a new life in security, equipped with better English language and computer skills. JRS welcomed new Refugee arrivals in Sewon community housing, many of whom joined English and Computer classes. *“We are happy. The resettlement means new Refugees can be released from detention into the community in Sewon. We are concerned about the Refugees awaiting resettlement for a long time, many of them are afraid they are forgotten or excluded from resettlement. They experience severe stress and depression.”* said Lino Sanjaya, Team Leader

## DETENTION

### 3. IDC Surabaya, in Bangil-Pasuruan, East Java

- The JRS team finally had success to get the permission to celebrate religious events, sports activities which seen the detained Asylum Seekers and Refugees leave their cells for the first time in months, more than that we are very happy to see that a group of Asylum Seekers and Refugees was allowed to leave the detention center for a few hours to enjoy a swimming pool.

### 4. IDC Medan, in Belawan North Sumatera

- The JRS team continues to deliver urgently needed accompaniment and recreational and educational activities in the hopelessly overcrowded detention center. A brawl between Myanmarese detainees - Rohingya and other ethnicity back in April has left 8 people dead, the trauma was still with the rest of the detainees for a long time. We successfully advocated for



the release of women and children from detention and increased accompaniment for detainees remaining in the IDC.

- JRS Research and Media Officer, Paulus Enggal, developed public awareness material for the field teams, and initiated the making of a short documentary film portraying Asylum Seekers and Refugees life in Indonesia. Enggal is currently collecting JRS' lessons learned of 4 years accompaniment, service and advocacy in Immigration Detention Centers in Indonesia.

#### IDPs & returned Refugees from PNG:

##### 5. Durable Solution for Prolonged IDPs in East Indonesia, Ambon, Maluku

- Purwaningsih, JRS Information and Advocacy Officer continues to accompany the IDP families resettling to land provided by JRS in Wa'ai. She is currently advocating for a timely issuing of the land certificates.
- JRS published and distributed the projects lessons learned in a case study on Prolonged Displacement, which is available on the JRS website (<http://jrs.or.id/publications/books/book/?did=164>).



6. The currently conducted in-dept Needs Assessment on the situation of returned Refugees from PNG in Papua Province is planned to be concluded by the end of June 2013. Findings of the first part of the needs assessment were shared in May 2013 to Church representatives, Regional Working Units (Satuan Kerja Pemerintah Daerah), and civil society in Keerom district. In June 2013, findings of the second part were shared in Merauke district.

#### SUAKA legal aid and advocacy network

- In May 2013 JRS supported the SUAKA Diplomat briefing on the situation of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Indonesia. SUAKA and JRS participated in a Focus Group Discussion at the National Human Rights Commission discussing and promoting Indonesia's ratification of the convention on the status of Refugees and its protocol. SUAKA continues to provide legal advice and accompaniment to Asylum Seekers during the RSD process mostly referrals from JRS. Currently a more comprehensive referral system is developed in a collaboration of JRS and SUAKA.

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