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# REFUGE

Jesuit Refugee Service Indonesia

Accompany, Serve and Advocate the Cause of Forcibly Displaced People

*Refugees, Where are They  
Coming from and  
Why are They Here?*

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# Refugees, Where are They Coming from and Why are They Here?

*Sofi Damayanti*

Two young Hazara men from different places Ali and Hasan (not original names) have similar interests. Ali likes cinematography while Hasan is a hobby photographer. They arrived in the city of Yogyakarta after a long journey compelled to leave their home and family on a way full of uncertainties. Young men of their age would leave home to follow a dream, to study, work or to build a family. The only purpose they both have at the time is reaching safety at the Australian continent. Both never thought that their journey would be so long winded.



Playing football is one of refreshment for Refugees

Ali was a journalist at a television station in his city. Day-to-day he managed sound recordings, cameras, providing news even if this meant taking risks. He extensively covered the situation of Hazaras in Afghanistan. The demanding work enabled him to travel to historical places. With pride he speaks about the history and culture of the Hazara people and their development. You cannot love, what you don't know about, people say. Which is true for Ali, the more he learned about his origins the more he loved the Hazara culture. Ironically, it was this passion that led to threats against his life and to him having to leave his home and people. As a journalist who sought to share about his identity and the situation of his people with the world he found himself at grave risk.

One night walking home from work, some people of an armed group confronted him. Only a few feet away from the yard of his home, a sack was put over his head, his hands were tied and orders were given. There was no choice but to follow and wait for an

opportunity to flee. The opportunity came and he fled, knowingly taking a risk he decided to go and asked his wife and children to get out of the house to live with their relatives. Aware that he was the target he subsequently left his beloved family in the care of his relatives not knowing if or when he will see them again.

Ali had to leave the country and arrived in Indonesia where he was detained in Tanjung Pinang immigration detention center until he received refugee status, what allowed him to go to the city of Yogyakarta. Here he spends his days thinking back at the day that changed his life forever and the decisions he took a few years ago. He is filled with sadness about the condition in his homeland, but still eager to tell the history of the Hazara people to anyone who is willing to listen. For him, this remains special, the job he loved and for whom he might have lost his own family. "Our culture is



Sofi Damayanti teaching English to Refugees in Sewon

Hasan asks: What is wrong if you are born with a different face, with slender eyes? How can it be that something so ordinary should determine one's life and death.

Hasan decided to escape with the help of an agent only certain about his destination not knowing where the journey would take him. One big part of his journey he spent in Indonesia, once just waiting further instructions on where to move next, another time getting lost in the forests of Sumatra. Eventually he embarked on a boat in the hope it would bring him to mainland Australia. The boat never arrived on its destination, but wrecked leaving the passengers and crew floating in the vast waters of the Indian Ocean.

very beautiful. I wish to be a bird so that I can fly to send a message of peace to all people in the world." Anyone who knows Ali will know, if at some point in time there will be peace in the land of his birth, then he would be one of the first to go back there despite the promises of a good life in Australia.

Hasan four years younger than Ali also left for the same reason and to the same destination, Australia. Why? Because he had not seen any hope for change towards a better future in Karachi, Pakistan, where he lived. Hazara people take a high risk when traveling out from their territory. Hasan's father who was famous for his kindness received many visitors from other territories, coming to his house to seek advice from Hasan's father. As his father was getting older Hasan used to accompany people in need, bringing them to the hospital and taking care of them.

With his motorcycle, the young man was quick to help others. But of course deep down he wanted to be more useful. He began to learn English in a college. He started dreaming of a safe life every time he heard about the dangers threatening him and the Hazara people, who look different to other ethnicities. Being hunted because of one's race, traveling on a bus could end up with an execution of everyone without mercy and without exception. Before he left killings and bombings by insurgents intensified in Pakistan. Being hunted because of race,

He and two friends tried to swim towards the sound of a passing ship. But the ship never turned around. Screaming for help Hasan had to see two of his friends drown that day. Their screams followed by silence and a death Hasan never looked upon in this form. "I only waited my turn," he recalled. Three days and three nights he floated silently until an Indonesian fishing boat rescued him, his skin burned by the sun. Being handed over to immigration officers Hasan was put without medical check-up into an immigration shelter in Central Jakarta. His sad legacy was to be the only survivor of 33 people, people like him in search for safety and hope. Witnessing the deaths of his companions one by one, seeing them carried away by the salty sea far from their mourning families. Hasan's experience seemed to have strengthened him and his belief and ideals, now being able to start a new life and prove that his second chance of a live will never be in vain.

*Ali is currently one of 50 refugees in Sewon community housing awaiting an interview by the Australian Embassy*

*Hasan finally got his visa and went to Perth, Australia in 2014*

# “Body Not Work”

*Gading Gumilang Putra*



Gading and Asylum Seekers participating in a Living Values Education Workshop

His name is Aaron, 24 years old, from Sri Lanka. Being a Christian Tamil meant his life was no longer safe in Sri Lanka. Even after the long civil war in Sri Lanka ended, kidnapping, torture and killing of civilians still occur.

Aaron had arrived in Indonesia in 2013. Together with other asylum seekers he tried to reach safety via a boat to Australia. However the boat broke leaving its passengers adrift in the Indian Ocean for days. His weight dropped 15 pounds. "Agents who provide these services run away and never returned our money," he said in broken English.

Living in Indonesia was not easy for Aaron. Being hunted by fear he found it hard to trust people even here. Aaron had to be patient during the long wait in Indonesia longing to finally hear the decision of UNHCR on his asylum claim. "I have no money to last a long time, my life is very problem," he said repeatedly.

JRS first met Aaron in March 2014. Aaron stayed with a friend at the time, which also came from

Sri Lanka. Without mattresses, Aaron slept on pieces of cardboard in the living room of a very small house. Every afternoon, Aaron walked 2 km to a temple that provides free food every day. Aaron finally contacted JRS when the itching all over his body would not stop even after nearly one year.

Before meeting JRS, Aaron went to a doctor but because of the lack of a mutual language communication was difficult. His illness was not cured and in fact getting worse. JRS decided to provide medical assistance to Aaron. When JRS first accompanied him to the doctor, Aaron was diagnosed with intoxication. Over the years, Aaron has been taking one medicine prescribed by a doctor for limited use. "I do not know, without medication, body not work." Aaron's friends were already reluctant to being close to Aaron afraid of getting infected with itching he suffered.

Together with JRS Aaron went to three different doctors, all of them stating that Aaron's itching was caused by a side effect caused by the repeated use of medication to which he developed an allergy, stating it is not contagious. The allergies got worse due to unhygienic bedding and the humid climate as well as scratching.

"Aaron body had become dependent on medicine containing steroids. This drug should not be purchased. If he would have come later to the doctor the side effects could have lead to bleeding in the digestive organs, swelling of the skin, bone loss and a mental breakdown. The only way to prevent this is to reduce the dose of the medicine and not to give other medicine" The doctor explained in detail. "But, body not work ... medicine doctor not work ..," Aaron who has difficulties with language, feels that the actions

recommended have no effect. Over the years, Aaron had trouble getting out of bed in the morning as he could not sleep at night without taking his medicine. His whole body felt sore and was covered with red spots. "You need to be patient. You should come back here and not buy medicine by yourself," advised the doctor. Aaron could only respond with a shy smile.

The language barrier can be a serious challenge to the lives of asylum seekers and refugees. Not being able to communicate and understand what was said by the doctor in the past had dire consequences for Aaron's health. This limitation also leads to doctors not knowing what to say or how to make themselves understood. Patiently, JRS repeatedly explained the doctor's advice to Aaron and contacted some of Aaron's friends help him understand.

On June 10, 2014, UNHCR finally acknowledged Aaron's status as a refugee. However, his face was still gloomy. "Refugee and asylum seeker same-same, no difference. My body still not work. I still no room," he said softly. Being a refugee does not necessarily change the life of Aaron. He still had to wait for the opportunity to be resettled to a third country which can take a long time. "Maybe I wait one year hm?" He asked innocently.

However, with the help of individual recently Aaron has moved to a cleaner and bigger house. "I use this money for the rent, 500 thousand and 200 thousand to eat every month. I only eat at night with this money, the afternoon I go to the temple to eat a snack," Aaron said with a smile to the JRS.

Aaron and JRS staff became close. Even though JRS cannot provide financial assistance to him, JRS is there for Aaron if he wants to talk about what happened in his life. Of course the language is limited. Every two weeks, JRS accompanies Aaron to a dermatologist in Bogor. Language is no longer a barrier for Aaron and doctors. After some time Aaron started laughing again sometimes with the doctors other times with JRS.



JRS supporting health care for Asylum Seekers

Now it has been almost three months of regular doctor visits with Aaron and the swelling of his face is gradually reducing. Aaron's body is still feeling sick. However, with Aaron understanding what caused his condition and the importance of following medical treatment given Aaron can reduce medication. "It may be another three months before Aaron can be completely healed," said the doctor.

Aaron now often jokes during JRS visits. His experience is an example of how accompaniment and limited medical support can have a tremendous impact for people we serve as well as to JRS staff themselves. Accompaniment translated into being with asylum seekers can overcome language barriers and create a bond that enables communication among human beings beyond spoken language. We wish Aaron a speedy recovery.

*The name of the refugee has been changed in order to ensure the safety of him and his family.*



JRS staff listening to Asylum Seekers telling their life story

## When Accompaniment Becomes Brotherhood

*Pieter Dolle SJ*

"No, full, Sir, thank you ..." he said with a moving his hand onto his stomach when I offered lunch. His face looks sad but there was a line of hope in a smile. Two nights before we met in Cisarua market, Fuadi had contacted me and told about his condition. Seeing him now made me feel relieved and calm. It was because some time ago, he was severely depressed, just quiet when spoken to, and dazed.

Who would have thought a professional photographer with expertise in Photoshop software must not struggle to survive in Cisarua, Bogor. Who would have thought the father who cared for three young school girls would become severely depressed over the lack of money and right to work in Indonesia depending on the kindheartedness of a market stall owner offering him shelter, food

and drink. It is hard to imagine the turn that Fuadi's life has taken leaving his world spinning rapidly, what stays is the memory of his family or taking pictures of weddings in Quetta. The reality now is to survive in Indonesia to obtain refugee status from UNHCR. "In Pakistan, before, my life is good. But, now, ..." Fuadi can only take a deep breath.

After his family could not send any more money to him he tried to find a job in Cisarua to buy food. The result, nihil, no one was willing to accept and give him a job. "I ask a photo studio but they have no work. I ask the photocopy shop, no work. I know Photoshop. I can operate a photocopy machine ..." said Fuadi. Now, he helps at one of the market stalls in return he is allowed to sleep in the store as long as he does not invite others. He gets

food and drink from the owner of the kiosk as a reward for his help. "Now, I am happy. I am occupied!" Said Fuadi with a bright face and sparkling eyes.

My encounters with Fuadi are moments of companionship which I treasure. Being present as fellow human being and accompanying refugees in Indonesia teach me much about brotherhood through companionship.

I felt happiness when Fuadi started contacting me by phone; even if it was only to complain and tell me about his difficulties to sleep, it was a sign. Being present for people in their worst moments can fill the heart with empathy and love, and gives time to reflect upon human values. Now sharing stories and even laughing with Fuadi eases my mind. Enjoying the sharing of memories and experiences we became brothers, despite our different origins, no blood relationship, different religion, ethnicity or political opinion. Companionship, fraternity,

the sharing of sadness and happiness charges our lives and lets us experience and live accompaniment when being with asylum seekers in their dark and bright moments. *The Moment of Dawn* adapted by Paulo Coelho expresses my hope for all of us in approaching others, especially asylum seekers.

*A teacher gathered together his students and asked them: "How do we know the exact moment when night ends and day begins?" "It's when, standing some way away, you can tell a sheep from a dog," said one boy. The teacher was not content with the answer. Another student said: "No, it's when, standing some way away, you can tell an olive tree from a fig tree." "No, that's not a good definition either." "Well, what's the right answer?" asked the boys. And the teacher said: "When a stranger approaches, and we think he is our brother, that is the moment when night ends and day begins."*

## A Day in the Life of a JRS Volunteer

*Sarah Watt*

It's Wednesday or Thursday, 10am. I get on my motorbike and head south through the city of Yogyakarta. I eventually arrive at the refugee centre in Sewon. I drive through the gate, say good morning to the security, and park up. I jump off and head to the classroom. Space is limited, so maybe our class will be in the kitchen today, either way, English class will happen!

I am greeted by many friendly handshakes. I've gladly become a familiar face for the refugees living in Sewon who call me anything from Sarah to Miss Sarah or Miss Teacher. Whatever they call me, I'm pretty sure they are happy to see me and the feeling is mutual. I then meet the regular teachers who have been faithfully teaching English to the refugees here for various lengths of time, and they are also wearing a big smile. Ready to chat about a great variety of

topics from our childhood pets to cows falling from the sky, I sit with the teacher whose class I will be joining for the morning. The students for that class come in, English folder in hand, ready for whatever challenge is coming their way in the next couple of hours.

Maybe we are doing a language game, or a test, or some happy compromise of the two. If we're doing a game today, there will be



Sarah is volunteering for 3 months as teaching assistant with JRS Indonesia

lots of laughing. There are many jokes between us all about cheating, but at the end of the day, if one of us doesn't understand, there will always be somebody to explain and encourage, whether that is the teacher, myself or a fellow refugee. Because life is sweeter when it's lived together. If it's a Wednesday there are Burmese refugees in my class, so I try my best to practise my somewhat waning Burmese language, and sometimes a few Indonesian words are thrown in for good measure. But in general, English is the name of the game. During these two hours, I smile a lot. I smile because of the funny times we share. I smile because of the progress made in their English language. And I smile because I realise that these guys are becoming more and more comfortable with me being a part of their class as we share just a snippet of life together.

English class comes to an end. Maybe we study some Indonesian language together as well, because, although English is probably more helpful in the long run, these people are living in Indonesia right now. After class, we chat together, with other teachers and refugees. Maybe some of the refugees invite us to their accommodation to eat lunch together. I am excited to try some new food from another country, and it never disappoints. I am fed seconds, thirds, until I can't possibly eat another thing. We chat, sometimes we talk about their home countries, and other times we talk about my home country of England. Sometimes we joke, but other times I'm lost for words when these people, who are becoming like brothers to me, share parts of their stories and put my miniscule hardships into perspective once again.

Sooner or later, I head back to my comfortable life as an abroad student at one of Indonesia's best universities. Back past security, I call out goodbye as I take to the road, past the paddy fields and onto Yogyakarta's busy city roads. But out of sight definitely does not mean out of mind. As I ride, I pray mostly for the guys in my class, that they would have peace in their difficult times, that all their needs would be provided for, and that they will not lose hope during this long process.

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