

October 2018 Edition

# REFUGE

Jesuit Refugee Service Indonesia

Accompany, Serve, and Advocate the Cause of Forcibly Displaced People



**A Month of Grace**

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**An Endless Journey**

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**Getting to Know More Refugees**

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**Teach to Learn**



# A Month of Grace

*Stefanus Bagus Aris Rudiyanto SJ*



*Their lives are far from comfortable, so refugees need us to touch their heart: They need to be heard, accompanied, and encouraged to continue their lives.*

Meeting with refugees was a graceful experience. Each individual encounter with them reaffirmed to me that the contemplation on the meaning of life is an endless quest. From them, I learned about the meaning of survival in an uncertain situation and how to continue living in it full of hope. When I was doing probation during my tertianship in Bogor, I tasted the experience of accompaniment and service to refugees with my JRS friends.

I have experienced myself, how to accompany refugees to the hospital, from registration until the medical examination was done, at Ciawi and PMI hospitals, or during medical check-up by Buddha Tzu Chi. For refugees who needed surgery, I helped them preparing themselves for what is coming. Communication with hospital staff was well established and they welcomed us warmly, although it felt a bit too procedural now and then. So there are some tensions during these accompaniments at times, especially when it got quite time consuming. But instead of pointing my finger at anyone, I learned to be more patient and enjoy the time focusing on the small positive things. For example, when our appointment was

on 9am but doctors were not available because they were performing surgery or on leave, leading to our schedule being moved to 1pm.

Spending a month with JRS friends helped me to understand more how important service is for those who are powerless, marginalized, and experience difficulties in accessing food, shelter, decent and dignified living facilities. Their lives are far from comfortable, so refugees need us to touch their heart: They need to be heard, accompanied, and encouraged to get on with their lives. Supporting and opening our heart to them is the best way to help them rise from traumatic experiences into more hopeful lives. Many refugees were longing to be resettled to a peaceful third country so they can start a normal and peaceful life, just like all of us wish for and experience.

My experience meeting with friends from JRS and especially the refugees had invited me to feel God's care for those in need. This takes a lot of energy but I felt happy to serve. In the midst of busy service, taking a moment to pray was a strength, giving meaning to what has been

done during the day. I believe prayers inspire work, and the other way around. I feel that accompanying refugees requires closeness to God. Whenever I had to take steps to help refugees, I needed to open my heart and mind allowing God's guidance, so I could make right and wise decisions according to God's will.

Once Pope Francis said, "*We encounter Jesus in those who are poor, rejected, or refugees. Do not let fear get in the way of welcoming our neighbour in need*". Encountering refugees who are vulnerable to illness and often hopeless, I was being invited to feel God's presence and to comfort them; to keep and love them. God is even present in those who are marginalized and helpless. God is the only source of faith, hope, and love for them. I also felt strengthened when accompanying and listening to their sorrow.

Encountering refugees also taught me to accept and appreciate them. Smiles and excitement have become the best medicine for those traumatized, frustrated, and sick, or even when facing ghosts! There was once a refugee, who was frightened after someone told him about a ghost in his house. One way to support is to be positive, energetic, humorous, and to do good to them. We need these attitudes to accompany them to keep their faith, love and hope.

One significant experience came at a time when I felt my energy completely drained after accompanying a refugee. In that exhaustion, I started longing to share my feelings with God. After that, there was an urge to remain faithful and enthusiastic in carrying out service duties. Meeting with refugees turned out to help me to feel God's presence in them. I was reminded of Jesus' words; "*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me*". (Matthew 25:35-36). Refugees experience all these hunger, thirst, alienation, illness, detention.

For me, welcoming refugees also means welcoming God himself, who was once a refugee. Because refugees are our brothers and sisters, we "share food, shelter, and life". To share is to let go of part of our comfort for solidarity with refugees. Learning from the poverty they experience, I was challenged to embrace the spirit to work hard and live simply. My friends in JRS were so generous, they have inspired me to always be humble, passionate and responsive, ready, and patient when accompanying, serving, and defending the rights of those exiled.

Meeting asylum seekers and refugees from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Sri Lanka, Somalia, Sudan and Myanmar has moved me deeply. I was reaffirmed that a life full of limitations and uncertainty should not stop one in enjoying life. Despite having lost many things, home, happy childhood, education, work, family, and stability, refugees still hold on to hopes. The burning flame of hope has become their strength in interpreting life. Thus I believe meeting them is an experience full of grace and consolation.



*Bagus Aris Rudiyanto SJ during a workshop with JRS Indonesia staff in Bogor.*

# An Endless Journey

*Rizka Argadianti Rachmah*



*Social visit for refugees living in Bogor.*

I still remember when I first made a social visit without my colleague. That day the sun was so hot, we got pretty soaked in sweat. I walked with Maria\*, an Afghan refugee who helped me as interpreter, along the crowded market, accompanied by the rancid smell of livestock blood mixed with mountainous piles of garbage. We walked quite fast and chatted occasionally, whenever we found a gap in between the swarm of customers or when the path was quite flat, hoping to get out of the market as quick as we could.

Fifteen minutes on foot, we arrived panting and thirsty. Nobody welcomed us in front of the house. The door was already open and we heard the voice of an elderly lady calling us to get in. The bedroom door was also opened. When we entered, a strange odor covered the room. We saw an elderly lady sitting on the edge of her bed, with a catheter that empties into the bucket on the floor.

The house I visited was the house of a widow named Haqqa\*. She is almost 70 years old, and she was living with her 28 years old daughter. With Maria's help, I could communicate with Haqqa. My mission to visit Haqqa was actually to ask for her approval, that because of JRS' limitation, JRS wanted to provide assistance in the form of reporting comprehensively to UNHCR so that Haqqa would get a holistic health care or if possible to speed up her resettlement process. Haqqa agreed.

Haqqa left Afghanistan in 2014 because her daughter was persecuted. She had a son but he was separated from her during their journey in finding safety and she never heard from him again. Her husband was murdered for defending their daughter. Haqqa's survival in Indonesia relied on the money she brought from Afghanistan.

After a year living in Indonesia, she got into an accident. She fell down the stairs in her house, which left her hip and left leg broken. Haqqa became very dependent on her daughter. Unfortunately, her daughter Saeeda\* was not always reliable. She had undergone psychiatric treatment to help her recover from her trauma. After Haqqa's accident, Saeeda became increasingly uncontrollable. After being treated by another organization, Haqqa decided to move to another city and brought Saeeda with her in 2017.

Life didn't get easier for Haqqa and Saeeda. Since there was no more treatment support for Saeeda, Haqqa had to find a way to fulfil their needs by herself. Haqqa then became very dependent on the mercy of others. This includes replacing expired

catheters, she got help from other caring Afghan refugees.

After a long period of gathering information and having several meetings, the report was finally completed. I underlined in the report to pay more attention to Haqqa's psychological condition because I found some inconsistency in information provided. Haqqa also expressed her unwillingness to meet me again because of the many questions I asked. I believed she didn't really mean it, but it was her age and physical condition, present circumstances, and her past that overwhelmed her feelings and thoughts.

In March 2018, UNHCR said that the resettlement opportunities for refugees in Indonesia had drastically decreased. It could take more than 10 years for a resettlement, some might even not be resettled at all. This information definitely came as a shock to many refugees. They were frantic. Getting stuck in Indonesia would mean an endless journey for them.

The dream of continuing formal education, getting a job and a decent life could not be realized in Indonesia. This confusion leads to more and more refugees asking to get help from psychologists and psychiatrists.

Indonesia didn't ratify the 1951 Convention on Refugees, so many feel there is no obligation to shelter or support refugees. According to UNHCR data, there are around 13.800 refugees in Indonesia. On the ASEAN scale, this number is actually much smaller compared to neighboring countries like Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines.

Few months after we sent the report to UNHCR, we learned that Haqqa had been treated in one of the major hospitals but unfortunately she did not survive the treatment. Haqqa died. In the end, Saeeda is left to fight alone in a place that is not her home.

\*All names have been changed to protect identities

As part of the Indonesian Province of the Society of Jesus, JRS Indonesia and SPM Realino will join the response to earthquake and tsunami survivors in Palu and Donggala, Central Sulawesi, in coordination with JMJ Manado and PSE Manado Diocese to address humanitarian needs.

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Photo: Facebook Caritas Indonesia - Karina

# Getting to Know More Refugees

*Maria Elga Ratri Ayudi*



Participants filling the guest book.



Testimonial from child refugee.



Seminar speakers.



Bikhuni Mei Chi, seminar participant.



Participants of the seminar.



Child refugees presenting Indonesia Raya (Indonesia's National Anthem)

*"I was one of those who were wrong and uninformed. But with the presence of refugee children who were entrusted to our school, it was a blessing that we could give something,"* said Sister Jeannette Tumuju JMJ, Principal of Pax Christi Middle School, Manado. Sister Jeannette's confession was presented at a seminar entitled "Knowing Refugees, Between Reality and Prejudice" organized by JRS Indonesia and partners at the Manado Convention Center, Manado, Tuesday (28/8).

In the seminar which was attended by around 70 participants from various government agencies, schools, colleges and religious communities, various opinions regarding the existence of cross-border refugees were discussed, moderated by lecturers from De La Salle University in Manado. Three main speakers, The Head of Manado Immigration Detention Center Arthur Mawikere, Protection Associate of UNHCR Makassar Oktina Hafanti, and Director of JRS Indonesia Th. A. Maswan Susinto SJ gave informative presentations drawing a snap shot of refugee's situation in Indonesia to participants who were

previously unfamiliar about who and why there were refugees in Indonesia.

There are currently almost 14,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia facing an uncertain future here. One of the very needs of these refugees is the acknowledgment of their basic human rights, including access to basic needs, education, and employment. Refugees are not outside of the law, regulating conduct and obligations. *"If a refugee violates the law, please process it, but still based on their human rights,"* said Oktina Hafanti answering some participants' questions concerned about a potential negative impact of the existence of refugees in Indonesia.

In his remarks, the chairman of the committee - and coordinator of JRS Manado - Zainuddin invited the community to do something, even little things, for refugees. For example, by opening up opportunities to get education for refugee children, as did some schools in Manado, both public and private.





Wahyudi

My name is Wahyudi, from Ponorogo, East Java. I'm a social worker and have worked for 2 years in a Non-Governmental Organizations in Malang. In the beginning of 2018, I was keen to learn about refugee issues. I found some organizations working on those issues, one of them Jesuit Refugee Service Indonesia. I felt really interested and also challenged to be involved in JRS programs for their mission to accompany, serve, and advocate for the rights of refugee. After reading through JRS' website, I applied to volunteer. JRS accepted and placed me in one of their projects in Cisarua, Bogor. My main duty was to teach Indonesian language to Beginner Class 1 and 2.

It's a special role for me as a volunteer because I could devote myself, especially to help refugees to learn Indonesian language. It was my first experience interacting with them. Their cultural diversity is very interesting. Despite of me being the teacher for refugees, I actually learned a lot from them. The dynamics that I experienced with them encouraged me to find out and understand about their situation. This mindset made language classes so interesting. Not only focusing on teaching, I also learned.

I have never imagined that I would teach Indonesian to foreigners. I found many things about Indonesian that I had never realized before. Teaching various additive words, explaining words in context, and narrating Indonesian culture were always part of the learning activities in my classroom. I felt challenged to deliver easy and interesting lessons.

Learning Indonesian as a third language after Farsi and English is not easy for refugees. High commitment and discipline is needed so that the learning process bears fruit. However, live as a refugee in Indonesia leads to some of them experiencing serious mental problems that affect their learning spirit. Some of them were often absent and did not do assignments, both written and oral. But I didn't necessarily give a warning or punishment. I always tried to understand their situation by not giving a lot of burden. I tended to invite them to discuss and reflect. Encouragement like this was what I often emphasized so they would be motivated to learn.

The most memorable experience during my time as a volunteer was meeting with refugees. Working alongside them made me aware of the complexity of their lives. So far, I had only heard about conflicts



Wahyudi in a discussion with JRS Indonesia staff.

occurring in the Middle East region and people having to flee, without knowing their real condition. When I was directly meeting them, I could feel how difficult it was to be in their situation. Even so, I am very happy to be able to learn Indonesian together with them. I hope the little knowledge that I shared could be useful for them while living in Indonesia.

Working with refugees was a very valuable experience for my future. Initially, I just wanted to improve my work experience. However, it turned out that I learned many useful lessons about perspectives and life after volunteering for 7 months.

*"Being a social worker is really not easy. However, work that is only project-oriented does not give meaning to our lives."* This important impression I will take away from my time with JRS. It is my most memorable to date. I wish JRS Indonesia ease and smoothness when continuing to carry out its mission to accompany, serve, and defend the rights of refugees in Indonesia.



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