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Diakonia, meaning literally "to serve," has been the quarterly publication of JRS Asia Pacific since 1983. The Jesuit Refugee Service is an international Catholic organisation established in 1980 by Fr Pedro Arrupe, SJ. Its mission is to accompany, serve and advocate for forcibly displaced persons around the world.

Asia Pacific: a world free of landmines and cluster bombs



Bernard Hyacinth Arputhasamy, SJ, visits the JRS project in Papua New Guinea. (Photo by Peter Balleis SJ/ JRS International)

And while April raised awareness about mines, we still need to keep our sights set on cluster bombs.

free world.

Two landmine survivors in Cambodia have now become ambassadors to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and Cluster Munitions Coalition (ICBL/CMC) and great friends of JRS. Tun Channareth and Song Kosal have travelled the world with JRS and the ICBL pushing for real progress to end the use of the weapons that almost took their lives. Losing limbs did not destroy their human dignity and they chose to rise above their pain in order to give voice to many other voiceless survivors.

While Mine Awareness Day is a chance to keep the issue current, it is also a chance to reflect. And in reflecting, it is a chance to be grateful. We are grateful to all of the survivors who fight against the use of landmines and cluster bombs. We are grateful to all of the survivors who continue to work in their community and raise families. We are grateful to the advocates around the world. And we still pray that we will see a mine free world in our lifetime so our children will never have to lend their legs.

Bernard Hyacinth Arputhasamy, SJ regional director JRS Asia Pacific

Australia: JRS launches new Residence Determination Project



One Australia's immigration detention centres.

It's only right that we put our money where our mouth is and show Australia that

Bangkok, 30 April, 2011 – Everyone at JRS lent their leg earlier this month, and I hope you joined too. April 4 was International Mine Awareness Day and JRS continues its work to advocate for a ban of landmines worldwide along with cluster bombs.

And while April raised awareness about mines, we still need to keep our sights set on cluster bombs. We were thrilled in 2008 when over half of world's governments outlawed cluster bombs.

But it was short-lived.

Recently countries like France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the UK, who signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions, were under pressure from the US, China and Russia, supported by Israel and Australia to circumvent the ban that would allow them to use particular kinds of cluster munitions. It took vigorous campaigning to defeat their attempt. A few months ago, a young boy picked up a bright metal object near his home in Cambodia that turned out to be a cluster bomb. He died and was survived by his grandmother. And she has to go on, living in the same place where her grandson died, not knowing if there are more bombs or mines around her home.

But things are moving. While we appreciate the generous assistance given to mine-affected countries to clear mines and assist victims, we continue to knock on the doors of countries like the US, Russia, China, India, Israel and others to ratify the treaty and convention to pave the way for a mine

Sydney, 30 April, 2012 – JRS Australia is in the throes of its biggest expansion ever, with the number of staff increasing threefold in response to the needs of its growing client base.

This development has come about as a direct result of the government's revised policies on detention, with the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Chris Bowen, announcing recently that selected asylum seekers who have until now been detained in detention facilities across Australia will be placed in community detention in partnership with church- and community-based organisations such as JRS Australia. In response to this announcement, JRS has extended its small Residence Determination Project to provide accommodation and casework to vulnerable adult asylum seekers and family groups who have been released from detention centres.

The primary aim of the Residence Determination Project is to create a safe, supportive and dignified living environment which will enable vulnerable clients to improve their mental and physical health, and to then move into the community and support themselves. JRS has partnered in this endeavour with Marist Youth Care, providing support to 40 asylum seekers identified by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) as

there are viable alternatives to secure detention.

being too vulnerable to support themselves in the community.

"Our involvement in the further expansion of the Residence Determination Program builds on the experience and expertise gleaned from our work with adult men and women in the Sydney Shelter Project, now in its fifth year, as well as the work we have done caring for Unaccompanied Minors

in Residence Determination," says the Director of JRS Australia, Fr Aloysious Mowe SJ.

Not only do many asylum seekers moving into [community detention](#) suffer from trauma, says Fr Mowe, many have also become dependent on others for their basic care.

"One of the purposes of the community detention expansion now is to try to move asylum seekers into some degree of resilience, some degree of independence. At JRS we have project assistants who come into the house in the evenings and supervise cooking with the men. These are men who in some cases may never have cooked in their lives, coming from the cultures they're from, or in other cases may have cooked but have been in situations in the past one or two years in held detention where they've become completely dependent on a kind of institutional living."

As long-time advocates for the ending of secure immigration detention for asylum seekers, JRS now has the opportunity through its community detention project to put its advocacy into practice, said Fr Mowe.

"It's only right that we put our money where our mouth is and show Australia that there are viable alternatives to secure detention. The asylum seekers have not committed any crime and should not be behind barbed wire and high fences. It is ironic that many come here seeking liberty, only to have their liberty snatched away from them. A secure border policy should not trump human dignity and natural justice."

Catherine Marshall, Province Express reporter

Asia Pacific: new research shows failings in protection in the region



This guide covers five broad themes: protection concerns, convention obligations and domestic frameworks, refugee status determination, durable solutions, and finally an outline of the realities of living in the region in relation to employment, education, health care and housing.

Bangkok, 27 April, 2012 – When asylum seekers reach the Asia Pacific they may realise more than anyone what is missing in terms of their protection. Where some countries are successfully helping asylum seekers live in safety, others are lacking.

The truth is, protection space for asylum seekers and refugees in South-East Asia is limited and constantly changing. It is in this environment that asylum seekers and refugees must negotiate the difficult, long and confusing refugee status determination (RSD) processes that will ultimately decide the direction their lives will turn.

The Search: Protection Space in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, The Philippines and Cambodia in Practice is a practical guide which will assist other advocates to give accurate information to asylum seekers and refugees about the realities of protection space within the region.

In South-East Asia, where only three countries, Cambodia, the Philippines and Timor Leste, are signatories to the Refugee Convention the challenges of living in an urban setting are amplified on a daily basis as people struggle to make a living, avoid detention, send their children to school and tend to their medical needs.

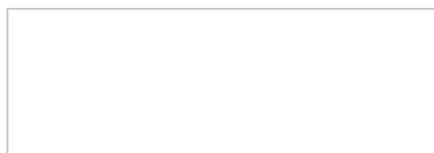
This guide covers five broad themes: protection concerns, convention obligations and domestic frameworks, refugee status determination, durable solutions, and finally an outline of the realities of living in the region in relation to employment, education, health care and housing.

Given the range of challenges, it is essential that those that work with asylum seekers and refugees know as much as possible about the asylum options available in urban areas in the capital cities of Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Jakarta, Manila and Phnom Penh.

The focus of this research has been to emphasise the experience of asylum seekers and refugees, to let them tell their own stories, while at the same time compile the relevant contextual information that presents a broad picture of the current situation in South-East Asia. The asylum seekers and refugees who have willingly shared their stories, opened up their homes and lives for the purpose of this guide have done so in the hope that it may ultimately help others on the same journey: the search for protection.

Nikola Errington, JRS Cambodia legal officer

Cambodia: Award winners urge landmine ban



Seol, 16 March 2012 — Anti-landmine campaigners from Cambodia have urged the government to ban using and scrap its stockpiles of landmines and cluster munitions.



Sr Denise Coghlan, OSM, JRS Cambodia director, and Song Kosal, youth ambassador for the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, accept their award in Korea and use their time to discuss de-mining in Cambodia.

We beg the world to stop making and laying mines and to help us rebuild our country.

Sister Denise Coghlan, founder of the Cambodia Campaign to Ban Landmines (CCBL), and one of its activists, Song Kosal, were in Seoul yesterday to receive this year's Tji Hak-soon Justice and Peace Award.

Kosal lost both legs after stepping on a mine in Battambang — the most heavily mined province in Cambodia — when she was five years old.

The pair met Tji Hak-soon Justice and Peace Foundation chairman, Monsignor Philip Kim Byeong-sang, yesterday in Seoul.

"We beg the world to stop making and laying mines and to help us rebuild our country," they said during their acceptance speech.

Before the award ceremony, they attended a press conference outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, organized by groups opposed to weapons of mass destruction.

"The Korean government, which is a known producer, importer, exporter and stockpiler of the weapons, has not signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions or the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty due to the unique security situation on the Korean peninsula," the pair said in statement.

"The government has to sign the treaty and the convention and stop making these weapons immediately," they urged.

South Korea and North Korea are still technically at war after ceasefire agreement was signed in 1953 ending hostilities in the Korean War (1950-53). China, Russia and the United States have yet to sign the mine treaty.

The CCBL, established in 1994, enables landmine victims to help each other and contributed in forming global public opinion towards establishing the two international agreements.

According to the Korea Mine Clearing Research Institute, there are around 970,000 landmines buried in the DMZ (demilitarized zone) separating North and South Korea.

The Tji Hak-soon award was introduced to honor Bishop Daniel Tji, former bishop of Wonju, in 1997 to promote justice, peace and human rights.

This story originally ran on UCANews.com

Asia Pacific: JRS news briefs from the region



Aung San Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi wins by-election

Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) won 43 seats in Burma's April 1 by-elections. She and the NLD will be the main opposition force in a national parliament dominated by the military and its political allies. She joins the parliament April 23 after living 15 of the past 22 years locked up by the former junta. Suu Kyi was released in late 2010 just days after a controversial election won by the military.

JRS Australia Youth Awards winners 'brilliant'

The third annual JRS Youth Award attracted a diversity of entries ranging from the clever and practical to the technically brilliant, with the Director of JRS, Fr Aloysius Mowe SJ, describing the winning entries as "haunting" and "brilliant." The winners made an interactive game called The Road for a Refugee. "It drew the viewer into a game where we have to make the choices and experience the consequences ourselves," said Fr Mowe. Another entry, Somali Refugees, was an outstanding entry that was well-deserving of first place, according to Mowe. "It did not look at refugees from a distance, or from the perspective of an outsider. Rather it gave the refugees a voice, and what a voice: eloquent, heart-felt, painting a world that spoke not just of the horrors that refugees flee, but also of the beauty of what they leave behind." Somali Refugees has already been shown at two major events and received good reviews.

Being globally strategic

After extensive consultation throughout last year, JRS published its Strategic Framework for 2012-2015, outlining broad goals, values, strategies and expected outcomes for the next four years. The 24-page booklet seeks to provide an inspirational framework and set overarching strategies for all 10 JRS regions to meet the challenges of working with refugees on the edges of humanity. The goals adapt core beliefs and make them relevant to the challenges of today: compassion on the edge of humanity, faith and justice, hope and education, and unity in action. Read the document in its entirety at www.jrsap.org

Spreading compassion through Australia

JRS teamed up with Caritas Australia last month to promote Project Compassion, the annual fundraising and community engagement appeal. The project's simple, yet insightful message: "If you want Peace, work for Justice" – Pope Paul VI, was shared with people across Australia.

Fire threatens refugee camp

A forest fire broke out in a small section of Ban Mai Nai Soi refugee camp along the Thai/Burma border April 6. The section leader immediately alerted camp residents via loud speaker as refugees mobilised to extinguish the fire. Strong winds stoked fears the fire would spread rapidly from house to house, but prompt action to remove the roofs prevented disaster. Luckily, a heavy downpour helped extinguish the fire so no homes were damaged and no one was hurt. The Permanent Secretary of Mae Hong Son visited the scene and praised the camps section leader for their efforts to stamp out the fire, noting the disaster response plan was well implemented ensuring the safety of life and property.

Learning the law of statelessness

JRS Cambodia in April partnered with the Statelessness Programme of the University of Tilburg Law School to deliver a training for civil society on statelessness. The issue is of increasing concern internationally, regionally and within Cambodia. The training introduced the concept and international law of statelessness, and explored how statelessness can be prevented. Case studies from the region and internationally showed the consequences of statelessness and possible ways to resolve it.

JRS makes more effort to connect with you

A JRS workshop in February produced a new two-year communication plan to promote attention on refugee issues. Field staff met in Rome for a week of workshops and discussions on how to best inform, educate and motivate readers like you to action on issues facing forcibly displaced people. Seminars throughout the week spanned from writing for the web, using tools like Facebook and Twitter, and fundraising. Both social networking and multimedia were presented as tools to share the voices of refugees and forcibly displaced people, and quickly inform the public in the event of a crisis or new positive development.

UNHCR exits Timor Leste

During a gathering at the presidential palace to mark the closure of UNHCR's Dili office in January, Jose Ramos-Horta thanked the UN refugee agency for helping see his young country through the humanitarian crises of its early years. UNHCR opened its office in 1999 and Timor Leste gained independence in 2002.

Video: Global approach to urban refugee issues



JRS staff from around the world discuss issues surrounding urban refugees while meeting at the St. Gabriel Personnel Development Center in Bangkok, Thailand, March 22, 2012. (Christian Fuchs — Jesuit Refugee Service/USA)

(Washington, D.C.) April 27, 2012 - Jesuit Refugee Service has long recognized that serving urban refugee populations is a major challenge. Isolation, restrictive and inadequate government policies and resource constraints all take on increased significance in urban settings.

In March of this year, JRS staff from more than 25 countries met in Bangkok for a global consultation meeting to discuss and debate our work with urban refugees. After four days of intense discussion and debate, quality, participation and learning emerged as the guiding principles for JRS work with refugees in urban areas.

Staff identified six priority areas for interventions in urban settings: access to services, psychosocial and mental health, education, material and basic needs, and legal issues, protection and rights. Guiding principles of intervention and steps to be considered when implementing projects in each area were also developed.

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Highlighted as a global priority in its [2012-2015 Strategic Framework](#), JRS has long recognized that serving urban refugee populations as a major challenge. Isolation, restrictive and inadequate government policies and resource constraints all take on increased significance in urban settings.

"The enhanced commitment of JRS to quality programming in urban areas may surprise some people. Let me be clear, we strive for quality everywhere. But it's so much more complex to work in urban areas. In camps, we mainly work in clusters other

agencies all learning from each other. Refugees are registered with the UN refugee agency, so it's easier to identify the most vulnerable," said Fr. Ken Gavin S.J., Jesuit Refugee Service Assistant International Director.

"Refugees become invisible in cities, and similar sized programs cost up to 17 times more in urban areas, without any guarantee we're reaching the most vulnerable. We're trying to help refugees to access the public services of states which often do very little to serve their own populations. And businesses run by refugees operate in much more complicated environments. This's why issues related to quality, participation and learning are so much more pertinent," added Fr. Gavin.

In surveys conducted with staff, many of whom have worked for years with urban refugees, these six cover the priority areas of people's lives. Nevertheless, staff made it clear that this should not exclude JRS involvement in others. Operating in more than 50 countries worldwide it is impossible to be so prescriptive.

During the consultation, staff considered the guiding principles for each area of intervention and the practical steps to be taken before programs are initiated. For instance, while seeking to avoid the duplication of existing services, JRS should empower refugees to access these services with further assistance. Practically, staff need to ensure they are aware of the existing services in their cities and the needs of refugees they are serving.

In taking the process forward the JRS International Office plans to establish an interim task-force comprising senior staff throughout the organization to identify strategies for the implementation and evaluation of the guiding principles and practical implementation steps. Moreover, JRS International will establish an internal forum to encourage discussion and debate throughout the wider organization, as well as the sharing of best practice.

Asia Pacific: expert Q and A on the tides of change in Burma



The Thai/Burma check point at Piang Luang, Chang Mai, Thailand. The area beyond the fence has landmines in place. Photo by Don Doll SJ/ JRS

It is fairly clear that the change came, finally, from within: There was movement from both the bottom of society and at the top of the power spectrum that happened to move in synch

Bangkok, 24 February 2012 – In order to speak candidly about the situation in Burma, this former staff member decided to remain anonymous in this Q and A that originally ran on the Italian website [Popoli](#).

Do you believe that the present political developments are concrete?

Yes, in the sense that many of the changes that have been made in the last few months cannot be easily reversed.

Are they going to bring Burma to a less repressive and democratic life for millions of people?

Yes, if they continue. It is unrealistic to think that the road ahead will be smooth however. The current government lacks the capacity to really drive home the changes: not just in terms of technical ability, but also because cronyism, corruption and worse, ethnic, class and religious divides will remain for years to come. In the main, the military continues to view ethnic minority groups with disdain and distrust, and vice versa.

At the same time, there are no doubt many in the military who are resisting the moves to a more open government, as witnessed by the way in which political prisoner releases have happened in the past four months; the by election in April will be a test of that struggle within the military, but it will not be the only one. We just have to hope that Thein Sein wins out, and that the international community continues to support his efforts in productive ways.

If yes, what are the events that most struck you? (Or, if not, what it is not convincing?)

The release, eventually, of most political prisoners by Jan 13 is remarkable. Regardless of what happens within the military, these brave and committed people have shown since their release that they continue to dedicate their lives to achieving democracy and lasting national peace.

Just 3 days after their release many of the former prisoners - including U Gambira who lead the 2007 monks' uprising, and Su Su Nway, a young woman who arrested for her involvement in those demonstrations, formed a multi-faith peace movement at a Lutheran Church in Yangon - with Hindu, Muslim, and all Christian denominations represented. These are movements that cannot be put back in a bottle. From the government side, what is particularly interesting is that from the start of the new government nearly a year ago, poverty alleviation was indicated as a priority - and this in a country where up until 2007 'poverty' was a word that could not be uttered in the presence of government ministers.

One of the very first steps the government took was to increase the pension paid to civil servants, and announce increases in government spending on health and education (doubling education spending from 2 - 4%) - increases which now look like they will be improved again under these current budget discussion in the Hluttaw (national parliament). This was a sign that the changes were not mere window dressing, but that the government had instead taken a hard look at the state of the country and realised, for the first time in two decades, that poverty is widespread and needs to be addressed. The other most important steps the government has taken are in relation to freedom of expression: the media have been freed from fifty years of draconian censorship, and the Burmese thirst of news and information is being satisfied by scores of weekly newspapers and monthly magazines, and now unrestricted access to the internet.

According to you, what are the reasons that pushed the regime to make steps like pardoning some political prisoners, halting the big dam project backed by China, searching some peace deal with minorities (at least Karen rebels) and, last but not least, allowing the Lady to be candidate?

Cause and effect are impossible to establish in the social world, and there are likely many factors involving personal relationships

and individual situations among those at the top that we will never come to know. However, it is fairly clear that the change came, finally, from within: There was movement from both the bottom of society and at the top of the power spectrum that happened to move in synch. Scores of brave individuals, including returned exiles with education and experience abroad, played important roles, like the economist U Myint, and the recently deceased Nay Win Maung, who tried to set up alternative networks and to speak truth to power. But then there were also the mass movements such as the 2007 monks' demonstrations and the blossoming of civil society movements in the terrible aftermath of the 2008 cyclone.

These movements showed that peaceful opposition could in fact be constructive; that they were not out to overthrow the government, but to make life better for people whom the government had ignored. Aung San Suu Kyi has played her own role in this too, taking a much more conciliatory line than she had in the past, not waiting for the government to play their hand, but willing to talk about compromise and a future of sharing power with the army, as must be, since the 2008 constitution allows for them to retain 25% of the seats in the national and regional parliaments.

Halting the dam took everyone by surprise and was a great step: but the question really should not be what prompted the government to cancel it, but why the former government ever agreed to it? The dam offered few benefits to Burma, but rather there were many dangers associated with the environmental destruction it could cause. A final surge of Burman nationalism is probably what swung the balance away from China - though the mass movement that was ongoing in Yangon and Mandalay no doubt played a part. Interestingly, the movement against the dam only had to get their message out to the general public through the uncensored media, and no sane person in Myanmar could understand why the government would allow such a thing to be built. The Information Minister breaking down in tears in Parliament as he tried to discuss the dam was merely a reflection of what the vast majority of Burmese were thinking: the dam was crazy and threatened to undermine the Irrawaddy, a potent national symbol and source of agricultural fertility the length and breadth of the country.

In terms of peace talks with the Karen National Union, the Kachin Independence Army and the Shan groups, again, the question must be why has it taken so long? There remains doubt as to the army's sincerity in these talks: no doubt those conducting the talks are sincere, but the majority of the army may not be behind them.

In the new government structure, the over-inflated army has a much depleted power base, and then only as politicians, not as soldiers. Perhaps the most significant signals are those that can be gained when looking at the situation in Kachin state. The KIO were early adopters of the peace process, signing an agreement with the military in 1994. Yet, there has been little headway in the 18 years since then in finding a lasting political settlement. Worse, the KIO was not permitted to field candidates in the 2011 election, and there were reports of massive ballot rigging in Kachin areas.

The army continued to insist that the KIA give up their arms and become part of the government-controlled Border Forces. When skirmishes broke out in June 2011, which continued right up to mid-January 2012, it was as usual Kachin civilians who bore the brunt of abuses and killings by the Burmese army. While peace talks continued during the fighting, the KIA were ever suspicious of the ability of their interlocutors to deliver on their promises, resulting in talks being stopped more than once while new negotiators were found. Currently there is a peace in Kachin state, and with the Karen and Shan groups as well, but until we see this translated into political progress: that is, accession to some of the demands of the minorities and de-militarisation plans for all sides, it cannot be called a settlement.

Do you think that international pressures played a role? That US, EU and Australian sanctions had an influence?

Change came mainly from within: sanctions and the isolation they both created and were symbolic of did not create the conditions for change, but they are playing a role now, perhaps in keeping those within the government who want a better future in Burma in a position of power. If every positive step is met with the kind of enthusiasm we are seeing at present, it will help build the momentum, and ending sanctions because there is greater political freedom will be a positive step. But it is also important to remember that along with sanctions, there were many efforts to increase engagement with non-state structures.

The fact that the army made it difficult for INGOs to work in-country with expat staff meant they had to find alternative ways of delivering aid (notably after Nargis) and this meant supporting the emergent civil society organisations that have now gained ground. In this the sanctions against development aid played a part, but so too, and perhaps more importantly, was the belligerence of the army, which did not want to admit to having failed to develop the country. Education opportunities for exiles, quiet engagement by experts, advisors, especially within the Asean region, all these things have played a part no doubt in bringing the changes we see now.

What do you think could be the developments for the next months?

We can only hope that things continue to move along positively.

Originally reported by Francesco Pistocchini

Philippines: carpentry in a post-conflict and post-disaster community



Bubong, 16 April 2012 – Fortunato Anggot, 56 years old, has been a carpenter since he travelled with his father as a 16-year old apprentice.

"I've learned carpentry from my father, who was called to build houses in many places", he said while fixing a window jam. Perhaps that explains why he has brought his own 18-year old son along for this assignment.

JRS hired Natoy, as friends call him, to build permanent houses for the 50 Muslim families who lost their homes during the typhoon Sendong that hit Bubong, Lanao del Sur in December 2011. It is the rainy season, so Natoy and his son are sheltered in the village hall where they live and work, shaping wood into doors and windows.

Natoy has been doing carpentry in post-disaster and post-conflict Muslim

But the work is not always smooth. There are times when the extra help is not there, as families must work on farms or gather pebbles to sell instead of helping him finish the house.

Kolambugan, Lanao del Sur was attacked by Moro rebels and houses would have been completely burned down, if not for the intervention of Muslim leaders living with them.

Rebuilding a community Back in Bubong, Natoy assesses the task ahead. He has already put up 15 houses with the assistance of the community. The family who will own the house helps haul the timber and provide an extra hand in the laborious process of roofing, walling, and flooring.

"There are aspects in building the house that I have to personally take over such as scaling and measurements, polishing the timber to shape", Natoy said, explaining the technical components of carpentry.

But the work is not always smooth. There are times when the extra help is not there, as families must work on farms or gather pebbles to sell instead of helping him finish the house.

There are more houses to be built after the first 15 are finished. Natoy remains positive to accomplish his task despite the challenges: irregular rains in summer, the strong winds last week that blew away the roof of some houses, and the ongoing rido (ethnic conflict) that turned violent in March.

Watching Natoy fit the zinc roof into the structure and work with the family who will live in the house, I can see his commitment. I can also see that something more than housing is being built in this Muslim community. Trust and dialogue about life emerge between him, a Christian carpenter, and the Muslim community with whom he works. It struck me that in the end, this dialogue of life and faith often becomes more solid and enduring in the process of reconciliation in post-conflict and post-disaster communities than the physical houses they will build.

"I work as hard as I can and people know that. I have a commitment to build these houses for the typhoon survivors in this area", he said.

Louie Bacomo, JRS Asia Pacific Regional Programmes Officer

Timor Leste: leaving a better land for our children



It is important and our obligation is to love and protect these natural resources so that we can use them in our lives.

communities in Mindanao for four years. The JRS local partner, MuCAARD, first hired him to build core shelters for Muslim families whose houses were burnt during the 2008 violence.

"I have worked in places where it is hard to sleep soundly at night. I always remember the exit route in case armed groups decide to attack", he said.

But the Muslim residents here have assured him of his safety as he builds their houses.

"They respect me even if I am a Christian and I have no problem with them".

The place where Natoy lives is a mixed community of Christians and Muslims. His brother has married a Muslim. In 2008, his town in

Dili, 16 April, 2012 – When Anita Maria de Jesus and her husband finished their education, they decided to do something different with what they learned: make the land better for their son.

Anita was born in Ermera, Timor Leste. After selling dry wood in Camea Village, her husband had a change of heart about cutting trees and selling them. Realising that deforestation would destroy their country, he, together with village chiefs, organised a ceremony of establishing traditional rules "tarabandu" prohibiting people from cutting trees to protect the environment.

Anita got proactive too. She formed a women's group (seven women and two men) and organised a farm that plants vegetables and sells the products in Dili's markets.

Anita is excited about her groups agricultural activities and there is strong sense they are all in this together. JRS provided seeds and agricultural training to the women's group.

"It is better to work based on available natural resources rather than working on something that is not available to us. Land, trees, sun and wind are available in our place, it takes part in us and in our lives," Anita said. "It is important and our obligation is to love and protect these natural resources so that we can use them in our lives. If we do this, the natural resources will never be scarce. This is also an important factor for our independence, our dignity and our love of God. We love what God has given to us because we can use these resources for ourselves and save them for our children and grandchildren."

Anita organises the group's daily work, takes care of their vegetables, cabbages, carrots and onions.

"My husband and I work hard together and love each other dearly. In this way can we can contribute to our family's growth and development within our society and with peace."

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