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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: policy change calls for renewed commitment



JRS Asia Pacific's Regional Director, Fr Bambang A. Sipayung (right), visiting flood survivors in Mindanao, Philippines. (JRS)

It will be a long road ahead, full of hurdles but also opportunities. Our goal is to pay attention to how policies filter down to the lives of refugees, and in what ways we can continue to accompany and support them on their journeys.

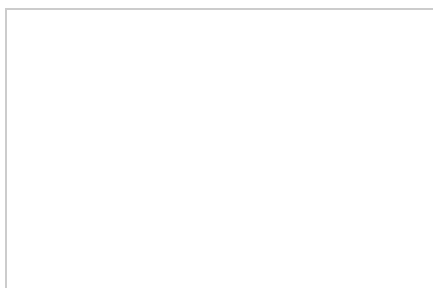
While political changes in Burma lend a shred of hope and optimism to the international community for the first time in decades, skepticism on the part of the refugees is substantiated by the ongoing conflict in ethnic areas, and the violence in Arakan state earlier that displaced more than 100,000 people earlier this month.

The humanitarian gaze shifts to projects inside Burma, but the 160,000 refugees in Thailand still require aid for survival. Cutting people's food rations, abandoning education programs, and investing in a country still wracked by violence overlooks and neglects an entire population. Searching also means considering the numerous questions and implications that bubble to the surface; if services in the camps dry up, will it provoke premature return and endanger lives? And do refugees born in the camps even consider Burma their place of origin?

It will be a long road ahead, full of hurdles but also opportunities. Our goal is to pay attention to how policies filter down to the lives of refugees, and in what ways we can continue to accompany and support them on their journeys, whether that is towards gaining refugee status and moving on to a new country, or going home.

Fr. Bambang A. Sipayung SJ, JRS Asia Pacific Regional Director

### Australia: expert panel, where is the queue?



Sydney, 29 August 2012 – 'The Devil is in the detail' seems to be a fairly recent idiom in the history of the English language, but I much prefer the earlier version of this idiom, sometimes attributed to Gustave Flaubert: 'Le bon Dieu est dans le detail': The good God is in the detail.

I write this a few days after the release of the [report of the Expert Panel of Asylum Seekers](#). I would urge all our readers to get a copy of the report and to read it in full. Absorbing all the detail takes time and effort, but we owe it to the asylum seekers and



Fr Aloysius Mowe SJ has worked for JRS Australia since the end of 2010. (JRS)

It is not like taking a number at the butcher's counter and then waiting to be served. It is more like being a starving person at the butcher's counter hoping that someone will take notice that you're literally dying of hunger and need some food immediately.

refugees in our region to understand the recommendations and the impact that they will have on Australian policy.

One of the problems in the policy debate concerning asylum seekers is that too many of us get our opinions second-hand from news pundits, or shock jocks, or unprincipled politicians, or refugee advocates, or even Jesuit priests. We allow others to do the thinking for us, and we eventually believe that mere opinion is established fact. We should start with the notion that facts are sacred, and that when it comes to facts, God is in the detail.

I have heard refugee advocates damning the Malaysia-Australia arrangement because it would involve asylum seekers being taken from Australia to Malaysia where they would end up at the end of a resettlement queue 100,000 people long. It is true that there are 100,000 asylum seekers and refugees registered with the UNHCR in Malaysia.

However, these displaced persons do not all have the same aspirations and motivations. The vast majority of these persons are Burmese, and they often apply for UNHCR registration because it affords them a degree of protection in Malaysia, despite the fact that Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol.

Many of the registered asylum seekers and refugees from Burma do not necessarily want to be resettled in a third country: they are in Malaysia because they are safer there than in Burma, and many are able to work and earn a living; but ultimately they are looking to return to their homeland when it is deemed safe to do so. We do not know how many refugees in Malaysia are waiting to be resettled because we have not done the research. Claiming that all 100,000 want to come to Australia is manifestly false. God is in the detail.

Besides, no one would go to the end of any queue, however long, because there is no queue. Refugees are not resettled according to how long it has been since they were found to be a refugee. The UNHCR makes decisions about resettlement based on the need to be reunited with family, the needs of women at risk, medical needs, the inherent vulnerability of being an unaccompanied minor and so on.

It is not like taking a number at the butcher's counter and then waiting to be served. It is more like being a starving person at the butcher's counter hoping that someone will take notice that you're literally dying of hunger and need some food immediately. God is in the detail.

The Expert Panel has recommended that offshore processing centres be opened in Nauru and Papua New Guinea, and that boat arrivals taken there will not be advantaged with regards to their refugee determination and resettlement over what it would have been if they had chosen to remain in Malaysia or Indonesia and awaited the outcome of processes there.

In other words, anyone attempting to come here by boat will now be treated as though they had in fact just stayed put in Malaysia and were waiting to get resettled. The Expert Panel, in formulating this, seems to believe that there is a queue for resettlement in Malaysia, and that the asylum seekers they now want sent to Nauru will go to the back of the queue in the interest of fairness. There is a problem with the panel's reasoning: where is the queue? Please see above. God is in the detail.

Fr Aloysius Mowe SJ, JRS Australia Country Director

Australia: struggling to survive on an atoll



JRS Australia, in cooperation with UNHCR Port Moresby, is documenting the resettlement of families from the Carteret Islands onto the mainland of Bougainville.

Bougainville, 30 August 2012 —The coming months will see the relocation of the first 40 families from the Carteret Islands onto the mainland of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea. This process has been closely followed by JRS Australia which, in cooperation with UN refugee agency (UNHCR) in Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea), designed a data-collection process to be used by the Autonomous Bougainville Government in this relocation process.

The 40 families are being relocated because their islands can no longer produce sufficient food to feed its population. For decades families have struggled to survive on the atolls, but population size, land degradation due to salt inundation and land erosion and severe climate events have finally overwhelmed many families and forced them to consider relocating to the mainland of Papua New Guinea.

This is not an easy decision when you have been born and bred on an atoll. Short-term solutions, such as supplementary rice supplies, have helped postpone the inevitable, but budget constraints have prevented these supplies being delivered in

Their islands can no longer

## produce sufficient food to feed its population.

2012.

The main purpose of the data collection was to obtain sufficient data for the authorities in Bougainville to plan for the needs of those to be relocated, as well as data on the neighbouring host community. In practical terms, the data collection was quite a challenge: the data collectors had to travel to the Carteret Islands by banana boat, a trip that usually takes three hours and can also be much longer depending on the weather. All of the food and equipment for the data-gathering had to be taken on the boat because the islands are without stores and electricity.

The data collectors were recruited from a local community organisation headed up by Sr Lorraine, a Nazareth sister. The data collectors were on the islands for three weeks.

In recent months we have been analysing the data and writing a report for all of the relevant government departments. Our next step is to conduct a similar study on the 'impacted community' at the planned resettlement site which is a former plantation called Karoola.

A similar but smaller relocation project is currently underway from the Carterets to another relocation site called Tinputz. This is an initiative of a non-government organisation called Tulela Peisa. In this project, land has been donated by the local Catholic diocese. A total of five families have moved to Tinputz at this time.

Those being relocated are sometimes called 'environmental refugees' in the media. This is a term that is neither accurate nor welcomed in Bougainville. What is clear is that refugee agencies, like UNHCR and JRS, who are familiar with forced displacement, have insights to offer those striving to relocate families so that their future can be more secure.

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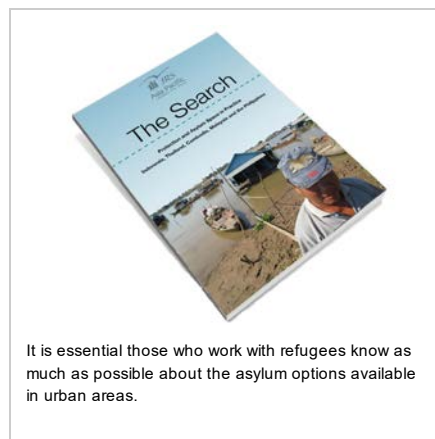
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Dr Maryanne Loughry, Associate Director of JRS Australia

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



This guide covers five broad themes: protection concerns, convention obligations and domestic frameworks, legal refugee-status determination,

Bangkok, 15 June, 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 Southeast 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 depend.

[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 Southeast Asia, where only three countries, Cambodia, the Philippines and Timor Leste, are signatories to the UN 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,

durable solutions, and finally an outline of the realities of living in the region in relation to employment, education, healthcare and housing.

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convention obligations and domestic legal frameworks, refugee-status determination, durable solutions, and finally an outline of the realities of living in the region in relation to employment, education, healthcare 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.

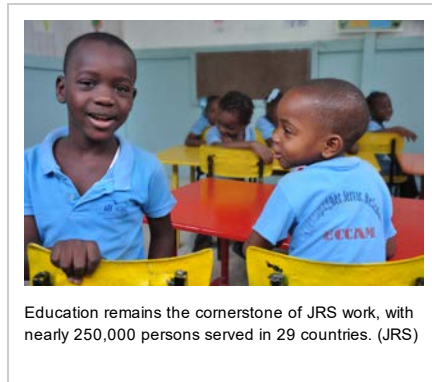
that presents a broad picture of the current situation in Southeast Asia. The asylum seekers and refugees who have willingly shared their stories, opened up their homes and lives for the purpose of this guide have done so in the hope that it may ultimately help others on the same journey: the search for protection.

Nikola Errington, JRS Cambodia legal officer

[Click here to download the summary page outlining the key issues of concern of the Jesuit Refugee Service regarding the lack of protection space in Southeast Asia](#)

[Click here to download the full report, The Search: Protection Space in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, The Philippines and Cambodia in Practice](#)

Global: number of refugees benefiting from JRS services reaches new high



Education remains the cornerstone of JRS work, with nearly 250,000 persons served in 29 countries. (JRS)

Rome, 17 July 2012 – The number of forcibly displaced persons benefiting from Jesuit Refugee Service work grew by approximately 10 percent in 2011, according to the figures published in the organisation's latest annual report. The latest increase brings the total number of beneficiaries to more than 700,000 for the first time in the 30-year history of JRS.

Data from the [2011 Annual Report](#) confirms that education remains the cornerstone of JRS activities, with nearly 250,000 persons served in 29 countries, in diverse projects from pre-primary to tertiary education, vocational skills training, language and computer classes. Psychosocial activities come next, with more than 222,000 persons served in 40 countries. Statistics are also given for other project categories: pastoral, emergency, healthcare, advocacy/protection and livelihoods.

Hospitality calls JRS staff to advocate for alternatives to detention, oppose xenophobia and all forms of exclusion, and work to create inclusive communities.

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Responding to worsening conflicts and more frequent natural disasters, JRS opened projects, or new frontiers, in Africa and Asia. In 2011, JRS ran a modest project for asylum seekers stuck in Tunisia after they fled the unrest earlier in the year in Libya, where they had first sought refuge. New projects were launched for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, a region plagued by chronic instability and conflict. JRS also started projects to assist persons displaced by floods and Typhoon Sendong in Asia Pacific and the famine in Eastern Africa.

Despite the increase in the number of new forcibly displaced persons, JRS teams began phasing down project in Burundi, Dominican Republic, Nepal, and South Sudan, among others.

**Foci.** The 2011 report highlights four themes: new frontiers, education, hospitality in action and accompaniment, offering JRS a chance to reflect on work thus far and set the course for the upcoming year.

JRS education projects take on many forms, and the report addresses education as protection, schooling in urban areas, higher education, skills training and best practices. Preferential access for girls is given special attention, as illustrated by stories from Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Chad and South Sudan.

The JRS decision to highlight its work on hospitality followed an appeal made by the Jesuit Superior General, Fr Adolfo Nicolás SJ on the organisation's thirtieth anniversary in 2010: "How can we advocate and promote more actively the Gospel value of hospitality in today's world of closed borders and increased hostility to strangers"?

Apart from making displaced people feel welcome, hospitality implies defending their right to protection, helping them to integrate in their host community, to live in dignity and not in destitution, and have enough to meet their family's needs. Hospitality calls JRS staff to advocate for alternatives to detention, oppose xenophobia and all forms of exclusion, and work to create inclusive communities.

While adapting to meet the ever-changing needs of refugee and displaced populations, accompaniment is fundamental to this work and can take many forms. The annual report looks at accompaniment in detention, in refugee camps and in cities.

Indonesia: carving livelihoods through handicrafts



Mahani makes beaded handicrafts to support her three children while awaiting refugee status determination. (JRS)

## In the future I want my children to have a free and peaceful life.

Bogor, 26 August 2012 – I met Mahani\* in her home in Indonesia, while she was cooking a vegetarian lunch for her three children, aged 13, seven and six. In her modest house, she spends her days making handicrafts to support the family, taking care of her children, waiting for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to decide whether or not she is a refugee. Her hope for the future rests on resettlement.

Since May 2012, Mahani has been attending classes at Church World Service to learn more skills to make handicrafts, cloths and beaded bags. She also studies English and computer technology. While sitting on the computer at Villa 666- a centre for asylum seekers and refugees run by World Relief- she typed out her story. Here is what she wrote.

"When I was a child, I had five brothers and two sisters. But two of my brothers were later killed by the Sri Lankan army. My brothers helped me with my studies and my sisters helped me with things around the house. I had a good life and a happy childhood. After school I studied typing, music and shorthand. I married my husband in 1996. I loved him very much. He was so handsome.

My parents did not agree with our marriage so his parents cared for us. After we had our three children, my mother-in-law worked on a farm to save money for their education. We were a happy family. In 2009, a bomb destroyed our village. The Sri Lankan army was at war with the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam and Tamil communities were being destroyed. A bomb killed my husband and broke my heart.

My son was only ten, and my daughters were nearly three and two years old. We were all so sad. I went to work as a typist to care for my family, but our home was destroyed by another bomb. We went to live in a camp with half a million other people. I lived with my children in a tent for three months. My children became very sick and I contacted my mother to move in with her. We moved to my mother's community and my children were able to live in a house and go to school. Things were better [temporarily].

But then the Sri Lankan military came to our new home and took me away. They tortured me because they thought I had information that would be useful to them. They wanted me to be a translator and a typist for them but I refused. We had to leave my mother's village. I knew the military would keep coming after me. And I knew how dangerous it was to be a single widow in that situation. So I packed up my things and boarded a plane for Malaysia with my children. From there we took a boat to Indonesia.

Although I am safe from the military, things are very bad for us here. The house is very small and rent is very high. I can see that my children are not happy. They cannot go to school. I know I am a good mother but sometimes I get very angry and there is so much tension in our house.

Every day I wake up early in the morning and cook, go to class and sleep. I must do everything on my own. I wait for the day we can go to a new country. In the future I want my children to have a free and peaceful life. I want them to have a good job and a good future. They have already experienced so much. They are the most important thing to me".

Since 2009, JRS helps urban refugees in Bogor to access health care, find an education for their children, and develop skills that will prepare them for resettlement.

To donate to this project, please click [here](#).

\*Names have been changed to protect identity

## Thailand: funding shortfall leads to education gaps



The current JRS project director gives vocational education lesson in Ban Mai Nai Soi, Mae Hong Son, Thailand.

Mae Hong Son, 28 August 2012 – A funding pitfall in education for the Burmese refugees along the Thai border may negatively affect their preparedness to home. The focus of the international donor community is shifting from the camps towards Burma, and a lack of sufficient resources has forced organisations in the camps, such as the Jesuit Refugee Service, to make cutbacks to critical programmes.

"It will be difficult for young people [to return to Burma] if they don't have an education", said Lee Reh\* a Karenni student who has lived in to the camp since 2001. JRS hopes that [support](#) for education can be bolstered so that the school programmes, and students, do not suffer.

Inside Burma, the Peace Donor Support Group, including the government of UK, Norway, Australia, EU, UN and World Bank, have offered a net total reaching nearly \$500 million US to support peace building. Meanwhile, in the camps in Thailand, up to 25 per

cent of funding for essential services may be cut, according to Burma Campaign UK (BCUK), a London-based advocacy and research organisation.

The refugee community fears that it may lead to higher student dropout rates, premature return and less preparation for a

durable solution. JRS partners with the Karenni Education Department (KnED) to implement education programs in two Mae Hong Son camps where the majority of the refugee population hails from eastern Burma's Kayah state. However, JRS has been unable to attain the full amount – roughly US \$800,000, or 24 million baht – needed to maintain the programmes in 2012.

JRS will struggle to stretch resources to cover the programme until the end of the year. Reviewing the secondary curriculum and staff recruitment have been suspended.

"We feel sad because of budget cuts", said Khu Oo Reh, a refugee education official. Other sectors affected by funding shortages include support for basic humanitarian needs, such as food provision. Rations have been cut down to only 1,640 kcal per day per person – 22 percent less than the recommended 2,100 kcal required to meet international standards, according to the World Food Programme.

**The risks of return.** An estimated 160,000 refugees remain in the camps, fearful that the decline in assistance will inevitably force them to return before the country is safe.

"The government is trying to show the world the image that the country is changing into a democracy. It's not true. There are still murders and tortures, as well as rape cases, uncleared landmines and [other forms of] violence", Sha Reh, another student, told JRS.

While a number of ceasefire agreements have been signed in the last year, based on past experiences, this is no guarantee of peace. In January 2012 the Karen National Union (KNU) signed an agreement with the Burma government but renewed fighting broke out in the east only a few days later.

Similarly, in the northern Shan State, the rebel group, the Shan State Army was fired upon little over a week after signing a peace agreement at the end of January. The Burma military also refused to withdraw troops from agreed upon areas, according to local news sources. In addition, eastern and western areas are rife with landmines. Roughly five million people in ten out of Burma's 14 states and regions are exposed to landmine contamination, according to [Geneva Call](#), an international mine ban advocacy organisation. This poses serious challenges for repatriation.

"If repatriation does happen, the government will have to be ready to provide for people's welfare, such as housing, security, education, food, healthcare and safety assurance", Sha Reh added.

**Education as preparation.** JRS education programmes in Mae Hong Son and Khun Yuam districts, ongoing since 1997, aim to prepare refugees for durable solutions. JRS provides basic education, teacher training, special education, school materials, vocational training and non-formal education to 5,200 students in Ban Mai Nai Soi and Ban Mae Surin from primary to secondary school.

"Education is very important for our people. We need many skills because we're poor. Many people are illiterate", said Than Maung, a refugee teacher. JRS education and vocational training provide refugees with skills that will enable them to find good jobs later on, according to Than Maung.

Similarly, in May, Aung San Suu Kyi spoke at the World Economic Forum in Bangkok and emphasised the importance of education that would allow young people to reach their potential.

"What I'm afraid of is not so much joblessness as hopelessness", she said.

In the camps, where people are trapped without freedom of movement, education provides hope for the future. Cutting back on assistance may push refugees back to Burma despite ongoing fighting and the risk of landmine contamination.

"Education is really important for the students", said Khu Oo Reh.

Without the legal right to leave the camps to find other schools or jobs, the funding shortages leave the refugees to face a difficult path ahead.

"If there is no support for education, where will the students go to school?", Naw Kreh, a refugee education official asked. Refugees cannot adequately prepare for return if funding for education dries up, according to the Karenni refugee students.

"Only education can provide for a nation. Darkness cannot drive out darkness", Naw Kreh added.

To donate to JRS Thailand programmes, please click [here](#).

Semsiri Ingavanija and Dana MacLean

\*Names have been changed to protect identity

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