

Director's Letter

[Regional Director's Letter - Eid al-Fitr 2013 : The Celebration of Gratitude](#)

News

[Cambodia: workshop promotes reconciliation in the lives of refugees](#)

[On Assignment: It is a privilege to serve refugees](#)

[Thailand: Rebuilding from the rubble: Post-fire reconstruction in Ban Mae Surin Refugee Camp 2](#)

Project Updates

[Thailand: Traditional Shan weaving finds a market](#)

Voices

[Thailand: Thoughts from a graduated JRS Scholar from Wieng Haeng](#)

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 Father Pedro Arupe, SJ. Its mission is to accompany, serve and advocate for forcibly displaced persons around the world.

Regional Director's Letter - Eid al-Fitr 2013 : The Celebration of Gratitude



The Bengali Sunni Jameh Mosque next to Sule Pagoda in Yangon, Myanmar. Just one of many venues around the region hosting Eid al-Fitr celebrations this week.

" [Let us] use the energy of gratitude in the celebration to continue fighting over the temptations that can get in the way of solidarity, tolerance and peaceful coexistence." ~ Bambang Sipayung SJ

Papua New Guinea (PNG) for assessment of their refugee status. The Myanmar refugees still wait for the best solution of their fate following the so-called opening up of Myanmar. Urban refugees still struggle in the midst of decreasing hope of the best solution for their futures. These facts somehow raise questions and pessimism about the world we live in, where conflict and fear of our fellow human beings seems to spread out.

While we celebrate Eid al-Fitr, as the victory over bodily temptations and to show the strength of divine grace and human will, it is also worthwhile to reflect on issues of intolerance, including homophobia, and conflicts like those in the Middle East, as part of our continuous struggle. This is not to destroy the festive mood but to use the energy of gratitude in the celebration to continue fighting over the temptations that can get in the way of solidarity, tolerance and peaceful coexistence. The energy of being grateful, having good values and an awareness of the synergy of grace and humility, may help us to move forward in creating hospitable relationships with our fellow human beings.

Happy Eid al-Fitr!

Bangkok, 8 August 2013- In Indonesia, where I grew up, Eid al-Fitr (or Idul Fitri as it's more commonly known) is a big celebration marked by special food. On this day, all Muslims pray in a designated open space and also give alms to the needy. It is a day where Muslim people celebrate the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and like to share in gratitude what they have with others, especially those who are poor. Muslims all over the world celebrate this festival as they end the fasting which they faithfully observed.

The fasting month is a break from the daily routine of fulfilling the physical needs of eating and drinking. It is very challenging to observe a full month of fasting, denying normal bodily needs, while maintaining daily work. Traditionally, all religions have practices of fasting which are related to the awareness of temptations that come between us and God. Fasting is a way to achieve higher values of being with God, submitting to God's will, and better understanding God's way. It is also a chance to be more aware of what can stand in a human being's way to the Creator and toward our fellow beings. At the end of the fast, the joy of celebration, including generosity- sharing and giving alms to the poor- is an expression of restoring this relationship with God, with fellow beings and all creation.

As we celebrate Eid al-Fitr this year, we are reminded of the opposite impact that a lack of grace and generosity in human actions can have on others and on our planet, destroying peaceful relationships. While Syria continues to be in a state of civil war, Egypt's political situation is also resulting in internal conflict. In this region, Australia recently announced its policy that all asylum seekers arriving there by boat will have no chance of being resettled in Australia as refugees and will instead be sent to

Cambodia: workshop promotes reconciliation in the lives of refugees



Siem Reap, 5 August 2013 – Although the issue of reconciliation has always been of concern to the Jesuit Refugee Service, in the past five years the organisation has begun mainstreaming reconciliation into all its work.

As a first step, in line with the commitment made in the 2012-2015 Strategic Framework, JRS partnered with the US university Boston College to co-sponsor a reconciliation workshop in Siem Reap, Cambodia in late June. Participants produced a corresponding draft document articulating the principles of reconciliation

Tun Channareth, JRS Cambodia team member and recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, described for the workshop participants the variety of landmines and cluster munitions that have caused enormous suffering in the lives of many Cambodians. (Ken Gavin/JRS)

"Our mission of reconciliation is built on a faith in God who is perfect love and present in all of human history, even in most tragic moments. We acknowledge that reconciliation is a gift, a grace from God."

underlying JRS programming. The final version will be published this autumn.

"JRS has committed itself to sow the seeds of reconciliation by creating opportunities that break cycles of violence through concrete actions of forgiveness, hospitality, compassion and justice", said Ken Gavin SJ, JRS International Assistant Director after attending the workshop.

"Our work with refugees is a constant reminder of the division and violence that exists in so many countries and convinces us of the great need for reconciliation in today's world. Our teams must grow in understanding the complex aspects of evil (e.g. impunity, revenge, hatred and rape) and their causes within the countries where we serve", the document explains.

Witnessing reconciliation. In order to deepen their own understanding of and reflect on the challenges involved in reconciliation work, the workshop participants visited significant sites from Cambodia's painful past.

"The visit to dam built by slave labour and the site of countless deaths during the Pol Pot era showed us the deep scars that often remain long after a conflict is over", said Fr Gavin.

Diverse perspectives. The 16 participants included JRS team members working in Syria, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia and the Philippines, along with faculty members from Boston College and international experts in reconciliation from the Muslim and Buddhist traditions, allowing participants to examine inter-faith dimensions of reconciliation.

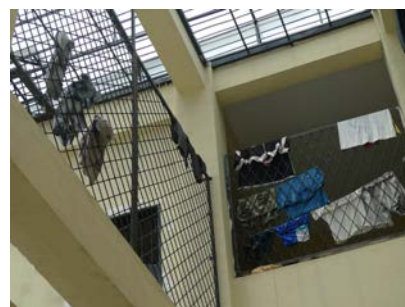
Participants shared concrete stories of accompanying refugees in both reconciled and unreconciled communities. Through this process, participants agreed that JRS can help create safe spaces to: reflect on reconciliation through accompaniment; facilitate community reflection through religious and cultural expression; and encourage public participation through advocacy activities that promote healing in both host communities and countries of origin.

JRS participants concluded the workshop by identifying core values and elements that articulate the JRS approach to reconciliation in its ministry, each of which are built on the seven JRS values of compassion, hope, dignity, solidarity, hospitality, justice and participation.

New programming surrounding themes of reconciliation may incorporate: role recognition elements, assistance with grieving, peace and trust building, or the promotion of transitional and distributive justice.

"Our mission of reconciliation is built on a faith in God who is perfect love and present in all of human history, even in most tragic moments. We acknowledge that reconciliation is a gift, a grace from God", the document concludes.

On Assignment: It is a privilege to serve refugees



Detained refugees are often more vulnerable to mental health issues such as depression and PTSD. The Pasuruan JRS Team regularly visits detainees in Bangil Immigration Detention Center (Bangil IDC).

"May everything we have done be a trustworthy sign of God who never forgets them."

Bangil-Pasaruan, 4 July 2013 – I am proud of my work with the Jesuit Refugee Service in Indonesia. At this Society of Jesus apostolate, the meaning of recognizing, loving and following Christ is very real for me. I do it by accompanying refugees, who are neglected and marginalized by mainstream societal institutions.

To serve refugees is a noble task and makes me feel happy, despite the hard and heavy issues we face on a daily basis. It is noble because JRS treats refugees with dignity and respect, as all human beings should be treated. The bureaucratic system they have to go through in order to become citizens of another country dehumanizes them, reduces them to case numbers, and this is what JRS accompaniment strives to compensate for.

The work is rewarding because the emotional availability of JRS staff is much appreciated by our clients. Goodwill for those less fortunate than one's self is often blocked by narrow self-interest. As JRS staff we strive to put ourselves aside and show goodwill to those we serve.

But the work is simultaneously heavy because it is easy to become anxious, sad, depressed, and exhausted when encountering the suffering of others.

In July 2012, I became a part of Pasuruan JRS Team, who regularly visits detainees in Bangil Immigration Detention Center

(Bangil IDC). Refugees detained in Bangil IDC are locked up in a cell for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with devastating effects on their mental health.

The IDCs are a prison for "illegal immigrants"- a label that discredits refugees who have been forced to flee conflict-ridden countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Somalia, and Palestine.

Instead of counting down the days to release, prisoners can only add up the steady days in detention that accumulate. They never know when they will be set free. How can you predict when a war in your country will end? When the UNHCR will finally make a decision that enables you to have a country again, to be allowed to live freely and legally without fear?

Life for those in Indonesia living outside detention centers can be just as emotionally and psychologically draining.

During my time working with the JRS team in Bogor, from August to December 2012, I enjoyed a deep companionship with refugees living in Cisarua. Forbidden to work, refugees outside detention struggle to meet their fundamental survival needs.

They wait only for Refugee Status to be granted by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), but they also crave the freedom to earn a living and contribute to society in the meantime.

"Work dignifies man," is a common saying in Catholic teachings since Pope Leo XIII (1878 -1903). For refugees in Indonesia their inability to work further dehumanizes them and forces them unwillingly into the position of unwelcome guests.

The Cisaruan community also lacks the resources to support them. JRS, with its very limited financial means, seeks to fill the cracks through which they could easily fall.

During my time in Cisarua, I accompanied refugees and asylum seekers to hospitals, translated for them with doctors, and helped them to pay for medicines in pharmacies.

With the JRS team in Medan, I worked to kindle a 'spark of hope' for detainees who live in Belawan IDC's overcrowded conditions (it was three times over capacity when I was there). Detainees include women and children as well – this is miserable. We visited detainees and listened to them. We organized several activities to support their physical and mental health.

May everything we have done be a trustworthy sign of God who never forgets them.

There is a true hope within those who believe that God always loves and accompanies us through our deep suffering.

I am amazed by how many people galvanize to support the work of JRS through both external and internal cooperation, so that the social concepts of the Society of Jesus are alive in Indonesia.

Staff and volunteers stay strong in heavy situations that demand courage and faith at every step. This is what I call the work of the Holy Spirit.

May the Holy Spirit continue to accompany us in our work.

Peter Devantara, Jesuit scholastic who has finished his one- year reGENCY in JRS Indonesia.

Thailand: Rebuilding from the rubble: Post-fire reconstruction in Ban Mae Surin Refugee Camp 2



Students back in class after successful rebuilding efforts, allowing the academic year 2013-14 to commence on schedule on 10 June. 1,111 students are enrolled in five schools in camp 2, according to recent enrolment data.

"I am delighted with the new school. I feel so happy that I can study again, and I will try my best"

Mae Hong Son, 8 July 2013 – Reconstructing schools and returning to the routine of daily school life after the devastating fire that swept through Ban Mae Surin refugee camp on Friday, 22 March 2013, killing thirty-seven people and rendering four hundred families homeless, is no easy task.

Buildings razed by the fire include: a clinic, a warehouse, two nursery schools, two primary schools, one middle school, one building for the vocational and non-formal education (VTNFE) programme, and a restaurant newly set up by the VTNFE program.

But even more lamentable and heartbreaking, casualties were not just material, but also human. Among the deaths, there were fourteen students, two teachers, one Special Education Assistant, one adult literacy facilitator, and one caretaker for VTNFE.

"I felt so sad about the fire. I heard that many died. I was worried that my classmates might be included in the fire," said Naw Moo Le Phaw, a ten year old standard four student.

With the kindness and generosity of donors from all over the world, two primary schools and a middle school were successfully rebuilt, allowing the academic year 2013-14 to commence on schedule on 10 June. Currently 1,111 students are enrolled in five schools in camp 2, according to recent enrolment data.

"Now I feel so happy that I met my friends again to study together in the same class in this school. I like the desks and chairs," said Naw Moo Le Phaw.

At the time of the fire, the final exams of the previous school year were still underway and had to be postponed. KnED eventually decided to let all of the students from the fire-affected schools pass on to the next level.

But for students from schools unscathed by the flames, their whole year performance was calculated based on previous assessment results throughout the year, depriving them of the opportunity to compensate for any low grades with the final exam.

"We were not able to show our performance in the third term exam," said Naw Ju Na Htoo, a 15 year old Standard 6 student in middle school.

The charred remains of the five burned schools had been a source of sadness for the students, who both grieved their classmates and teachers and feared that schools would not be rebuilt.

"I felt so sad when I heard [about our friends] and that our school was burned totally. I was thinking every night and worried that we would not have a school anymore," Naw Eh Moo, a 14 year old student from standard 6 at middle school, expressed with tears in her eyes.

The students are now pleased with the new school and jubilant about returning to study.

"I am delighted with the new school. I feel so happy that I can study again, and I will try my best," said Naw Eh Moo.

The light of happiness and renewed hope shines in the eyes of students playing and studying at the new schools.

But even though the schools have been rebuilt, the ashes and rubble have been cleared away, and the smell of smoke no longer permeates the air, the sharp pain of loss—the concave space in a family where a child, a teacher, or friend used to be— remains singed into the hearts of the community.

It will take time for the trauma healing — and secondary trauma recovery— to wash over the camp residents. In the meantime, JRS Mae Hong Son staff are dedicated and committed to accompanying the students and communities in every step of the way.

Rosalyn, JRS Mae Hong Son Project Director

Thailand: Traditional Shan weaving finds a market



Nang Lung, 37, is a mother of 3 and now has a steady income from the Shan weaving cooperative, which was developed with the support of the JRS Shan livelihoods programme and is now a self reliant business.

“The women are now operating the business on their own so the project is now self-reliant”

Wieng Haeng, 4 August 2013 – Approximately 500 Shan refugees first fled to Thailand more than ten years ago when conflict between the Shan State Army (SSA) and the Burmese military forces spilled over into their villages in southern Myanmar. After living in two temples in the small rural town of Wieng Haeng for more than one year, local authorities allowed them to build temporary bamboo shelters for an unofficial camp which was then named Koung Jor— only 20 km across the border from their abandoned homes.

Today, many of the Shan families in Koung Jor have sought out livelihoods through seasonal farm labour – picking garlic, beans, corn, or chili for local Thai farm owners— or, for one group of entrepreneurial and skilled women weavers, in sewing brightly woven cotton fabrics into scarves, clutches, bags, and table cloths.

“We started out with traditional patterns of the Shan people, but when the demand grew we adapted to also make modern designs that are popular with young people,” said Nang Lung, 37, a mother of three daughters who has been able to attain a regular income through her sewing.

JRS initially supported the women by providing the materials and looms, but the women now earn enough money each month – between 2,000 to 4,000 baht (roughly US \$64 to \$128) – that they can buy their own materials and have enough profit to co-support their families (along with their partners’ income from seasonal

labour).

Chantanee Paoponglersiri, the project director for the JRS Shan programme, first initiated contact with the Borderline Shop In Mae Sot [<http://www.borderlinecollective.org/>] – a store which showcases the handicrafts and art of women living along the Thai-Myanmar border to share the Shan women’s woven creations. Now the women can do it themselves.

“The women are now operating the business on their own so the project is now self-reliant,” said Ms. Chantanee. “Now we can focus on finding more external markets.”

Nine women make up the weaving cooperative, and each has their own code number listed on the tags of items to keep track of sales. In 2011 they created a brand name, Ying Yum Wan, which translates from Shan language into Sweet Smiling Women.

With income from the cooperative, Loung is able to pay for the education of her three daughters, aged 12, 15, and 18.

"I hope they can continue higher education and afterwards start a shop in Chiang Mai with our weaving goods," said Loung. "The livelihoods trainings helped us to develop our business," she added.

The group has now appointed a contact person to work with external markets in both English and Thai.

"Now they don't have to lean on us. Without dependency, they will succeed," said Ms. Chantanee.

To view or purchase the women’s handicrafts please visit the Borderline Shop website [<http://www.borderlinecollective.org/>].

Thailand: Thoughts from a graduated JRS Scholar from Wieng Haeng



Seangkaew is one of 7,870 refugee students supported by JRS in Thailand.

"If I have the chance, I will be very happy to support my community in any way I can."

Chiang Mai, 20 August 2013 – A little over a month ago, my family celebrated my university graduation from Rajchapat University in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand. While this may not seem an unusual accomplishment in many parts of the world, I am the first person in my family to complete higher education. I am the youngest of four children and was born to a Shan refugee family in Wieng Haeng, Chiang Mai province.

Shortages and difficulties characterize our lives in Wieng Haeng, and nothing ever came easily to me. At a certain point I realized that only education could bring the chance for change to me, my family, and others in our community.

We could not afford education, so JRS offered me a scholarship from primary school all the way through to university. The encouragement of JRS staff members was part of my inspiration to move forward after secondary school and study finance in the Faculty of Business Management at Rajchapat University.

For the past four years, I studied very hard. I worked all the time—it was not easy at all. My sister and family were strongholds of support, their continued encouragement whenever I felt like giving up was invaluable. Without my family and JRS, I never would have reached this day. I never thought this would happen to me – it is a great day in my life and I am so proud!

I currently work at a 7-11 in Chiang Mai University but I hope to set up my own business, like a mini-mart, in the next two to three years. I also dream about buying a small plot of land to build a house for myself and my family.

If I have the chance, I will be very happy to support my community in any way I can. Anything I can do for my people, I'll do my best. I would also like to volunteer with JRS in Wieng Haeng.

My father said that I should be a role model for my relatives, particularly my niece and nephew and should show them how to work hard like I did. My family is also very proud. I would like to thank my sisters, my family, supervisors and JRS, especially Teacher Nong and Teacher Somnuk, for their support along the way!

Ms. Seangkaew Namkham, 26, Rajchapat University graduate of 2013

JRS has worked with the Shan people in the northern border since 1999 in community based schools and scholarships. In 2012, JRS supported the education of a total of 7,870 refugee students in Thailand. For more information, see: https://www.jrs.net/Regions_Projects_Details?Region=APR&PC=THA04&RID=18&TN=CODE-20101220115613

Publisher: Bambang A Sipayung SJ Editor: Junita Calder Designer: Dana Maclean Contact: Diakonia@jrs.or.th www.jrs.ap.org +66 2640 9590

Diakonia August 2013
Editor: Junita Calder