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A Place for them to Stay



Fr. Bambang A. Sipayung SJ, Regional Director ,
Jesuit Refugee Service Asia Pacific (Helen Pardo)

In our present situation, it is not hard to find resemblances to the first Christmas story of refusal to permit entry.

natural resources, are affected by external actors with interest in a protracted conflict or even in one side winning the conflict outright. The consequence is a continuous flow of people fleeing to find safer places wherever they can.

Finding safe and amicable places to live has become a difficult process, full of barriers, it can be expensive and dangerous to undertake. At the same time, the option of return may mean facing the same weight or even more danger.

While conflict and war seems set to continue and stricter immigration policies and border control also continue, it appears to me that many people will continue to be stranded in places they never expected to stay long term.

For some the story is even scarier- one of unexpected poverty and unusual living places. Amidst the cheerful sweetness portrayed and displayed in stories about Christmas, I am just curious whether Christmas has been brought so far away from the real life story of its very first event. Or does it become a routine of life that people just need to celebrate and to have fun once a year?

While it is hard to provide a good answer to those questions, I would like to draw to your attention to the harsh reality faced by refugees, asylum seekers and displaced populations again this year. This is not meant to ruin the festive mood that we are about to celebrate at Christmas, as the Savior was born. It is meant to bring them to our Christmas prayers this year, to keep them in mind as our fellow companions in the journey to God. And may our Christmas prayers also help us to continue to do and to spread out the message of peace and hospitality for all people to live.

Merry Christmas!

The Christmas story is about a journey of a couple returning to their native land for a census. The wife was pregnant, so the journey would have been tough and also precarious for her, and for him as well. And as they reached the place where they were supposed to be, they were not able to find a place in the inn to stay nor for the wife to give birth. Eventually, the birth occurred in the animal's stable.

As a boy, I had some difficulty understanding why the couple did not stay with their relatives if they returned to their native place? And also why many people said that they did not have space for them to stay even though they could see that the wife was about to give birth. Is it a way for the author to dramatize the story of the nativity? Did this happen in the real world where we live?

The narrator of the story seems to believe that all this happened during the first Christmas. The couple and a soon to be born baby boy were refused, they could not stay in the inn.

In our present situation, it is not hard to find resemblances to the first Christmas story of refusal to permit entry. Stories of couples, children and families trying to find safe places to live and to raise their children being denied entry to countries where they can seek asylum, are all too common. The journey to such places is not only difficult but people have to face many immigration barriers that gradually give the impression that these countries are fortresses.

Cases of families being rejected for resettlement or even being recognized as refugees happen for various reasons. And often out of desperation, these people undertake a risky journey after paying a lot of money to people smugglers or sometimes even traffickers, only to perish in the stormy, dangerous sea.

Thanks to continuous rivalry, enmity and competition for resources, conflict and war will continue in many places. As often happens, local conflicts and wars, especially in areas of rich

Fr. Bambang A. Sipayung

Celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the FI Work with JRS and Presence in Mae Hong Son , Thailand



Sister Evelyn leading a Family Friendship Group meeting in Ban Mai Nai Soi Refugee Camp, Mae Hong Son in June 2012. Family Friendship Group meetings are part of the JRS Pastoral Accompaniment programme (Bea Moraras)

As a community we feel so blessed and deeply grateful to the Lord to have been chosen and sent to serve Him among our refugee brothers and sisters in the camps

Since 2003, Sr. Evelyn de Alba has been working with JRS and the Hijas de Jesus Sisters (FI-Fileae di Iesu) in the refugee camps of Mae Hong Son. Everybody knows Sr. Evelyn for her positivity, dedication and her encouragement of those around her.

On the 10th Anniversary of the work of her Congregation, Sr. Evelyn wanted to show her gratitude to God and to JRS through sharing some words with our Diakonia readers. We would also like to thank Sr. Evelyn for her commitment to work in partnership with JRS.

Mae Hong Son, November 2013 - There is so much to thank the Lord for-the opportunity to be part of carrying out the JRS mission of accompaniment, service and advocacy for our refugee brothers and sisters in Camps 1 and 2. This challenging and enriching experience started on October 22, 2003 when the first three sisters of the Hijas de Jesus, from the Philippines : Srs. Lina Cornelio, Dionisia Quela and Emma Quintero were sent by Sr. Ma. Pilar Martinez the Superior General at that time, to collaborate with JRS in Mae Hong Son. The 2nd group of Filipino Sisters: Madeleine, Evelyn and Rachel and later, Lilian were sent by Sr. Ma. Pilar Martinez to continue the same collaboration with JRS. At present, Sr. Ana Cristina Pena Mendoza (Dominican Republic), Sr. Elvenia Escultor and Sr. Evelyn de Alba, comprise the FI community which continues to work and collaborate with JRS in Adult Literacy, Basic Education and Accompaniment programmes.

This 10th Anniversary brings to mind the many blessings we have received from the Lord :

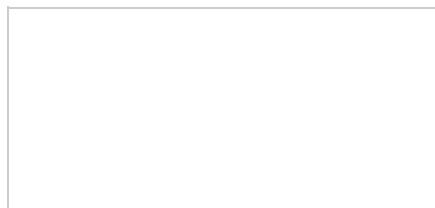
- the opportunity to work closely with the refugees and the JRS-MHS team, composed of persons with different nationalities, religions, cultures and personalities
- personal and professional growth we have from the trainings, meetings, seminars and workshops we have attended and participated in, the challenges, the failures and success we have experienced in our respective work
- the JRS Core Values of compassion, solidarity, justice, hope, dignity, participation and hospitality that have been gifted to us by the Lord as we accompany, serve and advocate for the refugees
- the joys and the pains of interpersonal relationships that lead us to know and understand one another better
- the international friends we have gained within JRS and other NGOs and agencies
- the spiritual support we get from the Community of the Yarumal Missionaries, the Karenni priests, our sisters, families and friends who pray for us
- good health of mind and body
- the opportunity to put into life our Congregation's commitment to serve those who are in most need and to express Saint Candida's love for the poor.

Indeed, as a community we feel so blessed and deeply grateful to the Lord to have been chosen and sent to serve Him among our refugee brothers and sisters in the camps. And as we continue to journey with them, the JRS staff and others, we ask God, our loving Father, to grant us His Spirit to lead and guide us always so that everything we do will redound to His greater glory and the good of the refugees.

With deep gratitude we give thanks to the Lord, to JRS and to all those who have been part of our life and mission for the past ten years. Our heartfelt thanks to all of you who have supported us with your friendship, concern, love, trust, understanding, patience and acceptance of our strengths and weaknesses, prayers, material and moral support. May God reward each one of you, your families and your communities.

Sr. Evelyn de Alba, FI

Stories of Courage: Surviving the Siege



On September 9, hundreds of Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) fighters occupied coastal villages in Zamboanga, a city in the southern Philippines, and held hundreds of civilians hostage. The 21-day siege resulted in the displacement of 140,000 people, the burning of 10,000 houses, and the deaths of more than 200 people.



Ateneo volunteers visited displaced families who sought to find the nearest safe areas in the early days of the siege using whatever material they could find (Louie Bacomo)

It was evening when they let us go. My father and I waded and swam through the dark mangroves. I was exhausted and bleeding

their lives. "I do not consider myself a brave man but I felt that I could not let any of my companions die," he said.

Robert's family is living in a shelter provided by the Jesuits. Their house was used as a base by soldiers who pursued and subdued 23 MNLF fighters hiding in the nearby mangroves. The house was damaged in the crossfire but his parents go there during the day to look after what remains.

Displaced many times over

Mr. Rey Abajar is a 33-year old seaweed farmer. "We left Tigtabon at the height of the military action", he said. Tigtabon is one of the island villages off the coast of Zamboanga City. The military intercepted their boat and tied their hands suspecting them as MNLF sympathizers. "We have lived and worked in a seaweed farm for a long time. We are not Muslims although we worked for a Muslim employer who was kind to us", he explained. They were released and reached the shores of Manicahan, a coastal village on the mainland about thirty kilometers from the city.

They were living in an abandoned shanty when JRS met with the group. According to him, they have no means of making a living in this village and the only way for them to survive is to start working again. His wife had to work as a domestic helper in the city to make ends meet. "This conflict has taken away our income and I don't know how my family can survive", he lamented.

When JRS met with Rey a few days later, he was more distraught. "My nephews and I ventured to visit our village. Our employer told us that the military will set up a security outpost in the area and has asked all families to leave", he said.

According to Rey, there are about thirty Christian and Muslim families in their community who used to work in the seaweed farm. Everyone had to leave including his employer. "Our employer left his boat with us because he is unsure of returning to Tigtabon", he said. They were so desperate then that they requested permission to harvest whatever remained of the seaweed they had planted some weeks ago so that they could pay for the boat petrol on their return trip.

Rey and his community had been displaced by the conflict and have now been evicted. They lost their homes and their livelihoods. Their case is unique because shelter assistance is only for those families whose houses burned down. Also, their original village and their current host village are not in the area around what is considered "ground zero", they are far from the registry of government assistance. "While we are grateful for the food we receive, what we want is to resume working. We are concerned about our long-term survival", Rey explained. JRS will assist at least 250 families like Rey's with livelihood grants so that they can rebuild their lives.

Volunteering in the line of fire

The Ateneo de Zamboanga (Ateneo), a Jesuit university, was one of the first groups to provide relief assistance during the early days of the siege. Jesuits, staff, students and friends volunteered to coordinate reception and distribution of emergency assistance to the growing number of IDPs. "Gunfire and explosions were heard day and night. Some bombs landed near the Jesuit residence", Fr. Willy Samson who led the quick response team related. Stray bullets reached their rooms. They had to transfer their headquarters as the university area became more insecure.

Another Jesuit, Fr. Albert Alejo, was appointed as point person for negotiations by the Crisis Management Committee, which was chaired by the Mayor of Zamboanga. Fr. Alejo pursued negotiations for peace and release of hostages. There was a temporary ceasefire and some hostages were released. However, military action prevailed and the violent siege raged on for weeks.

Volunteers organized the packing and distribution of relief items. During a JRS visit to IDP communities, local officials thanked Ateneo for their assistance during the critical period when the communities were isolated. "Only Ateneo was able to reach my community", a local official from Arena Blanco told me. They were not able to evacuate because their place was in the middle of the fighting.

During those critical days, the local official would find a way to go out to meet Ateneo volunteers and carry in food

JRS met with survivors of the Zamboanga siege who lived to tell their story. Each offers a unique perspective from where they experienced the violence.

A young hostage saved others

"I was taken hostage by MNLF fighters who came to our house; it was past midnight when they knocked on our door", began Robert*, 23 years old. His parents and siblings, along with other villagers, were used as human shields. Guns were aimed at us from both sides we did not know what would happen to us, he continued. The MNLF fighters brought them to Sta. Barbara village after seven hours, walking slowly and under cover, to avoid soldiers and evade snipers. Robert worried about his father who he had to carry for most of the trek. Encouraged by the release of his mother and two sisters, Robert resolved that he and his group would live. When they were left by their original captors at a command base, Robert spoke up and sought their release. Speaking in Tausug, the language the MNLF fighters use, he told the MNLF they were guides, not hostages, and that they should return to their waiting families. The MNLF fighters believed him and let them go. The six men then agreed to take separate paths to escape snipers. It was evening when they let us go. My father and I waded and swam through the dark mangroves. "I was exhausted and bleeding", he said as he showed me cuts to his legs. Robert was later reunited with his family and fellow hostages who thanked him for his courage in speaking for them and saving

supplies. Fatimah, an Ateneo staff volunteer, remembers "In the early days, we did not have enough relief goods and we were at the receiving end of the people's anger. It was understandable but it was difficult". Ateneo, with JRS assistance, will continue to deliver food assistance to at least 800 extremely vulnerable families who are still cut off from their source of livelihood.

As classes resume, the university is aware that it will still be a long road to recovery. The university is implementing a comprehensive plan of action to help the city recover and heal the wounds of conflict. JRS is contributing to implement the emergency and early recovery component of this plan.

Louie Bacomo

I have been Displaced Since I was Five Years Old



Children forced to flee with their parents participating English learning organized by JRS at Immigration Detention Center (JRS Indonesia)

Displaced; that is the word that describes most of the 25 year journey of Musa's life.

He is one of the millions of descendants of Afghan ethnic minorities who seek asylum in other countries. Since the age of five, he was forced to live with fear and threats. His father, the school principal in his village, was forced to take him to Pakistan in order to save the family.

At first they felt ok living in Pakistan, but this feeling did not last long. In 2004 ethnic and religious minorities living in Pakistan began to be targeted in murders and bomb attacks that continue to this day. As a teenager Musa faced many difficulties and threats. Being not even allowed to go to school or work, he decided to flee again in search for a safe place.

Hopefully one day I can study again, work and be together with family

"I paid an agent in order to leave Pakistan. I had no other choice with the threat of being killed in sight. From Pakistan I went to Thailand, Malaysia and finally to Indonesia, where I met others that promised to take me to Australia. Unfortunately, Indonesian security officers arrested me on the way. Then I got detained in an immigration detention center" said Musa.

"I met with JRS in the detention center. They help refugees and organise many activities in here. Every time JRS comes, I feel calm because they often bring news and help us with a lot of things. I feel comfortable to share my grief and the difficulties experienced here. I am grateful JRS is here." JRS organises soccer games, aerobics and yoga sessions in the detention center, but more often just comes to speak and listen to people held against their will here.

Recently Musa was granted refugee status by UNHCR after they found that Musa's life will be in danger if he returns home. After 20 years of restlessness and fear Musa is finally able to apply for resettlement to Australia; his first real chance to leave behind threats to be uprooted over and over again, detained, jailed, injured or killed. This is a glimpse of hope for him, in what can be described as a hard life so far. "Hopefully one day I can study again, work and be together with family. I long for a safe place where I can forget my worries about me and my family, a place where the law and courts listen to me."

Citra Ayi Safitri

Keeping the faith through years in detention



Due to her faith, Elizabeth has never given up, even during her hard times in the Immigration Detention Center she always had hope that she would see light at the end of the tunnel.

The JRS Asia Pacific Communications team recently visited Elizabeth (not her real name), a refugee woman from Cameroon, who was successfully bailed out of immigration detention in Bangkok in June 2013. During the interview Elizabeth explained how her faith helped to sustain her as she spent over two years in detention facilities in Thailand.

Elizabeth fled to the Netherlands from Cameroon more than a decade ago, and while seeking her permanent residency in the Netherlands, she travelled to Bangkok for work. In Bangkok, her passport was stolen. At the Bangkok airport, en route to board her flight back to the Netherlands, Elizabeth sought help from airport officials. She was then submitted to a cell in the airport detention centre, where she remained for nine months before transfer to the Bangkok Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) for another 18 months.

That kind of future, based solely on a lack of

Unable to leave the cell and communicate with officials due to language barriers, Elizabeth spiraled into depression and hopelessness.

acknowledged national status, is simply unacceptable

"When I thought about my isolation, I felt panicky," said Elizabeth. "If I died there, no one would know – not my family in Cameroon, nor my friends in the Netherlands."

During her nine months in the airport detention centre, the embassy of the Netherlands visited her to inform her that her permanent residency application to the Netherlands had been

rejected, and any affiliation with the country revoked.

A faith which sustains

A devout Christian, Elizabeth relied heavily on the teachings of the Bible to sustain her spirit during this extremely difficult time.

"I kept remembering Isaiah chapter 43, verses 18-19 about making a way in the wilderness and God making a new life for us," Elizabeth said. "It was the only way to keep going."

Two months later, Elizabeth was transferred to the IDC in Bangkok, where she remained crammed in a cell with many other detainees and only two toilets, for nearly two years.

During this period, Elizabeth had assistance from the JRS IDC team, who provided her with medical advice and legal support. She very much appreciated the support of Ms. Vatcharee Thanyaananphol, the JRS IDC Nurse, and Ms. Saadia Alem, her lawyer at the time.

"Mama Vatcharee is a mother to all the detainees. She helped me a lot with her advice on how to connect to other services in the IDC while waiting for an outcome on my case," said Elizabeth. "And Saadia fought for me as she went about applying to UNHCR for my refugee status and UN protection."

Elizabeth was initially denied refugee status in 2012. "I cried so much when I heard I was rejected. I experienced the hardness of people every day in the IDC. I only survived by singing, studying the Bible (including helping others with their study), and holding onto the word of Jesus to drive out negative thoughts," she admitted.

However, after appealing the decision, she was granted refugee status in June 2013.

The problem of indefinite detention

Elizabeth risked being indefinitely detained because she had no way of proving her nationality.

"Though Elizabeth was never convicted of any crime, she spent far too many years in detention facilities and was facing the very real prospect of indefinite detention. That kind of future, based solely on a lack of acknowledged national status, is simply unacceptable" added Ms. Alem.

Less than a week after she was granted refugee status, Elizabeth was then granted bail from the IDC. An anonymous JRS staff member had fundraised the 50,000 Thai Baht needed for Elizabeth's bail from generous donors who were aware of the difficulties faced by refugees in detention facilities. The donors all expressed a sense of gratitude for having been able to help someone so directly with a simple contribution. Elizabeth was awestruck.

"-According to bail out criteria, UNHCR recognised refugees are prioritised for bail; many of them are long stayers, and have a history of trauma, and may have experienced or be experiencing psychological disorders which are made worse under detention conditions," explained Mr Wanrob Wararasdr, IDC Project Director, JRS Thailand.

Sadly, there are thousands of other asylum seekers and refugees in immigration detention facilities throughout the Asia Pacific as they await refugee status determination or resettlement – a process which has no fixed timeframe.

JRS AP offers legal, health, and psychosocial support to some of those detained in Thailand and Indonesia, and has offered pastoral care as well. In Australia, JRS played an advisory role in policy-making decisions resulting in alternatives to detention for asylum seekers.

Elizabeth has now been out of the IDC for over four months and is waiting for her application for resettlement to be accepted. She has her own one room apartment, and while life is still difficult financially and emotionally as she awaits resettlement, she is so happy to be living outside the IDC.

"Even if I just spend all day in the apartment, being released was such an unexpected gift," Elizabeth smiled.

Continuing Challenges

Looking into the future, Elizabeth hopes that, in addition to a successful resettlement and becoming self-sufficient by working, she can locate her daughters (whom she has lost contact with since fleeing persecution in Cameroon). While the UNHCR recognises the importance of family reunification and will provide derivative status, issues of family reunification are often complicated and require the cooperation of many different agencies and state governments. One thing is clear. The faith which enabled Elizabeth to endure life in detention will continue to be her stronghold. "I will continue to pray and speak the word of the Gospel – God bless," she said.

Dylan Shepherdson

Thailand: "Website", SHDA's tool to gain more recognition.



Websites have become an essential tool nowadays, both in



The Social Health Development Association (SHDA), a community based organization (CBO) partner of the JRS Mae Sot Project, has developed their website with JRS support. (JRS Thailand)

The website can provide first-hand information to the government authorities about migrants

Myanmar also invited SHDA to provide a workshop on health in Yangon. In addition, at least one political organization has contacted SHDA to see if they would be interested in further cooperation. However, SHDA has not yet cooperated with any political organization due to different interests. "Our main focus is on social issues, particularly health but not politics. We prefer to follow our mission" indicated Yar Sar, Director of SHDA.

Another outcome of SHDA being on the web is that additionally, the website-link was provided to the Myanmar government authorities, who also visited it. "The website can provide first-hand information to the government authorities about migrants' situations in Mae Sot, especially about health issues. For this reason, we consider it will be easier for us to start the activities in Myanmar, because the government authorities are already aware of our existence" explained Yar Sar who is in charge of opening a SHDA office in Yangon in 2014.

Members of SHDA consider the fact that the website is reader friendly, easy to understand and focuses on relevant activities to be its strengths. However, they are aware that many things will need to be improved in particular, the translation from Burmese to English and keeping the website updated regularly. They also expect to face some technical problems such as unreliable internet connection). To handle this kind of problem problems, an action plan will be set up and fulfilled within the next couple of months.

"Through the website, SHDA have gained more consideration from various sectors. There are more visitors contacting us through the email address provided on the website. This account is more trustworthy than using free -email service providers. We hope that our website will benefit the visitors offering useful information about health, people living with HIV Aids and SHDA's activities. We will try to do our best to advocate for the migrants as well as to provide accurate information. We hope that the website will make a strong impact on SHDA's image", states Yar Sar.

HeroRATS clear landmines



Until recently, the standard methods for humanitarian mine clearance have been - manual detection using metal detectors, detection by specially trained mine detection dogs, and mechanical clearance using armoured vehicles. Now, in parts of Africa, 'HeroRATS' (yes – rats as in rodents!) are being used to speed up the survey and mine clearance processes and there is potential for uptake in other parts of the world - including Southeast Asia. Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Asia Pacific would like to take this opportunity to feature the work of the organisation undertaking this initiative, APOPO, as landmines continue to pose a profound threat and have a significant socioeconomic impact in the region. For example, Asia Pacific figures reported in 2012 included [Cambodia](#) being affected in at least 945km² of its total land area, and [Thailand](#) having a total contaminated area of 542.6 km² remaining.

Landmines are still a problem. While global landmine use has dropped significantly since the [1997 Landmine Ban Treaty](#) was introduced, contamination continues to pose a serious risk to human safety. For example, [The Monitor](#) reports that state estimates suggest global cluster munition casualties were approximately 54,000 in 2012.

Landmines can also prevent affected communities from accessing

APOPO trains Mine Detection Rats (MDRs) to provide a solution to the global landmine problem. (courtesy of Maarten Boersema)

Although 80% of the world's governments have joined the Mine Ban Treaty, as have 6 out of 10 ASEAN members, there is still no consensus within ASEAN regarding the landmine ban as key members Vietnam and Singapore remain outside the Ban

basic needs, such as food and water, and essential services, including education and health care.

Yet another negative impact of landmines is that they can prevent the repatriation of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Residual landmines are currently one of many factors affecting the return of hundreds of thousands of IDPs in Southeast and Northern Myanmar.

The mine ban treaty and progress to date. The 1997 Landmine Ban Treaty is an international agreement that bans antipersonnel landmines. When states join the Mine Ban Treaty, they commit to a range of [measures](#), including: to never use antipersonnel mines; to destroy mines in their

stockpiles within four years; and to clear mined areas in their territory within 10 years.

"Although 80% of the world's governments have joined the Mine Ban Treaty, as have 6 out of 10 ASEAN members, there is still no consensus within ASEAN regarding the landmine ban as key members Vietnam and Singapore remain outside the Ban," said Mr. Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan, Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor.

"Even for countries that have ratified the treaty, including Cambodia and Thailand, land mine clearance is a very time-intensive process", said Sermsiri Ingavanija, Campaigns Coordinator, JRS Asia Pacific.

JRS Asia Pacific welcomes any development that might expedite demining activities, both in the region and globally. Such developments include situations where governments take steps to prioritise decontamination efforts, or where new tools in the mine clearance industry emerge. One such innovative demining method, that has the potential to be adopted in Southeast Asia, is the use of Mine Detection Rats (MDRs).

Rats: a new mine clearance tool. 'HeroRATS,' as they have been affectionately named, are large African giant pouched mine detection rats (MDRs) that are now being used in the African nations of Mozambique and Angola to speed up the mine survey and clearance process.

"In Mozambique (the first country MDR's have been put to work), APOPO's HeroRATS, manual deminers and mechanical teams have so far found and safely destroyed 2649 landmines, 1015 unexploded ordnances (UXOs) and 13051 small arms ammunitions. In total, APOPO has handed-over 8.1 million square meters (1150 soccer fields) of land back to communities in the country" explained Tesfazghi Tewelde, APOPO Program Manager.

In Angola, our HeroRATS have just passed the mine authorities accreditation test and are now ready to be deployed. To pass the test each mine detection rat must find all mines in the test boxes, make no more than one false indication, and complete two 100m² boxes in no more than 30 minutes.

The Benefits. According to APOPO there are many advantages in using HeroRATS for mine detection. A HeroRAT may cover as much as 400 m² per day while it may take one manual deminer as long as two weeks to cover the same ground. Compared to mine detection dogs, HeroRATS have a low maintenance cost, are cheap to source, feed and breed, and their weight (usually between 0.7 kg and 1.7 kg) makes them too light to set off mines. Their lives are therefore not endangered during mine detection. Also, HeroRATS do not get attached to their trainers and can thus be handled by different trainers and sent abroad for operations. Their small size also makes them cheap and easy to transport locally and internationally.

HeroRATS in Southeast Asia? When asked about the prospects for using HeroRATS in the mine affected countries of Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar, APOPO provided their current country outlooks. Here is some of what they had to say.

"In Cambodia, one of the most mine impacted countries in the world, the prospects are good" explained APOPO Thailand and Cambodia Program Manager Kim Warren. In June 2013, APOPO registered as an independent NGO and has also applied for accreditation of its MDRs. A Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been granted and it is anticipated that if funding can be found the MDRs will be operational in Cambodia during 2014.

According to APOPO, operator funding and deployment of clearance assets in Cambodia to date has mainly focused on clearing the landmine contamination in northwestern Cambodia using manual and mechanical methods. APOPO's approach is to supplement and compliment the work of the Government of Cambodia's clearance efforts countrywide to deal with the remaining contamination in Cambodia.

"APOPO's focus in Thailand is to conduct non-technical survey (NTS) with project partner Peace Roads Organization (PRO) to identify, define and document areas where there is a mine/ERW hazard. This is carried out through the gathering of local and historic evidence that identifies the extent of mine contamination and defining with as tight polygons as possible the Confirmed Hazardous Area. It is the first step in the land release process and may result in cancelling land without any further clearance or Technical Survey" Says Kim Warren.

In Myanmar, APOPO notes there is currently no plan for the use of MDRs due to the current political situation and uncertainty surrounding the issue of potential mine clearance. "However, if TS and clearance is possible in Myanmar in the future APOPO will of course look into the relevance and effectiveness of bringing the rats to support its operations," added Kim Warren

Time will no doubt tell how far and wide these Tanzanian rats will be transported to be put to work in the global action against landmines. For more information and to stay updated see [APOPO's website](#).

JRS Asia Pacific would like to thank the significant contribution of APOPO to this article.

JRS Asia Pacific would also like to note that is not in a position to endorse the work of any one mine clearance organisation over the other, but does seek to raise awareness in developments relating to the issue of landmines.

Dylan Shepherdson

Diakonia December 2013
Editor: Helen Pardo

JRS Asia Pacific