

diakronia

Serving refugees | sharing their voices

PROVIDING A
stable
FUTURE

Education in refugee camps

BURMESE ALONG
THE BORDER

Advocating for a safe return

LIFE IN LIMBO

*Sri Lankans' fears of
living in Bangkok*



Asia Pacific
accompany · serve · advocate



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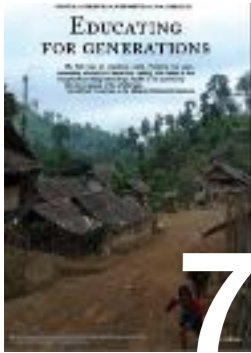
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Cover photo: Mu Reh knows the value of education. After finishing school she hopes to someday be a leader in the refugee camp. See page 7. (photo by Molly Mullen/ JRS Asia Pacific)

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.

Issue 78

Publisher

Bernard Hyacinth Arputhasamy SJ

Editor

Oliver White

Designer

Molly Mullen

Printer

ScanMedia, Thailand

Contact

Diakonia@jrs.or.th

www.jrsap.org

+66 2 640 9590



EDITORIAL

Everybody's challenge

Fr Pedro Arrupe, who founded JRS in 1980, wanted this service to be "everybody's challenge."

Thus, from its humble beginnings JRS was shaped by Jesuits, the religious, lay people, and those of other faiths and persuasions. We have also been blessed by many partners and benefactors these 30 years. It's been a shared solidarity to directly and personally be present with refugees and displaced people, responding to essential needs and justly defending their cause. The refugees themselves have defined for us how we are to respond and the appropriate structure that is needed for us to be flexible and available.

Fundamental to this, and which has become the hallmark of JRS, is accompaniment—being true friends who remain with them through sorrow and joy, hope and grief. Listening attentively to their unheard voices, we walk the journey together with those who have suffered the loss of their homes, land, livelihood, family and friends.

And yet their human dignity remains undefiled. It is all they possess. They courageously, and sometimes desperately, search for ways to hope for the day when they no longer have to live in exile.

The categories of refugees for JRS includes people displaced in their own country, by climate change and natural disasters, people anonymously surviving in cities and in detention centres, and vulnerable migrant workers. The realities of their lives define our response to and with them. The challenge remains—not to create dependency through a paternalistic approach but to creatively and imaginatively build together, they themselves taking responsibility for what they can do in limited circumstances.

However, in our globalized and resource-rich world, the protection space has decreased for them. Countries are closing their doors to them—"stop the boats"—or are using detention as a way of containing them. They flee out of desperation, for their safety.

Who wouldn't?

They still lack a place to call home or a welcoming and protected space. Hostility greets them instead of hospitality. Geo-politics-economics and resource trading couched in the language of development takes priority over integral protection of people.

Education is a rooted way for us to hope for a better future with the refugees. There are many like Mu Reh (page 7) who thirsts for education and is committed to remain in the camp for the sake of others. Unfortunately, those detained in detention centres or live anonymously in cities cannot access education. It is a missed opportunity for them.

It is a missed opportunity for us to live and express the finest of our humanity towards shared solidarity. It still remains everybody's challenge.

Bernard Hyacinth Arputhasamy, SJ
Regional Director JRS Asia Pacific



Sr Ath remembered

Former long-term JRS member and survivor of the Cambodian genocide, Sr Marie Jeanne Ath, a Sister of Providence, passed away 22 Dec. She joined JRS in 1987. "We loved her greatly, and will now miss her terribly. Yet we were also so fortunate that she could be with JRS and the Jesuit Service team for these last 23 years," said Mercy Sister Denise Coghlan, who accompanied her through all of those years, and who is now JRS Cambodia Director.

To read more news briefs or more on these stories, go to www.jrsap.org



JRS marks 30 years

Images of the lives of refugees in the Asia Pacific region visually displayed JRS' work over the past 30 years. The regional office acknowledged its three decades of service 14 Nov., which was JRS founder Fr Pedro Arrupe's birthday, with Mass and a photo exhibit held at Xavier Hall. "We are grateful to all JRS staff and volunteers for generously dedicating their lives in the service of refugees and displaced people," said Fr Bernard Hyacinth Arputhasamy, SJ, regional director of JRS Asia Pacific. "We are grateful to the refugees themselves for challenging us and defining our mission. We hope that in some way we continue to make their lives a little better through our compassionate accompaniment, self-less service and just advocacy."



The new 'boat people'

The Director of Jesuit Refugee Service International, Fr Peter Balleis SJ, has called on Australia to live up to its reputation as a tolerant nation by showing compassion to boat people, who are 'the most desperate and poor of all refugees.' Visiting Sydney on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of JRS, Fr Balleis said that although Australia receives relatively few refugees, it is important that JRS Australia keeps their cause on the agenda, particularly on behalf of boat people.



Redefining 'refugee'

Sr Maryanne Loughry, Associate Director of Jesuit Refugee Service, has posed new questions in two books. "Driven from Home: Protecting the rights of forced migrants" explores issues for Iraqi urban refugees and "Climate Change and Displacement" examines the mental health challenges caused by climate change and migration.

Teacher's Day

Singing, dancing and sporting events filled camps one and two in Mae Hong Son Province in Northern Thailand for the celebration of World Teacher's Day. JRS' partner in the camp, the Karenni Education Department, was recognised for its work educating thousands of refugees in the camp since 1997. JRS, with KnED, plans to support all the teachers with continuous capacity building by providing intensive teacher trainings.

Read more about KnED's work with refugees on pages 7-9.





☞ A man helps a woman and her child across the river back to the Burma side of the border. The river is low enough to walk across this time of year. (photo by Chantal Scholten/ JRS Thailand volunteer)

Burmese feel unsafe to return

AFTER BURMA'S MILITARY-CONTROLLED ELECTIONS IN NOVEMBER, PEOPLE CONTINUE TO FLEE DAILY TO THAILAND AS FIGHTING CONTINUES.



The Thai-Burma border has become a site of international concern as fighting continues along the border in Karen state between the Burmese military and insurgent group, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA).

Since Burma's military-controlled elections in November, people have been fleeing to Thailand to avoid the violence. While Thai authorities have allowed most to enter the country, the majority at known refuge sites have been told to return to Burma within a matter of days, or in some

cases, hours.

NGOs have continued to report similar instances of returns at other sites along the border since an estimated 20,000 refugees fled Burma the day after the elections.

Some comply with the Thai military and return home, only to come back over the border once more when conflict breaks out again. Others choose to stay in Thailand, hiding in local households, along the river or in the forest.

"Citizens in Burma are entitled to protection under international humanitarian law as long as the conflict continues. However, such reports indicate that this is currently not being respected by either party to the conflict," said

Kraisak Choonhavan, deputy leader of Thailand's Democrat Party.

Seeking safe returns

While people continue to cross the border daily, it is difficult to estimate how many refugees have remained in Thailand. Community networks have identified at least 3,400 new refugees remaining in the Thai border province of Tak as of 14 December, but real numbers are likely much higher.

"While Thailand is not a state party to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Thailand has an obligation under customary international law of non-refoulement of persons to places where their life or freedom is at risk. International law also obliges Thailand to allow asylum seekers access to Thai territory to seek asylum," Mr Choonhavan went on to say in a public letter to Thai military and government officials.

JRS is working with the UN refugee agency (UNHCR), NGOs and community networks to meet the needs of these new refugees. JRS, together with other agencies, is also advocating to local authorities to extend periods of asylum, to grant full NGO and UN access to all temporary refugee sites and to verify safety in the place of origin before refugees are returned to Burma.

JRS continues to participate in a series of meetings with NGOs, the UN, and military and Thai government authorities to discuss ways of ensuring refugees are adequately protected.

Molly Mullen, communications intern JRS Asia Pacific

Lost in the ashes

AFTER THE ERUPTION THAT LEFT 400,000 INDONESIAN PEOPLE WITHOUT SHELTER, JRS CONTINUES TO ACCOMPANY THOSE WHO ARE NOT YET ABLE TO START REBUILDING.



Yogyakarta, 19 November 2010 – Eruptions of the volcano Mount Merapi led to the death of approximately 260 people and caused the displacement of nearly 400,000 others.

The volcano, literally meaning 'mountain of fire', is the largest of at least 129 volcanoes in Indonesia. The evacuation radius now stands at 20 kilometres.

After the first eruption on the 26 October 2010, JRS began administering to immediate needs of 3,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in four affected districts (Sleman, Boyolali, Klaten, Magelang) in Central Java and Yogyakarta provinces. Supplies from food, water and coffee to mattresses and sanitary products were distributed.

However, following the sixth and largest eruption on 5 November, the initial ad hoc response began taking a more planned and coordinated form. JRS expects its emergency response programme will run for the next one or two months. JRS support will focus on the meeting the food and material needs of IDPs living in inadequate housing.

Surviving with no assistance

Due to the volatile nature of the situation on the ground, many families have decided to leave the area for safer places after being moved by the government several times.

Members of surrounding communities have taken some IDPs in.

Although this provides them with housing, they are then excluded from government assistance.

Unfortunately, the policy of Gunungkidul district local government is to provide assistance only to those who remain in official IDP



☞ Above: smoke and ash erupt from Mount Merapi. Right: JRS staff congregate around supplies they distribute to the newly displaced people. (photos by Molly Mullen/ JRS Indonesia)

camps, excluding those accommodated in family homes.

"I've had to move four times. I hope that this is the last time," a woman said to a JRS worker.

The woman had just arrived in Wonosari sub-district of Gunungkidul, some 60 km from Mount Merapi. She and many others moved from their village without having received anything from government or other agencies.

Fortunately, the local community welcomed them with open arms and offered what support they could. Some families even offered to share their homes.

"When they arrived here, their bodies were covered with ashes. I was so sorry to see them.

“When they arrived here, their bodies were covered with ashes.”
Village leader



So without thinking, we agreed to accept them into our village," said the nearby local leader of Watusigar village, Gunungkidul district.

"We began raising donations from our community to support their needs during their stay in our village. However, most of us are poor, so we won't be able to accommodate them for a long time, unless others offer assistance to meet their basic needs," the local leader added.

Molly Mullen, communications intern JRS Asia Pacific

“All I want is to see my daughter walk, to get an education. I want her to experience a free life, a real life, that she could not have in Djibouti.”

Amina, refugee from Djibouti

Surviving for the sake of her baby

AMINA IS BUT ONE OF MILLIONS OF WOMEN WHO FLEE THEIR COUNTRIES DUE TO VIOLENCE IN THEIR HOMES. AFTER BEING ABUSED BY HER HUSBAND, IT WASN'T UNTIL SHE BECAME PREGNANT THAT AMINA KNEW SHE HAD TO ESCAPE.

Amina came to Bangkok looking for a new life for her and her baby.

“(I hoped for) a free life compared to Djibouti,” Amina said. “Freedom on what I want to eat, where to go to church, etc. No one to control me.”

Amina was a police officer in Djibouti for 10 years in the secret service with the Immigration Passport Division (Foreign Service Division). When she was in her early twenties, Amina’s uncle, who wanted her dowry, forced her to marry a high-ranking police officer.

With this forced marriage, she claimed she had been sold.

Her husband forced her to wear headscarf.

“If you wear western clothes then you are

Amina was not allowed to leave the house even to see a doctor while pregnant.

considered not to be a good woman,” she explained.

What’s worse, he maltreated her by poisoning her food. After eating dinner, her nose would bleed. This was one of many tactics to keep her inside the house and

keep her subordinate. He also burned her head with chemicals. Today, she still faints easily and can’t keep her balance.

“Men have all the power. Women have no power. I cannot eat what I want when I want. I have to eat leftovers,” she said.

And things got worse when she became pregnant. She was not able to get prenatal care.

This is when she decided to escape.

She is but one survivor of sexual and gender based violence.

She fled from her country with the support of an evangelical church at nine months pregnant. She gave birth in Bangkok and her baby girl was born with medical problems due to absence of vaccination.

Doctors are not sure if she will be able to walk.

“All I want is to see my daughter walk, to get an education. I want her to experience a free life, a real life, that she could not have in Djibouti,” Amina said.

When she first got to Bangkok, she had to beg for money on the streets, and relied on unstable support from individuals to buy formula milk for her daughter. She slept on the floor in the Bangkok church during night time since there was no space for her and baby during the day.

“My biggest fear is the police. Without a visa, I am always unsafe here,” Amina said.

With assistance from JRS, she has found housing and food for her and her daughter. She was quickly given refugee status and is seeking resettlement.

other women fleeing sexually and gender based violence.

A woman from Congo who is also a single mother and a fellow survivor of SGBV came to JRS. Amina started as an interpreter for this woman, but during the counseling session she was moved by the testimony of the client.

“I could see myself in her,” she said. Instead of JRS offering her temporary shelter for a few days, Amina offered her home.

JRS has been working with urban refugees since 1990 providing housing and emergency financial assistance, legal advice and psychosocial counseling.

**name changed for protection*

Zarah Alih, psychosocial counselor for the Urban Refugee Project of JRS Thailand



What is SGBV?

Sexually and gender-based violence Perpetuates sex-stereotyped roles that deny human dignity and individual self-determination.

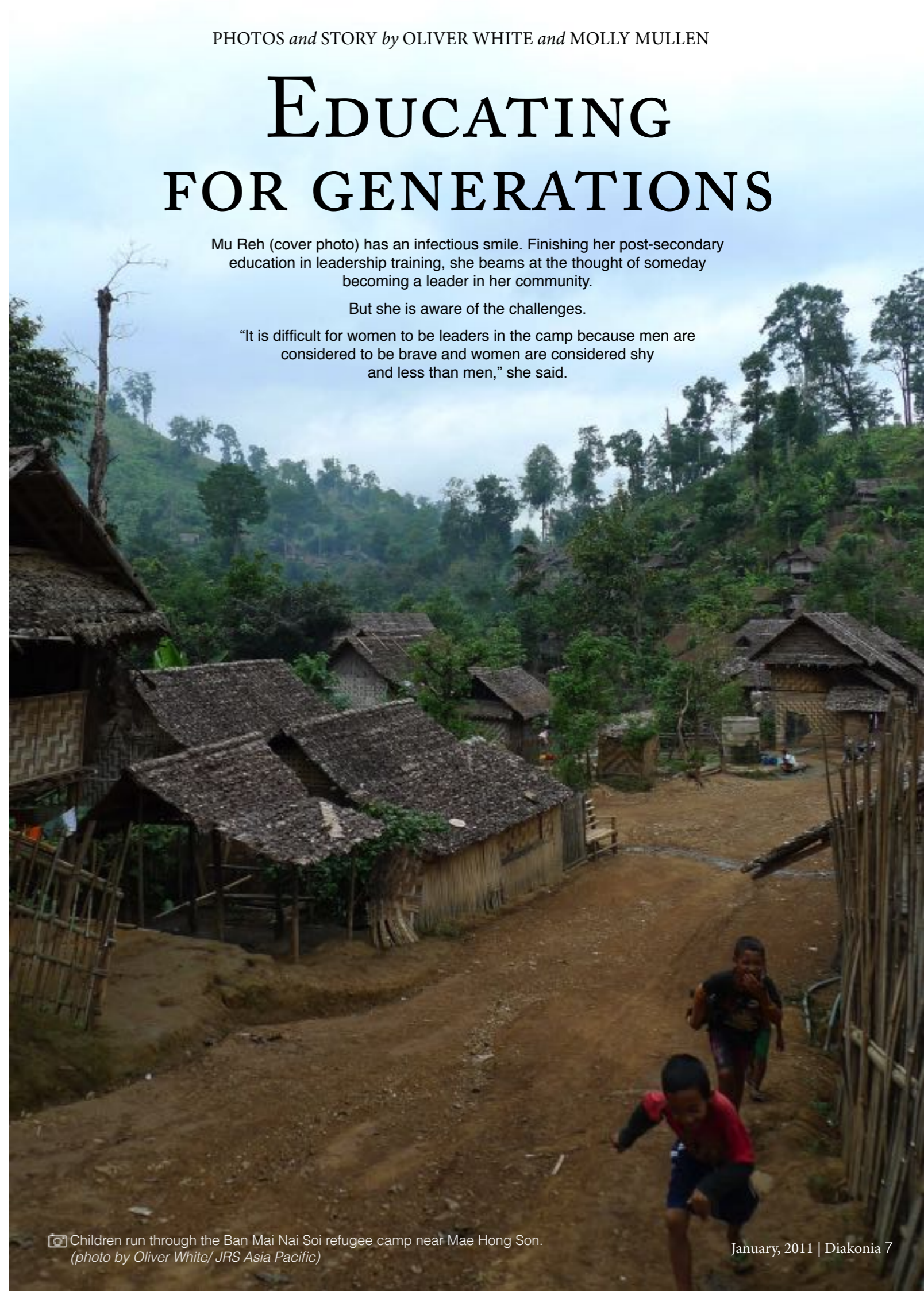
Physical, sexual and psychological harm that reinforces female subordination and perpetuate male power and control

EDUCATING FOR GENERATIONS

Mu Reh (cover photo) has an infectious smile. Finishing her post-secondary education in leadership training, she beams at the thought of someday becoming a leader in her community.

But she is aware of the challenges.

“It is difficult for women to be leaders in the camp because men are considered to be brave and women are considered shy and less than men,” she said.



Children run through the Ban Mai Nai Soi refugee camp near Mae Hong Son. (photo by Oliver White/ JRS Asia Pacific)



In Northern Thailand's Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp, where mostly Karenni refugees from Burma live, there seems to be a shortage of leadership.

But Mu Reh isn't ready to step up yet. As a young woman, she says she isn't educated enough. She thinks

she is still too quiet for anyone to listen to her. A thin, teenage Karenni girl with long black hair and brass rings around her long neck that she has grown to resent, she may have a quiet voice, but her presence is loud.

Mu Reh went to school until sixth grade until her mother passed away and she became responsible for her siblings.

But she continued to educate herself and was accepted into a post-secondary leadership school. After she graduates next year, she hopes to continue her education and is choosing to stay in the camp indefinitely rather than be resettled to a new country.

People from Burma began settling in this area in 1989 after violence erupted between the Karenni people and the Burmese military.

In the past decades, the population in this remote jungle camp has swelled to more than 15,000, many who are not registered as refugees because the Thai government put a moratorium on asylum claims in 2006, meaning they do not have the opportunity to resettle to a new country because they officially don't exist.

JRS started working in the camp 13 years ago with a strong focus on education in partnership with the Karenni Education Department (KnED), which is run by Karenni refugees and is responsible for providing education to the entire camp. JRS sponsors teachers, provides supplies and teacher training and works with KnED to solve some of the problems of supporting an education programme in an ever-changing environment.

Teachers and students are resettled throughout the school year. Because of a lack of formal education, parents sometimes don't support their children's education. Because of quick resettlement, the pre-service training for teachers has been cut to two weeks. Some teenagers, recent graduates from tenth grade, are responsible for teaching their peers.

"It is difficult to teach students who are the same age. There is no respect for teachers," said Christina, a high school maths teacher.

Needless to say, dropout rates are increasing. Still, JRS continues to face these problems head on, restructuring with KnED to meet the needs of the students and teachers.

Lack of Motivation

There are few options for one's future, living in this refugee camp. People will either be resettled to a new country – usually the United States or Australia – or will live in the camp.

Returning to Burma is almost never an option.

People are not allowed to leave the boundaries of the camp and either find work with NGOs or community-based organisations or don't work. People either continue education or they drop out, and nothing changes.

In this situation, teachers consider students' lack of motivation a problem without a solution. "Many parents are not educated. They don't support their children because they

New teachers have to be constantly trained as others are resettled during the school year.

don't understand the value of education," said Marcel, who is currently the coordinator of middle and high school, until he is resettled to the United States. He taught high school English for six years and said he understands the importance of parental involvement.

Besides, he said, students don't have to finish high school in order to get a good job working for an NGO, so they see little point in finishing school.

To address this, KnED started a home-school liaison programme in 2005. Each school has one staff member who makes home visits and meets with students and their families to discuss absences or other concerns.

Staff members are trained to investigate the home life of students of concern. The camps' child protection forum and child protection advocacy officer for Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR) are informed about any student under the age of 18 who drops out of school.

Mu Yain, the home school liaison manager, has begun to hold workshops to educate parents about parenting styles.

"Most parents think of the material needs but exclude the psychosocial needs," she said, explaining that parenting goes beyond food and clothing, and must include helping the child discover who she is.

This programme along with the newly formed KnED Parent Teachers Association is working to teach parents about the importance of parental involvement in education.

One of the challenges NGOs face is how to empower and build capacity in an environment that doesn't allow people to live independently of outside assistance. NGOs have done their best to deliver assistance but there has been some criticism that these organisations have been doing too much for the refugees. NGOs on occasion pay people to do usually what would be community responsibility.

"If we are to promote education, then everyone should take responsibility in the community," said Khu Bue Reh, high school headmaster. "Many NGOs talk about rights, but



often forget responsibilities."

Others, however welcome all of the assistance from NGOs. And both community leaders and NGOs seek partnership.

"(The community) should assist us in a way that the community gains a sustainable development," Fr Hampson said.

Accompaniment Today and Tomorrow

Since 2004, KnED has trained special education teachers to accompany children to

Education by the numbers

5,776 students enrolled in KnED education

832 teachers

23 adult vocational classes offered from knitting and hair styling to motorcycle repair and sewing

school, so they can participate in their class. Students who are too physically or mentally handicapped have home visits and lessons.

Unfortunately, special education teacher training has also been cut from four months to two weeks. But still, the teachers are passionate about assisting families and are optimistic about how the programme has changed stigmas in the camp.

"Before this programme some parents and others in the community, did not like disabled children. This programme has helped the community be more accepting," she said.

While special education teachers accompany students, JRS continues to accompany refugees both individually and camp wide. While JRS and KnED face major obstacles, both are dedicated to remaining in the camp and working with people who are also dedicated to improving their community.

"Many NGOs stay for two or three months but JRS has been here so long. If there is a need then JRS will stay. JRS will be here until the last refugee leaves," Marcel said.



Top: high school maths teacher training. Above: KnED office.

“After spending four years in Thailand, and one year in detention, I have no hope anymore. I don't feel lonely or sad anymore. Just empty.”

Divea, detained since 2009

Spending teen years detained

LOOKING AT DIVEA, SHE SEEMS LIKE AN AVERAGE 18-YEAR-OLD GIRL. WEARING A FASHIONABLE DENIM SKIRT WITH A T-SHIRT AND LONG, BLACK HAIR, SHE COULD EASILY FIT IN AT HER HIGH SCHOOL BACK IN SRI LANKA.

But after speaking with Divea for a few minutes, you may forget that she is only 18. Unfortunately, she seems to have forgotten as well. After spending over a year detained in Bangkok's Immigration Detention Centre, she says she has been forced to grow up fast.

“I miss my friends,” she said. “When I was on the outside, I could still contact them (in Sri Lanka). I miss being in school and having the freedom to be young. Now I feel like I am over matured. Like we wouldn't understand each other anymore.”

While she has grown up in detention, Divea was never allowed a care-free childhood. Her father was an independent politician in Sri Lanka, which made her family

Since Canada has allegedly pressured Thai authorities to arrest Sri Lankans, many are living their childhoods detained.

a target for the militant group The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Her father was followed by two police officers day and night, and her brothers were threatened on the way to school.

“Something terrible would have happened if we stayed,” Divea said. “We can never go back and still, IDC is better than Sri Lanka.”

She made it to Thailand with her family in 2007 and she began working as a translator for a psychologist at the Bangkok Refugee Centre. This is where she

became interested in some day studying psychology.

While Divea and her family are recognised refugees, they did not have valid visas. So she, like any other urban refugee or asylum seeker, was subjected to arbitrary arrest and indefinite detention.

Her family (including her parents, three sisters and brother) was arrested last year, along with 45 other Sri Lankans that day. She thought that because she was a recognised refugee by UNHCR, her family would be released.

When she realized her family would remain detained until they are resettled to another country, she tried to keep her hope up.

“When I first got to IDC, I would work with the kids, teaching them English and math and I would study and read,” Divea said. “Now I am scared that I have lost interest in studying altogether. All my friends are finishing secondary school and going to college. I am so far behind.”

JRS Asia-Pacific works in five detention centres in three countries, offering material assistance (blankets, sanitary items and food), pastoral care, release-return, counseling and medical assistance.

“After spending four years in Thailand, and one year in detention, I have no hope anymore. I don't feel lonely or sad anymore. Just empty. My eight-year-old sister asks all the time, ‘When are we going to get out? When are we going to get resettled?’ and it makes me sad. I am sad that she still has hope because she is able to be disappointed.”

Her family was rejected for



A typical sight in an immigration detention centre. In rooms filled sometimes with 300 people, some people are growing into adulthood here. (Photo by Oliver White/ JRS Asia Pacific)

resettlement in Canada after waiting 14 months. They have now been waiting 19 months for a response from the United States.

After learning about her family being rejected from the Netherlands in December, Divea said, “I feel very desperate. I don't know what will become of me and

my sisters.”

“I just want to be resettled to a new country with my family. I want to have freedom and I want to try to be a teenager and study again,” she said.

**name changed for protection*

Molly Mullen, communications intern JRS Asia Pacific

One year without answers

A YEAR AFTER 20 UIGHUR ASYLUM SEEKERS WERE FORCIBLY RETURNED TO CHINA, TAYA HUNT AND SR DENISE COUGHLAN ANSWER QUESTIONS ABOUT WHO THESE PEOPLE ARE AND WHAT HAPPENED THAT LEAD TO THEIR ARREST, RETURN AND POSSIBLE EXECUTION.

Taya Hunt is the former legal officer for JRS Cambodia. Sr Denise Coughlan, country director for JRS Cambodia. Both worked with and befriended the Uighur asylum seekers.

Q: Who are the Uighur?

A: Pronounced Weeger, they are a Muslim ethnic group living mainly in northwestern China. They were considered a terrorist group after a Chinese government crackdown that followed violent clashes between the Uighurs and Han Chinese in July, 2009. In the following months, hundreds of Uighurs had been imprisoned and nine executed, according to Chinese sources, for their part in the disturbances.

Q: Why did they need to leave China?

A: They said that they faced persecution in China following the 5 July riots. One of them that I interviewed had previously faced persecution in the form of imprisonment, beating and torture while being detained.

Q: Why were they unsafe in Cambodia, if it's a signatory to the 1951 convention?

A: They should have been safe in Cambodia for that reason. It's a signatory. It's has its own refugee office that at the time was working with UNHCR to do RSD (refugee status determination). The legal framework was there for them to be protected. What happened to the Uighur tells us that from good legal framework, protection doesn't necessarily follow. They had registered both with UNHCR and the government as asylum seekers.

When they were deported, none had received decisions about the refugee claims after waiting up to 7 months. At the end of the day, Cambodia did what was best for itself geo-politically. They received \$1.2 billion from China. The day after they were deported, China's vice president met with Prime Minister Hun Sen, shook hands and handed over billions, thanking him for their return.

Q: What happened to these people in Cambodia?

A: These people came to Cambodia between May and October 2009, seeking asylum because they feared persecution in China for being of Uighur ethnicity. While they waited for their refugee status to be determined, they feared they were being followed and watched. On 15 Dec. they were taken to a UNHCR and Cambodian government-run safe house, where they were presumably safe from forced return. On 18 Dec. they were taken at gunpoint and the next day they were returned to China. No one has heard from them since.

Q: What do we know about what has happened to them since they were forcibly returned?

A: Subsequent newspaper reports said that four of the deported men had been sentenced to death for fleeing China and 14 were given life sentences. These reports cannot be verified, and the fate of the rest of the group is unknown.

One year later, we continue to ask: What happened to the Uighurs? Where are they now? We know them all by name and ask for an account for each one who was denied the protection that international law is supposed to guarantee for every human being: not to be involuntarily returned to a place where they have a well-founded fear of persecution.

Q: What lessons can be drawn from this?

A: The forced return to the Uighur breaks international customary law. It breaks international human rights law. It breaks Cambodian law.

What this teaches us is in a country such as Cambodia where institutions of government are weak there is always a risk that politics will trump human rights protection.

How could this happen? A timeline of events

May-October 2009

Uighur people, including a pregnant woman and her two children, arrive in Cambodia and registered with UNHCR and the government as asylum seekers

November- December 2009

The media published stories of the presence in Cambodia. The asylum seekers complained of being followed and watched

Tuesday 15 December 2009

UNHCR and the Cambodian government placed the asylum seekers in a site reserved for refugees from Vietnam

Thursday 17 December 2009

The asylum seekers were transported to a safe-house jointly managed by the Cambodian Government and UNHCR. After years of delay and protracted negotiations with UNHCR, the Cambodian government issues a sub-decree on procedures for processing refugees and asylum seekers

Friday 18 December 2009

The Uighur are taken at gun-point from their safe house and detained in a cell within the Cambodian Ministry of Interior

Saturday 19 December 2009

Twenty Uighur asylum seekers, including two children, are forcibly returned to China via chartered airplane

Saturday 20 December 2009

The Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping arrives in Phnom Penh to sign contracts worth \$1.2 billion USD

December, 2010

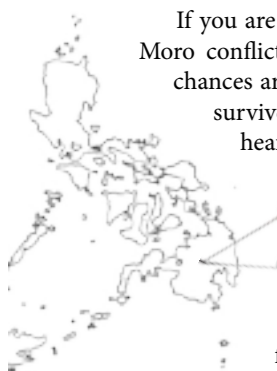
It is rumored that four of the 20 have been executed and is speculated that the others are imprisoned

Sunday, 19 December, 2010

No information has been made public about any of these asylum seekers, and no investigations have taken place

Struggle to be heard

If you are a person displaced by the Moro conflict in southern Philippines, chances are you not only struggle to survive but also struggle to be heard.



In a meeting on IDP safe return this year, a colleague observed, “Why is the IDP perspective on what safe return means for them absent in this discussion?”

The government was resolved to restore any semblance of stability by closing evacuation centres in their towns while many agencies report safe return an indicator of success. Many meetings on protection and security have no IDP representation.

JRS presence in Mindanao is a response to the struggle of IDPs to be heard. In Maguindanao where most of the evacuation centres are located, JRS and partners assist IDPs in organizing and providing access for the IDPs to present their peace and security concerns to the government and stakeholders.

In June, a group of IDPs have met with the DSWD Secretary to present their security and protection concerns. Learning from past experiences, JRS finds a dialogue process between concerned parties that is direct and personal the most effective advocacy strategy.

In Lanao where the displaced are staying in shared households, JRS supports 150 households with

income generation, skills training and emergency assistance to the extremely vulnerable and enable them to cope with their recurring displacement. These legitimate household-based IDPs, as they are called, are not given support by the government. Only two international NGOs including JRS are present in Lanao compared to a network of development agencies that have congregated in Maguindanao.

The Moro conflict in Mindanao has been raging on for four decades, displaced thousands of people and parties have signed and failed agreements. Still, no consensus towards a peaceful resolution has been reached.

Working with partners in co-implementing activities on the ground highlights the learning process that JRS is going through since it initiated activities in July 2010. In Maguindanao, JRS works with Mindanao People’s Caucus a tri-people network with an office in Cotabato City; in Lanao region, with the Ranao Integrated Assistance Program, a local Muslim NGO based in Marawi City.

The criteria of choosing JRS apostolates—where need is greatest, where it can be most effective, where resources are available, where few groups are present and gaps in services exist—continues to guide JRS engagement and future directions. At this stage, JRS believes that by responding to the struggle of IDPs to be heard, it can also listen and discern more clearly what the real needs are from IDPs themselves.

Louie Bacomo, regional programs officer



The struggle of daily life is etched on this young Filipino girl’s face. (photo by Louie Bacomo/ JRS Asia Pacific)

Going back home

JRS SPENT 2010 HELPING INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE RETURN TO THEIR HOMES AFTER YEARS AWAY.



After a decade of living in West Timor, Mrs Clara Ximenes decided to return home.

“My life in Kupang was very hard,” the single mother relates.

She was cleaning houses after her husband

left her and their two children but could not make ends meet. In October, she gave up her status as a “new citizen” (those who chose to remain in West Timor, Indonesia when the option to return was presented in 2003).

“I went to the Embassy of Timor Leste in Kupang and was referred to CIS,” she recounted the beginning of her journey back with the help of the local NGO.

After giving her Indonesian ID card at the border, she was greeted by an NGO worker from Timor Leste who works with the Timor

Centre for IDPs (CIS) and was brought to relatives in Dili who earlier agreed to accept her.

“My sister has many children of her own and so I cannot stay dependent to her,” Mrs Ximenes firmly resolves.

When we met her, she was trying to get an official Portuguese translation of her birth certificate, the education of her two children who needs to learn the local language having been born in Indonesia and finding her own home in the country of her birth.

As 2010 ends, JRS reflects on its work of

accompanying the forcibly displaced return home. The 22,577 IDPs JRS assisted in 2007 have been reintegrated into local communities. Since 2009, the work has focused on rebuilding trust and reconciliation through mediation and capacity building at the local level.

The task of (re)building the country faces many challenges: residual conflicts over land and property remain, unemployment is high, territorial disputes over natural resources is unresolved, environmental degradation is heightening and local capacity needs strengthening.

While the rebuilding process continues with the reintegrated IDPs, the quiet return of “new citizens” to Timor Leste is an emerging issue that needs attention. The Timorese government has declared that those living in the Indonesian province of East Nusa Tenggara are welcome back but leaves the process of return and assistance to this group precarious.

In fact, as the population of returning “new citizens” steadily grows, the lack of official bilateral agreement and government action towards a planned return process eventually risks

potential violence and social instability.

JRS continues to support and, at the same time, present a challenge to government and stakeholders to ensure that all the displaced are given protection and equal rights. Many Timorese like Mrs Ximenes who have returned often find their circumstances not much better than when in exile. The question begs to be asked: Will Timor Leste’s rebuilding process become more responsive and truly become a home for all who have returned?

Living day to day in limbo

A FAMILY OF SIX SITS IN THEIR BANGKOK APARTMENT TALKING ABOUT FIELD TRIPS,

exams and homework. The oldest daughter smiles as she talks about college brochures.

Both daughters, 14 and 17, have scholarships to a prestigious high school and have dreams about someday going through college to be a computer engineer and a doctor, respectively.

But then the gravity of their situation seeps into the conversation, as it always does.

"I hear my classmates talking about going shopping or to the park. Even if I was invited to go with them, I can't. With no visa, I can't do anything," the oldest daughter explained in nearly perfect English.

Fear of arrest

This family, all recognised refugees from Sri Lanka, may have those dreams evaporate if they are not resettled soon. For four years they have feared being arrested by Thai immigration authorities and detained indefinitely for being illegal migrants.

Since a boat carrying 490 Sri Lankans landed in Canada 13 August, Sri Lankans in Bangkok are aware that they are targets for immigration police. Since August, sometimes 150 Sri Lankans have been arrested at a time. For this family, that would mean these girls would have to end their educations and give up their dreams of college.

"We were afraid when we heard about the arrests. We don't go out anymore," the oldest daughter said. "We always stay in the room. We are afraid if the police see us, they will arrest us. Any noise we hear from the street, a Jeep or anything, we think it's the police. We lock our door, turn off the lights and stay quiet. We are always living in fear."



A Sri Lankan family sits in their apartment that they consider to be a prison because they are too scared to leave for fear of arrest. (photo by Molly Mullen/JRS Asia Pacific)

Their studio apartment — barely large enough for one bed, a desk and a vanity — has become a prison, they say.

Allegedly, pressure to arrest Sri Lankans is from Canadian officials. Because boats of Sri Lankans arrived, Canadian authorities are purportedly trying to curb numbers of those seeking asylum. There is now legislation in Canada that, if passed, nulls an asylum request made by a person who arrived by boat.

People who arrive by boat to seek asylum take risks. They sometimes give their savings to agents they don't know, and board an unsafe vessel with an unknown destination. When they arrive

Since the boat carrying 490 Sri Lankans landed in Canada, many refugees have been arrested in Thailand.

in Canada, the asylum seekers along with their agents are treated as criminals, according to new legislation on human trafficking.

"I know some people who took a boat to Canada," said one Sri Lankan man, whose wife was arrested and has been detained for months. "I support them getting to safety, but we cannot do that. Most

of us living here can barely afford to keep an apartment. We cannot afford to pay for the boat trip."

Canadian influence

Canadian immigration officials are defending their legislation — which infringes on humanitarian law — by saying that they are cracking down on dangerous people smugglers and keeping Canada safe from terrorists, because some people who arrived on that September boat had former affiliations to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a paramilitary group considered a terrorist organisation in Canada.

Thai immigration police detained two former LTTE members and their wives for more than three years. They cannot leave the detention centre. They cannot return to Sri Lanka because their former military affiliations have made them targets for assassination. And they cannot be resettled because they are considered terrorists.

"I joined the LTTE during peace time when I was 15. I did not know who they were. It was like playing," said one man who was never involved in combat. "Now they say we are terrorists. But I am no terrorist. We are not terrorists. We are not animals. We are human beings. We just want life."

Whether in their homes or in detention, Sri Lankans in Thailand consider themselves prisoners, unable to go to school safely, start families or walk down the street. Each hopes for resettlement, but is aware of the possibility of waiting years only to be rejected.

"When we came here from Sri Lanka, we did not know this would be our lives," the mother of the two teenage daughters said, crying. "We wanted a better future for our children. We never thought this would be our experience. It hurts my heart every day."

Molly Mullen, communications intern JRS Asia Pacific



A child walks through the hallway of an apartment building where migrant workers live. Their white factory boots line the doorways.

Life for a female migrant worker

Kyaw never expected to be a father.

"The mother was raped by a Burmese broker who promised her a job in a factory," he explained. "He locked her up, raped her and she became pregnant. When her belly became visible she lost her job as a housemaid."

"It's not that she doesn't like the baby but she just can't survive," he said. "She said 'you can give the baby to anyone... if you cannot find anyone I will throw it in a garbage bin.' So I kept the baby. It is a girl. Her name is Nan Yuhlai."

This mother is just one of an estimated two million Burmese migrant workers who travel to Thailand in a frantic search for work. The journey is often hazardous. At the mercy of traffickers, young girls are subjected to sexual assault or rape.

"In many cases these people are sold into prostitution, to the fishing boats and to farms. It is the brokers that sell labourers to factories and girls to brothels," he said.

If women make it, their destination is one of Bangkok's sprawling industrial estates, like the district called Bangkhuntian where there are around 10,000 migrant workers who produce everything from steel spoons to canned fish, making 206 baht (\$6.80 USD) a day. At least half are without work permits and are considered illegal by Thai authorities.

Surviving in Bangkok

At 5 p.m. hundreds of young women, faces pale from hours indoors, poured out of crumbling grey factories. Their eyes squinted as they emerged from the damp darkness into



Two people walk home after finishing their 8-hour shift at one of the many factories that employ Burmese migrants. (Photos by Molly Mullen/JRS Asia Pacific)

the oppressive humidity. After a short walk home they re-entered the darkness of an ageing apartment block crammed with 800 other migrant workers from Burma. For women with children, there is little time to rest after work.

"The women do almost exactly the same work physically as the men, and then go home to take care of their baby," explains Hla Win.

While pregnant women are often given less dangerous work, serious accidents in the factories are common due to ageing machinery and insufficient health and safety standards. "The machines are old and breakdown and limbs are injured because of the poor maintenance," explained Khaing.

"Sometimes there are no gloves or helmets. There is no ventilation and the Thai supervisor won't install fans," Hla Win said.

Injured workers rarely receive proper medical treatment and without work permits or money are prevented from accessing hospitals.

"If they are injured, they are sent to the factory clinic rather than a hospital. All it is is an office with some aspirin and bandages and someone acting as a nurse," she added.

Female migrant workers are often unable to find the money or papers to leave; factory owners who fear losing their cheap labour refuse to issue employment termination letters, which are needed to find another job.

In an attempt to address some of these issues the Ministry of Labour is considering re-opening its national verification scheme in early 2011. This will provide the first opportunity since 2008 for migrants to register with the authorities and apply for a work permit. However, the cost and lack of documentation means that legal status is out of reach for many.

JRS has assisted migrant workers from Burma through the provision of seedling funding to a small community centre which supports refugees and migrant workers.

The funds were used to buy rice and phone cards, which are sold to cover the costs of running the centre. The community centre also provides child care for women and a temporary shelter to a small number of migrants who are sick or cannot find work.

Despite the tough conditions in Thailand, many migrants feel they are better off.

"At least here you can work and fill your belly. If you have a job at least you can eat daily. It Burma there is nothing," Khaing said.

**name changed for protection*

Oliver White, regional communications and advocacy officer, JRS Asia Pacific

Diakonia is now electronic-only

This will be our last printed version of Diakonia. With rising distribution costs, JRS has decided to make this publication available online only. If you would like to receive a copy of Diakonia electronically, please email diakonia@jrs.or.th

We appreciate the support of our readers and will continue to give a voice to refugees in the Asia Pacific region in the new electronic Diakonia. We hope you continue to enjoy Diakonia.



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Return address:

P.O. Box 49 Sanampao Post Office
Bangkok, 10406, Thailand

For further inquiries, please contact



JRS Asia Pacific Office, 43 Xavier Hall, Rachavithi Soi 12
Victory Monument, Phayathai, Bangkok 10400 Thailand



+66 2 640 9590
+66 2 278 4182



www.jrsap.org
diakonia@jrs.or.th

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