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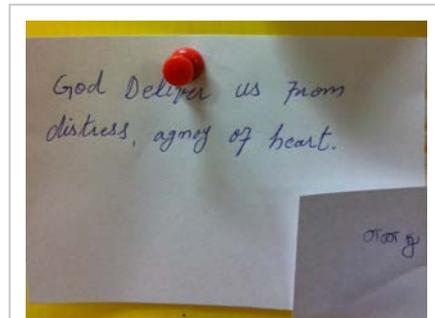
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Diakonia, meaning literally to serve has been the quarterly publication of JRS Asia Pacific since 1983. The Jesuit Refugee Service is an international Catholic organisation established in 1980 by Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ. Its mission is to accompany, serve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

Director's Letter: Hospitality in a globalised world



In the Immigration Detention Centre of Bangkok, Thailand, refugees and asylum seekers wrote letters of thanks and prayers to JRS and the UNHCR on 20 June 2013 as part of the commemoration activities for World Refugee Day. (Dana MacLean/ JRS AP)

People in dire need of our protection and assistance are denied lifesaving asylum and protection.

luck to make it through the bureaucratic process of applying for a visa or refugee status and resettlement are welcomed. It is at the booth that visitors find out if they are to receive a welcome gesture, a refusal of entry, or further interrogation.

The welcome is conditional, based on legal identity and validity of entry documents. With visa costs, which are prohibitively expensive for the majority of people in the world, the ability to pay becomes a condition of welcome. From an act or service or free gift to others in need, the practices and use of hospitality have now become accessible only after a series of stringent conditions are met, excluding all those except the wealthy and privileged, or the brutally determined.

The old wisdom of assisting passers-by, vulnerable people and people in need has faded away in the harsh light of fear. Fear of people from different backgrounds has blinded us from natural compassion and tightened the noose of immigration control on society – national security strangles us from embracing cultural diversity and people in need.

People in dire need of our protection and assistance are denied lifesaving asylum and protection. Hunching down inside national borders to protect the materials we own, thinking in terms of a nation's wealth, policies are informed by narrow minded fear instead of empathy for fellow beings. We could have been born in their shoes.

Our globalized world appears to offer easy movement to every corner of the world but in truth it is only for those with power and wealth. Those in need or in vulnerable situations are left immobilized in the dust.

The fast pace of today's world provokes us to value wealth and self-interest over human lives, alienating us from the beautiful nature of hospitality. We pursue our goals without looking back or pausing to take a breath to see what we have lost.

By building walls against people who flee, we are creating a world of strangers and adversity.

This World Refugee Day, the 20th June 2013, it is time to pause and reflect: are we staying true to ourselves and our values? How can we help those who are unable to move, who remain locked up in detention, or stranded during their journey to safety?

How true is the supposed fact of globalization and easy movement, is it for everyone, or only for some of us? We need to ask ourselves how much we maintain the tradition of hospitality to others. The meaning of the words "to welcome" and the globalizing world are constantly changing and it is our task to direct that evolution to a humane place where everybody can exist in safety, without discrimination.

Every airport around the world has a welcome sign just past immigration, expressing greetings with proclamations of hospitality.

To welcome others is to accept them willingly or gladly. Those signs do not specify that welcome is dependent on the passport or documents a person holds. It appears to be offered freely, to citizens and non-citizens; residents and foreigners alike, all those from countries flung far across the globe.

In northern Thailand, many villages have a tradition of leaving buckets of water in front of each house. Anyone who needs water can take it without any complaint from the owner of the house. It is intended for travelers who may have run out of water and need it to continue their journey.

This tradition is proof of what is known as hospitality in society. It is an act of service and of welcoming others. There is no limit as to whom the welcome greeting can apply to or to whom the water can be given. If there is any condition at all, it is preferably for those in need - especially strangers, foreigners or travelers who are away from their homes.

But the truth of the matter is that there is more to the immigration booth and the welcome sign. The value of hospitality has eroded globally with the increased securitization of borders over the past decades. Only those with valid visas, passports, airfares, and the

Papua New Guinea: Refugees and advocates call for greater legal rights



West Papuan refugees living in urban areas are at high health risks due to overcrowding.

Most people struggle to survive on a day to day basis.

2,435 are dispersed throughout urban areas, according to a 2012 JRS field report.

"West Papuan refugees continue to suffer from the lack of a durable solution, naturalization, which would enable them to have official status. While livelihoods are a key issue for all residents of Papua New Guinea, refugees are made more vulnerable without any laws to protect them," said Junita Calder, the Regional Advocacy Officer for JRS Asia Pacific.

Poverty is rife amongst the estimated 7 million total population of PNG, making life as a refugee even more challenging. In the face of ongoing citizenship and barriers to higher education, refugees' hopes for improved housing, access to water and sanitation, and livelihood opportunities continue to dwindle.

In addition, overall population growth in PNG continues to strain limited land resources, according to Oliver White, the Head of Policy and Advocacy for JRS Australia.

"The lack of arable land for refugees to live on as well as the dumping of mine pollution in rivers has degraded refugees' quality of life," said White.

An impoverished asylum country

But life for locals is not much easier.

Only 60 percent of all children countrywide in Papua New Guinea attend school, 37.5 percent of people live on less than \$1 a day, and [67 percent](#) do not have access to a clean water source, according to the World Bank.

"Most people struggle to survive on a day to day basis. Refugees, who cannot own the houses or land that they live on, face extremely insecure conditions in terms of food and health," reported White.

More than 2,430 West Papuan refugees live in urban 'corners' in impoverished shanties, which provide little protection against wind and rain.

In Port Moresby alone, there are an estimated total of 350,000 people- including refugees, displaced people, and PNG citizens- dwelling on the outskirts of the city in [slums](#), reports the University of Sydney.

"We came here and have no proper houses. People are living in very poor conditions. It is a very challenging situation," confessed Immaus*, 51, a West Papuan refugee.

Due to overcrowding in urban areas and lack of access to sanitation facilities, the [risk](#) of infectious water and vector-borne diseases such as Hepatitis A, typhoid and dengue fevers, as well as malaria, is 'very high,' according to the US-based CIA World Factbook.

"There needs to be an allocation of land for those West Papuan refugees living in makeshift accommodation on wasted land in urban areas," said Ben Farrell, the regional spokesperson for UNHCR based in Canberra.

Refugees call for legal rights and government assistance

While the some 2,366 refugees who chose to resettle in East Awin are granted free Permissive Residency Permits (PRPs)- allowing them to access school and health care- the remaining 7,710 refugees in other parts of the country rarely have the US \$4,000 to cover the costs of naturalization.

"The fees are prohibitively expensive for most West Papuan refugees," said White.

"We are deeply concerned about the future of our young people. We want the government to support us with further education for our youth," said Teresa.

While the UNHCR [downsized operations](#) in Papua New Guinea in 2012 and withdrew support for the lowara-East Awin refugees, public awareness and ongoing legal initiatives will continue throughout 2013, supported by the regional office based in Canberra.

Kiunga, 17 June 2013— More than 9,000 thousand West Papuan refugees and asylum seekers remain in Papua New Guinea's Western Province (on the southwest coastal border with Indonesia), in camps, border areas, and urban areas. With displacement stretching on for more than twenty years, refugees are becoming increasingly discouraged by their lack of citizenship and consequent lack of access to basic necessities, such as higher education, employment, and proper housing.

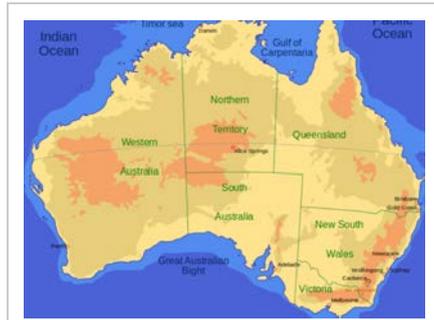
"In the eyes of the world we are sinking, and all that will be left will be our story," said Teresa* an elderly West Papuan refugee in her mid-70s, living in East Awin, PNG.

The majority of West Papuan refugees in Papua New Guinea originally fled from Indonesia in the 1980s when the Indonesian military ruler Suharto crushed West Papuan attempts to secure independence.

While 2,366 refugees have lived in government allocated camps in lowara-East Awin since the adoption of the 1996 Limited Integration Policy (which required refugees to live in East Awin for a minimum of 6 months before receiving the most basic of rights); 4,567 live in border areas without assistance; and an additional

"We sincerely hope that the church, civil society, NGOs, and local community organisations will continue to fill the gaps in social services not yet covered by the government," said Calder.

Australia: removing a country from the migration



Australia's decision to excise territory from the migration zone in mid-May 2013 means that asylum seekers arriving by boat will not have access to Australian asylum procedures. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons).

The legislation discriminates against vulnerable people and penalises them because of the way they arrive in Australia.

Sydney, 27 May 2013 — The entire Australian mainland has been excised from the migration zone with new laws passed through parliament by the Federal Labor party on the 16th of May.

"This is an unprecedented effort by the government to deter the arrival of asylum seekers who are in need of sanctuary," said JRS Australia director Fr Aloysius Mowe.

The amended Migration Act – which now grants the government power to remove all unauthorised arrivals to offshore processing centres in countries like Nauru and Papua New Guinea (PNG) – is a key component in the governments 'no advantage' policy where asylum seekers must wait up to 5 years for a permanent visa or resettlement to a third country.

"It will ensure asylum-seekers who unlawfully arrive anywhere in Australia by boat without a visa will be subject to the same regional processing arrangements as asylum-seekers who arrive at an excised offshore place," said Immigration Minister Brendan O'Connor.

Refugee advocates such as JRS Australia are outraged and argue that the government is ignoring its international obligations and jeopardising the global asylum system by setting a dangerous precedent that other countries may follow.

"The excision bill has not just removed the Australian mainland from its own migration zone; it has in effect removed the concept of asylum for boat arrivals from Australian law, and therefore placing

Australia, we believe, in breach of international law," said Fr Mowe.

As the Bill was debated in the Senate, the Australian Greens party proposed a number of amendments to the legislation, including access to offshore processing centres for the Australian Human Rights Commission and the media and the removal of children from Manus Island.

The Labor party rejected the Greens proposals, arguing they would infringe on the sovereignty of Papua New Guinea and Nauru.

"Australia's refusal to allow the AHRC access to the Nauru and Papuan centres on the grounds that this would infringe on the sovereignty of these two countries is simply a further exercise in evading Australia's responsibilities," said Fr Mowe.

Australia's Human Rights Commission condemned the legislation, saying it undermined the nation's obligations under the 1951 refugee convention.

"By targeting unauthorised maritime arrivals, the legislation discriminates against vulnerable people and penalises them because of the way they arrive in Australia," said Commission President Gillian Triggs.

UNHCR has pointed out that acts such as excision of territory for domestic policy purposes have no bearing on a country's international treaty obligations. As such, asylum seekers arriving in Australia engage Australia's international obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Adding to the confusion, the Papua New Guinea Prime Minister, Peter O'Neill, has been reported as saying on 3rd May that it is the Australian government, and not Papua New Guinea, that is in charge of the Manus Island processing facility.

"It was a grave dereliction of duty on the part of Australia to have opened the facility before such safeguards were guaranteed," said Fr. Mowe.

Asylum seekers who arrive by plane will not be affected by the changes, and will continue to be processed in the community.

While the [expert panel on asylum seekers](#) recommended the most recent amendment to the Migration Act, the decision to excise Australian territory to limit migration, has been an ongoing and controversial topic debated in government for more than a decade.

Earlier, in September 2001, the Howard government excised Ashmore Island, Cartier Islands, Christmas Island, and Cocos Islands from the migration zone, to limit the ability of asylum seekers arriving by boat to make valid visa applications or access judicial review.

A further attempt to excise the entire territory in 2006 failed after a backbench revolt led by Liberal moderates.

As Australia takes extraordinary lengths to avoid its responsibility for a comparatively small number of asylum seekers, the [UN Refugee Agency](#) (UNHCR) has reported that more than 1.5 million Syrians have fled their conflict-ravaged homeland into neighbouring countries, such as Jordan and Lebanon, who collectively host nearly one million refugees. A further half million Syrian refugees are seeking shelter in Turkey, Iraq and Egypt.

With four-fifths of the world's estimated 15.2 million refugees hosted in developing countries, Australia's excision of

territory to minimise its refugee intake demonstrates what the UNHCR High Commissioner Antonio Guterres called in 2010 "[vastly overblown] fears about supposed floods of refugees in industrialized countries.

Australia: Refugee art exhibit provides unique perspective on forced migration



The View From Here art exhibition will be displayed from 19 June 2013 at the Waverley Library in Sydney.

Sydney, 19 June 2013— Part of the festivities for JRS Australia's annual Refugee Week include an art exhibition showcasing the artistic expressions of refugees, entitled *The View from Here*. The display launched at a public library in downtown Sydney on Wednesday 19 June. Refugees and asylum seekers in Australia, hailing from places as diverse as Asia, the Middle East, South America and Africa, plumbed their deepest emotions on canvas. The startling expression of displacement, courage and the restoration of hope tell the refugees' stories from their own viewpoint.

Fr Aloysius Mowe, the director of JRS Australia, opened the ceremony with a speech detailing the refugees' perspectives and context in which space for their expression and interaction with local communities is created.

We are inhospitable only when we believe that we will never need another person's hospitality.

Artists, refugees, and asylum seekers offer society a unique perspective about the instability, uncertainty, and conflict in their home countries and their often dangerous journeys to safety. The current political climate in Australia means that we no longer offer a place of safety, but one of peril.

Asylum seekers and refugees told to return as they are not welcome here. For some Australians, the "view from here" is of unwanted people trying to take advantage of Australia's wealth

and of its opportunities. We send them away, to other countries; we lock them up in remote detention centres; some even want to tow their boats back into the ocean.

We are inhospitable to the refugee, to the asylum seeker, without realising it is to our own detriment. Our faith traditions warn us again and again that we must welcome the alien, the stranger.

The Hebrew Bible says in many places, "You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew identifies himself with the stranger, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me...truly I say to you, whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

The Quran, in Qur'an al-Nisa' 4.36-37, enjoins Muslims to "Be kind to parents, and the near kinsman, and to orphans, and to the needy, and to the neighbour who is of kin, and to the neighbour who is a stranger, and to the companion at your side, and to the traveller, and to [slaves] that your right hands own."

We are inhospitable only when we believe that we will never need another person's hospitality. It is a great temptation to think that we will always be rich, or secure, or safe, or healthy. Any one of us, however high the office we hold, however wealthy, could find our fortunes reversed, our lives turned upside down. Refugees are people like us who for reasons beyond their control have had to abandon their homes, families, friends, countries to start their lives anew. Where they are, we could be one day.

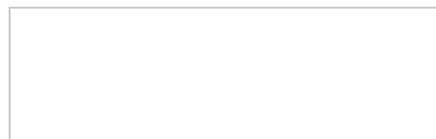
Let us remember that there were once 6 million people who could not flee, who found no refuge, and whose only destination were the cattle cars that took them to the extermination camps of Nazi Europe. One of them, Anne Frank, wrote in her famous diary, "No one has ever become poor by giving." Let us remember, from our place of security and comfort, that in giving to asylum seekers and refugees, we become not poorer, but richer.

On behalf of Jesuit Refugee Service, JRS, I wish to thank Waverley Council, and in particular the officers from Waverley Library, and Recreation and Community Planning, as well as the Multicultural Advisory Committee, for hosting this exhibition and the launch this morning. The Refugee Council of Australia has also supported this project, and we are grateful for the partnership and for the powerful advocacy that the Refugee Council does for refugees and asylum seekers. The JRS staffs at our offices in Marsfield and Elizabeth Bay has also put a lot of love and passion into this project. You worked hard, I know, to pull this off; it may be some consolation to you that yesterday our JRS colleagues in Aleppo in Syria had to prepare 17,000 hot meals for the displaced Syrians trapped in that city.

But above all, to the artists whose works are exhibited: thank you, for sharing your lives with us, for welcoming us, and for allowing us to walk with you.

Fr Aloysius Mowe, JRS Australia Director

Asia Pacific: Addressing the mental health needs of refugees



Bangkok, 3 May 2013 — Depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), while frequently overlooked by the governments, continue to plague more than [50 percent](#) of all



Refugees and asylum seekers detained in Medan and Surabaya detention centers in Indonesia have exercise classes four times per week through JRS Indonesia to improve their psychosocial well-being (Photo courtesy of JRS Indonesia).

Refugee reactions are normal reactions to abnormal situations.

refugees and asylum seekers worldwide, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

"Refugees and asylum seekers tend to be more prone to suffering from mood disorders...because of the situation they are in, the journey they undertook, and the initial cause that made them flee," said Nawinda Limamapar, the Information Assistant for WHO Thailand.

The prolonged and difficult refugee status determination process (RSD)— which can take up to three years in some cases, according to *The Search*, a 2012 JRS publication on RSD challenges in Asia Pacific— can exacerbate the fragile psyche of people who have been forcibly uprooted from livelihoods, homes and loved ones.

Refugees' reactions are "[normal reactions](#) to an abnormal situation," WHO points out.

"They could be under a great deal of stress due to the protection environment in the country of asylum, where they have no legal status and are subject to arrest and detention," said Vivian Tan, the public information officer for the UN Refugee Agency Regional Office, based in Bangkok.

Yet urban refugees in Asia Pacific do not have enough access to adequate psychosocial services that would help them to cope, leading to the frequent occurrence of psychosomatic health problems, chronic nightmares, and other stress-related symptoms, according to UNHCR, WHO, JRS, and the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN).

Living in limbo exacerbates health risks

Asia Pacific is home to upwards of 9.5 million persons of concern — 30 percent of UNHCR's total global population of concern.

Yet "policy makers frequently ignore the mental health needs of displaced persons. Public opinion should be directed towards recognising the shared humanity between refugees and local communities, acknowledging and helping with refugees' extraordinary struggles - rather than focusing on immigration status and cultural difference," said Junita Calder, the regional spokesperson for JRS Asia Pacific.

Urban asylum seekers or refugees awaiting a durable solution are the most vulnerable, as they often need to find work to survive- risking arrest in many countries without the legal rights to work.

"They worry about trying to make ends meet in a difficult protection environment where they cannot be legally employed," said Tan.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow's 1954 [Hierarchy of Needs](#) emphasises physical health, safety, belonging, and achievements, as the fundamental basis for mental health.

But urban asylum seekers live "in a state of distress because they often live in poor physical conditions, cannot support themselves or integrate into the local community, and have little information about their future for long periods of time," said Zarah T. Alih, Psychosocial Counselor, JRS Thailand Urban Refugee Programme, Bangkok. "It is impossible for them to establish a stabilising routine," she added.

Suffering in silence

Urban refugees generally disperse into the population, [living in obscurity](#) to escape attention of the authorities. As such, they rarely have access to mental health care.

"There is a lack of adequate services across all sub-regions of Asia Pacific," said Julia Mayerhofer, the Communications Officer, for APRRN.

The lack of qualified interpreters, lack of coordination between stakeholders such as UNHCR and humanitarian organisations, along with limited reach to vulnerable groups and scarce information held by authorities about the seriousness of mental health concerns of refugees, all lead to neglected mental health needs that interfere with the RSD process, according to Mayerhofer.

"The occurrence of traumatic events, stressful living situations, as well as difficulties in retelling a story may interfere with the outcomes of the RSD process. Trauma can interfere with memory and the ability to recall events," she explained.

If UNHCR and immigration officials - often the first people that refugees encounter in the asylum country - were trained to recognise mental health problems, issues could be identified and treated at an earlier stage to avoid interfering with RSD outcomes.

Currently medico-legal reports - reports detailing the medical condition of a refugee claimant - can be submitted to UNHCR offices, such as UNHCR Bangkok, to lighten the burden of proof on the client.

"This is a necessary pre-condition to ensuring a fair process," said Junita Calder, the advocacy spokesperson for JRS Asia Pacific.

The way forward

But providing access to mental health care alone will not provide a solution, as mental health is intrinsically connected to

other issues such as safety, acceptance, and the right to work, according to NGOs.

"Urban refugees face security risks when travelling to access these services and have very little disposable income to spend on transport for follow-ups," said Tan.

States and service providers should adopt policies and practices that address the toll that deprivation of human rights takes on health, according to APRRN.

"Sending a refugee to a counsellor will not be enough if he or she continues to suffer under these conditions," said Mayerhofer.

Dana MacLean, JRS Asia Pacific Communications Officer

While JRS' Urban Refugee Project targets up to 500 urban asylum seeker and refugees, to provide financial, legal, and psychosocial support services. Due to the limited budget, each family can only be supported for three months. Meanwhile, up to 80 percent of asylum seekers survive in Bangkok without any assistance or protection.

Cambodia: Displaced women forced into marriage deserve an apology



Evidence of the human rights atrocities, including forced marriage and rape, that were committed under the Khmer Rouge regime are kept at the S21 museum in Phnom Penh city, where women, men and children were once executed indiscriminately. Nowadays in this building, with former torture and detention chambers, billboards show pictures of convicts, taken as part of the identification process once they got caught by the regimen.

There is a feeling of justice that comes with a judgment by a court.

Bangkok, 24 May 2013—Cambodian women who were displaced by the Khmer Rouge and forced to marry strangers between 1975 and 1979, are taking their cases to the ECCC courts in Phnom Penh as a way to heal.

"Our clients want to know why people were forced to marry, understanding the reasons would help them [make sense of what has] happened to them," said Ms Beini Ye, a lawyer representing the Civil Parties in the ECCC and program advisor on sexual and gender based violence to the [Cambodia Defenders Project](#), a local NGO providing legal aid to victims of the Khmer Rouge.

While the total number of women displaced and forced to marry is currently unknown, [coerced marriage](#) was common in all regions throughout Cambodia under the genocidal regime which wiped out nearly two million and forcibly relocated urban residents en masse to the countryside to farm in cooperatives.

"The use of forced marriage in particular was systematic and widespread, employed by the regime to secure loyalty to the Government by breaking family bonds and taking [the] major life decision [of] who to marry out of the hands of citizens and entrusting it to the State," said Ms Zainab Hawa Bangura, the special representative to the UN Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, in a [statement](#) issued on 1 March 2013.

Sexual and gender-based violence is often used by repressive armed forces as a tool of war in order to destroy the social fabric of a community and degrade its members, according to campaigns such as [Stop Rape in Conflict](#) and the UN Women's initiative, [Stop Rape Now](#). While new developments in Cambodia's court system are a step forward for women survivors, inefficiency of the system and impunity for SGBV remains an ongoing problem in Cambodian society, say rights groups.

Legal recognition takes baby steps

The ECCC ruled at the end of April 2013 that [sexual violence crimes were allowed to be tried](#) in current ongoing cases against former Khmer Rouge officials.

This is an important step for acknowledging that rape and other forms of sexual abuse when perpetrated by armed forces in conflict situations, are crimes against humanity, according to JRS.

"Victims of abuse often feel the need for public recognition that what was done to them was wrong, in order to move forward and re-build their lives," said Ms. Junita Calder, the advocacy spokesperson for JRS Asia Pacific.

In other war-torn countries, such as Rwanda (where up to 250,000 women were raped within three months during the 1994 genocide), or Yugoslavia (where roughly 60,000 women were raped from 1992-1995), legal decisions defining [rape as a war crime](#) have been put in place through the International Criminal Tribunals, according to the UN, see, wherein rape is outlined as a war crime and a crime against humanity.

But often times the issue of rape is still sidelined by legal systems and silenced by stigmatization, going unpunished and perpetuating a cycle of acceptance in communities.

"Sexual violence is the only crime against humanity that is routinely dismissed as 'collateral damage'," said Nancee Bright, the chief of staff to the UN special representative on sexual violence in conflict, in a statement issued in December 2011.

Post-conflict recovery hindered by corruption

From 2000-2005 the UN Security Council issued five resolutions condemning sexual violence, recognizing that even when conflicts end, sexual violence often continues to afflict societies because the denial of human rights has been normalized and strong family units do not exist to protect and support women.

In Cambodia, it is still uncertain if the women survivors' voices will ever even make it to trial.

"The court has split the case into small sub-trials dealing with forced. Whether future sub-trials, including the charges of forced marriage, will ever take place is very uncertain given the age of the accused and the decline of funding," said Ms. Ye.

Survivors of any type of SGBV in Cambodia are unable to access real justice due to "criminal justice system failures" and corrupt settlements made out of court, in which police and law enforcement officials take a cut, according to Amnesty International's 2011 and 2010 [reports](#).

But without proper address, women will have a difficult time moving forward.

"There is a feeling of justice that comes with a judgment by a court," explained Ms. Ye.

Whether trials are conducted through traditional courts, such as those seen with the Gacaca trials in Rwanda, where more than 1.9 million cases were managed by over 12,000 village 'courts', or in international court systems, such as the prosecution of three Bosnian Serbian commanders convicted of rape as a war crime in the UN for acts committed during the war in 1992, what women deserve is to have a space where their voices can be heard, say the UN and NGOs.

"All people have the human right to stand as individuals before the law and have their voices heard," stated Ms. Calder.

Dana MacLean, JRS Asia Pacific Communications Officer

Indonesia: When differences disappear



Refugees and asylum seekers detained in Medan detention center in Indonesia look forward to brief moments outside of the cell spent in recreational activities such as swimming. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Refugees and asylum seekers in detention are so frequently robbed of the natural human quality to play and enjoy life.

away, laughing.

The story might have ended differently if the incident had taken place inside the concrete walls and iron bars of the IDC. But in the clean, refreshing blue water of the pool, the heavy-heartedness of detention has dissolved.

The intimidating officers with wide-reaching authority have morphed into playful water-polo teammates. The stern security guards with suspicion-filled eyes and depressed detainees with despairing faces - have all become cheerful friends. The water-polo teams— a combination of detainees and immigration officials— care little about who wins. They just enjoy the game by jokingly throwing the ball at their contenders. The pool's inhabitants appear to have returned to their childhood, when human beings play without any other purpose than for the sheer joy of it.

Homo Ludens is the Latin term for human beings who play for fun and joy, it is a natural state for human beings. Refugees and asylum seekers in detention are so frequently robbed of this quality.

Later in the afternoon, when the refugees have left the pool and are about to get on the bus, one of the detainees gives a sincere speech of gratitude to the IDC officials, JRS, and IOM, for the opportunity to feel human again. The other detainees show their thankfulness by hugging the officers and IDC staff members who respond with warm gestures and smiles.

On the bus on the way back to the detention facility, the detainees are given another surprise; they are not taken back straight away but invited to drive around to enjoy the view of the highlands and take photos with the IDC officers.

"Today is a special day for us. It was a chance for us to forget detention, forget everything. Today is a wonderful day," said Haidar, another detainee.

Even though afterwards the detainees had to return to their locked cells, the day provided a small window where the obstructing divide between human beings- detainees and IDC guards, asylum seekers and those who seek to help them- was forgotten temporarily.

Medan, 20 June 2013 – When asylum seekers and refugees are held in immigration detention centres (IDCs), their lives are not much different than that of criminals. They are confined behind iron bars, deprived of their freedom of movement, left with few activities to do, and allowed only limited contact with loved ones.

The situation may last for years without any sign of an end in sight. However, asylum seekers and refugees have not committed any crime except to seek the freedom, safety, friendship and dignity that they are entitled to as human beings. In the limiting conditions of detention, even a small and modest experience of freedom, compassion, friendship and dignity is cherished.

In the IDC in Medan, Indonesia, outings and recreational activities for detainees are now being piloted. Accompanied by a number of immigration officers, refugees and asylum seekers have the opportunity to temporarily leave behind the high walls, iron bars and barbed wire of the centre for a few hours once a month.

A joint decision between the IDC Office, JRS Indonesia and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in April 2013, was made in the hopes that the recreational outings could become routine.

On one day trip to water park, Wisnu Bawana, an asylum seeker, is startled when a ball hits his face. An IDC staff member, looks around to find the perpetrator. A young adolescent detainee teasingly smiles at Wisnu from the other side of the pool. Wisnu lunges after him playfully. Zaidan, the young detainee, swims

We do hope that Indonesia's laws will increasingly allow the dismantling of iron bars from the lives of asylum seekers and refugees.

Saefudin Amsa, Information and Advocacy Officer, JRS Indonesia

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