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

Asia Pacific: five wishes on International Women's Day



The wishes of refugee women are shared by women in all walks of life, Phnom Penh, Cambodia (Tess O'Brien/JRS)

If we don't make the bread in the morning, if we feel sick or tired, we won't have enough money to feed our children. So we have to do this. Every day. No matter what.

in the outskirts of Jakarta. "If we don't make the bread in the morning, if we feel sick or tired, we won't have enough money to feed our children. So we have to do this. Every day. No matter what."

That our yard is free of cluster bombs and landmines so my children and grandchildren can play freely. [Yay Mao](#) lost her daughter and niece to a landmine in the 1970s. And just five months ago, her 10-year-old grandson was killed when he found a cluster bomb close to their home. While Cambodia is a signatory to the ban on landmines and cluster munitions, it takes decades to clear the country of mines. Tell your government to ban landmines and cluster munitions today and find out other ways to help people like Yay Mao live safely [here](#).

My house is safe during both the rainy and dry seasons. In the refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border – some holding more than 20,000 refugees – women wrote about their worries about resettlement, being sent back to Burma, education for their children and earning a living. But they all were concerned first and foremost about something more basic: survival. Living in the jungle during the rainy season means mudslides. One mudslide and the trees that fall with it can sweep entire homes down the slopes of the camps. In the dry season, fires like the one in Umpiem Mai refugee camp can burn sections of the camp in a matter of minutes.

"We sometimes hear the news that someone has died because of a fallen tree. We are constantly threatened by landslides in the rainy season and by fire in the summer. We don't have enough clean water in summer and there are no fire engines," said [May Tho](#), a refugee mother.

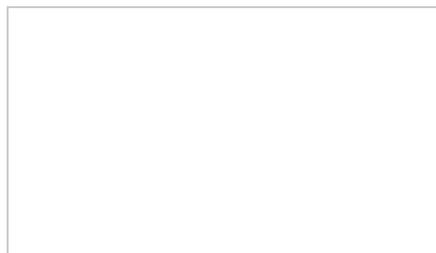
Bangkok, 7 March 2012 – Women live in vulnerable situations throughout the region from border camps to urban apartment blocks. Over the past year JRS has been collecting testimonies of women in the Asia Pacific. On this International Women's Day, take a minute to read what they want for their futures and their families.

A secure future for my children. "I came to Thailand assuming that I would make enough money with my husband to return to Burma and put our children in a good school. Now we are here and can't even make enough to live a proper life. We have no savings and my children will soon have to drop out of school to help with work," said one [mother](#) of two who migrated to Ranong's fishing district five years ago.

Freedom from sexual violence. [Amina](#) is just one of hundreds of women who fled sexual violence in their home countries. She now lives in Bangkok caring for her son. She is waiting to be resettled and start a new life with her son someplace where she is safe. "I was really respected as a police officer in Djibouti. But once I realised that the abuse and torture from my husband would never stop and no one in the community would save me from him, I had to leave. Without refugee status I am afraid they will send me back to him and I will die."

Enough food to feed my family three meals every day. Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia aren't signatories to the refugee convention, meaning people who seek asylum there aren't legally allowed to work. [Adelah](#) and her husband have learned to bake Afghani flat bread to sell to the refugee community where they live

International: workshop produces new communications plan



Rome, 28 February 2012 – A JRS workshop last week produced a new two-year plan to promote attention on refugee issues. The 2012-2014 communications plan is firmly rooted in the [Strategic Framework](#), a document released in January outlining JRS values and strategies with a particular focus on the needs of refugees on the margins, quality education, interfaith dialogue and organisational unity.

Field staff began arriving in Rome on 16 February for a week of



Children playing at a JRS centre in Jordan, part of the organisation's newest region, represent hope for the future. (Peter Balleis SJ/JRS)

United by the three broad campaign goals, staff had the opportunity to develop strategies focused on meeting the needs of the refugees and forcibly displaced persons in their specific region.

creative approach," said JRS International Communications Director James Stapleton.

Both social networking and multimedia were presented as tools to promote the voices of refugees and forcibly displaced persons, share their stories and quickly inform the public in the event of a crisis or new positive development.

One important objective of the meeting was to work toward the creation of web pages for all regions. The websites are tools for sharing information and multimedia about JRS projects in the field, as well as spiritual reflections, news related to refugee issues and JRS work around the globe. By clicking on the following links, you can view the websites of [JRS USA](#), [JRS Eastern Africa](#), [JRS Latin America](#) and [JRS Asia Pacific](#).

The meeting was an important step towards a stronger, more united JRS outlined in the [Strategic Framework](#), released at the end of January. Communications and advocacy officers return to the regions this week to share the ideas and plans with staff on the ground and incorporate new tools and strategies to accompany, serve and advocate for refugees and forcibly displaced persons.

Thailand: Bangkok's refugees show themselves through their photos



"See what I See" was an exhibition of seven refugees who share their stories through photography of what they are doing now in the city of Bangkok, Thailand. Sandgar Photo&Video ©2012

I am so happy to share my work and to be a part of this. I have never been to a photo exhibit before, much less been the one whose photos are on display.

workshops and discussions on how to best inform, educate and motivate others to action on issues facing refugees and forcibly displaced persons. Participants included JRS communications and advocacy officers based in Bangkok, Nairobi, Bujumbura, Amman, Caracas, Brussels, Washington DC and Rome.

After a welcome speech from International Director Fr Peter Balleis SJ, staff attended presentations and participated in exercises led by their colleagues. Seminars throughout the week spanned a large range of activities including writing for the web, using tools like Facebook and Twitter, and fundraising.

During a joint session, the advocacy and communications officers sketched timelines and drew up goals to shed light on the plight of refugees living in city centres, make quality education available to refugee students and promote hospitality in host communities. The completed plan is expected to be ready for implementation within the next few months.

JRS field staff planned events designed to give refugees a platform to express themselves to the local community, using successes like the [photo exhibit](#) in Bangkok last month as a template. Those working in centres of power focused on ways to share research findings and testimonies from the field with policy makers and governments. United by the three broad campaign goals, staff had the opportunity to develop strategies focused on meeting the needs of the refugees and forcibly displaced persons in their specific region.

"As global media continues to evolve, communicating the needs of refugees and forcibly displaced persons requires an increasingly

Bangkok, 3 February 2012 Four white walls became the canvas Saturday for seven asylum seekers to tell their stories. And once those walls were filled with nearly 50 photos, viewers began to get an understanding of their daily lives in Bangkok.

With the opening of "See What I See: photos by and about urban refugees" these photographers, from six different countries, were able to express what it's like living in this foreign city as asylum seekers and refugees.

"I am so happy to share my work and to be a part of this. I have never been to a photo exhibit before, much less been the one whose photos are on display," said Nidal, a Pakistani asylum seeker.

You can view the photos from the exhibition [here](#).

Nidal, along with the other photographers, took their cameras with them around the city for two months. Nidal photographed his volunteer work at the Bangkok Refugee Centre, a free dental clinic in the park, and a funeral of an asylum seeker. Through his lens he was able to capture what many of Bangkok's 2,000 urban refugees see every day.

At the opening, held at Toot Yung gallery in Bangkok, Fr Bernard Hyacinth Arpusthamy, SJ, spoke about the JRS commitment to urban refugees and asylum seekers.

"'See what I see' is about the lives of asylum seekers/refugees told through their lens or photos and in their own words," Arpusthamy, JRS Asia Pacific's regional director, said. "If we want to know what kind of world we need to construct, we need to listen to their unheard voices, get to know them and their families personally, listen to their dreams and desires, know what breaks a human heart and what brings joy, to hear the

longing to return home or be welcomed in a strange land.”

JRS began this project in April. After a dozen small cameras were donated, JRS staff began training people in basic photography. After working with the cameras for two months, the photographers chose the photos they wanted displayed at the gallery and the words to present with them.

The world represented in Bangkok

The photographers came from China, Cambodia, Iran, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. They ranged in age from 14- 45 and their photos are as different as their countries of origin.

Phea had to flee Cambodia after writing two book criticizing the government. He photographed what his life is like now that he lives in Bangkok. He is 29 and was educated in journalism and published two books.

He now spends his days sorting vegetables on the docks of the Chao Praya river for 140 baht (\$5 US a day). Sometimes he picks the heads off of chillies and receives 40 baht (\$1.50 US) for 10 kilos.

“I stood up to the Hun Sen government with my writing,” said Phea, speaking to a crowd at the gallery. “Now I feel safe in Bangkok. But I know I can never go back.”

Others don’t feel as safe as Phea. The two teenage Sri Lankan sisters used their photos to show how they are forced into hiding as refugees in Bangkok. After living here for five years waiting for resettlement to a third country they feel unsafe whenever they leave the house. After their three-month tourist visas expired these sisters, along with every other refugee or asylum seeker in Thailand, is subject to arrest for living in the country without a valid visa. They could be detained indefinitely while committing no crime.

“We just want people to see that is so hard to live here and we just want to have freedom some day,” said the younger sister, 14.

View the photos [here](#).

Molly Mullen, assistant regional communications officer, JRS Asia Pacific

International: JRS publishes Strategic Framework 2012-2015



Serving refugees forced to live on the edges of humanity, we will work with compassion and love, which enable us to engage with people of all races, cultures and religions in an open and respectful way, said JRS International Director, Peter Balleis SJ.

Rome, 25 January 2012 – After extensive consultation throughout last year, today the Jesuit Refugee Service published its Strategic Framework for 2012-2015, outlining broad goals, values, strategies and expected outcomes for the next four years. The 24-page booklet seeks to provide an inspirational framework and set overarching strategies for all ten JRS regions to meet the challenges of working with refugees on the edges of humanity.

“Serving refugees forced to live on the edges of humanity, we will work with compassion and love, which enable us to engage with people of all races, cultures and religions in an open and respectful way”, said JRS International Director, Peter Balleis SJ.

Reaffirming the mission of JRS to accompany, serve and advocate for refugees, the document clearly sets down the values driving the organisation: compassion, hope, dignity, solidarity, hospitality, justice and participation.

“The JRS mission is built on our faith in God who is present in human history, even in its most tragic moments. We are inspired by this faith and by core values that inform all the work we do.... Although practical in its nature, our service will be equally spiritual, promoting hope and reconciliation. We believe that education, learning together, and sharing knowledge are vital ingredients to nourish hope in people”, added Fr Balleis.

Concrete goals and strategies

The goals adapt core issues underpinning JRS work since its establishment and make them relevant to the challenges of today: compassion on the edge of humanity, faith and justice, hope and education, and unity in action.

- Compassion for humanity on the edge: JRS pledges to be more flexible and focused in responding to new emerging situations of forced displacement. Strategies will focus on addressing the needs of urban refugees and persons vulnerable to trafficking.
- Rooted in faith, acting in justice: Inspired by faith and the values of inclusiveness and solidarity, JRS will seek to address the causes of structural inequality. JRS strategies focus on strengthening the role of advocacy, both at grassroots and global levels, and promoting intercultural, ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue.
- Kindling hope through learning: Based on the belief in the dignity and interdependence of the human family, JRS will empower uprooted people through learning, fostering a future filled with hope. Strategies focus on assisting the most vulnerable in education, emphasising girls' education and teacher training. In addition, actions will also seek to promote access of refugees to third level education and educational excellence through the distribution of best practices throughout the organisation and beyond.

- A stronger, more united JRS: Firmly rooted in the values of subsidiarity and participation, JRS will develop and apply coherent standards in governance and management, so that the organisation works with and for forcibly displaced persons, in international unity, with transparency and accountability.

In the forward to the document the father superior of the Society of Jesus, Adolfo Nicolás SJ, described the Strategic Framework as a creative, inspiring and challenging document that will demand hard work and considerable risk.

"It is a great joy to see that this framework has been formulated so clearly and yet so humbly, so imbued with our Christian commitment and Ignatian vision. In this strategic framework we see faith, justice and collaboration joined once again in a single unified vision", he wrote.

A copy of the full text of the JRS Strategic Framework can be found on [here](#)

Philippines: super typhoon survivors turning debris to income



Ponod village chief, Managayao Langgoyo, shows home-made gravel filter used by people to sort and sell stones and pebbles. Photo by Louie Bacomo/ JRS Asia Pacific

"The stones sell according to their sizes," said Ponod village chief Managayao Langgoyo, holding up a home-made filter used to separate rocks from pebbles. A sack of finer gravel sells for about PHP 18 (\$.40 US) if you hoist it near the river bank. Buyers come and sell them to construction business in Marawi City, Lanao del Sur, about 20 kilometers away.

Just a few weeks ago, the same Kamanga river (Raman river among the Moro locals) rushed down so hard and swept away the soil where the community mosque, solar drier, and 50 houses stood and changed the landscape. While the alert warning of the village chief saved their lives, they have lost all that they have including crops and livestock.

Kamanga river is a tributary to the Mandulog river that wreaked havoc in Iligan City where more than 7,000 families have been displaced and hundreds killed.

Donate to the JRS project in the Philippines [here](#).

"The villages of Pantar and Ponod received one-time relief assistance such as rice and tarpaulin a month after the disaster struck," Mike Macarambon, JRS field officer in Lanao del Sur, said. About 90% of the 26 upstream villages in Bubong municipality were submerged days after the disaster making access difficult. Information about damage came late while relief assistance focused in downstream areas and cities where thousands have lost their lives.

"We are thankful for the groups that came to help including you," a widow who lost her small sari-sari store to the floods expressed. "I

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Safely starting over

JRS is offering assistance for permanent shelter in the two villages under the following criteria: totally damaged houses, safe relocation site, high economic and social vulnerability and strong interest in resettlement and rebuilding their house. The community in turn is offering their counterpart in building the permanent shelter through their labor, some locally-sourced materials and transportation.

Since the villages are composed of closely-knit Moro clans, the two village chiefs have taken the responsibility to organize them for the rehabilitation task ahead. JRS staff will continue to accompany the community as they rebuild and gather pieces of their lives and community in the next few months.

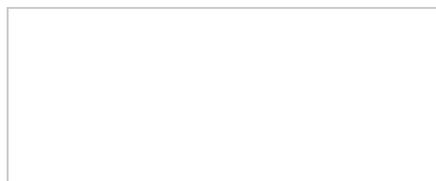
Meanwhile, families continue to collect stones and carefully sort the rocks from pebbles. "Poor people like us live very hard. We have no choice but to struggle and fight back the ravages of this typhoon," a father said as he lifted a sack full of large stones.

The ravaging waters have brought rocks that destroyed their community. Fighting back, the people of Ponod and Pantar is slowly using the wreckage to rebuild, and as it were, using them as stepping stones towards a better future.

Donate to the JRS project in the Philippines [here](#).

Louie Bacomo, assistant regional director, JRS Asia Pacific

Asia Pacific: expert Q and A on the tides of change in Burma



Bangkok, 24 February 2012 – In order to speak candidly about the situation in Burma, this former staff member decided to remain anonymous in this Q and A that originally ran on the Italian website [Popoli](#).

Do you believe that the present political developments are



The Thai/Burma check point at Piang Luang, Chang Mai, Thailand. The area beyond the fence has landmines in place. Photo by Don Doll SJ/ JRS

It is fairly clear that the change came, finally, from within: There was movement from both the bottom of society and at the top of the power spectrum that happened to move in synch.

concrete?

Yes, in the sense that many of the changes that have been made in the last few months cannot be easily reversed.

Are they going to bring Burma to a less repressive and undemocratic life for millions of people?

Yes, if they continue. It is unrealistic to think that the road ahead will be smooth however. The current government lacks the capacity to really drive home the changes: not just in terms of technical ability, but also because cronyism, corruption and worse, ethnic, class and religious divides will remain for years to come. In the main, the military continues to view ethnic minority groups with disdain and distrust, and vice versa.

At the same time, there are no doubt many in the military who are resisting the moves to a more open government, as witnessed by the way in which political prisoner releases have happened in the past four months; the by election in April will be a test of that struggle within the military, but it will not be the only one. We just have to hope that Thein Sein wins out, and that the international community continues to support his efforts in productive ways.

If yes, what are the events that most struck you? (Or, if not, what is not convincing?)

The release, eventually, of most political prisoners by Jan 13 is remarkable. Regardless of what happens within the military, these brave and committed people have shown since their release that they continue to dedicate their lives to achieving democracy and lasting national peace.

Just 3 days after their release many of the former prisoners - including U Gambira who lead the 2007 monks' uprising, and Su Su Nway, a young woman who arrested for her involvement in those demonstrations, formed a multi-faith peace movement at a Lutheran Church in Yangon - with Hindu, Muslim, and all Christian denominations represented. These are movements that cannot be put back in a bottle. From the government side, what is particularly interesting is that from the start of the new government nearly a year ago, poverty alleviation was indicated as a priority - and this in a country where up until 2007 'poverty' was a word that could not be uttered in the presence of government ministers.

One of the very first steps the government took was to increase the pension paid to civil servants, and announce increases in government spending on health and education (doubling education spending from 2 - 4%) - increases which now look like they will be improved again under these current budget discussion in the Hluttaw (national parliament). This was a sign that the changes were not mere window dressing, but that the government had instead taken a hard look at the state of the country and realised, for the first time in two decades, that poverty is widespread and needs to be addressed. The other most important steps the government has taken are in relation to freedom of expression: the media have been freed from fifty years of draconian censorship, and the Burmese thirst of news and information is being satisfied by scores of weekly newspapers and monthly magazines, and now unrestricted access to the internet.

According to you, what are the reasons that pushed the regime to make steps like pardoning some political prisoners, halting the big dam project backed by China, searching some peace deal with minorities (at least Karen rebels) and, last but not least, allowing the Lady to be candidate?

Cause and effect are impossible to establish in the social world, and there are likely many factors involving personal relationships and individual situations among those at the top that we will never come to know. However, it is fairly clear that the change came, finally, from within: There was movement from both the bottom of society and at the top of the power spectrum that happened to move in synch. Scores of brave individuals, including returned exiles with education and experience abroad, played important roles, like the economist U Myint, and the recently deceased Nay Win Maung, who tried to set up alternative networks and to speak truth to power. But then there were also the mass movements such as the 2007 monks' demonstrations and the blossoming of civil society movements in the terrible aftermath of the 2008 cyclone.

These movements showed that peaceful opposition could in fact be constructive; that they were not out to overthrow the government, but to make life better for people whom the government had ignored. Aung San Suu Kyi has played her own role in this too, taking a much more conciliatory line than she had in the past, not waiting for the government to play their hand, but willing to talk about compromise and a future of sharing power with the army, as must be, since the 2008 constitution allows for them to retain 25% of the seats in the national and regional parliaments.

Halting the dam took everyone by surprise and was a great step: but the question really should not be what prompted the government to cancel it, but why the former government ever agreed to it? The dam offered few benefits to Burma, but rather there were many dangers associated with the environmental destruction it could cause. A final surge of Burman nationalism is probably what swung the balance away from China - though the mass movement that was ongoing in Yangon and Mandalay no doubt played a part. Interestingly, the movement against the dam only had to get their message out to the general public through the uncensored media, and no sane person in Myanmar could understand why the government would allow such a thing to be built. The Information Minister breaking down in tears in Parliament as he tried to discuss the dam was merely a reflection of what the vast majority of Burmese were thinking: the dam was crazy and threatened to undermine the Irrawaddy, a potent national symbol and source of agricultural fertility the length and breadth of the country.

In terms of peace talks with the Karen National Union, the Kachin Independence Army and the Shan groups, again, the question must be why has it taken so long? There remains doubt as to the army's sincerity in these talks: no doubt those

conducting the talks are sincere, but the majority of the army may not be behind them.

In the new government structure, the over-inflated army has a much depleted power base, and then only as politicians, not as soldiers. Perhaps the most significant signals are those that can be gained when looking at the situation in Kachin state. The KIO were early adopters of the peace process, signing an agreement with the military in 1994. Yet, there has been little headway in the 18 years since then in finding a lasting political settlement. Worse, the KIO was not permitted to field candidates in the 2011 election, and there were reports of massive ballot rigging in Kachin areas.

The army continued to insist that the KIA give up their arms and become part of the government-controlled Border Forces. When skirmishes broke out in June 2011, which continued right up to mid-January 2012, it was as usual Kachin civilians who bore the brunt of abuses and killings by the Burmese army. While peace talks continued during the fighting, the KIA were ever suspicious of the ability of their interlocutors to deliver on their promises, resulting in talks being stopped more than once while new negotiators were found. Currently there is a peace in Kachin state, and with the Karen and Shan groups as well, but until we see this translated into political progress: that is, accession to some of the demands of the minorities and de-militarisation plans for all sides, it cannot be called a settlement.

Do you think that international pressures played a role? That US, EU and Australian sanctions had an influence? Change came mainly from within: sanctions and the isolation they both created and were symbolic of did not create the conditions for change, but they are playing a role now, perhaps in keeping those within the government who want a better future in Burma in a position of power. If every positive step is met with the kind of enthusiasm we are seeing at present, it will help build the momentum, and ending sanctions because there is greater political freedom will be a positive step. But it is also important to remember that along with sanctions, there were many efforts to increase engagement with non-state structures.

The fact that the army made it difficult for INGOs to work in-country with expat staff meant they had to find alternative ways of delivering aid (notably after Nargis) and this meant supporting the emergent civil society organisations that have now gained ground. In this the sanctions against development aid played a part, but so too, and perhaps more importantly, was the belligerence of the army, which did not want to admit to having failed to develop the country. Education opportunities for exiles, quiet engagement by experts, advisors, especially within the Asean region, all these things have played a part no doubt in bringing the changes we see now.

What do you think could be the developments for the next months?

We can only hope that things continue to move along positively.

Originally reported by Francesco Pistocchini

Australia: what I saw at Christmas Island Detention Centre



Christmas Island Detention Centre is 2800 kilometres north-west of Perth, 2500 kilometres from Darwin and 500 kilometres from Singapore.

I sit in the compound,
surrounded by young men
housed in a cage, in a
situation where they wait for
someone else to make
some kind of decision for
them.

re-integration programs, and they have made wonderful citizens.

And in [Africa](#) a similar story: the men largely were dead or displaced, women and children found themselves in camps, and the mothers, because of the hard life and constant work to provide for the family, were not able to discipline their children, who in turn became more and more difficult to control.

Living in a cage

They were left in a cultural and spiritual void by wars and lack of self-determination.

Sydney, 29 February 2012 – When Fr Celso Romanin SJ arrived on Christmas Island in October this year, he encountered detainees living without hope, scenes that reminded him of his work years earlier with refugees in Asia and Africa. Here, he reflects on his experience.

In the mid-1980s a group of young men from Hei Ling Chow were involved in a violent riot and were removed to Victoria Prison on the island of Hong Kong in what can only be described as the bowels of the prison. The authorities said that although it was within the prison, this was not in fact prison but part of the detention system.

No one ever went there - no lawyer, no case-worker.

I, as chaplain, went each week, and felt the utter powerlessness of the young men. I listened as best I could to their stories, and felt the hopelessness of their situation. Whilst others lived in some kind of hope that their case would be activated and they would be found eligible for re-settlement in a third country, these young men were deprived of all hope. I often wonder what happened to them, where they are and how they cope with life.

It was a similar story throughout the camps of Asia, Pulau Galang, Pulau Bidong and Site 2 on the Thai/Cambodian border, and to a much lesser extent the Hmong camps of northern Thailand; a story of young people who had been snatched from their traditional family and cultural environment and had taken to a life of gang adherence. Fortunately, many who came to Australia were able to re-discover some of this cultural tradition, especially through family

So too here at the detention centre on Christmas Island. I sit in the compound, surrounded by young men housed in a cage, in a situation where they wait for someone else to make some kind of decision for them. They need someone else to interpret for them, and then their case is taken away, and they wait. I sit in the compound, surrounded by languages I don't understand. I try to picture myself in their situation, living with others who represent different cultures and languages, carrying different stories of violence and war, desperately seeking somewhere to be able to live peacefully, and most importantly missing family. And this goes on day after day. I stay for a good while, and when I can no longer cope, I have a key and can go out.

But the question persists: what are we doing to young lives?

The government's answer is to tell us how evil the people smugglers are, and we must do what we can to stop them. And so those punished are the desperate, and the fishermen who receive a small payment for sailing the boats. These people are bewildered and totally lost. Most have no language, no affinity with others in detention, and ultimately are not the ones responsible for people smuggling – they are simply trying to provide for their families. And so, who claims responsibility for young lives lost?

For a short time of my life I can feel something of the emptiness, even the despair of others with very little to hope or live for. I can theorise about the importance of border control, of how just we are as a society to protect our citizens. But to do this we must distance ourselves from the human face of suffering. Here, people wait in despair; when things become too much to cope with, they are given sleeping pills, and when their despair becomes too great they light a fire in their room, or break a window, then there is a court case, no end to suffering, just more of it.

Fr Celso Romanin SJ

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