

Director's Letter

[Editorial: Kindling hope through action](#)

News

[Philippines: Laguna Lake residents weather the storm](#)

Project Updates

[Regional cooperation: an impossible dream?](#)

Spotlight

[Thailand: moving the tides of education in Ranong](#)

On Assignment

[At home with Thomas](#)

Voices

[Papua New Guinea: Reaching potential against the odds](#)

[Indonesia: Escape from Rakhine state](#)

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.

Editorial: Kindling hope through action



Fr. Bambang accompanies survivors of the August 2012 floods in Mindanao, Philippines (JRS)

Hope and dreams alone will not change the policies that fail to protect those in danger.

The accompaniment aspect of our work is about kindling hope to keep it alive so that life does not lose its flavour. It is the basis for survival for refugees, who have most likely lost the material and concrete resources that people use to buffer themselves against insecurity.

Amidst a reality that seems impossible to understand, dreams about the future provide a sense of direction, and the stamina to continue the wait for refugee status determination. Can dreams inspire political decision making processes, especially those with drastic effects on the lives of the refugees? Yes, but they also require action.

The current political and economic structures in governments are often barriers between populations. When policies stem from misunderstanding and fear, they have real human consequences for refugees. Hope and dreams alone will not change the policies that fail to protect those in danger.

Fathum, and people like her, have faith in a better world, despite existing in socio-political structures that do not favour them. Their hope is not merely a mechanism to cope with reality, but a clear sign that alternatives are possible. Our role as humanitarian workers is to channel their optimism into our own actions, using it to spur on change at the policy level that will create a reality that supports and protects them.

Fr. Bambang A. Sipaying, Regional Director JRS Asia Pacific

Philippines: Laguna Lake residents weather the storm



Children in Barangay Banilan continue to play despite strong winds and flooded environment, 24 October 2012 (Louie Bacomo/JRS)

Laguna Lake, 8 November 2012 — Communities around Laguna Lake, a 911 sq. km freshwater lake east of Metro Manila, continue to suffer flooding and displacement from a succession of tropical storms that hit the country this month, rounding off with Typhoon Ofel on the 29th of October.

"I can hear the waves crashing into the walls of our house [at night]", Helen, a 53-year old grandmother and long time resident of Laguna, who cannot sleep at night for fear of the storms, confided in me while we stood in the kitchen with lake water splashing at our feet.

Norrie, Helen's husband, has already taken off the wooden kitchen wall to save the plywood from damage. During strong winds and rains, Helen takes her six-year old granddaughter to stay with relatives living on dryer ground.

"We have to take out loans to keep our business running, otherwise we will have nothing to eat."

Peoples' safety and livelihoods are continually threatened by the absence of relocation plans, insufficient support services and increasing poverty. Typhoon Ofel has so far left 36 people dead and missing, while displacing close to 11,000 people, and affecting more than 3,500, according to local news sources.

Rains bad for business

The onslaught of disasters continue to wipe out peoples' investments in infrastructure and materials, heightening vulnerabilities.

Jernee and Aiza make paper maché products for a living, earning a daily wage of 140 pesos, or US \$3.30. Though it was once a big export industry in Laguna, the dampness of the rainy season ruins the export quality of the paper maché.

Fishing, the traditional livelihood in this area, is also futile during this time as the waves are too strong, according to local people.

As one of the poorest areas in the municipality, Cabulusan residents rely heavily on farming, fishing and paper-maché all of which have nosedived as a result of the storms.

While Laguna Lake used to be a primary source of fish, "it now takes too long to grow fishes in cages. I have not harvested in the last two months," said the local village barangay, or chairman.

Other families have to take out loans to keep businesses running, "otherwise we will have nothing to eat," Edna Florano, a single mother of four, told JRS.

Relocation stalled

Jernee and Aiza Agnes, a young couple with two small children, returned one week ago to find that after two months, the water has only receded about 10 meters from where it was during the August floods that destroyed more than 14,000 houses, according to the International Federation of the Red Cross.

"[Three months] was too long to stay in someone else's house," said Jernee, explaining why they returned.

While up to three million people in 30 cities throughout 16 provinces in Luzon were affected by the raging August monsoons, according to an August 11 report by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), roughly 325,371 out of the total affected are from Laguna.

While the local village chief, or barangay, proposed a relocation site to the municipal government, payment negotiations for the private land has stalled.

Not over yet

The typhoon season will last until the end of this month, and with an annual average of 20 tropical cyclones, people only recover one storm to get hit by the next.

"I cannot clean the mud off my floor because another storm might flood my house again," said one resident.

Typhoon Ofel comes three years after typhoon Ketsana—the second most devastating typhoon in the region in recent decades—hit communities in Cabulusan, Panguil in October 2009, leaving more than 740 people dead and a billion dollars worth of damages.

Florida Sahagun, a widow, recalled "waves as high as coconut trees" from Ketsana that destroyed the upper section of her house. She is now repairing her mud-encrusted house from the August 2012 floods to make it liveable again.

Chona Unabia, another flood survivor in Panguil, had her house destroyed by Kestana and now wishes to relocate. "The government provided PHP 70,000 (USD 1,667) to rebuild a house, but we had no land that is safe to build", she said. The family continues to face the onslaught of typhoons that come their way each year.

Those who have returned to their homes after two months of flooding once again preparing to evacuate. On 29 October, during the JRS team visit, the government issued storm signal 1—a warning to the disaster response teams in all municipalities to be on standby alert. Many families will not be able to sleep tonight.

Louie Bacomo, JRS Asia Pacific Regional Program Officer

*JRS works with the Social Action Center (SAC) network to provide food and assistance for flood-affected families in Pakil and Panguil, Laguna.

Regional cooperation: an impossible dream?



Fifty-six-year-old Ali spent a year in detention in Indonesia until he received refugee status from

Bangkok, 1 November 2012 — Millions of refugees and asylum seekers face tough challenges in their struggle to find safety in Asia Pacific. With the lowest number of signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention in the world, this region* offers paltry protection to people on the move. The glaring absence of national asylum laws and standardised procedures for refugee status determination has driven asylum seekers underground.

Asia Pacific is home to some 10.6 million forcibly displaced people. They are on the move for different reasons: seeking economic survival or reunion with their families, fleeing human rights violations.

UNHCR. He left his wife and 11 children back home in Afghanistan. Ali was among detainees who diligently attended English classes in the detention centre three times a week. (Paulus Enggal/JRS)

Cooperation, consistency and subscribing to universally accepted standards of protection are the way forward to ensure more equitable burden sharing for states and to protect refugees transiting through Asia Pacific.

But their movements are marked by the same defining factors: fear; dangerous journeys, often by boat; being smuggled and vulnerable to trafficking; the risk of indefinite detention.

Stemming pull factors

In recent years, Asian states have increasingly sought to seal their borders by stemming pull factors, resorting to detention and making it difficult to file asylum claims. Asylum seekers are driven underground, where they are exposed to exploitation and hazardous conditions, and denied access to health care, work, food, shelter and education.

But the push factors forcing people to leave their homes are always stronger so curbing the pull factors only leads to greater human rights violations and despair. Mahmoud, an Afghan asylum seeker detained in Indonesia, is one victim of this hostile approach.

"I would rather be shot than wait for this process to keep going indefinitely with no idea what is happening," he said. "I don't want to spend my life in this prison."

Nowhere is safe. Police in Malaysia arrested David, from Burma, three times. "I don't have a UNHCR card and they told me and my friends they could do what they wanted to us. They stole 200 ringgit [local currency] from my wallet and my telephone."

Promoting regional collaboration

In recent years the region has seen increasingly large-scale displacements. Armed conflict in Afghanistan, Myanmar and, until mid-2009, in Sri Lanka, persecution of ethnic minorities in Vietnam and ongoing oppression of the Rohingya have continued to push people towards Australia. Transit countries along the way include Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia. The need for cross-border and regional collaboration has never been greater, and the last few years have seen a rising interest in such collaboration.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has proven to be an inadequate space to encourage the protection of refugee rights. Under the [Bali Process](#), a grouping of over 50 states and international organisations working to address people smuggling and trafficking, UNHCR has promoted a Regional Cooperation Framework to be used as a guide for states to collaborate on migration issues. But although it has been well received, the framework is non-binding.

One of the few examples of bilateral cooperation has been the [Regional Cooperation Model](#), signed in 2001, between Australia and Indonesia in collaboration with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The aim is to support asylum seekers and refugees to prevent them from onward movement to Australia. But such agreements fail without the involvement of other host, transit and resettlement countries.

As one of the most developed countries in the region, Australia offers the best capacity to protect refugees, but national security interests and domestic politics have undermined its ability to lead by example. [Recent decisions](#) to embark on offshore processing of asylum seekers in Nauru and Manus defy the country's obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and may seriously jeopardise refugee rights. Nearly [90%](#) of people arriving by boat are convention refugees, according to the Refugee Council of Australia.

Australia has found a legal loophole by excising its territory – excluding parts from its migration zone – in order to bypass its responsibility to process asylum seekers arriving by boat. But it is doubtful that the new policies will stop people from arriving because the problem lies in the lack of durable solutions for refugees elsewhere in the region. An Afghani refugee in Indonesia said: "I know it's a dangerous journey, and I don't want to put myself and my family at risk at sea, but it's not a choice. If you give me and my family the right to work here, then we will stay here."

The way forward

Cooperation, consistency and subscribing to universally accepted standards of protection are the way forward to ensure more equitable burden sharing for states and to protect refugees transiting through Asia Pacific. Standardising procedures means refugees will face the same treatment, no matter where they go, and increasing protection in transit countries such as Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia will reduce the need for onward movement.

[The Comprehensive Plan of Action](#) (CPA) initiated in the 1980s as a response to the deaths of thousands of Vietnamese in boats at sea facilitated durable solutions for Indochinese refugees, who were processed in transit countries and either resettled in the US, Australia and Canada or repatriated. Although far from perfect, the CPA exemplifies that regional cooperation is possible if the political will is there.

Oliver White, regional advocacy communications officer & Dana MacLean, assistant regional communications officer

* UNHCR definition, see unhcr.org/pages/4a02d8ec6.html

Thailand: moving the tides of education in Ranong



Ranong, 12 November 2012 – A seafood factory on the southwestern coast of Thailand is sometimes ironically referred to



Migrant children in Ranong attend a JRS supported learning centre to help them prepare for integration into Thai secondary schools (Bea Moraras/JRS).

"Once the students are 12 years old, their parents encourage them to leave school to work in the factories so that they can support the family income"

as the 'Burmese university in Ranong'. It is one of the only opportunities available to many Burmese migrant children denied an education due to chronic poverty and social pressure.

"Once the students are 12 years old, their parents encourage them to leave school to work in the factories so that they can support the family income", said Irene Ho, who as project director of the JRS migrant learning centres encourages communities to value education and seeks to mitigate the barriers facing Burmese children trying to go to school.

"We want to support the children to go as far as they can in their schooling", added Ms Ho.

But, as many representatives from international organisations have found, economic hardship commonly pressures families to withdraw children before completing secondary school.

"Poor wages in low skilled jobs mean that every member of the family has to work", explained Pakpoom Sawankhum, a field officer with [Raks Thai Foundation](#), a grassroots NGO working with various Burmese migrant communities throughout Thailand.

Raising awareness

Yet economic hardship is not the only obstacle faced by children in their search for an education. Family and peer pressure encourage children to join their friends and parents in the factory, while limited quotas and exclusion of Burmese children from some Thai schools are also major stumbling blocks.

"Lack of awareness among migrant population and Thai host communities, coupled with prejudices and discriminations remain the main ingredients responsible for the lack of enrolment in schools of migrant kids", said Claudia Natali, IOM Labour Migration Programme manager based in Bangkok.

Since the 2005 Education Act, the Thai government has tried to increase attendance rates through teacher training to decrease prejudice, and granting migrant children freedom to travel, without the risk of arrest, to schools regardless of the documents they hold.

Thai policies have been paramount to efforts to universalise education in Thailand, according to the IOM and JRS.

While school attendance has increased, rates still remain low due to a variety of reasons.

"Tension between Burmese and Thai communities and fear of identification as irregular migrants also pose barriers for the school attendance of migrant children", said Pauline Aaron, JRS Thailand's Director.

"Facilitating cooperation between schools, parents, and communities is key", Aaron added.

Integration into Thai schools

JRS currently supports six migrant learning centres, attended by roughly 900 students who can acquire a basic education, in English, Thai and Burmese languages. The education provided in the learning centres also helps to prepare students for Thai schooling, if they choose to attend.

While many Thai schools accept Burmese migrant children, some remain exclusive for Thai nationals due to limited space and resources.

Schools also face challenges with Burmese students dropping out in the middle of the school year.

"The school headmaster budgets for a certain number of students. If many of them drop out mid-year, the school faces an issue with numbers not matching their financial allotments", said Ho.

JRS conducts outreach with communities and parents to show the value of schooling, whether in migrant learning centres or Thai schools.

"Our children have a right to education. Our job is to help them realise that right, and open up more opportunities for them in the future", said Ho.

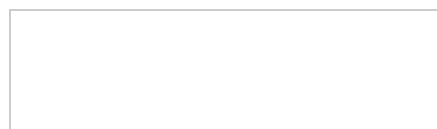
The official government policy by the Council of Ministers of Thailand asserts that all children, regardless of legal status in Thailand, are entitled to cost-free education until the age of 15 years old, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

While the necessary laws are in place to bind schools to accept migrant children, the MFA insists that public campaigns are necessary to encourage more migrant parents to send their children to schools, and allow them to finish.

"From 2013 to 2015, we will continue public outreach out to families to help them realise the value of education," said Ho.

Dana MacLean, Asia Pacific Regional Communications Assistant

At home with Thomas



Sydney, 5 November 2012 – Thomas has been one of our clients since the Sydney World Youth day 2008. In Sydney, the Jesuit Refugee Service provides shelter to asylum seekers who are at



A JRS shelter in Sydney, Blaiket House (JRS Australia)

A friend in need. For JRS, a friend on our watch, accompanied by us, had succumbed to despair.

become too much for him. The night before the suicide attempt I had spotted Thomas at evening Mass, he had chatted with some of the residents in his house and unknown to all had written a desperate email to all the human rights organisations he knew outlining his fears and announcing his wish to end his life.

Thomas was saved by a fellow asylum seeker in his house who happened to be a doctor. He recognised Thomas's distress and overuse of pills, rendered first aid and called an ambulance. Thomas survived this attempt on his life, returned to our house and returned to a spiral of claims and appeals for refugee status.

A friend in need. For JRS, a friend on our watch, accompanied by us, had succumbed to despair. We were shocked, concerned and inevitably asked ourselves questions about our care. In particular we asked if we could have done more? Should we have seen the signs? Thomas's house companions asked themselves the same question. Why, when chatting the night before, hadn't he shared his despair?

Each asylum-seeker companion made his way to the hospital to visit Thomas. Even those without a common language shared a common concern, Thomas.

Thomas has now received a decision on his future. He has been granted a visa and will stay in Australia. He received this news with mixed feelings.

Accompanying asylum seekers is a waiting game. They wait for the decisions they want to hear and JRS rides the emotional journey with them. Our office is a barometer of strong, often unspoken emotions, a place of waiting and uncertainty.

Marianne Loughry, JRS Australia Associate Director

Indonesia: Escape from Rakhine state



Noor is currently waiting with his wife and family in Indonesia for refugee status determination from the UNHCR (Bambang A. Sipayung SJ/JRS)

"I hope that one day we can finally realise our dreams of living safe, dignified lives"

risk of destitution while they undergo their refugee status determination.

One of the shelters, a large parish house next to the JRS office, can accommodate up to 10 men at a time. The proximity of this house means JRS 'shelter clients' are regular visitors to our office and Thomas is the most frequent of all.

When Thomas first came to JRS for assistance he was already struggling with the demands of the refugee determination process, and life in general. At the same time, Thomas's cooking and cleaning ability, and his concern for the needs of other residents endeared him to us.

With a willingness to assist in small chores, he would inform us on the comings and goings of visitors in the house. We also noted that as time passed he was getting thinner, poorer in health and occasionally incoherent.

Over the years, JRS went with Thomas to his various refugee hearings, counselled him in his needs, chatted with him, befriended and accompanied him. At each stage of his refugee determination process, Thomas received negative decisions; he appealed each one and entered into what seemed like spiralling negative pathway, characterised by dashed hopes and occasional irrational responses. In the office, we continued to enjoy Thomas's presence and offer all the support we could to someone who was becoming an old and familiar friend.

One night, two months ago Thomas attempted suicide in our house. The effect of the downward spiral we had witnessed had

JRS Indonesia met *Noor, an ethnic Rohingya from Buthidaung town in Rakhine State, Myanmar, in Cisarua at the end of October 2012. His story is a harrowing tale of struggle and survival in the face of poverty and persecution.

Cisarua, 13 November 2012 — Eight years ago after we celebrated Eid Al-Adha, a four-day Islamic religious holiday, my family was swimming in the seaside when suddenly the army came and took the men away. For three days we were forced to porter, carrying heavy loads of up to 60 kg on our backs for kilometres at a time.

One of my relatives was too weak, and they beat him until his head was bleeding. I tried to help him but an officer saw and beat me until I fell to the ground, losing a few teeth and a bloody face. We were dismissed at the end of the week, but had to find our own way home with food or guidance.

This is a normal part of life as a Rohingya in Rakhine state, on the western coast of Myanmar. We have no access to citizenship and cannot move freely, except to certain places at limited times. We

our religion, Islam.

lived under the threat that the government would come and take our land and give it to others. We were also restricted in practicing

Our temporary ID cards are not even accepted in most public services, such as hospitals. Many of our schools have been closed. We are forbidden to go to university. With limited access to education, we are only eligible for petty jobs. When I lived there, like many others in my village, I planted vegetables and grew my own food. Although we could grow many things, we were not allowed to go to town to sell it.

Military abuse makes our lives even harder. Many people are randomly taken away, tortured, and never return. People dying or disappearing is not something unfamiliar to us.

Abandoned in Indonesia

If any of us has money, we try to find a way out of the country to the nearest country in order to escape the persecution. My father urged me to find a safe place where I could work, so I went to Malaysia through Cambodia and Thailand. I worked there illegally for six years, and eventually managed to save enough money for a trip Australia.

An agent offered to take me, my wife, and family along with 16 other persons, from Malaysia to Australia by boat. After two nights of sailing, many passengers were seasick, so the captain left us in a hotel in Indonesia, promising that he would return after one or two days. One week later we were still waiting.

When we realized that we had been abandoned, the hotel manager forced us to leave as the hotel had only been paid for two nights. I did not know what to do. I decided to try to reach the UNHCR office in Jakarta.

A local man said could get us tickets for one million Indonesian rupiah, or roughly US \$104, per ticket. I only had 200 Malaysian ringgit, or US \$65.33, in my pocket. I gave him my wife's bracelet, which cost 1400 Malaysian ringgit, or US \$458. He gave me four bus tickets to Jakarta and some cash in return. I had no other choice.

We travelled for three days before reaching Tangerang, a city 25 km west of Jakarta. We took a taxi to the UNHCR office but when we arrived, it was closed so we decided to return the next day.

We couldn't pay for a hotel, but the manager kindly gave us a reduced rate of only 100.000 rupiah, or US\$10.40. The taxi to the UNHCR had been more than two times that.

The next day we applied for refugee status at the UNHCR, and there was nothing left to do but wait for the decision. I knew the money we had left would not last long.

Luckily we made an Indonesian friend, and he helped us to survive for the next two months. We found a cheap room to rent in Ciawi, a small town in West Java close to Jakarta, and currently live there.

Waiting with empty pockets

When our money ran out, I was desperate. Without access to employment, we had no way to earn money. I went to the detention centre to ask to be arrested, but was asked to leave after one night.

Two months later, my wife and niece made contact with [Church World Service \(CWS\)](#), an international humanitarian organisation. CWS gave us a small stipend, and referred us to JRS so that each of us could receive more support.

My situation in Indonesia is not easy, especially because I am not allowed to work here. Our survival depends on the little money given by charity. However, I feel safe, because I can practice my religion as Muslim here freely, and I have no problem with local people in the neighborhood or anywhere in Indonesia.

Right now our biggest concern is how to survive while we wait for the UNHCR decision. My only hope for the future is refugee status. I pray that UNHCR will announce the decision soon so we can move to another country to build our lives.

I don't care what country it is, but it would be hard to stay in Indonesia because it is poor, and a lot of people live difficult lives here. I hope that one day we can finally realise our dreams of living safe, dignified lives where we are treated as human beings with rights, and my children can have an education and opportunities.

*The name has been changed to protect identity

Papua New Guinea: Reaching potential against the odds

Port Moresby, 12 November 2012 – Like any other young girl, Anna grew up with a love for fairy tales – princes and princesses, people in dire situations and a hero coming to save the day.

But Anna's life has been anything but a fairy tale. As a West Papuan refugee born and raised in Papua New Guinea (PNG), she realised growing up that without citizenship her life would be more difficult than others'.

Still, as the famous activist Helen Keller once wrote, "character cannot be developed in ease and quiet." Anna has experienced her fair share of trial and suffering and is now a successful and ambitious young woman.

As a gifted student, Anna earned a government and UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) supported scholarship to study a two-year diploma in vocational education training in the capital, Port Moresby.



Anna attended vocational school in Port Moresby under a government and UNHCR scholarship. (Oliver White/JRS)

"Even though I consider my self West Papuan and am proud [of my heritage], my life and future are here in PNG"

and future in Papua New Guinea optimistically.

"Even though I consider myself West Papuan and am proud that I am West Papuan, my life and future are here in PNG", she asserts.

While Anna's hard work and perseverance has paid off, without citizenship or travel documents such as a passport, her chances of moving overseas will remain just a fairy tale. Although entitled to both, naturalisation is prohibitively expensive at 10,000 Kina or US \$4850 and the government has stopped issuing travel documents.

"I want to go forward [to New Zealand] and get my degree and masters. My dream is to go overseas and study", she said.

With greater citizenship rights, who knows how much more Papua New Guinea's refugees could achieve?

On returning home, Anna obtained work in the Kiunga district office's education department. Anna achieved all of this despite her limited legal status and lack of citizenship.

Growing up in PNG

Anna spent her early years in East Awin, a relocation camp of 2,366 refugees, established on 60 sq. km of land in the Western province. East Awin was founded as part of the governments 1996 Limited Integration Policy, which stipulates that West Papuan refugees must live in the camps in order to receive any assistance.

It is a policy that has left thousands to flounder in the urban and border areas without assistance or protection.

"Improvements in access to education and health services for both refugee communities and their PNG hosts would help to address needs more adequately", said Wren Chadwick, JRS' previous Advocacy and Information Officer formerly based in Kiunga.

While the Catholic Diocese of Daru-Kiunga— which manages most of the schools and clinics in the area— works hard to ensure both are available, "the problems in accessing these services in these remote locations is shared by refugees and locals alike", said Chadwick.

The requirements to live in East Awin to have access to residency permits also splits up families. When Anna was thirteen, she was sent to live in Kiunga to attend secondary school with a wantok, or extended kinship relatives.

"When I moved to Kiunga life became more difficult. At that time I missed my parents a lot", Anna said. "When the sun set I used to look at the ground and cry".

Looking to the future

Now, however, Anna is reunited with her family and sees her life

Oliver White, JRS Regional Advocacy and Communications Officer

Publisher Bambang A. Sipayung SJ Editor: Oliver White Designer: Dana MacLean Contact: Diakonia@jrs.or.th www.jrsap.org +66 2 640 9590

Diakonia November 2012
Editor: Oliver White