

Director's Letter

[Regional Director's Letter:
Rekindling our sharing](#)

News

[Australia: Government
slammed for attempts to portray
asylum seekers as illegals](#)

[Asia Pacific: reading between
the lines to decipher refugee
literacy needs](#)

[Thailand: JC:HEM commences
in Mae Hong Son](#)

[Asia Pacific: JRS Asia Pacific
Regional Office meeting in
Rayong](#)

Project Updates

[Cambodia: 'I am happy I am
alive' - Survivor Network
project report](#)

Voices

[Indonesia: The ongoing
struggle of a woman displaced](#)

Regional Director's Letter: Rekindling our sharing



Despite their own suffering, difficulty and confinement in an Indonesian detention facility, detainees from Afghanistan (pictured during Nawruz) still acted with joyful generosity during Persian New Year celebrations earlier this year – a lesson to rekindle our sharing

There are always lessons of values that we can have through direct accompaniment with the people we serve

not something freely given.

In his analysis of society, Michael Sandel, a Harvard political philosopher, sees our world as a marketplace society where everything is up for sale. War can be sold to the private mercenary as long as the price is right. Country territory is also for sale by naming it a Special Economic Zone. And even state policies can be bought by the highest bidder. In this situation where everything has a price-tag, then generosity, hospitality and compassion may be foreign words that have no basis in current reality.

I imagined that if 33 years ago, [Fr. Pedro Arrupe](#) was counting only the cost and financial situation of the Society of Jesus, there might not be a JRS. Fortunately, he started by making compassion the priority principle in responding to the 'Indochinese boat people' refugee crisis. His rootedness in the experiences of helping others because of his direct contact with the war and the war victims may suggest his strong will and compassion to respond to these people. He called the Society of Jesus to respond to the situation and to share with these people something that could ease their sufferings. It is really a journey of courage, generosity, compassion, solidarity and faith that moved Fr. Arrupe to call on the Jesuits to face this challenge.

The plight of the people, their stark future, despair and frustration continue to present to us challenges of the current world we live in together. The stricter immigration policies evolving in several countries bring more difficulties and fragmented journeys for refugees and asylum seekers. Meanwhile, transit countries sometimes do not give too much attention to their presence. For some people, these displaced people become a market opportunity where they can earn profit. However, while it is quite challenging and sometimes frustrating, there are always lessons of values that we can have through direct accompaniment with the people we serve.

The story above is an important lesson that we need to have during our service with refugees and asylum seekers. It is the source from which we can constantly relay the values that inspired the foundation of JRS. It is the source that often challenges who we are in this service for the suffering people, and what moves us to continue to share our lives with them. And as the JRS anniversary on 14 November also means a new year to come and to celebrate, let us take the examples of the Afghan celebration and lesson of sharing to rekindle heart and commitment of service to refugees, asylum seekers and displaced communities.

Australia: Government slammed for attempts to portray asylum seekers as illegals



Life is becoming even more difficult for the more than 2,200 asylum seekers currently detained on Christmas Island (pictured), the 1,061 transferred to Manus Island and 827 sent to Nauru (JRS Australia)

This is a deliberate attempt to control public opinion and to dehumanise and portray asylum seekers as criminals who have no rights

growing protest across Australia. In the past two days refugee advocates such as Julian Burnside QC together with churches, the Australian Human Rights Commission, and staff and volunteers of organisations who work with refugees in organisations such as St Vincent de Paul Society and the Red Cross have all spoken out against the change in terminology.

CEO of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Kon Karapanagiotidis, is another who has spoken out strongly against the Minister's terminology which he says is aimed at shaping the public debate over asylum seekers who arrive by boat.

"(The Minister) is deliberately trying to dehumanise these people by making them less than human", he says.

He has also taken issue with other terminology which includes onshore asylum seekers being referred to as 'detainees' rather than 'clients' and those held off-shore on Nauru or Manus Island as 'transferees.'

"To call them 'detainees', not people suggests criminality, and to call others 'transferees' suggests they have no rights and are no more than a package, a parcel, in transit", he said.

Under the UN Refugees Convention, those seeking refugee status are entitled to human rights in the country where they are seeking asylum. This includes the important principle they not be returned to a country where they may face serious threat to their life or to their freedom, the right not to be punished for illegal entry into the territory of a contracting State, the right to work, the right to housing, the right to education, the right to public relief and assistance, the right to freedom of religion, the right to access the courts and the right to freedom of movement as well as the right to be issued with identity and travel documents.

Yesterday the Minister, Scott Morrison defended his decision to alter the way in which asylum seekers are referred to by his Department, insisting that he was "calling a spade, a spade" and he would "offer no apologies" for his hardline stance. He also maintained he was backed up by international laws.

"Under the people smuggling convention it defines illegal entry as people who come without a valid permit for entry into a country", he said.

In other words rather than following the UN Convention for Refugees and the protections for refugees enshrined under that Convention, the newly elected Government is instead citing the United Nations Convention to Strengthen Fight Against Transnational Organised Crime, which Australia joined in 2004.

The Convention was created to fight trafficking and people smuggling and organised crime. It was not designed to make asylum seekers and refugees illegal or to punish them for seeking safety, opponents claim.

"Being cruel to asylum seekers is now a national sport in Australia and our national character is being redefined", says Julian Burnside but points that changes in terminology to instill Australians with a fear of boat people is not new.

Border control was reclassified 'border security' during the Howard Government era and last year when asylum seekers were permitted to live within the community, Scott Morrison argued they not be placed near 'vulnerable people.'

"If you make a group sufficiently feared and hated you can ill treat them at will", Mr. Burnside warns.

Oliver White of JRS Australia, who describes the new language as a deliberate attempt to control public opinion and dehumanise boat people, says JRS also remains opposed to the transfer of asylum seekers to Manus and Nauru and the arbitrary detention and transfer of pregnant women to Nauru.

"The principles of deterrence by which the members of one group of people who have come to Australia to seek

Sydney, 23 October 2013 - Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Australia has slammed the Immigration Minister Scott Morrison's instructions to departmental and detention staff that in future, asylum seekers who arrive by boat be referred to as 'illegal' maritime arrivals.

"This is a deliberate attempt to control public opinion and to dehumanise and portray asylum seekers as criminals who have no rights", says Oliver White, Head of Policy and Advocacy for JRS Australia.

The United Nations Refugee Convention which Australia helped write and to which Australia is a signatory, recognises refugees as having the right to enter a country for the purpose of seeking asylum, regardless of how they arrive or whether they hold valid travel and identity documents.

Under the Convention as well as under Australian law, asylum seekers arriving by boat are not illegal and have committed no criminal offence.

"The majority of those trying to reach Australia have fled horrendous persecution. Australia should treat them with dignity and respect", Mr. White says.

The condemnation by JRS Australia of the Minister's instructions that asylum seekers be called 'illegal' and those onshore referred to as 'detainees' and those offshore as 'transferees' joins a

protection are treated harshly in order to modify the behaviour of others, should form no part of Australian policy", he says.

Currently many more men, women and families seeking asylum and using false or tourist visas arrive in Australia by air rather than by boat. But unlike what used to be called 'irregular' maritime arrivals, they are not penalised, put in detention or sent to live in crowded army tents off shore.

"We oppose detention that is arbitrary and indefinite. Detention should only be for the purpose of necessary processing such as health, identity and initial security assessments and for the shortest time possible", the JRS Head of Policy and Advocacy says. "Pregnant women and children should not be held in detention or transferred off shore but should be housed in the community with the full range of services necessary for their welfare."

This article was written and first published by Communications, [Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney](#), on 23 October 2013

Asia Pacific: reading between the lines to decipher refugee literacy needs



Primary school students take part in literacy education activities in a refugee camp in Mae Hong Son, Thailand (JRS Asia Pacific)

Bangkok, 24 September 2013 – Falling on the second Sunday of September, International Literacy Day in 2013 bears witness to both movement and standstills in progress towards the Asia Pacific region achieving the [UN Millennium Development Goal of reaching universal literacy by 2015](#).

In the past decade, many countries in the region have made enormous leaps towards providing universal education, such as the pledges by [Thailand in 2004 and 2005](#) to open up access to public schools for all children regardless of their immigration status. However, the paralysing impact of conflict and violence on children's school attendance (evident in the experiences of refugee and internally displaced children) continues to tear holes in the fabric of progress.

The importance of education. "Without literacy skills and an education, refugees and other displaced persons can be more easily exploited and ignored in their communities or societies", Ichiro Miyazawa, a Programme Specialist in Literacy and Lifelong Learning at UNESCO Bangkok, told the Jesuit Refugee Service.

While specific data on literacy rates among refugees is not collected, approximately 897 million young people and adults worldwide are illiterate. The majority of these are women, and despite overall reductions in absolute numbers, [these literacy rates have been falling](#).

The most sustainable way for refugees to obtain quality education is through already well-established and accredited institutions

The ability to read and write not only enhances one's ability make a living. It is fundamental to individual well-being, gender equity and equality, according to UNESCO campaigns in the past.

"Refugees and other displaced persons are disproportionately at risk of missing out on education because everything is put on hold when they are forced from their homes", said JRS Asia Pacific Advocacy Officer and former UNESCO Consultant, Junita Calder.

Moreover, upon arrival in their new host communities, displaced children often face difficulties gaining access to local schools.

Community-based schools and NGOs sometimes aim to fill the educational gap by setting up alternative learning systems but long-term education solutions need to be sustainable, therefore integration into the local school system is desirable, says JRS.

"The most sustainable way for refugees to obtain quality education is through already well-established and accredited institutions", said JRS Thailand Programme Officer, Bea Moraras.

Looking ahead. JRS Asia Pacific supports the education of roughly 8,000 refugees and asylum seekers through programmes in Australia, Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand, yet staff hope that eventually governments will take over the responsibility for supporting the education (and literacy) of all children residing on their soil.

While the [1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#) which stipulates a child's right to education – has been signed and ratified by most countries in the Asia Pacific region, linguistic and cultural barriers, as well as prejudice and discrimination, remain major impediments to the acceptance of foreign children in state-run schools.

"National laws often take time to filter down and become practical action at the provincial and village level", said Ms Calder.

The JRS Ranong project in Thailand is currently facilitating the entry into Thai schools of Burmese migrant children residing there, through advocacy with migrant communities and school administrators.

"It's a long process, but we have had some success, especially in five Thai primary schools", said Ms Moraras, who also stresses the importance of engaging local communities to explain the value of education for the future.

"Literacy is the first and essential step towards better livelihood opportunities.... [It enables] refugees [to obtain] more

information, new knowledge and skills that help them to support their families in the future", Mr Miyazawa explained.

Dana MacLean, JRS Asia Pacific Communications Officer

Thailand: JC:HEM commences in Mae Hong Son



Signs advertising the advanced English Community Service Learning Track (CSLT), part of the Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins (JC: HEM) Initiative, in Mae Hong Son (Photograph courtesy of JRS Thailand, Ashleigh Callow)

The JC:HEM initiative will build on approximately 20 years of work in providing education to refugees in MHS. It will offer further education for adults, and also aims to strengthen the capacity of existing education staff such as teachers

solution has been found (either in a third country or if they choose to return to Myanmar).

The CSLT programme for MHS refugees will be the first engagement of JC:HEM in Southeast Asia. The programme will draw on JC:HEM's experience in other parts of the world (including projects in Kenya and Malawi, which last month delivered the first university refugee graduates funded by JRS – a combined total of 49) to develop the programme in MHS on the border of Thailand and Myanmar and potentially in other locations across the region.

In preparation for commencement of the first course, there has been a lot of activity in recent weeks - both inside and outside of the classroom.

"Working closely with our partners in the Karen Education Department (KnED), the CSLT course was advertised in the camp through posters and loudspeaker announcements. We had 43 eager students sit the placement test on the 14th of September, and we're looking forward to starting the course soon," said Ms. Ashleigh Callow, EFL-CSLT facilitator, JRS Thailand.

There are 21 students enrolled in the EFL-CSLT course which will run until February 2014. "Students unable to attend the advanced EFL-CSLT course will embark on an intermediate course to assist in preparing the students for future CSLTs," added Ms Callow.

For information on how you can contribute visit <http://www.jc-hem.org/contribute>.

Asia Pacific: JRS Asia Pacific Regional Office meeting in Rayong

On 15-18 September, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Asia Pacific staff met in Rayong, Thailand, to reflect and evaluate on the previous 12 months of work, and to consider priorities for the coming years.

It was evident that a lot had happened in the region since the office had come together about one year beforehand to define the Regional Office Strategic Framework. Such developments have included: planning and preparation for Myanmar, a new setting for



A group photo of meeting attendees (JRS Asia Pacific)

JRS Thailand, the transition out of Timor-Leste, the establishment of JRS Philippines and the reshaping of JRS Singapore – just to name a few.

The meeting was a very valuable opportunity to have an honest and open discussion about the current work context for each staff member and to consider how the regional office team could continue to best work together to achieve its objective of supporting regional projects and countries in the best way possible. Each staff member came prepared to present their views and experiences to the group. These presentations shared relevant information with the group about present responsibilities, successes, challenges, uncertainties and opportunities.

A plan for Myanmar was discussed and refined, including in relation to future trainings for field staff on accompaniment to implement the JRS mission, vision and spirit. Particular attention is given to the education situation, especially because of the

expertise and long experience of JRS in accompanying education for Myanmarese refugees in the camps on the Thai border.

The meeting was also very beneficial in terms of regional office staff getting to know one another on a more personal level, especially as there have been some staff changes over the previous year. The card games played after dinner on the Thursday night provided an insight into a previously unknown competitive streak in some staff members. Meanwhile, another staff member lightheartedly used the cards as a fortune telling aid.

Naturally, the sun started to shine at the beachside town only as the meeting concluded on the Friday morning –when the team was due to depart on the return trip to the office in Bangkok. More importantly though, well equipped with the learnings from and actions agreed in Rayong, JRS Asia Pacific looks forward to an effective and efficient period ahead.

JRS Asia Pacific

Cambodia: 'I am happy I am alive' - Survivor Network project report



The Cambodia Campaign to Ban Landmines (CCBL) and Jesuit Refugee Service Cambodia (JRS) initiated this quality of life project with strong collaboration from the Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority (CMAA)

Preah Vihear, 29 August 2013 – JRS Cambodia and its Survivor Network Project have released its report titled 'I am happy I am alive'. It is a practical approach to improve the quality of life of people with disability.

The research showed that many people with disability are happy people who try to help their communities, their families and work to make sure their rights are upheld.

But it also had some bad news:

- 1) Only 41% of handicapped people have identity cards
- 2) 39% have land titles
- 3) 56% can read and write (39% among women)
- 4) Only 51% have enough food to eat
- 5) Few say they have enough income to live in dignity.

The full report, including the recommendations, can be [downloaded online](#) in English, with the Khmer version to be available soon.

A publication titled 'Services Booklet for People with Disability in Cambodia' has also been released. It is available in [English](#) and [Khmer](#).

JRS Cambodia

Indonesia: The ongoing struggle of a woman displaced



A woman asylum seeker living in the community (JRS Indonesia).

27 September 2013 - Every person's story is unique. The story of Qamariah as Sabiha, a member of an Ethiopian ethnic minority who fled persecution and has now found herself (against her intentions) as an asylum seeker in Indonesia, is a clear example of one woman's struggle with displacement. However, what is not so unique in the stories of displaced people are the all too common experiences of horrendous abuses in their countries of origin, followed by ongoing struggle and disadvantage as they seek asylum and try to establish a safer future.

Qamariah as-Sabiha was born as a member of a minority clan in a small village in the Ethiopian highlands. The majority populations in this region are of Somali descent. When Qamariah

All of my neighbours, especially the women, suffered physically

her country.

Conflict and violence in the area have led to the suffering and death of many civilians. Often unwarranted accusations about political activities have resulted in tragic consequences, such as those experienced by Qamarah's family. Women and children receive no official protection and are vulnerable to the threat of maltreatment and rape.

"One day, the gunmen came to my house. They accused my father of being involved in a political activity. When my father explained that the claims were untrue, they did not believe him and shot him in front of our family. My brothers tried to help and protect him, but the gunmen immediately shot them as well. At once, all of them died", remembers Qamarah.

After her arrival in Kenya, Qamarah found a job for a year, washing dishes in a restaurant. This gave her allowed her to access food and a place to stay. Qamarah then worked for two years as a housekeeper for a family that was temporarily residing in Kenya. During her stay with this family Qamarah earned some money and was able to indirectly learn from her employer's children who went to school. "Because I cannot go to school as they do, I always asked them about the lessons they learnt so I could learn from them", said Qamarah.

Qamarah's employer was also supportive in helping her to submit a claim for asylum at the local UNHCR office. "I was interviewed by UNHCR for the first time. Six months after the interview, UNHCR invited me to come to the office, but I could not go because I was very ill", she continued.

When her employer's family moved back to Europe, they made arrangements for Qamarah to be able to follow them. A travel agent was entrusted with the documents and the payments were made but instead of traveling to Europe, Qamarah was brought to Malaysia and then to Indonesia.

"From my understanding, the plane transited in Malaysia and the next day we flew to Indonesia. Arriving in Indonesia, the agent was gone, and I did not have any contact numbers of the family. I could not do anything", Qamarah said regretfully.

At the young age of 23, Qamarah has already encountered much suffering and loss. Women who are forced to leave their homeland in search for safety and security are vulnerable and in need of protection. Living as a woman and an asylum seeker in displacement does not provide the safety or security needed. In constant danger of being arrested and detained, never knowing what the next day might bring in a life without a clear future or any guarantees, Qamarah is now expecting to become a mother.

The father of her child is also an asylum seeker, Qamarah says. "We both fell in love and I became pregnant. But now he's disappeared and I'm confused and in panic."

As asylum seekers and refugees, women and men are not able to get legally married in many countries, including Indonesia. Children born to asylum seeker and refugee parents have difficulties securing birth certificates and a nationality. Will Qamarah's child suffer with limited rights like her mother, who has no country to call home, does?

Qamarah, born to a group experiencing persecution, is bound to continue her journey through the world, enduring suffering, threats and uncertainties until finding the people and a country that is willing to accept her. Until such a time she will continue to lack the rights she deserves – the Right to Freedom from Physical Harm, the Right to Education, the Right to a Nationality, the Right to form a Family and the Right to Work.

Rights we take for granted every day.

Fransisca Asmiarsi

This article was first published by JRS Indonesia in its September 2013 [Refugee newsletter](#). For protection and security, all names in this article are fictive.

Publisher: Bambang A Sipayung SJ Editor: Junita Calder Designer: Dana Maclean Contact: Diakonia@jrs.or.th www.jrs.ap.org +66 2640 9590

Diakonia October 2013
Editor: Dylan Shepherdson