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Message from the Director

This year JRS celebrates its 30th anniversary. Founded in 1980 as a spiritual and practical response to the plight of refugees at that time, JRS continues to advocate, serve and defend the rights of refugees and displaced people around the world. Unfortunately, rather than diminishing, their plight is now greater than ever. As you will read in this issue, JRS continues to respond to the crisis in many places around the world.

Closer to our shores, our presence on Christmas Island and in the Immigration Residential Housing (IRH) within the Villawood Detention Centre in Sydney are recent initiatives with a common aim: to accompany asylum seekers who are detained as they wait for a resolution to their asylum applications. This accompaniment can mean simply spending time with people in a spirit of trust and friendship, acknowledging their worth and dignity as human beings, and listening to their stories.

In collaboration with the Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Sisters of Mercy, JRS carries out its pastoral work on Christmas Island with the assistance of a priest and a religious pastoral worker. Sr Maureen Lohrey RSM, who recently spent two months on the island, describes the experience vividly:

'To see grown men sitting alone, slumped over; their shoulders heaving with sobs, is not an easy sight, and yet it happens. They're sick with worry over their loved ones whom they cannot help. While phone calls are good, they also bring heartache as they hear children and wives crying at the other end. The routes [the asylum seekers] take to escape are unbelievable. One man from northern Afghanistan made his way to Kabul, flew to Dubai, then to Laos, down to Bangkok, on to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, then took a boat to Indonesia and finally

got a boat to Christmas Island, a journey of more than four months in very dangerous situations. He still has to pay back money he borrowed otherwise his family will be killed. I met a young man who sailed with 39 men from Sri Lanka to Christmas Island. The boat finally took on water, broke up in the rough sea and sank. They clung onto anything that was floating for 18 hours before a Thai fishing boat picked up 27 [men]. Unfortunately this boy's father was among the 12 who were drowned and only one body was found. I was told by an officer that this was the first time he had seen the young man talk, so I was glad to hear he was beginning to live again after his terrible trauma.'

These stories mirror some of those our volunteers visiting the IRH have heard. Despite the suffering, the stories speak of resilience, courage and hope. 'It's a privilege to meet such amazing people and to have the chance to make new friends,' says Jason Rushton, one of our young JRS volunteers. 'These friends have a whole range of labels that can really mask their humanity— asylum seekers, or illegal immigrants, or protection applicants. These are the words of bureaucracy, and that's not why we visit them. We just go to be with people, extend the hand of friendship, joke and tell stories, and even sometimes we have the privilege of celebrating the Eucharist with some of them—how amazing.'

Extending this hand of friendship can contribute to the healing process in their lives, as Jason has discovered. 'Perhaps it's their sheer happiness that has been drawing me back. When you begin to imagine what their stories might be, their sheer happiness is quite baffling, quite surprising. It draws you back. It gives you hope.'

Sacha Bermudez-Goldman SJ

JRS in Haiti

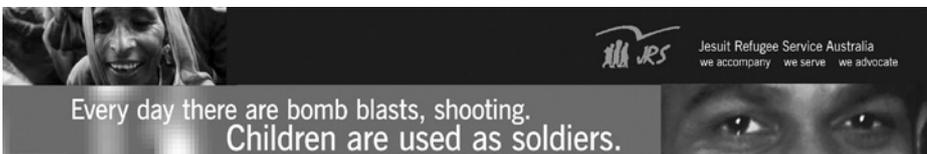


Photo:UN

While talks about rebuilding Haiti following the January earthquake have begun, in reality many basic needs are still not being met. Just one quarter of the estimated 1.2 million displaced people have received emergency shelter support, and about 17,500 children are suffering from acute malnutrition. 'The food distribution centres open at 8am and long lines begin to form at 3am. But there still are people who do not receive food,' says Jesuit priest, Kawas François.

JRS has become a leader in the provision of emergency relief in the form of food, medicine, tents and debris-removal tools. In coordinated efforts with partner organisations JRS has set up collection depots throughout the Dominican Republic from which it transports supplies into Haiti. And JRS staff have also been a supportive and encouraging presence among survivors. 'The people have shown an unparalleled solidarity: assisting the wounded, sharing food and water,' said Fr François. 'Without this solidarity I don't see how people could survive.' Over 200,000 people were killed and 300,000 injured in the disaster. JRS Australia has already contributed funds to assist the relief effort in Haiti. If you would like to further support the work of JRS there, please use the enclosed donor card.

You will notice that we have new donor cards! In celebration of JRS' 30th anniversary, we have designed these cards to share the stories of some of the refugees and asylum seekers we have accompanied along the way. We hope that they will help you to see the fruit of JRS' labours and will encourage you to continue with your invaluable support of our work among asylum seekers and refugees.



Every day there are bomb blasts, shooting.
Children are used as soldiers.

JRS appoints Australian volunteer to Cambodia

Lian Yong knew that spending her days zoning and planning would cause her to 'scratch her eyes out'. So she gave up the idea of environmental law and turned instead to her second passion: refugee and human rights law.

Lian, a Hobart native, is JRS Australia's new representative in Phnom Penh, where she will work with the increasing numbers of asylum seekers arriving in Cambodia.

It was while working in her first job as an intellectual property lawyer that Lian decided to break the boredom and volunteer as a Mandarin interpreter at Refugee and Casework Services (RACS) in Sydney. Not long after she landed a job with Kerry

Murphy, former JRS Country Coordinator, and his wife, Lisa D'Ambra, at D'Ambra Murphy Lawyers.

Lian subsequently applied for an Australian Youth Ambassador position in PNG, and spent a year working as a juvenile court liaison officer in Goroka in the PNG highlands. 'I was situated in the district courts, working on juvenile law reform,' she explains.

Lian plans to use both her qualifications in Asian Studies and Law and her volunteer experiences in her new role. 'I did some casework on advocacy on the side in PNG and discovered I really love doing that, being an advocate and a voice for more

disadvantaged people. I'd like to continue doing that, and to do it in a developing country context.'

We would like to wish Taya Hunt well as she comes to the end of her year-long tenure with JRS

in Cambodia, and to thank her for the important contribution she has made in the lives of both refugees and locally displaced people.



Lian Yong

Building capacity with refugees in Papua New Guinea

JRS will collaborate with the UNHCR to undertake a participatory assessment of West Papuan refugees to establish the scope of their challenges and needs. Wren Chadwick, JRS Australia's representative in PNG's Western Province, says the exercise will help JRS to provide assistance that is tailored to the needs of the 10,000 refugees who have lived in the border region of PNG for the past two decades.

Wren, who arrived in PNG in early December to support the work of the diocese of Daru-Kiunga with refugees, has spent the past two months researching ways in which to continue the groundwork laid by her predecessor, Mariano Griva. 'December wasn't the best time to get things going,

but it was a good opportunity to slowly orientate myself to issues and the place,' she said. 'I've learnt from my previous experience that if you try to dive in too quickly you often waste time and effort. You need to gain people's trust before you can work out what's achievable.'

In response to one of the needs she has identified, Wren will hold training sessions for local priests and diocesan personnel on refugee and human rights law.

Wren plans to expand the purpose of the local JRS newsletter, which aims to share information with refugees to help them make informed decisions. 'I thought that was a good opportunity to involve them in creating that information. We've got a

group who are coming on a weekly basis to create a participatory newsletter; they go out and do stories, put articles together, and analyse them. The by-product of that exercise will enable them to be critical about any information source.'

This skills transfer, and giving voice to refugees, is especially important in PNG, where education is often abruptly terminated on the basis of exam results. 'I went around to introduce the project, and had no idea who would turn up. I ended up with 16 very keen young people, and more have joined since the word has got out there. I might have a problem keeping the numbers manageable!'

Refugee advocate outraged at Uighur deportation

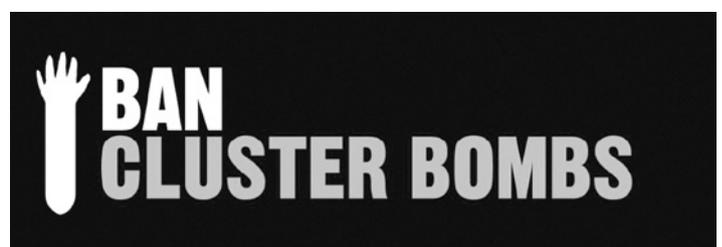
The Director of Jesuit Refugee Service in Cambodia, Sr Denise Coghlan, says Cambodia probably committed one of the gravest violations of the United Nations Refugee Convention when it seized 20 Uighur refugees at gunpoint and deported them to China last December. The Uighurs are a Muslim minority group in China.

'This has put a lot of fear into other refugees,' said Denise. 'The refugee situation in Cambodia is now in a state of flux.'

Denise praised the role of the Australian embassy during the crisis, but says the hope that Cambodia would serve as a model for refugee status determination procedures has been dashed. 'These embassies and the EU all asked the top level of the Cambodian

government to have this decision overturned and they weren't even allowed to speak, they were snubbed.' A law has now been passed ensuring that the government is the sole determiner of refugee status.

As well as refugee issues, Denise is also involved in the implementation of the landmine treaty and the promotion of the cluster bomb treaty. 'There are two jobs to do: the continued implementation of the landmine treaty around the world, particularly with regards to mine clearance, [and also] the assistance of the survivors.



We're very strongly involved with that.' Currently, 104 countries have signed the cluster bomb treaty, and 28 have ratified it—two short of the number of ratifications needed to enforce it.

For more information on the Cluster Munitions Coalition visit www.stopclustermunitions.org

Child soldiers face reintegration challenges

One of the topics that captured the imagination of many of the students who participated in the inaugural JRS Youth Award last year was the plight of child soldiers, especially in some African countries, including Uganda.

Northern Uganda has been the stage for one of Africa's longest and most brutal conflicts. Ninety percent of the northern Acholi population were displaced by the atrocities committed by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and an estimated 20,000 children have been abducted and forced to become child soldiers or mistresses, according to UNICEF. Since the initiation of a peace process in 2006, people have started moving back to their villages.

Children who have managed to escape the LRA have come back hoping to be reintegrated into their communities. But this is a major challenge.

'Reintegration is not an easy process. It requires expertise and commitment of all involved to make it happen,' says Akera John Paul, JRS Peace Education Advisor in Kitgum. 'Communities expect things to go back to normal quickly, [yet] many former child soldiers are not offered the support they would need; instead, they are discriminated [against] and stigmatised.'

JRS seeks long-term solutions in South Africa

The Country Director for JRS in South Africa, Fr David Holdcroft SJ, believes that people's mindset needs to change so that refugee rights can be acknowledged and entrenched. 'Where the 20th century was known for freeing up its constraints on money, I hope the 21st century will be known for its freeing up of constraints on the movement of people.'

David says South Africa, which currently accommodates 700,000 asylum seekers, is proof that a society can absorb large numbers of people, and that this can be used as a means for developing and stabilising the countries from which they come.

Formerly the Director of JRS Australia, David says he has faced a different set

The children are first brought to the child protection unit where their former military engagement with the LRA is assessed. Then they are transferred to one of the rehabilitation centres in the northern districts run by different aid organisations. Here they receive counselling and help to trace their relatives. They are also linked up with the Ugandan Amnesty Commission, formed in 2000 as a means of promoting reconciliation, peace and security in Uganda.

Tracing a family can take time. In the meantime, the former abductees become so used to the support they receive at the reception centres that they find it difficult to adjust to the new and often harsh conditions once their families have been identified and they can return home.

Some families organise thanksgiving prayers to welcome their children back home and help them reintegrate in their community. Cultural cleansing rituals such as the stepping on eggs or shrubs can help both sides to start anew. Vocational training also helps these children to find their way back into normal life.

Since 2006 JRS has supported former abductees in various ways. 'Even if we are now at home we still have to cope with so

of challenges in his new job. 'The sheer weight of numbers is a huge challenge. Our office at Mahkado in Limpopo province saw 15,000 people last year. The offices in Pretoria and Johannesburg assisted 5,000 to 6,000 people each.'

JRS has seen children as young as seven turning up at its Limpopo office. 'They would have walked for 200 kilometres. They're vulnerable to all sorts of things—many have been robbed or assaulted in the process of coming down from Zimbabwe.'

Emergency accommodation for asylum seekers is virtually non-existent, and JRS struggles to convince the local population of the value of migrants. 'We're working in a fairly hostile environment. Refugees tend to be better educated than the poorest



A child soldier

many painful memories and flashbacks from the time we spent with the rebels. It helps to come together, to share and to support each other,' says Pauline, who was 13 years old when she was abducted.

Australian Jesuit appointed to JRS East Africa

Fr Chris Jenkins SJ, parish priest at Norwood in South Australia, will join JRS East Africa in April. He will work with refugees from Sudan and Somalia in Kakuma camp in Kenya, and will provide pastoral care, staff support, counselling and tertiary education. If time allows, he will spend a couple of weeks working with JRS Australia on Christmas Island before leaving for Africa.

South Africans—they're twice as likely to end up in jobs, twice as likely to be employing others after a couple of years. So when South Africans see us giving things to refugees, there's a natural resentment.'

JRS hopes to implement a solution where refugees will be helped on condition that they also employ South Africans. 'But it's a long-term plan because there's a lot of resistance.'



Shelter Project

Friends of JRS (pictured left) entertain guests at the annual JRS Christmas Party, where refugees, asylum seekers, volunteers, staff and benefactors gathered to enjoy each other's company and toast another eventful year. 'The party gave people a chance to relax and put their worries behind them for one night,' said Louise Stack, Project Coordinator at JRS. 'There was dancing, singing, guitar playing and some outstanding Bob Marley impersonations! Our plan for 2010 is to work even harder to create a strong sense of community, and break down the social isolation so many asylum seekers and refugees feel being away from their families and friends.' *If you would like to make a donation or select an item off the Shelter Project Wish List, please go to www.jrs.org.au.*



Trafficking of concern to International Catholic Migration Commission

The Associate Director of JRS, Sr Maryanne Loughry, recently attended an International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) committee meeting in Vienna to discuss the needs of trafficked persons. 'The UN estimates that virtually every country is affected by these crimes,' said Maryanne, who serves as a counsellor to the ICMC governing committee. The ICMC is an international commission of

Catholic Bishops Conferences, and Episcopal assemblies of similar status, working with migrants and refugees in more than 40 countries.

Mother and sons reunited after long wait

One of JRS's success stories had another happy turn over Christmas and New Year when Rwandan refugee Antoinette was reunited with her three sons in France. The family was forcefully separated in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, and

Antoinette's husband is believed to have been killed. Some of you might remember that after an article about her appeared on the JRS website, a French lawyer working on behalf of her sons' asylum application contacted JRS Australia. It took Antoinette more than a year to make it to France, but she finally got there. 'I was very happy, it was really amazing to meet them!' said Antoinette on her arrival back in Sydney. 'They are doing well, they are studying. But they want to live with their mum!'

Upcoming events

- After the successful launch of the **JRS Youth Award** last year, JRS is now calling for schools to enter the second annual event. More information can be obtained from our website www.jrs.org.au or by phoning JRS on 02 9356 3888
- Mark your calendars for the **JRS Winter Solstice Ball** in Sydney (24 July) and the **JRS Brisbane Ball** (17 July).

Would you like to receive your copy of Link electronically? If so, please send an email to info@jrs.org.au with the words 'ELECTRONIC LINK' in the subject line.

If undeliverable return to:

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