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REFUGE

Jesuit Refugee Service Indonesia

Accompany, Serve and Advocate the cause of forcibly displaced People

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Impressions and Reflections on World Refugee Day

Indro Suprobo

"My son is now three years old, but I have never seen his face", said an Afghan refugee living in Sewon, Bantul, Yogyakarta. "He was still in the womb when I left. Since then I have not met my wife and child", his sad and lonely eyes gazing at the horizon, far beyond the lively atmosphere of the International Refugee Day celebration. The man that minutes ago danced excited and demonstrated his Kung Fu martial arts skills falls silent holding a glass of hot tea in his hand. The refugee next to him just embraces him patting his shoulder, without saying a word.

The happy Indonesian songs sung by a singer leads to smiles and excitement in the listening refugees. They have fun dancing and singing together in joy. "Happiness like this is rare, so I just want to enjoy it, I do not want to remember the many problems," said another refugee, who from the beginning of the show was up on his feet to dance. The occasional traditional song sung in Farsi language gets applause from the refugees and the present Indonesian community leaders.

However, all this excitement cannot hide the mood of the refugees who were forced to separate from the people they most love, the meaning of their life. After all, this event was able to make forget the pain for a short time and strengthen resilience for things to come.

"Practicing martial arts is good for physical and mental strength," said one refugee. "Not only our bodies become stronger but also mentally, we become stronger in facing the toughest challenges", he adds.

World refugee day highlights that the root causes of displacement must be taken more seriously. "Displacement occurs in many places because of the violation of human rights and against humanity", said Dafri Agussalim, MA, lecturer at the Department of International Relations on University Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta. "Unfortunately, the displacement tend to not be viewed from a humanitarian perspective, but rather be addressed as a political or security issue", he added. As a result, humanitarian refugees are likely become vulnerable. They are not granted access to fulfill their basic needs or rights. Governments and the people of countries where the refugees seek asylum, should ensure their protection and fulfillment of their rights. "In reality the instruments of International Law alone are not strong enough to ensure the protection of refugees. The reasons for this are different regulations based on the assumption of the sovereignty of the National Law over International Law." He adds.



Countries that experience major "human rights violations" which often cause displacement should be approached by others in the region that share their cultural and social context to effectively encourage positive changes. ASEAN member countries have a chance to engage member states regards policies and practices that have implications for neighboring countries. The issue of human rights abuses and the failure of democracy in a country that results in displacement across borders have implications for its neighbors and should encourage and allow those neighboring states a role in at least suggesting how to solve these causes.

The current tendency to criminalize people seeking refuge labeling them illegal's or smugglers have severe implications on how they are treated. A refugee fleeing persecution often cannot choose about the flight and should be treated accordingly as real people with real needs. Forced to leave their homes, land, possessions, often without personal documents, and hardest of all loved ones in order to reach a land that can provide peace and safety.

Political analysis and laws and regulations should be acknowledging the human rights and humanitarian aspects of the situation instead treating people in need for protection and humanitarian assistance as violators of laws and regulations. Hope can be found in the words of one head of a refugee hosting community in Padukuhan Pandes, at Sewon, Bantul, Yogyakarta, who told the refugees: "We strongly hope that the refugees can blend in with all the people living here as brothers and sisters and as a family, even though we are different".

Simple people, who provide hospitality and friendship to those who have lost protection of their own state, are desperately needed by the world today. Willingness to learn and share sad and happy moments with others can enrich us. "The refugees made me understand that other people cook in a different way, more healthy, does not cause stomach ulcers and gout", joked a mother from the Pandes community attending the world refugee day event. By receiving and sharing with each other we are able not only to practice solidarity and learn about others from a different part in the world but also learn about ourselves.

When Hope is all that Remains

Silvester Gultom

Today, more than one million four hundred thousand Rohingya, one of Myanmar's ethnic and religious minority groups, have been scattered in various countries such as Bangladesh, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Middle East and Indonesia. Rohingya people were forced to leave their country of origin, Myanmar, because the development of the political situation is increasingly discriminatory and inhuman. Ethnic Rohingya hundreds of years ago settled in Arakan region, in western Myanmar and have recently been systematically marginalized by the authorities and left without citizenship rights.

Burma Citizen Law which was passed in 1982, is a law that regulates and determines the criteria for citizenship. Ethnic Rohingya are not listed in it as one of the Myanmar's ethnic groups. As a result they became stateless, without access to jobs, health care, education and political participation. This situation leads to poverty, illiteracy and a life on the very border of society and forced many to seek refuge in various countries, travelling perilous journeys on which they encounter similar rejection and threats.

Sholeh Abdurrahman (not his real name) is one of the ethnic Rohingya who fled. With his wife, four children, and his nephew, he was forced to leave Myanmar to seek a safer life. The Rohingya family arrived in Indonesia via boat, which is just the recent part of a ten year journey full of difficulties and uncertainties seeking refuge in foreign lands.

"I lived ten years in Malaysia. We passed through many countries, were arrested and exiled. We were not allowed to stay. In Myanmar we are also not allowed to stay. We do not know where else we can live" he said.

One officer at the Immigration Detention Centre stated there would be more Rohingya families arriving in Indonesia. However, the Detention Center cannot accommodate them if there is no referral or no arrest warrant.

Rejection and inhumane treatment was often suffered.

"We've been sitting here two days. There are people who drove us here, but we were told to go away. We are not allowed to sit in front of this place. Officials hit my face", he explained, pointing to his blue cheek.

"Child too", he said, pointing at his nephew. *"Officials hit ... kick ... with shoe"*, said Sholeh while starting to cry, his entire family joining him weeping.

During their two days in Indonesia, they did not encounter one place that welcomed them. The pilgrims transit shelter they approached would not accept them. Other small hotels or guesthouses nearby also did not want to accept them even if only to stay for one night, so they could report to the Immigration office the next day.

Despite these rejections and resulting sadness after repeatedly being pushed aside, Sholeh and his family still guard their hopes for a better future. Being one of the millions of ethnic Rohingya who have experienced much loss in their life, he holds on to hope, willpower and belief to survive and live in dignity.

After ten years of continued efforts there is no end in sight to his desperate journey. But he does not react with despair and remains determined to achieve his dream of a dignified life. He is filled with hope even if the dream of a better future feels still very far. I hope that fortune and kindness will turn to them one day, let them finally find a place they can call 'home'.

“
*By giving, we are taking part
in contributing happiness
for our family*
”

Making the daily foods are available

Yohanes Suryadi

His posture is tall and robust with brownish skin. His dark hair is kept short, with little curls, which is typical for people from Southeast Moluccas. His round eyes are sharp in look contrast with the way he talks, soft and organized. He always smiles revealing his face line clearly. His name is Ranglalin Karel, a young father who was born at Kandar-Saumlaki, February 5, 1986. People used to call him by the name "Kace". He is one of the refugees who live in warehouse Vitas-Barito with his family and struggling through difficulty.

Kace went to high school for only one semester at the first year. He left after getting himself involved in the beating of his teacher who was being rude to him. Kace's parent took customary measures to solve the problem namely "biking baik" (making it good). The parent went to the teacher's house by bringing Sopi (liquor) and drank it together. They also brought two sets of clothes, two sets of tablecloths, two woven fabric, and Rp 600,000.00 for forgiveness. The original customary sanction to be paid for beating a teacher is Rp 15 million cash and a whole pig.

The teacher forgave and was willing to forget. Karel

was called back to school, but he decided to go to Tual in 2001 and worked nomadically from one place to another. From then on, his goal to establish and develop furniture business grew stronger. He keeps a principle of which he believes it is better to give money to employees than receiving money from an office.

Being a Refugee

In the warehouse of Vitas-Barito he lived with his Maitua's (wife's) extended family, Welly Lololuan. Karel met Welly in 2006 when they both had the opportunity to intern at the Balai Latihan Kerja Kota Ambon (Ambon City Working-Training Center). His meeting with Welly who happened to live in the same dormitory with him raised hope to build a family together.

Karel later on found that Welly has been living in the refugee camp, Karel didn't mind at all. He remained assured with his choice and didn't change his commitment to get married. Now, Karel and Welly are blessed with a 5 year-old son and a 3-year-old daughter.



Not only marrying one, but marrying all

A year after marriage, he suggested for them to rent a house outside the refugee area. However, they didn't have the heart. It was difficult for him to leave his mother and father-in-law in the poor-stated refugee camp, while he was to live in a more comfortable situation. For Karel, the faith keeping him and his family while at the refugee camp was the belief of "beta seng nikah satu, tapi nikah semua" (I am not only marrying one person, but I am marrying all). Given this, marrying Welly also means bonded ties with her whole family too.

Karel is always keen in the belief of leaving the plate open meaning that there should be food in it. Behind a limitation of any kind, blessing is needed to be shared with the big family in the refugee camp. "Deng memberi, katong bicing peran dalam kebahagiaan keluarga katong" (By giving, we are taking part in contributing happiness for our family). In order to fulfill the needs of everyday life, he earns his wage as a construction worker.

His deepest desire was to go back to Kandar, his hometown in West Southeast Moluccas. Especially when the heavy rains along with strong winds made sleeping in the camp a threat. It would remind him of the comfort sleeping at home. "Mama often calls par beta asking how life in refuge is, she also offered help." Karel simply replied that he would survive

because he still had plans and effort, as well as a strong sense of solidarity because of the bond of marriage.

"Beta bilang Mama, kalau beta masih pung harapan di Ambon. Beta masih bisa usaha, nanti kalau seng ada yang bisa dilakukan lai, beta akan bawa pung anak dan istri ke Kandar. Katong tunggu dulu lah". ("I told my Mom that I still have hope in Ambon. I still have some business to do. Later on, if I don't have anything else to do, I will bring my children and wife back home to Kandar. In the meantime we will wait first lah")

The presence of JRS in the warehouse of Vitas-Barito may not directly provide a long-term solution towards the situation of displacement going on for a long time. But for Kace, JRS's presence was truly felt. "I feel that JRS has come here to be part of my family, to listen our stories, to talk from heart to heart. For me, it is a relief meet and talk with JRS," he added.

"If my mind is pono, I will usually re-open text messages from JRS. Akang it makes it easier to go through, and makes me forget about my fatigue. There is deep longing if we don't meet in a long time or hear from you through my cellphone."

Children Learn What They Live

Pius Marmanta

“

**If children live with hostility
they learn to fight,
If children live with friendliness
they learn the world is a nice place
in which to live**

”

Dorothy Law Nolte

Since history started to be recorded conflicts and violence have forced people to flee and seek asylum in other countries. From among those forced to flee, children are most vulnerable. They miss times to play, learn and build friendships with children their own age. Deprived of the experience of receiving love and attention they witness and experience war, conflict, and violence, often forming memories and trauma that can affect their personality later in life. "If children live with hostility, they learn to fight" writes Dorothy Law in a poem. Accompanying displaced children with often dramatic experiences brings challenges that are not easily solved.

"Teacher ... hurry here, here! They were pushing me! I don't like it!"

Suddenly the boy came to the room and took my hand to follow him. I wondered what's wrong with him. His face indicates that he was very upset. Then he pointed to several children from Somalia playing in the yard. "They pushed me and he hit my head like this. Where are my sandals? Teacher, where are my sandals?"

I asked the children about the whereabouts of



Manahil's sandals and if they would apologize to him. It was a relief to see Manahil shaking hands with them. But after shaking hands, he cursed, looking at them. I was shocked, did not wait long and immediately put my hand on his shoulder leading him back into the house. Such strong emotions. Why is his anger so big? Is this expression of anger typical for children that have experienced violent conflict? If so, how do I have to treat him?

In the classroom, there are many children with diverse backgrounds from Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Sudan, Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Palestine and Somalia. They all come together on the basic terms of respect for each other to learn. After all, children are still children. Different background, family situation, and the experience of violence in their home countries leads to a variety of behavior.

Through various activities, we learn about values in our life with children of diverse experience. There are times when we sit down together to share and explore what it means to respect others as well as respect for their belongings. Learning and practicing values with each other is a long process that needs to be encouraged through concrete examples at all times. We exist as a friend who provides a space for children to express themselves, give confidence and support them. To children, we also need to be clear and sometimes strict without offending them, in order to show when something is wrong and needs to be solved without giving the

impression of patronizing and blaming them. We also learn to honestly praise the virtues that have been demonstrated by the children and explain in an easy way what to do or not to do. Really, this is not easy and requires patience taking step by step. Children are children and not small adults.

By bringing love and peace as an experience in the world of children I hope the values of love, peace, respect, and compassion can prepare them for a better life withstanding abusive words and xenophobia. Hopefully in the future, wars will cease with the birth of new souls and personalities.

One day in English class a child suddenly kissed my cheek and said "This is my friend" pointing to me. I was surprised and thrilled. I hope that expression is a sign of hope for a more better and friendlier future for refugee children.



Pearls of Life

Paulus Enggal

Since one year now my friends and I are visiting asylum seekers and refugees held in one of Indonesia's 13 immigration detention centers, sharing happy and sad moments with them often only able to bring an open heart and listen to their thoughts and concerns. When hearing a Beatles song the other day it felt like it echoes their feelings and voices. Here I want to share some of their thoughts and experiences with you in the hope it might inspire some to care about those forgotten behind bars.

"Why are they doing this to me?" said a detainee. His face wrinkled, his voice husky. His eyes stared at the blank brownish wall resembling his fatigue. Another detainee sat on the floor on newspapers. Drops of blood were dripping from his torn forehead. Pieces of glass covered the floor in the corner of the room. "They will only move me to Pontianak over my dead body!" one detainee shouted to another. The confusion, anger and fatigue were tense in the Immigration Detention Center that morning. Ten of policemen guarded the moving process stood without any words. The weapons strapped on their shoulders did not need to be fired. Maybe this was the first time they witnessed the desperate melancholy of people excluded from their land of birth.

These asylum seekers went against injustice their own way, by harming themselves. Life for them seems unfair. For no apparent reason, they become target of groups fighting in the name of 'truth'. "They say that they are Muslims, but what they did to us was beyond what is taught by our Prophet Muhammad," said one asylum seeker. On their way to a promising peace in asylum, they dealt with the side of the world was far from loving and peaceful. "I met someone from Indonesia in front of UNHCR office in Jakarta. He promised to take me to Australia through Surabaya.

Nothing you can make

that can't be made

Nothing you can save

that can't be saved

Nothing you can do

but you can learn how to be you in time

Nothing you can know that isn't known

Nothing you can see that isn't shown

Nowhere you can be

that isn't where you're meant to be

(All you Need is Love, The Beatles)

We went to Surabaya with a bus, but in the bus he took my money and passport. I lost him in Surabaya, " said an Iranian detainee. Life for detainees is full of the question "why". A clear and honest answer is a luxury. Baba, in the novel by Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, said that the biggest crime in life is stealing. Killing is a theft to the right to life. Lying means theft of truth.

"Chitori, hubbi? Tasyakur, Alhamdulillah," said one asylum seeker from Afghanistan while clutching his hands to his chest. He left his wife and 11 children in Afghanistan. *"I left Afghanistan because a group of people went to my home saying we had no right to live there. They killed my brother and beat me with wood,"* he explained. He really loved his family and was willing to leave the family at his no longer young age to seek peace in the land of others. *"I want to bring my family to Australia,"* he continued.

Everyone has a different story. But behind all of those stories there is the longing of love and peace. *"I left my children in Afghanistan. I miss them every day. Since the day I left Gazni, I lost my contact with them. I did this for my family because I love them,"* said another asylum seeker. These stories weave their hidden feelings, inner conflicts, dreams, and expectations. We will not find it behind their smile and warm hugs every time we meet them. At the moment,

those feelings are their hidden treasure in result to losing everything. It is the treasure needed to be re-emerged with love. In order to see what is not revealed, all you need is love.

We need love to find treasures crimped under every question, doubt, fear, and uncertainty. They are more than just helpless people who wait for our pity. Finding a treasure means finding love and dreams; finding the fire that always gives life to their hopes every day. *"I was sad when I left my parents and sister. My mother cried all night. But I know that through this, I will meet them again in a better condition,"* said 15-year old teenager who had to leave his family in Quetta. Their biggest desire is to be reunited with their family after finding peace and love. Currently, as the hope is not yet brought to realization, the turbulent feeling of love is expressed through poetry, writing, images, or the surge of emotion at the injustice. Everything is because of love. *"My love, you are like honey, when I kiss your lips, my heart feels your sweetness. The look in your eyes is the pearl in my life. You held me in longing as I went away from you,"* one asylum seeker wrote in his poem for his beloved wife.

"We can not force them because they are not criminals or prisoners," said security officer when he was being requested to force the detainees to move to another immigration detention center.

**They are not prisoners.
They are dreamers and lovers
who travel thousands of miles to Australia.
They left their family in the midst of war
and surrendered their faith on the promise
of a person they have never met before.
Everything is done for love.
Should we give humiliation, injustice, and
uncertainty to those who dedicate their
lives in the name of love?**

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