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Hidden Lives: The Plight of Urban Refugees



Editorial

A refugee living in the city asks, “How do I survive?” When most people think of refugees, if they are aware of their existence at all, they think of closed camps. The thought of refugees trying to live in a city and the difficulties that accompany that, is rarely, if ever considered.

The reality for a refugee in the city is that they live their lives hidden amidst the everyday hustle and bustle. They are invisible and anonymous people trying to forge a living. They lead precarious lives without access to basic necessities such as food, shelter, basic health care, employment and livelihood opportunities, a lack of family connections and friends, not to mention access to education, social and cultural development – all the ingredients of a ‘normal life.’.

The burden of isolation and daily survival combined with the paralysing fear of being caught is the hard reality they are faced with every day.

Fleeing for their lives from an insecure environment, in search of a safe haven, these refugees often find themselves in even more insecure surroundings. They can find themselves in a foreign country, confronted with a ‘stranger-danger’ syndrome or phenomena, where hospitality to the ‘other’ is excluded because of who they are or where they come from.

If we chose to display compassion and worked to create a safe place for refugees, by welcoming and befriending the ‘stranger’, then the burden that is their fight for daily survival could be alleviated.

As many as 50% of the world’s 10.5 million refugees (UNHCR mandate) are now living in cities and towns in different parts of the world. At least twice that number of internally displaced people (IDP) and returnees are believed to be living in urban settings. This is not counting those outside of the UNHCR mandate and who are left in a more vulnerable state. We need to recognise this new reality – that of the urban refugee.

JRS continues to offer some solace to many refugees through financial and material assistance, psycho-social support, health care, legal assistance, and livelihood opportunities. However, this is ‘everybody’s challenge,’ as Fr Arrupe commented when he founded JRS 30 years ago (this November 14).

Government and international institutions need to join forces in order to make the lives of urban refugees less precarious. We need to provide a space where refugees are able to flourish and engage with the community. This needs to become reality – not only for the sake of the refugees, but for ours also – to illustrate that we are capable of displaying compassion to our fellow humans through our laws and structures, despite who they are or where they are from.

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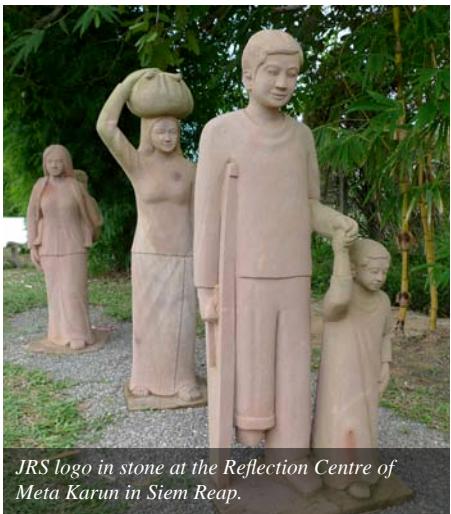
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Fr. Bernard Hyacinth Arputhasamy, SJ, JRS Asia Pacific Regional Director

Hidden in plain sight



JRS logo in stone at the Reflection Centre of Meta Karun in Siem Reap.

Jesuit Refugee Service, one of the few organisations to assist refugees in urban settings worldwide, has long recognised the severe state of neglect of urban refugees, and has tried to address these needs. Through advocacy to UNHCR and local authorities, direct assistance with food, housing and medical expenses, education, livelihood projects, and counselling and referral services, JRS addresses the broad spectrum of needs of urban refugees.

In many countries hosting large displaced populations, refugees are tolerated only if they consent to live in camps designated by the government. These may be open camps, which refugees can come and go more or less freely, or closed camps, where refugees are confined by physical or legal barriers.

Camp life can be harsh, characterized by poor standards of housing, sanitation, lack of adequate food, water, and medical facilities, a lack of security and, perhaps worst of all, enforced idleness and dependency. Refugees who choose not to live in camps or who fear to do so may be treated like escaped prisoners: subject to arrest, detention, forced return or even deportation. Even under more lenient regimes, refugees who do not live in camps are usually at best ignored, and are subject to neglect and exploitation. In those refugee hosting countries that have not established refugee camps, refugees typically subsist on the margins of society: tolerated, perhaps, as a source of cheap labour, but lacking access to legal status, legal employment, medical care, education and social services.

For many years, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – the organisation responsible for ensuring the protection of refugees – and international donors and aid agencies to a large degree accepted encampment as a necessary, temporary expedient, feeling that this was a price that had to be paid in order for governments to permit refugees to stay on their soil, and also feeling that the job of housing, feeding, and protecting large populations could best be achieved in an ordered and contained camp environment. In accordance with this view, refugee aid programs have often been limited to camps or to rural border areas where refugees reside in camp-like settings. As time has passed, however, and the hoped-for durable solutions of return home, integration into local communities, and resettlement have in many instances proved unattainable, temporary camps have become permanent homes to generations of increasingly despondent people. Funding to support refugee camps has also become harder and harder to maintain, and the resulting deterioration of facilities, cuts in already meagre food rations, and overcrowding have led to a host of social ills.

In the meantime, the number of refugees living in urban settings has grown, with the majority of refugees finding it necessary to make their own way in towns and cities. Increasingly, there has been a trend for refugees to leave camps or to bypass them entirely, seeking instead to settle in communities where they hope to find jobs to support themselves and their families. This trend has led to a re-evaluation of refugee needs by the international community, as reflected in the new urban refugee policy recently published by UNHCR. The policy re-asserts the principle enshrined in international treaty law that refugees have the right to freedom of movement and are entitled to protection and assistance wherever they live.

One of the greatest barriers to improving care to urban refugees is their invisibility. Because they are so often barred from legal employment, urban refugees live in the poorest neighbourhoods, distant from city services. Many refugees are afraid even to ask for help, knowing that risking the attention of the authorities could get them thrown into a jail or detention facility with the prospect of either

lengthy incarceration under appalling conditions or summary deportation. For these refugees the quiet assistance provided by JRS can be a lifeline.

Even for refugees not afraid to seek help, a lack of legal documentation often means exclusion from services. In many countries, the lack of work authorization papers limits refugees to work in the “informal sector,” surviving on odd jobs, and often undertaking dangerous and physically demanding work for little pay. Refugee workers are commonly exploited, and their lack of legal status means it is impossible to seek redress.

The burden of daily survival combined with the social isolation that refugees experience in unfamiliar cities often leads to a sense of desperation. Outreach, counselling and social support, are key elements of JRS programs.

Access to education for their children is one of the greatest challenges facing urban refugees. Barriers such as language or the law often prevent children from attending school. Too often, the cost of education is simply too high for people struggling to meet basic needs. JRS tries to help refugees to gain access to education in many ways, through advocacy with local authorities, through payment of school fees, by establishing classes especially for refugees, and by helping parents to earn an income and become self sufficient.

The successful programs carried out by JRS demonstrate that it is possible to help refugees to survive and prosper in an urban setting, despite the many barriers that they face. The growing needs of urban refugees far outstrip the resources of any one agency, however, and require a concerted effort by governments, international institutions, and civil society to address.

The new UNHCR urban refugee policy presents a welcome opportunity to develop a more enlightened and comprehensive approach to identify, protect and serve refugees in urban settings. This will require efforts to end policies of forced encampment, arbitrary arrest and detention and the failure of states to adhere to existing refugee law.

Taken from an article by JRS U.S.A.

Protecting urban refugees and asylum seekers in Thailand

Urban refugees in Thailand



Struggling to survive in Thailand, many refugees live in fear of detention and deportation

At present there are no official or reliably accurate estimates of the total urban asylum-seeker and refugee population in Thailand. In Bangkok, as of July 2010, UNHCR has registered 2696 individuals as persons of concern to the organisation of which 1497 are registered as asylum seekers. In other urban centres such as Mae Sot, Chiang Mai and Ranong, persons of concern to UNHCR number in the hundreds of thousands. Outside Bangkok, the majority of urban refugees originate from Burma and these populations are contiguous with well-established camp populations, as well as a smattering of rural refugee communities. Within Bangkok, however, refugees and asylum seekers hail from more than 40 countries including Sri

Lanka, Afghanistan, Nepal, Iraq, Iran, Vietnam, Laos, Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan, Somalia and Libya. Urban refugees and asylum seekers in Thailand without a valid Thai visa – regardless of whether or not they are documented by UNHCR – are considered “illegal entrants” by the Thai authorities and subject to arrest, indefinite detention, removal and possibly refoulement.

Urban asylum seekers throughout Thailand face a number of challenges which include, homelessness or insecure housing; a lack of formal access to employment; a lack of access to public education; limited access to physical and mental health care; difficulty accessing to birth registration for children born

in Thailand compounded by in ability to obtain documents from their country of origin of asylum-seeker parents; a need to balance the risks of social isolation with the risks associated with becoming part of a visible community; xenophobia and discrimination; violence; and waiting periods for accessing (full) UNHCR registration and refugee status determination of between two to twelve months. All Burmese urban asylum seekers and a significant proportion of non-Burmese asylum seekers face a protracted displacement situation. With little prospect of repatriation and limited likelihood of local integration in the foreseeable future, resettlement is the only durable solution available to them.



Waiting for refugee status determination in Bangkok. Asylum seekers and refugees are not legally permitted to work.

JRS Thailand Urban refugee programme

JRS Thailand began working with urban asylum seekers and refugees in Thailand in 1990, primarily through its urban refugee programmes in Bangkok and Mae Sot. JRS assists urban asylum seekers through the provision of emergency financial assistance; assistance to find housing; legal advice; psycho-social counselling; health care and material assistance in detention; and assistance to be released from detention. In 2009 JRS assisted more than 544 asylum seekers in Mae Sot and almost 1536 asylum seekers in Bangkok. In addition, JRS Thailand operates projects in other towns, including Ranong, Mae Hong Son and Chiang Mai that also bring it into regular contact with urban “persons of concern” to UNHCR. JRS is not an implementing partner of UNHCR but works with other NGOs and CBOs and is the leading provider of support, assistance and protection for urban asylum seekers in Bangkok.

JRS helps establish community centre



Zarah Kathleen T. Alih, JRS psychosocial counsellor accompanies urban refugees in Bangkok

Bangkok, 26 August 2010 – At the beginning of the month, a group of ethnic Ahmadi asylum seekers finally opened the doors of their new community centre in the outskirts of Bangkok. The new centre is the result of a partnership between JRS and Ahmadi asylum seekers from Pakistan.

“One of our objectives is to organise and support asylum-seeker groups to respond to collective needs and help them build the capacity of their communities to respond to their needs”, explained JRS Thailand Urban Refugee Programme Director in Bangkok, Rufino Seva.

Unable to work legally, urban refugees and asylum seekers are often forced into crippling idleness. As well as providing them a degree of self-sufficiency and independence, the centre will also act as a meeting place where the community can come together to support one another. JRS hopes this approach will help improve the morale and wellbeing of asylum seekers in Bangkok.

In addition to providing advice and information, JRS is currently funding the new centre in the short term. In the long term, JRS hopes to help the community find sustainable funding sources. For a community whose members struggle to survive in Bangkok, this will not be easy. But the community is determined to succeed.

“We appreciate this opportunity to keep ourselves busy. ... We can organise activities at the centre which we think important. It will also be a place where JRS can provide services like legal advice and psychosocial counselling”, said Azhar, the community leader in charge of the centre.

Services and support

Refugees and asylum seekers are considered ‘illegal-migrants’ by the Thai authorities and are prevented from accessing public services, including education. The children of recognised refugees only receive one day’s schooling per week from an UN-supported NGO. Asylum seekers who

cannot afford private and international schools are forced to keep their children at home.

“This centre is very important for our community. It will allow us to provide informal learning opportunities for our children closer to home,” explained Azhar.

Until recently, Pakistani Ahmadi asylum seekers had to travel to central Bangkok to avail of JRS services. Urban asylum seekers face considerable risks when travelling into the city due to their precarious legal status. This initiative reduces the risk by responding to asylum seekers within their own community.

“In a situation where refugees and asylum seekers are invisible, isolated, and vulnerable, there is a need to reach out and provide support at community level. Taking our services to the community is an effective way of responding to their needs and problems”, explained Mr Seva.

JRS is the only NGO organising support groups and community centres for urban asylum seekers in Thailand. Other organisations conduct community outreach and home visits. In the near future, JRS hopes these NGOs take their services and activities to the community centre.

Oliver White, Regional Communication Advocacy Officer



Helping asylum seekers and refugees to empower themselves, Bangkok, Thailand, (JRS Thailand)



Living in fear of detention and deportation

Bangkok, 24 July 2010 - Az Bhatti fled Pakistan due to religious persecution in September 2008. He is one of an estimated 2,600 urban refugees and asylum seekers living in Bangkok, Thailand.

Az is from a religious minority group called the Ahmadiyya, who are considered heretical by orthodox Muslims in Pakistan. A number of laws have been passed that make it a criminal offence for Ahmadis to profess, practice and preach their faith. "We can't use Muslim verses. We can't even say salaam alaikum," says Az sadly.

After receiving death threats and an intrusion into the family home, Az realised there was no option but to leave Pakistan and seek-asylum. "I received threatening phone calls, harassing and abusing me. They said 'If you will not stop your work here, we will kill you. My wife also received calls. They told her 'we can rape you because you are a non-Muslim.'" Shocked and scared by the murder of a relative, Az and his family left immediately on a flight to Bangkok.

Since arriving in Bangkok, the question that troubles Az is: "How to survive?" The burden of daily survival, combined with social isolation takes its toll on refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok. "One woman miscarried due to beatings [in Pakistan]. She also miscarried in

Bangkok due to depression," reports Az despairingly. A lack of access to medical and mental health care only adds to the pervasive feeling of desperation.

Registration and status determination by UNHCR is often a lengthy and gruelling process for refugees and asylum seekers. Az has been in Bangkok for two years and resettlement to a third country is still not guaranteed, "[UNHCR] take a long time for determination. It's a very hard interview, very harsh. Five hours in front of an officer. There are hundreds of questions to check credibility." Az was granted refugee status in 2009 and is waiting on a security clearance for resettlement to the US.

However, Az, like the many other urban refugees and asylum seekers, lives in constant fear of arrest and detention. "I live in fear of being stopped. It depends on the officer. If he is calm he will let me go; if he is angry he will not." Urban refugees and asylum seekers in Thailand without a valid visa – regardless of whether or not they are documented by UNHCR – are considered 'illegal entrants' and are subject to arrest, indefinite detention, forced return or even deportation.

The inability to legally work means Az must survive on a variety of odd jobs and a small allowance from UNHCR. "We can survive as adults but children need

milk. Products like milk are expensive. If I have kids I'm thinking about the kids all the time." Az is one of the more fortunate urban refugees in Bangkok. His command of the English language has allowed him to work as a translator for a number of NGOs. Others are forced to undertake dangerous and physically demanding work for very little pay.

Access to education for urban refugee children is another challenge facing Az and his family. Language is a barrier to his children accessing mainstream education. "An NGO suggested my child go to a Thai school. I am teaching him English. A Thai school will not teach him English. This is not useful for him."

The JRS Urban Refugee Programme in Bangkok provides emergency financial assistance; material assistance in the form of clothing, hygiene supplies, mosquito nets, bedding, cooking equipment; assistance to find housing; legal advice; psychosocial counselling; police liaison; and health care, material and legal assistance in detention. Despite the best efforts of JRS to support the needs of urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok, gaps in protection remain.

1. His name has been changed to protect his identity

Oliver White, Regional Communication Advocacy Officer



Bangkok: refugees and asylum seekers are considered illegal by the Thai authorities. Survival in the city is a daily struggle.

Sri Lankan refugees left languishing in Bangkok

Bangkok, 23 July 2010 – Nathan and his family are recognised refugees. They fled Sri Lanka after Nathan was kidnapped and held for ransom by a paramilitary group known as the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE).

Now residing in Thailand, Nathan and his family face a daily struggle for survival in a country that refuses to acknowledge their status as refugees; leaving them exposed to the risks of arrest, indefinite detention and removal to a country where their lives or freedoms would be threatened.

"The document of UNHCR recognises us as refugees, but if we give it to the police we can be arrested because it is not a visa. When my children go to school I am always scared they will be arrested."

Back in Sri Lanka Nathan and his family led an active life assisting others displaced by conflict. "In Sri Lanka I was helping the refugees by showing them screen-printing. My wife worked as a counsellor for an NGO. "We were helping refugees in Sri Lanka, and now in Thailand we are refugees."

Nathan and his family are dependent on others for their daily needs. "Usually children depend on their parents so they can fulfil their needs and desires, or if they are old, then the children will look

after the parents, but here we all are dependent on an NGO to give us food, books, clothes, and medicine."

Nathan and his family would like to work and be self-sufficient. "Here we are unable to work hard and achieve something." The inability to work and provide for his family causes Nathan great distress. "We are told to go to a psychologist if we have any mental problems." However, for Nathan this is not a solution. Nathan insists the ability to work would reduce much of the mental anguish in their community. "They should send us to another country to live freely or let us be free here."

As urban refugees in Bangkok, Nathan and his family are forced to lead a life of poverty and dependence. "The word refugee is a very hard word to say. When seeing the people in Thailand living a better life, we just want to be like them. We have not lived a life like that for four years. We want to live like that so we can take care of our kids and fulfil their needs and desires."

Nathan's family, like many other urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok, face restricted access to basic services. "In Sri Lanka if I get sick I would go to hospital and take medicine. But here in Thailand as long as we are refugees we have to go to an NGO and let them know

we are really sick and then they will give us a form to go to a hospital. If we were really sick and went to hospital first they would not give us money."

The family's application for resettlement in the US was recently rejected. Nathan describes the problem as political. "Out of all the countries that want to resettle people, none want to resettle Sri Lankans because they think we are LTTE [ethnic Tamil insurgent group]."

Nathan's plea to the international community is simple, "our request is please consider us as refugees, not Tamil Tigers." Nathan and his family are acutely aware that the chances of resettlement are slim. However, what they insist upon is the right to legally work and rebuild their lives. "We are not necessarily insisting UNHCR resettle us in a western country. We can live anywhere except Sri Lanka. Even if they let us live legally in Thailand, then this is ok. We can work hard for ourselves."

Nathan and his family request that the government of Thailand reconsider the status of refugees and asylum seekers and take measures that foster their independence and self-sufficiency.

Oliver White, Regional Communication Advocacy Officer

Goodbye conflict, Welcome development



Just four years after the civil unrest in 2006, and two years after simultaneous attacks on the top two national leaders, the government of Timor-Leste is saying goodbye to conflict.

While some “remarkable progress” has been achieved (UN Special Representative’s Report, February 2010), the bold proclamation invites us to ask whether conflict and other essential issues have been adequately addressed or have simply been swept under the rug.

JRS in Timor-Leste is a witness to the herculean tasks facing the country. About half of the country still lives in poverty. Sixty percent of the total population are under the age of 25. Twenty percent of all young people are unemployed; this figure rises to forty percent in urban centres like Dili (CIA Factbook, 2010). Many of the young people have joined martial arts groups and were involved in the 2006 violence.



Isidoro, JRS Project Director meets with a returnee in Dili (Don Doll SJ/JRS)

JRS works with about 35,000 returned IDPs [Internally Displaced Persons] in four villages in Dili district. Together with the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MSS) and other NGOs, JRS focuses on assisting the 40 sub-villages in this district to manage the reintegration process through conflict mediation, peace building and reconciliation. The situation is delicate as institutional mechanisms are weak. Land and property laws in the country are complex. The absence of comprehensive land legislation has been a major source of conflict in the reintegration process.

The JRS team builds confidence in the community through accompaniment, dialogue, use of traditional conflict resolution practices such as “Nahe Biite Boot” (a traditional dialogue process) and “Juramentu” (a blood oath to seal a settlement or agreement), and training and inter-community activities.

This year, JRS assisted in a “Juramento” settlement between two warring youth groups. In February, 10 youth groups from 22 sub-villages organized four music concerts with the assistance of JRS and partners; more than 2,000 people attended the events.

The team also facilitates access to social welfare services in education, health, and other material assistance for vulnerable and marginalized people who otherwise will be disenfranchised. It is worth noting that the government had spent \$38 million on pensions in 2009 and has allocated a further \$52 million for 2010.

Many believe that the country has adequate resources to address these concerns. According to the government, Timor-Leste’s non-oil GDP growth rate is estimated at 12% in 2009 and the Petroleum Fund is expected to be valued at \$6.16 billion by 2010.

This poses the question: how are these resources going to be used and will the benefits trickle down to the communities?

It is only two years before the Presidential election and the end of the UN Integrated Mission in Timor Leste (UNMIT). The population feels the tension mounting and there is no assurance that violence similar to 2006 and 2008 will not happen again.

Last month, the President pardoned his attackers and the ex-military commander responsible will be released awaiting a court order. A year ago, a similar pardon, which was widely criticized, was granted to the former leader of 1999 Laksaur militia. Perhaps these pardons are a way of saying goodbye to conflict and forging a path towards reconciliation. But many feel that there are pending justice issues that need to be resolved and failing to do so creates the potential for more conflict.

Conflict and development are not always at odds with each other. Conflict can be seen as the symptoms that expose reconciliation and development issues that are often hidden or ignored.

By Louie Bacomo, Regional Programme Officer

Cambodia: Resettlement no longer an option for urban refugees

The urban refugee population in Cambodia comprises people from all corners of the world. Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma, Sudan, China and Vietnam. Porous borders and the fact that Cambodia is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention are the standard reasons refugees give for seeking asylum here.

The legal framework in Cambodia affords basic protection to urban refugees. Cambodia however presents a number of its own unique challenges for this population.

Firstly, institutions of government are relatively weak and accordingly there are considerable gaps in the implementation of the rule of law. This challenge touches most departments and government agencies, including the department of immigration and the refugee office.

Secondly, the social and political context in which refugee status determination occurs and refugees live is in continual flux.

And thirdly, Cambodia has an uneven history of providing protection to refugees, and this came to international attention in December last year when 20 ethnic Uighur asylum seekers were forcibly returned to China from Cambodia.

JRS has been working in Phnom Penh for close to 15 years providing direct assistance to refugees. The office provides, usually on referral by the Cambodian Refugee Office or the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) but also to walk-ins, individual legal representation, as well as emergency and other humanitarian assistance.

Most refugees here do not see living in Cambodia as a long-term solution for themselves or their families. Many wish to be resettled to countries such as the United States, Canada or Australia. They quickly learn that this is increasingly difficult.

Of the many refugees who apply to UNHCR, only a very small number are recommended for resettlement in third countries. UNHCR's reasoning is that, as a signatory to the Refugee Convention,

with its own domestic refugee law, Cambodia has adequate legal frameworks to provide sufficient protection to urban refugees.

With this in mind, JRS is now focusing on meeting the long-term needs of refugees, helping them to become self-sufficient. For example, JRS is facilitating small training workshops enabling women to gain skills which will help them to find employment in Phnom Penh.

The question, however, remains: are refugees able to become self-sufficient in Cambodia?

Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in the Asia Pacific region. Ranked 137th on the Human Development Index; sitting between the Republic of Congo and Burma, Cambodia is barely able to provide for its own citizens. If daily life for the average Cambodian is difficult, then for a refugee in this context it is incredibly hard.

Mohammed, an Iranian refugee living in Phnom Penh, has no family and very few friends here. Alone, he faces the challenge of caring for his deteriorating mental health and the daily battle of keeping depression and anxiety at bay. This is especially difficult as Mohammed is unemployed, leaving him bored and unproductive, with plenty of time to ponder his worries.

Without any money or employment prospects, Mohammed lives day-to-day on the small subsistence allowance provided by UNHCR. How he could become financially independent from this assistance is difficult to conceive. Due to the lack of state social assistance, most poor Cambodian families rely on moneylenders and enter into private debt agreements accessed through social networks. In Cambodia, local knowledge and social connections are important to ensure fairer terms; refugees like Mohammed possess neither and this marginalisation renders him and others reliant on UNHCR and JRS for social assistance.

Whether refugees can become self-sufficient in Cambodia remains to be seen. Meanwhile a more pressing



On 19 December 2009, 20 Uighur asylum seekers, who were registered with both the government and UNHCR, were taken to this 'safe house'. Two days later, they were forcibly returned to China. Cambodia was not safe for them. (Phnom Penh, Cambodia, ABC)

concern for refugees in Cambodia is their safety. Given the uneven protection Cambodia has historically afforded refugees, it is difficult to perceive merit in the argument that the protection needs of refugees can be guaranteed by the government.

In 2002, two Falun Gung practitioners were forcibly returned to China from Cambodia; individuals with outstanding decisions have been refouled from Cambodia to Vietnam; and in December 2009, 20 Uighur asylum seekers, who were registered with both the government and UNHCR, were forcibly returned to China.

The lesson Cambodia teaches is that in the absence of political will, the legal framework does not guarantee protection. Recent history has demonstrated time again, that in Cambodia, obligations towards refugees accorded by the Convention and their own domestic refugee law are considered subsidiary to geopolitical interests.

While the present political reality indicates that refugees from certain countries of origin are safe in Cambodia, the geopolitical context is in a constant state of flux. Those safe from refoulement today, may not be safe tomorrow.

Until UNHCR demonstrates that Cambodia meets the basic protection needs of refugees, those refugees unable to live in dignity and safety in the country should continue to be recommended for resettlement in third countries.

Taya Hunt, Legal Officer JRS Thailand

Somali refugee resettled in the US



Hassan now resettled in the U.S.

Phnom Penh, 23 July 2010 – Hassan came to the JRS office the day he was about to leave for America. He brought with him a piece of paper with ‘St Louis’ written on it. He sat in my office and we looked at a map of America and found St Louis. He asked if it was very cold there.

This name on a piece of paper would be the final chapter in a story that took Hassan from Somalia to Libya, Iraq, Malaysia, Thailand and Cambodia.

Hassan comes from a minority group in Somalia. His two brothers were killed and his family disappeared. With nothing left for him in Somalia, he left for Libya, where he learned that Iraq was offering free education for Somalis. He worked hard, earned enough money for a ticket to Baghdad and after learning Arabic and gaining a bachelor’s degree, he worked as an interpreter for the US-led coalition forces.

With the security situation deteriorating in Iraq, Hassan knew that he would be targeted by extremist groups for working with the Americans. Many of his friends who were translators had been killed. Soldiers within the coalition forces helped him to buy an air ticket and visa to Malaysia. In Malaysia, issues with his visa forced him to travel on to Thailand, where he faced similar problems, and eventually he arrived in Cambodia.

JRS assisted Hassan gain refugee status in Cambodia, and provided basic accommodation and social assistance. However, even with his degree, work experience and proficiency in a number of languages including Somali, Arabic, English and even Italian, he could not find work in Cambodia. Complications

with his health hampered his ability to be self-sufficient and isolation from the broader Cambodian community rendered life extremely difficult.

“Cambodia is a very difficult country for refugees – economically, jobs and education are hard to find, as is accessing health care; it is very hard to find good doctors”, Hassan says, describing his circumstances and those of all refugees in the country.

“It was difficult to find friends here because I would be treated differently. We could not get further training here. Mostly we stay in our rooms; we just think, get stressed and worry. We would get emotional. It’s like this for everyone. I am hopeful that my life in the US will be better than this. But life will be new for me there. The country, the people will be different. I just want to make contacts and be integrated”.

Hassan was fortunate to be given a new opportunity in America. For the rest of the refugee population in Cambodia, everyday life continues to be a struggle.

Lian Yong, Legal Officer, JRS Cambodia

Women's group provides friendship, support and skills to urban refugees in Phnom Penh



A group of women form an informal support group to combat boredom and isolation, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Phnom Penh, 26 August 2010 – Le Thi Hong, an asylum seeker from Vietnam, teaches the basics of giving manicures and pedicures to a small group of asylum seekers and refugee women at the JRS office.

The women have formed new friendships among themselves and enjoy the opportunity to leave the house and indulge in some beauty therapy, while learning a skill that may help them become more self sufficient in the future.

After JRS learnt that Ms Hong was a skilled nail technician and that she had helped to support her family for over ten years with this profession, she was approached to teach some of the women supported by JRS.

‘I am happy to teach this class because all refugees are like a family together.

JRS Urban Refugee Campaign Focus

Everyone has left their home country for another country. It is a very difficult life in Cambodia. I want to share my experience and skills with them, and in the future they can support themselves.'

Classes are run twice a week and some students commute to the office themselves, while others are picked up and dropped off by a JRS social worker to ease the burden of transportation costs. There is no formal language of instruction, as the students and teacher do not share any common language; rather, classes are taught by following example. The women practice on each other, and members of JRS and Jesuit Services staff have taken advantage of the opportunity to get a free manicure and pedicure, without even leaving the office.

Lian Yong, Legal Officer JRS Cambodia



A family supported by JRS Thailand

Recently the balance between urban and camp refugees has shifted towards the former. Most of the world's displaced persons now live in urban areas. Although the quality of services and availability of jobs is much better, urban refugees face a myriad of obstacles ranging from xenophobia to detention. JRS works to ensure that the most vulnerable urban refugees do not fall through the cracks. For further information go to www.jrs.net

Even though they are both young and bright, Htin and Myaing have not been able to find work.

"We are not Cambodian citizens so we cannot find a job. Lack of opportunity and language skills has made it very difficult for me to find work. I applied at one of the hotels and they told me I could not get a job because I cannot speak Khmer. All the clubs and hotels want Khmer people. I cannot get a job ahead of the local people", Htin says.

Htin feels frustrated by the lack of opportunity.

"I'm young, I want to study and have a good life. I want to study at university or get a diploma. We have very little income, no job, so how can we study? How can we have good lives?"

Htin has tried to remain positive and find things to do in Cambodia; however, the political situation presents a challenge. When he took part in a number of rallies in Phnom Penh trying to promote political freedom in Burma, the local police forced them to stop their activities.

The close relationship between the Burmese and Cambodian authorities, and the deportation last December of ethnic Uigher asylum seekers back to China,

make Htin feel as if he isn't free to express his political views in his country of asylum.

Many refugees find it difficult to make friends and socialise in Cambodia. They are treated as outsiders by local Khmer people and are charged higher prices in the markets and shops.

"We buy our food, vegetables and rice, from the market. They know we are foreigners; there are no fixed prices, so they charge us more than Cambodians. It's the same with transport. I am also depressed because we stay at home all the time; we have no jobs or friends. Some of Burmese people run businesses here so they don't want to meet people like me who have been involved in politics."

"Sometimes I think we have no identity, I feel we are stateless. I spoke to a lady at UNHCR and she said we need to wait more than 10 years before we can get [Cambodian] citizenship. How can we struggle for 10 years?"

What Htin says here sums up the situation for many refugees in Cambodia who lack support networks, opportunities and the ability to gain political rights.

Lian Yong, Legal Officer, JRS Cambodia

Without rights and opportunities, integration is an illusion for urban refugees

Phnom Penh, 23 July 2010
Htin and his wife, Myaing, are recognised refugees from Burma. They managed to escape persecution from the Burmese junta for their pro-democratic activities, only to find themselves struggling with day-to-day life in Cambodia.

Convention on Cluster Munitions becomes binding international law



Bangkok, 1 August 2010 - On the 1st of August the Convention on Cluster Munitions came into force, becoming binding international law in 107 countries around the world.

Adopted in Dublin on 30 May 2008 and opened for signature in Oslo in December 2008, the Convention bans the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of cluster munitions and calls for the destruction of stockpiles within eight years, clearance of cluster munition-contaminated land within 10 years, and assistance to cluster munition survivors and affected communities.

Pham Quy Thi, a 52 year old landmine survivor from Vietnam said, "I hope that the Treaty will make a real difference in the way that the contaminated areas will become de-polluted, so that I will be able to work without any fear, and that children will no longer risk finding cluster munitions more than 30 years after the end of the strikes."

JRS Asia Pacific celebrated the entry into force of the most significant disarmament and humanitarian treaty in over a decade by organizing a mass at Xavier Hall in Bangkok, followed by traditional Thai drumming and dancing.

"Even though we are from a small country, our voices are loud. The voice from our drums carries our message to the countries that have not yet joined the Convention. We hope more and more countries will join then the cluster bomb survivors, their families and communities will get support they need" said Sermsiri Ingavanija, JRS Ban Landmine and Cluster Bomb Campaign Coordinator.

Bernard Hyacinth Arputhasamy, SJ, Regional Director of JRS, who attended the event at Xavier Hall, said "There is no justification for these weapons of mass destruction. Today we celebrate this achievement through the efforts of many people from many nations and backgrounds expressing our global moral solidarity."

Father Bernard urged Thailand and other non-signatories to sign the treaty. "More needs to be done to persuade other countries to join the global moral and creative force to ban cluster munitions."

This sentiment was echoed by Sermsiri Ingavanija who said, "South-East Asia is the most heavily affected region from cluster munitions and has spent decades dealing with the effects of landmines and cluster bombs. The decision to join would show solidarity with Lao PDR which is providing much needed

global leadership on the issue and would positively influence other countries in the region to join the ban."

As a leader on the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, Thailand participated in the "Oslo Process" to negotiate the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions and has expressed concern about the humanitarian consequences of cluster bombs. Despite this support, Thailand has not yet signed the Convention.

As a member of the Cluster Munitions Coalition (CMC), JRS urges Thailand to sign the Convention without delay and to attend the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention, which will be held from 9-12 November in Lao PDR, the world's most cluster-bombed country. This key meeting will lay the foundation for future work on the Convention by bringing together for the first time state parties to the treaty, UN agencies, international organisations, civil society groups and cluster bomb survivors. Governments will share progress reports and draw up plans for action to implement the treaty's lifesaving provisions within the established deadlines.

Oliver White, JRS Asia Pacific Regional Communication Advocacy Officer

Bombs Out! Balloons In!

Siem Reap, August 2010 - Tuktuks gaily decorated with balloons and Ban Cluster Bomb banners rode around Angkor Wat carrying cluster bomb survivors on 1st August 2010. They were celebrating the entry into force of the Convention to ban Cluster Munitions. Led by Tun Channareth in his wheelchair they handed out leaflets explaining the law and gathering signatures of support.

"Bombs out! Balloons in!" said one US tourist. "Yes, and you need to sign the treaty" returned the campaigners! It was a special day of celebration for 20 survivors who travelled from Kratie and Kompong Cham to attend the events in Siem Reap.

After a ban advocates seminar convened by Song Kosal where survivors learnt more about the treaty and honed their campaigning skills and the ride round the temples the survivors celebrated! For many it was their first time to visit a restaurant!



The 2nd of August was filled with activity. An old friend, himself a landmine survivor and his band called all to beat the drum as they entered. Flashes of red from the ban shirts dotted the grounds as children and adults played soccer, balloon football, sack races and hung peace doves on the sweetly smelling jasmine tree in the centre of the labyrinth.

The traditional Cambodian ceremony Chay Yam drummed all to follow in procession to witness the Cluster Bomb Dance created by Tolah of Battambang, herself a child refugee during the shelling of Site 2 Refugee camp years ago, featured cluster bombs, devastated fields, rice farmers and peace doves. Wheelchair dancers singing, "If we all

join together we can uproot evil and change the world" touched the hearts of many. Cambodian instruments set on the outside amphitheatre of the Reflection Centre accompanied the dance. Some of the dancers were small girls and boys in 1996 when they joined the dance against landmines.

En Sam Ouern, who lost both eyes and arms in 2004 to a cluster bomb dropped in the seventies called all to the dragon boat to sign the people's treaty against Cluster bombs. He urged all States, including Cambodia, to get on board and go to Laos to make a strong action plan with immediate effects to clear clusters and uphold the rights and quality of life of those affected by them. More than 1000 people signed on in the afternoon.

Finally the Buddhist monks and Bishop Kike blessed miniature boats of the countries which have ratified the treaty and survivors and campaigners sent them off on our pond as hundreds of balloons flew into the sky.

It was a day of hope as the first disarmament treaty of this century became international law.

Sr. Denise Coughlan, RSM



World Refugee Day: Cambodia Soccer Game



Urban refugees and asylum seekers play football on World Refugee Day, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Phnom Penh, July 2010 - Undeterred by the storm clouds gathering ominously over Phnom Penh, over 80 urban refugees and asylum seekers clamoured into the back of JRS vehicles and luckily for most, were able to reach Don Bosco vocational school in Phnom Penh Thmey for a World Refugee Day soccer match before the monsoon rains hit.

Coaches and referees from the Indochina Starfish Organisation were there to

meet us at Don Bosco, upon arrival the soccer balls were already out and being kicked, head-butted and tossed around in all directions. Having roused some interpreters for the various languages for those present such as Burmese, Vietnamese, Rohingya, Somali and of course Khmer, we managed to enforce some crowd control, and two teams were formed. Unfortunately this was short-lived; when the soccer uniforms arrived (shorts, tops, socks, and even shoes);

it was each person – and child – for themselves.

Thankfully the weather finally cleared and we were able to hold a match: one for adults and a smaller version for children. For the younger ones, there was a three-legged race and Pin the Tail on the Donkey, which I think provided more amusement for the adults watching.

And the final result – the Orange Team of mostly Rohingya asylum seekers and Burmese refugees won, 2-1. Judging from some of the talent (and mostly the enthusiasm), training for the next World Cup will be forthcoming.

Many thanks to Don Bosco for allowing us to use their facilities; Jesuit Services and Jesuit Refugee Services staff who gave up their Saturday; staff from the Indochina Starfish Organisation, without whom the day would not have been possible; representatives from the Cambodian Refugee Office, UNHCR and the International Friendship Development Organisation; and finally, all the asylum seekers and refugees who participated.

Lian Yong, Legal Officer, JRS Cambodia

Thailand Celebrates World Refugee Day

Bangkok, 20 June 2010 - JRS Thailand and JRS Asia Pacific celebrated the sixth anniversary of the United Nations designated World Refugee Day with a gathering at Xavier Hall in Bangkok, Thailand.

Refugees and parishioners were invited to attend Mass at Xavier Hall. During Mass we were privileged to have two refugees willing to share their stories of displacement and exile; demonstrating their courage and resilience and providing us with a glimpse into the hardships they face.

After Mass, parishioners spent time learning about the plight of refugees in the region through a public exhibition designed by JRS Thailand. Information on the causes of displacement and the 'refugee journey' in Thailand was displayed outside the church, alongside updates on JRS projects in the region.

The traditional dress of several ethnic groups that JRS supports was also on display, including the Shan, Karen, Mon, Karen and Burmese. Guests had the opportunity to support a number of livelihood projects by purchasing items produced by refugees participating in JRS projects. The day concluded with a shared lunch and some light hearted fun and games within the welcoming sanctuary of Xavier Hall.

Oliver White, Asia Pacific Regional Communication Advocacy Officer



Urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok, Thailand celebrate World Refugee Day with JRS staff.

JRS meets Director of Thailand Mine Action Centre

Bangkok, 3 August 2010 – On the 3rd of August Ban Landmine Campaigners from JRS Asia Pacific met with new Director of Thailand Mine Action Center (TMAC), Major General Ong-ard Ratanawichai.

Our group comprised of Fr.Bernard, Khun Emilie Ketudat and Sermsiri (Chompoon) Ingavanija. We introduced ourselves to the director and his staff and shared with them the history of the Ban Landmine Campaign in Thailand.



We also assured him that JRS would like to work closely with the Royal Thai Government and the TMAC and explore how we can support the Government to fulfil the Convention requirements, in particular, providing assistance to victims of land mines.

JRS also offered to share its years of knowledge and expertise by providing capacity building in the areas of mine risk education and victim assistance for TMAC staff. JRS looks forward to further collaboration with the TMAC.

Sermsiri Ingavanija, Coordinator Ban Landmine and Cluster Bombs Campaign

Treasures of JRS

Chan and Took thanked for long and dedicated service to JRS

JRS owes deep gratitude to Mrs. Ornchan Pakdeewong and Ms Rachanee Sareechaitaweepong for their dedicated and long service to JRS. Both have been great treasures in JRS and for all who have lived and served in Thailand over the years. All have been touched with their warm hospitality and generous hearts.

Mrs. Ornchan Pakdeewong, known worldwide as P'Chan, has



worked for JRS Asia Pacific for over 23 years as a house keeper and cook, and is well known for her delicious food and open heart. She knows the favourite foods of so many, who have worked with JRS in Thailand, and is always attentive to people's personal tastes and likes. P'Chan said, 'I am very glad to work for JRS. Thank you to the JRS team for all your help and support. I have worked with JRS for 23 years. I would like to continue working with JRS until I am no longer able to do

so'. Quiet and with an unassuming nature, she has contributed so much of her time, energy and cooking skills to keep the team healthy and happy in order to continue our mission.

Ms Rachanee Sareechaitaweepong, also known as Took has



worked for JRS Asia Pacific for 20 years. Took works as the regional human resources officer. Took has a wealth of knowledge and experience and her friendliness and humour is greatly appreciated by her colleagues throughout the region. Reliable and organized, her kind and personal approach to people with various needs are remembered by everyone who has met her over the years. There are many aspects of her work that are not known to others and yet she does them with devotion and care, joyful in giving and serving people. At a small ceremony Took said, 'I would like to say big thanks to my family who always support and understand my work with JRS, long term as 20 years now for the refugees'.

Bernard Hyacinth Arputhasamy, SJ



diakonia

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