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Refugee Voice

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Dear Friends of JRS

In this issue of the Refugee Voice, we feature two articles – one from Ranong and the other from Nepal.

Venessa explores the hidden plight of the refugees in Ranong, while Seey Seey offers us a pictorial journal of her trip to Nepal. Their physical travels helped them to reflect on their spiritual journey: The meaning of their work and their mission in JRS. Their stories invite us to think about our own spiritual journey this Lent.

After all, the Lenten season is a good time for us to reflect on the direction our spiritual lives are heading. I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of you a meaningful journey of self-discovery.

Fr Colin Tan, S.J.



RANONG EXPERIENCE

Written by Venessa Lee

We couldn't see the end of the passageway, which had high walls along each side. There was a lonesome feeling about it, but this gave way to surprise: we soon arrived at Party Central!

A Christmas carnival was underway at Sea Dragon Learning Centre in Ranong, one of three primary schools for migrant children we visited last December. There was singing and dancing (including a Thriller-style zombie dance) and a Nativity play (where a stagehand handed Baby Jesus to Mary on a tray). All the children were dressed in their festive best.

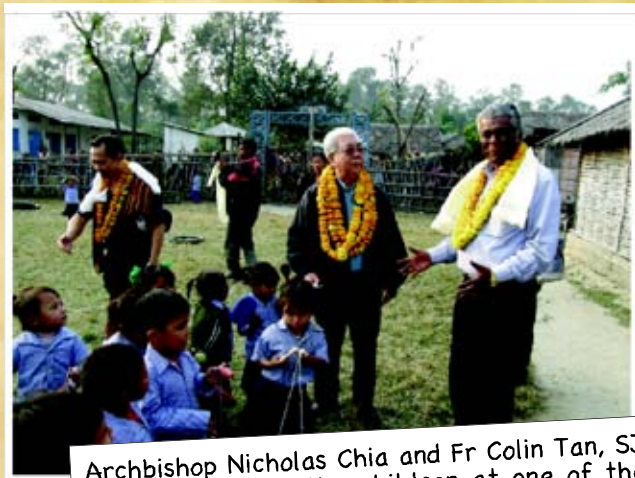
But just a few steps away from the makeshift concert stage was a row of wooden huts, some of which overlooked a vista of discarded junk. This was the home of some of the children, who mostly come from ethnic Mon families. These families are urban refugees who had left Myanmar to find work at this small seaport town of Ranong, which lies across from Myanmar's coast. They live in poverty in Ranong, where JRS Thailand runs Sea Dragon and other learning centres, as part of their programmes to assist these migrants.

Later that day, we visited another tucked-away slum, bringing some groceries and stickers as gifts. The dark-timbered, two-storey shack looked like it was half-constructed, half a ruin. Some children ran barefoot on ground covered completely by sea-shells and jagged shellfish husks. The kids seemed delighted at the stickers we gave them, but the tired, sombre faces of their mothers told a story of deprivation.

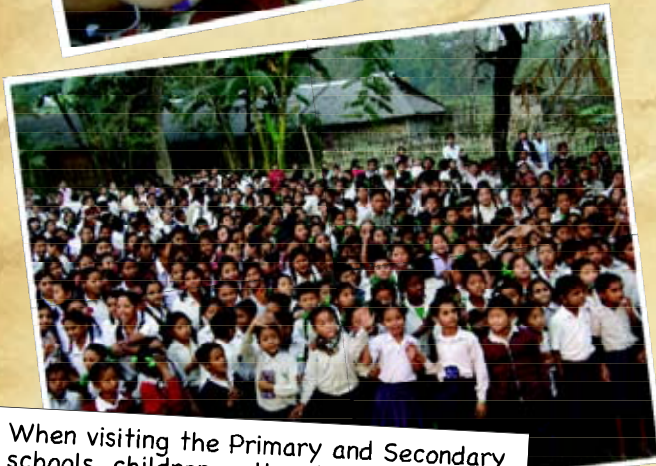
Urban refugees in Ranong live in hidden poverty. With many of them unable to work legally, their lives of quiet desperation are lived apart from mainstream Thai society. Our small team from JRS Singapore were grateful for the refugee programmes run by JRS Thailand. But we were only visitors, and we wished we could do more to help.

Bhutanese Refugee Children at The Child Play Care Centre (CPC)

JRS Singapore has been supporting the seven CPCs at the refugee camps in Nepal since 2005.



Archbishop Nicholas Chia and Fr Colin Tan, SJ interacting with the children at one of the CPCs, together with Fr P S Amal, SJ (in white shirt) when the Singapore team visited the refugee camps in Nepal in Dec 2010. Fr Amal is the JRS Country Director for Nepal.



When visiting the Primary and Secondary schools, children gather in full force to welcome their Singaporean visitors.



With resettlement constantly taking place, schools at the camps continue to lose good teachers. This is due to the fact that the chances of being resettled earlier are better for the more educated



Fr Colin Tan, SJ having a chat with a teacher and some students at a school.



English classes are conducted to prepare the older refugees for resettlement.

Bhutanese Refugee Children at The Child Play Care Centre (CPC)

World Food Program warehouse in one of the refugee camps



Daily distribution of rations, such as flour, sugar, salt, cooking oil, etc, for some 10,000 to 15,000 refugees in each of the seven camps.



The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) helps in the resettlement of the Bhutanese refugees to countries like USA, Canada, Denmark, etc. They also provide an orientation camp to help those refugees who are preparing to leave.



A group of Bhutanese refugees preparing to leave for Canada



The team from Singapore who visited Nepal with the Archbishop in Dec 2010

Breaking News

Fire at 2 Refugee Camps in Nepal



On the 23 march, JRS Singapore received news of two fires which took place on the same day at Goldhap and Sanischare refugee camps in Nepal. The first fire broke out in one of the houses in Goldhap at about 7.22am.

Unfortunately the wind carried the flames from hut to hut and within ninety minutes 512 huts out of 605 were reduced to ashes. Along with the huts, a Child Play Centre and Youth Friendly Centre were totally consumed by fire and nothing could be salvaged. All the materials in the Palliative Care Centre were burnt.

The Health Centre run by Association of Medical Doctors of Asia was also engulfed by the fire. The school which has a brick wall and tin sheet roofing was not affected and has now become a shelter for about 3000 people.

The second fire occurred at Sanischare Camp at around 2.25pm. It started in one of the huts and within forty five minutes, 180 huts were reduced to ashes. As the space between the rows of huts was very narrow, it was difficult to salvage anything.

The refugee community unaffected by the fire pulled together their own rations and fed the victims of the fire who had lost their possessions.

Many of the fire victims of Sanischare have lost whatever little they acquired during their 20 year stay in the camp and they remain inconsolable.



The recent natural disasters in New Zealand and Japan have claimed numerous lives. The earthquake as well as tsunami in Japan have destroyed many homes. In Libya, people have also been affected by political unrest and fighting.

Besides claiming lives, natural disasters as well as political conflicts often result in people losing their homes or having to flee because they fear for their lives. To date more than 280,000 people have fled the violence in Libya. Most have gone to Tunisia and Egypt, while smaller numbers are also seeking protection in Algeria and Niger.

We pray for the people affected by the earthquakes and the tsunami as they attempt to rebuild their lives. We also pray for peace and a quick resolution to the conflict in Libya.

About Our Organisation

JRS is an international Catholic organization with a mission to accompany, serve and plead for the rights of refugees and internally displaced people.

JRS was founded by the Jesuits in 1980 and our priority is to be where the need is greatest or where no other organisation is present.

JRS is part of CSCC but does not receive any funding from them. We thank you for your support and making our work with refugees possible!



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