

June 2010



# Refugee Voice

Produced by Jesuit Refugee Service Singapore - For internal Circulation Only



**REAL  
PEOPLE  
REAL  
NEEDS**

## World Refugee Day 2010

Dear Friends of JRS,

On June 25<sup>th</sup> we will celebrate World Refugee Day. Some of you may be wondering why World Refugee Day is celebrated year after year. In this issue of Refugee Voice, our JRS member, Jeremy Lim, writes about the origins of World Refugee Day as well as his take on why we should commemorate it.

Not only is World Refugee Day a time to reflect on the serious issue of displacement, it is also an opportunity to remember the actual people who have been forced to leave their homes. Thus it is apt that this year's theme is **Real People, Real Needs**.

For us in JRS Singapore, our work has been made meaningful and enriched by meeting and sharing in the lives of the refugees whom we serve. However, our work cannot be done without your generous support all these years. I hope that you will continue to support us and I look forward to seeing you at our World Refugee Day Mass when we will unite once again to pray for our refugee brothers and sisters.

Yours sincerely,

*Fr Colin Tan, SJ*

### Come Join Us!!

**Date:** 25 June 2010,  
7.30 pm  
(followed by fellowship)

**Venue:** Church of the Risen Christ

**Celebrant:** Archbishop Nicholas Chia

**Guest :** Fr Louis Prakash SJ  
(JRS Regional Director, South Asia)

In conjunction with World Refugee Day, we will be organizing the following activities:

- Exhibition and sale of handicraft on **19 and 20 June at Church of the Risen Christ**

- Screening of Burma VJ, an undercover documentary of the 2007 revolution in Rangoon, Church of the Risen Christ Auditorium, **19 June 2010, 8 to 9.30 pm**





## THE STORY BEHIND WORLD REFUGEE DAY

For JRS and many other humanitarian organizations around the world, life can be a rush. A rush to deliver food and water, to counsel people in prison, to fill up application forms and other paperwork, to liaise with government bureaucracy etc. But World Refugee Day is when we take a step back to remember the key focus of our work – the people that we serve.

It was started by the United Nations in 2001, marking the 50th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention. This was the first international treaty to recognize refugees, or people fleeing their homes because of persecution.

### Born From Ashes

Back in 1945, the human race was facing the aftermath of the deadliest war it had ever seen. Epic battles between the European powers had left 40 million people homeless. Some were stranded in foreign lands after fleeing massive tank invasions. Others had lost their fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers.

In those dark years, the UN and other organizations did great work helping these people to go home. To ensure that countries would respect the rights of refugees, the 1951 Refugee Convention was created and signed by more than 100 states.



Shan girl, refugee camp at the Thai-Burmese border

### Real People, Real Needs

Some things don't change. Most refugees today are still victims of war and violence – in Sudan, Burma, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and many other countries.

Our day-to-day work can sometimes be so impersonal, in this age of e-mails. This year's World Refugee Day focuses on the theme of 'Real People, Real Needs'. It reminds us to look up from our computer screens and remember the faces of the people we serve.

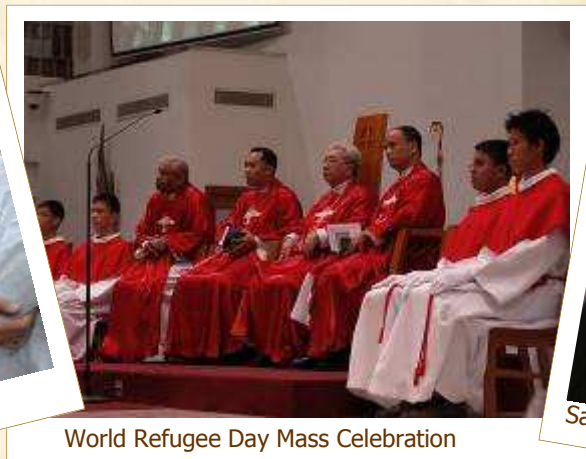
The first face that comes to mind is Long Pang, one of the top students at a refugee camp in Northern Thailand. Bright, cheerful and confident at 16 years old, the world should be her oyster. Yet, living in a refugee camp, life is a dead end, without a chance to complete her education or find a professional job. What will the future hold for young people like her?

Another friend who left a deep impression is Anthony, a Sri Lankan journalist who spoke out against human rights abuses, such as the killing of civilians during the island nation's bloody civil war. Soft-spoken and unassuming, his courage in the face of death threats is inspirational. Will we be willing to stand up for justice and truth even if it compromises our livelihood and safety?

Let's not get mired in the numbers – 140,000, 5 million, 40 million, etcetera. These numbers highlight the enormity of the refugee problem. But let us not forget the unique individuals with their own hopes and dreams, fears and challenges behind each of these numbers. So join us this World Refugee Day as we work with refugees, one face at a time.



Exhibition on JRS work



World Refugee Day Mass Celebration



Sale of Handicrafts made by Refugees



## JRS Updates - South Asia

JRS Singapore remitted S\$85,000-00 to JRS Sri Lanka from funds received from our Lenten Project. The funds were acknowledged by Fr Joel who sends his thanks "for the response and the team's [JRS Singapore's] generosity on behalf of the suffering people."

"We also thank JRS Singapore for raising a substantial amount of money for the works of JRS Sri Lanka. Kindly extend our gratitude to all who contributed in this act of solidarity," Fr Prakash, SJ, Regional Director JRS South Asia.

### Campaign to Ban Landmines – The World Cup Connection

Last year at WRD, JRS Singapore highlighted the campaign to ban landmines. This year, JRS Cambodia is calling on people worldwide to send a letter from cluster bomb survivor, Youern Sam En, to footballers participating in the 2010 World Cup asking them to speak out publicly in favour of the cluster munitions convention.

"It's straight forward. Just post Youern's letter asking a footballer to send a signed photo of himself for the Cluster Munitions Coalition website. Already, Chelsea football star Didier Drogba, from Côte d'Ivoire, has decided to support the ban on cluster munitions in his role as a Goodwill Ambassador for the UN Development Programme", said JRS Cambodia Director and veteran anti-landmine and cluster bomb campaigner, Sr Denise Coughlan.

"The World Cup is just around the corner and we need to take advantage of this fact. We will write to the players urging them to support us. With the help of friends and JRS colleagues worldwide we should be able to raise awareness about the importance of the cluster bomb convention" added Sr Denise. Check out Youern's letter at <http://jrs.net/news/index.php?lang=en&sid=5479>



### Please keep them in your prayers...

Several of our JRS Singapore members will be visiting Sri Lanka from the 11-19th June 2010. The team will be visiting the JRS Sri Lanka projects in the war-devastated North and Northeast Sri Lanka, formerly the territory of the Tamil Tigers.

Another group of JRS Singapore members will be making a trip to Ranong, Thailand, from the 12-16th June 2010. They will be there to review the refugee situation (namely the Mon ethnic group from Burma) and do an analysis of their needs. Upon return, JRS Singapore hopes to work with a parish here to provide support for these people.

You can read about their experiences in the forthcoming issues of Refugee Voice.



Sri Lankan Refugee and child

#### 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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