

EDUCATION IN CRISIS

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ASIA
PACIFIC



The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS)

is an International Catholic Organization with a mission to accompany, serve, and advocate on behalf of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons.

At the heart

of our service to refugees is our commitment to journey with them throughout their experience of displacement. JRS's many projects – education centers, food security, livelihood training, reconciliation, et cetera – may require practical planning, political negotiations, and financial sustainability.

However, our mission always remains rooted in a love for refugees that is profoundly bound to God's unfailing love for us. Our service to refugees is an expression of our desire to faithfully accompany those who experience so much rejection and absence in their lives.

DIRECTOR'S LETTER



Education to Reclaim their Future

Aung Min and his family crossed the Myanmar-Thai border on foot to escape violence and military harassment. He is a development worker in a Buddhist organization in southeastern Myanmar and was falsely charged with armed involvement.

Even if he wanted, he had to be with his wife who was pregnant for the first time. In the Thailand border, he joined others who fled the violence and trying to make ends meet. They are afraid of getting arrested but also of going hungry.

Last year, Aung Min's wife gave birth to a boy while in hiding. In one of my visits, we saw the baby struggling to crawl the length of the floor. Someone then remarked, "So young, yet already training for the PDF*!" Everybody laughed.

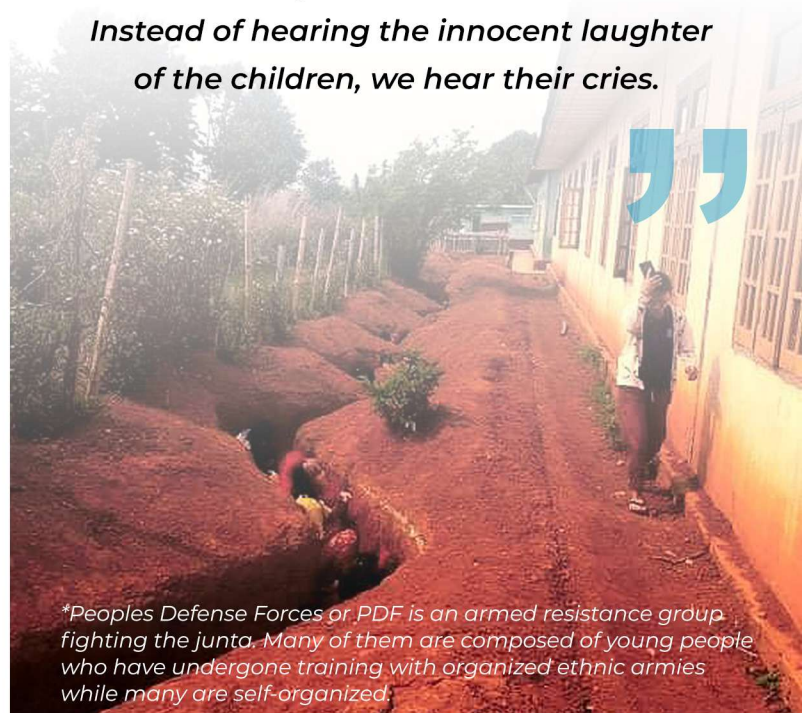
The coup stole the future of education in Myanmar away from the young. There are more than 12M children unable to attend formal education in Myanmar since the military violence and persecution. The danger of a lost generation among children is imminent. Education is in chaos and laden with vested interests. The military junta, the NUG, the ethnic organizations, and other groups proffer various forms of education. The people want an education that is safe, flexible, and non-ideological that prioritizes the best interest of the children.

The stories in this Diakonia issue tell of education in the context of crisis and chaos. The post-coup displacement has impacted the work of JRS in all countries in Asia Pacific and beyond. JRS values guide our mission to ensure human dignity and rights of children during forced displacement where they are often most vulnerable. Teachers, parents, students and support groups all strive for children to continue learning despite difficult and often dangerous circumstances. These stories present hopes and efforts towards a near future where children don't need to hide in bunkers to learn; where the struggle of the youth would lead to learning opportunities and living freely to reclaim their own future through education.



***We witness
the daily suffering
of the people.***

***They feel unsafe and frightened
by seeing the shelling falling from the sky
that destroyed buildings, injured people,
and took the lives of
their family members and friends.
Instead of hearing the innocent laughter
of the children, we hear their cries.***



*Peoples Defense Forces or PDF is an armed resistance group fighting the junta. Many of them are composed of young people who have undergone training with organized ethnic armies while many are self-organized.

We continue to work and dream of a time when our laughter at babies struggling to crawl, would mean pure delight at their growing strength moving onwards to this hope-filled future.



For the longstanding work that JRS has been doing, there are 7 values that guide our mission of accompanying, serving, and advocating for the refugees.

In this regard, JRS Asia Pacific presents 7 quotes from JRS teams working in the region. These stories from JRS staff in the region represent how they understand and live out the JRS mission and values.

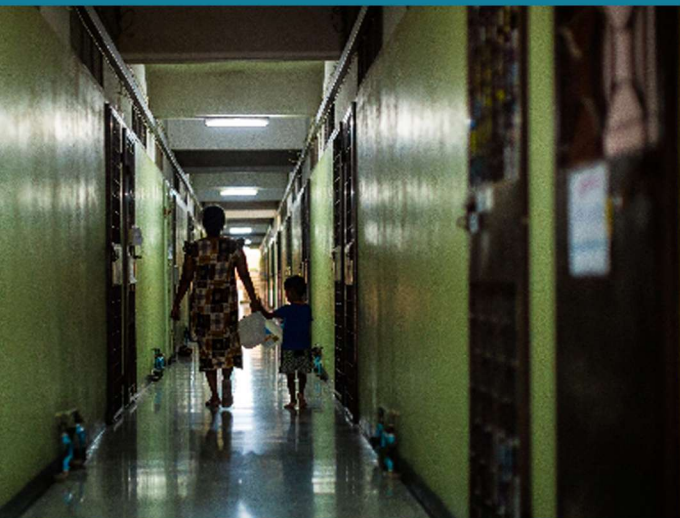
HOPE:

I believe that even the tiny light matters if we do not lose hope. From day to day, the flame will become bigger.



JUSTICE:

Even though justice is very far away, at least I will go listen to the people we serve. Sometimes we also cried with them too.



SOLIDARITY:

For JRS staff, together, we do our best to serve the most vulnerable people.





DIGNITY:

In JRS, refugees and displaced people are not different from us. They are us.

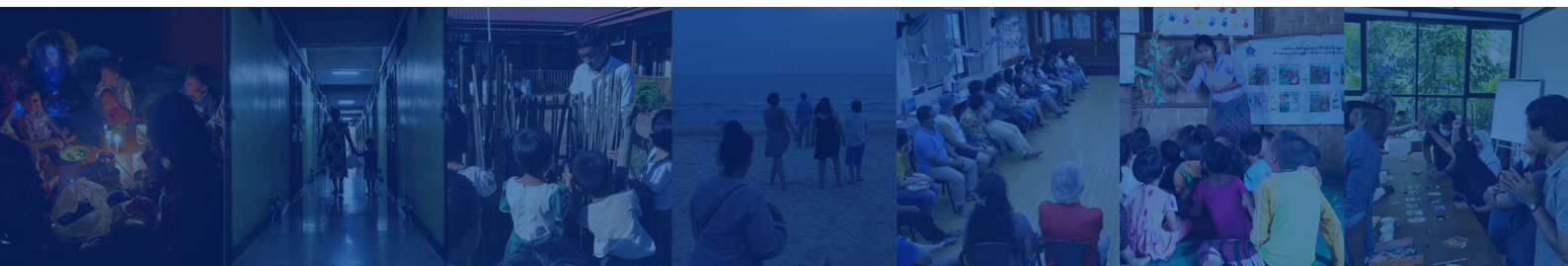
PARTICIPATION:

The keyword I always use is "We are 'working with' the refugees, not 'working for' them." In every step of the work process, I try to do my best to plant roots to grow, and wings to fly



HOSPITALITY:

We can see through our work, such as support groups, mental health and psychological support, and other services. Those have proven that hospitality makes our work successful.



COMPASSION:

*Compassion is not only a value of the JRS staff,
but I can also see compassion
within the refugee communities.*



THE WAY FORWARD

Next Direction of JRS Asia Pacific Strategic Plan

JRS in Asia Pacific's distinctive role is to uphold and protect the dignity and rights of all forcibly displaced persons in the region through an inclusive, healing, and caring approach, embracing the diversity and richness, and wholeness of the spiritual, intercultural, and inter-religious reality of our region, and opening our mission to all persons of goodwill.



CHILD RIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF REFUGEES



Of the eight countries JRS Asia Pacific is working, Australia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, all those countries ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child.



The Right to Survival

All children have the right to live from when they are born.

It is the universal right that children have the right to a registered name and nationality. Unfortunately, this is not the case with children who live under displacement conditions.

Many minors become unaccompanied because of the conflict or threat to life, which causes them to flee and separate from their family. Access to quality health care, age-appropriate nutrition, clean drinking water, a safe place to live and the opportunity to grow is the rights that are very challenging and sometimes impossible to achieve.



The Right to Protection

The children must be protected from physical and psychological violence.

They must be protected from trafficking, smuggling, kidnapping, sexual abuse, and all forms of exploitation. The risk of danger is higher for young refugees or asylum seekers.

While it is stated in the Convention that when children are refugees, they must have special assistance and protection, the reality is very complex. Special assistance and protection are even far-ranging when their basic needs are unmet.



The Right to Development

A child today is an adult of tomorrow

Therefore, education and development are fundamental rights. Development and education will enable them to realize their potential and meaningfully participate in society. Miserably, the lost generation is happening in the region. In many places, children could not go to school, hiding from conflict and fleeing from one place to another with poor living conditions.



The Right to Participation

Children are members of society

Ideally, everyone also needs to take action to support children and youth to participate and exercise their agency, as they are also the main driving force in bringing about positive change in society.

Life on escape makes them left out.



JRS do our utmost,

*JRS works for the betterment of exercising
the rights of the displaced children,
their families, and communities*

THE FUTURE I TOUCH, THE MOMENT I TEACH

THE STORY OF KUDZAI

#UrbanRefugeeTeacher

Kudzai is a volunteer teacher for an English class

under the Urban Education Project from JRS Thailand. Kudzai brings the JRS mission to life through her dedication to the classroom and her pedagogical stance. She has been teaching English to adults for many English classes from various countries.

Being a refugee, she understands parents' difficulties when raising their children in a foreign country without understanding a different language. Her teaching helps children to overcome the language barrier living somewhere far from their homes.

"Teaching is rewarding and comes from the heart," Kudzai said.

Education is the crucial gateway for children to access opportunities in their lives.



She shares with us that the Urban-Education Project changed her life wholeheartedly. "I can assist my family with basic needs. I can support my niece, who is suffering from cancer," she says.

I spend much time researching the knowledge to teach my students, and that helps distract me from stress and anxiety. Teaching brings her to life in the present.

She appreciates the time with the team and is grateful to JRS for the opportunity to help students improve their English language skills.

"I just wanted to thank you for making me a part of the team because we all work toward the same goal, to help students communicate in English."

*Communication
and self-understanding
are the apparent impacts
that changed me.*

— Quote from a student

THE FUTURE I TOUCH, THE MOMENT I TEACH

#TeacherinIDPsCamp

THE STORY OF
Nu Nu (pseudonym)



Teacher Nu Nu is the middle-school principal

in Ban Mai Nai Soi refugee camp, Thailand. She has been teaching for more than ten years.

Nu Nu grew up in Myanmar. She could not complete her primary education because she had to flee from her home to escape the armed conflict. However, she continued her study in an IDP camp setting, and one day she successfully became a teacher. Since then, she has been teaching for more than ten years.

Teacher Nu Nu is talented. She is friendly and open-minded. The student feels comfortable around her. Her character is also outspoken. She always stands up for others when someone faces unfair treatment.

As the mother of two beautiful daughters, she juggles between family and school.

Nevertheless, at the bottom of her heart, she always worried about her family and friends in Myanmar who suffered from the impact of armed conflict.

*JRS activity is very useful
for me. I feel relaxed.
Please come and
revisit us frequently.
Please do not leave us alone.*

Quote from a student —

THE FUTURE I TOUCH, THE MOMENT I TEACH

THE STORY OF
San San Win (pseudonym)

#TeachinginCrisis

I was working as a freelance guide teacher

before the coup, there are many job opportunities for us, especially for youth. After the coup, all my dreams for my education were delayed and even totally lost. My safety, security, and freedom as a citizen were gone.

As a teacher, my ideal school is a school that has a great system that can give quality, promote critical thinking, and boost ideas and creativity among students. It is required to have qualified teachers, good teaching-learning materials, and support.

“We need to have a good education system as we can see that most of the problems happening in our country are because of the results of the failure of our education.”



To improve Myanmar education, it is essential to have qualified and committed teachers who can support the effective learning of the children.

“If God has given me a chance to have three wishes, I will pray that all our people get inner peace and live in a peaceful society; children and youth may have the courage to overcome their difficulties and challenges without giving up; and every human being on earth may have empathy on each other with the full understanding of each other.”

*I feel like myself again.
Better than that,
I am now aware of
who I am, and realize
my strengths and weaknesses.*

—— Quote from a student

THE FUTURE I TOUCH, THE MOMENT I TEACH

THE STORY OF Julia

#TeacherInTheSchoolforRefugee



All her students call her teacher Julia,

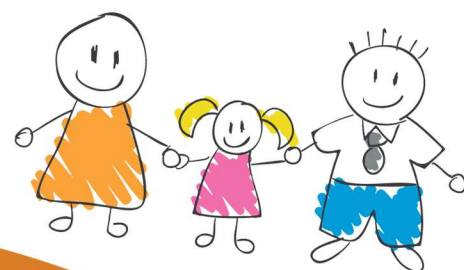
but her full name is Julia Susan Paul. She has been teaching at New Thessalonian Apostolate (NTA), -a supported refugee school. Before teaching here, she was a teacher for two Malaysian kindergartens in Alor Star, Kedah.

Teacher Julia teaches preschool classes (age 4 – 6 students). The subjects that she teaches are English and Bahasa Malaysian.

Teaching children at preschool also gives her the greatest joy by only watching the students having fun during class activities.

“Their cute facial expressions and the joy they get during activities are heart-catching. These children are like the lost sheep-the Lord looked out for in the Bible. They need guidance, care, love, and most-importantly, education for them to survive in this world.” she said.

At the end of this conversation, Julia said, “My only goal as a teacher is to see all my students succeed in the future and become role models for the younger ones. Eventually, among the students I taught, I would love to see one of them becoming a teacher and teach the next generation.”



Thanks to JRS, not only could I find myself again but aware myself even better, what are my assets, strengths, and weakness also, which I had never considered, how to relieve stress, face the problem, make decisions, and plan for future amidst of crisis and hardships”.

Quote from a student ———

SOLIDARITY

*is not just an ideal,
but is expressed in concrete actions
and steps that draw us closer
to our neighbours,
in whatever situation they find themselves.*



THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

JRS Asia Pacific is grateful to private individual and institutional donors who want to remain anonymous. Their selfless generosity is never forgotten.



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