

FOOTPRINTS OF COURAGE:

THE JOURNEY OF JRS CAMBODIA



Jesuit Refugee Service
1980 - 2000



*I see our work with refugees as a timely mission
in the service of faith and the promotion of justice*

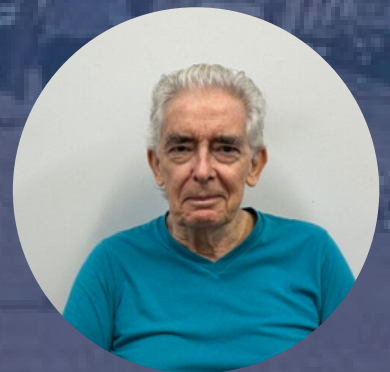
Peter-Hans Kolvenbach SJ,

dignity and life
all they could
ke with them

SJ, JRS International Director, 1980-1990



DIRECTOR'S LETTER



Dear friends and partners,

JRS Cambodia's story has always been one of courage and compassion. From the early years of landmine campaigns to the current efforts supporting refugees and stateless persons, our mission has remained the same: to accompany, serve, and advocate for those at the margins.

This edition of Diakonia offers a glimpse into that journey, one rooted in the past, grounded in the present, and reaching toward a hopeful future. As we step into a new space and new chapter, we continue to draw inspiration from the people we serve and from pioneers like Sister Denise Coghlan, whose legacy reminds us of what committed presence can achieve.

*Thank you for walking with us.
Joseph Hampson, JRS Asia Pacific Regional Director*

**A LEGACY
OF ACTION:**

**THE LANDMINE
CAMPAIGN
AND SURVIVOR
EMPOWERMENT**



***"IF WE ACT TOGETHER,
WE CAN DO MUCH MORE."***
– SISTER DENISE COGHLAN

Sister Denise Coghlan, began her humanitarian work at the Cambodia-Thailand border in 1988. In interviews conducted in 2010, she recalled witnessing the devastating effects of landmines. "Each day I met many people with missing legs, their legs blown off by landmines," she said, reflecting on those early years. This direct exposure to human suffering motivated her to focus on landmine eradication and survivor support.

When the Jesuit Refugee Service expanded its work into Cambodia in 1990, Sister Denise played a key role in establishing vocational training centers like Banteay Prieb. These centers became places where people injured by mines could develop practical skills in carpentry, welding, electrical skills, sculpture, agriculture, and wheelchair and furniture production enabling them to rebuild their lives despite their injuries.

The Campaign against landmines began in the early 1990s as a grassroots movement involving non-governmental organizations, Buddhist monks, and local communities. The Cambodia Campaign was launched with a letter from four Banteay Prieb survivors belonging to the four different factions. This letter also launched the drive by JRS and gained more than two million signatures representing Cambodia's internal conflicts and urged global action. That letter helped launch a national campaign that collected, underscoring the country's united demand for a landmine ban.

These early efforts contributed to the momentum that led to the adoption of the Mine Ban Treaty in 1997. Cambodia's involvement in the global campaign was more than symbolic. It was driven by people on the ground who understood the day-to-day dangers landmines posed to their communities.





The signing of the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty was a significant moment in the global disarmament movement. Representing landmine survivors worldwide, Tun Channareth (Reth), a Cambodian survivor who lost both legs to a landmine in 1982, accepted the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the ICBL.

Reflecting on that experience during a 2011 interview, Sister Denise said, "I was determined the world was going to hear what they had to say!" The award recognized the collective efforts of survivors, activists, and humanitarian organizations that worked tirelessly to bring global attention to the landmine crisis.

The winner of the Nobel Peace Prize Jody Williams bows in front of Cambodian Tun Channereth, who holds the International Campaign to Ban Landmines diploma and medal, on her way to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo City Hall, December 10, 1997.
© 1997 Reuters



**"WE CONTINUE TO WORK IN RAISING AWARENESS
BY ASKING EVERYONE TO BAN LANDMINES
IN THEIR HEARTS."**

– TUN CHANNARETH

Tun Channareth knows better than anyone the damage inflicted by anti-personnel mines, having stepped on one 43 years ago. Today, he dreams of a world without these weapons. SWI swissinfo.ch / Rachel Barbara Häubi



A HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO SISTER DENISE COGHLAN

On behalf of the entire team at Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), we extend our deepest gratitude to Sister Denise Coghlan, for her unwavering dedication, compassionate leadership, and tireless advocacy for the rights and dignity of those affected by landmines, conflict, and displacement. Since joining JRS Cambodia in 1990, Sister Denise has been the driving force behind numerous life-changing initiatives. Her vision and commitment have not only transformed the lives of countless survivors but have also inspired global action for peace, justice, and reconciliation.

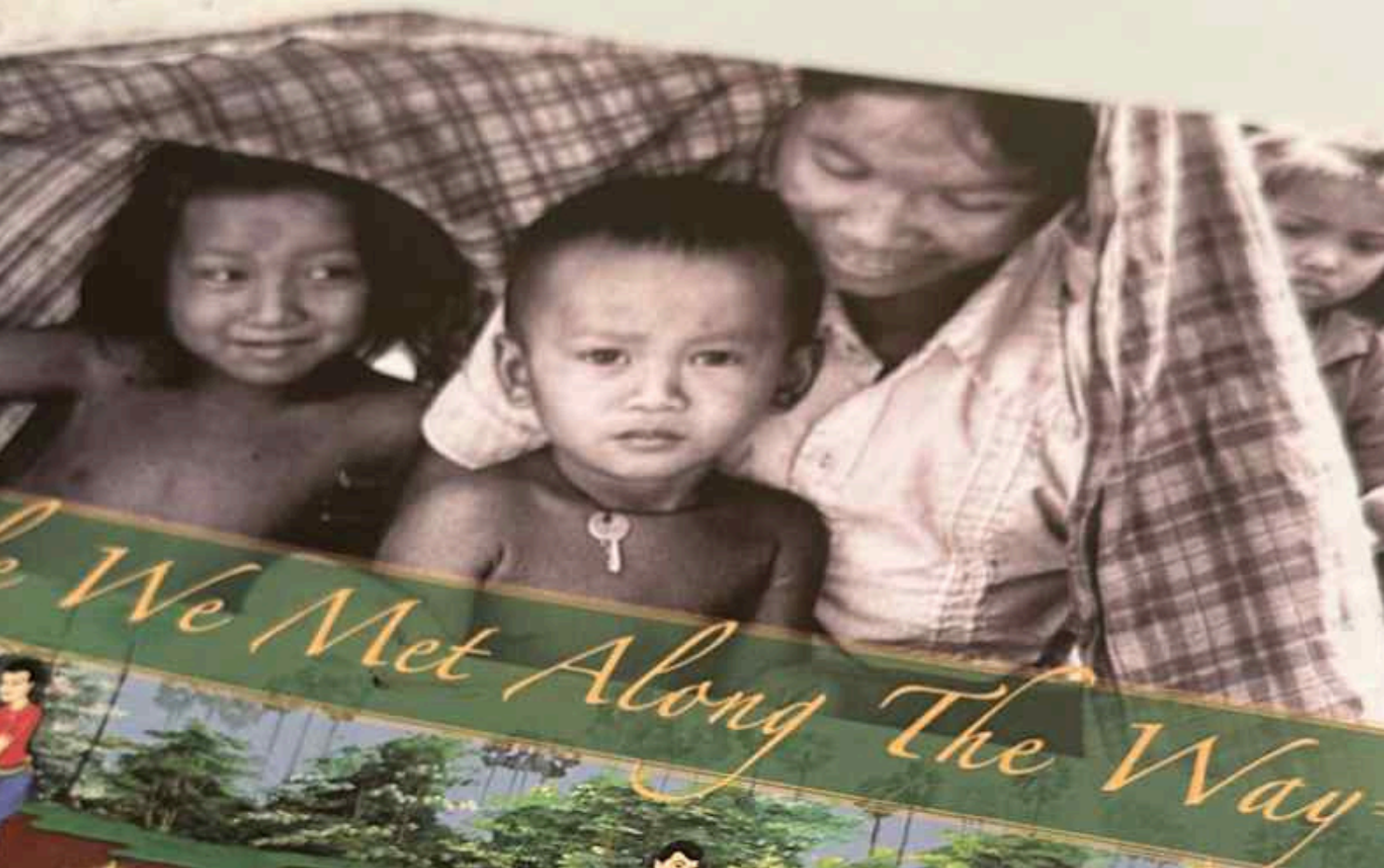
Under her leadership as Country Director, JRS Cambodia established vital programs including vocational training for people with disabilities, mine risk education, and extensive advocacy that contributed to the global landmine ban movement. Her ability to bring together people from different backgrounds, survivors, community leaders, religious groups, and policymakers, has been key to fostering hope and creating lasting change across Cambodia.

Though Sister Denise is stepping down from her role as Country Director, we are grateful that her journey with JRS continues through her work at the Metta Karuna Reflection Center in Siem Reap. Her unwavering presence in the community remains a source of inspiration to many.

Sister Denise, your dedication, kindness, and tireless pursuit of justice have left an indelible mark on JRS and the communities we serve. We are profoundly grateful for your leadership, and your example of living out the mission of JRS with compassion and courage.

We look forward to continuing this journey with you as you carry on your invaluable work in Siem Reap. Thank you for being a hope and a true advocate for peace.

*With heartfelt appreciation and best wishes,
Jesuit Refugee Service Asia Pacific*



**THE NEW CHAPTER BEGINS
WELCOMING CHANGE
CONTINUING THE MISSION**





As 2025 begins, JRS Cambodia has stepped into a new chapter both literally and symbolically with a recent move to a peaceful and refreshing new office space. The setting provides a calm, welcoming environment that supports the team's ongoing commitment to accompaniment and service.

Alongside this new beginning, JRS is launching fresh initiatives focused on long-term refugees many of whom have lived in Cambodia for nearly three decades. These communities primarily come from Vietnam, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Syria, and continue to face uncertainty despite their long years of residence.

In 2025, JRS Cambodia continues its longstanding commitment to supporting refugees who have lived in the country for many years but still face significant barriers to stability and protection. Many of these individuals and families remain in precarious situations, navigating complex administrative systems and struggling to access basic services.

To respond to these challenges, JRS offers a range of practical interventions designed to uphold dignity and restore a sense of hope. This includes providing financial assistance to ensure that children can attend school without interruption, regardless of their legal status. Education remains a central pillar of JRS's mission, and supporting young learners is key to breaking cycles of vulnerability.

Alongside education support, the team accompanies refugees through documentation processes offering guidance and presence as families navigate bureaucratic steps that are often confusing or inaccessible. JRS does not issue documents directly but plays a critical role in helping people understand their rights and options.

Regular home visits allow the team to assess needs more holistically, offering targeted support such as emergency food, hygiene supplies, rental assistance, or school materials, depending on each family's circumstances.





Newly arrived refugees often face complex day-to-day challenges, ranging from neighborhood tensions to the absence of essential documentation. In such cases, JRS plays a bridging role helping families understand their rights, connect with appropriate services, and explore options for resolving disputes or accessing legal aid.

While JRS does not have the authority to issue official documents, the organization works closely with government and civil society partners to ensure that no one is left alone in facing these hurdles.

Statelessness remains a profound and under addressed issue in Cambodia, where an estimated 70,000 individuals live without legal identity or citizenship. This lack of documentation limits their access to education, employment, healthcare, and legal protection, often rendering them invisible within the systems that are meant to serve all.

JRS Cambodia responds to these realities with focused initiatives aimed at increasing inclusion and opportunity. For children who are unable to enroll in school due to missing birth certificates, JRS supports Khmer language and foundational education programs. These classes provide not only essential literacy and numeracy skills, but also a sense of belonging and purpose.

For youth and adults, vocational training opens new pathways toward independence. JRS offers skill building opportunities in areas such as hairdressing, cooking, and nail care. By supporting stateless individuals in building their capacity and confidence, JRS affirms their humanity and strengthens their ability to shape their own future, even in the absence of formal recognition.



"I am grateful to be part of this mission. My deepest hope is that every child born in Cambodia receives a birth certificate, ensuring their rights to education and legal protection. Many stateless youth face exploitations, sometimes falling into illegal work. It is urgent that we address this issue."

Fr. Joseph Do, JRS Cambodia Project Director

"My work involves accompanying refugees to hospitals and conducting home visits. I also teach English and Khmer and help with gardening activities. I hope the government will prioritize issuing birth certificates for stateless children, as this document is crucial for their future."

Cheatta Seng, Communications Officer

"I have worked with JRS for 30 years. My hope is that refugees will either resettle in third countries or gain Cambodian citizenship especially those with Khmer families. Many refugees have waited decades for resettlement without success, which feels discouraging. I hope the Cambodian government will reconsider its stance and support these communities."

Sony Srun, Program Officer



THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

JRS Asia Pacific would like to thank you
for supporting us in promoting the rights and dignity
of displaced persons.

