

REFUGE

Jesuit Refugee Service Indonesia

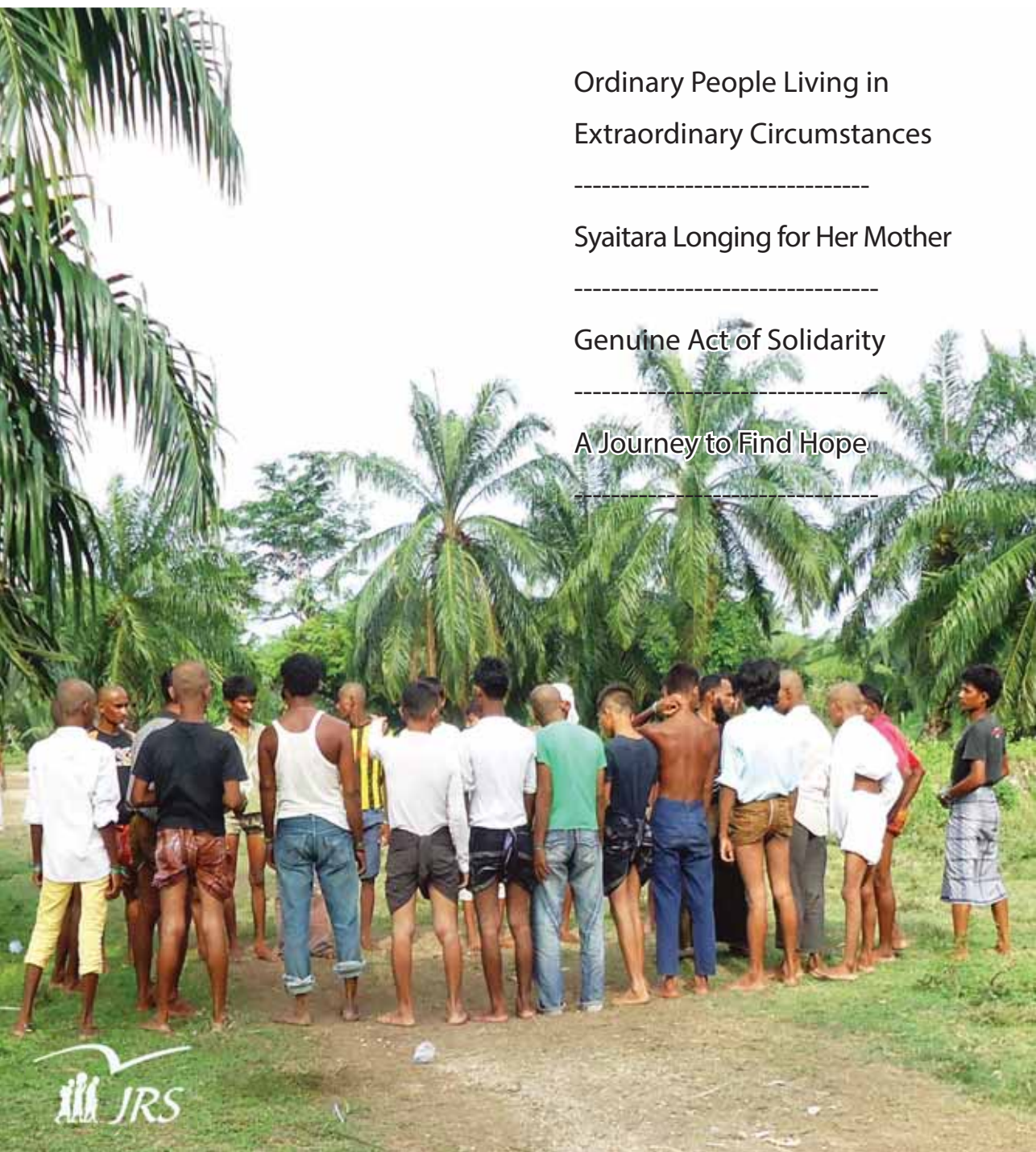
Accompany, Serve and Advocate the Cause of Forcibly Displaced People

Ordinary People Living in
Extraordinary Circumstances

Syaitara Longing for Her Mother

Genuine Act of Solidarity

A Journey to Find Hope



Ordinary People Living in Extraordinary Circumstances

Th. A. Maswan Susinto SJ



Rohingya refugee receiving medical treatment in one of the camps in Aceh

This year's World Refugee Day draws attention to our brothers and sisters who are experiencing an extraordinary situation, namely asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and refugees. Those have felt the loss, separation, and the destruction caused by war, conflicts, natural disasters, discrimination, threats or suppression of their rights. If we are to weigh the meaning of poverty, it is them who are experiencing poverty as capability deprivation (Amartya Sen: 1999). These last few years, we encounter refugees who have experienced displacement several times during their lives. Some of them lost their homes three times after their houses had been vandalized and burned, just because of being different. Initially, many of those refugees were like us, free to choose a job, school, or embrace a different view on life or members of the public at large. When hatred was kindled, they who are different were no longer free to choose. From there onwards, any access to public life began to be closed to them.

Since May we are again aware of the presence of people fleeing on boats, 996 Rohingya

refugees arrived in Aceh and North Sumatra along with 795 immigrants from Bangladesh (UNHCR, as of May 28, 2015). We see clearly the results of prolonged suppression of basic rights, their potentials, life choices, and their chances to survive. They are part of a class of the world's inhabitants without citizenship (stateless people) who globally number around 10 million. The only option left for them is to flee the country that has rejected them, taking the risk of being exploited or ill treated by people smugglers or even death in the middle of the ocean.

However, the truly remarkable aspect to be witnessed in the encounter with refugees is not the extreme situations they experience but the look on their faces, the expressions of a belief that wars and disasters can deprive them of their life opportunities, but cannot break or exhausted their spirits. All the fear and trauma they experienced, do not remove their will or hope in life. They did not stop at being a victim, but they continued to live as survivors.

At the end of May, we were present in the refugee camps of Kuala Langsa and Bayeun in East Aceh, to explore the wider needs and provide some urgent medical assistance, including for children that spend weeks drifting in the ocean. We will come back to accompany and serve, to fill the gaps that have not been answered by the brothers and sisters who are kindly attending to the refugees. Far from merely seeing them as passive recipients of aid, we would like first of all to appreciate the life energy of the survivors of gross violations of human rights in Southeast Asia in the 21st century.

It is the inspiring hospitality shared by fishermen and the people of Aceh to the Rohingya refugees and immigrants from Bangladesh that leads a fight against the stigma of “illegal immigrants” in countries where the boat people and other refugees stranded. Noble souls extending help to those in need become challenge to the

criminalization of asylum-seekers around the globe. Hopefully, the attention and solidarity extended to the 1,791 displaced Rohingya and Bangladeshi immigrants will also be an opportunity for state and society to rediscover the approximately 12,000 asylum seekers and refugees who currently live in Indonesia with similar experience and needs. On World Refugee Day June 20, 2015, let us celebrate the resilience, courage, and vitality of asylum seekers and refugees.

In Children's Hands

In children's hands, paper becomes Sinbad's boat

unconquered by the waves, become a bird whose calls open flowers in the forest; in children's mouths, the word is Sacred.

“Hey mister, please leave my game alone.”

(a poem by Sapardi Djoko Damono, 1981)

Syaitara Longing for Her Mother

Daryadi & Indrayanto

Syaitara, a 10 years old Rohingya girl has been longing for her family since she was separated from her mother Khonsuma (34) and her two siblings Imam Husein (8) and Nurul Amin (6). The boat carrying her was stranded on the coast of Aceh Tamiang, while the other boat carrying her family was stranded on Pusong Telaga Tujuh Island, Langsa and then towed to Kuala Langsa. Syaitara is now staying at SKB Kuala Simpang Camp while her mother and siblings stay at Kuala Langsa Camp, about 38km apart.

Syaitara and her family left Rakhine Myanmar to reunite with the father, who is now in Malaysia. They travelled together from Myanmar to the border of Myanmar-Thailand with a cargo boat, then planed to travel by land through Thailand. But they were refused to enter the country by the Thailand authorities



Rohingya children playing around the camp



Rohingya refugees queuing for medical check up

then loaded onto some fishing boats and directed towards the Indonesian shore until they got stranded on the east coast of Aceh on May 11, 2015.

At the port of Kuala Langsa, there are now 678 displaced people who occupy two warehouses. It is very hot during the day due to lack of air circulation.

When JRS showed Syaitara's picture to Khonsuma, she was very happy. Clasp hands on her chest and repeating her daughter's name, "Syaitara... Syaitara," Khonsuma expressed how excited she was to finally hear about her daughter again. Then she called her other two children to show Syaitara's picture on the JRS' camera. Because of language limitation, JRS could only said, "Syaitara is ok" and raised thumb to hint the good news.

Syaitara now stays at SKB Kuala Simpang Camp with 8 adult females and 4 girls. There are also 35 males, including 11 men from Bangladesh. Her camp has quite decent facilities. Normally used as accommodation for teacher training in Aceh Tamiang district, there were rooms with beds for the refugees.

Some activist from a local NGO, Hijabers Tamiang, Dira and Liza Tantiana accompany refugees in this camp. When JRS visited on Friday (29/5), Liza and Dira were chatting with Syaitara using a mix of languages, including sign language and Indonesian. Syaitara shyly expressed that she wanted to see her mother. She could only say "Bibi, bibi" which means mother. Hijabers had tried to find Syaitara's

mother in Kuala Langsa Camp and showed Syaitara's picture through a smartphone. They were hoping to reunite them but it didn't get any further than that due to some permit restriction. According to Dira, she already contacted Langsa City Social Agency, Red Cross, and Immigration to either transfer Syaitara to her mother's camp or the other way around.

Tahir, a fisherman from Pusong Telaga Tujuh Island had tried to help them too. He printed a picture of Syaitara and gave it to her mother. But he couldn't do anything further than wait until the relevant authorities will approve the transfer.

Tahir told JRS his story in helping the boat people. While helping two boats towed to Kuala Langsa port on May 13, Tahir and his friends were initially stopped before entering Kuala Langsa port. However Tahir insisted and reminded port authorities that he was carrying people who needed help, and according to Aceh's local marine law it is obligatory to help other human beings drifting in the sea. Finally the boat people, including Syaitara's mother and her siblings were pulled to the port and got helped by the locals.

JRS had reported Syaitara's situation to international organizations and local authorities, but until JRS left on May 30, it was still not clear when she would be reunited with her family. The last update JRS received from Hijabers was still the same. Dira and her friends are still hopeful to soon reunite Syaitara with her mother and siblings.

A Genuine Act of Solidarity

Triarani Utami



Indonesian class for detainees at Manado Immigration Detention Centre

(Seminari Tinggi Hati Kudus) Pineleng. Some seminarians then decided to volunteer for JRS teaching guitar and Indonesian classes to people detained.

Erlyn is now actively involved as volunteer teacher in Indonesian classes for the detainees. When we asked about her experience entering the Detention Centre for the first time, she said, *“I was shocked at first, the detainees were huge! But turned out they were really nice and polite, I felt comfortable to talk with them.”*

Erlyn also learned from her teaching experience. *“Before I started teaching, JRS staff has taught me about their cultural norms, how to act and behave. So I didn’t experience any cultural obstacles or misunderstanding,”* she continued, *“but sometimes I couldn’t help laughing when I heard them speak wrong words in Indonesian. At the end we often laugh together.”* She remembers with a smile.

Reflecting on her experience teaching and meeting the detainees, Erlyn said, *“I was reminded to always be humble. Sometimes when we are already in a high position, we forget to look down. There are people forced to always look down just because they need help. This is what this experience has reminded me of.”*

With spontaneity to act, willingness to learn and humbleness, Erlyn Kindangen has built a bridge of solidarity with asylum seekers and refugees during her weekly encounters. She is an example for the many volunteers and people that extend a hand to asylum seekers and refugees. It is in simple words and deeds that solidarity is practiced, as well as in shared tears and laughter. The direct human encounter is the only way to learn and overcome differences, prejudices, and suspicions that so often emerge when we hear about foreigners.

“Really? There are refugees in Manado?” was the first reaction of Erlyn Kindangen after hearing about JRS services in Manado. JRS Indonesia started accompanying refugees and asylum seeker at Manado Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) in January 2015 .

Erlyn, a middle aged entrepreneur told us about her experience becoming a JRS volunteer.

“At first, I was just picking up my friend Elis (JRS staff) at the Manado airport when she arrived. But after I heard more about the refugee situation, I felt the urge to help. It’s so strange, they left their country to find freedom but then they got locked up in a prison instead. They’re not criminals!” she said with expressive voice and gesture.

Erlyn then got actively involved in connecting JRS with some stakeholders in the Manado Catholic community. One of the results was a public awareness session JRS held for seminarians in Sacred Heart Major Seminary

A Journey to Find Hope

Keyhan Farahmand

My name is Keyhan. I am a Hazara refugee from Afghanistan now living in Australia. Before I came here, I was in Indonesia for about three years and spent my time in several places. Places that I will never forget.

I came from a country which has a long history of conflict and millions of its citizens are refugees around the world. The trace of Hazara refugees can be found in many developed countries and some of us came to Indonesia to find a way to Australia. Let me tell you my journey, it is a story about finding hope.

First I arrived in Sumatra Island, a place where many asylum seekers pass through. Getting to Sumatra was one of the difficult and dangerous times in my life. Sailing in a small fishing boat with twelve other people for nights and days, without enough food and water, or toilet was like living in hell! I remember when I got off from the fishing boat, I couldn't control myself and fell down to the ground.

From Sumatra, I was brought to Jakarta then Surabaya. I was there for 10 days, then started my journey through the Indian Ocean toward Australia. After 4 very long days of sea sickness, a storm hit our boat. We couldn't do much but trying to hold on. It was horrible and I am sure nobody choose that danger for adventure. We had no other option. Seeking safety and trying to find safe place to live had put us in that situation. The next morning we found ourselves surrounded by Indonesian authorities and they took us in custody and sent us back to Surabaya.

I was detained in Surabaya Detention Center for about a year. It was hard to live with so many uncomfortable restrictions, not being able to wear shoes, to have contact with the outside world, or even to shave myself. Then I was released and transferred to Yogyakarta.



Keyhand Farahmand

Photo courtesy of Verity Chambers/Sydney TAFE Media

My experience as refugee in Yogyakarta was quite different from what I experienced in other parts of Indonesia. My bad past experiences had led me to believe that there was no good people and they only act nice because they expect something in return. But Yogyakarta and its people changed my mind and taught me to think positively.



JRS recognises the human dignity in refugees through its accompaniment

sometimes bad ideas came into my mind. But all the help and accompaniment from JRS staff and some friends I met there helped me get through with my life.

The programs that JRS offers to refugees are very helpful and it is really good that such organization exists in Yogyakarta. Since formal education is not accesible for refugees, it's great that JRS gives us opportunity to at least learn English language. I also think that it could be good idea if Indonesian language course is provided for refugees and to introduce Indonesian culture and history to them.

I got the chance to have some excursion to Kaliurang, the Palace Museum and also Gunung Merapi museum. From those visits I learned about Indonesian culture, history and the amazing nature. The Borobudur and Prambanan temples and Kaliurang were my favourite places.

All of my friends in JRS and IOM had a special role in building the foundation of my new life. Without their help I am sure that I would not have made it myself. In February 2013 I received bad news from home, my cousin was killed in a bomb blast in Quetta Pakistan and two other of my family had been injured, also there wasn't any response yet from UNHCR and the Australian embassy regarding to my application. So I was really desperate and

After many months in Yogyakarta, my application was finally approved and I departed to Australia. I had taken a diploma in Screen and Media in Sydney TAFE College for a year, which then allowed me to apply for a university degree. Later on, with the help from Australian Department of Human Services I received a full scholarship from University of Technology Sydney. Now I really enjoy my time studying Art and Communication at the



Computer course for refugees

faculty of Media Art and Production. I was born in a non-educated family and I am the first generation of my family to get the chance to being thought in an academic environment. I am so grateful for this.

I am also grateful to those who have helped me. People around the world have very different views about refugees and unfortunately most are either against or don't care at all about refugees. But we refugees and asylum seekers are also human. I really hope there will be more people caring about humanity, be kinder and respond to this refugee issue and treat us as a fellow human being.



This kind of direct and personal approach of individual interaction and cooperation with refugees mutually empowers refugees and JRS personnel alike

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