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Letter from the Director



Mr Louie Bacomo, Regional Director

JRS is proud to present to you in this issue the result of our work and the challenges we faced in the past months. Our project teams in Thailand have accompanied urban refugees to find safe spaces where they can find comfort and joy in the company of other refugees, develop livelihood skills and graduate from the language and vocational courses. Our teams on both sides of the border have also witnessed the voluntary return of some refugees from the camps in northern Thailand to Myanmar. Cambodia continues to campaign for the ban of landmines and cluster munitions and reach out to countries to get rid of these inhumane remnants of war. These are efforts sustained by commitment of JRS staff and refugees who help and participate in our work and partners who value and support JRS and the

cause of the forcibly displaced.

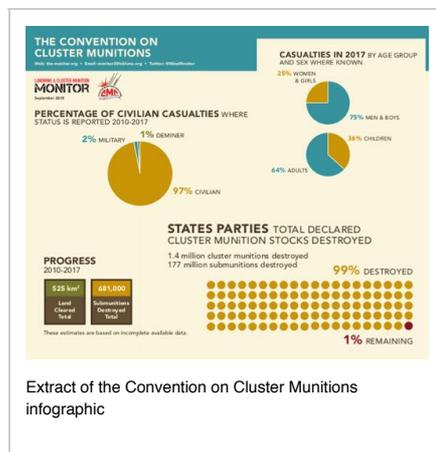
The past months also saw the challenges of working in fragile situations. The campaign of the Thai government to get rid of undocumented people has led to massive arrests of thousands in various parts of the country. Unfortunately, because of the lack of a legal framework, the campaign also led to the detention of asylum seekers and refugees including vulnerable women and children. In Myanmar, conflict and armed clashes continue discouraging many refugees and endangering those who have returned hoping to rebuild their lives. The political situation in Cambodia remains fragile with the dominance of the main party destroying legitimate opposition.

JRS continues to be present and labor under difficult circumstances with the encouragement and inspiration of many collaborators. The refugee communities inspire us with their resilience and perseverance. We have assisted refugees out of detention but those who are still detained have worked with us to keep their families safe. We had to suspend our urban education activities in Bangkok for some weeks but our students have encouraged us to continue with the classes with their desire to learn and hope for their future. Our partners have continually offered support for emerging needs and various emergencies.

I want to thank all of you for making us feel we have companions in our work and for ensuring the protection and well-being of the people we serve. We continue to seek improved and creative ways to address the challenges of moving forward in fragility with you.

Mr Louie Bacomo, Regional Director

Cambodia: Ten years on, treaty to ban cluster munitions yields positive impact



Extract of the Convention on Cluster Munitions infographic

Phnom Penh, 6 September 2018 - Since the adoption of the Convention on Cluster Munitions in 2008, significant strides have been made in eradicating cluster munitions. This is according to the latest report of the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) released on August 31 at the United Nations headquarters in Geneva.

The Cluster Munition Monitor 2018 found that between 2010 and 2017, a total of more than 688,000 sub-munitions were destroyed and at least 518 square kilometres of land was cleared worldwide. In 2017, the overwhelming majority of reported clearance took place in three of the most contaminated countries – all located in Asia Pacific: Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam, where 78 per cent of the global cluster munition-contaminated land clearance and 86 per cent of unexploded sub-munition destruction took place.

“It is exactly 10 years since one of our campaigners who lost two eyes and two arms to cluster bombs went to Dublin to push for a treaty against them. In the period since then a lot of clearance and stockpile destruction has been achieved,” said Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Cambodia Director Sr Denise Coghlan RSM. JRS Cambodia is the focal point for the Cambodia Campaign to Ban Landmines and Cluster Munitions (CCBL).

“Cambodia must sign the treaty and join the community of nations that decries the horrible suffering

these weapons have caused in their past and the past of others”, Sr Denise Coghlan, JRS Cambodia Director.

Despite being one of the earliest proponents, Cambodia is not a State Party to the Convention, which prohibits all use, stockpiling, production and transfer of cluster munitions.

CCBL has been actively calling on the Cambodian government to be a signatory to the Convention. “Cambodia must sign the treaty and join the community of nations that decries the horrible suffering these weapons have caused in their past and the past of others,” said Sr Coghlan.

On the day the report was released, the campaign team joined representatives from Hindu, Muslim, Taoist, Protestant, Buddhist, Jewish and Catholic communities in Cambodia to hear landmine survivor and CCBL member Tun Channareth speak. The group also participated in another interfaith gathering of about a thousand people, including government officials, against human trafficking.

“We took the opportunity to hang the cluster bomb banners and show that war often produces human trafficking,” shared Sr Coghlan.

Cluster munitions are air-dropped or ground-launched explosives weapons that release or eject smaller sub-munitions that disperse indiscriminately over a large area. The large number of sub-munitions that fail to explode as intended often result in large numbers of civilian casualties.

It is estimated that 26 million sub-munitions were dropped on Cambodia during the Vietnam War, concentrated on the country’s north-eastern provinces along its border with Lao PDR and Vietnam. Up to six million did not detonate and have remained on Cambodia’s land for over 50 years, where they continue to threaten lives, impede economic productivity and force communities to live with constant fear and uncertainty.

“Ten years after the adoption of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the treaty has an extremely impressive record of compliance due to the steadfast commitment by States Parties to the agreement’s binding provisions,” said Jeff Abramson, Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor Program Manager. “This treaty is an example of a life-saving and successful international effort, one that has stigmatised the use of cluster munitions and is helping move us toward a world free of these indiscriminate weapons.”

Download [Cluster Munition Monitor 2018](#) and [Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2018](#)

JCAP Communications team

Myanmar: The first official return of Myanmar refugees to Kayah State



One of the official entry point of the Voluntary return day with government officials

In October 2016, the first group of refugees who returned to Myanmar through UNHCR facilitation, had 71 persons.

Loikaw, 24 September 2018 – For thirty years, the camps have provided safe haven for those who have fled Myanmar due to ongoing conflict there. Now, some Myanmar refugees living in the camps at the Thai border are returning to Myanmar. Even though there is no formal tripartite agreement, the UNHCR is facilitating this repatriation through dialogue with the governments of Myanmar and Thailand.

In October 2016, the first group of refugees who returned to Myanmar through UNHCR facilitation, had 71 persons. On 7 May 2018, 93 refugees went back to Myanmar, including 20 returning to Kayah State. These returnees, all residents of the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp in Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand, became the first refugees to be officially repatriated to Kayah State through UNHCR facilitation. Voluntary returns facilitated by the UNHCR is ongoing slowly and in small scale but at a steady pace—another return is planned around October 2018.

There are still currently approximately 93,300 refugees in the nine camps along the Thai-Myanmar border. It is estimated that 18,000 refugees have returned to Myanmar spontaneously without getting assistance from the UNHCR. (Since 2016, the UNHCR has operated Voluntary Repatriation Centers (VRC) in the camps and provided counselling to those who are interested in returning to

Myanmar with facilitation.)

Government authorities from Mae Hong Son Province, UNHCR officials, and representatives of a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) active in the camp, accompanied the returnees to the border. They were introduced to Kayah State government officials, and then brought the Maese Township Hall. At the hall, state government authorities, UNHCR officials, and representatives of NGOs working in Kayah State, officially welcomed them.

The returnees received a cash grant from the UNHCR. This grant included money for transportation from the border crossing to their respective final destinations, reintegration support, and food for six months. In addition to the grant, they received counselling, mine risk education, and household items such as mosquito nets. Kayah State government authorities also provided cash assistance and other support. The returnees were assured of free-medical service for a year.

One of the concerns raised by one returnee family is that shelter is not included in the UNHCR assistance package or by the local government. In Kayah, the returnee families are staying with their relatives. Within a month, some of them will have already moved to stay with other relatives.

During JRS' partners visit to the returnees, one man said "We do high-land farming while we also help our relatives on their farm. We only know how to farm. We don't have our own house yet. As soon as we have one, we will move to it."

As far as education was concerned, he did not encounter any difficulty in enrolling his daughter in kindergarten at one government school, not far from where they are temporarily staying.

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) supports the local Catholic Church in accompanying the returnees. The goal is to help returnees become well integrated in their host communities in Myanmar.

Boe Meh

Myanmar: Providing love and learning through education



Roi San says that serving people through education has truly enriched her life. (JRS)

Myitkyina, 13 July 2018 – Roi San, a 24-year old woman, is serving as a volunteer teacher at a Catholic school in the town of Myitkyina in Myanmar's Kachin State. She began teaching in this school two years ago after graduating from a teacher training course supported by the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS).

Promoting quality education is one of the most urgent needs in many of Myanmar's remote areas, especially due to the country's ongoing civil war which began in 2011. As a response to this need, the Catholic Church sends volunteer teachers each year to the conflict-affected areas to address the shortage of teachers. It was one of these groups of volunteer teachers that Roi San joined.

"I was interested in teaching young children. I wanted to have an experience as a volunteer teacher educating young children in very remote areas, where the government cannot reach," she explained.

To achieve her goal, she did JRS's 9-month Teacher Training Program, the first 7 months of which are theoretical learning, followed by 2 months of practicum. Usually, the practicum is done in one of the biggest camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Myitkyina. There, the student teachers create relationships of love and hope with the children, and they grow their confidence in teaching.

After graduation, the Diocesan Education Commission (DEC), JRS's main partner in Myanmar, assigns the trained volunteer teachers to camps and community schools supported by DEC. The volunteers must commit to working as a teacher for at least two years.

Serving people in need has enriched Roi San's life. "I learned a lot from the teacher training course. It improved especially my self-confidence. I also learned how to coordinate with other people and organisations. I know that all these skills I learned from the training, will not only be useful in teaching but also will help me to grow as a person," said Roi San.

Roi San loves her students and, together with other teachers, she spends extra time supporting slower learners. She is trying her best to nurture the development of young children, who are the hope of the community and country as it undergoes the process of nation-building.

"The happiest time for me is when the students and I are playing games together and when the learning objectives I set for students are achieved," said Roi San.

In Kachin, there are still many remote areas where children cannot enjoy their right to an education. Structural barriers to education as well as protracted armed conflicts are hindering the continuation of their studies. Through teachers like Roi San, JRS in Myanmar is working together with local partners to fill gaps in education for internally displaced and vulnerable children.

Thailand: Refugees find safe haven in sports



Pakistani refugees playing cricket. (Mr Joseph/JRS)

Bangkok, 10 July 2018 - A group of Pakistani refugees stand in position in a small sheltered cricket field in Bangkok. The bowler throws the ball forcefully. The batsman hits it hard and runs to the other side of the field. He scores! His team cheers.

Playing cricket is a joyful outlet for a group of Pakistani refugees who have lived in Bangkok for years. It is a time when the men can forget that they are refugees.

Cricket is part of a community outreach program launched by the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in Thailand to help refugees deal with stress. Initiated in 2018 by the JRS' Psychosocial Community Unit, the program promotes refugees' participation in sports. Through JRS sports activities, refugee men living throughout Bangkok come together to shed stress by having fun.

"These men are staying in their rooms, depressed, without the right to work, and fearful about their legal status. Playing cricket gives them an opportunity to meet each other. It creates stronger bonds in the community," says Joseph, a Pakistani who helped organize the cricket matches.

Thailand is not a signatory to the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention, and does not yet have its own refugee legislation. Therefore, all refugees, asylum seekers, and other undocumented persons living in Thailand are at risk of arrest by Thai immigration police.

"I'm grateful for the support JRS provides us. Playing cricket definitely helps us to cope with tension and stress. It's relaxing and refreshing", says Joseph.

According to the United Nations, sports can have a positive influence on the development of human rights, as well as on social and economic development. The UN General Assembly has declared that 6 April each year is the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace. This day aims to bring goodwill and positive social outcomes to all through sporting activities.

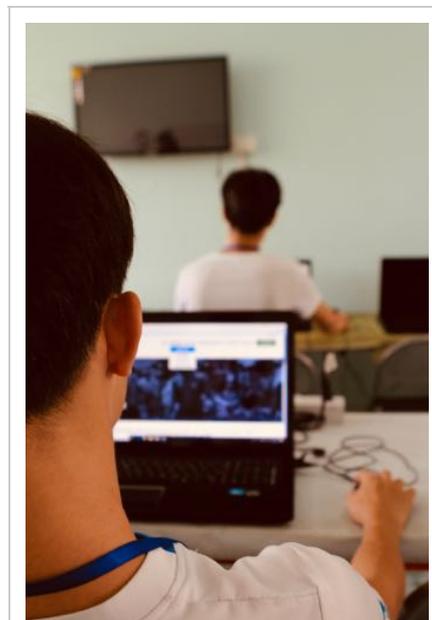
"Sport has the capacity to empower individuals and bring one's moral values to the forefront. It can play a strategic role in transferring life skills and communicating useful, encouraging messages on important issues, thus driving social change. This new commemoration on the international calendar will further promote the value of sport as a catalyst for development and peace." – Wilfried Lemke, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace.

Pakistani refugee men show their interest in playing cricket because cricket is commonly played in Pakistan and is the most famous sport amongst Pakistanis. The participants are eager to play and JRS organized a cricket tournament the following month. This sport activity greatly benefits the participants both mentally and physically. It is not wrong to say that cricket is a safe haven for Pakistani refugee men where they seek refuge from stress and depression associated with their daily experience as refugees.

Prattana Tublom, JRS Thailand Caseworker

*Names have been changed

Thailand: Refugee graduation ceremony and beyond



Danh during his computer class in Bangkok (Stephane Larue)

“ I am truly blessed to have had the opportunity to be in this program and now I want to give back in providing my support to the school.”
Danh, recent graduate of the Urban Education Project.

Bangkok, 2 August 2018 - Danh, a 21 year-old Vietnamese refugee, walked slowly towards the centre of the stage when his name was called. His steps were unstable but proud. He was handed a certificate that acknowledged his successful hard work. He smiled at the camera while his fellow students and teachers gave him a big round of applause. Danh is differently abled, but it does not define him.

Danh received his certificate for completing the language and skill training provided by the Urban Education Project (UEP) of Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Thailand. The project, offered to urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok, provides a 6-month course of Thai and English classes, as well as vocational skill training in computers, sewing, and hairdressing. The 2018 cohort had 27 refugees from various nationalities. All 27 finished their training in June. The UEP held a graduation ceremony to celebrate their success.

Danh will give some support to the school as soon as he graduates.

“I will prepare the classroom and make sure that class materials and devices are ready. I am truly blessed to have had the opportunity to be in this program and now I want to give back in providing my support to the school.”

Danh is a good example of where there's a will, there's a way. He has lived with a physical challenge throughout his entire life. He has demonstrated how to be successful. Danh's story is not about what society can do to help persons who are differently abled, but rather, what persons who are differently abled can do and give back to the society.

The JRS developed the UEP because educational opportunities for refugees are scarce in Thailand. Most refugees and asylum seekers living in Thailand are undocumented. This makes it difficult for them to access schools.

Nonetheless, there is one door to education in Thailand that remains open to refugees. In 2005, the Cabinet Resolution on Education for Unregistered Persons provided the right to education for all children in Thailand, regardless of race, sex, nationality and legal status. The Resolution gave them the right to 15 years of free basic education.

Unfortunately, there remain a number of obstacles that limit learning opportunities for refugees in Bangkok. Security is the first and foremost. Thailand is not a signatory to the Refugee Convention of 1951 and does not provide a legal status to refugees. Therefore, refugees are not protected by law. They are often afraid to go outside of their homes because they fear arrest. Parents are afraid to send their children to school alone or even walk them to school.

In addition, classes offered by non-profit organizations are non-formal. This means that the classes refugees take in non-formal programs are not recognized officially. They cannot be used in formal education (i.e. technical colleges and universities) in order to obtain diplomas or degrees in Thailand or in their countries of resettlement.

“Even though the legislation for education exists in Thailand, there are still gaps and needs when talking about education for refugees and asylum seekers in the urban context,” says Khun Kornkaew Phimoei, Project Director of the UEP.

**Name has been changed to protect identity.*

Diakonia September 2018
Editor: Elphie Galland