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Letter from Director: Fr. Bambang Sipayung SJ



In these last three months, media informed us on violence in Europe. Some perspectives tried to link it with the influx of refugees' to Europe. In addition to that, the presidential race in the United States of America where Donald Trump often has made speeches that discredits and divides people through negative pictures of certain groups of people. Just last week here in Thailand, a series of bombs exploded in several cities in the south which are tourists destinations. We can add many incidents, events or words that happened lately in the world to demonstrate attempts to not only to discourage but also to repress human spirit through fear, hatred and division.

I often wonder whether attempts to crush human spirit with fear, hatred and division will finally win their battle? Or will it simply find the fact and the reality that the human spirit cannot be crushed and repressed despite its extreme circumstances? What happened during the World Refugee Day celebration in Bangkok proves to me that despite terror, human spirit can move beyond the fear to express their real joy. It echoes what Victor Frankl, a psychologist

who went through the Nazi's concentration camps, says that people are driven by "striving to find a meaning in one's life" including in suffering and painful experiences.

It also reminds Pope Francis words in Evangelii Nuntiandi "I can say that the most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have seen in my life were in poor people who had little to hold on to. I also think of the real joy shown by others who, even amid pressing professional obligations, were able to preserve, in detachment and simplicity, a heart full of faith."

Myanmar: Enlightening the candle of future in Kachin



Teachers doing their practicum with Maina IDP Camp Children. (Irene Ho, JRS)

John is one of the teachers who completed the nine months teachers' training organized by Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in Myitkyina, Episcopal Commission of Education (ECE) and Diocese of Myitkyina Education Commission (DEC) in May 2015. DEC assigned these young boys and girls with an average age of 20 to remote places to kindle and maintain the fire of learning and knowledge building for two years time in Myanmar and for Kachin state.

In 2011, the long-standing cease-fire in Kachin state with the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and its military wing the Kachin Independence OArmy (KIA) ended due to an attack by the Burmese Army against a KIA stronghold near Laisha. It forced people to leave their own villages to find safer places and to the border of Myanmar and China. The conflict disrupted the daily

routine and hard lives of the people in these dangerous areas. The existing remote schools that have been struggling to provide a good quality education for children found it even more difficult to maintain the quality, let alone to improve the education of the children.

The idea of a remote place can often suggest a far off place with a scenic view of green mountainous terrain, flowing clean water running through rivers, people fishing using agricultural as a livelihood to sustain their lives. It also may suggest a lack of infrastructure and facilities which globalized-internet minded people cannot live without.

In the Kachin context, these remote places are ongoing conflict-affected areas. Taking up a challenge of becoming a teacher in those areas from a Myitkyina based young person is a commitment deserving of praise and honorable service. John took that challenge because he wants to be a part of shaping the future of Myanmar and the Kachin people.

In August 2015, JRS, ECE and DEC started another batch of 12 participants for the teachers' training following John's batch of 2015. The participants concluded their nine months programs with 9 participants graduating. DEC then assigned them to several remote schools along with those several others from 2015 groups. Sr. Rosemary FI from JRS said that she observed not only growing skills and confidence as young teachers, but also maturity as they have to adjust to the new people coming to the course. They learned practical skills of teaching such as class management, lesson planning, teaching specific subjects, and learning from action – a reflection from Ignatian Paradigm Pedagogy. The approach of the

training focused on the children as individuals and subjects of learning which need to grow in their own learning process through the use of creative ways delivering the lessons rather than memorizing. Just before graduation, the participants have to go through a month practicum with children during the summer course.

As John attended the graduating second batch, he also decided that he would like to return to the place where he taught in the previous year. He has a new mission now, to lead and to induct the newly graduated teachers who have never been to that area. He wants to be like a big brother who accompanies them in their early journey as teachers, dealing with the same issues he had to in his first few months there. And yet, John requested if a mechanism could be put in place where more senior staff of DEC and JRS can visit them and help them with technical and on site specific subject review and training. This will give the chance for a more systematic review and accompaniment of these remotely assigned teachers to develop and to grow, not only in their skills, but also in their commitment as individuals. John longs for a new generation with more knowledge, confidence and ability to shape the future of their country.

Written by Fr. Bambang Sipayung SJ in Kachin State, Myanmar

Australia: Why stopping the boats does not solve the problem – Part 1



Refugees arrive safely to the shores of Greece after taking a dangerous passage. 238,220 migrants and refugees have entered Europe by sea in 2016. So far this year an estimated 2,942 deaths have been recorded. (Sergei Camara)

“The complacency in Australia about the fate of those who can no longer arrive here by boat can be summed up in the old adage: out of sight, out of mind.”

At first glance, the “Australian model” may seem attractive to politicians in Europe: this uncompromising and unapologetically militarised solution seems to have brought order to what had been a period of unregulated arrivals of thousands of people on Australia’s shores. In the words of the former commander of Operation Sovereign Borders Lieutenant General Angus Campbell, “The Australia government has introduced the toughest border protection measures ever... If you travel by boat to Australia you will never make Australia home.”

However, if Foreign Minister Kurz were to look more closely he would see that Australia’s tough border policies are having unforeseen and potentially catastrophic consequences.

The harm that Australia’s policies has caused to the people stranded on Nauru and Manus Island, those detained in mainland detention centres, and the nearly 30,000 people seeking asylum and living in the Australian community, is well documented. With the 2016 election now behind us, and the return of Coalition government, it is timely to review the government’s current strategy and ask the question: is “stopping the boats” a successful, long-term, sustainable approach?

If stopping the boats and securing Australia’s borders are the end goal – as the government unashamedly admits it is – then it appears the government has had a degree of success. The boats have been stopped from arriving on Australian shores; however, they have not stopped leaving Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam entirely.

While the number of boats attempting the journey to Australia has been dramatically reduced, people have not stopped trying to make their way to a country where they can find safety. In May of this year a boat with 12 Sri Lankans, including women and children, was intercepted off the Australian territory of Cocos (Keeling) Islands. Within two days the group had been returned to Sri Lanka. In fact, since Operation Sovereign Borders began in 2013, 26 boats have been intercepted, and a total of 708 people returned to the countries from which they fled.

What about the people who would have boarded boats headed for Australia, but have not done so because of its current policy of absolute deterrence? Has a “stop the boats” policy resolved the global challenge of forced migration?

Evidence has emerged in a recent paper by Caroline Fleay and Lisa Hartley[1] that “Australian policies are having disturbing impacts beyond our borders.” The authors describe how the Australian government’s direct collaboration with Sri Lankan security agencies has prevented the departure of people who are in fear of persecution and would like to seek asylum elsewhere.

The paper also outlines how the government’s policies restrict the ability of people seeking asylum to move beyond transit countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia, and effectively warehouse them in countries that deny them access to health services, education, and the labour market; these people also have little to no prospect of resettlement.

Alarming, the paper cites community members in Malaysia who claim that, because the route to Australia has been blocked, “those seeking safety and protection from their home countries are now undertaking longer and more hazardous journeys to Europe.” This troubling development points to an uncomfortable truth: all because people are not drowning on their way to Australia, this does not mean that they are not dying elsewhere. The complacency in Australia about the fate of those who can no longer arrive here by boat can be summed up in the old adage: out of sight, out of mind.

The publication of this research coincides with the release of the United Nations agency for refugees (UNHCR) Global Trends Report 2015. The report finds that an unprecedented number – some 65.3 million people, or one person in 113 – was displaced by conflict and persecution in 2015. The overwhelming majority – 86 percent – of those displaced reside in developing nations. They are there not because those countries have formally agreed to resettle recognised refugees

through the United Nations resettlement programme, but because those countries have kept their borders open and offered much needed refuge.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, has said, "At sea, a frightening number of refugees and migrants are dying each year; on land, people fleeing war are finding their way blocked by closed borders. Closing borders does not solve the problem."

As conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and South Sudan continue, the UNHCR is desperately urging neighbouring countries to keep their borders open. Australia's policy of shutting its doors to people in need of protection undermines the requests from the UN to those countries, and completely ignores the plight of thousands of people stranded across the Asia Pacific region.

However, a border policy that is completely open is not the alternative to Australia's "stop the boats" policy. Countries have the right to protect the integrity and security of their borders, and to regulate the movement of people across those borders. That right, however, cannot be allowed to render void the right of people to cross borders to seek asylum under the conventions of international law. It also should not countenance the return of people to countries where they may face persecution, harm, and violations of their human rights; or where they cannot receive a fair and timely hearing of their asylum claims.

Greater efforts must be made to reduce the need for people to take dangerous and irregular journeys in the first place. Rather than pouring valuable resources into returning boats and forcibly repatriating irregular migrants, Australia's efforts should be focused on engaging our regional neighbours to strengthen cooperation, address the root causes of forced migration, and develop the region's own protection infrastructure.

Historically, states in Asia Pacific have viewed protection as something that happens elsewhere, often in industrialised countries such as the U.S., Canada, and Australia. Assisting our neighbours to develop and coordinate asylum procedures could lead to the desirable outcome of refugees receiving the same treatment no matter where they go. One key consequence of increasing protection for asylum seekers in transit countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia would therefore be the reduction of onward movement to countries such as Australia.

The Australian government's current strategy of preventing people from fleeing persecution in their countries of origin, and restricting people from leaving transit countries where governments are unable or unwilling to provide protection, is causing people to take longer and more dangerous journeys to Europe and other parts of the world. If Australia's approach were to be universally adopted the entire global protection regime would grind to a halt. If you could not flee to another country without that country's prior approval, which is essentially the case now with Australia, there would certainly be no phenomenon of refugees in this world. The result however would be a global catastrophe: millions of people would face harm and death in the places from which they cannot flee.

Stopping the boats, while undoubtedly an expensive and difficult operation for Australia's Border Force, is a simplistic solution to a complex problem: people moving irregularly in search of safety and security. Forced migration is a challenging problem with no simple solution. In the short to medium term, countries need to come together in an effort to manage the challenge more effectively. Australia's current plan – to deter, deflect and ignore – is prohibitively expensive, inhumane, and ineffective in addressing the global challenge of forced migration. Crucially, a unilateral policy of closed borders fatally and comprehensively undermines the architecture of the global protection regime.

By Oliver White, Assistant Director, Jesuit Refugee Service

Next...The government argues that by stopping the boats more places can be offered through our humanitarian programme to refugees waiting patiently in UNHCR administered camps around the world. In this policy series we will examine some of the problems with this argument, most importantly, how stopping the boats undermines the architecture of the global protection regime. We will examine the effectiveness of the global resettlement program as a solution for the worlds displaced; the ethics and morality of stopping the boats; and finally, what an effective regional plan for refugee protection would look like.

[1] Fleay, C. & Hartley, L. (2016). The regional impacts of Australian asylum seeker policies: What 'stopping the boats' means for people seeking asylum in our region. Academy of the Social Sciences Australia Academy Papers 2/2016, Canberra. <http://www.assa.edu.au/publications/papers/234>

Bangkok: The Urban Refugee, the Sacrament of God



Fr Jae-wook Lee SJ shares his experience volunteering with JRS in Bangkok and how the real lives of refugees is one of struggle in the urban setting.

To make matters worse, the role I was to take in Bangkok was like a joke. Reception manager! This place seemed to precipitously designed only 'for me'; it had not existed until I joined. The ostensible reason was for me, a Jesuit, to become the face of JRS, but the original one was to allow me to join with minimum inconvenience to the team. Double ouch! Things have gone awry again.

Now we come to the most interesting part of the story - the reality of mine. I always want to be a kind, nice and wonderful Jesuit. Conflictingly, however, my main job at JRS-URP [Jesuit Refugee Service, Urban Refugee Programme] was to say "NO!" I had to tell our clients "NO" at least over ten times in a day: "I am sorry. I can understand your difficult situation. But there is a limit to our abilities. We cannot help and save everyone. You don't meet our criteria. There are more people with more urgent needs. I hope you will understand." And then they cry on my shoulder full of despair, anger and resentment, saying: "Argh! You call yourself a Catholic Jesuit priest? This stuff may be just work for you, but this is life for us! Okay, I see. (Your) God bless you!" In this context, the blessings they gave me were not really blessings of good wish. Triple ouch! Things were constantly getting worse!

Now, I have also had a fixed image of refugees. Whenever I imagined them, the first vision that appeared in my mind was one of fluttering tents in a desert, or bamboo shelters knitted with large stitches in a refugee camp. I recently added

another image of fully packed boats crossing the ocean perilously. I have never imagined those refugees wearing Nike shirts and sneakers, and using smart phones, before coming to Bangkok. I did not even think that there would be refugees who looked much better than me (at least by appearances). The image of 'refugees', which I had unwittingly constructed, was distinct.

However, the urban refugees whom I met in Bangkok have completely changed these images of mine. Their real lives of struggle in the urban setting were totally different from my expectation. It is even more dangerous, tough and intense. Their miserable situation is really hard to describe. They are easily forgotten because they are not visible. They are deeply apprehensive because they are always exposed to the risk of being arrested by immigration authorities. They are severely vulnerable because it is not easy to get any job and to receive proper wages with their illegal status. They are firmly excluded from the medical system in one of the most well-known medical tourism cities, Bangkok. They are pitifully marginalised from the formal and normal education system. Comparing with even camp refugees, they are a lot poorer. There is only one reason why there is much less help and interest for those urban refugees. Because they are invisible and intangible!

Beyond all these difficulties, there is a single dominant challenge for them. It is 'uncertainty'. Roughly speaking, it will take eight years for urban refugees to resettle to a third country from Bangkok in the context of 2016, and the waiting time is increasing. And resettlement is not the outcome for everyone. Even though there are no guarantees in life, living in uncertainty is one of the most difficult struggles. These asylum seekers and refugees in Bangkok are putting their lives on the line fighting against uncertainty. That is why they are so demanding. Because they are poor and they have no one to lean on.

Paradoxically, every day here was a day of repentance for me. The very poor people, asylum seekers and refugees whom I met every day made me repent. This was not because of the relative comfort I had, but because of their presence itself. The presence of invisible urban refugees showed the invisible God to me in a visible way. The holy family, Jesus, Joseph and Mary, who fled into Egypt escaping from persecution in the Bible (Mt 2: 3-22), visited me every day. The Hebrew who escaped from the slavery and oppression of the Pharaoh (Exodus) asked me for help every day. The Israeli who were in Exile (BC 587-538) came to me every day. The orphans and widows, whom Jesus loved deeply, reached out to me every day. Our invisible God came to me visibly through them, invisible asylum seekers and refugees, every day. In this sense, urban refugees are the sacrament of God for me.

I was thankful that there was always something new to learn from them. I, who had studied theology and became a priest, was newly learning from them about what faith is. I was newly learning from them, the seemingly hopeless, about what hope is. I was newly learning from those who could not seem to take care of themselves about what love is. I was newly learning from Muslim refugees who our Christian God is. I was newly learning from the fragile about what human dignity is. Above all, I was newly learning from them all about how blessed and graced my life is; the life which seemed like a series of disasters before! Now I hope that when it is my time to leave this world, God will not say to me at the gates, "you do not meet our criteria..."

I thank my friends, those who are forcibly displaced, for bearing with and blessing me, the one who usually had to say 'no'!

I thank my colleagues at JRS for giving me this wonderful position and opportunities to be accompanied, served, and advocated for!

I thank my companion Jesuit, Fr Bambang for sending me to Bangkok, not to Mae Hong Son!

I thank my God for always transforming my disappointed self into a consoled one!

Fr Jae-wook Lee, SJ
Urban Refugee Programme, JRS Thailand

Indonesia- Accompaniment : Encountering Those Forsaken



English study materials used by Rohingya refugees in Aceh.

After visiting for several days and observing the refugees' activities, I noticed a teenage boy sitting alone in a tent, while his friends were outside. I was so curious, so I went to see him. "My name Mohammad Hasan," he introduced himself. Looking shy and unconfident, he answered my questions with inarticulate Indonesian. "Saya no like study, saya hari-hari duduk di sini. Sore hari saya play football (I don't like studying, I sit here every day. In the afternoon, I play football)". During my early days here I had never seen him joining his friends in classes.

I couldn't believe Hasan didn't like studying. I tried to find out why he was reluctant to join his friends in studying English or other subjects. One day, I finally got the answer. "Brother, I don't like study, I'm embarrassed. I can't read, I can't write," he answered when I urged him to tell me why.

After observing for few days, I realized Hasan was not the only one. There were also Rofik, Mohammed Aziz, and Armin who were just sitting around during the study time. They felt discouraged to join the classes for being illiterate.

Then an idea came to me, to do a special and personal intervention for them. I asked my friends to accompany Hasan and the other boys to learn how to read and write. From meeting to meeting we could see they were getting more excited to learn.

One and a half months later, Hasan looked different. He seemed more cheerful and confident. "Brother, now I can write my name. This is father, this is mother, and this is my sister", Hasan wrote his parents' and sibling's name on a small white board. I complimented him with a big smile on my face.

Hasan is a symbol of forgotten refugees, those left behind. While some refugees get up and join activities, there are some out of sight. Those who are afraid to show themselves, those who are shy and unconfident, they're the ones who need intervention.

While most people choose to pay attention to those who can be seen, we should look out and pay more attention to those invisible. In addressing big needs when caring for people, there are often some small aspects out of our sight. In ensuring no one is forgotten or left behind lays the real value of genuine accompaniment.

Since their arrival in May 2015, much support has been provided to the Rohingya arrivals in Aceh by the local and international community. In an euphoric outpour of sympathy and welcome for the Rohingya guests communities, local and national government were moved to helping them.

As time goes by, the waves of assistance provided for the refugees still continue. Not less than 18 local, national, and international organizations, in cooperation with local governments, are doing their part to help refugees; UNHCR, IOM, JRS, Save The Children, Dompot Dhuafa, PKPU, Insan TV, Sheep Indonesia Foundation, Peduli Muslim, Red Crescent Indonesia, ACF, CMC, Roja TV, MSF, As-sunni, MDMC, Geutanyoe Foundation, BPBD, Tagana, and Aceh Timur District and Langsa City government, and Immigration Office are working together in helping the Rohingya refugees.

This is a very interesting phenomenon, as it is different to the common response to refugees in Indonesia. Asylum seekers and refugees are usually tended to only by Immigration, UNHCR and IOM who have a direct mandate from or agreement with the Indonesian government. The response to Rohingya refugees and Bangladesh immigrants in Aceh involved local authorities, humanitarian agencies, and community groups collaborating together in a Rohingya Task Force organized by Aceh Timur District and Langsa City government, providing the space for many parts of society to participate, expressing a commitment and concern on refugee and asylum seeker issues. But the involvement of many parties needed proper management and guidelines addressing mis-communication, coordination and overlapping in services, conflict of interests, or even how to avoid jealousy by the local community. Based on this experience, it was necessary to establish guidelines for community based humanitarian care for refugees. Guidelines based on these experiences are currently combined by Sheep Indonesia Foundation and will be published in the coming months.

As much material support was provided by generous organizations, JRS chose to focus on supporting the coordination of responses as well as increase the understanding on who the Rohingya are, their status as refugees and asylum seekers in conducting public awareness activities, such as talk shows on local radio. Public discussions with government officials were facilitated by some NGOs (Geutanyoe Foundation, SCF, and Sheep Indonesia Foundation) inviting JRS to share about our under

standing and experience in accompanying and serving refugees in other parts of Indonesia.

Following the principle to ensure no refugee is left behind and no aspect is forgotten, JRS focused its support on assisting coordination, addressing emerging gaps and those forgotten, sharing information and supporting others in outreach to the local community and to the Rohingya refugees aiming to improve understanding about cultural differences.

*Names have been changed to protect identities.

* Original article on JRS Indonesia website.



Apou Charlotte has welcomed dozens of refugees into her home who have fled from Central African Republic to her community in Cameroon. "Refugees," she says, "bring gifts to our communities." (Denis Bosnic / Jesuit Refugee Service).

This World Refugee Day, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) urges you to remember we must not only provide refugees with a safe place to stay, but with opportunities to grow and contribute to society. To truly protect means keeping people safe from all evils, including poverty, isolation, exploitation, misconception and neglect.

Refugees in motion eventually must stop, and when they do, they change. As the fabrics of society change, host communities change too. So many people are forced to flee from war, persecution and oppression. But we as humanity also seem to be fleeing from each other. Content with a comfortable sense of normalcy, we fear change. However, change does not mean carelessly tossing ourselves into the unknown. It rather means choosing how we want to positively reshape our societies through positive encounter with our neighbours.

"We need to reinvent our way of being together. We must show mercy to and accept one another, and this act of mercy must be mutual and concrete. Opening doors is not enough; we must open ourselves and our minds to unlock our potential as a society," said JRS International Director Fr Thomas H Smolich SJ.

Access to quality education allows refugees better to fulfil their own potential and fully contribute to the growth, strength and stability of communities. Knowledge is the one thing that no war or disaster can seize.

"I ask everyone to be educated for not only themselves, but for the betterment of their nation. To say it simply: no education, no life," said Seda Abdallah Abakar, a refugee and teacher at the JRS school in Goz Amir camp in Chad.

Host communities across the globe must guarantee that refugees do not lose their fundamental right to learn. Let's educate ourselves in the highest sense and learn from one another. We must genuinely open ourselves, our minds and our communities to unlock our potential as a society. This World Refugee Day, let's take the opportunity to mobilise our compassion and put our Mercy in Motion.

For Video URL: <https://youtu.be/ziz9a-2Zhvs>

For more information

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Note to editors

The Jesuit Refugee Service programmes are found in nearly 50 countries, providing assistance to refugees, internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and those held in detention centres. The main areas of work are in the field of education, psychosocial support, emergency assistance, healthcare, livelihood activities and social services. www.jrs.net

The JRS Mercy in Motion campaign aims to provide 100,000 additional refugee children and youth with access to education by the year 2020. The campaign, launched on 8 December 2015 with the Holy Year of Mercy, will continue through the end of 2016. www.mercy-in-motion.org

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