

servir

JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE

NO. 52

- NEPAL Time to move on
 - TUNISIA Hope in the desert
 - ETHIOPIA Beyond survival
 - CAR The diamond curse
 - THAILAND Rice & curry
- ...and more*

hope for a
better future



accompany | serve | defend

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COVER PHOTO
Celebrating in a camp for Bhutanese refugees in eastern Nepal.
(Peter Balleis SJ/JRS)

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The Jesuit Refugee Service is an international Catholic organisation established in 1980 by Pedro Arrupe SJ. Its mission is to accompany, serve and defend the cause of forcibly displaced people.

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Appeal (back cover)

The following are used throughout this issue

IDP/s Internally displaced person/s

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



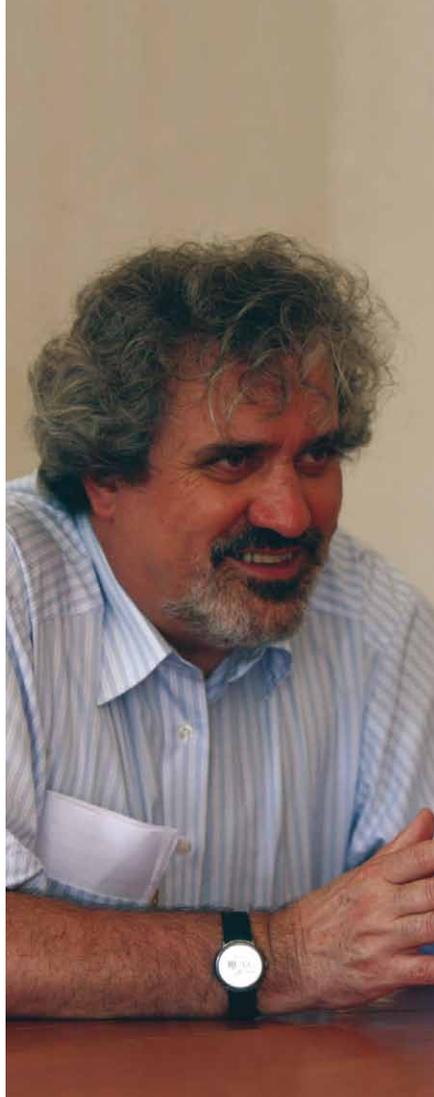
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acronyms



I love this school

I love this school and this camp, all my teachers and friends, because I have passed class X from this school. The school in Goldhap camp, eastern Nepal, is empty except for the budding weeds. On a dusty blackboard, alongside the neatly listed totals of students on the very last day of school, this message is chalked in a child's writing. Neither the school nor the camp exist anymore. Most likely the child who scribbled on the board is already gone, one among thousands of Bhutanese refugees who have been resettled, mostly in the US.

To draw such praise, this school must have been a great place to learn – even if it was just a simple structure in a camp, hardly an ideal setting. The tens of thousands of children who attended this and other schools run by JRS in eastern Nepal will take to their new home not only memories of tough camp life but happy ones too. The girl in the cover photo, whose graceful traditional dance radiates hope, comes from another Nepal camp – the photo was taken just three months before her school closed.

This is the happy ending of a saga of exile lasting 20 years. It is also a time of nostalgia, as PS Amalraj SJ, who has served Bhutanese refugees for many years, writes in his reflection about God's plea: *Let my people go* (Ex 5:1). The JRS team in Nepal worked with the refugees for a long time but it is time to let go now.

Meanwhile, the crisis in Somalia has forced thousands of people to flee to Kenya and Ethiopia to escape war and famine. New camps have sprung up in barren surroundings. Since most of the refugees are children, JRS has made plans for education. When the drought is over, the refugees probably will not return to a failed state that gives no protection. The school will offer a space of security, peace and hope in the camp environment. It will be a place where boys and, crucially, girls learn for their future, where the foundation for a new Somalia will be laid. One day the camps for Somali refugees will no longer be needed. When this time comes, if a grateful child leaves behind a message, then JRS would have fulfilled its mission.

Peter Balleis SJ

JRS International Director

📷 New arrivals in Shousha in February 2011. Many had lived in Libya for years before fleeing the unrest. (A.Duclos/UNHCR)



life *is* stronger than death

“ Try to imagine how difficult it is to build hope among refugees living in the open desert. But this is just what is being done by the sisters. Their names are printed in our hearts.

Treza Debasay ”

When unrest broke out in Libya in February 2011, an exodus of foreigners started to flood across the border into Tunisia. Most were migrant workers; others had been waiting in Libya for the chance to be smuggled into Europe to seek asylum. The majority were repatriated by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) however those who could not return home, mostly asylum seekers from sub-Saharan Africa, remain

stuck in transit camps in Tunisia. Some have applied for resettlement in Europe or North America while others hope to return to Libya, to try to undertake the highly risky journey across the Mediterranean Sea. JRS has dispatched two religious sisters to Tunisia to work for the local Church in Shousha, a transit camp that is home to nearly 4,000 people in the desert of Ras Jedir, a few kilometres from the border with Libya.

Sr Mercy Mbugua, a veteran JRS worker, reflects on her time in Shousha so far.

The desert is sad and when there is wind it is terrible. Most of the people here left Libya by lorry, a means of transport for which they had to pay dearly, some with a few of their belongings. Others were rescued from the sea; they lost everything. The refugees are very vulnerable. They suffered a good deal in their home country and some had crossed more than one border to reach Libya. There many had met with hostility and, because life is stronger than death, they had tried several times to leave the country, using dangerous means, only too aware of the risks they would encounter. For many, this dream has not been extinguished as they cannot wait in the desert without seeing any light at the end of the tunnel.

On the material side, food, clothes, and so on, the refugees are well cared for. What they need more is accompaniment, someone to lend them an ear, to listen to their



☒ Sr Mercy Mbugua (left) and Sr Elisabeth Won surrounded by refugees in Tunisia.

stories and to journey with them from this point. We are helping the women by gathering them together for sewing, so that they may share their experiences and build bridges among themselves. Let me give one concrete example: two women had a misunderstanding and would not talk to one another. When Sr Elisabeth intervened, one reacted quickly and asked for the wool to pass to the other woman, so they

were reconciled.

One of those I have accompanied so far told me: "My sister, I feel better and was able to sleep better." Another said: "You have given me great value by coming to my tent." They have welcomed me warmly as their sister. Despite language barriers, we manage to communicate and to laugh about life – life is stronger than death!

For Treza Debasay from Eritrea, life is more bearable in Shousha since the sisters turned up. She writes:



☒ A. Duclos/UNHCR

Hope is the living bread for human beings, it is what gives them courage and widens their vision for a better life. Sr Elisabeth brought a wave of hope for us refugees by visiting our tents even during the hottest weather here in the Sahara. Each day, she visits different communities of refugees, from Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and others. She tells us to be hopeful, to see a future beyond the daily stress and survival. The sisters are teaching many women how to make dresses, providing material

for free to those who are interested. They are busy the whole day, going from one student to the next, to guide them as they sew. This pastime has served to divert our minds from the stress we are under, to help us to relax while we work, to share our talents, and to spend time together.

Try to imagine how difficult it is to build hope among refugees living in the open desert. But this is just what is being done by the sisters. Their names are printed in our hearts. 📍

a reminder of *God's presence*

Jack Mattimore SJ is JRS chaplain at Buffalo detention facility in New York State. He says pastoral ministry in detention echoes the personal care and compassion that characterised the mission of Jesus.

In the United States, the mission of JRS is implemented by a small group of men and women who serve as chaplains in detention facilities. Our opportunity to advocate for those in detention is quite limited. Even our ability to serve them, at times, can seem meagre. But what we can do best is accompany them, be with them as they await a future that is often unknown, and faced with fear.

Of the hundreds of men I have met in the detention facility over the years, some have been apart from their families for months or even years. Some have families in the US; the families of others are thousands of miles away, and may not even know their husband, father or son has been detained. Some have been in the US only a few weeks or months but others have grown up here, gone to school, served in the US military, married and raised families, and worked hard for many years. While some have served time in prison, most are locked up for the first time. They come from places as close as Canada and Mexico and as far as Africa and Asia.

Once they have established a relationship with the chaplain,

the men are eager to talk about their loved ones, proudly sharing photographs, and repeating what their children told them either in letters or during phone calls. They ask for prayers for their families, particularly wanting a blessing for their safety. When the time comes to see the judge or when they know their time to leave is fast approaching, they ask for prayers for themselves. One man, when asked what it was we should pray for, told me, "I want what God wants, but I need help in accepting whatever that is." Despite obvious temptations to anger, bitterness and self-pity, many turn to God for strength and courage in the face of whatever is to come.

Throughout the detention facility, God is sought and worshipped in many ways, many times each day. Muslims bow low in prayer when they gather on Fridays. Catholics kneel silently with heads bowed after Communion. Sikhs sit on the floor in a small circle and pray and talk peacefully and quietly. At Bible Study, all listen attentively as each man has an opportunity to share his insight into a particular

☒ Celebrating the Eucharist at the Mira Loma detention facility in California. (Christian Fuchs/JRS USA)





☒ The Mira Loma detention facility in Lancaster, California, where JRS runs a chaplaincy programme together with the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the California Jesuit Province. (Christian Fuchs/JRS USA)

passage and how the Word has helped him to be a better person.

Chaplains in the detention facilities work to ensure that the men and women there are allowed to practise their religious beliefs. We recruit volunteers from different faiths to come and lead services, including Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, Seventh Day Adventist and Jehovah Witness. We coordinate kosher meals for our Jewish brethren and halal food for our Muslim brethren. Arranging for fasting and times of special prayer and celebration are all part of the chaplain's work as well.

The Gospels tell stories of Jesus taking care of large groups at a time, such as the thousands he fed with a few fish and loaves, or the multitudes he taught on the mountain or on the seashore. But Jesus also cared for people one on

one, seeking out individuals, and in speaking and listening to each of them patiently and quietly, he brought them peace and a sense of their value in God's eyes. As we make our rounds of the housing units, being available for anyone who wants to talk, or simply walking through with a smile and a reassuring nod, we seek to be a peaceful reminder of the presence of God.

In Matthew 25, in the story of the last judgment, Jesus tells us that being merciful includes

visiting those in prison. Being with those kept apart from society, for any reason, is a work of mercy that few are given the opportunity to perform. We chaplains working for JRS are blessed to have our work in the detention facilities, and, in turn, we seek to be a blessing for our brothers and sisters who are detained. Our faith tells us that it is Jesus we visit and that realisation brings consolation. And in the spirit of St Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuit order, we do it all for the greater glory of God. 



INFO POINT

The number of detained 'non-citizens' in the US has grown dramatically, more than tripling over the past decade. Most of those detained have committed no criminal offence. Poverty or persecution has led them to overstay their visas or enter the country without documents.

After living and working for years in the US, they must confront the real possibility of deportation. JRS USA has chaplaincy programmes in major detention centres in Arizona, California, New York and Texas.

all *these* *children* in the *desert*

JRS is setting up education and counselling projects to reach out to Somalis displaced in 2011 by drought and famine. The focus of this new intervention is to look beyond survival, to build hope for the future.



 (right) Newly arrived refugees from Somalia wait outside the reception centre in Dollo Ado.

 (below) Arriving to Dollo Ado.

(Angelika Mendes/JRS)



“What is really sad is the huge number of children in every camp. There are children everywhere, with nothing to do. It was one of the worst things I have ever seen: all these children in the desert, in the heat and dust, on the rocks, between thorny bushes, looking out of the tents. And what I found most astonishing: they smile at you, friendly, looking at you with open eyes.”

The children described by Frido Pflueger SJ are Somalis displaced by one of the world’s

worst humanitarian crises: the most severe drought to hit eastern Africa in 60 years, affecting more than 13 million people. Fr Frido, who is director of JRS in this region, saw the little refugees when he visited Dollo Ado in southeast Ethiopia, across the border from Somalia.

Somalis have long been escaping the civil war in their country. This year, tens of thousands of people left southern Somalia, mostly in June and July, walking for days in a desperate search for food. Some died of

hunger on the way or shortly after reaching aid centres. The drought tipped the precarious balance between life and death in this war-torn region, much of which is controlled by the al-Shabaab militia, an extreme Islamist group opposed to any western influence, including humanitarian aid.

Many Somalis fleeing the famine headed for Dollo Ado. Although the number of new arrivals has dropped compared to earlier in the year, the average daily rate was nearly 300 in October, and a fifth camp was constructed as the number of refugees exceeded 134,000, mostly women and children.

JRS was quick to dispatch a needs assessment team to Dollo Ado to see how best to serve the Somali refugees in their new “totally dry and desert-like”

surroundings. While basic needs like shelter and food are being met by UNHCR and a host of NGOs, the fact that the vast majority of the camp population is under 18 immediately suggested educational activities.

Given its Jesuit pedagogical tradition, JRS has decided to build a secondary school in one of the camps – the assessment team found no access to education at this level – to cater for refugees and the host community. Another aim is to support the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs of Ethiopia (ARRA), which provides some primary education in Dollo Ado. Throughout several years of service to refugees elsewhere in Ethiopia, JRS has built a close working relationship with ARRA.

The assessment team also discerned the need for recreational

activities such as sports, drama and music, and for counselling to help the refugees cope with the trauma of displacement, of loss of livelihood and years of insecurity and war. The psychosocial intervention will be shaped along the lines of a successful JRS project that has been under way for years in Kakuma camp in Kenya among refugees from Somalia and other countries.

The decisions about what services to offer reveal that, although intervening in an emergency situation, JRS is looking to be in Dollo Ado for the long haul, considering the chronic instability in Somalia. Apart from giving the children who so impressed Fr Frido something meaningful to do, JRS will offer them and their parents concrete hope for the future. 📍

📷 Arriving to Dollo Ado. (Angelika Mendes/JRS)





☒ Josephine Adame, from Ouadda, is one of countless civilians who have had to endure lasting violence in northern CAR. (Peter Balleis SJ/JRS)

the 'diamond curse'

Clashes between two armed groups in northeast Central African Republic (CAR) in September 2011 led to displacement and the temporary closure of JRS projects. Albert Edgar Manyuchi, JRS CAR Director, delves into the causes of the violence that has heaped more suffering on civilians in this volatile region.

Some 30 people were killed and more than 11,000 displaced when conflict erupted between armed groups in Haute Kotto Province in September 2011. JRS, which has been present in this remote region since 2008, was forced to close its offices temporarily in the towns of Bria and Ouadda on 19 and 21 September respectively, and to suspend extensive projects under way to support 68 schools and to provide pastoral care together with the local Church.

The explosion of violence

On 10 September 2011, simmering antagonism and sporadic incidents between the CPJP (*Convention des Patriotes pour la Justice et la Paix*) and UFDR (*Union des Forces Democratique pour le Rassemblement*) escalated into fighting that ended with a ceasefire two weeks later. While the UFDR is based in the Gula ethnic group, the CPJP is Ronga-based. The explosion of violence was ignited by events in August, in which 12 people of Ronga

JRS IN CAR

Primary school education is the main focus of JRS CAR, whose services benefit around 44,000 people in two war-affected provinces: Haute Kotto in the northeast and Ouham in the northwest. Activities include school construction, distribution of educational materials, teacher-training and particularly the promotion of education for girls. JRS has helped local displaced communities to establish Parent-Teacher Associations and to develop sports activities. The education projects are complemented by pastoral services: parish capacity-building, celebration of the sacraments, and other activities implemented in cooperation with the local Church. JRS is also involved in peace-building and advocacy.

origin were killed at UFDR bases in Haute Kotto. In retaliation, the CPJP launched attacks on people of Gula origin in the provincial capital of Bria and other areas, so that the violence spread throughout the province. Many civilians in Bria, including the parents of a JRS staff member, lost their homes to arson. In Ouadda, a house rented by the International Medical Corps (IMC) was attacked as the proprietor is of Ronga origin. The sub-prefect of Ouadda was killed and the mayor fled to Ndele, the headquarters of the CPJP.

Fighting over diamonds

The Gula and Ronga have long lived side by side in Haute Kotto. Although relations between the two have not always been trouble-free, it appears that the 'new' factor that has caused them to deteriorate so badly is control of the trade in diamonds, which are found in abundance in this vast and sparsely populated province.

Previously both groups formed part of the UFDR in its battle against the government. However, it was always the Gula who had been at the helm, directly controlling proceeds from the diamond mines dotted across Haute Kotto. Their domination of the trade was made possible by well-established traditional family networks that cross into

Sudan. Since the Gula live on both sides of the border, it was easy to trade or smuggle diamonds from mining claims in Haute Kotto. The vast Gula network sustained the UFDR for a long time so the Ronga may have felt it was better to be subordinate to them in order to reap the benefits of the diamond trade.

Things changed in 2007 when the UFDR signed an agreement with the government to end the war. The UFDR became part of the government and in 2010 was made responsible for security in the region. This transformation imposed behaviour change on the combatants; one outcome was that some mining claims were left to entrepreneurs to run, and the trade to diamond merchants. Income from the illicit diamond trade became harder to come by for many UFDR members; in fact, the peace accord was resisted by some, including officials.

So the UFDR that signed the treaty with the government was already a fragmented military apparatus, and discontented rebels welcomed the formation of the CPJP by a breakaway faction of the UFDR and fresh elements from various communities. While the Gula remained in the UFDR, the Ronga joined the new group *en masse*. The CPJP gave the Ronga an opportunity to vie for control of the diamond

 Marie, the cook of JRS in Ouadda, and her baby. (Peter Balleis SJ/JRS)





Members of the Christian community in Ouadda. (Peter Balleis SJ/JRS)

INFO POINT

Although it is rich in resources, CAR is one of the least developed countries in the world, plagued by conflict which, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), directly affects up to 36% of the population. The situation, especially in the north, remains volatile and unstable due to sporadic outbreaks of violence. In 2010, the number of IDPs in CAR rose from 168,000 to 192,000.

mines. As the UFDR resisted attempts to weed it out of the mines, conflict became inevitable, leading to the September deaths and displacement that spread like wildfire throughout the province.

Civilians bear the brunt

The armed men hit out at each other but, as happens all too often, some also lashed out at civilians. Communities have suffered from the fighting over the diamond trade, and JRS staff and projects have suffered too. Staff members who are not from Bria and Ouadda were evacuated to Bangui, travelling by motorbike and plane. In the past year, one JRS vehicle and some communications equipment were stolen by suspected CPJP rebels.

Despite the challenges, JRS wants to resume work in Haute Kotto as soon as possible. Since at the time of writing, the end of October, the ceasefire is still holding, JRS plans to return to Bria in early November and to Ouadda later in the month. We are sure humanitarian needs will have increased substantially.

Diamonds are supposed to signify wealth but this is not so for the people of Haute Kotto. The 'diamond curse' has brought untold anguish for many and the presence of JRS on these demanding frontiers means that we have had to bear the brunt of this chaos too. However we are determined to keep on accompanying, serving and defending the people of this region. 📍

rice and *curry*

Richard Haavisto, Pedro Arrupe
Fellow at the Refugee Studies
Centre of Oxford University,
sketches some impressions
of the Koug Jor refugee
community in Thailand, with
whom he spent six months.

Rice and curry is a phrase that worked itself into every conversation I had with Koug Jor community members. It is emblematic of social conviviality within the household that together produces and consumes the rice and curry. The availability of rice and curry signifies that they are in a good place. It symbolises a quiet mind as well as a full stomach. In their discussions of where they have been, are and want to be, community members frequently use rice and curry as a metaphor to describe their well-being, or lack of it.

Koug Jor camp contains the most vulnerable households of four neighbouring Burmese villages that came under attack in May 2002. This attack forced them across the border to Thailand. This move followed numerous forced moves within Burma itself. The people in the camp are overwhelmingly Shan, one of the many politico-cultural communities constituting Burma.

The article highlights the importance of understanding the displacement-resettlement experience from the refugee's perspective. It is only through this understanding of their perspective that we can accompany, serve and defend the rights of forcibly displaced people. In my case, it was crystal clear from the beginning that Koug Jor community members approached their experience with a drastically different mindset and idiom from mine.

(Dis)placement

To me, the displacement of Koug Jor community members is a familiar story of political persecution and economic vulnerability. The Burmese government's infamous "Four Cuts" strategy for dealing with political unrest led to the forced internal displacement of some 520,000 Shan from 1996 to the present. Shan out-migration to Thailand increased from an estimated 80,000 in 1996 to 200,000 by 2005. In addition to the forced relocations, human rights documentation details continued high levels of extrajudicial executions, rape and other abuses committed by the Tatmadaw (Burmese armed forces) against civilians. This documentation further describes the precarious economic situation of displaced Shan wrought by the loss of land, property and housing through relocation, confiscation, destruction and financial extortion. There is also the Burmese government's consistent use of forced labour.

One can discern elements of this objective narrative in the displacement narratives of Koug Jor community members. What is particularly striking, however, is that this is not how they tell their story. Community members acknowledge but do not focus on their political persecution. It was not political persecution alone that led to their displacement but the persistent, irregular and abusive intrusion of the state into their ordered lives. Constant



☒ JRS supports the transport of children in Koung Jor camp to Kindergarten classes in Piang Luang. (Don Doll SJ/JRS)

state interruptions made it difficult for them to *yu lii kin waan* (taste their rice and curry). While human rights abuses constitute a significant part of their displacement narratives, they appeared subordinate to the individual's desire for social harmony and mental equanimity.

Community members do not depict themselves as economically vulnerable either, though by all objective criteria they clearly were and are at risk. Prior to their displacement, the vast majority were farmers who rarely had the land or labour to be self-sufficient in food production. They relied heavily on forest foraging and intra-community loans to make up the difference. Displacement has robbed them of their few material possessions and social network. Still, none of their

movements were described as a bid for economic survival or a search for economic gain. Rather, their migrations were described as a search for a more satisfactory state of mind; one in which they were not *khan tsau yaap tsau* (distressed, annoyed, harassed in mind).

An anthropological interpretation

A number of Shan specialists told me when I began my research that understanding the Shan boils down to an understanding of *khwan* and *phi* (souls and spirits). Shan culture views the body as a contested site where souls and spirits meet and do battle. All people are susceptible to soul loss and spirit invasion. Illness, the fragmentation of self, results from the absence of runaway *khwan*,

the life force that animates the body, and the invasion of *phi*, a disembodied life force that feeds on the body. *Sara* (traditional healers) and *tsalei* (lay Buddhist scripturists) stage events that *haung khwan* (call the souls to return) and *pat phi* (sweep away the spirits).

Shan extend the notion of the body as a contested site to their villages. Shan live in place-defined groups. Where many neighbouring peoples use ancestral relics or lineal descent to exclude outsiders, Shan constitute their groups inclusively to individuals sharing a common place. Regular rituals are held that *song phi* (lure troublesome spirits out of the village) and *mei waan* (ritually empower the households comprising the village).

There is a direct logical relationship between the Shan

notion of the contested body and displacement. *Khwan* seek a safe refuge. An unquiet mind, a mental malaise brought on by a surfeit of emotion, causes an individual's soul(s) to flee. The equanimity of a quiet mind ensures the individual's spiritual completeness. The quest for a quiet mind, as a result, tempers the displacement narrative of Koung Jor community members. Displacement becomes more a search for an autonomous, ritually empowered space that enables the consolidation of self.

(Re)placement

The seeming successful reestablishment of the Shan in a Thai "refugee" camp is usually attributed to their small number, ethnic homogeneity, the cultural and historical commonalities they share with the host Thai community and their relative autonomy vis-à-vis officially encamped recognised refugees along Thailand's western border. This script, however, does not tell

the whole story.

Place is critically important for the Shan but the actual physical space is not. They possess a ready blueprint for socialising physical space and creating place. A critical component of this blueprint is a village head and council who coordinate Shan village life and navigate the village's interactions with the external world. They attempt to provide harmony within and accommodation without. Shan leadership is not political, village leaders are merit-making managers who construct an enabling space in which individuals can have, and taste, their rice and curry.

Political violence in Burma effectively destroyed this regulatory aspect of village life. Village heads and councillors occupied increasingly dangerous posts, caught in the conflicting demands of the Tatmadaw and armed political groups. They were eliminated, withdrew from public life or fled with no one willing to assume the unoccupied posts. This

further threatened the mental equanimity of the Shan.

A modicum of peace in their new environment has facilitated the return to an ordered universe (at least within the camp) that the Koung Jor community understands and appreciates. Once again, councillors and community members alike fulfil their assigned roles and responsibilities. The resulting order has, moreover, engendered a restoration of the moral precepts governing human interaction.

I do not want to leave the reader with too rosy a picture of the Shan in Koung Jor. The constraints imposed by their uncertain legal status, combined with the fact that they are now landless rice farmers, necessitates a dependency on the goodwill of international donors. Nonetheless, the community has achieved a minor miracle, a miracle partially dependent on our understanding of the displacement-resettlement experience from their perspective. 📍



Molly Mullen/JRS



Oliver White/JRS

📍 A woman works at a loom in Koung Jor camp, weaving shawls to sell with material supplied by JRS; (left) shawls woven in the camp.

ignoring grounds for *protection*

Thousands of Colombians who go to neighbouring Venezuela to escape violence are not granted protection. Minerva Vitti, who works on communications and advocacy in the JRS Latin America office, explains why.

Ana* and José are two names on a long list of asylum seekers whose applications for refugee status in Venezuela have been refused on the grounds that they fled situations of generalised violence and were not individually persecuted.

Back in Colombia, the district Ana and José came from was declared a demilitarised buffer zone when peace talks were held between 1998 and 2002. Once the talks failed, fighting broke out. Aeroplanes and helicopters flew overhead. Bombs were dropped and shots fired without warning. One of the bombs fell on Ana's neighbour's house, blowing off a part of his leg.

"We said no, no, no! From one moment to the next they'll kill your kid and you'll be screwed We had a business in the village from which we got by. We had a small plot of land with bananas and cassava. But if you went there you were considered a guerrilla because it was guerrilla territory and you were supposedly in contact with them. And this is frightening," Ana recalls.

When military operations

started in 2005, groups of up to 20 people were arrested and brought to Bogotá. The army had lists of suspects and every day there were more arrests.

Having three children – two of whom were adolescents – was worrying in this scenario. Ana and José frequently heard the guerrillas were recruiting the sons of so-and-so. "All of this was going on. Every little thing adds up, they all add up," said José. Until one day when they contacted another family and fled to Venezuela.

Ana and José were lost when they arrived. While customs were similar they also noticed marked differences. They soon realised they could regularise their immigration status by applying for asylum to the national council for refugees (CNR). But their applications were refused. "They said there wasn't sufficient

proof because there was conflict throughout Colombia: generalised violence," said José.

This type of decision by the CNR generates fear. While the agency has improved its decision-making capacity, it has rejected a large number of asylum applications, usually citing generalised violence, which is not included in the refugee definition of the asylum act (LORRAA). This restrictive definition explains the low level of refugee recognition. According to figures produced by UNHCR, there are 15,490 asylum seekers in Venezuela; yet the CNR has only recognised 2,790 (130 cases in 2010) as refugees.

Unfortunately, in Venezuela, it is not enough that asylum seekers' lives are at risk. "The country is at war. But if you are not taken to prison, you're not frightened; if your children are not



☒ A refugee for years, this man runs a garage in El Nula, on the Venezuelan side of the border with Colombia. (Peter Balleis SJ/JRS)



Many new arrivals from Colombia head for this barrio outside San Cristóbal, the capital of the Venezuelan state of Táchira. (Peter Balleis SJ/JRS)

recruited by the guerrillas, you're not frightened. If only one of these things happens it's not so bad, but four or five together is much worse," said José.

In January 2011, changes to internal regulations on Venezuela's asylum procedures added the concept of "manifestly unfounded" applications. If applicants cannot show that they have fled their country of origin for a reason listed in the refugee act, or if their allegations are apparently false, they may be refused. Since generalised violence is not mentioned in the LORRAA refugee definition, applications may be turned down regardless of the circumstances presented and without an in-depth assessment of their merits.

This shows that Venezuela has failed to correctly interpret the 1951 UN Geneva Convention. Bárbara Nava, a refugee lawyer and former JRS Latin America

Advocacy Officer, says an accurate application of the landmark convention involves an evaluation of the "motives or facts which influenced the flight decision" of each applicant. Even though a person may not face individual or direct persecution, there may still be a threat to his or her life and security.

There are many circumstances, Ms Nava continued, where flight for reasons other than individual persecution could justifiably result in the granting of international protection. These include landmines, the assassination of people with similar views, mass killings and threats to entire populations. Many applicants, refused on the grounds of fleeing generalised violence, could have been recognised in line with the UN convention. Further, if the more comprehensive refugee definition in the 1984 Cartagena Declaration – which includes

persons who flee to safeguard their security, physical integrity and lives due to generalised violence, massive violations of human rights or other circumstances that could seriously disturb public order – were incorporated in Venezuelan law, many Colombians would be protected.

Upon receiving a negative response to their asylum applications, José and Ana submitted an appeal for which they are still awaiting an outcome. "Yeah, yeah, they believe we got afraid and came here after hearing a few gunshots. It's one thing to talk about it and another to have personally experienced such horrible things," says Ana. If refused on appeal, they are left vulnerable to detention or deportation with no guarantee of safe return. 

**Names have been changed*

mapping the way *forward*

Oliver White, JRS Asia Pacific
Advocacy Officer

Molly Mullen, Assistant
Communications Officer

“They called me down to the office. I didn’t know what they wanted. The officer just said, ‘We are going to release you,’” said Theresa, who was nine months pregnant when she was released from Bangkok’s Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) with the help of JRS and UNHCR. “At first I didn’t believe it. I was so happy, I felt numb. It wasn’t until after I walked out, got into a taxi and was driving away that I really believed I was free.”

For us, it is a victory to get one person released from detention. JRS has been involved in detention issues since the 1980s when a team assisted Vietnamese refugees detained at the IDC. Medical and legal aid, supplementary food, and help for those wishing to return home, are still provided at the Bangkok centre.

This year, JRS Asia Pacific took steps to expand its work in detention, starting with a meeting in Yogyakarta in March 2011 for representatives from JRS Australia, Indonesia, Thailand and the regional office. In Australia, JRS offers pastoral care in detention and advocates for the release of children, co-running a home for them. More than 700 children have been released to live in the community under supervision. JRS Indonesia is the last in the region to serve in detention centres; they started by offering aerobics classes.

The meeting led to the

establishment of a regional goal to advocate for improved conditions and alternatives to detention. More than creating plans for the future, staff talked about “the JRS way”, succinctly summed up by JRS Asia Pacific Director Bernard Hyacinth Arputhsamy SJ: “JRS has a human approach. We are personal and respectful with detainees. And although willing to listen to other viewpoints, we are committed to our position, which is that detention is inherently undesirable and vulnerable people should never be detained.”

Following the meeting, JRS offices have increased their efforts. In Thailand, JRS joined a taskforce that submitted a proposal to the government outlining alternatives to detention. Another initiative: signing as guarantor for refugees who wish to be bailed. JRS Australia has facilitated staff visits to other detention projects to share experiences about their work and insights on avoiding burnout. In Indonesia JRS has been invited to work in a second detention centre.

Ultimately, the work of JRS in detention is about upholding the dignity and rights of forcibly displaced people. A Sri Lankan man who was bailed with the assistance of JRS in Bangkok, after spending five years detained with his wife, had this to say: “We are not terrorists. We are not animals. We are human beings. We just want life.” 🍎

📷 Coby and Theresa stand with their newborn daughter just days after Theresa was bailed from detention in Bangkok. She has since been resettled to the United States with her family. (Molly Mullen/JRS)





THEN AND NOW - GOLDHAP CAMP



Peter Balleis SJ/JRS

PS Amalraj SJ (Peter Balleis SJ/JRS)

let my people go

PS Amalraj SJ

Ghatastapana is a national holiday in Nepal. Cherishing fond memories of each of the seven camps for Bhutanese refugees in eastern Nepal, I drive to Goldhap camp. A place once familiar looks strange. People used to throng to greet me, *Namaste*, the little ones calling “Father, Father!” The food distribution centres were crowded; opposite, old men sat in the “kiosk”, sharing their woes. The youth coordinators would be after me to see their activities.

Now I am alone. The area has been levelled and fenced. The JRS school boards stand as monuments of history. Our disability centre stands in the middle of the razed ground. As I enter, memories of every face that once welcomed me

choke me, and I cry. The emotions frozen within all these years melt and flow down in tears.

I pass by the Kirati temple and the temple of Shiva – the symbols of my people’s faith in God during their 20-year exile. They never stopped hoping that God would lead them either back home or to a country where they would prosper. I go to our Blooming Lotus English School and climb onto the stage. Where are the hundreds of children at assembly? As my hands cover my face, the students march in my memory chanting their favourite slogan, “We are born for greater things.” And I hear a voice saying, “I have observed the misery of my people in exile. I have heard their cry and have come to deliver them from this land to a prosperous country. Let my people go to celebrate joyfully the festival of life.” An echo of the words God spoke to Moses in Exodus. Should my people’s moving make me sad? No. The founder of JRS, Pedro Arrupe SJ, once said that as long as there is one refugee in this world, it will remain an unjust world.

The Bhutanese longed to return

home but 16 rounds of ministerial talks between Bhutan and Nepal failed to make either repatriation or local integration possible. The only way ahead was resettlement to third countries. The process continues smoothly. Out of 107,000 refugees, more than 53,600 had gone by the end of September 2011. As the number of refugees shrinks, camps are being merged. By mid-2012, there will be only two camps left.

The coming years will be challenging. We need to maintain the quality of our services despite budget cuts. The words of Robert Frost, “...I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep,” flash across my mind as I go to the office. The student statistics are still on the blackboard where, in a corner, someone wrote: “I love this school and this camp, all my teachers and friends, because I have passed class X from this school.” What a testimony! If our education has instilled such confidence, then we have achieved our goal and in humility should thank the Lord for this wonderful service. 🙏



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“Life is stronger than death”

Bishop Desmond Tutu

Our experience of walking with forcibly displaced people around the world has taught us that the will to live does triumph over evil, sorrow and death. JRS helps refugees to carry on living, not to give up. We offer legal aid so that those in fear of their life will be protected; education for a better future; and we accompany refugees through the tough times.

Join JRS in its mission to give hope for life.

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