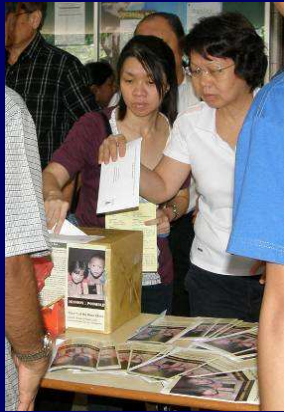




## MISSION POSSIBLE: JRS CONTINUES COLLABORATION WITH CHURCHES IN SINGAPORE



The donations will be used for projects such as the education of refugee children.

In line with JRS' policy is to go where the need is greatest, JRS continues to provide assistance to the refugee communities near the northern border of Thailand where not many NGOs are present. JRS Singapore has been helping the Shan and Lahu refugees with their basic needs and advocating for their rights since 1999. Refugees from the Shan State are not recognized as refugees or afforded protection by the Thai government or UNHCR, and are considered illegal.

Since 2002, JRS has provided assistance to the Krung Jor temporary shelter, which houses 673 Shan refugees who have fled from attacks in Shan State in Burma. JRS had originally intended the assistance to be temporary. However, the situation has since protracted with no resolution in sight, and JRS' strategy has changed to ensure the sustainability of its assistance, towards a more durable solution. Initiatives include community-based schools for young children and over time, the program expanded to include medical assistance, support for orphanages and income generation.

### *Working with churches in Singapore*

In 2005, JRS Singapore started its collaboration with the parish of Church of Christ the King to support the Shan project, and this has continued for another 3 years. With the assistance of the Church, there have been significant improvements to the quality of life for the refugees, in terms of basic educational and medical needs; and income-generating activities.

In November 2008, together with JRS, four members from Church of the Risen Christ's Parish Mission Ministry made a 5 day trip to the Shan refugee camp, schools and orphanages. Besides visiting and accompanying the refugees on this trip, the group was also there to identify areas where they could help as a Parish Involvement Project. Upon their return, Church of the Risen Christ agreed to carry on the Shan project from Church of Christ the King.



JRS volunteers sell handicrafts made by the refugees and landmine victims

The team organised their first awareness and fundraising activity at Church of the Risen Christ over the weekend of 26-27 September 2009. Called "Mission Possible", the Mission Ministry team, together with JRS volunteers set up an exhibition and a booth selling handicrafts made by refugees and landmine victims. There was also a jumble sale by the RC parishioners. A short presentation on the plight of the Shan refugees was also screened in church.

The money raised over the weekend will support various projects carried out for the refugees living at the Thai-Burmese border. The projects include teacher stipends, school fees, income generation such as handicrafts, and a new road for the orphanage. JRS is working together with Church of the Risen Christ to organise another visit to the Shan refugee camps again in November 2009.

As John Bosco, one of the Parish Mission team aptly puts it, "Mother Theresa once said, you may not be able to help all the poor, but to touch one person and make him comforted is all you need to do. The poor and the marginalized will always be around. We need to identify and channel our resources to the most pressing and needy of these."

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## JRS REGIONAL UPDATES

### Peace prospects in Sri Lanka – A long cherished dream

After being used as human shields for more than eight months by the LTTE, nearly 270,000 Tamils of the Vanni region are incarcerated in more than forty welfare camps. Keeping several hundred thousand civilians who had been caught in the middle of a war penned in these camps is outrageous. Haven't they been through enough? They deserve their freedom, like all other Sri Lankans, says Brad Adams, Human Rights Watch Asia director (New York) July 28, 2009.

According to independent sources the facilities in the camps are grossly inadequate. Cramped camp conditions, lack of privacy, severe shortage of food and drinking water are the order of the day. Tents meant for five people are occupied by around fourteen people from different families; toilets meant for twenty people are used by hundred people. Long queue for about three hours for using toilets are a common sight. When United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon visited some of the camps in May, he said: "I have traveled around the world and visited similar places, but this is by far the most appalling scene I have seen."



Civilians stand behind the barbed-wire perimeter fence of the Manik Farm refugee camp near Vavuniya, Sri Lanka. Photograph: David Gray / REUTERS

The separation of family members is a cause of concern as nobody knows the whereabouts

of their dear ones as 7,000 people were killed and 20,000 injured according to UN sources in the last stages of the war. The cultural rights of the people too have been completely ignored. The marriages, baptisms, mourning of the dead, church and temple festivals and offerings and similar gatherings are a thing of the past.

Amnesty International has also called on the government of Sri Lanka to end restrictions on liberty and freedom of movement; ensure that camps are of a truly civilian nature and administered by civilian authorities, rather than under military supervisions; and give immediate and full access to national and international organizations and observers, including aid agencies, in order to monitor the situation and provide a safeguard against human rights violations. (Unlock the camps in Sri Lanka, Amnesty International, 7<sup>th</sup> August 2009)

International agencies have had a very restricted role to play. In September 2008, the Sri Lankan government ordered all the Humanitarian agencies including the International committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), to move out of the war zones. There were no independent monitors or observers of the war prompting war historians to call this war as the 'War without Witness' as the media was completely kept away from the war zones – *Article contributed by JRS South Asia*

*Editor's Note: JRS South Asia's efforts have been hampered by the lack of access to the camps.*

### People Smugglers Bringing Sri Lankan Refugees to Australia by boat via Indonesia (13 Oct 2009)

Australia's Prime Minister, Mr. Kevin Rudd has made a personal plea to the Indonesian president to prevent a boatload of Sri Lankan migrants reaching Australia. People smugglers are suspected of bringing Sri Lankan refugees to Australia by boat via Indonesia. If the boat had reached Australian waters it would have been the largest number of asylum seekers since Mr. Rudd's centre-left government came to office in 2007.



Many of those seeking asylum are taken to an immigration detention centre on Christmas Island, about 2,575km (1,600 miles) north-west of the mainland, from where their applications are processed. According to the Australian press, the centre is nearing its full capacity of 1,200 people. For more reading, please refer to <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/http://jrs.org.au/content/view/99/1/asia-pacific/8303992.stm>

## JRS REGIONAL UPDATES

### Australia's Bishop Calls for Compassion in Response to the Refugee Crisis

"While the assessment of each individual's claim for refugee status must be left to the formal process, we should all be aware of the incredible trauma being experienced by many people in present and past war zones such as Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Iraq," Bishop Grech said.

"Not only does Australia have humanitarian obligations under UN Charters, but many Australians are descendants of people who came to Australia to escape persecution in their countries of birth. This can help us understand and open our hearts to those who are suffering."

"I am not suggesting that we can take everyone in the world, but we should particularly look towards the needs of those in our immediate area of the world. Let us look at the reasons why these people have become asylum seekers and let us encourage our government to talk to other governments in our region to offer assistance to relieve such suffering."

to <http://jrs.org.au/content/view/99/1/>



Many refugees attempt to reach Australia by sea.

For more reading, please refer *Contributed by JRS Australia*

*Editor's Note: JRS Australia is monitoring the refugee situation closely*

Other articles on the asylum-seekers crisis:

"Refugee hysteria breeding Pacific Solution 2.0" (<http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aid=17064>)

"Stop Sri Lanka, not its Refugees" (<http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aid=17118>)

### Thailand: schools for migrant children may be closed

This year, the governor of Ranong announced plans to either close down the education centres for migrant children, or place them under the jurisdiction of the education ministry. Many of the centres are Catholic-run. Sister Prapatsorn Srivorakul, project coordinator of the JRS centre for migrant children for Burma, said that without an education, these children risk being drawn into smuggling and prostitution. Projects such as the JRS centre help ease the burden on the Thai government, she added. JRS Thailand provides education for about 800 Burmese children in six educational centres. JRS Singapore also sponsors the education of over 100 children at Thai schools.



The JRS centre in Ranong provides education for Burmese migrant students (source: Yingyong Un-Anongrak, Bangkok Post)

### Nepal: Over 20,000 refugees resettled



For many refugees in Nepal, resettlement in another country is their only route to a better life

On 8 September, UNHCR reported that over 20,000 Bhutanese refugees have been resettled in third countries. A further 5,000 are expected to leave by the end of 2009. Of the over 108,000 refugees living in eastern Nepal, nearly 78,000 have submitted their declaration of interest in resettlement. Most have gone to the US, while others headed for Australia, Canada, Norway, New Zealand, Denmark and the Netherlands. The refugees came to Nepal from Bhutan in the early 1990s, after the government deprived many ethnic Lhotshampas of citizenship and civil rights.

The JRS Bhutanese Refugee Education Programme provides primary, secondary, vocational and special needs education in 42 schools. Advisory services are given to refugees considering resettlement, and offer English classes. JRS continues to advocate for the option of voluntary return to Bhutan for those refugees who wish to do so.

*Editor's note: JRS Singapore is planning a project to support Caritas Nepal to meet the needs of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. This include facilities and material required for the child play centre (CPC), repair and renovate 100 classrooms of the refugee camps school and training in computer skills and driving skills to the refugees waiting for resettlement. JRS Singapore is planning a trip sometime in mid December 2009 to access the needs of the camp.*

## JRS REGIONAL UPDATES

### Workshop on the Catholic Social Teachings and Its Relevance to JRS (by Ms. Wendy Louis)

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 2009, JRS Singapore's Information and Advocacy Committee organised a half day workshop on the Catholic Social Teachings (CST) and how it is very relevant to the work of JRS. The workshop was conducted by Ms. Wendy Louis from Caritas Singapore. About 25 JRS members and friends attended the workshop. Wendy Louise gave insights to the CST and highlighted how this "treasure" is only now beginning to be uncovered by Catholics. The workshop was interactive and participants had the opportunity to discuss and see how the CST principles are breached in the context of today's refugee situation. "The workshop was good. Did not realise the depth of the CST", said Corina Sobrielo, a JRS member. Jeremy Lim, another JRS member reflected, "I thought the point on common good versus greater good was interesting and that we cannot substitute human lives or sacrifice one for many i.e., don't play God".

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and

[www.jrs.net](http://www.jrs.net)  
(JRS International)

Thank you for  
making our work with  
refugees possible.



JRS members discussing the CST principles and its application to various refugee situations



Ms. Wendy Louis engaging the participants

**Check out our New Website:  
[www.jrssingapore.org](http://www.jrssingapore.org)  
We welcome your feedback!**

### About Our Organisation

JRS is an international Catholic organization with a mission to accompany, serve and plead for the rights of refugees and internally displaced people. JRS was founded by the Jesuits in 1980 and our priority is to be where the need is greatest or where no other organisation is present.