



In Malaysia - refugees live in makeshift huts or roam around the jungle to avoid arrest

A CALL TO SERVE

Malaysia has an estimated 152,700 refugees in 2006 and of whom, 47,000 have been registered by the UNHCR. As Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 UNHCR Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, there is no distinction between illegal migrants, asylum seekers or refugees. Hence, refugees and asylum seekers are subject to regular raids, arrests, detention and deportation. Many of them live either in jungle sites or in rundown and often overcrowded flats in the urban areas.

Kumpulan ACTS Bhd (an acronym for "A Call to Serve") is a local NGO based in Malaysia. They have been helping the refugees for the past four years.

PERCH 1 (Blessed Peter Favre Refugee Convalescence Home) is one of ACTS' existing projects. It was officially opened on Nov 16, 2005 to serve male refugees who were unable to get access to Government hospitals for treatment and for those who needed a place to recuperate after being discharged from the hospital. The home is located about an hour's drive from Kuala Lumpur.



Refugees receiving treatment at ACTS' Nursing Home

PERCH 2 is the second refugee convalescence home, presently being setup by ACTS, to provide for the needs of women and children. It provides medical treatment to those who need pre/and post hospitalisation care.

Inside this issue:

A Call To Serve 1

World Refugee Day 2

Refugee Situation Around the Region 3



Mobile Clinic

Besides providing a safe shelter where 24 hour medical assistance is offered, ACTS also transports the refugees to the hospitals or convalescence homes. ACTS also arranges referrals for refugees who require hospitalisation and accompanies these refugees to the hospitals to ensure registration is smooth due to the language barriers and to settle issues relating to the payments of the hospital bills.

On weekends, ACTS organises mobile clinics to more inaccessible areas, e.g. Cameron Highlands, to provide the refugees with some basic medical treatment. A group of volunteer doctors, nurses, and translators assists ACTS operating the mobile clinics. On weekdays, ACTS organises urban clinics for those living in the urban areas.

A JRS team has recently paid a visit to the two convalescence homes in Kuala Lumpur and the mobile clinic to get a better understanding of the work of ACTS.

- Agnes Peng
(Head- Malaysia Sub-committee)

VACANCIES AVAILABLE:

JRS Sri Lanka is looking for:

- **An experienced person** to head an English Language Teachers' Training Academy in Mannar.
- **A Census Officer** to help collect data on the number of displaced and missing people in Batticaloa, Jaffna and Mannar.

For more information, please email: admin@jrssingapore.org or call Dawn Yen at 9825 6621.



Sale of Shan handi-crafts during exhibition

WORLD REFUGEE DAY 2007

This year, the JRS World Refugee Day (WRD) Organising Committee decided to take a bold step of holding the event and Mass at another parish church instead of the Church of St. Ignatius. The aim was to create awareness of the plight of refugees and the work of the JRS to a new audience.

With His guiding hands, this year's WRD events and the Mass on June 29th, was held at the Church of the Holy Spirit, with overwhelming success. Adrian Teo, who was leading the WRD Organising Committee, reflects on the events and Mass.

JRS Singapore commemorated World Refugee Day 2007 with a series of activities at the Church of the Holy Spirit. This was made possible with the tremendous support of Fr. Andrew Wong, the Parish Priest, the Parish Office, the Liturgical Committee and Altar Servers.

This year, we wanted to share with the parishioners of the Church of the Holy Spirit the plight of Burmese refugees and internally displaced persons. Due to the fighting between the Burmese military government and the armed ethnic resistance groups demanding autonomy and independence, many innocent villagers have been killed. This has led to thousands of Burmese refugees fleeing for their lives and the lives of their children, to Thailand and Malaysia. In addition, an estimated two million Burmese people have been internally displaced because their villages have been burnt down, or because they were forcibly relocated by the Burmese military government.



Archbishop Nicholas Chia and priests celebrating the WRD Mass



Choir from the Myanmar Catholic Community at the WRD Mass

For our WRD events, we were fortunate to be joined by two special guests; (i) Fr. Mark - Chaplain for Burmese refugees in Mae-Hon Son refugee camp situated along the Thai-Burmese border, and (ii) Rosemary Chong - Director, Kumpulan ACTS (which stands for "A Call To Serve"), an NGO in Malaysia.

During the week-end Masses on 23rd and 24th June, JRS held an exhibition featuring the Burmese refugees. At the Masses, Fr. Mark also personally shared with parishioners of Holy Spirit the sufferings, anxieties and hopeless situation of refugees living in camps along the Thai-Burmese border. He also shared on his work of providing pastoral care, education and support to Burmese refugees. Each day, he faces many struggles, difficulties and risks. These range from dealing with the authorities, to the risks of being blown up by land-mines scattered along the Thai-Burmese border.

This year, we were also fortunate to partner with the Myanmar Catholic Community in Singapore, and their chaplain, Fr. Peter Paul in organising the World Refugee Day Mass on 29 June 2007 at the Church of the Holy Spirit. His Grace, Archbishop Nicholas Chia, was the main celebrant.

WORLD REFUGEE DAY 2007 - CONTD

"The Myanmar Catholic Community, made up of Burmese working in Singapore, spent many hours preparing for the Mass. They formed the choir, prepared the Mass booklets and made the slides for the Mass.

The Mass had a distinct Burmese character. Several hymns and the Lord's Prayer were sung in Burmese, and the readings were done by lectors dressed in their traditional ethnic costumes. "The Lord's Prayer sang in Burmese is really beautiful. It made the Mass very special and unique" commented Ian Shan, a JRS supporter who regularly attends the WRD Masses.



Burmese performance during reception

After the Mass, the Myanmar Catholic Community put up a cultural performance to share with us the diversity and differences of the various ethnic groups in Burma, while Burmese food was served.

Most of the JRS volunteers who helped organize this year's World Refugee Day commemoration are relatively new to JRS. They worked very hard and used their many talents to put the various events together, so that more people will learn about the atrocities and human rights abuses being committed - forced labor, conscription of child soldiers, rape, extortion, destruction of crops and forced relocation. We can make a difference by our prayers, and by supporting the promotion and protection of human rights for the Burmese people.

- Adrian Teo, JRS Singapore



Refugees at Wat Tham Krabok

REFUGEE SITUATION AROUND THE REGION

THAILAND: CRACKDOWN ON UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS

On 10 July, a Sri Lankan asylum seeker fell to her death from the fifth floor of her apartment while trying to escape arrest by immigration officials. Nine other Sri Lankans were arrested in the same raid and transferred to the immigration detention centre (IDC) in the capital, Bangkok. The group comprised one recognised refugee and eight asylum seekers. The raid was part of a nationwide crackdown on all undocumented migrants in Thailand, regardless of their nationality or refugee status. The crackdown began at the start of July, which coincided with the end of the work permit year on 30 June.

On 2 July, a group of 42 refugees and asylum seekers was arrested at their apartment block. Included in the group were three refugee families from Nepal, Sri Lanka and Laos, as well as 23 Sri Lankan asylum seekers. On 12 July, seven Sri Lankans were arrested from Madras Café in Silom Road. Four of them held refugee status while the rest were asylum seekers.

"JRS Thailand is very concerned about the recent spate of arrests and detention of recognised refugees and asylum seekers, particularly of children and young people. The ban on access to asylum in the IDC has not yet been lifted. In addition, resettlement from the IDC has now been blocked. JRS Thailand fears that the conditions in the IDC, and therefore the safety and well-being of the refugees and asylum seekers being

REFUGEE SITUATION AROUND THE REGION



Chin Refugees in a makeshift Church—2005



Burmese Refugees working at a rubber plantation

detained, are going to deteriorate further due to overcrowding”, JRS Thailand Information and Advocacy Officer, Chen Chen Lee, told Dispatches on 30 July.

Extract From JRS Dispatches – 30 July 07

MALAYSIA: IMMIGRATION RAID OF CHIN REFUGEES IN KUALA LUMPUR

At around 2am on 25 June, officers from the Immigration and People's Volunteer Corps (RELA) raided two ethnic Chin communities in Jalan Imbi and Jalan San Peng in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, capital of Malaysia. During the raids men, women (some pregnant) and children were suddenly woken up and made to assemble in open spaces.

Most of those arrested were in possession of UN refugee agency (UNHCR) documents, many of them recognised as refugees and some on the verge of being resettled to third countries within days. Such explanations were ignored. UNHCR officials subsequently asked the immigration authorities to release the refugees but to little avail. Only 11 out of 228 people were released. The remainder were taken to two detention centres south of Kuala Lumpur.

“While Malaysia is not a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention, we urge the authorities to treat the Chin refugees humanely and with dignity. Moreover, under international law, states have a duty not to expel individuals to areas where they may face persecution. These people are under the territorial care and responsibility of the Malaysian authorities”, JRS Asia Pacific Regional Advocacy Officer, Sanjay Gathia, told Dispatches on 9 July.

The detained refugees in possession of UNHCR refugee cards will remain in detention until they are resettled, whilst those awaiting their refugee status determination interviews will have them conducted in detention.

Those without any UNHCR documents will be charged with immigration offences. They are generally given a four to five-month prison sentence, one or two strokes of the cane, and sent to the Thai-Malaysian border.

“Detention and mistreatment are not effective deterrents for people fleeing from persecution in their countries of origin. Detention does not help refugees prepare for resettlement or contribute to their host society. Every human being has rights, regardless of their immigration status”, concluded Gathia.

Extract From JRS Dispatches - 19 July 07

MALAYSIA: AUTHORITIES ARREST REFUGEES

In July 2007, 150 UNHCR recognised Burmese refugees, from the minority Rohingya community, were among the estimated 550 migrants arrested during a number of raids by immigration officials and the volunteer security corps (RELA) in the central Malaysian state of Selangor. Children and pregnant women were among the 150 detained.

Malaysia is not a signatory to the UN refugee convention, and considers refugees as undocumented migrants who can be detained and deported. Nevertheless, the government allows UNHCR to operate in the country.

All the arrested refugees and migrants are said to be in the custody of the immigration department, which will decide whether to release or deport them. UNHCR stated it was trying to verify the number of Burmese refugees being detained but could not give further details.

REFUGEE SITUATION AROUND THE REGION

Some 36,000 mostly Burmese refugees, registered with the UNHCR, are currently living in Malaysia, including 12,000 ethnic Rohingyas.

Earlier this year, both JRS and UNHCR voiced concerns over the arrests of asylum seekers and refugees, in particular women and children, urging Malaysia to uphold its humanitarian commitment to refugees.

Extract From JRS Dispatches – 16 Aug 07

SRI LANKA: SHOCKING INCREASE IN HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

On 6 August, the international human rights organisation, Human Rights Watch highlighted the increase in unlawful killings, enforced disappearances and other abuses over the past 18 months in Sri Lanka. According to Human Rights Watch, from January 2006 until June this year, more than 1,000 abductions had been reported in Sri Lanka.

The government admitted there were cases of disappearances but denied the security forces were involved in an increase in abuses. The government said it was taking every step to investigate. The report also accused Tamil rebels of targeting civilians, extortion and the use of child soldiers.

On 7 August, John Holmes, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, visited the northern Jaffna peninsula, to hold discussions with government and NGO representatives. However, civil society organisations were not allowed to meet him in the absence of the security forces. Human rights NGOs condemned the military interference in matters relating to civil society and NGO activity.

JRS staff speaking to Dispatches also expressed concern for ongoing attacks on civilians. They stated that four civilians were reported injured, killed or disappeared in July.

JRS Sri Lanka also spoke of the economic and social cost of the continuing conflict. Prices of essential food items are increasing daily in the Jaffna peninsula. Though the food items and non-food items are available in the markets, the prices are high, staff reported.

Extract From JRS Dispatches – 16 Aug 07

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Call us or email us
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Our website:
www.jrssingapore.org

and

www.jrs.net
(JRS International)

Thank you for
making our work with
refugees possible.

**Check out our New Website:
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.