

Jesuit Refugee Service, International Office

World Refugee Day Statement, 20 June 2004

Invest in refugees to create the conditions for durable solutions

On World Refugee Day 2004, JRS calls on the international community:

1. to ensure freedom of movement for refugees in their countries of asylum.
2. to ensure decent education opportunities for refugees and displaced peoples
3. to guarantee rights to seek employment and to facilitate the development of other income generating activities

"We express real concern about the situation in many camps where people live in sub-human situations. The current situation is one of desperation and many refugee situations are forgotten", **said Fr. Lluís Magriñà, JRS International Director.**

Too often refugees are forced to live in camps, segregated from the local populations in conditions that cause them serious physical deprivation and psychological harm. For those who are free not to live in camps, they frequently must eke out an existence on the margins of society. Personal security is a major concern, as refugees are often harassed and victimized by the very authorities who are charged with providing them protection. For those denied any legal status, their existence is typically characterized by poverty and insecurity.

"Life in a refugee camp is hard and the food given to the refugees is hardly enough for survival. The refugees are not given clothing, many are given a plastic sheeting as the only means of constructing a house. Some have stayed for close to ten years in these circumstances", said a refugee who produces and presents a JRS radio programme, in Tanzania which provides a voice to Burundian refugees.

Thousands of refugee children are denied the basic right to education, thereby being deprived of vital opportunities of restoring hope and dignity. Without an education, young people often feel a loss of self worth and a sense that they have had their life chances severely reduced. Displaced children without access to education are often more vulnerable to being recruited as child soldiers, leading to a vicious cycle of brutalization and social disintegration.

Too many refugees are denied the opportunity to contribute to their host country, to preserve their skills or develop new ones in preparation for return to a more normal life. Under such conditions, it is not surprising that some individuals become victims of human trafficking. Refugee assistance needs to be carried out in a spirit that preserves and fosters the dignity and autonomy of each individual.

Creating the conditions in which refugees can live more normal lives and contribute to the development of their host communities means creating the conditions for real durable solutions. This is regardless of whether the refugees eventually go back to their original homes or find new homes elsewhere.

"Everyone deserves a home. Yet around the world, fifty million people have been forced to leave the place they called home, compelled to run away because of war and persecution. For most, their exile will be a time of immense hardship and suffering. But throughout those long years, which for many will be spent in camps on remote borders, refugees will keep the burning dream alive: the dream of finding a place to call home", added **Fr. Lluís Magriñà**.

Note to editors

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organisation whose mission is to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees and forcibly displaced people. JRS works and has representation in almost 70 countries. It works close to people in refugee camps, refugees in urban settings, with internally displaced people or with asylum seekers in detention. It does so by offering services in education, psycho-social support, pastoral care, legal services, emergency assistance, health care, as well as research, advocacy and information sharing.

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