

SURVIVING LANDMINES

Every day JRS works with people who come from countries that have been desolated and impoverished by war. JRS teams work in at least 32 of the 83 countries affected by anti-personnel landmines and unexploded Ordnance (UXO). In 1994, JRS joined the *International Campaign to Ban Landmines* and continues to lobby for the signing and ratification of the Mine Ban Treaty by countries that have not yet done so. In the UK, JRS is a member of the local campaign to ban landmines, *Landmine Action*. For more information on the campaign please see: www.landmineaction.org.uk

Below is the account of Alma Halilovic, a child landmine survivor from Bosnia:

"I do not know who ran to my aid right after the explosion, because of the pain, but I am almost sure it was my father. We have been living in Srebrenica before the war, when I had the accident; I was nine. My father died a couple of months later in this damned war. I fell into a deep depression and became very afraid of people. My family and friends did not accept this very well at the time, but things are much better now. I live temporarily in Sarajevo, where I am attending first class in secondary school.

At 17, it is much easier for me to find friends, because I do not fear people any longer and I am ready to give them a part of myself.



People have often asked me if I think about the future and I must confess that when I do, I am a little scared. My life has taught me to take each day as if it was my last, and I really do this. I have learned not to make plans, because only God knows what will happen today, tomorrow and in coming years. Now I live through my relationships with friends, giving my love. Here is one important message: love people and they will love you. To all those who have lost hope in life: everything that has happened to you is not a tragedy, it is not a punishment. It is a test and lesson as to how to live."

To read more life stories from other landmine survivors please take the time to read: *Surviving landmines: Personal accounts of child Bosnian Landmine survivors*, which is available for purchase at just £4 from the JRS Office.

THE SMALL PRINT

A woman refused asylum in the UK but who is housed by the local authority on medical grounds below details her experience of being moved from one hostel to another. She has been in the UK for several years.

"After a month of repeatedly being told to prepare to shift - I was finally moved to my new residence. Upon arrival, I was shocked to find that none of the requests made by the hospital had been met...

I was later visited by a housing officer, whose attitude was cold and negative. When I complained about how I had been denied transport, I was told that as an asylum seeker I was not supposed to have more than two black bags and was asked how I had acquired so much luggage, which I explained [by telling of the kindness of church and community organisations]. In response to my concern over the roaming cockroaches and cobwebs I had seen around the house, I was told to contact the environmental protection agency.

This whole experience has left me isolated, depressed and in a state of confusion. The outside of me is alive, but the inside is completely dead. I cry and scream on a regular basis, I even think of self-harm. This is the situation I am currently living in."



VOLUNTEERING FOR JRS

It is hard to believe that 6 months have already gone by at JRS. Yet, when I look back over these months – its enriched with so many heartfelt encounters I will never forget. The visits to the detention centre were at times difficult partly because of the vulnerable position most of the detainees found themselves in. These are people who have fled their countries of origin for political, social or religious reasons and sought a safe haven in the U.K. However, upon arrival, they were confronted by a hostile bureaucratic system, which placed them in detention centres in order to ease the administrative burden of processing their cases. The application system is geared towards limiting the entries of asylum seekers into the country without fully taking into account the role of external factors, which influence refugee flow. This leads to a conflict of interest between the two aims: that of granting asylum to refugees and one which seeks to limit the level of immigration. Problems arise when the government and media inaccurately project refugees as economic migrants, which evokes antagonistic attitudes from the public. As a result there is a serious danger that those in need of protection will be denied asylum into the UK in the future.

Unsurprisingly, detainees find their experiences within the detention centres demeaning and humiliating. Inability to understand English, emotional distress, mental and medical conditions as well as being in unfamiliar surroundings, all hamper detainees' preparations for presenting their cases in a well-argued and coherent manner. Civil society groups like JRS try to address these factors through advocacy work, influencing policy makers and acting as the voice to champion the plight of refugees. It has been a pleasure to work with JRS and witness the fantastic work they do in representing marginalised and isolated segments of society such as refugees. JRS continues to be a strong and passionate voice for those who are overlooked and neglected by mainstream institutions within society.

Caroline Barwa

LIVING GHOSTS

Refugee Week sees the launch of the asylum destitution campaign: *Living Ghosts – Dignity not Destitution for asylum seekers*, organised by the **Church Action on Poverty (CAP)** in partnership with a wide range of other organisations, including **Churches Commission for Racial Justice** and the **Jesuit Refugee Service**. The campaign aims to change current Government policies that make unsuccessful asylum seekers destitute, by raising awareness of the reality of life for destitute asylum seekers, and by encouraging churches and others to make the case for change to the relevant decision makers, policy makers and opinion formers. **CAP** is now looking for wider support for the campaign. There are two ways you can help:

- (a) Provide individual case studies/stories of destitution; accounts of Church projects, which help to alleviate the situation; figures/estimates of the numbers of people being made destitute, which countries they are from etc. in each area; and examples of how they are being failed by the system (lack of access to legal aid/representation, bad adjudications etc).
- (b) Are you interested in doing something locally to support the campaign (e.g. public signing of the campaign statement with church leaders; Poverty hearing)?

If you are able to help with either of these, please contact Alan Thornton: Church Action on Poverty, c/o St Dominic's Priory, 41a Red Barns, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 2TP Tel/ Fax: 0191 2611026



Refugee week 2004, Scotland

THANK YOU !!

We would like to thank you for the generous donations given in answer to our appeal in reuniting the Ugandan family. Our friend's wife and children arrived safely just before Easter. They all would like to extend their sincere gratitude and appreciation for your help and support.



EASTER IN DETENTION

During Mass on Easter Sunday, a detainee was called out to be returned to his country, where he feared imprisonment. Was it that God could not prevent his return or was it His will that he should be imprisoned if it came to that? If the first, then Jesus' claim that God was our Father was an empty one; if the second, then all kinds of inhumane treatment can be justified as God's will, so as to turn Him into a monster figure. During my next visit, a few days later, as I was scanning the list of names on the notice board, I heard his voice behind me - I was surprised and overjoyed. He told me that as his travel documents were not in order, he was brought back. He knew, though, that return to his country of origin was inevitable. He was resigned, but his faith that God was with him remained.

Surely, God's will is not the inflicting of suffering for its own sake, but in using suffering as the raw material for our happiness. Faith and acceptance of His will is a gift, a sharing in Christ's trust and acceptance of his Father's will. It is a faith that suffering, in all its particularity for each individual, brings us to the Father's glory. In St John's Gospel, Jesus lifted up on the cross is at the same time lifted up in exaltation to the glory of his Father. This glory, given to the beloved Son, is shared with us in the Holy Spirit. Easter is the celebration of the glory of the cross, where, by the offering of our cross, becomes our own glory.

The experience of that glory, however much in detention itself, is real enough. God's glory denotes divine presence, and especially His saving presence enduring in the face of all suffering and sin. The believer preserves a sense of personal dignity and freedom in the face of the temptation to be overwhelmed, and is given a taste of peace, which encourages endurance to the end. The justification of faith is in this experience of God's presence saving the *person*. "From the end of the earth I call to thee, when my heart is faint. Lead thou me to rock that is higher than I; for thou art my refuge...so will I ever sing praises to thy name..." (Ps 61) The detainee was a witness to that cry of prayer being heard.

Fr. Harry Elias SJ

Newsletter Survey

Many thanks to all of you who took the time to answer our questionnaire about the newsletter! Your comments have been very helpful. We now have a good idea of what you find most useful; and we have some ideas as to how to update the newsletter's layout and look. If you would like some feedback on the response we received, please do not hesitate to contact us. We hope to have the new look up and running in the autumn!

JRS International

JRS International produces three free publications: Dispatches (a bi-monthly e-news bulletin); Servir (a quarterly magazine which tells the stories of refugees and displaced peoples); and the Annual Report (describes JRS projects world-wide).

To receive any of these, please contact Bema.solis@mail05.jrs.net, or write to JRS International Office, C.P. 6139, 00195 Roma Prati, Italy.

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

A prayer for refugees

Compassionate God, make your loving presence felt to the refugees, torn from family, home and everything familiar.

Warm especially, the hearts of the young, the old and the most vulnerable among them.

Help them know that you accompanied them as you accompanied Jesus, Mary and Joseph in their exile to Egypt.

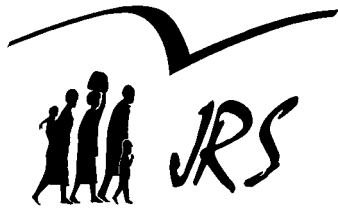
Lead refugees to a new home and a new hope, as you lead the Holy family to their new home in Nazareth.

Open your hearts to receive them, as our sisters and brothers, in whose face we see your son Jesus. Amen

(United States Catholic Bishops Conference)

Peer pressure

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) has pulled out of plans to implement failed asylum seekers to work on community schemes in return for the support they receive from the government. This would have involved 40 Iraqi asylum seekers to perform local clean up jobs. JRS was active in persuading YMCA not to support this scheme, given its negative impact on asylum seekers. The very fact the Home Office was even considering such measures, demonstrates the need of adequate remunerative employment for asylum seekers.



Mission Statement

The Jesuit Refugee Service is an international Catholic non-governmental organisation, at work in over 50 countries, with a mission to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees and forcibly displaced people.

The purpose of JRS UK is to accompany, to serve and to advocate on behalf of all asylum seekers from their first arrival until they are satisfactorily settled. This work is carried out in collaboration with other JRS offices round the world, other Church and secular organisations, voluntary and governmental, which are active in the same field.

Values

JRS is grounded in Catholic social teaching and draws on the principles of Ignatian spirituality in discerning with whom we work. All members share a common set of values and principles concerned with justice, the dignity of the person and a responsibility to carry out the social mission of the Church.

Jesuit Refugee Service
6 Melior Street
London SE1 3QP
Tel: 020-7357 0974
Fax: 020-7378 1985

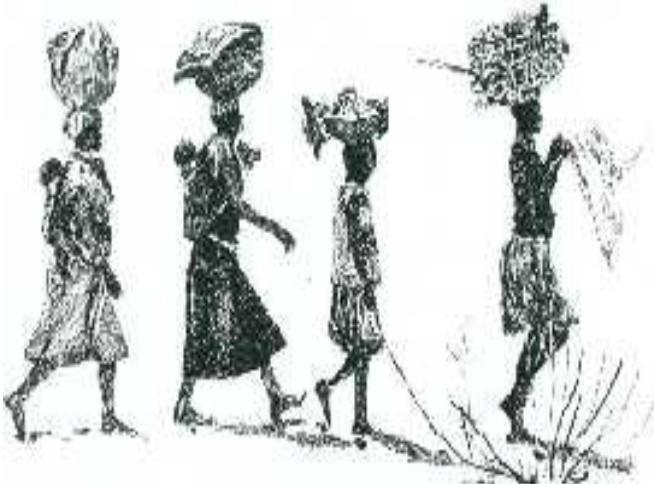
e-mail - uk@jrs.net
website: www.jrsuk.net
www.jrs.net
www.jrseurope.org
www.detention-in-europe.org

Diary

20-26th June Refugee week

This is a UK wide festival, which celebrates the valuable contribution made by refugees to UK life and promotes social awareness of why people become refugees. The theme this year is persecution. Full events listing is available on the website: www.refugeeweek.org.uk, or from the Refugee Week team: 3, Bondway, Vauxhall, London SW8 1SJ, Tel: 020-73466752

2nd July (Saturday) Edinburgh, 11.00am – 7.30 pm
Make poverty history rally organised by the make poverty history coalition. For further information please contact:
Webmaster
@makepovertyhistory.org



8th-10th July, SWANICK

We are the Stewards of Creation. The National Justice and Peace Conference. Venue: Hayes Conference Centre. Speakers include Sean McDonagh SSC, Ed Echlin and Ellen Teague. For further information, pricing structure and bookings: National J& P Network, 020-79014864.

We would like to again take one or two refugees with us to participate in this year's event but as ever we rely heavily on your generosity in order to be able to do this. To take two refugees would cost around £300. Comments from refugees who have attended past conferences are available on our website: www.jrsuk.net. In the past the opportunity to participate in thought provoking debates and interacting with other activists engaged in the field has proved a valuable experience which was highly appreciated by those refugees who had been able to attend. We would ask you to enable us to repeat this experience by donating generously. Please do help us again this year!

- Please add me to your mailing list
- Donation enclosed Amount: £ _____
- I am a UK taxpayer and would like to gift aid my donation to JRS (Gift aid increases the value of your donation to us by 28p in every pound)

Name: _____

Address: _____