



REFUGE

Jesuit Refugee Service Indonesia

Accompany, Serve and Advocate the Cause of Refugees and Forcibly Displaced People

November 2007

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Notes : Names and Location have been changed to protect identities.

Preface

This Refuge newsletter is dedicated to Universal Children's Day on November 20. This date marks the day on which the General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959 (& Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

In this Refuge JRS relays 2 accounts from children whose early childhood was traumatized growing up in a conflict before the Peace Agreement in August 2005. A 3rd story highlights small measures that are going on to assist vulnerable children affected and the 4th story is a call for the Aceh authorities to place greater attention on the emotional scars of conflict and to heal tomorrow's future generation.

" I WANT TO BE A POLICEMAN "

By Daryadi, JRS Meulaboh

Adri Irawan Saptra, a 13 year old boy from small village in Nagan Raya District, Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam province, like most boys in Aceh likes to drive a moped around his village and play by the nearby river catching fish together with his friends after school but Irwan is no ordinary boy.

On our visit to the village we bumped into Irwan standing in his soaking wet clothes having just come back from the river with his fish. His elder sister, Rosmawar, now a first grader at senior high school student, sent Irwan in to change his clothes and to come and sit with us and tell us about his upbringing and his experiences

of being a child growing up in a conflict area. At first Irwan was shy but we soon learned that Irwan has already been through quite a lot for someone so young.

Along with his family and whole village he fled from his home to live in a camp settlement where he spent several years (2002-2004). The villagers were too scared to return and had little to return to. Their homes, school and community center were all burnt to the ground by unidentified person.

While living in a camp Irwan also experienced watching his father being arrested and hauled away as he was accused of being a GAM





Irwan (middle) and friends
(Free Aceh Movement) as a result of a false accusation in 2003.

During the height of the conflict 2001 - 2004, many villages like Irwan's were abandoned as they bordered on to the forest. They were caught between the two sides, the Indonesian army-TNI and GAM. These villages were often suspected of supporting the GAM guerillas who used the forest for protection.

Irwan's village is a mixed community of locals and Javanese transmigrants, the conflict affected both and saw the transmigrants also flee to avoid being caught in the conflict.

We asked Irwan what he wanted to be when he was older and he replied a little hesitantly, "I want to be a policeman." It seemed a strange answer for someone that has watched his father suffer at the hands of the law. "Why do you want to be a policeman?" "My father was arrested and beaten, when I become a policeman, I will arrest everyone who arrested and beat my father."

Irwan's father Darmi Yus, now a

free man states he was in fact wrongly accused and a victim because another villager was forced by the TNI to point out GAM members in his village community. Even the Head of Subdistrict, a man of authority stood up for him and claimed he was falsely accused, but this did not stop the TNI imprisoning Darmi Yus for 2 years at the Teuku Umar Military Compound.

During his imprisonment Irwan's mother, Nilasari often visited him bringing along their children. Irwan remembers visiting his father and always crying to see him in a cell behind bars. "Father always said to me, be a good boy and a diligent student". These words helped Irwan during his remaining time at the displaced camp where he was bullied by his friends because his father was GAM and imprisoned.

The Tsunami 26 December 2004 destroyed the military compound where Darmi Yus was held as it was close to the seafront. Fortunately, Darmi Yus survived. No one knows exactly how many lost their lives when the compound was washed away but many people have been

reported missing but then those escaping the Tsunami might also have ran for freedom.

Darmi Yus was freed and returned home to find the village had already relocated back to their abandoned homes a month before in response to a security guarantee from the TNI. The TNI set up a military post for protection.

The Head of District assisted the return and built 25 semi-permanent houses for those whose houses had been burnt to the ground. With signs of peace and a brighter future for Aceh since the Peace Agreement of 2005, I ask Irwan what his hope for the future was -he remains silent so I have his sister translates into Acehnese "If peace is lasting forever, will you be happy?" he answered "Yes of course."

Acehnese children have had little access to state education and their Indonesian language is limited. Irwan's story and his signs of revenge at such a young age highlights the possible emotions of young children who have grown up under conflict.

It points to a need for trauma healing to heal the inner wounds accompanied by a need for peace education and respect for good governance so as to avoid future conflicts.

Irwan's father states that the village children are still afraid today even in peace time and hide when ever they see uniforms. He also points out it is not only the children but people like himself where the sight of uniforms sends shivers. Darmi Yus was recently stopped by the police and given a traffic ticket he trembled so much that the policeman seemed surprised and asked him why.

A CHILD'S EXPERIENCE OF CONFLICT

By Roy Purba, JRS Tapaktuan

Fatima aged seven, is a young girl who lives in a village in South Aceh. JRS has had contact with this village since 2001 when monitoring the conflict and has

village. Fatima and many like her each with their own individual story have had little or no access to professional counseling or trauma healing. When JRS visited the village to assess the needs of the village after peace it did

Fatima's village sits on the edge of the edge of Gunung Leuser National Park and was marked as a "black area" during the conflict. A black area because one of the villagers was thought to be the GAM Region Commander, and a further 6 people suspected of being GAM combatants even though they were of junior high school age,

The TNI in its pursuit of suspects built a military post in the village to keep a watchful eye and as result the community fled to another village in Tapaktuan city, April 2004. They returned in September 2005, a month after the peace agreement.

Fatima remains a timid girl frightened to meet officials in uniform. She does not distinguish between army or police. She is even too scared to enter a room within her own home as she fears what lurks behind the door.

Her parents have tried to help by using a local dukun (traditional "doctor") and have also exposed her to the hustle and bustle of the market as a way to break her fear. Fatima has progressed in small ways and continues to do so as is noted by both her parents and JRS.

Fatima can now stay in the village while her parents work in the fields, and is comfortable to play with the other children. JRS believes there is much to be said in the support and strength of friendship and the space to play as a means to overcome trauma but JRS also recognizes the need for greater support as Fatima still has no aspirations or dreams for her future like other 7 year olds who have never known conflict.



Fatima needs counselour for past trauma

been actively working there since the peace agreement.

Fatima's story relates back to when she was four when she witnessed her parents badly beaten by the TNI /POLRI ((Indonesian army - police) in front of their home as the TNI searched for her elder brother Arman who was thought to be a member of the TNA (military wing of Free Aceh Movement). Her father, Jamaluddin explains that Fatima yelled and cried as she watched helplessly and it is her crying he thinks that caused one of the perpetrators' to put the barrel end of his gun into Fatima mouth.

Fatima is a wary girl and frightened of newcomers to her

so through giving a small scale medical service in the form of a mobile clinic.

Fatima refused to be seen by the visiting clinic. Fatima however has overtime become more outgoing taking part in the informal education activities set up by JRS as it advocates for improved state education. Over the past 2 years JRS staff have monitored the educational activities and found the children have gained in confidence through reading and art.

JRS believes these activites have gone some way in assisting with trauma healing as a means of expressing emotions.

UNDER THE PALM OIL TREE

By Agus Heru, JRS Meulaboh

The house under the palm tree has sheltered dozens of children from the Aceh conflict since 1999. The house belongs to the Bustanul Fakri Foundation, an Islamic boarding school known as a Pesantren. However there is a stigma attached to this school whereby the students are referred to as "DOM children"¹ by the surrounding community. This saddens the students "We don't want to be known as DOM children, but rather as Bustanul Fakri's students" said Putra Irawan, a student.

The school is located in Seulala Atas village, in Langsa and was set up to house children who lost any opportunity to study because of the conflict. A primary reason being parents were unable to afford school fees (due to limited incomes as a result of conflict)² not to mention many schools were burnt down. In order to provide the children with a proper education along with some morality guidance Bustanul Fakri Foundation set up a school with the national curriculum and additional Islamic education.

The school was free of charge for those most poor and vulnerable. Siswanis Manaf, the Education General Coordinator of Bustanul Fakri, states one of the key aims of the foundation has been to see a break in the chain of violence so the next generation grows up resolving issues through

1 DOM (Daerah Operasi Militer) or Military Operation Region was a joint military operation in Aceh during Soeharto's regime, 1989-1998.

2 See 2006 Village Survey in Aceh: An Assessment on village infrastructure and social structures by The Kecamatan Development Program.

cooperation gained from their understanding of morality and faith, equality and life skills.

After tsunami, 26 December 2004, Bustanul Fakri Foundation also took orphans who lost the parents to the tsunami. JRS already aware of the foundation's work with conflict children assisted the foundation so it could increase its capacity to do so. The foundation is funded by its own palm oil plantation and a brick factory as well as donations from government and other institutions. However amounts fluctuate.

JRS gave food for a 6 month period to take the pressure of the foundation and its limited funds and supported a new trauma healing programme from January 2006 under the guidance of a psychologist using activities such as art, sewing, raising goats and chili growing.

The art group is primarily a media tool to address oneself through music, drama and dance and to gain confidence in overcoming issues of inferiority, introversion and a tendency towards a lack of cooperation. Students are taught living values and skills to gain confidence and to express their opinion.

Two children in this group have required extra assistance from the JRS psychologist. Ari, a tsunami victim, lost his father and until now has been unable to accept his death and a second student, Ikhsan raised by his grandfather after his father was murdered by an unknown person and his mother abandoned him. The two have made considerable progress

but healing is a long progress.

Another of the groups, goat herding was not designed to gain economic returns but concentrates on students learning how to be participatory in a group action, cooperate and express their ideas with the emphasize on discussion. This discussion revolves around the condition of goats and encourages the students to talk and begin to open up and share their life experiences.



Children playing traditional music

JRS has since successfully handed over the trauma healing programme to the foundation as they no longer require JRS support and teachers and assistants have attended training in trauma healing organised by JRS and are confident themselves to carry on.

JRS congratulates the foundation for its hard work and the lengths the staff go to in order to assist the children traumatized by conflict, tsunami and loss of loved ones and wishes all the students bright futures where they are no longer known as DOM children but Bustanul Fakri's students.

UNIVERSAL CHILDREN'S DAY 2007

By Enggal, Coordinator Aceh Advocacy

JRS - Indonesia calls to attention the fact that trauma healing especially for Acehese children is not a priority yet for many organizations includes BRA and government of Aceh. It is understandable as many organizations including JRS and government are still concentrating to finish posttsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction that has its own set of challenges.

During some interviews with Acehese children, taken after the signing of peace agreement, JRS colleagues learnt that many of them wanted to be policeman, soldier or idolize certain heroes. Considering the background of protracted and high intensity of conflict, we believe that these aspirations have been triggered after the children 'saw' violence during the protracted years of conflict. In other words, the phenomena which the Acehese children are projecting now is the manifest of traumatic syndrome, they (Acehese children) have come to believe, that the stronger person, who carries gun, is the right person.

This reality nowadays is common among Acehese children and is just the personification of their knowledge of weapon and violence. Air soft gun 'battle' has become a new trend among the children. Without any reason they jump in open truck and attack other children group or other person they meet. In some cases, this 'battle' becomes real battle using stones or an open fight between the groups that causes victims.

There is no real action taken yet by

government, community and other stakeholders. This phenomenon should be considered as not a normal juvenile delinquency, this is but just the top of iceberg of the traumatic experience which is suffered by the children during the conflict years. Law and punishment approach is just the part of big step to heal the trauma. The urgent need for the children is counselling and treatment which is aimed towards teenagers and primary school students to heal traumatic syndrome they get from conflict.

Unfortunately, there are few organisations which focus on healing the children's trauma. Even BRA is busy with the complexity distributing reintegration fund. In the NGO matrix program released by BRA, many humanitarian organizations work in post conflict area are focusing on economic empowerment, livelihood, or housing and other infrastructure project.

Indeed, physical aid and compensation are important, as it is mentioned in Helsinki MoU. Compensation is a one of the component of the justice mechanism and also it shows the commitment of many stakeholders to end conflict in Aceh. This means that many organizations respect and acknowledge that civilians are the biggest victim in 32 armed-conflict years.

The question comes later then, how to integrate material assistance with peace education concept and trauma healing? How to make the distribution of reintegration fund for ex-combatant and conflict victim does not trigger new conflict in the society?

Healing the trauma of Acehese children's suffering is one of right way to cut the violence chain because deep resentment is already planted because of conflict. Law of Aceh Government No.11 2006 Chapter XXXIII section 226 stated the importance of psychosocial need and healing the traumatic syndrome because of conflict and disaster.

JRS therefore takes this opportunity to raise the issue and push for Irwandi - Nazar (Governor) and the Aceh authority to place greater importance on the need for psychosocial counseling with an emphasis on Acehese children and integrate it with peace education so that violence imitation is not repeated in the next generation.

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