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REFUGE

Jesuit Refugee Service Indonesia

Accompany, Serve and Advocate the Cause of Forcibly Displaced People

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We Flee from One Country to Another

Th. Kushardini

Ali, a 6-year-old boy had been looking forward to playing ball in the yard. "Dad, when will we play football again?" he asked his father.

"Look, child, it is still raining heavily. Later when the rain stops, we play ball again," said Muhammad Hussein, Ali's father, with a patient voice.

Muhammad Husein and his family came from Afghanistan. Conflicts and wars forced them to leave Afghanistan to seek safety in Iran. Ali was born while the family sought refuge in Iran. Unfortunately, they could not stay long in Iran because conflict in Iran forced them to flee to Syria. They lived for four years and four months in Syria until the conflict broke out forcing them to yet leave again this time to Indonesia.

"We are already living four months in Indonesia," said Muhammad Husein. "For four months we lived on borrowed money," he continued.

Actually, Muhammad Husein and his family were already granted refugees status in Syria. However, after being forced to leave the country now in Indonesia they must begin again the process of applying for protection as refugees with UNHCR Indonesia. That is why they are not getting help from anywhere and are forced to live of borrowed money.

Together with his wife who is suffering from back pain and three children, Muhammad rents a small room. The place is similar to a warehouse, not designed to live in. The room was very damp and moldy with plasterboard many of which are broken. The room they live in has one bed and one additional single mattress. In the corner of the room there is a table with a stove on it, where the family cooks meals each day. But on the table, there



The right to play and learn is not a given for Asylum Seeker children

was no food at all, only cups, plates, and a jar containing sugar cubes.

Their room was on the third floor, while the bathroom which is shared with seven other families is on the ground floor. With her back pain going up and down the stairs to go to the bathroom is very difficult for the wife of Muhammad Husein.

Ali, a boy born in refuge, was never able to get an education and lacks the freedom experienced by other children of his age. War and conflict, violence and unrest forced him to become a child moving from one country to another in search of salvation and peace. His life is still full of uncertainty, for how long this will go on is not known to him or his parents.

Child Asylum Seekers in Danger

Indro Suprobo

Hamid left Afghanistan without his family one year ago when he was still 15 years old. He was always haunted by fear since his father was taken from his home by a group of armed men. Until now he does not know what happened to his father and seems afraid to talk about him.

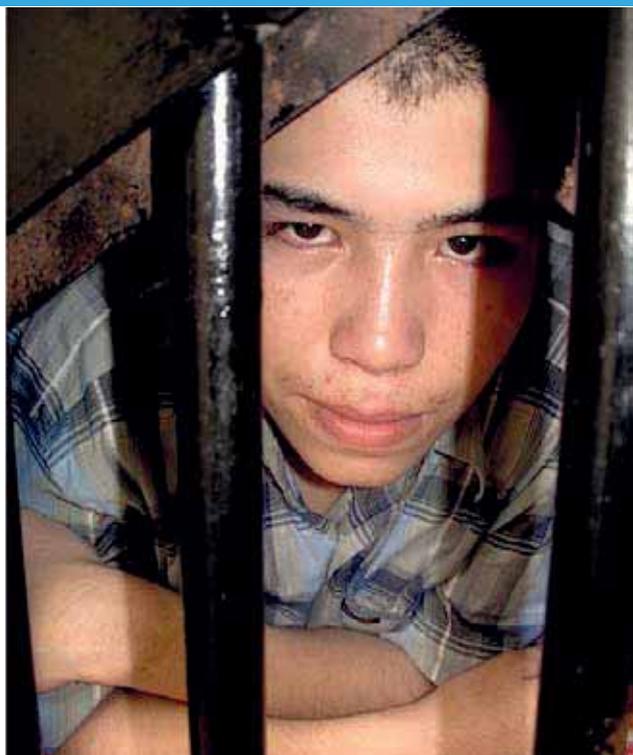
With only 300 USD in his pockets and the support of an agent he left Afghanistan via Pakistan to India and arrived in Malaysia by plane where he boarded a ship to Indonesia. He did not know where he entered Indonesia but took the bus for one night through many forests before arriving in Jakarta. After an overnight stay in Jakarta, he was escorted to Cisarua by an agent.

There was no one he knew here. Fortunately one new friend he met on the journey would share with him to rent a small room. But this did not last long. The following month they had to separate because Hamid could no longer pay his part of the room rental fees. He had no place to stay.

"For four days I slept on the front porch. On the terrace of the house there was an old couch that had been damaged. Not bad, I would still have a bed. For four days, I only drank water from the tap because I did not have money to buy food or water at all. I was forced to drink tap water just to survive," he said.

Because of only drinking tap water for four days Hamid started to have diarrhea. His body became thin and he felt very tired.

Hearing about him, some Afghans who lived in the area offered Hamid shelter in their rented house. Lacking the money to contribute to the rent, Hamid had to support the people who were helping him. Every day he was in charge of washing clothes, mopping the floor, making meals three times a day, and prepared tea when guests were visiting.



Unaccompanied child seeking asylum in Indonesia

For a child of his age, routine work like this was tiring and heavy. He became like a domestic helper, when he was still a child.

"I was so tired and because of this sometimes I would not help washing the clothes. As a result, I would get yelled at," he remembered.

After a month he was yet again threatened not to have a place to stay. The people he helped were forced to move and look for a smaller room with cheaper rent as they were also experiencing financial difficulties.

"Actually we did not have the heart, but we also cannot do much. We are experiencing the same financial problems. We will leave and look for a cheaper place," Hamid remembered their words at the time.



For many children of asylum seekers and refugees, going to school is a dream that does not come true for many years.

As a child living alone in a foreign country, he often misses his mother dearly, whom he left behind in a village in Afghanistan. When asked about his mother, he could only cry and could not utter a word. He actually really wanted to be able to speak with her, but did not have any money to pay for calls. When JRS borrowed him a cell phone to call his mother he was crying for joy even though his mother did not pick up the phone.

"I'm happy even though my mother did not pick up the phone. At least I know that my mother's phone number is still active. Thank you," he said in tears. Being able to make the telephone of his mother rang, was enough to raise his hopes.

While registering with UNHCR Hamid experienced another challenge. He was only 16 years old at the time, but was registered as being 26 years old excluding him from special support as Unaccompanied Minor, a vulnerable group UNHCR offers special protection. It happened because a fellow asylum seeker helping him during registration gave the wrong date of birth.

Hamid is one of hundreds of unaccompanied children seeking asylum in Indonesia vulnerable to be arrested and detained in one of the 13 immigration detention centers, or continue living on the streets in a situation without any guardianship and no support. Often children lose many months or even years of their life without education and dwindling hope for a better future.

Meanwhile, Hamid has been assisted by JRS to live together with some other asylum seekers at a house rented by JRS serving as an Emergency Shelter for those who are most vulnerable. He has also been receiving good health care so that health is improving. Suaka – Indonesian Civil Society Network for Refugee Protection, a group of individuals and organizations that provide free legal assistance and advocacy for asylum seekers in Indonesia is currently trying to help Hamid to receive protection in accordance with international laws and the guidelines of UNHCR. ***

Seeds of Hope in a Place of Desperation

Daryadi Achmadi



Vegetable garden in an Immigration Detention Center

For asylum seekers, living in an immigration detention center means spending their days anxiously facing uncertainties and boredom while awaiting a decision on their application for international protection. During these days of uncertainty a variety of activities aim to make this waiting period more meaningful. Some of the activities offered by JRS and IOM such as sports, English language courses, music lessons and swimming in a local pool have reduced detainees' emotional tensions and reaffirmed their capabilities. Recently the detained asylum seekers started to fill the bleak detention center with plants.

"I do not want to just sleep and eat here. I need things to do to fill my time" said Mahmud (40), an Iranian asylum seekers who arrived in the detention center in January. As one of the most enthusiastic and active detainees, Mahmud has planted and cared for the plants in and around the detention center. "I will make the environment around the detention center a *Jannah* (Paradise)," he said eagerly.

Detainees are increasingly excited joining the gardening activities. In some parts of the center the results are already starting to look encouraging. In one corner of the yard cucumbers, eggplants, peppers and tomatoes are starting to grow. Eggplants and tomatoes planted by a refugee from Myanmar in May is starting to bear fruits. Now the plants are looked after by other detainees as the first gardener was released into community accommodation. They diligently care for these plants, providing water and fertilizer and removing pests.

One time, when no fertilizer was available they eagerly started using organic waste to cultivate eggplant and tomato plants. A Sudanese asylum seeker who had just arrived at the detention center in April joined gardening straight away and was glad to help transform the gray yard into a garden.

The initial garden design was developed by Mahmud. He molded pots out of cement using plastic pipes to shape them. Now eight small circles forming a flower with eight petals are filled with various beautiful plants.

The detained men felt very happy when members of the Catholic Parish of Pasuruan visited them for a third time bringing 120 polybags of colorful ornamental plants. IOM also contributed several types of plants and flowers. In a few months the front yard and surrounding environment of the detention center will look like a garden as aspired by Mahmud.

Detainees, JRS and IOM facilitated this gardening together. While JRS is providing compost, plant seeds, bamboo planks, a hoe and watering cans, fertilizer and pesticides, IOM is providing sand, cement, flower and plant seeds.

This gardening experience shows that when given the opportunity detainees will use their creativity, skill and craftsmanship that at the end benefits not only themselves but also others around them. Being able to form and shape ones surrounding making it more beautiful and useful is a longing of every human being. Being able to leave ones legacy in even such a desolate place like a detention center is empowering. To see things grow is a worthy alternative to just counting the endless days hoping for a safer and more dignified future. The results of the detainees' efforts are also appreciated by the staff of the immigration detention center."

"Gardening and planting is a good activity for the people detained here. The garden they made is pretty good too. Unfortunately there are not enough plants yet," said the Head of the Immigration Detention Center. Other staff revealed similar views,"The garden and plants look good. I support gardening and planting activities because it reduces boredom and stress of the detainees here."

"May the people detained here enjoy planting flowers and appreciate their beauty. Planting flowers can be a simple entertainment and recreation that provides irreplaceable satisfaction," a visiting member of the local parish expressed hopes.***



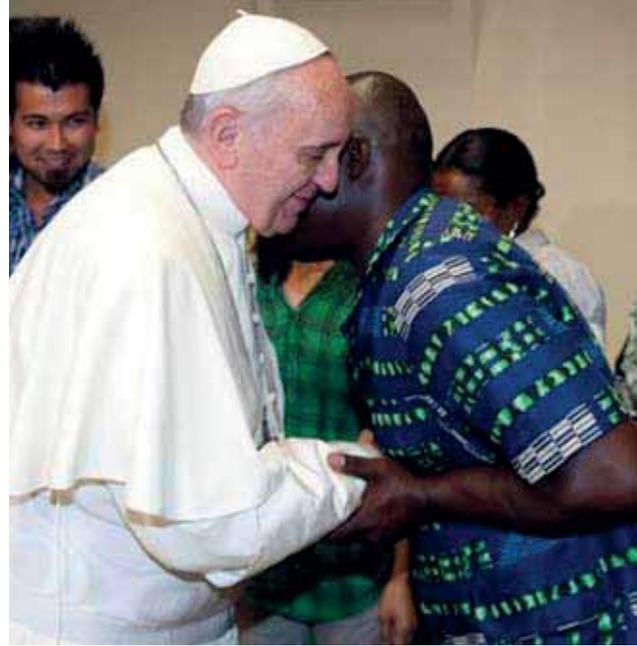
Gardening in progress, designed and hand made by people held in the immigration detention center.

A Message Echoing through the Human Family

Th. A. Maswan Susinto, SJ

Khaled Hosseini's latest novel "And the Mountains Echoed" introduces us to the intimate link among family members in Afghanistan. Hosseini takes us on a journey across time, from the era of pre-Soviet occupation in Afghanistan until the period after entering the third millennium. The characters show a close bond among family members, especially between the siblings of Pari and Abdullah, whose mother passed away during their childhood. It talks about the relationship between Saboor the father and those two children and also the close bond between Nabi, Saboor's brother-in-law and the children, especially Pari. Since his youth, Nabi has been a loyal servant of a rich man in Kabul, Wahdati Suleiman and his wife Nila. Saboor, a poor farmer, sold Pari to this wealthy family who cannot get children on their own.

Saboor's family in Shadbagh is separated by death, poverty, political turmoil, and difficult life choices driven by hope for a better future. The novel takes us from the fictional hamlet called Shadbagh, to Kabul, and all the way to Paris where Nila then resides with the little Pari. Nevertheless, the memory of closeness and warmth of family ties back home are not broken by distance, time, forgotten moments, and events. In the confusion of being uprooted of her past, Pari feels "That there was in her life the absence of something, or someone, fundamental to her own existence. Sometimes it was vague, like a message sent across shadowy byways and vast distances, a weak signal on a radio dial, remote, warbled. Other times it felt so clear, this absence, so intimately close it made her heart lurch (page 205)." Finally Pari and her brother Abdullah met again in California but he no longer remembers her as he is suffering from Alzheimer.



Pope Francis met with refugees in Centro Astalli, Italy

The dramas of Afghan families drawn in Hosseini's novel are a reality for asylum seekers and refugees as we met them in Indonesia. Of the 3,268 refugees and 7,168 asylum seekers here in the beginning of 2014, there are many children fleeing alone from their home country, a great distance from their parents or relatives. A few days ago, we were approached on behalf of two refugee children sleeping in a mosque in Jakarta. They rely only on the kindness of the people around to share food with them. Living in such a harsh reality, children continue to be left to struggle on their own in Jakarta and other cities in Indonesia as numerous countries in the Middle East, Southwest Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Africa are hit by conflicts.

Many of Indonesian people have shown hospitality accepting asylum seekers and refugees, particularly those who are vulnerable

such as unaccompanied minors, women, the elderly, those who have run out of savings or those who are ill. Solidarity Indonesians have expressed exceeds the limits of the family, state, tribe, religion, or race. Humanity becomes the only language that binds their hearts. Behind all the political maneuvering that countries undertake to reject the presence of asylum seekers and refugees, the actions of our citizens is a generous encouragement and kindles hope for refugees.

Pope Francis earlier this year encouraged us all that "A change of attitude towards migrants and refugees is needed on the part of everyone, moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalization – all typical of a throwaway culture – towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world."

World Refugee Day on June 20, 2014 is a chance to encourage and practice this change of attitude when meeting asylum seekers and refugees driven by war and conflict into our midst. Our consideration and real support for them is needed as currently they receive no or only little personal and institutional attention when trying to fulfill their basic needs for food, shelter, and medical assistance.

With the title "And the Mountains Echoed", Khaled Hosseini reflects about the bond of love during separation leading people to fix their families broken ties, like the echo of the joyful laughter of children echoes through the mountain cliffs of Afghanistan. Being with and for asylum seekers and refugees separated from their families is an act of solidarity and carries a message of love and hope for all of us. It is our decisions and actions that will echo into the future and into far places of the world, resonating powerfully through the human family, the message of love that is so needed in our time.

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