



# servir



## The enduring spirit of the Syrian people

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**NOVEMBER 2012**  
COVER PHOTO



The JRS field kitchen team in Aleppo, Syria (Avo Kaprealian and Sedki Al Imam/JRS)

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The Jesuit Refugee Service is an international Catholic organisation established in 1980 by Pedro Arrupe SJ. Its mission is to accompany, serve and defend the cause of forcibly displaced people.

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### Abbreviations

The following are used throughout this issue

**DRC** Democratic Republic of Congo

**SGBV** Sexual and gender-based violence

**UNHCR** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees





## Faith and protection

“I cannot believe this is God’s will.” Faced with the violence destroying her country, 26-year-old Lola from Syria expresses her deepest spiritual doubts. In Syria, people of all faiths frequently use the expression *Inch’allah*, ‘if God wants’, as an expression of their confidence that everything is God’s will. But the war, killing and destruction happening now cannot be God’s will. Lola is right: this is the will of human beings who opted for violent means either to maintain or attain power. To make things worse, some extremists don’t hesitate to use God’s name to justify their violence, saying it is His will... but not the God Lola believes in.

Extreme situations like war, forced displacement and despair confront us with the burning question about the utter meaning of life. For many refugees, their last hope rests in their God. For

humanitarian workers, for members of the local community, for people like Lola, who works with JRS in Damascus, faith in the God of love is the single most important reason to stay, to hope and to work for others who suffer. Lola is one of many Syrian JRS workers and volunteers, active in Christian and Muslim communities, who just want to serve their people, to protect them by offering shelter, food and education for their children. To do this, they risk their own protection.

Inviting partners to a dialogue on faith and protection, António Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, recognises “the important contribution of local religious communities towards the protection of forcibly displaced and stateless persons. At the local level, religious leaders and communities often find themselves on the front lines of

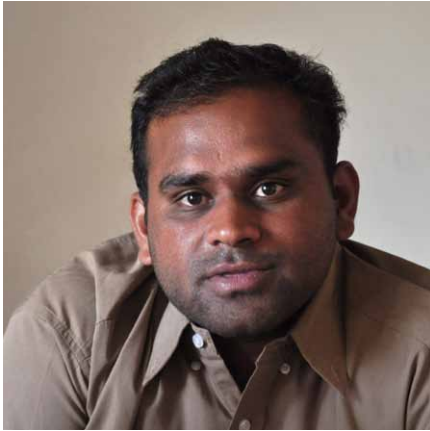
conflict and emergencies, serving as the first providers of life-saving protection and assistance... Local religious communities have also long played a fundamental role in the promotion of tolerance and reconciliation.”

Faith can motivate people to give up their own protection to protect refugees instead. Reflecting on his work in Afghanistan, Jestin from India says Jesuits are called to move out of their safety zones, to give without counting the cost. How many humanitarian workers of all creeds risk, sometimes lose, their lives for love? In this issue of *Servir*, we pay tribute to the late Pierre Ceyrac SJ, one of the very first JRS workers and a shining icon of our mission. A man who devoted his life to others, Fr Pierre always quoted a saying of St John of the Cross: “At the end of our lives we will be judged by love.” ●

**Peter Balleis SJ** | JRS International director

# Uncertain but hopeful

Jestin Anthony SJ



📷 Jestin is a Jesuit in formation from Gujarat province in India.

In 2001, the world watched helplessly as the Taliban destroyed two massive Buddha statues, carved nearly 1,500 years earlier in the cliff face overlooking Bamyan. Today, the silent mountains still depict the wounds of this small isolated province in central Afghanistan. It was more than precious cultural monuments that were destroyed. The male and female Buddha statues stand for all the men and women of Bamyan, neglected, marginalised and, still today, in pain.

The beautiful green valley of Bamyan is mostly home to the Hazara people. Shia Muslims, as opposed to the overwhelming Sunni majority in Afghanistan, the Hazaras suffered terribly under Taliban rule. Many fled

to neighbouring Iran, where they spent years as refugees. Their suffering has prompted a realisation in the people of Bamyan that education is the only way to fight injustice. Their desire to gain knowledge is so intense it really motivates me to give my best, always.

The needs of Bamyan are many and diverse. But knowing that education is a major key to development, JRS has invested in this field. I was asked to manage the English Access programme in four schools, the teacher-training centre and at the university. Jerome Sequeira SJ, JRS director in Bamyan, had to go to India for tertianship (the final phase of Jesuit formation), and I was slightly anxious about being alone



📷 The desecrated cliff face overlooking Bamyan. (Peter Balleis SJ/JRS)





📷 Girls are eager to go to school but the nightmare scenario of a possible Taliban return looms. (Peter Balleis SJ/JRS)

for three months. But it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. The biggest challenge to overcome was the cultural barrier but those months by myself allowed me to get to know the people and their culture more closely.

My interaction with the students helps me to see reality from their point of view. Young people in Bamyan really want to study and progress in life, their avid interest in class makes this clear. They are tired of war, but when asked how they see the future of Afghanistan, their eyes reflect grave concern. During the Taliban times, girls were not allowed to go to school, never given the opportunity to learn. One of our access students voiced their silent fear: “If Taliban come back, it would be most difficult for us girls to leave our house freely and go to school or university. There will always be the fear of death.”

Adults share the girls’ views. A JRS staff worker said: “The Taliban will never allow us [Hazaras] to live peacefully. They will find us and kill us. We’ll have no other way but to flee to another country

as refugees just as we did before.” Another staff member, Dawlat Bhaktiyari, says he’ll leave the country voluntarily. “I’d be very happy to go somewhere else where I can do higher studies and get a good job.” Many young intelligent minds feel the same, that there is no place for them in Afghanistan, no place for free speech.

As Jesuits we are called to move out of our safety zones, to give without counting the cost.

For now, at least, Bamyan is relatively safe although its surroundings and the roads leading to it remain volatile and dangerous. Many hold Bamyan out as a beacon of hope for the rest of the country. There is a long way to go, but can Bamyan truly change? My answer is yes – change is possible. But the people of Bamyan

need our support, now more than ever. If we pull out at this critical moment then we have nobody to blame but ourselves.

As for me, I have discovered more confidence and inner strength than ever before. This wouldn’t have been possible without faith in God, who has sent me on this mission, and my formation as a Jesuit. Every evening, in my silent prayers, I challenge myself with three questions from the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, the Society of Jesus: What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What will I do for Christ? I am thankful to the Society for placing so much trust in me and challenging me to go ahead. As Jesuits, we are called to move out of our safety zones, to give without counting the cost.

This land of uncertainties has taught me a great deal, and I am ever grateful to all who have been with me in this mission of the Society. For it is through your help and support that I have received formation that will be ever close to my heart. ●

## Between life and death

For Luis Fernando Gómez Gutiérrez, JRS Latin America advocacy officer, accompanying Afro-Colombian people in one of Colombia's most violent places is a privilege earned through being with them in their pain.

### First day...

29 June 2008: A wonderful Sunday afternoon. Children ran in every possible direction on the football pitch and community grounds of San Francisco district in Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca. Men and women bustled around, preparing activities to celebrate life as a community, with music, singing and laughter. It was an occasion worth celebrating: the closure of an intensive process of formation and exchange of ideas, of identifying ways to live in such an adverse environment.

Buenaventura has always been a tough place, with a harsh climate, high temperatures and stifling humidity. Throughout history, leaders have tended to forget about this region, except for its harbour, a crucial entry and exit point. Since colonial times, the harbour of Buenaventura has been the world's gateway to Colombia and the country's gateway to globalisation; a gateway built on exclusion and structural violence, on the kind of development that ignores the human element.

Today Buenaventura is a fierce battleground of guerrillas, paramilitary and governmental forces, of strongmen and drug dealers, all fighting one another and each other's allies, but mostly manipulated by external actors.

However, in the annals of Colombia's unofficial history, Buenaventura has also been a place of renewal for black communities, a space earned by the sweat of



Children playing in Lleras neighbourhood, Buenaventura. (Randolf Laverde)

men and women who sailed the long rivers and carved out a living space in semi-harmony with the jungle, wresting ground from the mangrove swamps to build entire settlements.

That afternoon, as we celebrated the life of black communities, brothers and sisters drew on their shared history to look to the future, agreeing on an action plan that would serve as the roadmap of a resurgent people. I

spent the entire afternoon with my video camera, capturing the joy of women in pink t-shirts, proud to be leaders in the process, and the talent of boys and girls dancing in traditional costume, bearing witness to the irrepressible strength of joint effort. I filmed faces, smiles, rhythmic movements, applause and speeches. At the time, I could never have imagined I was witnessing the last public words of Doña Martha



Cecilia “Chila”, a displaced black woman who had led this and many other initiatives in San Francisco district.

When the light of the sun that accompanied us that day disappeared, I received a distressed call from the director of the organisation that had enabled the entire process. She said Chila had been killed just a few minutes after the end of the activity. Her dead body lay on the football pitch. People were paralysed with fear; nobody dared go to her. I wasn't far away and all I dared was to make a couple of calls to the authorities and local people who might safely be able to help. Death was back in San Francisco and other districts of Buenaventura just when it had seemed the killers were yielding to the peaceful strength of the community.

## Second day...

In the late afternoon, in the chapel of the Franciscans, a few metres away from the place where Chila had been killed by anonymous weapons, family and friends, known and unknown, gathered to bid her farewell and to share their pain and indignation. Among the unknown were three of us *paisas*, as they call anyone who is not black around here, vaguely acknowledged as “the Jesuits” and friends in a joint project. The night before, we had prepared a short audiovisual presentation with the pictures and videos we had taken that Sunday afternoon, when we thought they might serve during a different kind of celebration.

In a room behind the altar, we discussed with members of different organisations what kind of words we should use, who

would speak and what to say, and whether it would be sensible to send a clear message about human rights through the presentation we had prepared.

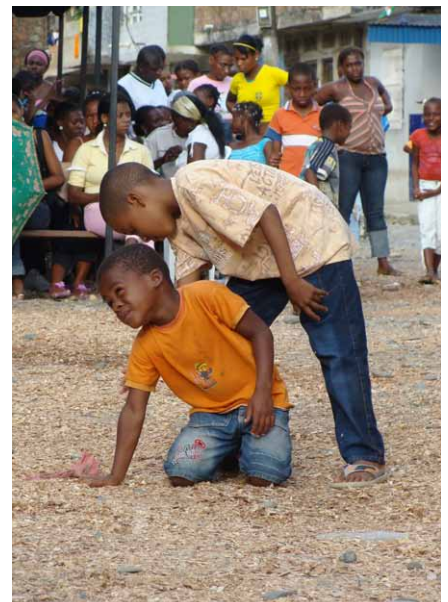
In that chapel, there was despair, indignation and pain caused by injustice and the mystery of death. However, from my perspective of faith, I could recognise the risen Christ in that lifeless body behind the altar.

Black people do not stand in silence in the presence of death. Music, drums, movement and alcohol accompany death, for life and death are not separate but parts of the same essence. There is death in life itself. With the melody of the music, the penetrating drumbeat, the cadence of the poems recited for Chila, and that strange mixture of life and death, my heart burst into tears. What exactly was I doing here, why had life confronted me with this reality, what could I offer these people, what lessons should I learn? What was God telling me in my desolation?

As tears rolled down our cheeks, Don Mario, leader and poet from Buenaventura's La Gloria district, approached us to shake hands, saying emphatically: “Whites don't cry for blacks,” suggesting with these words that we had become brothers of the community. A lasting friendship was born.

## Third day...

Months later, thanks to the seeds of life born from that celebration of death and to Don Mario, we found ourselves sitting under a tree in the Matía Mulumba centre, to discuss possible ways to give practical form to our friendship.



📷 Children performing in a cultural activity in Lleras neighbourhood, Buenaventura. The vast majority of Buenaventura's residents are black. (David Lima Díaz SJ)



📷 La Playita neighbourhood of Buenaventura, an area primarily home to displaced Colombians. Most of the homes are constructed on stilts over the bay. (Christian Fuchs/JRS)



📷 The funeral ceremony of Chila. (Luis Fernando Gómez)

Since then, many things have evolved in this relationship: the La Gloria district process, as we called it, the La Gloria district struggle, as they continue to experience it. La Gloria is a rural district on the outskirts of the city of Buenaventura, a violent place with a high concentration of displaced people. Since 2009, JRS Colombia has been accompanying the La Gloria community in its struggle to win respect for the collective rights of black communities and to prevent forced displacement and child recruitment. The action plan, in which Chila had taken part, remains a point of reference for their shared life. The danger is still there and rises each day like a giant threatening to crush small local initiatives. Not much has changed in reality. Nevertheless, there is “La Glorita,” a small farm that started as a symbol of collaboration between the community and some organisations, including JRS, and is now run by the community alone.

That afternoon, as we agonised over Chila’s death, we found renewed life in the courage that arose from that very injustice. Death is not eternal, life is. After three days, Christ shows

us the metaphor of death, the metamorphosis through death and victory over death.

This and other experiences have helped me to understand clearly that the message of the resurrection is present daily in families who must leave their homes to live as displaced, marginalised people. The history of humanity is marked by the stories of those forced to start all over again in a land not their own, in a foreign culture, to communicate their ideas and feelings in a borrowed language. This is the

fragility of our history, represented by people who see how the light of life fades, the sun hides and night falls.

But after night comes day and, before it comes, a beautiful and colourful miracle takes place. With each new day the sun brings its message of life. Death can bring life to those who suffer, with the strength that comes from sincere brotherly love, if they accept it in their hearts. In death is life, for those who want to believe and see it this way. ●



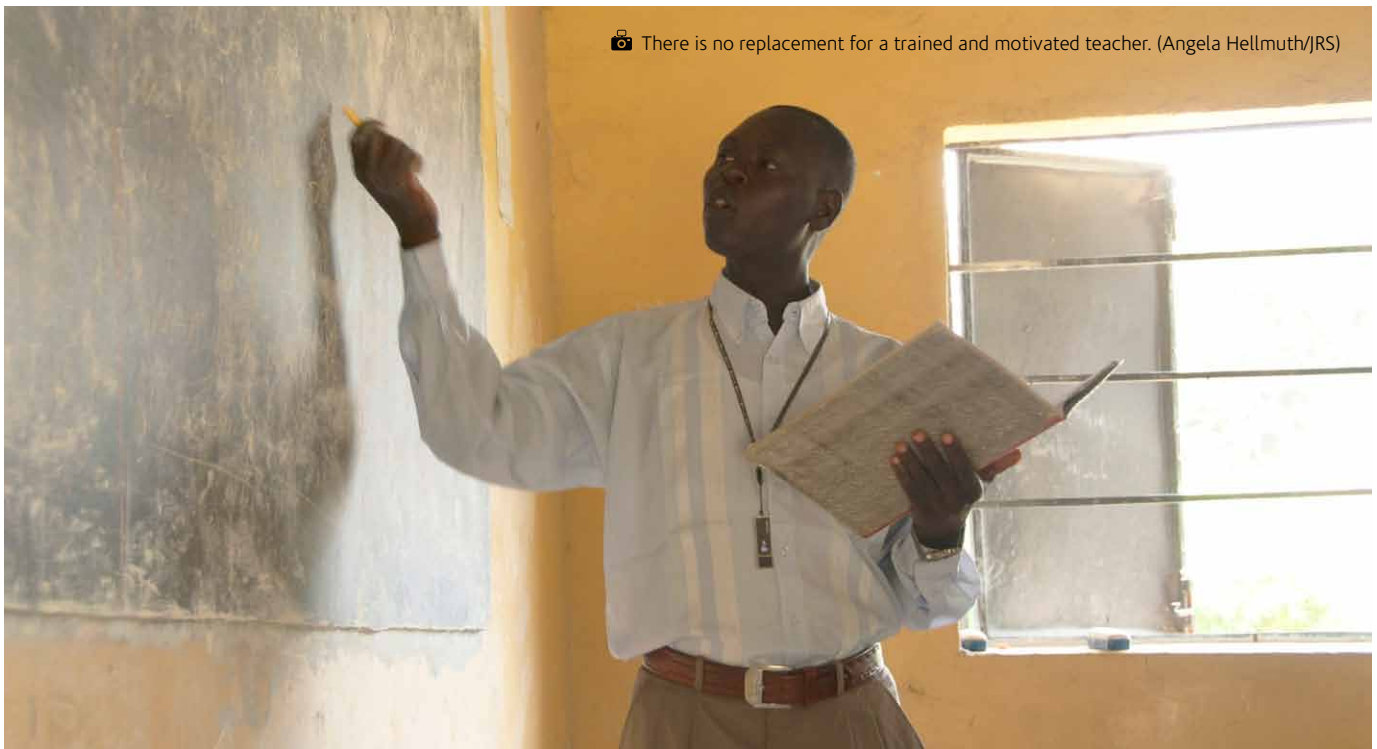
### Info point

In the department of Valle del Cauca lies Buenaventura — Colombia’s principal port city and also one of its deadliest. Buenaventura has received massive numbers of displaced Colombians in recent years fleeing violent displacement by armed groups. The city has become an important strategic location for both guerrillas and paramilitaries seeking to capture valuable routes for the shipment of drugs, arms, gold and other resources along the multitude of rivers that surround the

city and empty out into the Pacific port. The fear and violence gripping Buenaventura is palpable as we walk through the neighbourhoods hosting the displaced... Leaflets announcing the presence of illegal armed groups regularly appear... Of particular concern is the targeting of youth and children who are ripe for coercion and recruitment by the illegal armed groups.

**Shaina Aber, former JRS USA advocacy, *On assignment in Buenaventura*, 21 May 2012.**





There is no replacement for a trained and motivated teacher. (Angela Hellmuth/JRS)

## A community is as good as its teachers

Dr Biryaho Francis, JRS South Sudan education coordinator

A community is only as good as its teachers. There is no substitute for a trained and committed teacher to promote quality education. JRS learned this valuable lesson in more than 15 years promoting education in South Sudan.

JRS shaped its contribution in South Sudan – first as a region at war and later as a new country – according to need. For years, JRS concentrated on propping up the educational infrastructure: constructing and renovating classrooms, dormitories for girls, laboratories and libraries; supplying teaching and learning aids; building the capacity of school management bodies; providing desks, chalk and blackboards and paying the school fees of girls and vulnerable boys. Teacher training was provided too but JRS had no mandate to enter a classroom to supervise the teachers and learners.

Beneficiary communities in Nimule, Lobone, Kajo-Keji and Yei appreciated the JRS contribution. But an evaluation carried out in 2010 revealed that more needed to be done. Providing materials is not a *sine qua non* for learning. Literacy, numeracy, mathematics and sciences were found to be poor in primary and secondary schools. Among the problems identified were uncoordinated workshops for teachers.

JRS decided to set up school development teams (SDTs) to bring about positive transformation within the school by the school. Each SDT consists of three experienced and committed teachers who were trained and supervised by JRS and who in turn mentor, train and encourage their colleagues.

After training SDT members, JRS followed up with monthly

### ! Info point

South Sudan is struggling to build its education system amid soaring school enrolment with teachers who are mostly primary school leavers. The fledgling nation is believed to have the worst literacy rate in the world. A recent report by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) holds that less than 2% of the population has completed primary school education, while the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) says 70% of children aged between six and 17 years have never set foot inside a classroom.

meetings at the school level. Characterised by a personal approach and focus on specific issues, the meetings proved helpful for the teachers, who said they acquired knowledge and confidence. In all, 36 primary schools and 16 secondary schools benefited.

The move paid off. JRS developed tools to assess progress and carried out a shared assessment with government education officials and SDT members. They found team teaching had been introduced in schools; joint JRS and government supervision had improved; and there was marked progress in making lesson plans.

A ringing endorsement was the result of the 2011 South Sudan Certificate of Secondary Education, which revealed that seven out of the 10 best schools were supported by JRS. Students and teachers say SDT

was one of the factors contributing to this good performance.

Another positive step – recommended by experts – taken by JRS has been to support primary schools in the use of local mother tongues as a medium of instruction; these schools registered gains in literacy and numeracy.

What will happen now that JRS is withdrawing? In August 2012, during a training workshop, teachers and government officials pledged to support SDTs. However other steps must be taken to motivate teachers. A grade-three teacher earns about 200 Sudanese pounds per month (equivalent to US\$50). “We cannot send our children to decent schools yet others send their children to school outside South Sudan,” said one teacher. And another: “We have an obligation to educate and feed our

family as others do.” Teaching is a last resort for job seekers due to the low pay.

Other challenges abound. The home environment is not conducive to learning. Very few houses have electricity and poverty is rife: one harvest a year does not provide enough food for home consumption and to generate an income too. The infrastructure of pre-independence South Sudan had been destroyed by years of civil war. Education is not isolated from other social systems; fixing the problems of formal education must go hand in hand with tackling those in health, security, agriculture and other services.

Yet education is a key to development in all senses. Unless huge investment is pumped into improving our schools, low levels of literacy will persist in South Sudan.



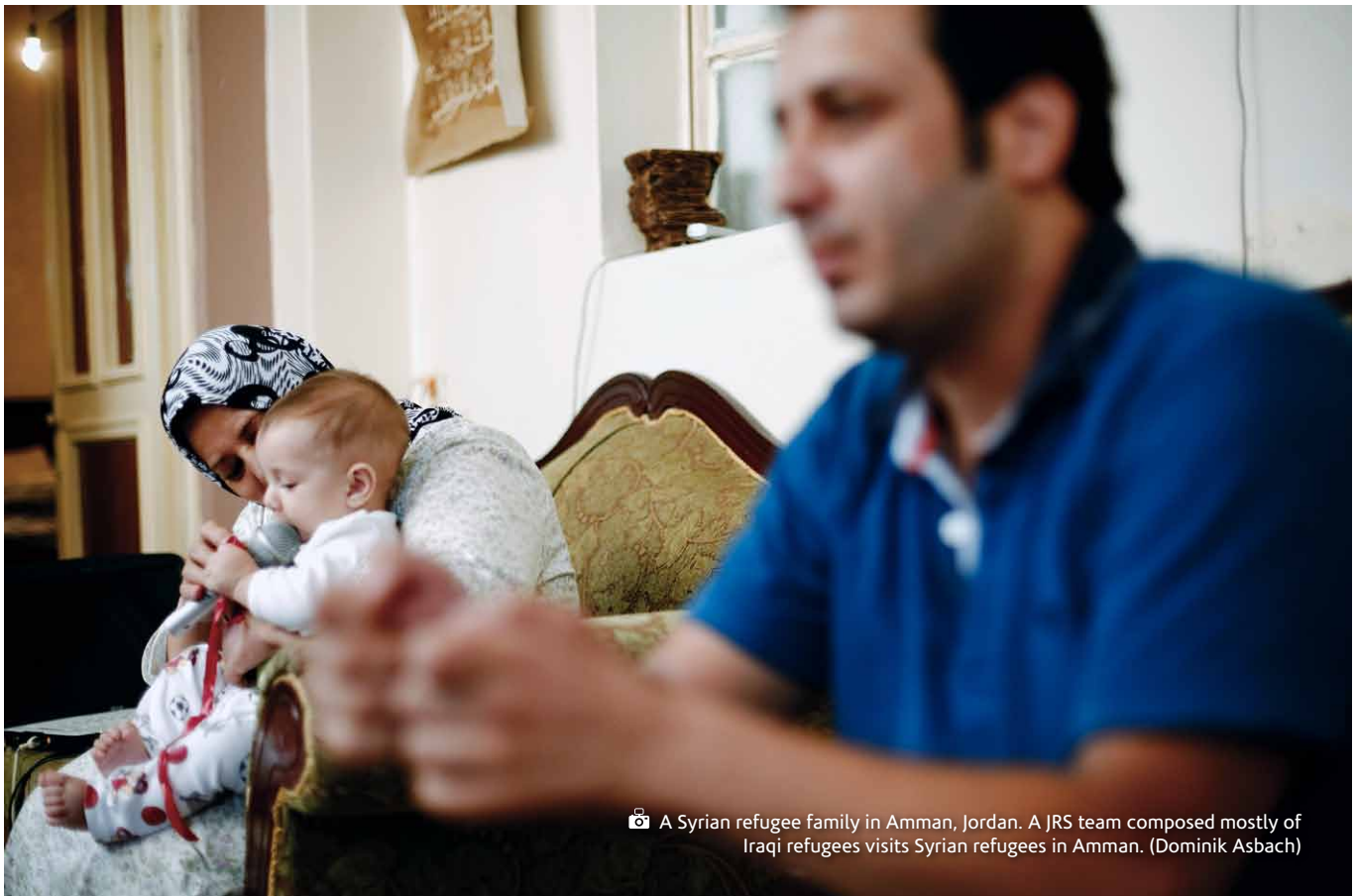
📷 Investing in bricks and mortar is important but not enough to have good schools. (Angela Hellmuth/JRS)

#### JRS LEAVES SOUTH SUDAN

At the end of 2012, JRS will officially close the last of its projects in South Sudan, focused on education, pastoral accompaniment and peace building. The decision to exit from these successful projects was made in line with the JRS mandate of attending to the needs of the forcibly displaced in situations of great need. Now that returnees, largely from refugee camps in Uganda, have settled and benefited from JRS work, the time has come to hand over ownership of the projects to the local communities... safe in the knowledge that the foundations are there for continued growth, learning and success.

**Deogratias Rwezaura SJ, JRS Eastern Africa regional director**





📷 A Syrian refugee family in Amman, Jordan. A JRS team composed mostly of Iraqi refugees visits Syrian refugees in Amman. (Dominik Asbach)

## Volunteer networks bring hope

Angelika Mendes, JRS International fundraising coordinator, and Zerene Haddad, JRS Middle East communications officer

Twenty-four year-old Selima was seven months pregnant when fighting in her neighbourhood forced her to leave Homs. With her husband Rami she sought refuge in Damascus. They stayed two weeks, but the shelling forced them to escape again, this time for Dera'a in southern Syria. Accompanied by members of the Free Syrian Army they set out at night to cross the border into Jordan. "It was a long and difficult journey, rocky and steep. We walked in the dark for three hours, afraid of coming under fire any minute," recalls Selima. They were relieved when the Jordanian military met them at the border and took them to a transit camp.

Estimates say more than 300,000 Syrians have crossed into Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon since the uprisings and their violent suppression started early in 2011. Exact numbers are unknown because many are afraid to register and live outside the camps, dispersed among the local people.

However, most Syrians who have fled their homes are displaced within their own country – an estimated one and a half million. Many move more than once because military operations target their refuge. Meanwhile hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees who fled to Syria years ago are caught up in the violence. One of them,

Fadia, said: "I fear things here will be the same as in Iraq. If this happens, where are we supposed to go?"

Present in Syria since 2008, JRS can help the displaced people thanks to strong local links. "Very few international aid agencies have access to Syria. It is our connection with local Jesuits and informal support networks of Christians and Muslims that allows us to reach families in need," says JRS International director Peter Balleis SJ. JRS supports networks of Syrian volunteers of all ages, religions and ethnic backgrounds that want to reach out to fellow Syrians and ensure help is delivered effectively to all.



Thanks to these volunteer networks, JRS is coordinating emergency relief services in Aleppo, Damascus and Homs. JRS teams regularly visit the displaced families and, at JRS centres, people register to receive food, accommodation, hygiene products, clothing, household items and basic medical assistance. A kitchen set up in Aleppo in August feeds more than 5,000 people twice a day, for breakfast and dinner. Volunteers hand out the food in shelters and at distribution

points across the city but it's never enough.

Educational support, counselling and activities such as sports and art give children the chance to share their experiences. "Helping children is one of our priorities. Even though they may not be direct victims, they suffer so much by being displaced and witnessing this terrible situation, the tragedy in their families and disruption of their lives," says Nawras Sammour SJ, JRS Middle East director and himself a Syrian.

In Homs, where the academic year was severely disrupted, some children were unable to attend school for more than a year. Since mid-April JRS has offered remedial lessons every afternoon at two centres. Up to 800 children attend. "We hope that through establishing an educational routine we can restore a sense of normalcy in their lives," says Fr Nawras. During the summer, activities for children were also held in Damascus and in the shelters in Aleppo.

Although some schools have reopened in Damascus and Homs, others remain closed. In Aleppo, they are closed because the fighting is too intense. Some 60,000 displaced people have sought shelter in schools, mosques, the university campus and abandoned buildings in the city. Sadly, Deir Vartan, the first centre of JRS in Syria, which opened its doors to Iraqi refugees and Syrians in more peaceful times in 2008, was partly destroyed by fighting in September. Despite this setback, JRS remains responsible for the operation of shelters in five schools in the city and supports others.



### Testimony

"We used to be one nation but now we are divided." Mahmoud fled Homs with Azra and their two children, Layla and Mustafa. In November 2011 protesters started to gather for peaceful demonstrations in the city centre every Friday after prayers. "The government set up road blocks and nobody could leave. I saw them shoot protesters," said Mahmoud. The young family lived in a part of the city controlled by government forces. "When soldiers began to hand out weapons to all


the men in the neighbourhood, asking them to fight the protesters, we knew we had to leave." Layla is almost two and Mustafa five. Their parents heard about children being abducted for ransom. "I was afraid something might happen to them in Homs," says Azra. They took the bus to Jordan and now they live in a small flat in Amman. "The Jordanians are very friendly", says Azra. "But life is difficult. We have used all our savings and it's not easy to find a job."



*“So sad, it hurts, the latest news about Deir Vartan, shelter, safe haven, inspiration, teamwork, love, meetings, friendship, serving, lessons learned, hope... Stones can be destroyed, but not the spirit.”*

**CORRY VERHAGE**  
WHO HELPED SET UP  
DEIR VARTAN



 JRS volunteer Philip Hamwi surrounded by children in Aleppo. (Avo Kaprealian and Sedki Al Imam/JRS)




In Jordan, Iraqi refugees reach out to Syrian refugees living outside the overcrowded camps. “When I see Syrian families I remember when we were first refugees,” says Laith Eskander. The young man coordinates the family visits carried out by the JRS team, which is mostly composed of Iraqi volunteers. They visit Syrians to show support, share useful information and connect them to helpful services. This is important in urban areas where refugees can

easily fall through the cracks.

Syrian refugees also attend JRS classes in English language and computer skills in eastern Amman. Eleven year-old Doaa attends lessons every day. She used to have many friends back in Syria but has not mingled much in Jordan. Instead, she grapples with images of war and dead people and the blast of explosions. The school is no substitute for regular lessons but does help children like Doaa to recover. There is a golden rule: no one is allowed to talk

religion or politics – to safeguard peace in exile.

Using religion to highlight differences and ignite conflict is a dangerous temptation for all sides in this situation. But concrete examples of solidarity beyond religious and cultural borders give reason to hope. “Bringing people together is not easy in such a scenario,” says Fr Peter. “But we see it working in our teams. They offer concrete help to all without distinction, helping those suffering to set their eyes on the future.” ●

 Angelika Mendes/JRS



**“I want to be there for other refugees”**

JRS social workers, Nawal and Adnan from Iraq, on a home visit in Amman. Both fled to Jordan in 2007 due to the war in Iraq. A mother of two, Nawal worked as an air hostess with the Iraqi national carrier for 12 years. In Amman, she has worked with several NGOs, and started with JRS last year. “They call me until midnight, I’m like their mother,” Nawal says about the refugees.

Her two mobile phones ring continuously. Refugees get her number from other refugees, right after crossing the border from Syria into Jordan. We tell her she needs to look after herself too, to rest, especially since she is fighting skin cancer and facing surgery – if she can find the money to pay for it. But Nawal insists: “I want to serve and help refugees, I want to be there for them.”

# Your support for the people of Syria

## Dear Friends

Each food package that JRS volunteers distribute in Syria keeps a family going for one month – a family that has lost its home and everything else because of the war. The packages weigh around 35 kg each and contain rice, bulgur wheat, beans, dates, tea, sugar, canned food and, for those who need it, baby food.

Networks of volunteers also distribute blankets, medicine and other essential items, and help refugees find a place to stay – a sign of solidarity in an otherwise divided country. JRS centres welcome children to learn and play. The good news is, **you can help us help them.**

€30 | US\$40

ENABLES A CHILD TO ATTEND ONE OF OUR CENTRES FOR A MONTH. WITH €25/US\$30 MORE, YOU CAN ENSURE A DAILY MEAL TOO.

€80 | US\$100

PAYS FOR A MONTHLY FOOD DISTRIBUTION PACKAGE FOR A FAMILY OF FIVE.

€100 | US\$130

PAYS FOR A WINTER KIT OF CLOTHES, JACKET AND SHOES FOR ONE.

€1,500 | US\$1,930

WILL FEED A FAMILY OF TEN FOR SIX MONTHS.

Go to [jrs.net](http://jrs.net) for the latest reports and to [jrs.net/donate](http://jrs.net/donate) to make an online donation. In some countries, you may benefit from tax deductions by donating through our partner organisations. Our website tells you more.

*Thank you*

### I WANT TO SUPPORT THE WORK OF JRS

Please find enclosed a donation of

My cheque is attached

Surname:

Name:

Address:

City:

Post Code:

Country:

Telephone:

Fax:

Email:

I want to subscribe to JRS e-updates

### FOR BANK TRANSFERS

**Bank:**

Banca Popolare di Sondrio,  
Circonvallazione Cornelia 295,  
00167 Roma, Italia  
Ag. 12

**Account name:**

JRS

**Account Number for Euro:**

IBAN: IT 86 Y 05696 03212 000003410X05  
SWIFT CODE/BIC: POSOIT22

**Account Number for US dollars:**

IBAN: IT 97 O 05696 03212 VARUS0003410





**FOCUS**  
ON SEXUAL & GENDER-  
BASED VIOLENCE

# Prevent, protect, prosecute

Amaya Valcarcel, JRS International advocacy coordinator

JRS has joined the new International Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict. We bring to this urgently needed initiative years of experience in protection and prevention and the voice of displaced women who have suffered or are threatened by such atrocities.

The campaign was launched on 6 May 2012, a global collaboration between Nobel Peace Laureates, international organisations and groups working at regional and community levels. There are three pillars: to demand bold political leadership to prevent rape in conflict, to protect civilians and rape survivors and call for justice for all—including effective prosecution of those responsible.

More vigorous action to address rape and gender violence

in conflict is long overdue. These crimes destroy individuals, families and communities and undermine the very fabric of society. Yet national and international commitments to put an end to them are either inadequate or ignored.


Rape has increasingly become a weapon of war, leaving survivors scarred not only by physical trauma, but also by shame and stigma that condemn them to silence or even blame. Impunity for perpetrators is usually taken for granted.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is an advocacy priority for JRS because it is a threat that constantly hangs over refugees during conflict, flight and exile. Prevention and protection through education and psychosocial healing are an

integral part of JRS projects in places as diverse as Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Venezuela, Italy, India and Angola. The new campaign is focusing on Burma, Colombia, DRC and Kenya; JRS is present in the last three and on the Thai side of the border with Burma.

The most valuable contribution JRS can make to the campaign is to bring the perspectives of directly affected women. After all, they are the ones who care most about the safety of their families and communities and their voices are the most important.

The enormity of the scourge of rape in war invites us to believe it is simply impossible to eradicate. But the prospect of motivated joint action helps me to believe we can make a real difference to stop these horrors. ●

 A JRS class for displaced women in Masisi, eastern DRC. Recent studies reveal that 48 women and girls are sexually assaulted every hour in DRC. In the east, a region marked by conflict, the situation is especially severe. (JRS International)



Internet link

Visit the campaign website:  
[stoprapeinconflict.org/](http://stoprapeinconflict.org/)





📷 Women at the JRS urban emergency project in Nairobi. (Gerry Straub/JRS)

## Kenya: It's painful but not the end

Stella Ngumuta, JRS Eastern Africa advocacy officer

Mary\* wept bitterly as she told the JRS social worker about the multiple rapes she had undergone at the hands of her employer's husband and two sons. "I sacrificed my pride to take up work as a housekeeper because it was the only form of livelihood I could find in Nairobi. Since I fled persecution and the killing of my husband in Ethiopia in 2010, I had to find a means of survival. I was desperate, for without the work, my two young daughters and I would be without food or shelter."

Mary said that while her employer was away, the latter's husband and sons would – separately – take turns in sexually molesting her. She endured this abusive behaviour for two months, fearing to lose her only income. When she finally found the courage to tell her employer, she was thrown out under false accusations that she had seduced the men. "I felt so helpless and worthless! I could not believe the accusations, especially from a fellow woman." Mary's only request to JRS was for a listening ear, to help her ease the pain, and re-assurance that her dignity remained intact.

Like other refugee women living in urban areas such as Nairobi,

Mary found herself at high risk of sexual abuse and exploitation. Difficulties in finding work and accessing social services left her with few options. As a single woman with children, Mary was especially vulnerable, because she was perceived to be without male "protectors" to shield her from abusers.

JRS social workers in Nairobi have realised that many survivors who turn to the police are left without follow-up or legal protection. Often the police fail to take the women's reports seriously; they do not arrest perpetrators and it is difficult to prosecute owing to lack of proper compilation of evidence, witness protection or assurance of a fair trial.

On the other hand, survivors of sexual violence do not find it easy to disclose their ordeal, owing to the stigma and shame they face from fellow community members, which are aggravated when they bear children as a result of rape. To fill this gap, JRS in Nairobi has been educating refugee women – partnering with the Church and other agencies – about SGBV and how survivors can get support. Consequently, more women are coming out to report cases. JRS

social workers help refugee women access health services, psychosocial support, legal aid and other forms of social assistance, and to find alternative accommodation away from insecure areas or risky jobs.

JRS has witnessed first hand that SGBV is not confined to women. Our social workers have met refugee men and boys who were sexually abused, especially in their home country, with a high number of cases from DRC. For over three years, Patrick\* lived with what he described as "unspeakable shame" after his sodomy ordeal at the hands of rebel forces in North Kivu province in eastern DRC. He is receiving support from several agencies.

JRS is part of a working group on SGBV affecting refugees in Nairobi. Mechanisms of ensuring trust and confidentiality are crucial between client and social worker, between different agencies working on the same cases. We are committed to upholding the dignity of survivors of SGBV and reversing the discriminatory effects they suffer to restore and reinforce their self-worth. ●

\* Names have been changed



# Regional cooperation: an impossible dream?

Oliver White & Dana MacLean, JRS Asia Pacific advocacy and communications

Millions of refugees and asylum seekers face tough challenges in their struggle to find safety in Asia Pacific. With the lowest number of signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention in the world, this region\* offers paltry protection to people on the move. The glaring absence of national asylum laws and standardised procedures for refugee status determination has driven asylum seekers underground.

Asia Pacific is home to some 10.6 million forcibly displaced people. They are on the move for different reasons: seeking economic survival or reunion with their families, fleeing human rights violations. But their movements are marked by the same defining factors: fear; dangerous journeys, often by boat; being smuggled and vulnerable to

trafficking; the risk of indefinite detention.

## Stemming pull factors

In recent years, Asian states have increasingly sought to seal their borders by stemming pull factors, resorting to detention and making it difficult to file asylum claims. Asylum seekers are driven underground, where they are exposed to exploitation and hazardous conditions, and denied access to health care, work, food, shelter and education.

But the push factors forcing people to leave their homes are always stronger so curbing the pull factors only leads to greater human rights violations and despair. Mahmoud, an Afghan asylum seeker detained in Indonesia, is one victim of this hostile approach.

“I would rather be shot than wait for this process to keep going indefinitely with no idea what is happening,” he said. “I don’t want to spend my life in this prison.”

Nowhere is safe. Police in Malaysia arrested David, from Burma, three times. “I don’t have a UNHCR card and they told me and my friends they could do what they wanted to us. They stole 200 ringgit [local currency] from my wallet and my telephone.”

## Promoting regional collaboration

In recent years the region has seen increasingly large-scale displacements. Armed conflict in Afghanistan, Myanmar and, until mid-2009, in Sri Lanka, persecution of ethnic minorities in Vietnam and ongoing oppression of the Rohingya have continued



## Detained for a year

Fifty-six-year-old Ali spent a year in detention in Indonesia until he received refugee status from UNHCR. He left his wife and 11 children back home in Afghanistan. Ali was among detainees who diligently attended English classes in the detention centre three times a week. (Paulus Enggal/JRS)



to push people towards Australia. Transit countries along the way include Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia. The need for cross-border and regional collaboration has never been greater, and the last few years have seen a rising interest in such collaboration.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has proven to be an inadequate space to encourage the protection of refugee rights. Under the Bali Process, a grouping of over 50 states and international organisations working to address people smuggling and trafficking, UNHCR has promoted a Regional Cooperation Framework to be used as a guide for states to collaborate on migration issues. But although it has been well received, the framework is non-binding.

One of the few examples of bilateral cooperation has been the Regional Cooperation Model, signed in 2001, between Australia and Indonesia in collaboration with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The aim is to support asylum seekers and refugees to prevent them from onward movement to Australia. But such agreements fail without the involvement of other host, transit and resettlement countries.

As one of the most developed countries in the region, Australia offers the best capacity to protect refugees, but national security interests and domestic politics have undermined its ability to lead by example. Recent decisions to embark on offshore processing of asylum seekers in Nauru and Manus defy the country's obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and may seriously jeopardise refugee rights. Nearly 90% of people arriving by boat are convention refugees, according to the Refugee Council of Australia.

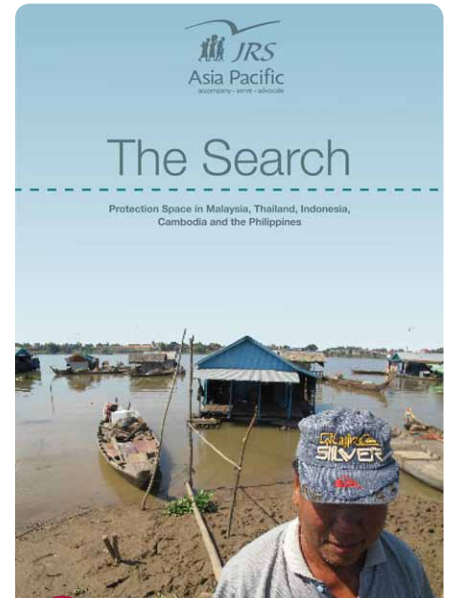
Australia has found a legal loophole by excising its territory – excluding parts from its migration zone – in order to bypass its responsibility to process asylum seekers arriving by boat. But it is doubtful that the new policies will stop people from arriving because the problem lies in the lack of durable solutions for refugees elsewhere in the region. An Afghan refugee in Indonesia said: “I know it's a dangerous journey, and I don't want to put myself and my family at risk at sea, but it's not a choice. If you give me and my family the right to work here, then we will stay here.”

### The way forward

Cooperation, consistency and subscribing to universally accepted standards of protection are the way forward to ensure more equitable burden sharing for states and to protect refugees transiting through Asia Pacific. Standardising procedures means refugees will face the same treatment, no matter where they go, and increasing protection in transit countries such as Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia will reduce the need for onward movement.

The Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) initiated in the 1980s as a response to the deaths of thousands of Vietnamese in boats at sea facilitated durable solutions for Indochinese refugees, who were processed in transit countries and either resettled in the US, Australia and Canada or repatriated. Although far from perfect, the CPA exemplifies that regional cooperation is possible if the political will is there. ●

\* UNHCR definition, see [unhcr.org/pages/4a02d8ec6.html](https://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a02d8ec6.html)



**Internet link**

Asylum seekers know better than anyone what is missing in terms of their protection. Based on their experiences, *The Search* is a practical guide published by JRS Asia Pacific that gives accurate information to asylum seekers and refugees about the realities of protection space within the region. To download *The Search*, go to [https://jrsap.org/Assets/Publications/File/The\\_Search.pdf](https://jrsap.org/Assets/Publications/File/The_Search.pdf)



# “All that is not given is lost”

Mark Raper SJ, former JRS International director

Pierre Ceyrac SJ died early on 30 May 2012 in Chennai at the age of 98. Pierre served with JRS in the camps of Cambodian refugees in Thailand from the early 1980s, indeed since the beginning of JRS. When Pierre died, a former JRS worker wrote, “an era of compassion without borders ends”.

Some years ago, Pierre wrote in a reflection for the JRS website: *“Without any merit on my part, I have lived an extraordinary human and religious life for more than 60 years along the borders of millennial civilisations. I have witnessed situations, whether in India or Cambodia, where the forces of evil and the forces of good ceaselessly confront each other. My way of being a Jesuit has become greatly simplified by all that I have lived through in both these countries...”*

*All this could be summarised in the great axiom of St John of the Cross: ‘My only work is to love.’ I find this phrase has two aspects that, more and more, become only one: first, a growing love for Jesus Christ – ‘He whom my heart loves’ – a love that increasingly pervades everything. But, secondly, this Jesus Christ is sought, found and loved in others, and above all in the poor and those who suffer. And so one increasingly becomes ‘a man for others’. To these two ways of identifying my way of being a Jesuit I would like to add a third: being a man of the Ignatian magis, striving for the greater glory of God in the footsteps of Xavier – always more, always further, always further to new shores!”*

Born on 4 February 1914 in France, Pierre entered the Society of Jesus in 1931. Destined for India, he studied Sanskrit and



At the Thai-Cambodian border, Pierre Ceyrac SJ standing firmly by a refugee in one of the camps. (Kuangchi Programme Service)

departed for Chennai in 1937, where he studied Tamil literature in addition to studies for priesthood. He was ordained in 1945.

## Compassion without borders

In 1980 Pierre went to Thailand with a Caritas India team to help Cambodian refugees who had crossed the border in great numbers as the Vietnamese army battled the Khmer Rouge. Pierre and several Jesuit companions, notably John Bingham and Noel Oliver, stayed on to be the founding members of a JRS programme for Asia Pacific. They accompanied the Cambodian refugees until their return in the early 1990s.

Pierre was fond of quoting a line of a Tamil poet, Thayumanavar: “Apart from wanting people to be happy, I want nothing else from life, God.” And he would refer to St John of the Cross, who said: “At the end of our lives we will be judged by love.”

Pierre was a wonderful friend of the poor – he had an infectious optimism, a deep sense of God’s love for all. On one occasion, at the Thai-Cambodian border, an exasperated UN official called Pierre an “unguided missile”. Pierre fretted for a short time, fearing the official would prevent him from entering the camps. But on seeing that he was still unrestrained, he delighted in the epithet, because it labelled him as a person who was free. He certainly was free, and his freedom brought joy to many. ●

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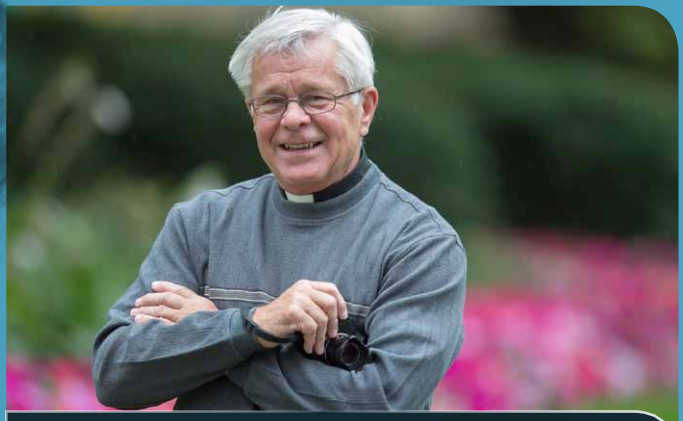


[www.jrs.net](http://www.jrs.net)

Design by



# Photo exhibition BY DON DOLL SJ



JRS projects in Asia featured in an exhibition of photos by Don Doll SJ held from 7 to 16 October at the Asian World Center of Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, in the US.

Fr Don, a well-known Jesuit photographer, has travelled the world photographing Jesuit works, especially for JRS in Uganda, South Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda, DRC, Chad, Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

Since 1969 Doll has lived and worked at Creighton University, where he is a professor of journalism holding the Charles and Mary Heider Endowed Jesuit Chair.

Fr Don's work can be seen on his website:  
<http://magis.creighton.edu>

His latest book, *A Call to Vision: A Jesuit's Perspective on the World* can be purchased through the website.

