

## **World Refugee Day Soccer Game**

Undeterred by the storm clouds gathering ominously over Phnom Penh, over 80 urban refugees and asylum seekers clamoured into the back of JRS vehicles and luckily for most, were able to reach Don Bosco vocational school in Phnom Penh Thmey for a World Refugee Day soccer match before the monsoon rains hit.

Coaches and referees from the Indochina Starfish Organisation were there to meet us at Don Bosco, and when I arrived the soccer balls were already out and being kicked, head-butted and tossed around in all directions. Having roused some interpreters for the various languages for those present such as Burmese, Vietnamese, Rohingya, Somali and of course Khmer, we managed to enforce some crowd control, and two teams were formed. Unfortunately this was short-lived; when the soccer uniforms arrived (shorts, tops, socks, and even shoes), it was each person – and child – for themselves.

Thankfully the weather finally cleared and we were able to hold a match: one for adults and a smaller version for children. For the younger ones, we had a three-legged race and Pin the Tail on the Donkey, which I think provided more amusement for the adults watching.

And the final result – the Orange Team of mostly Rohingya asylum seekers and Burmese refugees won, 2-1. Judging from some of the talent (and mostly the enthusiasm), training for the next World Cup will be forthcoming...

Many thanks to Don Bosco for allowing us to use their facilities; Jesuit Services and Jesuit Refugee Services staff who gave up their Saturday; staff from the Indochina Starfish Organisation, without whom the day would not have been possible; representatives from the Cambodian Refugee Office, UNHCR and the International Friendship Development Organisation; and finally, all the asylum seekers and refugees who participated.

July 2010