



JRS 2009 Report

I recently travelled to Christmas Island where JRS, in collaboration with the Sisters of Mercy and the Catholic Bishops' Conference, provides pastoral services for asylum seekers. It was deeply moving to celebrate Good Friday with a small number of these people, who related their own experiences of persecution, suffering and death to Jesus' own passion. Over 40 Catholic asylum seekers were allowed to attend Easter Sunday mass at the local church. It was the best Easter present they could have received, and their happiness was reflected in their joyous songs! But it was a short respite from the apprehension that fills their days, weeks and months as they wait for a decision on their asylum claims.

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As I left Christmas Island, the Australian government announced a freeze of the processing of new applications by Sri Lankans and Afghans, for three and six months respectively. This policy, which breaches several of Australia's international obligations under human rights treaties, sent shockwaves through the island.

Meanwhile, the decision to transfer detainees from Christmas Island to the mainland has had a mixed

reception. While JRS and other advocacy groups welcome the move, which provides asylum seekers with greater resources and services, the remote locations of the detention facilities is of great concern. JRS continues to monitor developments and explore ways in which we might provide assistance.

While Christmas Island is often in the news, it is just one facet of JRS Australia's work, both locally and abroad. In this winter issue of Link we present our JRS 2009 Report, in which we review our accomplishments and thank you, our friends and supporters for responding with generosity, humanity and compassion to the plight of refugees both in Australia and around the world.

Sacha Bermudez-Goldman SJ



Shelter Project

In 2009 JRS was able to provide accommodation and financial assistance to more asylum seekers than ever before. We took on our third property, and our volunteers worked tirelessly to support residents, providing meals and transport, accompanying them to appointments, creating a vegetable garden and arranging excursions. We held painting workshops, an art exhibition, a house-warming event and a Christmas party complete with donated gifts for everyone.

We forged strong links with employers, and many asylum seekers who were granted permanent residency are now supporting themselves and contributing to their local communities. We are proud of the achievements they have made and grateful for the opportunities we have had to get to know each and every one of them. We look forward to another eventful year, and the chance to welcome more strangers into our community.



Detention Issues

In addition to our work on Christmas Island, JRS continued to support the International Detention Coalition, which monitors detention issues around the world. We also provided religious and pastoral services at Sydney's Villawood Detention Centre, and, along with a committed group of volunteers, expanded these services to the Immigration Residential Housing (IRH), located within the Villawood compound. One volunteer summed up his experience in these words: 'It's a privilege to meet such amazing people... When you begin to imagine what their stories might be, their sheer happiness is quite baffling, quite surprising. It draws you back. It gives you hope. 'This hope is encapsulated in a baby born to a Sri Lankan couple waiting for their status resolution at the IRH. Devout Catholics, they have named their son 'Risen', because he was born during the first week of Easter!'



Pacific Displacement

In 2009 Sr Maryanne Loughry, our Associate Director, continued JRS' project of mapping displacement in the Pacific. Maryanne visited New Zealand, Kiribati, Tuvalu and Papua New Guinea, trips that were part-funded by the University of NSW Department of Psychiatry and Training and Misereor. Maryanne sought to understand the issues facing the populations of these countries, especially of those who are at risk of displacement because of climate change and environmental degradation, and to develop networks of key informants. Trained as a psychologist, Maryanne identified research sites for investigating the

psychological and social effects of climate change in the Pacific. In 2009 Maryanne gave several public addresses and also authored a book chapter on Pacific displacement.

JRS Youth Award

The inaugural JRS Youth Award attracted over 100 submissions, to which more than 400 high school students contributed. The judges commented on the high quality of the multi-media projects, which focused on the plight of refugees and provided resolutions to refugee issues. The second annual JRS Youth Award will be held in 2010.

Support of International projects

For several years, thanks to the generosity of many of our supporters, JRS has been able to contribute through Jesuit Mission to JRS projects overseas. In 2009 these projects included income-generating activities, social, health and educational services, outreach to urban refugees, peace-building activities and the Ban Landmine Project, among others, in Kenya, Sudan, Ethiopia, East Timor, Thailand and Cambodia. We also ran a special appeal for the victims of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka who were internally displaced.

Public Awareness, Advocacy and Policy

A greater understanding of the circumstances of asylum seekers and refugees is essential in informing our perception of their reality and our advocacy efforts on their behalf. In 2009 JRS Australia conducted talks and seminars on a range of topics at schools, parishes, universities and community groups. In addition to our quarterly newsletter, Link, we also contributed to regional and international publications, Jesuit publications and articles in mainstream periodicals and academic journals. We also updated and relaunched our website. We participated in a wide range of networking, information-sharing and advocacy activities with government and non-government organisations such as UNHCR, La Trobe University, the Refugee Council of Australia and the Asylum Seeker Interagency forum. JRS provided written submissions on the Inquiry into Homelessness in NSW and the National Consultation on Human Rights. Associate Director Sr Maryanne Loughry was invited by the Minister for Immigration, Chris Evans, to sit on the Council for Immigration Services and Status Resolution. Maryanne is a representative on the council's subcommittees for Christmas Island, Research and Evaluation and Minors.

International field placements

Australians filled several roles abroad in 2009. Mercy Sister Denise Coghlan continued as Director of JRS Cambodia; in addition to refugee issues, she was also involved in the implementation of the landmine treaty and the promotion of the cluster bomb treaty. Fr David Holdcroft SJ, former director of JRS Australia, was appointed Country Director of JRS South Africa in August. Brisbane lawyer Taya Hunt worked as legal officer for JRS Cambodia and David Palmer completed a two-year placement in southern Sudan as a Project Director, while Argentinean-born Mariano Griva completed a year-long placement as JRS' first representative in Papua New Guinea, acting as Information and Advocacy Officer at our project based in Kiunga, in PNG's Western Province. Mariano was replaced later in the year by Brisbane lawyer Wren Chadwick, who will continue in the role until the end of 2010.



Staff and Volunteers

JRS is blessed with wonderful staff and generous, committed volunteers. In 2009, Associate Director Sr Maryanne Loughry assisted with local projects, researched forced migration in the Pacific, taught at Boston College in the US and advised the Immigration Minister as part of the Council for Immigration Services and Status Resolution. Louise Stack took on more responsibility in her role as Project Coordinator of our ever-expanding Shelter Project, while two new members joined our team, Project Assistant Cecilia Silva and Office Manager Kim Mandelik. More than 60 volunteers supported our

works through fundraising and awareness-raising activities, administrative support, Shelter Project assistance, legal advice and detention centre visits. JRS' board members, the Australian Province of the Society of Jesus, Jesuit Mission (Australia) and the Catholic Parish of St Canice's provided continuous guidance and support.



Fundraising activities

Concern over the impact of the economic downturn was quickly dispelled as hundreds of JRS friends came to support our four main events. The JRS Winter Solstice Ball had its most successful year ever with over 560 attendees, while over 120 people joined us for the JRS Melbourne Cup Luncheon in Sydney. Both events are now in their eighth year and promise to be bigger and better than ever in 2010. We also held the inaugural JRS Brisbane Ball and ran the second annual JRS Melbourne Dinner. At all of these events we were honoured to have as our guest speakers refugees who shared their personal stories of survival, courage and hope. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the many JRS volunteers who participated in the committees which organised these events.

Upcoming Events

Notification of Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of JRS (Australia) Incorporated will be held on Thursday 10 June 2010, at the JRS Offices, 24 Roslyn Street, Elizabeth Bay, starting at 5pm. Under the constitution, Associate Members are welcome at the AGM and can raise business for the agenda. If you wish to do so, please notify the office no later than Thursday 3 June.

Other events for 2010:

13 June: Burmese Refugee Charity Concert in **Perth**

23 June: Refugee Week Multicultural Event in **Sydney**

24 June: JRS **Melbourne** Dinner

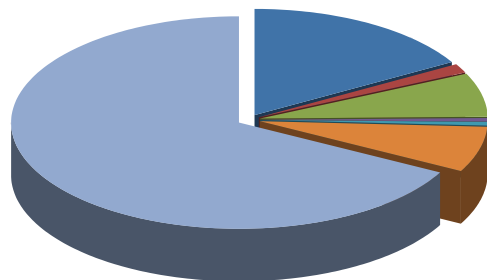
17 July: JRS **Brisbane** Ball

24 July: JRS Winter Solstice Ball in **Sydney**

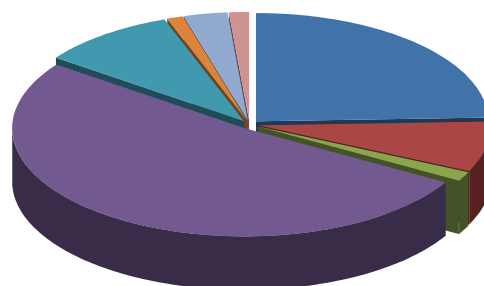
2 November: JRS **Melbourne** Cup Luncheon

For more information about these events go to www.jrs.org.au

2009 JRS Income



2009 JRS Expenditure



*JRS receives an administration fee for fundraising and donation services provided to Jesuit Mission in relation to JRS International projects. During 2009 JRS supporters contributed \$112,300 to Jesuit Mission for JRS projects overseas.

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Jesuit Refugee Service Australia

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Kings Cross NSW 1340

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