

Jesuit Refugee Service



**WAR HAS CHANGED OUR LIFE,  
NOT OUR SPIRIT**

Experiences of forcibly displaced women



# WAR HAS CHANGED OUR LIFE, NOT OUR SPIRIT

Experiences of forcibly displaced women



303820693Y

*War has changed our life, not our spirit*  
Anna Huml, JRS Bosnia, 1999

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organisation with a mission to accompany, serve and plead the cause of refugees and forcibly displaced people. Set up by the Society of Jesus in 1980 and now at work in over 50 countries, the priority of JRS is to accompany refugees whose needs are more urgent or forgotten.

© Jesuit Refugee Service, February 2001  
ISBN 88-88126-01-5

Editor Danielle Vella  
Production Stefano Maero  
Cover design Stefano Maero  
Cover photo Mark Raper SJ/JRS South Africa  
Special thanks to Chinappan Amalraj SJ Amaya Valcarcel Frances Wall

Copies of this booklet are available from  
Jesuit Refugee Service  
C P 6139, 00195  
Roma Prati Italy  
Tel +39 – 06 68 97 73 86  
Fax +39 – 06 68 79 283  
Email [international@jesref.org](mailto:international@jesref.org)  
JRS website <http://www.jesref.org/>

# Contents

<b>Preface .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1 We will win by non violence .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Women and war in the Grands Lacs region	
<b>2 Not just victims of war .....</b>	<b>33</b>
Women refugees in Southern Africa	
<b>3 In war, a woman is often left alone .....</b>	<b>47</b>
Women refugees in Eastern Africa	
<b>4 My country will again know happiness .....</b>	<b>71</b>
Women refugees and returnees in Asia Pacific	
<b>5 Let your tears fall for your dead .....</b>	<b>99</b>
Women in war and displacement in South Asia	
<b>6 Just another detainee .....</b>	<b>119</b>
Women in detention in the US and in war in Latin America	
<b>7 Hope for a better tomorrow .....</b>	<b>135</b>
Women survivors in Southeast Europe	
<b>8 Waiting for justice .....</b>	<b>151</b>
Women asylum seekers and refugees in Europe	
<b>A challenge for society .....</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>Glossary .....</b>	<b>167</b>



Amaya Valcarlos/JRS

**Sri Lanka** Poopathy, 37 years, lives in a camp for internally displaced Tamil people in Trincomalee, eastern Sri Lanka. Her son, Prabhakaran, disappeared following an attack in October 2000, by Sinhalese rioters, on the detention centre where he was undergoing 'rehabilitation'.

ing. In our absurd contemporary wars of identity, the reproductive power of women is feared, since they can reproduce the enemy. In all wars, women are subjected to violence, in Rwanda this was done on a massive scale. There some women were allowed to live only so they would 'die of sadness'. In Rwanda rape was a weapon to dehumanise and degrade a whole community for a political end. In such circumstances, gender intersects with other aspects of a woman's identity such as ethnicity, religion, caste, social class or political affiliation. Rape constitutes a war crime and a crime against humanity. But law enforcement and judicial systems are usually so weakened as a result of civil conflict that justice is slow in coming for women. Moreover stigma and fear breed silence.

Reconstruction after conflict is often hindered by lack of services to assist women, by traditional and institutional constraints on women and by sheer inattention to their needs. Yet women are key to the reconstruction of society. Obviously men have a role, but there is a balance to observe. Women are often artisans of peace and stability. In today's unstable world, treaties and international agreements are important. But such agreements must be premised on the capacity of states to fulfil their obligations. Those who plan for peace, whether nationally or internationally, must listen to the voices of women, particularly those who have reason to long for peace.

In 1990 the UNHCR established a policy that women, especially refugee women, should wherever possible participate in the planning of that agency's services for refugees. In practice the drafters of this policy claimed, women perceive and identify with clarity not only the desirability of gender-sensitive services, but also the priority for all refugees for security, employment, education and health care. Implementing these decisions requires not only resolve, but also imagination. One reason for publishing these stories is to help strengthen the creativity, resolve and practice in our own organisation, and among others who serve refugees, to find the ways to involve refugee women in the setting up of programs.

May this book help you to believe that it is possible to grow in love and to be an artisan of peace even in the most desperate circumstances.

*Mark Raper SJ JRS International Director May 1990 – September 2000*



**Thailand** Mary, a member of Burma's Shan ethnic minority, shares her home with 10 orphans. An English teacher, she started a boarding school for orphans in 1985 and also teaches English and Shan to many other children.

# PREFACE

Somewhere a mother awaits  
her man, her son  
in the chains of an oppressor  
or waits for those who never come  
and still endures we know not how  
And yet amid the smoking debris  
of a fear-driven world  
while man juggles with megaton eggs  
somewhere a woman gives the world  
an artist  
a child who sings and dances,  
dreams and weaves a poem  
round the universe  
plunging down the womb  
to fire a cell  
sinking down a borehole  
to probe the spring of life  
from where the earth will rise  
to meet the sky  
To know our sorrow  
is to know our joy -  
Somewhere a mother will rejoice

*Esia Mphahlele South Africa*

In the bitter Sri Lankan war for a Tamil homeland, the ideal woman is portrayed by the rebel Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ideology as an aggressive soldier or as a tearless suicide bomber. On the other hand the rare media reports of that war often present women as pitiful poverty stricken dependent victims. These images distort the real role of women in refugee situations. Chinappan Amalraj, a Tamil Jesuit who co-ordinates the work of Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in the South Asian conflict zones, urged us to record the truth about refugee women. This is best done, he argued, through their own voices.

The re-orientation of life amid destruction and death comes from women. In my experience, their instinct is towards life. When refu-



gees land in a camp it is usually women who get a fire going ' said Amal, as he is called. Moved by observing women in these situations he proposed we collect personal stories of women who face war displacement and human rights violations. 'I remember visiting an orphanage ' he said. 'Militant groups had killed the fathers of the girls there. Some girls knew that the father of one of their companions could well have killed their own father. But they all lived together, helping each other. Amal also met many widows of rebels and mothers of children snatched from their families to be made rebels. 'As I listened to these people talk and as I was moved by their stories, I thought why not listen to others? Let us collect these stories of women who suffer. These are not simply victims of war. These people saw the darkness of war, but they did not succumb. They chose life.

The collection of stories in this book brings you a taste of what we have observed and learned not only in Sri Lanka, but also around the world. Women are over-represented among the world's poor, displaced and refugee populations. But with this book rather than lament their fate we wish to celebrate and respect them and to identify their special skills and roles. Some of the stories are not easy to read but all carry characteristically consistent echoes of courage and beauty.

While the vulnerability of women during conflicts and emergencies is often stressed the specific strengths of women are less frequently noted. Seemingly at greater risk when crisis strikes women prove to have greater resilience in the longer term. Wherever people are darkened by the madness of war it is women who best offer the light of sanity. They have the power to create and promote peace. They renew and preserve humanity.

War and flight are obviously not liberating events but in such situations women take on new roles as the sole bread winners as leaders of families, as the preservers of culture and historic memory. The men are either still fighting and so absent, or held prisoner, or already killed, or perhaps despair has led them to alcohol. Ironically, the trauma of displacement offers opportunities for women, since it fractures former, strictly defined social roles.

This book gives women's accounts of the atrocities and exploitation they suffered including stories of women and girls targeted for sexual abuse. In recent wars civilians are specially targeted. Women become a special target because they keep civilian society function-

# INTRODUCTION

In the so-called world order, women refugees are at the bottom of the ladder in every respect. Like most forcibly displaced people they come from the poorest countries of the world they are victims of racism and they have lost everything their possessions, their land often their country and many of their rights. Most have lost those who were dearest to them. But women refugees are also targeted specifically because they are women: 80 per cent of all refugees are women and children, women are often left to raise families alone with inadequate medical or educational facilities, rape is used as a strategy of war, gender-related crimes and crimes of a sexual nature are often excluded from the international legal definition of a refugee the mothers of the estimated 300,000 child soldiers have the devastating experience of seeing their children taken away to carry out unspeakable atrocities.

Why compile a collection of stories of and about refugee women? Because women refugees have a right to tell their stories stories that are often not told and much less heard. In a recent visit I made with other JRS workers to a refugee camp in Zambia, an old man in a group of refugees we met remarked how important the meeting had been because it was "the first time someone who wants to know about food distribution in the camp, does not go to the office, but comes to ask our opinion and hears our side of the story

With this collection we wanted to provide women refugees with a place where they could tell us their stories as they would tell them almost always very simply, without drama at times with pain or resignation, often with hope, at times even with joy, but always with courage. It is also a place where others could say how they have been touched by the lives of the women refugees they have met.

This book is about women who live as refugees. These stories are particular to them because they are refugees and because they are women. There is no one story that describes the experience of refugee women, because each refugee-producing situation is different, and each woman, has a distinct and particular story to tell.

Women refugees are fighters, not only survivors. This is the recurring theme in the stories they tell us in this book. In the midst of death they fight for life at all cost. In the face of all adversity they rebuild to

ensure the continuation of life, their own, but mostly of their families. They have the courage to give new life in places of death.

These stories need to be told perhaps also to help the healing. After I heard the harrowing story of a woman, I asked her if she ever despaired. She said yes for many months, but the turning point came when she first told her story to someone. Perhaps the many women who have told their story to us in this book may be strengthened and healed by the telling. And perhaps every person who will read each story with compassion will contribute to this healing.

But this is not enough. We must also read these stories with righteous anger and we must be moved to action. As 'fortress Europe' and other countries of asylum build their legal and cultural walls of exclusion against refugees, we must work for a culture and policies of welcome to refugees. We must also work to stop the policies of exclusion and injustice that are at the root of wars and of the mass displacement of people throughout the world.

Perhaps this is a tall order for a modest publication such as this. But let us turn our ears and hearts towards refugees and be shown the way to suffering and courage.

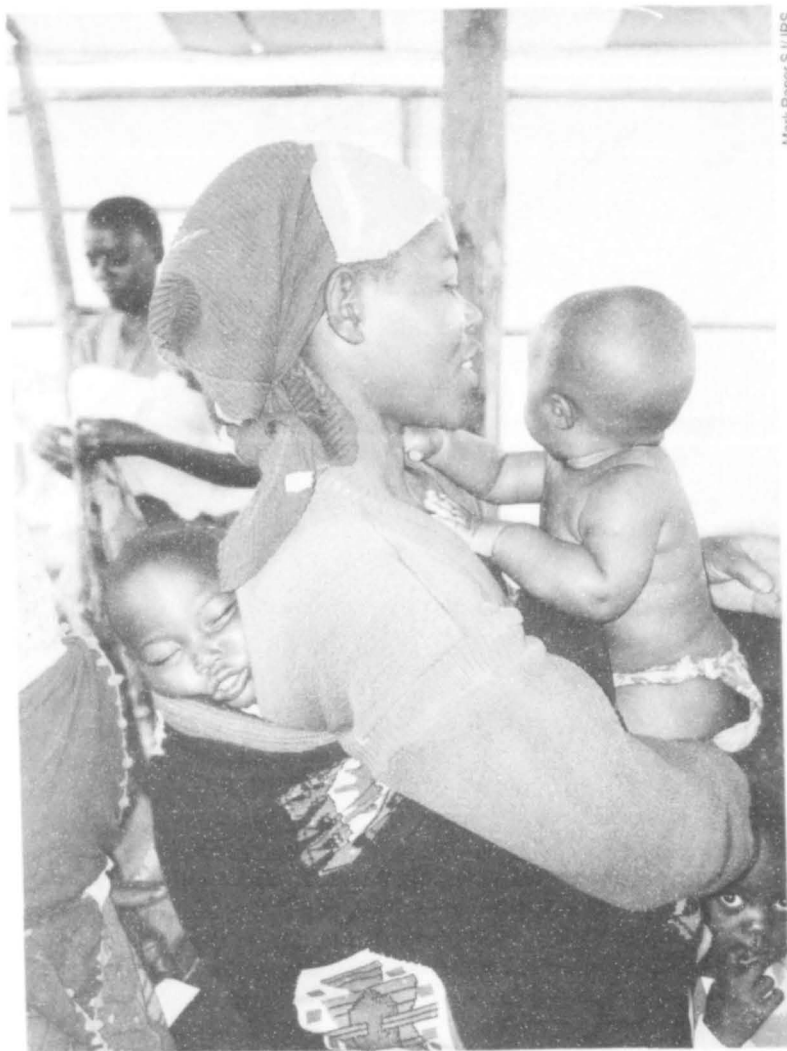
*Jenny Cafiso, JRS International programs officer*

## Note

The book is divided into chapters by region, based on the global structure of the JRS network. For easier reference, the name of a country is attached to each narrative. In some cases, this is the country of origin of the person, in others it is the host country, depending on the story she has to tell.



**Angola** Resumption of the country's civil war has resulted in the internal displacement of 2.7 million civilians (as at end August 2000). Many people today do not cross internationally recognised borders when they flee their homes, remaining within their country of origin.



Mark Raper SJ/JRS

**Rwanda** A mother with two of her children in a refugee camp for Congolese people of Rwandan ethnic origin.

## **WE WILL WIN BY NON VIOLENCE**

### Women and war in the Grands Lacs region

*After the genocide in Rwanda, Tutsi widows (whose husbands had been massacred), began coming together as they faced the same sort of problems. They worked together on their small projects, and their group expanded. They were approached by Hutu widows whose Tutsi husbands were also killed in the genocide. So they took them in. Then they saw other Hutu women struggling alone, unable to send their children to school. These women had Hutu husbands in prison, accused of genocidal crimes. The Tutsi widows expanded their association to include these women too... Women can become leaders of reconciliation. They realise what they have in common and stick together.*

Dr Alison Des Forges Human Rights Watch consultant on Rwanda speaking at a symposium *Africa at the threshold of the twentieth century*, Uruversity of Deusto Spain May 2000

## THIS IS HOW I BECAME A REFUGEE

When war broke out in Burundi my country, I lived in fear for a long time. At night, I got little sleep. At the slightest noise, I would leap out of bed with fright. I remember spending the entire night on my feet, carrying my two children, for fear of being caught as we slept.

One day, I read Jesus' word: "Do not worry about your life. Can any of you, for all his worrying, add one single cubit to his span of life?" (Matthew 6:25 & 27). Deeply touched, I regained my peace little by little.

Eventually, I decided to leave Burundi. I was alone with my two children, one aged three years, and the other eight months. We were crowded together with many others at the border between Burundi and Zaire (today Congo) waiting for a chance to escape the war. The only way to travel across is by bicycle-taxi.

I carried one child on my back, and strapped the other against my chest, so we could all fit on one bicycle. With one hand, I balanced the bag containing all our belongings on my head, and with the other hand, I clung to the bicycle frame. Almost as soon as we started to move, I cried out to the driver to stop. I was suffocating. Angered, he said I should hire a second bicycle-taxi. But I was afraid to give my child to a stranger and preferred to risk suffocation rather than separation. By the time we reached the border, I had to lie down on the ground to recover, barely able to open my eyes. When we reached customs, we were searched for any items of value we may have had, and were even undressed to make sure we had nothing hidden.

So that was how I became a refugee without knowing yet what it meant to be one. Within a few days, I soon understood the meaning, that I was now considered worthless. I remember a group of children playing outside my small room. I had asked them not to make so much noise, as my own children were asleep. Their reply: "This is our country." At the public water tap, I had just filled my bucket when another woman took it, claiming priority. The soldiers also took advantage of us, myself and the other Burundians who had found shelter in Zaire. They came to our places day and night, citing security reasons, and they took whatever they wanted. I decided to try to win my neighbours' friendship. I invited other children to

share a meal with mine; I looked after my neighbours' children while they did their shopping; I took an interest in their culture...

In time, we became friends. I told them how hurt I had been by the way they had treated us at first, and they apologised. When the soldiers turned up, my new friends began to defend me until one day, the soldiers left and never came back.

Then war broke out in Zaire, and there was panic everywhere. Strengthened by my previous experience, I told those around me: "Do not give way to fear, let yourselves be guided by God." But people would reply: "You are telling us! You could hardly get a wink of sleep back in Burundi." To which I said: "All the more reason to listen to me, since I am no longer in a panic." Unfortunately, however much I bore witness to my faith in prayer, I was unable to convince those around me to have similar faith.

*Claire Ndimisenga, JRS Europe*

*Claire and the rest of her family are now resettled in Belgium*



Claire, with her son in her arms, and three children who were their neighbours.



## SURVIVOR OF WAR

I grew up in a peasant family from Cibitoke province, north-west Burundi. From 1993, each time there was an army or rebel attack on the village, my family had to flee to the mountains and return later when the attackers left. In 1995, we were forced to leave our home to settle in another village. There, we worked for neighbours who fed us in return.

The following year, rebels attacked the village. A few men barged into people's homes, demanding money. Some of them came to our house. My mother, Chantal, opened the door with a baby in her arms. Two men started shooting, killing the baby and another of my brothers instantly. They looted everything in our home. My mother and I were wounded, and we were taken to hospital in Bujumbura. Hours later, I had a leg amputated. I suffered in hospital, but I was patient with this suffering and could live with it, since I saw God's will in all that was happening. We did not know anyone in Bujumbura, but some people brought food for us while we were in hospital. When we were discharged, we had nowhere to go. Eventually, we arrived in Buterere, a neighbourhood in Bujumbura.

I still live there today with my parents in a community of displaced people. My mother is also disabled; she lost a leg in a landmine accident. When I could walk on my two legs, I was happy, but being disabled made me sad. One day, Br Antoine, a JRS worker, met my father and told him he wanted to help me. JRS had just started work in Buterere with a group of women. Sr Teresa, who worked for JRS, began to look after me, and I learnt how to sew in a JRS workshop.

One day, Sr Teresa asked me if I wanted to continue my studies. I certainly did! I had to give up my studies when we fled from Cibitoke. JRS gave me a scholarship. I started to attend the St Kizito Centre for the Handicapped, run by the Bene-Umukama sisters. After this, perhaps I will be able to attend secondary school after passing the national exams. Now I have a future and I can live!

*Br Antoine, who helped Clonose, was shot dead by soldiers of the Burundian army as he travelled from Mutoyi to Bujumbura on 3 October 2000. For the last three years of his life, Br Antoine ran a JRS Burundi project intended to help the most vulnerable people in Buterere.*



Glorise feels the chance to study has offered her hope for the future.



Mark Raper/SIJRS

**Burundi** An internally displaced woman in a regroupment camp. In 1999, the government forcibly displaced 340,000 mainly Hutu civilians in squalid "regroupment sites", supposedly for the people's security. Widespread international condemnation resulted in the disbanding of many of the camps.

As for women's movements, there are many women's associations, some with political or economic motives, but many set up to provide a means by which Burundian women can come together and work on the extraordinary struggles they face. There are several committed and inspiring groups working in Burundi at the grassroots level. But identifying and supporting them can be difficult as there are countless groups set up by elites and wives of politicians that portend to be effective associations, but are in fact a means for the further domination of power by a very small clique of Burundians.

Shamil Idriss, director *Search for Common Ground in Burundi*

## DESTITUTE BUT IN PEACE

The war in Burundi is a war against civilians. Those on both sides of the conflict constantly target the Burundian civilian population for killing, rape, injury and robbery. The conflict ostensibly pits a ruling military and political elite of the minority ethnic Tutsis against insurgents from the majority Hutus. Government forces kill and injure civilians in military operations purportedly directed at insurgents. They have also selectively murdered people who they believe might organise opposition to the government.

It was 15 August 1998 when I saw a group of soldiers coming towards our home. I knew this would not be the only visit. I left immediately, carrying my two-year-old baby on my back. I took nothing else with me: no clothes, no shoes, nothing. After walking for some time, I arrived at the outskirts of a town called Gasamanzuku where I met so many people in distress.

We stayed there without aid of any sort. We could not sleep, our children were crying because of hunger, cold and rain. People died, especially children and pregnant women during delivery, as there was no one to assist them. Getting food was too difficult for us women, the only option being to climb a mango tree to get fruit. Only the men were able to do that; if they felt sorry, they would share some pieces of fruit with us women. After some days, the area was attacked by soldiers, and many people were killed. Some parents escaped without their children, some women who had twins took one and left the other behind. It was very painful. The survivors of the attack were marched by the armed forces into camps where they could be more effectively controlled, and subject to extensive rape and beating. People who resisted entering the camps were killed. In some cases, soldiers forced residents of these camps to work for them and to provide them with crops from their fields.

I decided to flee the country. On my way out, I saw bodies lying on the roadside, many of women and children. Today I am a refugee in Harare, Zimbabwe. I have bad memories; it may be too hard for me to go back home. I do not even know if my husband is alive or dead. I prefer to have nothing, to be destitute, but to live in peace.

*Denisa Baransata*

## LEFT WITH NOTHING

I decided to flee Burundi when my brother was killed and burnt by Tutsis. I was settled in Burundi – my country – with my husband, who is Congolese, and our three children. I had studied there and even formed part of the female section of the national football team.

However, we witnessed much violence in Burundi including armed attacks and bombings. My brother's murder was the last straw. We panicked and left in 1996.

We headed for Zaire (today Congo) and more trouble. FAZ (Forces Armées Zaïroises) troops of Mobutu looted everything we had: radio, television, money, bicycles, sewing machine, and other belongings. In October 1996, the liberation war started. Kabila entered Zaire. This caused us much suffering, both physical and psychological.

I decided to flee again when another war broke out in 1998. The conflict between the government of Congo and the rebels, both supported by many African countries, started. The Banyamulenge declared themselves Congolese and wanted to take power by force.

I knew the rebels were violating the rights of women and children, forcing them to join their ranks or raping them. The risks facing a woman living alone in such circumstances are enormous. My husband had already left the country and I was living alone. Government soldiers and mai-mai militias assumed my husband had joined the rebels, and the rebels suspected he had joined the pro-government militias. My only choice to save myself and my three children from reprisal was to escape.

On 10 December 1999, I boarded a boat to Mpulungu, Zambia, with 20 US dollars in my pocket. I had to sell everything – clothes and other goods – so my children could eat, and I was left with almost nothing. Thank God, a kind man offered to take us to Zimbabwe, free of charge, in his truck. When I arrived in Harare, my children were sick, suffering from fever and malnutrition. We had neither food nor clothes. We had to start all over again.

*as told to Stanislaus Galatino JRS Zimbabwe*

## GIVE US PEACE

The Hutu women of Busoro and the Tutsi women of Musaga can look into each other's burned out neighbourhoods without having to leave their home. All that separates their pock-marked shacks is a dirt road and a few bushes. What seems to stand between them as people is a mountain of suspicion and distrust rooted in years of mutual terror and suffering.

When the shooting starts across the road. They gather their children. Lie on their floors and pray, for reprisals are sure to follow. ethnic traitors' who dare cross the boundary to lend a helping hand or share in the suffering of the other risk their lives.

So when the women of the predominantly Tutsi Musaga and predominantly Hutu Busoro bordering neighbourhoods in one of the most violent districts of the capital of Bujumbura, announced their intention to organise an exchange of solidarity between ethnic groups, it was unprecedented and hard to believe.

As we pulled up to the Musaga district administrator's small two-building compound the first shots cracked and echoed in the hills. The shooting was unsettling this early in the day but certainly not out of place. What was out of place were the 250 women, elderly, young, frail strong, Hutu, Tutsi, all poor, squeezed into a room to demonstrate their solidarity. In that room overflowing with people there was likely not one who had survived without losing a close family member or friend to the violence and most have lost more than one. The shooting continued outside, breaking through the speech of one of the most defiant of the women, a tall elderly Tutsi dressed in a pink flowing wrap and black headscarf, known for her willingness to cross the dirt path to support her Hutu neighbours in Busoro immediately after they have been attacked. when the shots outlasted her words, she started a chant that overtook the entire room. they were shouting, 'Give us peace'.

*Extracts from Who Can Prevent Genocide? Ask the Old Ladies of Burundi by Shamil Idriss, director of the NGO Search for Common Ground in Burundi. The article appeared in The Peace Review an American-based quarterly journal in 2000.*

## A LESSON IN COMPASSION

Perpetue went to Rwanda in 1996. She escaped from Zaire (today Congo) after the death of her husband and two of her three children when Kabila's troops entered the country and launched the 'liberation' war. Most of Congo's ethnic Rwandan nationals were forced to flee the country during this time. Perpetue, who comes from Congo's Masisi region, went with her remaining daughter to live in a refugee camp in Gisenyi, Rwanda. However, in 1997, the camp was attacked and many refugees were killed or wounded.

Perpetue survived the attack and moved to another camp, this time in Byumba. She met Eric, a widower with two children. They started a life together, raising their three children. Months later, Eric started to disappear now and again from their house – a little hut made with wood and plastic sheeting – to visit a prostitute in the camp.

Eventually, Eric abandoned Perpetue and the three children altogether, to go and live with another woman. At first, Perpetue did not receive any money from Eric, who is a teacher in one of the camp schools, until he was asked by a JRS worker in the camp to share his salary with his wife.

The JRS worker who intervened for Perpetue, writes: Perpetue's strength is so evident. She cares for all three children, including two from her unfaithful husband's first marriage. She has suffered the loss of children and her first husband, exile, violence, displacement and fear. She has also lost a second husband, although he is still alive. The lesson Perpetue teaches me is of profound compassion and faithfulness.





Lolita Menéndez RSCJ-JRS

I shall name my child Clementine Ngiririkigongwe Clementine, a reminder of God's mercy. Ngiririkigongwe means 'forgive me', and 'I forgive you', so she will remember to do the same, always

A Rwandese refugee in Tanzania

## WHAT ARE YOU SEEKING, MEN OF WAR?

From the beginning of time many have said thought and sang War is harmful it is a sin an offence against the Creator ' So those who wage war for whatever reason those who use arms to take the lives of others, are bad If only they could understand that 'those who kill with the sword, will perish by the sword' they would stop their deadly practices, and seek peace in and through peace

Here in our land, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), we have experienced war for four years now Thousands have fallen, entire families have been annihilated a whole society, both on the side of the killers and of the victims, is affected None can pretend to be winning Even if gold minerals, diamonds and other wealth are accumulated none are worth the neighbour who has been killed. However, we see many who cultivate hatred to reap death What do they gain in reality?

The absurd war in DRC offers nothing positive to society Children have said no to this war, adults too Men have rejected this war women too Young people have clearly shown opposition, the elderly too Our bishops and pastors have condemned the war Those who are obstinate who insist on dragging out the war, what do they gain?

Everyone is aware of the family responsibilities we mothers must bear Entire villages are deserted, there are no crops to reap Displacement fuelled by the war has meant that families with no income must host many of their brothers and sisters who flee hostilities and massacres in Bunyakiri Kalonge, Burhale, Ninja, Kamituga and still those who sow terror do not get tired They have doubled tax rates to buy arms and to feed foreign troops who are here to kill They ask us to applaud and to continue giving them the little we have left for our babies

Too much is too much! We mothers are angry, outraged We pay the high price of this dirty war we become widows prematurely, we suffer rape and violence and the economic burden in a family where the breadwinner (the husband) is not paid his salary for a long time

How can people who do not respect what is most honourable and sacred, respect human rights? Can they respect us women our

daughters and babies? What are you seeking men of war, who get drunk on human blood? Why this endless provocation? What do you hope to win with this bloodbath?

Dear mothers, there is someone somewhere, who wants to be the victor in this bloodbath in our land. People talk about 'ethnic hatred', about new genocide, about 'machetes' and they want the approval of those who are just. The oppressor who holds the gun wants to be considered as a victim knowing all the while that none among us is armed. Thus lie is intended to be heard by those who are unaware of the barbarities committed by the invaders. Let us not be cheated and confused, let us not follow them. We will win by non violence and by our determination. Let us reject manipulation. Let us reject practices which run counter to our Congolese and Christian culture, based on hospitality and solidarity. Let us rather commit ourselves to the supreme virtue. love for God and our neighbour.

Meanwhile, let us stand firm, determined and united to discourage all evil. Let us advise our husbands and our children. Let us not nourish the killers. Let us not give them money, not in markets or anywhere else. And most of all, let us pray for them so that they may be converted.

*Extracts from a letter written by 11 Congolese mothers*

*Marie Mufungizi  
Zabiba Habani  
Viginie Mungufu  
Bisimwa Fonorina  
M Jeanne M Bachu  
Venantie Birhenyira  
Deodata Muningizura  
Angeli Cinama  
Jenne Nkere  
Anne Rwabidusi  
Sylvie Kakuto*

*February 2000*

## I THANK GOD FOR THE GOOD HE HAS DONE

I remember well the day 8 December around 3pm, when I was going from the camp hospital towards Emma's house. She was ashamed a person like me should go to her poor tent. We had a work meeting to discuss a proposed project of soap production. When entering the tent, I could hear the neighbours talking and laughing. Emma said "They cannot understand that an *umuzungu* comes to the house of such a poor woman. We looked at each other and started laughing.

After we discussed the project, I asked her how she felt about her long walk into exile, and the miserable situation of the Panzi refugee camp. Without hesitating she answered 'I thank God for all the good he has done in my life.' As if reading the surprise in my face she continued:

*Padm* (Father), I thank God for three things. First, because after waiting three years the Lord gave me the son I longed for. I have a son and a daughter. Second, after my husband's death I was exhausted without the strength to undertake a long journey into the unknown with two young children. But after we had walked a long time along the road a car stopped and took us to Bukavu. On arriving in Bukavu I had the chance to meet a sister who worked in the city hospital. My husband died of Aids and thanks to this sister, my children could have tests done, to see if they tested positive for the virus or not. You cannot imagine my joy when I learnt they have not been infected. I, however, am HIV positive.

*Emma a Rwandan refugee in the Bukavu camps in Congo speaking to Quim Pons SJ in 1996*

## ***Women living in situations of war and displacement risk infection with HIV...***

War is one of the major causes of the spread of HIV/Aids, through social dislocation, impoverishment and rape. The United Nations Aids program, UNAIDS, noted "In times of foreign deployment and in conflict situations, the risks go very much higher." Displaced women are particularly vulnerable to rape and sexual abuse by army soldiers, government-backed militia and rebel fighters, and so run a higher risk of becoming victims of HIV/Aids.

Africa suffers disproportionately from poverty and conflict, tragedies that are related to the equally disproportionate spread of HIV/Aids. A report issued in June 2000 by UNAIDS said there were an estimated 24.5 million people living with HIV/Aids in sub-Saharan Africa with four million new infections in the region in 1999. The report said the HIV prevalence rate in young women aged 15-24 was typically two or three times higher than among young men and that in the 15-19 age group, the sex differentiation was even wider.

## ***Refugees and displaced people in the Grands Lacs region***

Political and ethnic conflicts in the Grands Lacs region, which includes Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), have generated millions of refugees over recent years. Most remain within the region, even in their own country, but many others seek refuge in other regions.

### **Burundi**

Since independence in 1962, hundreds of thousands of civilians have died in the power struggle between the elites of Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups. In 1994, Hutu armed opposition groups waged open war against the Tutsi-dominated armed forces and their political allies. It is civilians who pay the highest price in Burundi's war as they are caught in the crossfire of rebel attacks and army reprisals. Both sides in the war are guilty of widespread human rights abuses, including indiscriminate torture and killings. Apart from internal displacement, which exceeded 327,000 people as of the end of August 2000, 330,000 refugees have fled to camps in neighbouring Tanzania. Others have sought refuge elsewhere.

A peace agreement was signed by the warring parties in Arusha on 28 August 2000. A major failing of the agreement is that the major Hutu rebel groups have not signed (as of December 2000). Analysts agree that much more work and commitment to ending the conflict are called for before peace can truly come to Burundi.

### **Rwanda**

A genocide orchestrated by the Rwandan government in 1994 claimed the lives of between half to one million minority Tutsis and moderate members of the Hutu majority during a three-



month period. When the mainly Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) came into power after the massacre, two million Rwandans followed the genocidal government into exile, more than half into Zaire (now Congo). Over 600,000 refugees returned from Congo in 1996, after the camp populations dispersed when Mobutu was overthrown. Others were forcibly expelled from Tanzania at the same time.

Today, the number of alleged “disappearances” and people who are detained is on the increase in Rwanda. Some 3,000 mainly Hutu Rwandans fled the country between April and July 2000, allegedly because of the increased insecurity. Hundreds of thousands of others have been moved to government-established “villages” in a forced relocation process.

Meanwhile, some 40,000 Congolese people of Rwandan ethnic origin are refugees in Rwanda.

### **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**

In the so-called “Africa world war”, six outside states are fighting inside Congo. Some armies allied with rebel groups to overthrow President Laurent Kabila (killed in January 2001), others were protecting him. Following Kabila’s death, his son was immediately appointed to lead the army and government (as at January 2001). Meanwhile, nine rebel groups in Congo are fighting to overthrow governments in neighbouring countries. The fighting in DRC has smouldered inconclusively since August 1998, and the war remains largely a stalemate. Despite a cease-fire agreement signed in July and August 1999, fighting continues. There are over two million internally displaced people, not to mention thousands of others who have sought refuge in other countries.





**Angola** A landmine victim. Both warring parties in the country's brutal conflict plant landmines, many times deliberately targeting civilians.

## **NOT JUST VICTIMS OF WAR**

### Women refugees in Southern Africa

*Women are not just victims of war, as some aspects of their experiences are empowering and can be used as a resource for healing and transformation... their role must be recognised as a resource, just as women's resilience should be acknowledged... Women's roles in the survival and reconstruction of society should be identified. We need to develop appropriate techniques that will make women's experiences visible; because the implications for women are different from those of men. We need to identify policies that will support women's survival strategies.*

Gabriela Cohen speaking at a seminar in Ottawa *Search for peace* November 1999 Cohen an Angolan woman studies administration at the University of Syracuse

## A KNACK FOR BUSINESS

Pauline Mushimiye a refugee from Rwanda, sought refuge in South Africa with her husband and three children in the wake of the 1994 genocide in her country. Having abandoned a successful legal practice and all her belongings in Kigali, she was aware that the road to economic security and independence would be a long and difficult one. Most of the meagre sum of money the family managed to take with them out of Rwanda, was spent on food while they were detained at a South Africa border post.

Upon their release the family moved to Pretoria where Pauline had to start from scratch, selling doughnuts and other food items. Business was good. Unable to meet steadily increasing demand for want of capital, she applied to JRS for a loan to buy a refrigerator, a crucial piece of equipment if she was to expand her business. Pauline also completed payment for and took over the ownership of the food caravan she had been renting. With the tools of her trade securely in place she made her husband cashier for her business and hired two local women as assistants.

Today, with a *bakkie* (van), an ever expanding business to show for her effort, and with her loan almost entirely repaid she is set to make good. Nothing proves this better than the ready smile always lighting up her face, and her latest ambition buying her own house.

Pauline is not the only woman refugee who is making strides in business. JRS runs income-generating projects in South Africa, offering refugees the chance to set up their own businesses by offering them loans. Increasingly, refugees are taking the plunge, with women leading the way, showing remarkable tenacity and flexibility. JRS business reports in Pretoria at one stage credited women refugees with a 75 per cent loan repayment rate, as opposed to only five per cent for men.

*Thomas Jug Ayei from Cameroon formerly JRS Pretoria now resettled in Canada*

## ***Many refugee women do not live in camps...***

but as “urban refugees” in towns and cities all over the world. The lack of protection for such refugees has long been of concern to JRS. Unfortunately, refugees in urban areas are often the target of xenophobia. Harassment plagues many of them, several times at the hands of law enforcement officials. Refugees are increasingly being viewed as a drain on scarce economic resources, a strain on the environment, and a threat to national and regional security. The growth of xenophobia stems primarily out of the failure of the public to appreciate the special situation of refugees.

Refugee women living in urban environments or villages need protection against human rights abuses. They might encounter problems related to lack of proper refugee documentation, and difficulties in access to education or to training and income-generating activities; access to own or lease property; access to social services.

## SENT BACK TO DIE

I met Marie Noel in 1996 after we had just staged a demonstration in front of the Union Building to protest against the treatment refugees and asylum seekers were getting from the South African authorities. We were offered shelter in the hall of the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Pretoria. Over 600 of us – men, women and children – from as many as 15 countries – were all crammed in this hall.

The church set up a camp for us in a township called Garankuwa, 32km away from Pretoria. Most of us had to resign ourselves to spending the cold nights out in the open. For Marie Noel, who was chronically ill, and her two daughters, it must have felt like hell on earth. Yet amid all the hardship and turmoil, she persisted, at times moving me to tears. One day, while the other refugees were out looking for odd jobs, we started talking.

She told me she had left Zaïre (now Congo) as a result of the oppression her family had experienced under the Mobutu regime. "I first travelled to Namibia, where we were herded into a camp. I lived there for over two years. One day, I went to town with my two daughters to visit a friend, and she insisted we stay over. I was reluctant to do so, but in the end I gave in," Marie Noel recalled. "The next day, the camp was empty. We were told that the evening I spent in town, Canadian government representatives came and took everyone away for resettlement. I had missed the train. We drifted to Swaziland. Not long after our arrival, my husband got a job. However, he soon started having problems at work, and we were compelled to move again. This time we went to South Africa."

Life took a turn for the better, and Marie Noel and her family settled down. One day, as she sat at home in the evening with her children watching television, one of Marie Noel's compatriots burst in with shocking news: Marie Noel's husband had been shot. "By the time I reached the hospital, my husband was dead. With my illness and the burden of taking care of my children, I did not know where to go. When this demonstration started, I figured that the government would do something for us, so I joined in. And here I am today," Marie Noel finished her story as we sat together in the camp.

The government did do something. After some months, Marie Noel and her two daughters were carted away by government officials.

Marie Noel pleaded not to be sent back to Swaziland, however, we learnt from a reliable source that she was sent back to that country and from there, she was *refouled* to Zaire. Not long after, someone came to the camp to announce that Marie Noel had been killed in Zaire's civil war. We held church services for her. Of her two daughters, we know nothing.

*Thomas Jing Ayeh*



## A MOTHER'S STORY

For a few months, until the situation in Angola settles," she was told on arriving at the Meheba refugee settlement in Zambia in 1975. She has lived in Meheba since. Her name is Lúcia, she is 65 years old and she had four children. Only one remains with her in the camp, and her husband is gone, living in Botswana with his second family.

Lúcia's eldest son, Joaquim, is in a psychiatric hospital in Lusaka. For some time Lúcia lived in Lusaka, when three of her children were there. She would visit Joaquim every day to feed him. It took a 20km trip to get there, sometimes she went by minibus, sometimes she walked. I met Lúcia on one of these trips and we talked for a long while. She told me about Joaquim, how he grew up and went to school in Meheba. A bright child, all his education was sponsored and at 18 he went to Kenya to attend university on a scholarship. After two years, for reasons unknown, Joaquim went mad. He was taken back to Meheba. His diagnosis is still uncertain, schizophrenia maybe? He soon became a problem, as he was given to violent and uncontrollable bursts. One day, after he set fire to three houses, the neighbours tried to kill him. He was admitted to a psychiatric hospital in Lusaka, only to be 'set free' five months later because the hospital could no longer afford to feed its patients. Joaquim was one of many patients who was left to survive alone in the city centre, without shelter, medication or food. He was later re-admitted.

Jose, another son, lives with his mother in Meheba. He has tuberculosis and had been on medication for nine months. Then no TB medication was available in the camp for some time and he suffered a relapse. Despite finally having access to medication, Jose has been getting weaker and weaker. Then there is Fernando, who lives on his own in Lusaka. Unable to find a job, he spends his days drinking honey beer and was evicted by the family who had taken him in as he was turning violent. Clara, Lúcia's only daughter, worked in Lusaka as secretary for a private company. She helped her mother and did all she could for Joaquim until she fell ill. She was fired from her job after 15 days sick leave. Clara died shortly after and the little money Lúcia had, she spent on her daughter's funeral.

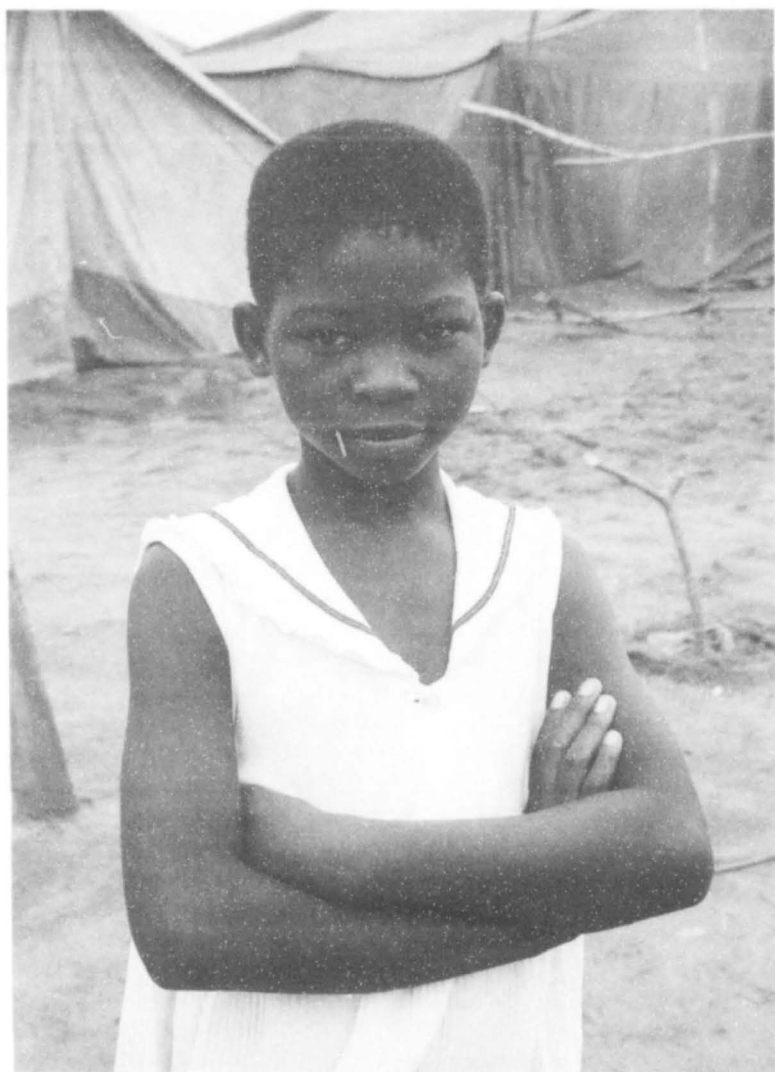
*Christina Celia Correia JRS Zambia*

## **Many refugee women are over 60 years...**

.. This is a reality which runs counter to assumptions that most older people are more likely to stay in their place of origin, or to perish in flight or exile. Older refugees make up some 8.5 per cent of the population which UNHCR has a mandate to serve, and the majority are women. The mental and physical needs of elderly refugees are great, however, while the plight of older refugees can be severe, they should not be seen only as passive, dependent recipients of assistance. They are valuable resources and often serve as formal and informal leaders of communities. Older refugees have taken the lead in return to countries as far afield as Croatia and Liberia, and can also contribute to peace and reconciliation measures

UNHCR program executive committee, *Older refugees looking beyond the International Year of Older Persons*, February 2000





Lolín Menéndez RSCJ/JRS

**Angola** An internally displaced girl in Viana. Many children in refugee camps remain at home, bearing heavy responsibilities. But there are women among the refugees who work for a better tomorrow for their children and who strive to send them to school.

Refugee women are the ones who re-weave the fabric of family life in a refugee camp. Children cling to their mothers as the only certainty in a world that is now hostile and unfamiliar. Is it, then, a wonder that women keep their girls close to home? They are needed as helpers in daily chores, as carers for younger siblings, as providers of water, firewood and food

Instead of being children with other children, learning and playing in the security of a school routine, developing their intellectual and physical selves, most often they are at home, bearing responsibilities beyond what their age warrants. This situation is not unique to refugee camps, but perhaps finds there its most poignant expression

But there are women among the refugees who see themselves in a different light. They know their value as 'weavers', as custodians not only of the past heritage, but also of a better tomorrow for all their children. Such mothers are the first to volunteer to make bricks for a new school building, to attend parent-teacher meetings and make their views known, to badger the NGOs in the camp for soap and other necessities for the school-going girls

Women who are better educated offer, by their activity, reflection and advice, both role models and challenges to school girls and parents alike. They are the ones who, with patient persistence, will change the perception of the role of the woman in the family and in society, without losing the skills of 'weaving'

Lolín Menéndez RSCJ JRS education resource person for Africa

## PREACHING THE GOOD NEWS

There is a young woman, Rose (not her real name) in the camp suffering from TB. Her husband died of the same disease over a year ago, and she has a son who is only three years old. After the death of her husband, Rose was well for a while, but she soon started to deteriorate. She became very sick and often had to stay in bed. I visit Rose almost daily. During her sickness, she has become very close to God. She has no fear of death because she is going to God, who cares for her. Rose does not ask to be cured, only to do God's will. The woman is beautifully serene and in peace.

For many months, a young girl, no relation to Rose, looked after the sick woman and her son daily. When Rose's illness became more serious and she was in need of constant care, a group of women took it upon themselves to care for her. They drew up a roster and now every day there is someone to attend to Rose, to do the cleaning, cooking, washing, and to care for her child. When the child is sick, they go to the clinic with him. The clinical officer in the camp wanted to send Rose to a hospital a few kilometres away, so as to lighten the women's burden a little, but the women refused. They said they had agreed together to take care of Rose, knowing what it implies, and that they were happy to do it.

These women have been a source of inspiration to me, they are a living witness of the scriptural text of Isaiah of preaching the Good News to the poor. They love, care for and comfort Rose, they pray and read the Scripture with her on a daily basis. They act quietly, without making any fuss, and they are there when needed.

*Yolande Jacob MSOLA, JRS Malawi*

***Women living in war and displacement often face “one of the most serious health hazards in the world”...***

Tuberculosis (TB), especially in nations with a high prevalence of HIV/Aids. The emergence of HIV/Aids has more than doubled the incidence of TB cases in several African countries. Dr Peter Piot, executive director of UNAIDS said co-infection with TB and HIV is the leading killer of people with Aids in sub-Saharan Africa, where the majority of Aids-related deaths are now occurring. However, if treated on time, TB is curable, even if the patient is also infected with HIV.

## **Refugees and displaced people in Southern Africa**

*In 1994 when Bie was under siege by UNITA for 16 months, the only source of fuel and food was outside the city, across the front line. The civilian population organised small groups often of girls as they are normally responsible for collecting fuel, to run across the lines at night. Sometimes men used girls and women as shields, sending them in front to explode landmines.*

Gabriela Cohen *Search for peace* a seminar in Ottawa November 1999

In southern Africa, Mozambique is absorbing millions of refugees, demobilised soldiers and internally displaced people returning home after years of war. Angola should have been on the same path after the signing of the Lusaka accord in 1994, but it has been plunged back into civil war since late 1998. New refugees from Angola arrive daily in Zambia, Namibia and Congo.

### **Angola**

The country has known little peace since its independence from Portugal in 1975. Internal conflict rages between the ruling Movement of the Popular Liberation of Angola (MPLA), and the rebel National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). Violations to the UN-brokered Lusaka peace agreement signed in 1994 led to the resumption of full scale war in late 1998. The war continues, fuelling widespread death and displacement – 2.7 million Angolans are internally displaced (as at end August 2000) and hundreds of thousands of others are refugees in other countries.

Refugees live in camps in a number of countries in Southern Africa, including Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi. Southern Africa also hosts refugees in urban areas, now a phenomenon in most African cities.

### **South Africa**

A high number of refugees seek refuge in South Africa, at the rate of 1500 a month. A faltering economy and unemployment rate of about 40 per cent feed increasing xenophobia in the country, mainly targeted at people from other parts of Africa. This makes life hard for refugees there as they have been scapegoated for many of the country's ills and have virtually no hope of finding a job.

### **Zambia**

Refugees from the wars in Angola and DRC seek refuge in Zambia. According to UNHCR, there are an estimated 223,700 refugees in Zambia, the majority from Angola. A new camp was set up to cater for arrivals of Angolan refugees in early 2000, as thousands of refugees massed along the south-western borders of Zambia.

### **Malawi**

Malawi hosts 3,500 recognised refugees and asylum seekers from a number of countries, including Burundi, DRC, Rwanda and Somalia. There are some 50 to 60 new arrivals a week. In November 2000, UNHCR voiced concern at the increasing xenophobia among government officials and police.



Amaya Valcarlos/IRS

**Kenya** Halima and her family, from Somalia, outside Halima's hut in Kakuma camp.

## **IN WAR, A WOMAN IS OFTEN LEFT ALONE**

### Women refugees in Eastern Africa

*Halima, a mother of two children, first fled Somalia with her husband, and later left her husband, when he shot and injured her. She always kept her shelter in Kakuma camp, Kenya, clean and welcoming, carefully washing the metal door made of used oil tins. I admired the ceremonial way in which she received her guests: hot sweet tea always ready, a broad, resilient smile. Halima: a refined housekeeper of a provisional and fragile house, living with dignity. This heart is indeed a heart full of hope... the heart of many refugees still remains hopeful for a return to their land. Nothing – despair, loneliness, fear, violence – is stronger than their dreams about return.*

Amaya Valcarcel JRS International office



## CELEBRATING LIFE

I am convinced that all will be well with me always. Life, like love, is a choice. A choice based on faith, and this is why I will celebrate life and catch all thieves who strive to steal away my joy.

At present I live in a one-roomed house. It is beautiful immediately as you enter on the left, there is my little kitchenette where I prepare meals for my family of four. I have four plates, two spoons, two aluminium pots to cook in and one wooden cooking spoon. As you move away from the three stones that make up my cooker, you find three stools which are my sitting room, where my visitors and I lounge to while away the time. My bedroom is in the right corner. I am the proud owner of a three and a half inch mattress, three blankets and two sets of bed linen. Not quite enough for a family of four, but we are happy to warm one another when we stretch out to call it a day. A corner at the end of the room serves as our washroom. We have put up a cloth for privacy.

I am not sad about my living quarters. Not at all. I like my home just the way it is. This way, we bond as a family as we sit together every night. We have learnt the value of story telling which serves as entertainment easily available and even as a channel for sharing on the day to day challenges of life. Should one of us forget our responsibilities, we only need to enter our home to be drawn to the reality of our needs. These living quarters have made even my husband appreciate the work of running a home. He cannot help but see all the duties I perform as a housewife, and he is quick to help me. More often than not, this ends up being a laughter session.

However, he has proved efficient at picking rice and from this, he draws a comparison about why leaders back home have failed in their quest for peace. He says if only they realise the need to address issues affecting the people while taking care not to allow for selfish gains, refugees would be a thing of the past. He is convinced if the leaders pick out the bad yeast, the way one picks out stones in the rice, transparency and political goodwill will characterise the governance of the country.

My experience of displacement has been of significance to me, in some ways good, others bad, but all of them important, because where I come from, every season has a reason. I forget when it was I

came to Kenya. Law enforcers demand that I should know details about border entrance, arrival at registration point and all these things which do not quite matter to me. My concept of time does not correspond with the European calendar of January to December. And anyway, my sense of orientation was very bad at the time I sought refuge. Even now, I am not clear about whether it was the night after the rebels attacked our camp, or the eve of registration for repatriation, or the night when we were attacked while queuing for water at a water point that dried up shortly after.

I think it may have been the night when my husband traced me in the camp after we had been apart for six months. We were so happy to be re-united, only the camp authorities came to my tent thinking I was harbouring a rebel. I remember how difficult it was to prove to the authorities that the rugged, dirty, dishevelled man was the joy of my earthly life. I remember them saying, 'What would a beautiful woman like you be doing with such a thug? Why are you protecting him? Does he pay you for providing him with information about the camp?' How difficult it is to prove a marriage when you lack the very certificate you signed and have long sold the wedding band you religiously wore for years. Eventually they left me alone, but not before kicking and slashing at my love. How I wept. Do you know what it is to weep yet keep your eyelids dry? Do you know about that fat potato that sits in your throat and refuses to move either way, and makes you heave like a tractor in a field? Now I understand how one can hurt so deeply yet remain unable to convey their feelings. Next time you meet someone like me who cannot quite explain themselves, remember the big potato story.

Shortly after, I fled with some women, and entered what turned out to be Kenya. How can I forget the experience of crossing the border? The people commiserated with us, God bless them. As we drew closer, we noticed border patrol police and since we had no documents, we feared we would not be allowed entrance. To our surprise, a policeman approached us and sought our documents, telling us we looked frightful.

The eldest amongst us, Matilda, spoke on our behalf. 'Kind sir, we are refugees and we bear no documents,' she said.

'Refugees, you said? Where from, I wonder?' replied the officer.

'I know some of us are from Rwanda and another from Burundi.

Two of us are from the Congo. We are accompanied by some of

our children and none of us are with our husbands " said Matilda  
And if I may ask, are you then available for marriage? And what  
will happen to your children lest you marry? ' asked the officer  
You should have heard the chuckles from the women, for marriage  
was the last thing in our minds. All we sought was a safe haven.  
Kind sir, we do not seek marriage or adoption for our children. All  
we seek is a place far from war. We do not have any identification  
documents for we sold our ration cards before we left the camp to  
raise money to see us to the border. replied Matilda

"I have your young ones eaten today?" asked the officer

"No sir. But we hope to first cross the border, then look for a reason-  
able food house " said Matilda

Follow me, and I will make you fishers of food, ' was the reply of the  
kind man

You should have been there to see our faces light up with happiness.  
This treatment was a far cry from what we expected. Anyway he  
brought us to a feeding house across the border and settled our  
bill and then bundled us all - a group of 19 women - into a mini  
bus.

We were at a loss for words and thanked God

"That was angel sent by the lord" shouted Amina

'No no. I recognised him as one of my dead relatives sent to assist  
us, declared Uwimana

As if to sober us up the cynic amongst us said. You never cease to  
amaze me. An angel or a spirit? Wake up to reality. That was a  
real human being who has probably sent word to the destina-  
tion of this bus, for his relatives to await a group of new women.  
If only he knew that we are all used goods '.

The mini bus driver said then. How unfortunate you do not realise  
the kindness of a stranger. Be informed this is not the first time  
that officer has helped a group of refugees to cross the border  
and pay for their fare. And I am sure you are not the last either "

As if to cover for our shame, Matilda asked why. "The story is that  
one day, Officer Kamau experienced the death of a refugee at the  
immigration quarters when she was denied entry due to lack of  
identification papers. The woman was with her four children all  
under six years of age, who Officer Kamau realised were now  
orphaned. He took them in and has continued to provide for them  
ever since. He has since married, and now he has a complete

family He is known to declare he was blessed with a ready made family," explained the driver

Now it's 9pm, and I am worried about where my husband could be He left home early this afternoon to collect food rations and a medical voucher from the parish from where we have continued to receive assistance. The social worker would have stopped working hours ago. I pray he has not been arrested Not on a night like this when I am so weak and will not be able to prepare food for my children or organise a search for him.

I don't want to give up, but my body doesn't seem to understand my wish. Ever since my husband traced me two years ago, I have continued to suffer of this or the other First, I discovered I was pregnant and none of us was gainfully employed or was on regular assistance I named my child Joy Makena Joy, for the new gift of life and Makena, meaning happiness Unfortunately Joy does not seem to live up to her name She is continuously sick and in need of medical attention, patience and loving care. My fear is, what will happen to her when I am gone? Who will rock her to bed? Will her eight-year-old sister do this? Who will lie awake to watch over her when she is running a fever? Makena, will you live to experience your name to the full? I wish I could bribe fate so I would live to see you grow up I am not asking that I live to see my children's children, I am only asking that I live to see you in a professional job I wonder where my spirit will be when you deal with the difficulties of adolescence? Or when you cry over your first broken love affair?

Dear Lord, I want to say a prayer of safety for my family when I am gone and another for my husband to come home quickly, for my spirit is weak As I move on, may my children be able to experience the kindness of the likes of Officer Kamau. May they find the courage to seek to do their best no matter the situation and experience Your love through the warmth of others. I go to bed to rest believing my children too, will not be strangers to You and with a belief that they too will get to celebrate life in spite of displacement lack of gainful employment, and the scourge of the HIV virus

*As shared by Angelique Uwamahoro in her last days with Antoninah Njau, JRS Kenya Angelique was a refugee from Rwanda who fled first to Tanzania and later to Kenya She died of an HIV-related illness in June 2000*

## A WOMAN IS OFTEN LEFT ALONE

I became a refugee as my country, Sudan, is gripped by a civil war. I left my home and ran for safety when I heard gunshots around me, when I saw the dead bodies of people around me. I lost my father and my brother to the war, as well as other relatives and friends. People just left their homes, running in different directions, all seeking shelter. Some saw others leaving, panicked and also ran away.

I reached Kenya on foot after trekking for three days. Now I live in Kakuma camp. I feel very, very lonely, worried and afraid. During a war like the one fought in Sudan, a woman is often left alone. Her husband is gone. Either he is fighting in the bush, or he has run away, or he has been killed. If he remains at home, although he may be physically present, his mind is always with his countrymen who are fighting. His heart is not fully in home life, not even in plans for the future.



Amaya Valcarlos/JRS

The life of a refugee is not easy... As a woman facing life alone in Kakuma camp, Christine often feels very alone and afraid.

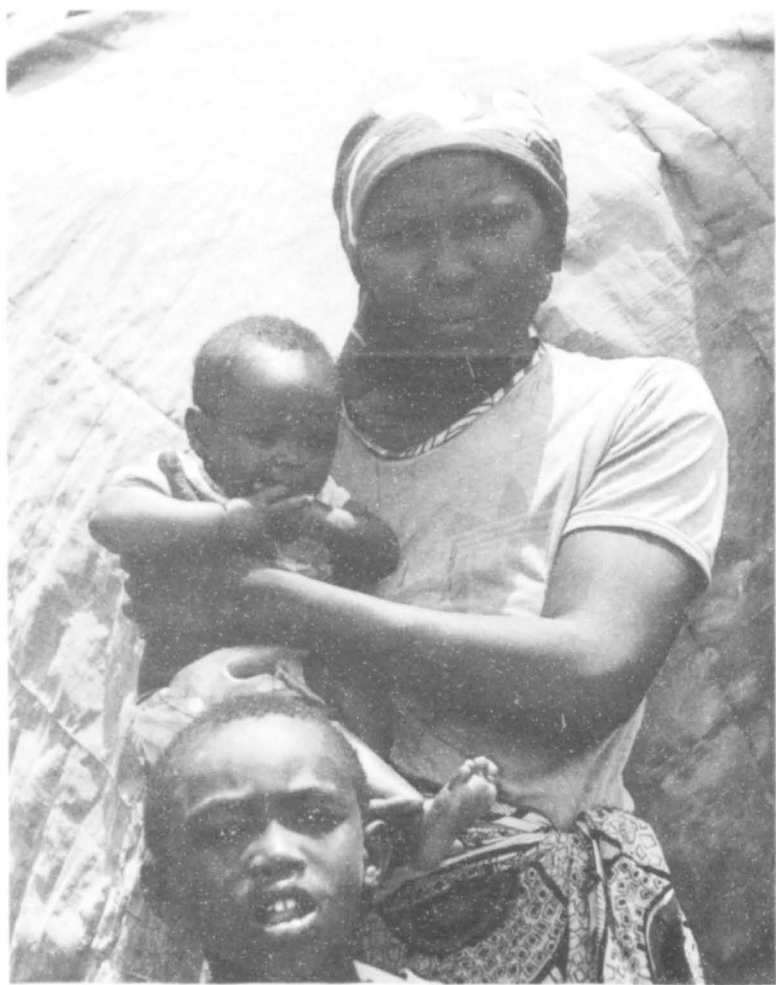
Many of my fellow women refugees are the ones who do everything for their families, they must try to cater for everything. Some are exhausted in their efforts. They regret the time wasted, and pray the war will stop. Some try politics, most are housewives.

I myself have faced many difficulties. My husband left me a year ago, he went to the US seeking asylum. He left me suffering mistreatment at the hands of some of his relatives, and facing life in a refugee camp. At the same time, I am always worried about members of my family who are fighting, and about the war, wondering when it will finally be over.

My life in Kakuma camp was made impossible by a relative I was living with, who treated me harshly because I am of a different ethnic tribe to her. Some days, I did not even have food to eat and my ration card was taken from me. I decided to move from the shelter of the family I was staying with to a common reception area for refugees in the camp. Here, both sexes sleep in the same place in houses which have dusty floors, and doors which do not shut. The walls have holes which leak if it rains, so that the floor soaks water which takes ages to dry.

The life of a refugee is not easy. What I would say to people who work with refugees is that they should be patient enough to listen with care to what we have to say. Many refugees feel their needs and views are not considered. Women, especially, are full of worries and frustrations. Apart from being overworked, they face discrimination. The world should consider women's rights in all aspects and help them solve their problems accordingly.

*Christine a Sudanese refugee in Kakuma refugee camp Kenya*



**Rwanda** A woman and her children in a refugee camp. The unique needs and strengths of women must be taken into account in camp design and services.

## ***Women living in refugee camps often face difficulties as a result of poor camp design...***

as they have special needs in addition to the problems they share in common with all refugees. They need protection against sexual and physical abuse and exploitation, and protection against discrimination in the delivery of goods and services. In refugee camps, too often, refugee women face dangers stemming from poor camp design. Problems they face

- Communal housing that provides no privacy for women
- Location of basic services, such as latrines, at unsafe distances from where refugee women are housed
- Refugee women who formerly had a means of expressing their views in the community may find themselves unable to do so through the camp leadership, which is often composed of men
- In many refugee situations, strangers are thrown together while no efforts are made to restore traditional communities, unaccompanied women and female-headed households may be intermixed with single men, traditional mechanisms for ensuring order within the community may be broken down
- Women may not have equal access to food and other distributed items in camps; they may have to walk great distances alone to obtain water and firewood
- Women may not have equal access to health care, education and skills training and income-generating activities

UNHCR and its NGO partners, *Protecting Refugees A Field Guide for NGOs*



## **A DEAR FRIEND AND AN OUTSTANDING MOTHER**

Mary Alemnetu, a refugee from Ethiopia, single mother of three children, born in 1952, died on 26 February 1997, after a short illness. My words to the mourners at Mary's funeral were 'We have lost a dear friend and an outstanding mother.'

I got to know Mary some years ago, when she earned her living by cooking for workers on construction sites making just enough money to feed her three children. Mary dreamed of opening a small Ethiopian restaurant. All she needed was a stove, some chairs and tables, and utensils, which she bought with some assistance from a JRS income-generating project. So Mary set up her little restaurant, and all went well until some policemen discovered the place. They started to visit every weekend asking how much money she had made during the week and demanding their 'share'. They threatened to close the restaurant on the grounds that it was illegal if Mary (who had a government-issued license) refused to pay.

The harassment made Mary decide to move her business to a safer location. Everybody felt at home in her restaurant, which soon earned a reputation for excellent food. Regular customers included expatriates and poor Ethiopian refugees alike. The latter were welcome even if they could not pay.

Although her restaurant was doing well, Mary was plagued by trouble. The City Commission started clamouring for her eviction from the restaurant premises, claiming that the site was needed for development. Mary tried to fight the Commission in court, but she was eventually forced to set up elsewhere after her restaurant was demolished twice. She rented an old house and continued to receive her traditional guests.

Mary's business and life came to an abrupt end when she suddenly fell ill and was diagnosed as having TB and being HIV-positive. She died on 26 February 1997. As I was preparing for the funeral and going through her papers, I discovered an extraordinary story about Mary.

When she was a teenager, Mary used to work as a maid for an Ethiopian politician. At 16 years, she was abducted by her employer.

and forced to leave the country with him and his family. "You know too much about me. You will never see Ethiopia again in your life," she was told. They ended up in Nairobi. Locked in a room day and night, Mary managed to escape. Eventually, she got married to a Kenyan, Elias, and they had three children. Mary worked hard to keep her family going, selling vegetables daily on the market. However, Elias wasted most of his wife's meagre income on alcohol. After some years, Mary left him. This was when I met her for the first time, in 1991, as she struggled to raise her children by herself.

During the last few weeks of her life, Mary came often to our office, worried about the future of her children. Shortly after her funeral, the three children and a guardian were placed in a new home in a housing project for refugees in Kangemi, a township of Nairobi.

*Fr Eugene Birrer, JRS Kenya*



Mary's daughters and friends at her grave

## HOPE FOR TOMORROW

Fatum 15 years is one of the patients who stayed the longest at the JRS rehabilitation centre in Kangemi Nairobi. Fatum arrived at the centre after she was shot by Somali militia men in Mogadishu. 'I was injured during the civil war in Somalia,' recalls Fatum. "Members of one of the militia groups which had been defeated by another faction came to our house and forced us to leave at gunpoint. We left, taking a few quickly packed belongings. As we walked away from our home, one of the militia men shot me in the back.

The bullet came through her neck, robbing her of the power of speech and paralyzing her from the waist down. Fatum's mother and her sisters managed to get the wounded girl to Mombasa, Kenya, by boat.

'For five days,' her mother explained, 'I held my unconscious daughter in my arms as we sailed. It was only after a week that we were able to get medical assistance at Mombasa general hospital.'

Fatum was taken to the Kangemi centre - which offers orthopaedic treatment and physiotherapy to victims of gunshots, landmines and accidents - and she lived there with her mother and four sisters undergoing treatment. 'I have made some progress. I can walk a few steps between parallel bars. Had I not been with my family and received treatment and care from the staff at the centre, I would not have got better,' she says. Six months after the accident, Fatum was unable to speak and had to be spoon-fed by her mother. Now, not only can she walk a little with support, she can transfer herself from her wheelchair to her bed and also wash and dress herself.

Happily, Fatum and the rest of her family were resettled in New Zealand three years after she was shot. 'I have been promised specialised treatment in New Zealand,' Fatum said. "I believe that with advanced medical care, I might walk, instead of remaining bedridden for the rest of my life.

'My dream is to learn to walk again like other people, perhaps even go to school. One day I wish to have a family of my own. Right now, I don't know when my wishes will come true, but I have not given up hope of a better tomorrow.'

*Fr Eugene Birrer, JRS Kenya*



Although severely disabled following a militia attack on her home in Somalia, Fartum has not given up hope of walking again some day.

## I ACHE FOR THE LOSS OF MY CHILDREN

Often I go to the church in the camp to pray. Prayer at the church helps me. I attend services on Sunday; I like to listen to the choirs and to meet others there. Sometimes I wait to greet Sister (Roxanne - JRS) and talk with her about my problems, especially when I am sick or very troubled. The first time we met, I asked her to teach me English. We practice: "Good morning. How are you?" "I am well, thank you, and you?" And we laugh.

I became a refugee in 1972, when I fled from my home in Burundi for Zaire (today Congo) with my husband, a magistrate, and five children. Four years later we returned to Burundi. But things got very bad again in the nineties, and my husband said I should leave Burundi or I would die of fear. So in 1994, I went back to Zaire with three of my children and their families, but this time we walked through Rwanda to reach Bukavu. My husband and two children remained in Burundi.



Rosalie, who lives in Nduta, wonders every day whether her children are still alive.

From Bukavu we moved to Uvira, Zaire, in 1995. The following year, 1996, signalled the start of very great suffering for me. I received the news that my husband had been slaughtered in Burundi in July. The civil war in Zaire came to Uvira and we had to flee again. One of my daughters and her seven children went on to Kinshasa, another daughter and her children returned to Burundi. With one of my children and some of my grandchildren, I walked many, many months, hiding in forests and villages, trying to reach a safe place. We were hungry, our feet bled, no skin left. We were separated and we lost each other.

Finally I reached Tanzania with three of my grandchildren. For a while, we stayed in a village in the Kigoma area, then we were brought to Nduta camp in October 1998. Today, I live in Nduta with three of my grandchildren, whose parents are believed to be dead.

I am 68 years old, caring for my teenage grandchildren. I know my husband is dead. I think one of my daughters lives in DRC. What of the others? I don't know. Last year I heard two of my children might be in another camp near Kigoma. When I went in search of them, I heard they had also been killed, it is thought that all who remained or returned to Burundi were killed. But nothing is confirmed, and there is no news from any of them.

I am haunted still by the story of how my husband was killed and I ache for the loss of my children and am troubled with not knowing if any are still alive. I worry about my grandchildren who are with me, how to provide for them, to get enough clothes and food, to send them to school in the camp. And who will care for them when I die? My health is poor. I suffer from hypertension and frequent bouts of malaria. I am losing my eyesight. There is no treatment for cataracts or most eye problems at the camp or district hospitals here.

At times I feel overwhelmed with sadness and suffering. When I remember all that has happened, I weep. I come to church, only prayer at church helps me. I know God has been with me, is with me. God helps me.

*Rosalie a Burundian refugee in Nduta camp Tanzania*

## TALKING TO ANYONE WHO WILL LISTEN

Michelle fled from Burundi after spending over two years in the forest seeking shelter from the fierce fighting around her and hoping that one day it would stop. Michelle said she left her home with the rest of her family when she heard gunfire close by, they escaped as soldiers pursued them.

In the forest they lived in hiding, unable to cook lest the smoke betrayed their location and unable to move except at night when they would search for edible leaves. Michelle lost two of her five children during those years in the forest. Her eldest daughter was shot dead as she bathed her child in the river, she was 20 years old. The child survived and is cared for by Michelle as her own. Michelle lost her own baby, she was shot while sleeping on Michelle's back by a bullet which grazed her mother's cheek. Many of the people living alongside Michelle in the forest also died, some of starvation, others when they stepped on landmines buried around the area to keep the people hostage.

As it became more and more clear that peace was not forthcoming in Burundi, Michelle decided to go to neighbouring Tanzania. Today she has found refuge in a camp in western Tanzania, and apparent peace. But she is not without sorrow and remorse. At times, she is stricken with guilt that she survived when those around her did not.

When I met Michelle, I soon realised she loves to talk, but it seemed to me as though she did not have anyone to talk to, to express her innermost feelings and fears. All those with her are equally tired, they do not have the energy to listen to her. Yet she needs to share her thoughts so much. When talking to me, telling me her story it was as though she could not stop.

*Sarah Njeri JRS Eastern Africa*

## ***Listen, Listen, Listen...***

Surely the only way to learn about the hope of a refugee is to listen to her. Our biggest temptation on seeing the distress of the refugees in Karagwe or Fungnido Camp, or in a city like Johannesburg or Nairobi, is to begin projects, to give material things, to decide en masse what the refugees need. They often arrive in exile without shoes, with only one torn shirt, hungry, without a clear plan. But they did not undergo this experience in order to get a shirt or shoes. Their human experience calls for respect. They are traumatised by violence, lonely, rejected, exhausted in body certainly, but also exhausted by losing their place in a stable society, and sometimes feeling guilty about what they did in order to survive. They want to be understood, to be heard. Their frequent question is, 'Why is God doing this to me?' They have a right to ask this question. But it cannot be asked unless someone listens. This is our primary role, to listen to the questions, to the longing and to the fundamental human need of the refugees.

JRS International director (1990-2000) Mark Raper SJ, *Pastoral accompaniment among refugees – the JRS experience*, September 1998



## A WOMAN FOR RECONCILIATION

When the killing in Rwanda started in 1994 Stephanie (not her real name) a Tutsi asked her Hutu husband to see what he could do to save her mother. He managed to protect both his wife and his mother-in-law, and before long, they left the country for Bukavu in Congo, to camp life and the rigours that entails. Another move brought Stephanie and her three children to Nairobi. Her husband managed to reach France and sought asylum there.

Stephanie's time in Nairobi, away from her husband, in the wake of all that had happened, was not easy. Often she would find herself thinking about what would happen if the killing started again, would her husband stand up for them this time – or not? An urge to ensure such a tragedy never repeated itself, to convince people to address division, drove Stephanie to become involved in groups to foster the healing of division, like women's groups and the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

With life in Nairobi being hard even for the relatively well-to-do, Stephanie took the chance to smuggle two children to France on a friend's passport to be united with her husband. Any official family reunion for herself had to wait on official papers for her husband in France.

While waiting Stephanie even thought maybe she should go back to Rwanda. If people do not work for the healing of divisions there, when will it end, she would muse. At the same time she seemed to find a freedom in the conviction that she had nothing to lose.

Eventually Stephanie's husband did receive official refugee status in France and she left Nairobi to be reunited with the rest of her family. No doubt life there will be easier, if not trouble-free. But Stephanie's prayer and action for a united Rwanda will continue.

*Stephen Power SJ JRS Eastern Africa*

## IT IS HIGH TIME WE DECIDED

Oh my people  
Why all the loud cries  
Why the guns and bombs  
Why destroy the land, the innocent souls  
Why the division  
Oh my people

Oh my people  
When shall we unite?  
When shall we decide ' we want peace'  
Oh yes, it is high time we decided  
Oh my people

Oh my people  
It is very easy to cry and blame  
It is very easy to talk of disunity, injustice and oppression  
It is very easy to sign peace agreements  
It is very easy, easy, easy  
Oh my people

Oh my people  
Who is the enemy?  
Who is to call off the war?  
Who is to sow peace?  
Who is to restore the dignity, the hope and the lost love?  
Oh my people.

It is high time we decide from our hearts

*Frances Philippa, JRS Uganda*  
*Frances is of Sudanese origin and lives in Uganda*





Mark Raper/SIJRS

**Sudan** A woman with her child in Nimule, southern Sudan. The civil war has greatly exacerbated the burden on women. In many communities, men have gone to war, and women are left to care for children and the elderly, grow food, haul water and maintain overall stability.

## CONDITIONS FORCING ME INTO EXILE

In Sudan, people like rebels robbed or looted us by taking our clothes, bicycle, radio cassette, slaughtering our goats. If you have a daughter, they may use her as a subject indecently, in front of you, which is not good. This is also one of the major things for those having daughters from 12-15 years old, (they) are forced as their wives

*Anjilina Dudu, Rhino refugee camp settlement Uganda*

When the rebels entered Sudan, we ran from Juba to Nimule. When I was in Nimule with my children, some people broke into my house. They beat me, a disabled woman, and added to my pain by knocking some of my teeth out. I left my husband in the town, I do not know where he is now. I have seven children. I am finding difficulties in caring for them, in providing school fees, clothing, blankets, and books. I also came across two orphans, and it is not easy to help them.

*Rebecca Ifuho, Rhino refugee camp settlement*

These are the conditions which forced me into exile. I was beaten by the rebels, then as I was leaving Sudan, I was robbed. We were told that we were the wives of Arabs, and some of the girls were raped. Many of us women were forced to grind two basins of maize every day. When we came to Uganda, my husband was paralysed after a beating. His bicycle was stolen. Now that my husband is disabled, I have no one to help me raise my eight children.

*Margaret, Rhino refugee camp settlement*

I am 20 years. My husband is a student in Sudan, he left me when our child was three months old. We have no ration card, yet the child needs food and is often sick. I am selling sweet cassava on the main road to at least buy food and clothes for my child and myself. When there is no market for cassava, I go hungry and sleep without food.

*Selina Dawa, Siripi refugee camp settlement Uganda*

## ***Refugees and displaced people in Eastern Africa***

Eastern Africa is both a major refugee-hosting and refugee-generating region. The Horn of Africa witnesses continual armed conflicts which provoke millions to search for safety, either in their own or in neighbouring countries.

### **Sudan**

Civil war between the north and south has dragged on for years, with a death toll estimated at a staggering two million lives, and displacement at double that number. Victims are mostly southern Sudanese, and an estimated 80 per cent are women and children. A 1999 appeal by the Catholic Bishops of Eastern Africa (AMECEA), drew world attention to the "gross human rights violations" practised by the government of Sudan (GoS) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). One of the violations practised by the GoS against civilians in the south is frequent bombing of civilian and humanitarian targets despite international condemnation.

### **Ethiopia and Eritrea**

A peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea signed in December 2000 ended a two-year border conflict which was massively costly in terms of human lives. The fratricidal conflict had been resumed in 1998 despite the fact that both countries were beleaguered by famine. Largely ignored by international attention, the war caused huge deportation and displacement on both sides of the border.

### **Somalia**

Peace-making efforts in Somalia paid off on 27 August 2000 when Abdiqasim Salad Hassan was sworn in as President. Since 1991, the country had been torn apart by fighting between rival clan factions following the post-Cold War collapse.

of the artificially propped-up dictatorship of Syed Barre. The wars and prolonged drought forced more than 900,000 Somalis to flee to neighbouring countries. The refugees went mostly to neighbouring Ethiopia and Djibouti, and over half a million Somali refugees sought asylum in Kenya. Today, many have returned home in either spontaneous or organised repatriations.

Apart from refugees from the above-mentioned countries, people uprooted in conflicts in the Grands Lacs region also seek refuge in Eastern Africa. Countries in Eastern Africa which host large numbers of refugees are Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

### **Tanzania**

The country hosts nearly 500,000 refugees, two thirds come from Burundi, the rest from Congo or Rwanda. Most live in camps in the Kibondo and Ngara districts. There is a constant flow of refugees in and out of Burundi.

### **Kenya**

Around 350,000 refugees live here in diverse and difficult circumstances. Some live in camps, namely Daadab and Kakuma, while others live in urban areas. With no national refugee legislation, police and other officials sometimes harass refugees. A bill for refugee legislation was drawn up in 1999.

### **Uganda**

Uganda hosts over 200,000 refugees, most come from southern Sudan, while others come from Congo and Rwanda. The majority of refugees live in rural settlements in northern Uganda and the refugee communities are gradually moving towards self-reliance. Besides, many civilians in northern Uganda are internally displaced due to rebel activity.



Brian Fox

**East Timor** When will the survivors of the killings have justice?

## **MY COUNTRY WILL AGAIN KNOW HAPPINESS**

### Women refugees and returnees in Asia Pacific

*The other day I visited Suai to talk with the widows. In Suai the widows call their group 'Mate restu' or 'the leftovers of the dead'. They survived the massacre at the Suai church on the afternoon of 6 September 1999. The widows in Suai gave me a photo of Mary Robinson holding one of the babies born as a result of the rapes. The mother was so happy that Mary was willing to hold her baby. And Mary was touched when she asked the name of the baby and was told "Her name is Maria". Printed on the back of the photo given to me was "Mate restu. Ami hakarak justica, Bain hira...!" or "When will the survivors of the killings have their justice?"*

Peter Hosking SJ, JRS East Timor





**East Timor** Women mourning at the Polres (police station) in Maliana, where just over six months before (during the post-election violence in 1999), many of their husbands, brothers and sons had been massacred.

## THE CRIES OF THE WIDOWS

I have been honoured to attend a few of the three-day workshops facilitated by Fokupers (NGO of women in East Timor, working on human rights and empowerment). These take place with some 30 survivors of gender-based violence. The widows and those who were raped by the Indonesian military or their militias share their stories. Recently the workshops were with the women of Maliana. The women shared their stories of sadness and suffering. They found with each other strength, solidarity and spiritual bonding. We had a Eucharist together and finished our mass by walking in silence to the Polies. The place where just over six months ago, many of their husbands, brothers and sons were massacred. There we laid candles and prayed for the dead. In the scandal, we listened to the voices of the dead calling us to life.

An 18-year-old girl lamented 'I am only young. The militia took me from my village and made me cook for the military and militia when they went out to commit acts of violence. At night they raped me. This sexual slavery continued for several days. I am now pregnant with my violators' child. My people do not support me because they do not understand why I was trapped for so many days without escaping. But the terror of the degradation and imprisonment of those days will never go away.

Another woman spoke. She told of how three men raided her home and shot her. She managed to escape and fled. From some distance away she watched them rape her 17-year-old daughter. She watched as her sister came from next door with her husband to try to protect their niece. The husband was killed and they raped her sister. The sister was stabbed to death. The militia then killed her 17-year-old daughter.

Another woman said 'They came to our home. They killed my father with two blows of a machete to his face. They stripped me in front of my husband and raped me while my husband was held. They then beat my husband and stabbed him many times. There was so much blood before he died. Nothing has been done to charge those responsible for my father's and husband's death.

*Peter Hosking SJ, March 2000*

## HOPE FOR THEIR HOMELAND

May 1996 – I was in the compound of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in University Avenue, Rangoon. I was there just to see how she was and what she would say to the international media. Despite the hardship she had endured for the cause of democracy in Burma, she still smiled. After the news briefing, she served tea to the journalists. With a touch of both humour and irony she told them, quoting a classic American film: 'I'll give you tea and I hope you'll give me sympathy.'

May 1998 – I am in exile in Thailand, working with Burmese refugees. Many are women. They fled from the killing fields in the jungles near the Thai-Burma border where fighting between the Burmese military and opposition groups is common. Their villages have been shelled and torched, or relocated. Their farms have been looted or laid with landmines. Their husbands and relatives have been put into forced labour or made to be porters for the Burmese troops. Or else they have been recruited by opposition groups. These women have experienced inhuman treatment at the hands of Burmese soldiers. Finally they deserted their villages and farms to seek refuge in Thailand. All they can bring with them are their personal belongings bundled on their backs and their children in their arms.

As refugee camps along the border are frequently attacked and admission is difficult to gain, the women risk going further inside Thailand. Some end up in the Immigration Detention Centre because they are undocumented. Those who reach Bangkok appeal to UNHCR for protection. They are homeless and helpless, their future unclear.

I think these women refugees and Aung San Suu Kyi, who is so well known for her selfless sacrifices for the people of Burma, have one thing in common: hope for their homeland.

*Ko Ko Thett JRS Asia Pacific*

## NOT THE ONLY ONE CRYING

I was born in the jungle I was lucky, my mother told me, lucky that I was born when so many around me died I come from Burma where thousands have perished in the war between Burmese troops and opposition groups I was born in the jungle because my parents fled their home to avoid the fighting When I was in primary school, I had to leave my home village and from that time on, I would move from village to village to attend school.

Until 1992 I visited my parents and brothers and sisters about once a year, but I have not seen them since, as I have been unable to return home following the closure by Burmese troops of all roads along the Thai-Burma border

So I must live by myself, stand alone without my parents I have relatives who live around here, but I know I cannot get my parents love and care whenever I want I cannot talk to them whenever I want When they are sick, I cannot visit and look after them

I realised how much I missed my parents when I was sick Life as a refugee is so difficult I badly needed my parents to be with me right there by my bed, but I could not have them I burst into tears, it was so hard for me I was unable to see my parents because of the war Then I realised I was not the only one crying and I felt consoled I know there are thousands of people who are suffering like me When will there be peace in Burma? When will the war be over? When will the ethnic issues be solved?

After years of moving from place to place, I finally settled in the Karenni refugee camps I was asked to teach at the camp schools Before long, however, I was selected for an internship in the Philippines During my time away, I learnt more about human rights and I am now working with JRS in the field of education We are busy supporting Karenni schools in a number of ways I am happy I can use my education to assist my people in these difficult times

*as told to Moo Hser a Karenni who works with JRS*

## A WEeping WOUND

I come from a small village in Karenni State, where I lived for many years. I worked on a rice farm and looked after my 12 children. Every year when I harvested the rice, the SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) would demand a large supply, which I was forced to provide. If I did not, they would have taken all the rice I collected for my family. I was left with too little to feed my children, so I often had to borrow rice from our neighbours or even buy it at expensive prices from the government.

As my children grew up, they refused to live under the SLORC regime. Some joined the KNPP (Karen Nationalities Progress Party) movement. When this came to the ears of the SLORC, soldiers came and searched my home, hoping to find evidence they could use against us. We were suspected of anti-government sympathies, so the soldiers tried hard to find something to incriminate us. These searches, which occurred many times, pushed me to throw away the letters my sons wrote me and their photographs. I badly wanted to keep them, but I had to get rid of them because if they were found, I was certain I would be arrested and accused of having rebel connections. I had to forget my sons who were fighting in the mountains.

The worst experience I have ever had to endure was the killing of my younger brother. SLORC troops came to our village one day, ordering all the men to gather at one of the schools, ostensibly for a meeting. All the men attended, only to find that the actual reason for calling the meeting was to take the men as porters for the military to carry soldiers' equipment. My younger brother was one of them. As he carried equipment, his shoes broke, so he had to walk barefoot for days. His feet were torn by sharp rocks and thorns. When he was unable to walk any more, he pleaded with the soldiers to let him stop. Their response was to beat him to death. One of the men who escaped and made his way back to the village told me what had happened. I went to look for the body of my brother and buried him. This was 10 years ago, but I will never forget it. His story is like a wound that never stops hurting.

Eventually, I left my home village, and I arrived in the Karenni camps on the Thai-Burma border in 1999. Today, I am reunited with seven of my children and have met their husbands and wives, and

"His story is like a wound that never stops hurting"... the killing of this woman's brother by Burmese troops was the worst experience she ever faced.

JRS in Mae Hong Son



my grandchildren, many for the first time. Two of my sons are still at school, unfortunately in a different camp to the one I live in. I spend most of my time looking after my grandchildren, who I adore.

*As told to Moo Hser*



A member of Burma's Karenni ethnic minority. The Karenni are also known as the 'Red Karen', a reference to their traditional costume.

**Civilians of the Kayah minority** (Karenni) have fled their homes in Burma because as members of one of the many ethnic minorities in Burma, they are subjected to gross human rights violations at the hands of Burmese soldiers. The repressive approach towards ethnic minorities adopted by Burma's military junta has resulted in the displacement of over 17,000 Karenni refugees who live in refugee camps along the northern borders of Thailand. Kayah people, traditionally identified as the 'Red Karen', lived independently in an area called the Karenni State for centuries, ruled by their own kings and administration. This state of affairs continued until 1947 when plans for a newly independent Burma incorporated the Karenni State into the Union of Burma



## FINDING A FATHER LOST IN WAR

My mother delivered me without the help of my father. She raised my sister and myself single-handed, I do not know how she managed. Bringing up children alone in Karenni State is very tough. I could only go to school thanks to the support of generous neighbours and relatives. As I grew up, I realised I had never seen my father. I started to think about it because my friends had fathers. I thought about it often. I wanted to have a father to spend time with, like my friends. I did not know where my father was, what he looked like, and I wanted to find out more about him. I asked my mother, but instead of replying, she started to cry, so I did not ask again. I thought perhaps I could find out something about my father from our neighbours. When I asked, I found I did have a father, and although he wanted to be with my mother, he loved his Karenni people more than he loved us. When conflict between the SLORC and KNPP became increasingly volatile, he was unable to return to visit my mother. The last time he returned home was when my mother had me in her womb.

When I was three, my mother remarried. She had two more children, and died when giving birth to a third. I was left alone, and my stepfather was cruel to me. He did not allow me to continue my studies, making me keep house for his new woman and my step-sisters. He worked me like a slave and only allowed me to eat food left over by his children. He gave food to his children first and if they could not finish, then he would ask me to finish it. I was desperate to continue my education, but could not. When my father found out my mother had died, he asked someone to take me to the place where he lived. As soon as I heard this, I left my stepfather's house, without letting him know, as I was certain he would not let me go.

I travelled for a month before reaching my father's home. I was 12 years old when I finally met my father, and I have lived in his care and love ever since. Being with my father enabled me to get an education. Today, my job involves taking visitors to the Karenni camps, and informing people about the situation of the Karenni people. I know I have been lucky to get an education as it has opened up so many opportunities in my life.

*As told to Moo Hscr*

JRS in Mae Hong Son



## THE SOLDIERS RAPED US

I lived in Karenni State and enjoyed a happy life with my husband and our two children. Until one day, I was stopped by three SLORC soldiers on my way home back from our farm. I was with my husband and three women friends, and I remember we were in good spirits, chatting and laughing as we walked.

The soldiers appeared suddenly as we made our way through dense jungle and ordered my husband to go on home alone. I pleaded with him not to leave, telling him, "don't go, wait for us". But the soldiers forced him to move on. He pretended to go home but actually hid a little further on, out of sight. The soldiers took us deeper into the jungle and raped us. We fought them, but they beat us into submission with their guns and covered the face of one of my friends with a cloth. We were not as strong as they were so they were able to rape us. When they were finished, they ran away, leaving us behind.

We returned home, shy to tell our friends what had happened. One of us, a 60-year-old woman, could not face what happened. A short while later, she died.

My life continues. I now live in the Karenni refugee camps. I am a housewife, looking after my family as best I can. I am glad we have enough food to eat, health care is available, and my children can go to school. I hope they will never have to suffer as we have done.

*As told to Moo Hser*



JRS in Mae Hong Son

## ***Women in situations of war and displacement risk sexual assault...***

.The threat of rape and sexual violence may be one of the dangers that force women to leave their homes and become refugees. They may be at risk as a result of a general breakdown in society, with resulting lawlessness, or they may be specifically targeted for abuse, due to their political beliefs, the beliefs of their male relatives, or for reasons such as ethnic origin or social status.

During and after flight, women remain at risk. They are vulnerable to abuse by border guards and military personnel in the host country, fellow refugees, members of other clans/ethnic groups, and even members of their families: under conditions of stress and social disturbance, the incidence of domestic violence is known to increase.

Women and girls often find themselves unprotected after separation from male relatives. They may be forced into prostitution as the only means of survival.

## NOT ENOUGH FOOD

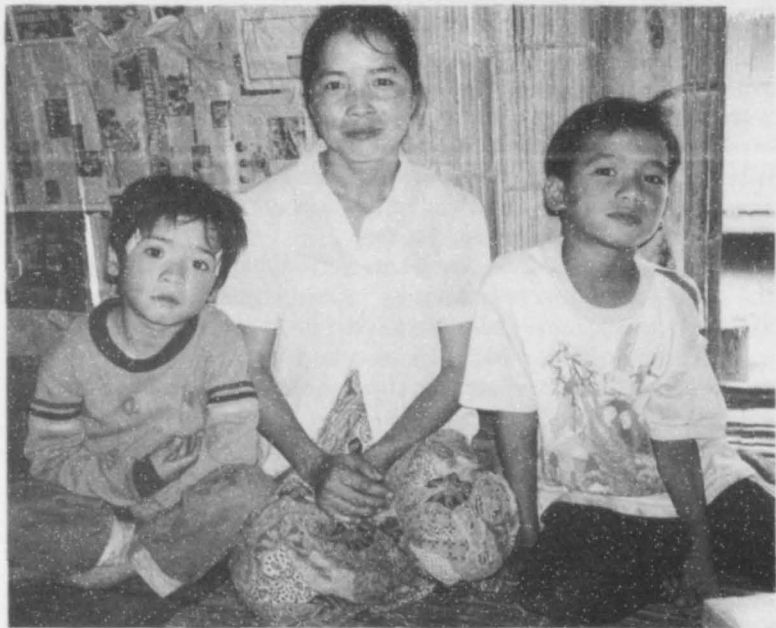
The most pressing concern for Nang La, a Shan refugee living in Thailand's Fang district, is finding enough food for her two little sons. Mung, aged 11, and Ting, aged seven. She lives with her husband, Keo. Mung and Ting in Ban Muang Chum village.

For seven years, both Keo and Nang La earned a living working long hours at a nearby farm. Keo received 80 baht (nearly two US dollars) a day and Nang La received 60 baht (1.5 US dollars) a day, not enough to feed the family. Two years ago, Keo's leg was broken in a car accident. As Keo is a Shan refugee, the man driving the car which ran him down was reluctant to take Keo to hospital. He was afraid of being stopped by police on the way. So he took Keo home and gave him some medicine in an attempt to ease his pain. Since that day, Keo has been unable to walk. Nang La is the only one who works now, earning a little to feed her family. Work is not regular; if she is lucky, she will find odd jobs which pay 60 baht a day. Life for the family has become much harder. There are many people looking for work in their village so Nang La is forced to go far from home in a bid to find more permanent jobs. It costs some 150 baht to feed her family with rice for a week. Nang La earns this amount in three days if she finds work on all the days.

Her daily concern is that her sons do not have enough food to eat. Nang La would like her children to go to school and to study like other children; she does not want them to be different. But she has no money to send them.

*Phongphan Phokthavi (Jub), JRS Thailand*

**Some 100,000 refugees from the Shan State in Burma** living along the northern Thai border are not recognised as refugees, and must find means of surviving alone. In 1996, a massive relocation of the Shan population in Burma began. In that year, over 300,000 people were uprooted. Many Shan refugees fled in the early 1990s for economic reasons, but in recent years, their reasons for flight have been directly related to the civil war and humanitarian crisis in their homeland.



Nang La with her two sons, Mung (right) and Ting (left).

## I DO NOT DESPAIR

My husband's name was Chhoum Somchay. He was a customs official and held several posts in the provinces. I was born in Battambang, the second city of Cambodia. We were married on 11 March 1960 in Phnom Penh and we had 12 children. Our twelfth child died in 1972, during the war when he was only three months old. This was for me such cruel suffering that I thought I would never get over it.

On 17 April the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh. On 21 April, they drove us out of the city along with all the other inhabitants. We walked and walked and walked for 30 days. Eventually we arrived at a small village, Thmai Pong, in the middle of the forest. We made a clearing in the forest, built a hut and stayed there for four months working like brute beasts. It was there that Pev and Peou, aged five and six, died with only a day's interval between them, as if they did not want to leave each other.

Four months later we were transferred 200km further away to the village of Chrey near Maung in the province of Battambang. There the whole family was scattered. The four older children were assigned to the flying teams in the collective work sites.

Vanny, our oldest daughter, died of cholera. Her chief notified me that she was ill. I left with all haste to see her. I was able to say a few words to her then she left me. Then it was my son who left us. The other children died of hunger one after another. They were not ill, but they had no strength left after suffering too many privations for a long time. Before dying the children wept, begging for something to eat. But we had nothing to give them. They died in twos, as if they did not want to be alone in the Beyond.

On 5 August 1977 the cadres arrested my husband. He was working very hard loading sacks of rice husks and maize for the co-operative. He never complained, never stopped working for fear someone might notice he had been an official. But how could he hide it? We were not as strong as the people from the rice fields.

Some knew about us and went to denounce my husband to the village chief. The chief called him for a meeting at 2pm and killed him. Three months later, in November, Vichet, the eleventh child, abandoned me in his turn. At the age of five he had already suffered too much; he could not stay any longer in this sad world. So for

a year and half, I remained alone, quite alone, carrying all in my heart, working, working under constraint, to forget.

In January 1979, the routed Khmer Rouge soldiers took all the families of our co-operative to the mountains. Then on 22 April the soldiers fled before the advance of the Vietnamese troops. We managed to get away, and I set off in search of my two children enrolled in the flying teams. I was told the Khmer Rouge had massacred all the flying teams. So, completely in tears, a bag on my back, I walked in despair. Suddenly, my two children were there: the boy and the girl, Somkhann and Ravann. Oh the happiness of it!

Since I had no longer any ties with my unfortunate country and having nothing to eat because the famine was worse than ever, I left for Thailand. With my two children, I walked for 20 days, and at the end of November 1979, I reached the border where fighting was still going on. Here I am, at last, in Khao-I-Dang camp, waiting to leave eventually for a third country.

My life is not easy now, but I do not despair. I hope in God. I believe God is my Father and will not abandon me. One day I shall join my husband and my children and we shall be all together again. Ten of my children are dead, and my husband has been killed, but I do not hold it against anyone. I have no spite against anyone at all. Nor did my husband hate the Khmer Rouge. He did not want to avenge himself for the evil they had done. I am like him. If I met the one who killed my husband, I will not hate him, for I have no hate in my heart: I have agreed to strip myself of everything. In any case, I am not the only one to suffer. It is a whole people, a whole country, that suffers as well. But one day, I am sure, Cambodia will once again know happiness.

*Anne Noeum Yok Tan*

*Anne is now resettled in France. The above extracts of the account of her life are taken from *Voices, Stories, Hopes* published by Collins Dove in 1993. The book features *The Little Book of the Dead*, the writings of her deceased husband, Pierre Chhuom Somchay, who composed a prayer or poem in French on the reverse side of the baptismal certificate of 10 of his 12 children, as they died one by one.*



## LIFE AFTER LANDMINES

I was born in 1970 in Kandal Stung and today I am the eldest of 10 brothers and sisters. During the Pol Pot era, my parents fled with me to Battambang where we struggled to survive. In 1979, we returned to Srok Kong Pisey in Kompong Speu. My father worked as policeman, my mother started farming and I went to school in 1981.

Until one day, I went to collect water for my family. Boom! I suddenly felt as if lightning had struck right inside me. I had stepped on a landmine and both my legs were gone. I was 12 years old.

I was taken to Monks Hospital for two months. My parents helped me very much, but I had lost hope in life. When I went back to my village in Kandal Stung, I had no legs and no wheelchair. I was unable to go to school and stayed at home for 13 years. I was too ashamed of my body even to go to the Khmer New Year party or any other celebration. When my brothers and sisters came home from school, I tried to learn their lessons. It was a very sad time for me.

A turning point in my life came when the Cambodia Trust visited our village. They had artificial legs made for me, which gave me hope. But it was so painful to learn to walk, my legs bled and I cried with pain. Within a year, I could walk well, but what next?

I was approached by a teacher, Yeth, from the Centre of the Dove, a Jesuit Service training centre. He asked me if I wanted to learn sculpture, sewing, carpentry, weaving or electronics. I chose electronics. At first, it was very hard, because I had only been to school for one year, but after nights of hard work, I succeeded. I was good. I was also taught home gardening and made many friends, disabled like myself. On graduation night, I danced, and I was so happy.

My hopes ran high, but at the same time, I wondered, what will I do when I leave, how will I earn a living? The answer to these questions came when I was asked to become the leader of the new girl students at the training centre. I accepted. During school hours, I mend television sets and learn more, and after school, I care for the students. So today, I have a job and a salary, and I love helping others.

*Sok Leng is adviser to the disabled girl students at the Centre of the Dove a Jesuit Service project in Cambodia.*

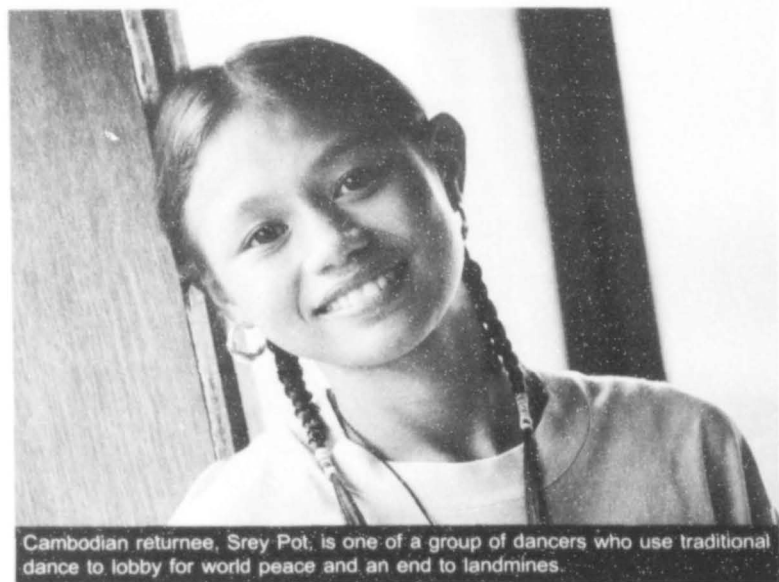


Sok Leng, in the words of Jesuit Service Cambodia director, Denise Coghlan RSM, "is a miracle of grace and charm for us all".

## DANCING FOR PEACE

My name is Srey Pot, which means 'the girl who was born on Wednesday'. I am 14 years, the sixth of eight brothers and sisters. I was born in Chumrum Ampil, a refugee camp along the Thai-Cambodia border. Shortly after my birth, the camp was bombed and destroyed. My family - what was left of it, two of my elder brothers died during the Pol Pot regime, one 'disappeared', the other killed by a landmine - fled with all the other refugees to Thailand.

We were placed in a camp which was to be my 'home town' for almost 10 years. My two younger brothers were born there. These were hard years for us, a large family with little means to earn money. My father worked in the camp offices but there was no work for my mother, a seamstress. We survived thanks to donations of rice and the help of humanitarian organisations. I was too young to remember any of this, my elder sisters told me about our life then. I have



Cambodian returnee, Srey Pot, is one of a group of dancers who use traditional dance to lobby for world peace and an end to landmines.

Kiva Figaredo SJ/JRS

good memories of my years in the camp. My sisters learnt traditional Cambodian dances at a dance school there. I joined them when I was six years. My class had the best teacher, and we used to practice for four hours every morning.

In 1991, when a peace agreement was signed in Cambodia, the dancing troupe of our school was given permission to leave the camp to go on a tour in the United States. At the time, I was too young to travel, but my sisters went, and they had a wonderful time. They made many friends, who still write to them after all these years.

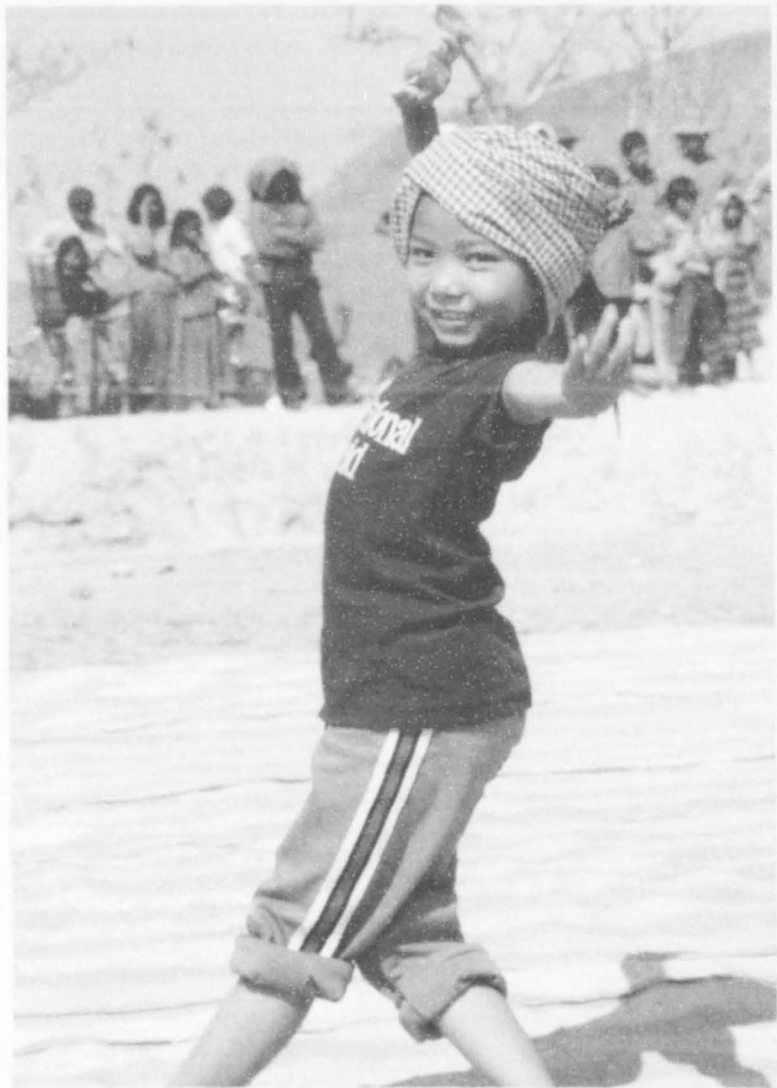
The following year, we were repatriated by UNHCR to Cambodia. We opted to go back with another 22 families to a small village, not far from Phnom Penh. The UN gave us a small piece of land to construct our house, some wood to build it, tools for farming, rice for 400 days and 25 US dollars per person. Not so bad. We have lived in this village, Prey Som Raong Thmei, since.

There is a school in the village where we continue to learn Cambodian dances. My sister, Tu Phy, is one of our teachers. We cannot practice every day, as we did in the camp, but we have sessions two days a week. On other days, I go to school.

I love dancing. We are all good friends in my troupe. I would like to learn other kinds of dance, like ballet. My favourite Cambodian dance is 'Peace', in which I dance as a dove of peace. I also like the 'Ban landmines' dance, in this one I dance as a butterfly captured by a landmine.

One of my dreams is to visit the world with my dancing troupe to dance and wish people peace, to make friends and show them our culture and to learn how people live in other countries. I look to the future with the hope that real peace will one day come for all of us.

*Srey Pot's dream came true when she travelled to Spain with her dance troupe in October and November 2000.*



A dancer in one of the camps on the Thai-Cambodia border in the eighties.

## ***Cambodia's dancers***

In the early eighties, a group of art-loving Cambodian refugees set up a Fine Arts Centre in a refugee camp along the Thai-Cambodia border, where refugee children could learn traditional, classical and folk dances. The dance troupe entertained visitors from all over the world with their beauty, charm and exquisite dance technique. Nearly all the original members of the troupe had been born in border camps. Today, they have been repatriated. Many live in Prey Sam Raong, an agricultural location situated 30 km from Phnom Penh. Others joined the Royal Fine Arts Centre of Phnom Penh and live in the city. The tragedy which the dancers experienced during the war motivated them to participate in the International Campaign Against Landmines with their Dance of the Mines, born from personal experience.

## **Refugees and displaced people in Asia Pacific**

*When the SLORC captain discovered my husband had run away and joined the KNPP army, he had me arrested. At the time I was four months pregnant with our third child. I was imprisoned and tortured, and I lost the baby. I nearly died too, and although I was seriously ill, I was not admitted to hospital until it seemed certain that I was dying.*

a refugee from the Karenni camps

International attention was drawn to the post-referendum displacement crisis in East Timor in September 1999. Further from the public eye, the Burmese ethnic minorities in Thailand constitute one of the longest running refugee problems in Asia. Meanwhile, 25 years after the Vietnam war, Cambodia is still crippled by the legacy of the war, the Pol Pot regime and other episodes in its recent tragic history.

### **Cambodia**

Cambodia is listed as one of the world's poorest countries. In truth, Cambodia is rich—rich in agricultural land, water, and cultural traditions. However, the Pol Pot genocidal regime between 1975 and 1979, and the elimination of educated people, have contributed to massive forced displacement and appalling poverty, especially in the rural areas. During the Pol Pot regime, over one and a half million people were murdered or starved to death. The legacy of the Vietnam War, the Pol Pot regime, the Vietnamese take over of the eighties, is still felt in Cambodia today. Millions of people bear heavy psychological scars as a result of the trauma they have endured. Scattered across Cambodia are countless landmines, which claim more victims per capita than any other place in the world.

## **Burma**

Shortly after Burma gained independence from Britain in 1948, the military took over. The military governments which have since been in power, subject the people of Burma to numerous human rights violations, including murder, rape, torture, forced labour and forced relocation. Ethnic minorities and religious groups are targeted by the military. In 1988, massive non-violent demonstrations were brutally suppressed by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC, now called State Peace and Development Council, SPDC). In 1990, the military regime permitted democratic elections. An overwhelming vote – 80% – for Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) resulted in the imprisonment of newly elected MPs and the flight of others. Aung San Suu Kyi herself remains under house arrest in Burma. The military junta continues to repress ethnic minorities, and systematically to crush opposition to their rule.

## **East Timor**

The people of East Timor voted overwhelmingly for independence from Indonesia (which had annexed the territory in 1975) in a historic ballot on 30 August 1999. Weeks of violence, destruction and murder followed the announcement of the election results as anti-independence militias went on bloody rampage, aided by elements of the Indonesian military and police. Over 250,000 East Timorese fled or were forced to go to West Timor. The arrival of a multi-national force, Interfet, did much to restore order and slowly, refugees began to return. A year after independence, some 170,000 refugees had returned, but over 100,000 remain in camps in West Timor, where they face intimidation. The people of East Timor now face the tough challenge of rebuilding their nation.







The 'one who has to bear suffering'... A refugee from a Thai-Cambodia border camp in the eighties.

Those who have worked with refugees are in the best position to know that when people have been stripped of all their material supports there only remain to sustain them the values of their cultural and spiritual inheritance

It occurred to me that the Burmese expression for refugee is dukkha – the 'one who has to bear suffering' In that sense, none of us can avoid knowing what it is to be a refugee. The refuge we all seek is protection from forces which wrench us away from the security and comfort, physical and mental, which give dignity and meaning to human existence

Aung San Suu Kyi, *Towards a True Refuge* (1993)



**Sri Lanka** A mother cries over the photo of her dead son in Batticaloa. The occasion is Heroes' Day, 27 November 2000, when the rebel movement of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) honours its fighters who have fallen.

## **LET YOUR TEARS FALL FOR YOUR DEAD**

### Women in war and displacement in South Asia

My child, let your tears fall for your dead, and as one in great pain begin the lament Lay out the body with due ceremony, and do not neglect the burial Let your weeping be bitter and your wailing fervent, make your mourning worthy of the departed

*Sirach 38 16-17*

*The place: a cemetery of militants in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. Boys and girls who sacrificed their lives for a cause they thought was noble. Most of them were younger than 18. We see a mother wailing over a tomb. Her son was killed in the latest battle, just 16 years old and a favourite son. She looks at us and says: "Even when freedom comes, we shall all walk over the bones of our sons and daughters. What kind of freedom is that?" The Sri Lanka war has claimed thousands of young boys and girls as 'martyrs'. To the mothers who bore them, the much touted martyrdom is eternal agony.*

C Amalraj SJ JRS South Asia

## PAYING THE PRICE OF WAR

12 July 1999 Five masked men in army uniform forced open the door of Antonia's house during the night. The intruders bound Antonia and seized her 21-year-old daughter Ida. After raping the young woman repeatedly, they shot and killed her. In her tragically short life, Ida had been a refugee, a rebel fighter, a young girl who dreamed of a 'normal' life, and finally, a rape and murder victim. She was the third of Antonia's seven children to be murdered. "I am a widow. I raised seven children alone, often having to make do without food," said Antonia when we met in Pallimunai, her home village on Mannar Island, Sri Lanka, six days after Ida's murder. As Antonia talked, our eyes wandered to the dried blood, the bullet holes in the ground.

Antonia fought hard to save her daughter. She tore herself loose from the ropes which bound her and ran for help. No one opened the door for her. Another lost battle Antonia fought for her children. She tried to keep her family together over the years, but they scattered. In 1990, Ida, just a child at the time, went to India alone where she lived as a refugee in the camps. Education was denied the refugees at the time and, frustrated, Ida returned home when refugees were forced to repatriate to Sri Lanka in 1994. Barely a month later, Ida witnessed the killing of two of her brothers by a rebel faction. The killers came to Antonia's house at dawn, pulled the boys out of their beds, and shot them. Antonia was shot in the hip when she tried to save them.

Intent on avenging the death of her brothers, Ida joined a rebel group. After three years, she left, but was afraid of returning to her home village for fear of the army. Return she did, however. In an attempt to save her daughter, Antonia offered to surrender Ida to the army, provided they spare her. Assurances were given, and the girl was released after hours of interrogation. Ida felt better after this and began to map out plans for a new life: she would study, get married and have children. Then she was killed.

As Antonia talked, a deep faith in God underlined her words. "I do not curse God. I cannot forsake Him. I have lost faith in human beings, no army or group can protect helpless people like us. My only prayer is, that I do not let myself lose faith in You. I have nothing else."

*C. Anandraj, JRS South Asia*

Her rape and murder attracted widespread media attention in Sri Lanka. A few days after her death, two witnesses identified two men in uniform in an identification parade. Army personnel warned the witnesses to leave the island or be killed. They are now living as refugees in India. Following her death, her brothers and sisters also fled to a camp in India. Antonia stayed behind to bring her daughter's killers to justice. In January 2000, Kumar Ponnampanam, the lawyer handling the case, was killed in Colombo. Frightened, Antonia also escaped to India. Meanwhile, the killers remain at large, and according to forensic evidence, the bullets used in her murder correspond to those normally used by the army.

Ida



**Antonia and one of her sons, Sebastian Nimal, in India**



**Sri Lanka** A female LTTE fighter in Batticaloa

***Girls in situations of war and displacement risk recruitment into governmental armed forces or opposition groups...***

.. Displaced communities are at particular risk of exploitation by armed forces who use camps as easy recruitment grounds. Families have often been torn apart, and as a consequence, children are left to their own devices, community support structures have broken down, and the general situation is one of profound social and economic uncertainty (The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers)

Many children and young people join armed movements to avenge the killing of loved ones by rival forces

At least 300,000 children under the age of 18 are currently taking part in hostilities around the world, either through propaganda or by force.



## THE GUNSHOTS WERE LIKE RAIN

My husband Linden Peries, was shot by the Navy in Pesalai, ' said Neeta Dias 27 years. Linden was a fisherman, and on 16 August 2000 he went trawler fishing as usual at about 3am with his partner Saverian Arokiam Lobu 50 years, also from Pesalai, a fishing village in Mannar Island north Sri Lanka. About 15 to 20 boats leave for fishing from Pesalai at around that time every day. As per regulations, the boats remain within 200 yards of the shore.

The Sri Lankan government and army impose crippling restrictions on fishing in north and east Sri Lanka. Restrictions include no night fishing (unless with permission) no deep sea fishing and a restriction on fuel. In a bid to ensure compliance fishermen must hand in their motors and kerosene to the security forces when they return to shore.

"At 3 20am, the army gave the fishermen kerosene and a motor for the boat, meaning they had permission to go and fish. Usually Linden was allowed to go those with larger trawlers were allowed to go early following a request from the Fishermen's Association," explained Neeta.

At around 4am, some fishermen went to the home of Elias Albert Peries, Linden's father to tell him Linden had been shot from deeper sea by the Navy while he was in his boat and that the firing was intense like rain. The other fishermen had immediately headed for the shore and could see Linden's boat from there. Lobu was not injured and was able to swim to the shore. The body of Linden was recovered by the Police later and his boat brought ashore with bullet holes in it.

When Linden was killed Neeta was expecting their third child.

"I have three children aged eight and seven years and 30 days," she said in November. The Navy apologised for shooting my husband but I received no compensation. Now there is no one to look after the family. When it rains the roof of my home leaks it is chilly, my baby feels very cold. I am now living with my mother and my brother who is 18 years old. He was studying, but he has stopped to start working, to provide food for all the family.

*As told to Danielle Vella JRS International with additional details from a local human rights report*

## BLOWING LIVES APART

Mary Anne Smuley had cooked a lavish lunch for her family and friends, who were gathered at her home in Jaffna after mass on Christmas day, 1992. Civil war had resumed in Sri Lanka the previous year, but the Smuley family lived in the hope that the violence around them would soon be over. Jaffna was hotly contested territory, controlled at the time by the LTTE and often the target of army attacks. As the Smuleys enjoyed themselves with their friends, Sri Lankan air force bombers suddenly appeared in the sky. Before anyone could move, a bomb ripped through Mary's home.

When her husband, George, recovered consciousness a few seconds after the blast, he saw his wife lying in a pool of blood. Mary was immediately taken to hospital, where she had 25 splinters of debris removed from her body.

Luckily, Mary and her children survived the bombing, but they remain deeply scarred, both physically and emotionally. Seven years later, Mary is in constant pain. She frequently complains of stomach pains and headaches, and cannot afford the surgical treatment to remove three painful splinters still lodged in her body. Often, George must take Mary to Colombo for medical treatment, an undertaking fraught with problems because of a strict pass system, which severely limits movement of Tamils from the north, particularly between 'cleared' and 'uncleared' (that is, rebel-held) areas.

After the attack on their home, Mary's eldest daughter Deuba, aged 11, lost her memory for over a year. Her behaviour became unstable and she was prevented from attending school, which she had loved. Mary's 12-year-old nephew, Ajit, who was at their house for Christmas lunch when the bomb fell, was paralysed from the waist down.

The bomb destroyed the home of the Smuley family, and today they live as internally displaced people on Mannar Island, dependent on relatives in Canada for survival. Their lives are changed irrevocably but Mary does not seem bitter, far from it. When talking about what happened, she smiles, and says her family is alive today thanks to the grace of God.

*Paul Newman JRS South Asia*

## A SHELL FELL ON OUR HOME

My native place is in Jaffna peninsula, however my family was displaced to the Vanni region (Akkarayan in Killinochchi district) in 1990. On 15 July 1997 at 8:30pm, an artillery shell fell on our home. I was eight years old.

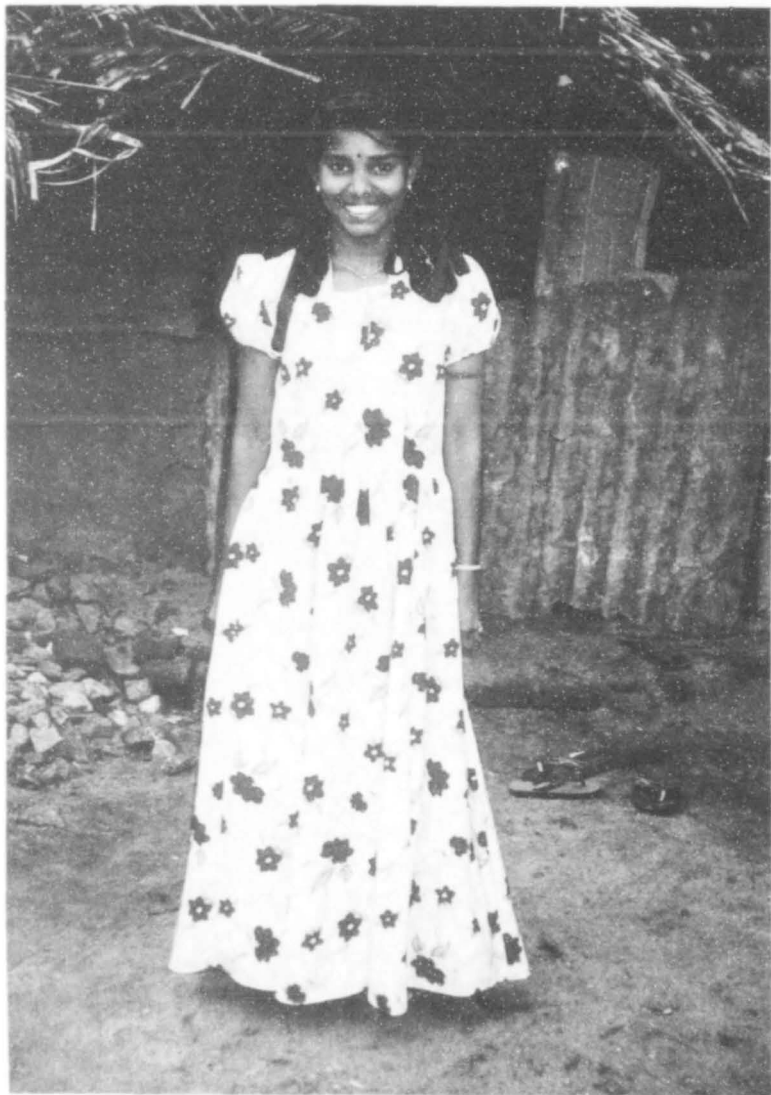
When the shelling started I was inside the house and the others were outside. I went running out. My parents, grandfather and 10-year-old brother were all killed. My father and grandfather died on the spot, the other three were taken to Mallavi hospital and they died there.

I was injured by the blast, and my leg was amputated in Mallavi hospital. From there I was transferred to Vavuniya hospital. My other leg had shrapnel which was removed after six months in Vavuniya hospital. I was there for a long time. I was given a prosthesis in Kandy, sponsored by the local Red Cross.

Now I live in Vavuniya with my mother's elder sister. I still have a younger brother who is studying in Colombo. I am studying and am in 13th standard. School is not far away from home, I go walking from here or my friends take me by bicycle. Studying is easy for me. I want to study, to be able to help orphans and others in the same situation as I am.

War is futile because it creates generations of people like me, invalid and handicapped. This must be stopped, resources are being destroyed and wealth is wasted. Peace must prevail.

*Kamalavathini - a displaced person living in Vavuniya, Sri Lanka*



Kamalavathini wants to help people like her: survivors of Sri Lanka's war.

## AMMACHI

I happened to meet Meenakshiammal at the Addappankulam 'welfare centre' on the outskirts of Vavuniya, where she has lived since 1997. The parish priest of Cheddikulam, Fr Gnanaprakasam was with me that day. Sometime in November 1999, we had gone to enquire about the condition of detainees at the centre, as food supplies to the area had been totally cut off. The civil war in Sri Lanka had escalated with the launching of an offensive by the LTTE to recover land lost to the military some months earlier. Vavuniya was one of the towns hardest hit in the offensive, and most of its population fled when the LTTE announced an imminent attack on the town. The SLA did not allow the displaced people detained at the centre to leave during the exodus; they were used as human shields to prevent a rebel attack on Vavuniya.

When we arrived at the centre, people crowded around us, seeking emergency assistance. The faces in the crowd were all pale and drawn, Meenakshiammal alone was smiling. Her disposition prompted me to approach her.

A widow, Meenakshiammal talked easily about her life, a glow coming to her face as she recalled moments in her past, so different from her present existence. Meenakshiammal was once resident in Jaffna. Her husband was a prosperous farmer, and they had nine children. Seven were married, and Meenakshiammal's joy was to spend time playing with her grandchildren.

In 1988, an IPKF (Indian Peacekeeping Force) shell was dropped on Meenakshiammal's house, killing her husband and three of her sons. With the help of her two surviving sons, the widow struggled ahead. Forced to move out of Jaffna in 1995, the family went to the jungles of the Vanni region, where hunger followed them like a shadow. One day her sons, who used to protect and look after her, went out to work and did not return. Meenakshiammal was alone. In 1997, other displaced people brought her to the "cleared" areas where she had to undergo the ordeal of army interrogation before being sent to the centre. Meenakshiammal has no news of her surviving children. She believes they are alive, but she cannot be sure. She has not seen any of them since 1995.

Meenakshiammal lays claim to an unusual capacity - foretelling



Meenakshiammal has lost her home and most of her family to the war.

the future – which commands respect from those around her. They also sympathise with her as she is alone. In her own words ‘I am destitute, deserted by everyone, but protected by God.’ Meenakshiammal is tired, but hopeful of seeing the dawn of peace return to Sri Lanka. At the camp, this optimistic woman is known affectionately as ‘Ammachi’ (mother), who has managed to survive the war.

*Paul Newman JRS South Asia*

## MY DAUGHTER WAS NOT ALONE

I came to this camp for displaced people Jeeva Nagar near Murunkan Mannar Island in March 1999. Before, we lived as displaced people in Madhu shrine. We had been there since 1997 but we had to leave with thousands of others when the army took over the zone of the church campus in March 1999.

My daughter Jude Yalini was a teacher. She was working in a school in Madhu near the church. At night, people would take shelter in the Madhu church. On 20 November 1999 the church was shelled. Jude was killed. She was 25 years old. But she was not the only one, there were others.

I had another son who got sick and died. Now I live with my surviving daughter and my husband Nicholas, a retired postman. Nicholas is 56 years, he is sick with liver problems but cannot get medicine as it is embargoed by the government in the northern areas. To leave the camp to get medicine a pass is needed. This is difficult to get – although it is a little easier for Nicholas who has a medical certificate – and since only one-day passes are given he would have to be back by the evening. Long hours of travel by road are needed to reach the hospital.

Although Nicholas retired last year they have not yet given him the government pension he is entitled to. We do not receive dry rations either as the government said Nicholas is eligible for a pension.

*Arokiam a displaced person living in Mannar Island Sri Lanka*

The Madhu Shrine campus in northern Sri Lanka used to be known as the only "safe" and demilitarised area in the war zones. On 20 November 1999, it lost claim to this distinction when the Sacred Heart Chapel on the campus was shelled. Forty-two displaced people sheltering in the church were killed. Over 60 were injured. The victims were asleep when they were attacked. They had been resting after walking for hours to reach the shrine to escape shelling elsewhere. The shrine was shelled during a time of intense military activity and widespread displacement in the north of Sri Lanka.



Nicholas and Arokiam outside their hut in Jeeva Nagar camp. "We are refugees, we are very poor and must survive without assistance," says Nicholas. "It is difficult to get by without a pension. My wife had to sell all her jewellery to get food."





Amaya Valcárcel/IPS

Sivamalar has lost two sons to the war: one was shot by the army in the Vanni region; the other was massacred in a riot at Bandarawela 'rehabilitation' centre.

## TWO OF MY SONS ARE NO MORE

My son, Kandeepan, was killed in the riots at Bandarawela detention centre in October 2000. He was 17 years Kandeepan was arrested in August of the same year on suspicion of connections with the LTTE and was first kept in a local police station for two months. I visited him regularly, but suddenly he was taken to Bandarawela After some time he wrote, saying he was fine. His only worry, he told me, was 'I am not with you'

We wrote back, saying we would visit him after *Drwali* (Festival of the Lights) I had planned to visit him on 25 October but the riots broke out that same day. I had approached the local human rights commission to see about visiting, but they told me about the riot and not to worry, because my son was only injured. I immediately went to the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) who told me Kandeepan had been injured and to go home The radio also listed him as one of the injured But then at around 9pm, they brought his dead body home to me, mutilated, with the fingers chopped off, the face unrecognisable Kandeepan had sent us his photo only a day before he died

Another son of mine, Prakash, was killed in 1997. The army shot him just like that, in the stomach, he was not even arrested He was 17 years at the time and he also had no connections with the Tigers At the time, we were in the Vanni, we had moved there from Jaffna As soon as Prakash was killed, we left the Vanni and came here to Trincomalee as we wanted to save the other children. I had seven children, five sons and two daughters Now my third and fourth sons are no more

*Sivamalar a displaced person living in Trincomalee eastern Sri Lanka*

On 25 October 2000, a Sinhalese mob attacked the Bandarawela rehabilitation centre in central Sri Lanka, killing 29 Tamil detainees aged between 14 and 23 years Strong allegations of complicity of police stationed at the camp have prompted human rights groups to call for an impartial investigation into the killings

## WE ARE HERE TO DEPORT YOU

I was alone in my house when two trucks carrying policemen drew up in front of my door at around lunchtime. My three young sons were out in the village, playing with their friends, as the schools were all closed. My husband, at the time a member of the Assembly, was out of the country, following orders of the King of Bhutan to negotiate with members of the political party in exile, the Bhutan People's Party across the border in Nepal. He was commanded to go on this mission on 21 September 1990 and I was anxiously awaiting his return. The atmosphere in the village was fraught with tension, with people being arrested every hour. Everywhere was quiet, no one dared talk other than when necessary and even then in whispers.

The policemen climbed out of the truck and surrounded my home. One officer named Harka Gurang, walked through my front door and told me that, as per government directives 'we are here to seize your property and deport you and your children out of Bhutan'. I could hardly believe my ears. I begged Gurang to wait until my husband returned from his mission since after all he had been sent by the king. But they ignored me, and instead starting closing all the windows of my home, and locking the main door with a padlock they had brought with them. By that time my children had arrived, and burst into tears when they understood what was happening.

We were dragged out of our home and pushed in the direction of the border. We walked for seven kilometres, until darkness fell, and were joined by relatives of mine who had also left, although without notice from the police to do so. At the border, one elderly lady from my village appealed to the policemen to allow us to stay at least for the night but our pleading was in vain. We were thrown off Bhutan's soil that same day exactly one week after my husband's departure to Nepal for negotiations. Before he had a chance to win the confidence of members of the Bhutan People's Party to start giving them the king's message we were refugees. After spending the night on the roadside near Bhutan without food and water, we were met the following day by members of the Bhutan People's Party who took us to a temporary camp in Assam, India where I met my husband. We walked for days, begging for food for our children. Finally, with the help of a Bhutanese social worker we reached the Timai camps in Nepal.

I cry when I look back at my life in Bhutan. We built our house after working and saving money for 15 years. We had a beautiful garden around the house, we had cows and other animals. My children had their toys. We were forced to leave everything. Our religion says that sometimes, one has to face the Karma (fruits of a previous life) of our life. Perhaps I am facing the Karma.

*A Bhutanese refugee in Timai camp, Damak, eastern Nepal*



## **Refugees and displaced people in South Asia**

*My husband, Krishnarajah, was taken by the army On 30 June 2000, he went to work on his motorbike as usual, and he was arrested in Mannar on suspicion of being a member of the LTTE, which he is not He was tortured, so he confessed to belonging to the LTTE Today, he is still in Kalutara prison We have a four-year-old daughter and a two-year-old son*

Vasantani 26 years lives in Adappankulam welfare centre a camp for displaced people in Vavuniya district north Sri Lanka

South Asia is home to many chronic – and forgotten – refugee problems Apart from Sri Lankan and Bhutanese refugees, the Bihari Muslims have been displaced for 27 years, while millions of Afghan refugees are displaced in Pakistan and Iran. India's Tibetan refugees, who fled China's occupation of Tibet, are known to the world thanks to their respected spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama

### **Sri Lanka**

An ongoing civil war has raged for 17 years between the Sri Lankan army (SLA) and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Some 60,000 people have been killed, and an estimated 200,000 children have lost at least one parent The (largely Tamil) population of the war-torn northern and eastern districts is caught up in the conflict, and many are killed in the crossfire, victims of indiscriminate shelling

In the rebel-held zones of the north, civilians are heavily burdened by government-imposed embargoes, and their children are in danger of being targeted for recruitment by the LTTE. In the army-controlled northern areas, the freedom of movement of civilians is severely restricted by a rigorous "pass system", particularly those displaced people living in so-called "welfare centres". The centres are government-run camps where living space is cramped and assistance inadequate. "Disappearances", arbitrary arrest, torture and prolonged detention without trial are common, and wives are often left without income when their spouse is detained or killed.

Apart from heavy internal displacement estimated at between 650,000 to 800,000, a steady trickle of Sri Lankans defy rigid security to reach Indian shores, where they often face further hardships in refugee camps.

### **Bhutan – Nepal**

Over 100,000 Bhutanese refugees live in uncertainty in seven camps in eastern Nepal. They have been there for a decade, anxiously awaiting repatriation. The refugees claim they were expelled from Bhutan because they are ethnic Nepalese. Talks between the Nepal and Bhutan governments are supposed to reach a solution about the refugees, many of whom risk *statelessness*. In December 2000, the two governments agreed to launch a joint verification process (to start end February 2001), to ascertain the Bhutanese nationality of the refugees.





Jerry Calisco/IPS

**Colombia** Nearly two million people have been displaced in the civil conflict.

## **JUST ANOTHER DETAINEE**

### Women in detention in the United States and in war in Latin America

*As a refugee who spent two years and four months in Wackenhut Detention Centre in Queens before I was granted asylum, I know how important it is to have support from people who come to help keep hope alive. I am a Christian, and I went to Bible study sessions in detention, which kept my faith alive when it was challenged every day. Refugees come to this country thinking it is a land of freedom – freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from persecution. Detention almost killed my soul. Prayer and humanity saved me.*

Adelaide Abankwah from Ghana in a letter to the *New York Times* February 2000



## WAITING FOR FREEDOM

My family's life changed when the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) came to my house on 28 March 1998. They arrested me along with my husband, we were charged with overstaying our tourist visa. I was taken to a windowless cell along with other women. I was shaking, because I was scared and worried for my three teenage children who would have to survive without their mum and dad.

We were taken to the INS centre in San Pedro, California. I felt miserable, abandoned, alone and rejected. I was not allowed to talk or write to my husband, as the INS wanted to prevent the hatching of any escape plans. We could not even receive a visit from our children together. This hurt me very much because we are a close family. At the San Pedro centre, I lived with 70 to 100 women of different nationalities, races, language and cultures. We had one thing in common: we were all suffering and we were all feeling frustrated and sad. In this situation, you just feel like dying. You don't know anything about your case, your future, how your family is doing. You are just waiting for the door to open to your freedom. When? Nobody knows.

To live in detention with all this hardship and suffering was not easy for me. I had to work every day on my faith to get the strength to live with dignity. I decided to start reading the Bible and praying the rosary, which gave me peace. God is in control of my future and my family is in His hands. This was my litany when I faced problems. I started to gather other detainees for Bible study and prayers. We encouraged each other to persevere in being patient with others, in being peacemakers, and not fighting over petty things.

At San Pedro, I had an encounter with Jesus personified, the Romans made fun of Him, they took His clothes, they rejected Him. He was a prisoner and He suffered. I saw His passion when detainees were crying after being searched naked, I saw Him when detainees were fighting for their rights and justice, when they were suffering and in pain and nobody cared about it. My heart was broken and my hands were tied. I could do nothing to help them. I was just another detainee. But I can say that I also saw Jesus' face when people came to see us.

I was detained at San Pedro for 16 months the most crucial months of my life. I had the chance to share my feelings with other women. I was by their side in moments of sorrow and pain, but I also cried with happiness when I saw the door open to their freedom and that is a blessing I got the strength to fight and be able to survive, not giving up, no matter the circumstances I had the privilege to help others in the worst moments of their life

*Ana Amalia Molina Guzman from El Salvador*

*Amalia and her husband lost their political asylum case in August 1998 They appealed in September of the same year and were bonded out of detention in July 1999 after spending 16 months inside In March 2000, the couple won their political asylum appeal from the Bureau of Immigration appeals*

## **Women seeking asylum may face detention in prison...**

and other places, like closed camps or airport transit zones, because of their illegal entry and/or presence in a country in search of asylum. Detention is practised in many countries, including the US, Australia, Germany, the UK, and Thailand. Many asylum seekers are kept in detention until their status is resolved. Unfortunately, genuine asylum seekers may be deterred from seeking refuge in countries where detention is practised. In many instances, asylum seekers are not informed about their rights in detention, are not allowed to seek legal advice, and are sometimes refused access to UNHCR or concerned NGOs.

JRS firmly insists that asylum seekers should not be detained. Seeking asylum is not a criminal offence, and freedom from arbitrary detention is a fundamental human right. There are several viable alternatives to detention, for example, allowing asylum seekers to live in the community as long as they periodically report to State authorities.

## THERE ARE ALWAYS THINGS I MISS...

I was born in 1966 in Barrancabermeja Colombia I grew up in the countryside, helping my father till the land and harvesting yuca After some years we moved to the municipality of Yondo, where my parents continued to work the land I lived there until I met my husband, Javier, in 1987

After my father's death, I moved with my husband to a small village called La Felicidad We settled with some others - we were around 40 families in all - and started a new life My children Merlady and Yorlan were born there Our life in the countryside was happy, we had many animals, fish, land to cultivate

We lived this way until 29 August 1996, when the guerrillas attacked a National Army boat in our village Fighting between the army and guerrillas ensued and the army attacked the village We heard bullets crashing into the walls and thought, 'we will die here We leaned one on top of the other, the children too This went on for five hours from 11am to 4pm The attacks raged for four days and our homes were destroyed I decided to return to my father's place with my family So we headed for Yondo leaving everything behind and taking only two bags with some clothes for the children and for us We had no time to collect more because we were likely to be bombed again The rest of our belongings were left behind, our hens everything

We arrived in Yondo with another 14 families on 4 September and stayed in the community centre, SENA The centre was overcrowded, we had only one bathroom for 70 people However, we lived in an atmosphere of brotherhood The option to return home was closed to us in November when the river flooded the region where our village is The floods took with them our land livestock and houses Why did we want to return if we had nothing?

The mayor and the Red Cross organised assistance for us in Yondo and the Jesuit Refugee Service has supported us materially, emotionally and financially during these four years of displacement We will stay here until Javier gets a piece of land, 'I thought We finally got some land where we live now Some other families opted not to wait and went to search other horizons Still others went with their families to live in the shelter for *campesinos* (peasant farmer) in Barranca

We now earn a living by selling fruit and hope to set up a shop selling different products. We hope this project will be approved so our children can get what they deserve. Thank God at least we can live, we can raise our five children and we have a house.

We realise we cannot work in the countryside any longer. It is too violent. The poor *campesino* is always the one to pay in the war. At the moment, we do not have any plans to return. What I miss most about the country is the way of life, the way one feels. In La Felicidad the climate was cooler, but we have got used to the weather here. Now after much struggling, I have a very small space to grow animals and at last, I am able to buy some chickens. There are always things I miss, always, but we are getting used to this new life.

*Maria Prada, a displaced person in Barrancabermeja, Colombia*



Jenny Caliso, IJRS

**Colombia** Poverty and violence mock the name of the village of La Felicidad (happiness) in the war-torn Magdalena Medio region.

We fled La Felicidad after the bombings, with our children  
We spent three months in one place, four in another I lost  
everything: pigs, chickens, and house...

But we were tired of begging for our food and lodging, so we  
decided to return home, at least we could cultivate something  
So we are 'displaced returnees' We found the river had flooded  
our fields, washed away our houses. We have nothing .

We have suffered so much in this place floods, then the bomb-  
ing But we still call it Felicidad, which means happiness

Displaced people in Colombia's Magdalena Medio region

## WE DON'T KNOW WHY THEY FIGHT

I once wrote a poem for peace. When my daughter was six years old she read the poem out during a public celebration in our home village in Tolima region, Colombia. Years later, I was kidnapped by guerrillas. They wanted to know why my daughter had read a poem publicly all those years ago. The poem was about peace, nothing harmful. They also pressured me to give them information about military operations in the area. But I could not tell them much: my only contact with the military was when I provided food for military engineers constructing a road near the village. I had a little shop. I sold crops which I grew and stored myself. However, I never saw a penny of the money owed me for the food I sold the military.

The guerrillas kidnapped me when they attacked my home village in 1999. The military barracks were destroyed, many people fled. Shops and houses were looted. People in the village were so confused. There were different armed groups, all fighting one another. We don't even know who is who in this war. We don't know why they fight, or for what.

I was forced by the guerrillas to go to the mountains, together with two other women. Thank God the parish priest, together with some others, managed to negotiate my freedom. I spent a day and a night with the guerrillas. They treated me badly. One of my friends who was taken hostage with me managed to escape; the other one is still in captivity, or dead.

After this terrible experience, we decided to leave our home. So we distributed our goods among our remaining neighbours, the TV, the car, the house... everything. We have nothing now. We fled to another region where my brother lives, but there too, we experienced insecurity. There were rumours that guerrillas were coming, and we left town. We moved to the capital, Bogota. Eventually, we felt it was not safe for us there either. Everywhere in Colombia there is war. It is not true: people feel safer if they move to another region in the country. This war is like a cancer: it has spread everywhere.

*Daniela, an asylum seeker from Colombia*

*Daniela, her husband and her 12-year old daughter are now living in Europe, waiting for a decision on their asylum request.*

# PEACE

peace has no peace  
it's sick and tired  
and wants to live no more  
its look is cold and withered

peace is no more a white dove  
it's a cursed bird of prey  
a wild beast in search of people  
to make them fight

they depict it lovely and white  
but it's a fearful mulberry tree without love  
which people are afraid to see  
their sorrow and pain are so strong

my native land is ill and pained  
blood flows through villages and fields  
and in the mind of people the cursed disgrace  
of violence damn them, they suffer hunger

men, women and children die each day without comfort  
many others are abducted, mutilated or in prison  
why my Lord why so much evil and disgrace?  
can it be that people have lost their heart?

but I love you, dear mother country  
I love you even if I do not find peace  
I love you even if you are wounded  
and no matter what happens you will always be in my heart

dear brother, make your heart good  
say goodbye to arms and to viciousness  
suddenly the world needs you strong and well  
to overcome evil and to rescue our people

no more violence my brother no more no more  
can't you see that happiness is dying in my country?  
(can't you see that the happiness of my people is dying)  
can't you see that the world wants peace?  
can't you see there are still good people?

Lord almighty, with your power  
can't you make the dove reclaim her colour?  
can't you make brave new people?  
can't you give my country joy and love?

*A poem by Daniela the poem which the guerillas interrogated her about  
when they kidnapped her (translated from the Spanish original)*





Jenny Calfo/JRS

**Colombia** Government assistance for internally displaced people is often no more than words on paper, but the people are determined to fight for their rights.

There is supposed to be government money to assist returnees,  
but it has not yet arrived

We regard it as violence when they don't give us fair prices for  
our products on the market. They pay just a few cents for my  
products, but then charge me four dollars for a kilo of meat

The government has not honoured its promises and obligations,  
but we'll continue to fight for our rights

Displaced people in Colombia's Magdalena Medio region

## I DON'T KNOW WHY THEY TOOK ME

I live in the Dominican Republic, in the Batey (shanty town inside the sugar plantations where Haitian migrants live and work) Santa Rosa. I was born in 1963 in Alto de San Pedro, Dominican Republic. Both my parents say they were born here. I have two children. One day in March 1999 I was sitting by the door of my house when a migration official came and asked to see my documents. They were looking for people without identification papers to deport them across the border to Haiti. They took my papers and told me to collect them from the Migration Office. I asked the officer to give them back, and he told me to go with him. I thought we were going to check if my documents were authentic.

However I soon realised I was being taken to the border to be sent forcibly to Haiti. The migration officer checked my birth certificate and other documents and told me sarcastically "What a Dominican you are - you have even the right to vote." I asked if I could go home to get some clothes, but they ignored me and loudly told me to shut up. I said "I know I will come back because I am not from Haiti." When we came to the border, they left us there, they opened the gate and we crossed.

In Haiti, I did not know where to go and burst into tears, thinking: "God, what am I going to do? I don't know this place." Then, I heard someone saying "What are you doing here?" It was a friend of mine who worked in Malpasse. I told her what had happened to me. It was late - around 8pm. She took me to her place and gave me food, looked for pieces of cardboard for me to sleep on. The following day, she helped me to work out my return to the Dominican Republic. I had to spend a large sum of money for travel arrangements. I came back in hiding because usually, only people who are being trafficked are allowed to cross from Haiti to Dominican Republic.

I was born and grew up in the Dominican Republic. I do not know much about government and bureaucratic matters - but I should not have been taken away. I do not know why they took me away, maybe because of the colour of my face.

*Rosa's story is taken from the June '99 bulletin of REDH - an organisation bringing together 14 agencies, NGOs and church institutions which defend the rights of Haitians.*



Dominican Republic Women in one of the bateys in Santo Domingo

## ***Refugees and displaced people in the Americas***

*I went to an attorney visitation room to visit Haitians detained in the Elizabeth detention centre. We met 'Gertrude', who is the only Haitian woman in the centre. We came to listen, support her and boost her morale. Gertrude spoke of her feelings of isolation. She smiled and looked relieved to speak in Haitian Creole. At the end of the visit, Gertrude asked us to pray with her. I have learned that prayer means a good deal to people in detention.*

Will Coley, JRS in New Jersey

The most serious humanitarian crisis of the hemisphere is that facing civilians in Colombia, caught in a fierce civil war. Other pressing problems include the oppression and displacement of indigenous peoples and violence associated with large-scale, poverty-induced labour migrations.

### **Colombia**

A civil war involving the country's armed forces, paramilitary groups and rebel guerillas, has displaced nearly two million civilians in recent years. Colombia's civilians are subjected to massacres, kidnappings and other human rights violations perpetrated by parties to the conflict. The vast majority of the violations are attributed to the paramilitary forces. Thousands of people have fled to other countries, but often find they are not welcome. The growth of cocaine and heroin cartels adds to

the violence, but interventions such as Plan Colombia, a US aid package sold as part of the war on drugs, only serve to exacerbate the conflict. The Plan, approved in 2000, is almost exactly three-quarters military and police aid

### **Dominican Republic**

*Haitians living in the Dominican Republic are often forcibly deported to Haiti, even if they possess legal documentation ascertaining their Dominican citizenship. The Haitian population in the Dominican Republic is extremely vulnerable and subjected to human rights violations and exploitation. Most are recruited for cheap labour and live in miserable conditions. The police and army periodically carry out round-ups in the bateys, usually during the night, arresting people without making a distinction as to whether or not they carry identification documents.*

### **North America**

In both Canada and the US, previously generous immigration policies have given way to concerted preventive measures. In the US, special immigration centres are not large enough to hold the high numbers of detained asylum seekers. There are about 20,000 detainees who are undocumented migrants or who are awaiting the outcome of deportation proceedings, up from an average of 8,200 in 1997.



Don Doll SJ/JRS

**Bosnia** As the country struggles to recover socially, economically and physically from recent devastating war, refugees and displaced people are returning home.

## **HOPE FOR A BETTER TOMORROW**

### Women survivors in Southeast Europe

*During the war, my family spent some years in Italy and Canada. I was so unhappy, I wanted to go home although at the time (1995), it was very dangerous to return to Sarajevo. We did return, although we had no work, no home, nothing. We do not have much, but we are happy. Things are getting better, they will get better.*

Milka one of five women working on a JRS project in Sarajevo which caters for elderly sick and lonely people





Don Doll S.I./JRS

**Bosnia** The war left widespread destruction in its wake. Today, one of the major obstacles to the return of refugees is that they have no home to go back to.

Seven long years passed before people returned to my village of Tramosnica. Nevertheless, in the meantime, my soul was peaceful... Waiting is beautiful if you have someone to share it with, and the hope of a better tomorrow. We overcame our grief with forgiveness, praying and caring for others. In work I meet many volunteers from different continents they have given us great happiness. Many people cannot understand why someone from faraway wants to come to our ruins and dirt and clean them for nothing.. Only if you give will you get, you become a happy person. Happiness should be spread and not saved.. Let us continue being like water, which everyone can drink, so we can live.

Sr Berta Puskaric, JRS Bosnia volunteer

## FINDING ANSWERS

Aleksandra is a Serb. One of the victims of the war in Bosnia, Aleksandra lost a leg when she exploded a mine at the age of 20. A devastating experience at any age but perhaps particularly for a young woman in her prime. When I started to visit Aleksandra, I had been told she was in deep despair. Immediately I realised that her outward happy disposition was a mask to hide the anguish within. In private, she contemplated the shattered remains of her life and looked to the future with little hope. She had so many questions: about work (What work could she do? Who would employ her? How would she travel from place to place?); love (How would she find a partner? Who would marry an invalid?); life (What kind of future was an invalid condemned to?) and so on and so on.

All fair and honest questions but no easy answers. In the absence of answers, Aleksandra declined to venture out, choosing instead the prison of the four walls of her bedroom. The difficulties facing Aleksandra were certainly real. In the aftermath of war, living in Republika Srpska meant precious few employment opportunities, especially for an invalid.

Despite these problems I could see a spark. There was a deep-rooted independence in Aleksandra which served her well. In time she learned to drive with a prosthesis. When she crashed into a police car she never mentioned her disability, preferring to pay a heavier penalty than be treated differently because she was an invalid.

Over the past 15 months I have seen Aleksandra grow and change beyond all recognition. Most significantly, she started an office management course in Sarajevo. She overcame many obstacles, those of transport, the course work and not least her deep fears of resentment and intimidation as a Serb in Sarajevo. When Aleksandra finished the course, the walls of her bedroom beckoned again. But now she was strong enough to refuse to take refuge in isolation as she had once done. Recently, Aleksandra found a job as a secretary, an achievement of which she is rightly proud. For me I share in her triumph as a disabled person, a survivor of war and above all as a woman.

*Suzana Muzui JRS Bosnia*

## ***Civilians living in war and displacement risk death or disability from landmines...***

. Until recently, anti-personnel landmines were an accepted tool of war. Today, thanks to the tireless efforts of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, the staggering damage these weapons cause has been *universally recognised*. The campaign estimates that there are one hundred million landmines in one third of the countries in the developing world, and that they kill at least 12,000 people a year. The Ottawa Treaty, which became binding international law on 1 March 1999, forbids the production, stockpiling and use of anti-personnel landmines. The treaty has been signed by 139 countries as at January 2001 and ratified by 110. However, landmines continue to pose a deadly threat to civilians in countries where they are still being laid, like Angola, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan, to name a few

JRS is part of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which was launched in 1992. The goals of the campaign include the removal of existing mines and caring for mine survivors. JRS is committed to working with landmine survivors, and to campaigning for a mine-free world.

## SAFIJA'S STORY

I owe a debt to Safija. Her story is a singular one of courage, strength and in the end, of love. Few suffered more during the Bosnia war: her husband was killed, her son shattered a foot stepping on a mine. Safija was widowed with two young children and a baby of three months. To compound her woes, she is suffering from multiple sclerosis, a debilitating disease which has seen her lose the ability to walk unaccompanied over the past two years. The house of Safija's family is uninhabitable, and they live illegally in an apartment in the city, awaiting eviction and an uncertain future.

Safija lives under the death sentence of her illness. She is expected to completely lose the use of her legs in the next year. Each day is a battle with the pain which wracks each fibre of her body, which she endures with little comment. Maybe her greatest suffering is living with the knowledge that her children will be orphaned, and her fears for their future.

Those who have spent time in the company of Safija are always struck by her unique warmth and personality. Several people who visited her have commented to me about her beauty, but there is more. This is something I felt too. As Safija talks, she often says 'I can't believe... as if the existence of the evil visited upon her is still a mystery to her. Despite her life experiences, she refuses to allow suffering to enter her soul and poison it, as has happened to many here. Her unshakeable belief in the basic goodness of people radiates through her face and few are not impressed by it. She has such a deep appreciation of any help rendered that you are humbled by the sincerity and depth of her thanks.

She is first and foremost a mother. After a battle of a year and half to save his shattered foot, her son, Almir, had to concede defeat and have his foot amputated. I spent much time with them both in this traumatic and terrible period. Rarely have I witnessed anything as poignant as the day he entered the hospital. You could almost see Safija's heart breaking as she had to sign a consent form to allow a doctor to amputate her son's leg.

Strength born of necessity I know, but nonetheless extraordinary for all that. The source of her strength probably arose from the depth of her suffering. Her bond with death seems to have allowed her a

unique insight into life and its meaning. Often Suzana and I would visit Safija when discouraged and exhausted by our work. We never left without being revitalised, without renewed enthusiasm. I have often wondered who is helping who.

In the final analysis, her story is not a story of extraordinary feats, her achievement has been to continue to live and love under extraordinary circumstances.

*Eugene Quinn JRS Bosnia*

*Eugene adds about Almir, Safija's son:*

Almir's shattered foot was grafted together after stepping on a mine. During initial medical visits, Almir neglected to mention that in the centre of his injured foot there was a large open weeping wound which was dressed by a nurse every second day. On one occasion the nurse detected a peculiar odour and there was an emergency examination. It was a false alarm, only a minor infection, but the resident doctor recommended another operation. Almir was furious. Why did he need another operation?

The diagnosis of the doctor brought even greater disappointment at some stage Almir would have to amputate his leg. A further operation was out of the question as his 'good' donor leg could not support further donation of muscle for grafting, without the risk of permanently damaging it. Clinically it all made sense, but to be responsible for cutting off your own foot - who can understand this?

In subsequent conversations, Almir displayed amazing maturity in reasoning out the decision for his future. He explained that during rehabilitation he realised that the guys with prostheses could walk freely, run and play football, all activities hampered or impossible for him with crutches. Furthermore the open wound was a time bomb. He would amputate.

Thankfully the operation was successful and Almir has recovered quickly. Now he must wait six months before he can receive the prosthesis which will restore his leg and fulfil the Gospel prophecy "and the lame shall walk"

## DARING TO DREAM

Emina is 18 years old, a refugee from eastern Bosnia, one of those wounded in body and soul. Her story begins in the summer of 1995. She recalls, 'I still was a child then. My parents warned me not to go to the field but I wanted to pick cherries for myself. So there I was standing under the cherry tree when grenades started falling around me.'

She sat down on the ground trying to make herself invisible but 'next I remember is lot of blood on my arm, my leg and my mouth full of soil and cherries. I saw my father running towards me, he took his shirt off, tore it up and tied a strip above my elbow. We had to reach the ambulance in the town. The pain came later.'

A few stitches were needed on the left knee. One piece of grenade remained in her elbow. The ambulance was equipped with barely the essentials. All they could do was to clean the wound every second day and put on fresh bandages.

After a traumatic journey fleeing the horrors of Zepa, a Muslim enclave which was about to fall, Emina arrived in Sarajevo two weeks later. There doctors operated on her injured arm, removing the shrapnel. It became immediately clear that there was long term damage to her arm. Several nerves had been severed rendering her arm below the elbow immobile.

When we first made contact, five years later, she believed that her arm was beyond repair but she still retained a glimmer of hope and a dream that something could be done. Where there is a will there is a way, and so it proved.

Over a period of four weeks she had examinations by several specialists, numerous visits to the hospital culminating in an operation. The aim of the operation was to restore functionality to two fingers and the thumb of the injured arm. Last week, after two weeks in plaster, she had her first check-up. The plaster of paris was removed and then the moment of truth. The doctor asked her to move her fingers. She went automatically to use her right hand to move them, but it was not necessary. To her disbelief her fingers moved autonomously for the first time in five years. But before she had time to comprehend and test to what extent the mobility had returned, the plaster had been restored once more.

That afternoon we sat in her living room with her father. She was still a little dazed by it all. She requires another operation to adjust the position of her wrist and a further one to insert a mechanical aid to restore mobility to her arm. So there is still great uncertainty and a long road of rehabilitation ahead. But starting from nothing and just having a dream, she has come a long way. She may yet wake up one day to find that all her dreams have come true.

*Ankica Nusic, JRS Bosnia*







Don Doll SJ/JRS

**Bosnia JRS runs a soup kitchen in the Jesuit parish of Sarajevo.**

This lunch means a lot to me. We are five and we all live from my husband's pension. He needs special food because he is diabetic. Our three sons are young and do not have jobs. We had everything but now we have nothing. Our life is agony in peacetime. Materially we are broken but not spiritually. We don't give up. In life we search for beautiful things.

Danica is a beneficiary of the JRS soup kitchen in Sarajevo.



Mano Almeida SUJRS

**Albania** An elderly Kosovar refugee waits to be evacuated at a train station in May 1999.

<b>JRS volunteer</b>	Hello, how are you?
<b>refugee woman</b>	Fine thanks, although a little tired
<b>volunteer</b>	Would you like some water?
<b>woman</b>	Thanks, only one bottle is enough
<b>volunteer</b>	If you want, take more than one
<b>woman</b>	No, thanks, we have another bottle of water and maybe you will need to give water to other families that do not have
	Thanks again and thanks for coming, for waiting for us and for sharing bread and water

Dialogue between a refugee woman and a JRS worker Albania May 1999, on a train which carried refugees during evacuation from Mieda to Fierz southern Albania The woman was travelling with four children and her elderly parents The volunteer added "She saw me and smiled and then, taking my hands, cried softly I cried too "

## ***Refugees and displaced people in Southeast Europe***

The high profile Kosovo crisis dominated the state of affairs in the region in 1999, with a massive exodus of some 800,000 ethnic Albanians from the province. To some extent, events in Kosovo overshadowed the plight of hundreds of thousands of other refugees scattered in the region, the result of three other wars over the past nine years.

### **Yugoslavia**

The flight or expulsion of ethnic Albanian refugees from Kosovo during a harsh Serb crackdown in 1999 followed NATO's military intervention against Yugoslavia. The return of the Albanians to Kosovo with the signing of a peace deal led to a reverse tide of refugees, this time, Serbs fearing reprisals. Some 200,000 Serbs and Roma fled Kosovo to Serbia and Montenegro, joining another 500,000 refugees and displaced people from former wars in the region. The refugees live in miserable conditions in a shattered country.



## **Bosnia**

A bitter ethnic war fought between 1992 and 1995 claimed the lives of 200,000 people. Three million people were displaced, and 300,000 women raped in the conflict, described as the worst carnage Europe had seen in 50 years. Millions of landmines were laid, it will take years to remove them all. The war ended with the 1995 Dayton agreement, which established the Republika Srpska for the Serbs and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the Croats and Muslims.

In 2000, for the first time since the end of the war, refugees and displaced people returned in relatively large numbers to areas where they would be part of an ethnic minority. However, over a million people remain displaced, most within the country. With the Kosovo crisis in 1999, many aid organisations left Bosnia after four years and headed for Kosovo instead.



Italy Refugees queue in a soup kitchen operated by JRS in the heart of Rome.

## **WAITING FOR JUSTICE**

### Women asylum seekers and refugees in Europe

*Much of the problem comes from one simple fact: we don't believe refugees... In other words, the "culture of disbelief" can make us deaf to genuine cries for protection... The place of JRS is by the side of the forgotten refugees, those who are unacknowledged and even despised. We must allow their cries of pain to be heard.*

Lena Barrett JRS Europe



## FAR FROM WAR AND HATRED

We were living as a happily married couple, in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, where both my husband and I had good jobs. But it all came to an end in 1994 when war broke out in Chechnya.

From the very first day my husband fought for the freedom of our country and I helped in giving medical care and in sheltering people in danger.

In April 1996 I gave birth to a boy. When Grozny was shelled for the second time, our home was destroyed. For two long weeks, I hid myself in a cellar with my baby. Once water and food were exhausted, with my hope only in God, I got out of the city with the child, while the bomber planes were flying over our heads. It was just by a miracle we were able to reach the town where my mother was living in the Dagestan Republic.

When the war ended, my husband took us back to Chechnya, but as far as we were concerned, the war was still going on. Chechens who were supporting the Russians, sought to take revenge for the deaths of their parents and friends during the war. One day my husband did not come back from his work, and one month later he was declared missing in action. Again I took my son to my mother and I returned to Chechnya to look for my husband.

One night four armed men broke into my house. They told me they had already killed my husband and it was now my boy's turn. When they did not find him, they beat me and promised to come back. As I was pregnant, I was afraid my new child, together with his older brother, would have to suffer for their father, so I decided to leave the country and search for a safe place for my sons, although I was unable to confirm my husband's death.

My second son was born in Spain. It is in this country that I hope to bring up my children, far from war and hatred. But I do not lose hope we all might be reunited with their father one day.

*The writer, now a refugee in Spain, wishes to remain anonymous and works as an associate of JRS in Barcelona.*

## PAYING WITH OUR BODIES

Angela and Charity, both university students, saw nothing wrong in fighting for justice, human rights and respect for the dignity of women in their home country in West Africa. More and more people joined them in the demonstrations they organised. One night, they got a warning to leave the country immediately, as rumours were circulating about their imminent arrest.

Angela and Charity wasted no time. They headed for the harbour, hoping to get on a boat to a neighbouring country. They explained their situation to some sailors and were eagerly taken aboard a ship about to leave the port. They had no travelling documents, and no money to pay their tickets, but this did not seem to matter. The ocean liner left, with the two young women hidden among boxes and cases in the hull. Angela and Charity soon found out what payment was requested from the human traffickers they had unwittingly trusted. In their own words, "we had to pay with our bodies". Although they begged to be let off the ship at the next stop, no matter where, their pleading went unheeded.

So Angela and Charity ended up in Hamburg, Germany. They were handed over to a brothel where, it was explained to them, they had to work to make good the expenses they had incurred. Over and over again, the women insisted on being put in touch with an office where they could ask for political asylum. Eventually, one night, they were brought by car to Berlin and given passports as British subjects. When Angela and Charity protested at being given false documents, the traffickers simply told them there were many black British subjects in Europe. On arrival in Berlin, they were passed on again, this time to a fellow countryman.

Early one morning, police and passport control officials appeared at the door of the apartment where they had been placed. Angela and Charity explained their case. 'Documents deceit' was the answer of the police, and they were condemned to four weeks in prison. It was in prison that they finally got an opportunity to apply for asylum. The women were given an appointment for an interview for refugee status, and finally a place in a hostel for asylum seekers.

*by a JRS Germany volunteer*

## EXPECTED TO COMMIT SUICIDE

Roshani was a teacher of several years experience in a South Asian country. She decided to leave her country after being raped by military troops. Roshani believes she was raped because her husband, who was hunted by the soldiers, could not be traced: taking revenge on the wife of a wanted suspect is fairly common practice in that country. The assault made life unbearable for Roshani. According to her Hindu faith, a woman who has been raped should commit suicide to wipe away the shame she has brought on herself and her family. Many of her relatives who were raped had gone to Europe and America. One of her brothers, who lived in Germany, kept contact with Roshani, and she took advantage of an invitation to visit him. Everything was organised through a contact, by whom she was given a passport and ticket with the assurance that friends would help her further.

Roshani was put on a flight to the Ukraine, where she was supposed to change plane. Three so-called friends met her at the airport and took her travel documents, explaining she was now in their care. Roshani found herself imprisoned in a flat, together with five other women of different nationalities, and forced into prostitution. Her pleading to contact her brother was in vain.

Months later, Roshani was put in a container vehicle at night with two compatriots. She had no idea where she was going. After some time travelling by night only, the women were told by the driver they had arrived in Berlin and were dumped there. Picked up by the police, they were placed in a detention centre as they were in Germany illegally, with no evidence to back their story. Roshani submitted an application for asylum, and with the help of a lawyer, she was released after three months and sent to a hostel for asylum seekers.

Roshani's brother contacted her, but he would not reveal his address, and she suspected he may belong to the mafia of women traffickers. The thought was unbearably painful to her, and as months passed, she grew increasingly depressed. Psychiatric therapy helped, and Roshani is now much better. A recent phone call from her let me know that, in spite of the difficulties facing her, she is fine.

*by a JRS Germany volunteer*

## ***Women seeking asylum often face...***

the danger of being forced or tricked into prostitution. Every year, up to half a million women are brought into the EU from central and eastern Europe and work as prostitutes. Some women know what they are going in for; some are abducted, many others are tricked, promised jobs as cleaners or waitresses, and then on arrival forced to sell their bodies to all comers. As well as women from Russia, Ukraine, Poland and Albania, there is also a market for women from southeast Asia, particularly Thailand and the Philippines, and from African countries such as Nigeria. It is commonplace for the women to be beaten by their pimps, drugged, and threatened with harm to themselves or to their families at home. They are usually unable to seek help because as "illegals", they are afraid of being deported, because they often do not speak the language, and because they are moved round constantly, so they become confused and disoriented. Most trafficked women are under 25, with a significant number under 18.



A. Crescibini/JRS

**Italy** A refugee makes an appointment at a medical clinic run by JRS in Rome. A paper drawn up by JRS Europe in 1996 underlined our "special obligation" to seek ways of meeting the needs of refugee women in policy and daily work.

A paper drawn up after a JRS Europe meeting in 1996 made the following recommendations to JRS

- Development, at regional and country levels, of appropriate tools to help staff design, implement and evaluate gender-sensitive programs
- Inclusion of gender awareness materials in orientation programs for field workers
- Integration of gender awareness training
- Ensuring adequate participation of refugee women at all levels of program implementation
- Encouraging the participation of refugee women in community representation and decision making
- Highlighting the plight of refugee women in publications and other channels of communication
- Recognising the disadvantages women are exposed to in situations of asylum and detention
- Acknowledging that refugee women have individual claims in status determination procedures
- Preventing and responding to sexual violence against refugee women
- Promoting awareness of guidelines and policies on refugee women at all levels

## WAITING TO BE BELIEVED

When Maryam's husband became involved in an opposition political party in Somalia, he saw no need to inform his wife. Even when this kept him out late every night, coming home at two or three in the morning, he offered no explanation. The one time she dared to ask him about it, he slapped her across the face and told her to mind the children and the house, and forget about anything else.

But she was not allowed to forget about it for long. One day, the police came to the house. Maryam's two small sons, aged four and two, saw their father being beaten and taken away. A few weeks later the police came back. They told Maryam her husband was dead and they arrested her. The police held Maryam for a month for questioning. They were angry when she could tell them nothing about her husband's activities and his contacts. They raped and tortured her. Like most women in her country, Maryam was circumcised as a child. The rapes caused her great pain and physical damage, as well as immense distress. Eventually the police let her go, but they told her she would have to leave Somalia or she and her sons would be killed.

And so Maryam came to Europe and applied for asylum. She found the asylum interviews very distressing. At all stages of the procedure the interpreters and nearly always the decision-makers were men, which created an immense barrier for her to talk about her experiences in prison. She could only bring herself to speak in euphemisms – she had been mistreated, dishonoured'. The asylum authorities refused to believe she could not know about her husband's political activities – if he really was politically involved, of course she should be able to give details! She had to be lying, and her claim was 'not credible'. Her request for asylum was rejected.

Maryam is currently waiting for the outcome of her appeal. Often she cries and thinks she will never be granted refugee status, so she will be sent back to her death. Other times she allows herself to be hopeful. Despite all she has been through, part of her still thinks that justice does exist, and if she keeps telling the truth long enough, somebody somewhere will believe her.

*Lena Barrett JRS Europe*

## ***Women seeking asylum often face...***

lack of sensitivity regarding their special protection needs. International protection must go beyond adherence to legal principles. The protection of refugee women requires planning and a great deal of common sense in establishing programs and priorities that ensure their safety and well-being. A female asylum seeker faces particular difficulties:

- she may not always be given a separate interview if she is accompanied by her spouse;
- she may be reluctant to speak freely in front of a male interviewer, either because of cultural mores or past experiences;
- she may feel embarrassed or humiliated when relating information about sexual assaults she has had to endure;
- the person reviewing her claim may not be sensitive to the particular persecution she faces as a woman.

As it can be difficult obtaining information about the protection needs of refugee women, it is important, if not essential, to use female staff when trying to elicit information from female refugees.

UNHCR and its NGO partners, *Protecting Refugees, A field guide for NGOs*



## WHY DIDN'T I RETURN TO ETHIOPIA?

I was born in Ethiopia. My father was Eritrean and my mother Ethiopian. Both died years ago. I spent most of my life in Ethiopia, until I was 18 years old, when I was selected to study in Cuba. During Mengistu's regime, many children of army officers were sent to Cuba for studies. Although my father was not part of the military, I was among those who got sponsored. I stayed in Havana, in a residence where many African and Caribbean students lived, and studied accounts. Years passed and many Ethiopians returned to Ethiopia or stayed abroad. As my studies came to an end, my time in Cuba was up, and the Cuban government gave me a flight ticket to Italy.

Why didn't I return to Ethiopia? A war between Eritrea and Ethiopia broke out in June 1998. It is a silly war, so many people are being killed and displaced for a piece of desert land. I imagine there are other interests for both countries involved. My younger brother was imprisoned in June 1998, for the crime of being of Eritrean origin (although he was born in Ethiopia). He is still detained in Bilate detention camp, on the outskirts of Addis Abeba. My elder brother was deported to Eritrea but I have no news of him. My two younger sisters are in hiding in Ethiopia, I know nothing about them either. I cannot return to Ethiopia. I would not even be allowed to enter the country just because my father was Eritrean. What will I do if I'm sent to Eritrea? I've never even been there. It is not my land, I was born in Ethiopia.

In both Eritrea and Ethiopia, there are so many homeless children. How can these two governments invest so much money in arms, instead of constructing our society? Don't they realise we need education and growth? I would like to return to my country whenever there is peace. However, if there is no peace, I will stay here, even if I am not accepted. I cannot return to a warring country where I am considered a stranger. I also want to fight for my brother. He has already been in prison for two years. But I prefer him to be in prison, rather than in Eritrea, where young men are conscripted, trained and sent to fight. How could he fight against his own country, Ethiopia?

*Tigist: an asylum seeker in Italy, 1999*



Lipid wants to return to her country when there is true peace there.

## ***Refugees and displaced people in Europe***

There is currently much debate in Europe on the issue of access to territory. European countries impose restrictive policies limiting the arrival of new refugees and other migrants, on the pretext that such vast numbers of people are impossible to assimilate. The governments know they are supported by public opinion.

Human trafficking is a pressing problem. While action must be taken against traffickers who exploit vulnerable people, these networks are often the only means for genuine refugees to gain access to territory to claim asylum.

### **Belgium**

Registration of undocumented migrants took place in January 2000. Nearly 33,000 people applied. However, the process turned out to be extremely slow and in December 2000, some 5,000 people took to the streets to protest against the delays.

### **Germany**

Germany received 50,042 asylum applications between January and August 2000. A law introduced in 1998 authorises cuts in social assistance (accommodation, food, pocket money). In some cases, no assistance is provided.

### **United Kingdom**

A total of 49,565 asylum applications were filed in UK in the first eight months of 2000. At the end of 1999, there was a backlog of over 100,000 asylum applications yet to be decided.

The new Asylum Act, which has been severely criticised for stigmatising asylum seekers, and for creating hardship, came into force on 3 April 2000. UNHCR has accused the main political parties of exploiting the issue of asylum seekers and of playing on public fears and misconceptions

### **Italy**

Italy has seen a considerable increase in the number of asylum seekers in 2000: 34,000 as compared to 20,000 in 1999. Until a few years ago, for asylum seekers, Italy was a stepping stone to other destinations. However, since Italy signed the Dublin Convention in 1997, asylum seekers must remain until the asylum procedure is completed.

Europe is also home to one of the most dramatic man-made crises of forced displacement today: the brutal and unchallenged war in Chechnya.

### **Chechnya**

Over 100,000 are estimated to have died in the country's 1994-1996 war with Russia, which started when Russia sent troops to Chechnya to crush the independence movement. In 1996, a truce was agreed, and Chechnya granted independence. Russia started another military campaign in Chechnya in September 1999. Countless civilians have fallen victim to the continuing bombing and shelling campaign, and others have been summarily executed by Russian soldiers.



John Kleiderer/JRS

**Tanzania** A Burundian refugee and her child in one of the camps lining the border between Tanzania and Burundi. Displaced women are a symbol of suffering, but the struggle to protect their children and their commitment to reconciliation make them also beacons of hope.

## A CHALLENGE FOR SOCIETY

The refugee women's testimonies paint a shocking picture which casts a shadow on great declarations and speeches concerning human rights. Several questions arise in the face of violations of human dignity perpetrated against women. Where has talk on human rights ended? If such rights exist, who protects them? One of the great shames of the past century is that human dignity and life itself have been subordinated to a frenzied search for power and wealth.

The experiences of these women pose a challenge to all society, men, women and institutions. The challenge calls on us to opt for a concrete commitment for the promotion of peace, and for the dignity of all human beings, whatever their gender, age, religion, ethnic or racial identity.

Refugee women are a symbol of suffering, but also of hope. They represent the suffering of humanity because they are victims twice over. Like other refugees, they are subjected to the consequences of war, and as women, they are exposed to further suffering like rape, physical abuse, death, widowhood. Their testimonies reflect sadness, mourning, but also hope.

The struggle of women to safeguard the lives of their children, often at the cost of their own life, their commitment to the promotion of reconciliation, makes them irreplaceable pillars for the construction of a more humane society. Unfortunately, their tremendous efforts are often doomed to failure because of men's indifference, and worse because of the indifference of other women. May women help women, appeals Pope John Paul II to all those who, thanks to their social, political, economic and cultural situation, find themselves in a position to help other women.

We call on all women wherever they are, whatever their activity may be, to affirm their existence by engaging themselves in the promotion of peace.

*Sr Marie Bernard Alima*

*Sr Marie Bernard is a Congolese sister with the order of the Sisters of St Joseph in Kinshasa. She has written a thesis on women in the Democratic Republic of Congo.*



Rwanda An elderly refugee from Congo

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS RELATED TO THE PROTECTION OF DISPLACED PEOPLE

**Asylum** the grant, by a State, of protection on its territory to persons from another State who are fleeing persecution or serious danger. A person who is granted asylum is a refugee. Asylum encompasses a variety of elements, including *non-refoulement*, permission to remain on the territory of the asylum country, and humane standards of treatment.

**Asylum seeker:** a person whose request or application for asylum has not been finally decided on by a prospective country of refuge.

**Convention relating to the Status of Refugees** a Convention that establishes the most widely applicable framework for the protection of refugees. The Convention was adopted in July 1951 and entered into force in April 1954. Article 1 of the 1951 Convention limits its scope to 'events occurring before 1 January 1951'. This restriction is removed by the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. To date, there are 137 States who are parties to the 1951 and/or the 1967 Protocol.

**Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons** a Convention that provides the definition of a stateless person and establishes a framework by which a stateless person who is lawfully resident in a State can have legal status. The Convention was adopted in September 1954 and entered into force in June 1960.

**Gender-related persecution:** persecution that targets or disproportionately affects a particular gender. Under certain factual circumstances, gender-related persecution may come within the refugee definition.

**Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement** a series of principles that articulates standards for protection, assistance and solutions for internally displaced persons. They reflect and are consistent with human rights law, humanitarian law and refugee law and provide guidance to States, other authorities, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations faced with issues of internal displacement.

**Internally Displaced Persons:** those persons forced or obliged to flee from their homes, . . . in particular as a result of or in order to avoid



the effects of armed conflicts situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border' (*Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement*)

**Local integration** a durable solution to the problem of refugees which involves their permanent settlement in a country of first asylum

**Non-refoulement** a core principle of refugee law that prohibits States from returning refugees in any manner whatsoever to countries or territories in which their lives or freedom may be threatened. The principle of *non-refoulement* is a part of customary international law and is therefore binding on all States, whether or not they are parties to the 1951 Convention

**Persecution** generally refers to any severe violation of human rights. In the refugee context, persecution refers to any act by which fundamental rights are severely violated for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group

**Refoulement** the removal of a person to a territory where she/he would be at risk of being persecuted, or of being moved to another territory where she/he would face persecution. *Refoulement* constitutes a violation of the principle of *non-refoulement*, and is therefore a breach of refugee law and of customary international law

**Refugee status determination procedures** legal and administrative procedures undertaken by UNHCR and/or States to determine whether an individual should be recognised as a refugee in accordance with national and international law

**Repatriation/Reintegration** the process by which refugees resume a normal life in their country of origin. Ideally, reintegration should follow from the durable solution of voluntary repatriation

**Resettlement** the transfer of refugees from the country in which they have sought refuge to another State that has agreed to admit them. The refugees will usually be granted asylum or some other form of long-term resident rights and, in many cases, will have the opportunity to become naturalised citizens

**UNHCR** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UNHCR is mandated to co-ordinate worldwide protection of refugees

**Voluntary repatriation** return to the country of origin based on the refugees' free and informed decision

In the bitter Sri Lankan war for a  
Tamil homeland, the ideal woman is

viewed by the rebel Liberation

Frontiers for Tamil Eelam (LTTE)

ideally as an aggressive soldier or

as a fearless suicide bomber. On the

other hand the rare media reports of

that war often present women as

pitiful, poverty stricken, dependent

victims. These images distort the

real role of women in refugee

situations. Chinappan Amalraj, a

Tamil Jesuit who co-ordinates the

work of Jesuit Refugee Service

(JRS) in the South Asian conflict

zones, urged us to record the truth

about refugee women.

He proposed we collect personal

stories of women who face war,

displacement and human rights

violations.

The collection of stories in this book

brings you a taste of what we have

observed and learned not only in Sri

Lanka, but also around the world.

Women are over-represented among

the world's poor, displaced and

refugee populations. But with this

book, rather than lament their fate,

we wish to celebrate and respect

them and to identify their special

skills and roles."

*Mark Raper SJ*

*JRS International director, 1990-2000*

JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE  
112 Thornbury Road  
OSTERLEY  
Middlesex TW7 4NN

ISBN 88-88126-01-5

Jesuit Refugee Service

C P 6139 00195

Printed in Italy