



Jesuit Refugee Service Australia

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MEDIA RELEASE

4 September 2008

For immediate release

NEW JRS DIRECTOR CALLS FOR PERCEPTION-SHIFT IN WAKE OF DETENTION REFORM

Australians need to change their perceptions about refugees and asylum seekers if they wish to alleviate the ever-increasing migratory trend, says the newly-appointed director of Jesuit Refugee Service Australia, Fr Sacha Bermudez-Goldman SJ. 'It is true that stories concerning asylum seekers and refugees can be quite overwhelming and depressing, but it is also true that face-to-face contact with them is inspiring. Their resilience and energy to overcome great disadvantage motivates and instructs us, and my hope is that JRS will contribute to make these face-to-face encounters possible.'

Fr Bermudez-Goldman brings with him substantial experience working as a volunteer with asylum seeker and refugee organisations in Sydney and Melbourne, and as chaplain at the Maribyrnong Detention Centre in Melbourne. He is privileged, he says, to have met and accompanied some extraordinary men and women through their experiences, and hopes his new role will allow him to continue to support and advocate for people still seeking asylum.

'The recent changes to Australia's asylum policy are commendable, but there is still much reform that needs to take place before Australia can be regarded as having a just and fair system of asylum, in particular for applications made onshore. Together with changes to the system we need also changes in our attitude so we can embrace those systemic changes.'

Since his ordination last year, Fr Bermudez-Goldman has also worked with young adults at MAGiS, the Ignatian young adult ministry. Through his new role at JRS, he is hoping to expose more young adults to the work of the organisation. 'Some of the young people I know are already tutoring children of asylum seekers, have been part of the annual JRS ball and have actively advocated for the rights of refugees. These young people have a great sense of social justice, are incredibly talented, energetic and enthusiastic, and have deep compassion for those in need.'

Originally from Nicaragua, Fr Bermudez-Goldman moved to the United States for his secondary schooling and university studies. He did a Masters in

Engineering in Texas, after which he worked as an engineer. He then joined an American missionary society and served as a lay missionary teacher for seven years in Tanzania and Cambodia. He joined the Society of Jesus in February 1999, and was ordained to the priesthood in June 2007. He takes over from Fr David Holdcroft SJ, who served as director of JRS for the past four years. Fr Holdcroft is now undertaking his Jesuit tertianship in New England.

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