



Jesuit Refugee Service

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Dear JRS Colleagues and Friends,

Greetings to you all from Rome!

As you know, I became the fifth International Director of JRS last Thursday. I am humbled and honored that Fr. General has given me this assignment, because our work with refugees and other forced migrants is a true expression of one of the key conditions for Jesuit mission as expressed in the Complementary Norms of the Society of Jesus:

A desire to embody Christ's ministry of healing and reconciliation in a world increasingly divided by economic and social status, race and ethnicity, violence and war, cultural and religious pluralism. (*Complementary Norms 246, 4^o*)

I begin this assignment with deep gratitude to my predecessor, Peter Balleis, S.J. Peter's love and commitment to refugees has inspired the mission of JRS through his eight years of leadership. Through his efforts, accompaniment of refugees continues to be the starting point of our work, a foundation that guides us in what we do and how we do it. Peter's heart has led JRS to great desires and great accomplishments; his heart inspires me to grow and deepen my commitment to those we serve.

I am also grateful to each of you at JRS for your work. JRS cannot not be what it aspires to be without the JRS family of workers, volunteers and friends. Your hands and your hearts make our accompaniment, service and advocacy real. One important aspect of my position is to visit each JRS region at least once a year. I look forward to those visits, not only to come to know the refugees who inspire us, but also to meet you – you who put a face on our commitment to those most in need.

When Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J. founded JRS in 1980, he was responding to the needs of one group of refugees: Vietnamese fleeing their country for a new start. Thirty-five years later, the realities of refugees are more complex: civil wars, drug and mineral-based violence, and exploitation and trafficking force more and more people to flee their homes. Some cross to new continents to find safety, others stay in camps for decades, and many others are lost in the

anonymity of urban environments. While many people in host countries open their doors to those in need, their governments often band together to ignore and exclude those seeking protection and a new start.

We can no longer imagine that individual refugee situations are separate from one another. Rather, they are part of a global crisis of people on the move, a crisis which requires JRS to act and respond globally. The challenge I see for JRS at this moment is to remain grounded in our accompaniment of the individuals we meet while confronting the global reality of 60 million forcibly displaced people. Neither task is easy to do, and doing them together is an additional challenge. But it is a challenge we must take if we are to be faithful to JRS values of hope, dignity and justice.

As I begin this work, I ask for your prayers: prayers for the refugees we serve, and prayers for each of us who serve refugees in many different ways. You and all members of the JRS family are in my daily prayers. In the spirit of JRS Mission Statement, together let us continue to be “inspired by the compassion and love of Jesus for the poor and excluded.”

In peace and solidarity,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom".

Thomas H. Smolich, S.J.
International Director