



Director's Letter

Dearest Friends,

As this is the Christmas edition of LINK, by the time you read this, it will be the holy season. But at the time of writing, I have just left *Port Moresby. Whilst there, I met the men who were in Manus Island, who have been exposed to the most harrowing conditions. In all my life, I have never witnessed such sadness and suffering and also so much courage. Some of the men are currently in a detention centre called Bomana. One of the men told me that "everything in Bomana was torture."

As I return to Sydney, I also reflect on the difficult conditions that some women, men and children, some of them medically transferred from Nauru and Manus, face here in Australia

affected by destitution and hunger as a result of the cuts of the government's financial, casework and counselling support. But I am always heartened when I remember our JRS Community Spaces in Westmead and Parramatta where refugees and people seeking asylum are welcomed, served and accompanied by our team. Children can play and people are part of a community.

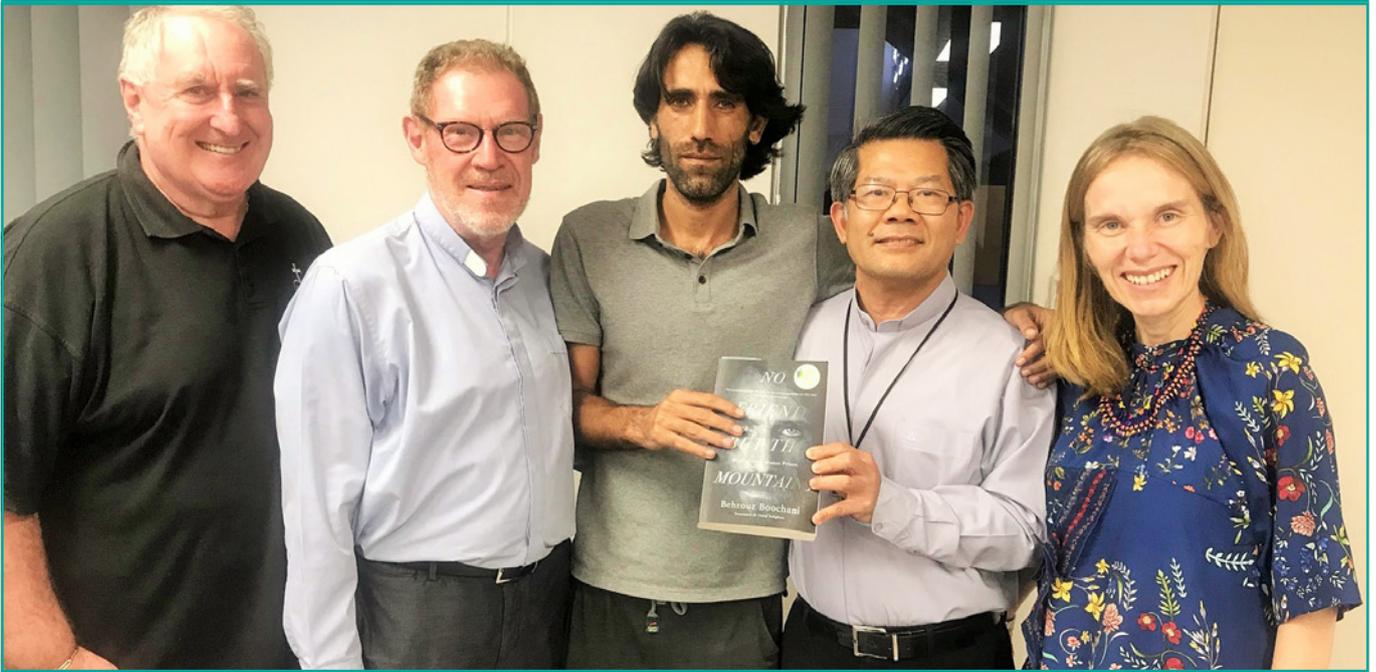
At Christmas, we think of the holy family, and of our own families. We understand the love we feel for our dear ones is a great love. But for these men in Bomana, the men still in Manus, and in Port Moresby, this will be yet another Christmas separated from their beloved families despite having endured 7 years of cruelty, suffering

and slow torture, and this fills me with such sadness and also with the drive to do something about it.

As troubling as all this is, I am heartened by people like you who have walked with JRS throughout this year so we can continue in our work. Together, I have hope that we can exit this dark chapter of Australian history. With all my heart, I thank you for this support. I wish you and your families a Merry Christmas.

In Peace,
Carolina Gottardo,
JRS Australia Director.

**In November 2019, a high profile delegation of Catholic leaders visited Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea including JRS Director, Carolina Gottardo (also Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) Co-Convener).*



"Where is love?"

 Pictured from left is Fr Tom McDonough (Executive Member of Catholic Religious Australia), Fr Peter Smith, Behrouz Boochani*, The Most Reverend Bishop Vincent Long and Carolina Gottardo.

A reflection from Father Peter Smith, Justice and Peace Promoter for The Justice and Peace Office, Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney. This year, JRS Australia had the pleasure of working with The Justice and Peace Office of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney. In November 2019, both Father Peter and Carolina Gottardo (JRS Australia Director and co-convenor of CAPSA) were part of a high-profile Catholic solidarity delegation to Port Moresby (pictured above). Throughout 2019, Fr Peter and Ruth Moraes (Research and Project Officer, Justice and Peace Office) have promoted the dignified living of people seeking asylum and refugees.

In the classic British musical "Oliver", based on Charles Dickens "Oliver Twist" which first previewed in London's West End in 1960, the title character sings a moving ballad: "Where is Love?" Frightened, alone, rejected by the state and society in general, Oliver laments the hopelessness of his situation. Dickens satirises the hypocrisy of the time (serialised between 1837 and 1839) where children were abandoned to forced labour and denied support by those with wealth and power. As the tune echoes in my head, I can't but help thinking of our modern day Olivers, refugees and people seeking asylum, demonised by successive governments as "illegals", "queue jumpers", "terrorist sympathisers" etc.; in addition to systematically reducing financial support such as Status Resolutions Support Service (SRSS) funds, to the extent that much

of society has imbibed the rhetoric and so "normalised" the rejection of these most vulnerable people. I can only imagine children and adults in untenable circumstances in Australia's major capitals or languishing in Bomana prison and elsewhere in Port Moresby quietly thinking "Where is love?" As in the nineteenth century, so now, it is left up to charities and NGOs to show love, compassion, support and justice for those left behind. (Fortunately modern charities are more successful than in Dickensian England).

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) has, since its inception in 1980, worked to bring justice to refugees across the world. Here in Australia they care for refugees and people seeking asylum by promoting their physical wellbeing with food, clothing and shelter, their legal and emotional needs through caseworkers and do advocacy work to reverse the injustices done to them. You are reading this edition of Link

because you are a valued member contributing to that process. To praise the wonderful work done by JRS people is almost redundant here as we all know and are grateful for their contribution. What does need to be said is "thank you" to them on behalf of not only the people they care for but from all in society who are glad that there is an alternate story being told to the government and media driven disparagement of those most deserving of our compassion.

As we approach the Christmas Season when we will once again recall the birth of the infant saviour, refugee in Egypt, who is our ultimate hope and cause for joy; we should never lose heart. We also hope and pray that the hearts of governments on all sides (especially those who wear their religious belief as a badge of honour) will hear the voice of the Gospel of Jesus and the cries of the poor. When a refugee or person seeking asylum cries again "Where is love?" JRS will be there to answer "Here we are!"

** Behrouz Boochani's memoir "No Friend But the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison" detailed some of the horrors of offshore detention.*

Reflection from Maeve Brown

Maeve Brown is Service Manager of JRS' Westmead Community Space of welcome for people seeking asylum and refugees.

Whenever I'm asked to write a summary of the year-gone-by, I usually start by saying that it has again been a more challenging and difficult year, filled with punitive shifts in policy and the rolling back of rights and protections for people seeking asylum. This year is no different. 2019 has been filled with more forced destitution, ongoing indefinite detention, and a shift in rhetoric now demonising those who have come by plane to seek protection.

In the lead up to Christmas and the Advent Season, we look forward to coming together with the people we love and care for to celebrate the hope and salvation that comes with the birth of Jesus. At this time of year, I find myself thinking about hope, faith, and resilience,

particularly about the end of another year in which so many of the people we walk alongside are still clinging to those feelings.

I also think about Mary, Mother of God, and the many mothers seeking asylum. I think about the countless women who are doing everything they can to protect their children, to find shelter, food, and safety. After so many years of uncertainty, declining mental and physical health, and grinding poverty in Australia, how do mothers, how do parents seeking asylum keep going? How did Mary find the strength to get through that first Christmas and the displacement and persecution that lay ahead?

At JRS, we get to spend our days surrounded by Marys - by Maryams,



Maeve with Volunteer Coordinator, Margaret Guy RSC,

Leilas, Zahras and Fatimas. Women who have survived arrests, torture, assaults, perilous journeys, detention, and years of limbo in Australia waiting for protection, who somehow keep going. We witness the hope, faith, and resilience of so many holy families. This Christmas, I pray for 2020 to be a better year for the people we serve, one where their hope, faith, and resilience is repaid with permanent protection, family reunion, and safe and meaningful lives.

Hear the real story.



At Table Talks, speakers with lived experience of seeking asylum share their story. Pictured here is refugee leader, Hava Rezaie. Find out more about hosting a Table Talk at your organisation, school or parish. Simply call: 0293563888 or email anne.rutherford@jrs.org.au

JRS Australia acknowledges that the Table Talk model was developed and first implemented by Sydney Alliance.

TABLE TALKS

Opening a Conversation
about People Seeking
Asylum



Notes of a JRS Caseworker

Each week, refugees and people seeking asylum come to the JRS Community Space of welcome at Westmead. Nicole Ascaino is one of our talented JRS Caseworkers. Each week, Nicole serves and accompanies people who exist in one of the most punitive political landscapes in the world for people seeking asylum -- Australia. Recently, Nicole shared her good news story of a young family who benefited from JRS' work. Here are Nicole's special casework notes....

The *Ali family who only recently arrived in Australia are seeking asylum after fleeing persecution and each day are facing complex challenges. Fatima, Reza and their children are happy to be in Australia for its safety and opportunity. Mother and father are searching for work, have excellent English, good professional experiences and are highly capable. Their daughter, Latifa, and son Mustafa, have not been able to attend school because the family do not have a safe place to live yet. Even without a stable home, and by

surviving on small amounts of money from JRS, the Ali family continues to show hope, determination and passion by always showing up, and continuing to network with organisations and communities.

Within the past couple of months the family have been working on their goals with JRS caseworkers. Two weeks ago, Reza was able to obtain work at an event to celebrate a step forward for people seeking asylum in Sydney and following engagement with *Empowered to Work*, a program that JRS



runs in collaboration with the House of Welcome (HOW) to support people securing jobs. At the same time we were advised that Mums 4 Refugees were able to donate a guitar for Latifa, and Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group stepped up to house the family for a few weeks. Our inter-agency collaboration and the persistence of each individual in this family has led to positive change.

** Names have been changed to protect identities.*

accompany.serve.advocate

What JRS Does

JRS Australia advocates for policies of welcome and protection at all tiers of government. At our two spaces of welcome in Westmead and Parramatta, JRS directly serves and accompanies people seeking asylum in Sydney. Each space has programs to facilitate agency, employment and to foster a sense of community.

 www.facebook.com/JRSAustralia

 [@JRS_Aus](https://twitter.com/JRS_Aus)

donate

How your donation will help

General donations will directly fund: emergency assistance, casework services, legal advice, employment support, foodbank, homework clubs, community kitchen and many other activities for refugees and people seeking asylum. Your donation also allows JRS to advocate for policies of welcome and protection.

Jesuit Refugee Service Australia • ph: 02 9356 3888 • fax: 02 9356 3021 • email: info@jrs.org.au • web: www.jrs.org.au

If undeliverable return to:
Jesuit Refugee Service Australia
PO Box 522
Kings Cross NSW 1340

PRINT
POST

PP236873/00020
PP236873/00021

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA