

For immediate release

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Press Release

JRS' stand against detention honoured

At 18.30 on 1st October 2007, Dr Katrine Camilleri, a lawyer with the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), will receive the Nansen Award from the Secretary General of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres.

Dr Camilleri will collect the 2007 UN Nansen Award for her courage and commitment in the defence of refugee rights. This award recognises the personal work of Dr Camilleri - initially one of the few legal advisors providing support to hundreds of people in detention in Malta, particularly the most vulnerable.

Honouring Dr Katrine Camilleri draws attention to the suffering of thousands of asylum seekers detained in centres throughout Europe. Detention criminalises these individuals, often heightening the physical and psychological trauma they already experienced.

JRS deplores the detention of asylum seekers in Europe. Individuals should not be detained for the sole purpose of his or her asylum application.

States have a basic obligation under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention to offer protection to individuals fleeing persecution. This protection continues to be eroded by government criminalising asylum seekers and housing them in prison-like detention centres. Berhe, an asylum seeker from Eritrea, was detained in Malta. He believes he lost 14 months of his life in detention.

Alternatives to detention should always be sought. Open centres, regular reporting requirements, release on bail and provision of a guarantor are all possible solutions which go some way towards respecting the human dignity of those arriving in Europe.

"Today, it is as if the detention of asylum seekers was the norm in the EU Member States. It should, however, always remain a measure of last resort if the EU wants to build an effective area of justice", concluded Philip Amaral, the JRS-Europe Advocacy Officer.

In all cases asylum seekers and migrants must be treated as humans with rights who possess skills, talents and qualifications that can benefit host countries in Europe and countries of origin. Only then will the work of Dr Camilleri, and thousands of others like her be truly appreciated and acknowledged.

Notes to the editor:

The Jesuit Refugee Service is an international Catholic organisation. Its mission is to accompany, serve and advocate for refugees and forced migrants. JRS Europe is a network of over 20 offices working in Europe with and for refugees and displaced people. It is part of the JRS international network. Its services are provided to refugees regardless of their race, ethnic origin or religious beliefs.

For further information contact Elizabeth Underhill, Media Officer JRS Europe; tel: 00 32 (0) 2 250 32 27; email: press.europe@jrs.net