



Press Release

Jesuit Refugee Service

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Senior Muslim, Jewish, Catholic leaders support launch of international coalition challenging the detention of migrants and refugees

100 human rights groups worldwide seek alternatives to imprisonment of migrants and refugees

"After facing persecution and extreme poverty at home, refugees face further suffering when they are deprived of their freedom of movement and detained – simply for fleeing for their lives. We have been visiting immigration detainees around the world for more than 20 years and our staff witness firsthand the physical and psychological harm caused to very vulnerable individuals, particularly children," said Fr Lluís Magriña SJ, International Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS).

JRS is a founding member of the newly-formed International Coalition on the Detention of Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants which is being launched worldwide with events around the world this week. On 15 June, JRS will organise the launch of the first such event in Rome, Italy, with an inter-religious round table discussion on detention. This will take place on Thursday 15 June 2006 at 12:00pm in the Sala Marconi, Radio Vaticana, Piazza Pia 3, Roma.

The conference will be addressed by Cardinal Martino of the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace, Mario Scialoja - President of the Italian Muslim League, and Alan Naccheche - President of the Jewish Bnai Brith Youth Organisation. The event will be moderated by Fr Lluís Magriña SJ.

"Even in closed centres in many affluent countries, like Italy, the legal procedures governing detention are wholly inadequate and the conditions unacceptable. Such treatment is often illegal, but always immoral and degrading", said Mario Scialoja, Italian President of the Muslim League.

"In carrying out their role of managing migration flows, it is understandable that states should establish temporary detention centres. Nevertheless, states should never forget their international obligations to refugees and other migrants. In particular, the arbitrary detention of refugees penalises human beings for seeking safety, and denies their common humanity," said Alan Naccheche, President of Italian branch of the youth section of the Jewish Bnai Brith Organisation.

"Arbitrary imprisonment poisons human society. It harms those who practice it as well as those who suffer it," said Cardinal Martino, of the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace.

The coalition, involving over 100 human rights groups from 36 countries worldwide, was established to raise awareness of governments' detention policies and practices and to promote greater protection and respect for the human rights of detainees. It advocates limiting the use of, seeking alternatives to, and using the least restrictive forms of, immigration detention.

The coalition has been collecting information on immigration detention practices in 36 countries. It found that the worst detention practices adopted by governments were being copied from others and politicians frequently justify their immigration detention policies on the grounds that another, often richer, country is operating a similar policy.

Notes to Editors and Journalists

JRS works in over 50 countries in five continents around the world. It employs over 1,000 staff: lay, Jesuits and other religious to meet the education, health, social and other needs of over 500,000 refugees and IDPs. It also provides legal and other services to migrants refugees detained purely on the basis of their immigration status in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Its services are provided to refugees regardless of their race, ethnic origin, or religious beliefs.

The coalition involves over one hundred members (non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations, academics and individuals) in 36 countries from around the world – in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Oceania, the Caribbean, North America, Central and South America – all from countries where individuals are detained purely on the basis of their immigration status.

The steering committee of the Coalition brings together a number of leading international NGOs which share concerns about the treatment of immigration detainees, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights First, Human Rights Watch, Jesuit Refugee Service, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, World Council of Churches, and a number of national NGOs.

The international detention coalition is being launched worldwide on 20 June 2006, with events being organised by member organisations in the following countries: USA, Canada, Mexico, Kenya, South Africa, India, Australia, Lebanon, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Hungary, Malta, Ireland, Jamaica

For more information on the coalition, contact Anna Gallagher: e mail anna@comunicacionglobal.com Tel: (+34) 947 541 835 or Melanie Teff at Melanie.teff@jrs.net Tel: (+39) 06 6897 7386; (+39) 338 752 2606