



# JRS Europe

Serving Forgotten Refugees

Jesuit Refugee Service [www.jrseurope.org](http://www.jrseurope.org)

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For information about the Pedro Arrupe Award, visit the website:

[www.jrseurope.org/  
pedroarrupe-award/](http://www.jrseurope.org/pedroarrupe-award/)

## Pedro Arrupe Award winners

On Wednesday 4 July 2007, at the European Parliament, the Polish and Slovakian winners of the refugee awareness Pedro Arrupe Award 2007 assembled to collect their prizes.

This JRS Europe award, now in its second edition, seeks to promote understanding and tolerance of the refugee issue among young people as well as encourage their creative engagement. 35 high schools from 14 European countries participated in the award with entries as diverse as DVDs, board games, songs and cartoons.

The German MEP, Manfred Weber, who sponsored the event, opened the ceremony by praising the creativity of the young winners. He remarked that this generation of young people face a real challenge in helping find a common European solution to the problem of suffering in Europe.

The Slovakian winners, from the school Gymnázium sv. Tomáša Akvinského in Košice, will spend a week in Croatia visiting various refugee and asylum seeker projects. The winning project focused on the lives of refugees in Slovakia and how the students learned about the realities of living as a refugee. One of the winners, Martina Slivková, was very sad to hear a personal testimony from a refugee but reported that "it made me realise that refugees are just the same as us".

The winning Polish entry, a moving and thought provoking poem accompanied by photographs, was shown to the invited guests. Students from the school Gimnazjum i Liceum Jezuitów in Gdynia received a trip to Macedonia to visit a summer camp for child landmine victims.

Their teacher, Oliver Pasion, hoped that the students would continue to be aware of the plight of refugees and asylum seekers following participation in the Pedro Arrupe Award.

Blanche Tax, a representative from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), presented the students with their awards. She used the opportunity to highlight the suffering of child asylum seekers around the world; over 10 million uprooted children are cared for by the UNHCR. "Keep an open



*The winners in the Parliament*

mind and an open heart to refugees", Ms Tax recommended, "by doing this you will always remember that refugees are just people who found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time."

JRS Europe Director, Jan Stuyt, concluded the ceremony by offering his congratulations to the winning entries. "At a time when European countries are restricting access to asylum," he stated, "it is inspirational to meet young people with so much passion who are committed to helping raise awareness about the lives of refugees around the world."

## World Refugee Day 2007

To commemorate World Refugee Day 2007, JRS Europe, in partnership with Kerkwerk Multicultureel Samenleven, held an interreligious prayer vigil in Brussels to remember those asylum seekers and migrants who never reached Europe alive. Catholics, Buddhists and Moslems from around Brussels came together to pay their respects to those who died while trying to access 'fortress' Europe.

The prayer service, "Chemin sans Issue" was a vibrant mix of songs, readings and meditation from religions found in Europe, Africa and Asia. It brought people from different faiths, backgrounds and ages together to reflect on the suffering of those who did not survive the journey to Europe. As one of the congregation remarked, so many refugees die on the way to Europe, motivated by the desire to be free from pain, suffering and persecution. The service was a testament to those who experienced appalling trials in their lives but who will not be forgotten. Their suffering will not go unnoticed.

### ***Tight border security should never be at the expense of human rights.***

Since 1993 at least 8,000 migrants and refugees have died trying to enter 'fortress' Europe; that's equivalent to three people every two days. Strict European border controls are forcing vulnerable asylum seekers and migrants to take increasingly desperate measures to enter Europe. Air and sea patrols, fines for transporters carrying undocumented migrants and immigration officers preventing refugees and migrants from leaving their



Interreligious prayer vigil, Brussels

country of origin, all contribute to a restrictive policy of entry. However, these policies do not discourage the most vulnerable from trying to enter Europe. They just seek more and more dangerous methods of access.

JRS Europe calls on European governments to recognise that this loss of human life is meaningless. Tight border security should never be at the expense of human rights. Governments have an obligation to protect those fleeing persecution and ensure no unnecessary loss of life.

As JRS Europe Director Jan Stuyt warned, "Inhumane state policies currently give border security precedence to human rights protection." He added that, "we hope by raising public awareness others will not suffer the same fate."

## JRS events around Europe

### **Romania**



Picnic in Romania

On Saturday 23 June JRS Romania and the National Refugee Office organised a picnic for refugees and asylum seekers in the Stolnicul Centre. A children's choir from

Bucharest Children's Palace attended the event and sang many songs. Traditional food - African, Arabic and Romanian - was served to the participants. A table tennis championship was organised and all the children received prizes.

### **Italy**

On 21 June, JRS Italy, in cooperation with a group of Italian organisations, held an ecumenical vigil in memory of those migrants and refugees who have died while trying to reach safety in Europe. Other events included a press conference aimed at highlighting the importance of human rights education in Italian schools and, on 28 June, a seminar on refugee health.

### **Malta**

JRS and the Emigrants' Commission organised an inter-faith prayer service in memory of those migrants and refugees who never reached Europe alive. This was held on Tuesday 19th June 2007.

### **Ireland**

JRS Ireland/ Community Links Project organised an Open Forum to mark World Refugee Day. The theme of the Open Forum was education and how refugees can be integrated through education: both formal and non-formal.

# Detention in Europe

## JRS Europe - Detention visitors support group

From the 9 to the 13 May 2007, in Brussels, a training seminar was held for people who visit European detention centres. In attendance were professional social workers, lawyers, volunteers and pastoral workers from Belgium, Croatia, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Macedonia, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK – all part of the European JRS network.

**Marko Petrovic, a detention visitor with JRS Slovenia, reports...**

The seminar began with each country office presenting the detention conditions, and the activities and services offered by JRS in each country. It was interesting to learn how conditions varied from one European country to another – from draughty tents in Malta to 'cheap hotels' in Sweden. There followed presentations of six detention cases, illustrating the plight of detainees, and we discussed what a detention visitor could possibly do to help.

The following day, we were addressed by Stephen Power of JRS International. His talk about the Mission of JRS, in the light of Christian teaching, was very inspiring. Particularly, the story of Fr. Arrupe's imprisonment in Japan in 1941. It was Christmas day but it felt more like Good Friday for him in his cell – alone and without mass. Suddenly, he heard a Christmas carol being sung outside by his own group of Christians. He had taught them this song and now they had come to console their priest, heedless of the danger of being imprisoned themselves!



That afternoon we enjoyed a particularly interesting excursion to Kuregem – a district of Brussels where 99% of the population are foreigners. We were shown round the neighbourhood by Mieke Vrints, who said she used to live next door to the American ambassador and was never invited over for coffee but here in Kuregem she

enjoys no end of hospitality! She pointed out the particularities of the place – the sweatshops, the car dealers etc.

On Friday we listened first to Katrijn Maryns' talk on intercultural differences – how people from other cultures may tell their story in a way which requires more patience and understanding from a European. Afterwards, there followed a series of workshops on trauma and burnout by Maria van Noort. She told us a particularly interesting anecdote about the importance of listening. In her work as a psycho-therapist she once had to listen to a paedophile talk about his past. She managed to suppress her disgust, which she naturally felt as a mother, and listened patiently to him without expressing any judgement. The man later said that it was during this conversation that he first felt remorse for his past deeds.

Stefan Kessler, JRS Germany, provided some guidelines on advocacy and publicity. Visits to detention centres and interviews with detainees can be used as useful advocacy tools but need to be handled in a sensitive and respectful manner.

**Marko Petrovic, JRS Slovenia**

## JRS Ireland - Training for detention visitors

JRS Ireland, through its staff and volunteers, is very active in visiting and offering support to asylum seekers housed in detention centres. Ongoing outreach and psychological support is provided to women detained in Mountjoy's Women's Prison and a follow-up service for women after release is available.

In September 2005, as part of a Europe wide campaign to raise awareness on this issue, JRS Ireland arranged for four Irish MEPs to visit Cloverholl Prison to assess the conditions of detention for persons detained under immigration provisions.

To aid the work of these detention visitors, on 26-27 May 2007, JRS Ireland and the Mercy Refugee Network organised a training course. The objective of the training course was to provide support, information and training for people who visit or work with immigration detainees or who have an interest in immigration-related detention.

Issues discussed included listening skills, cultural awareness, medical problems and the legal framework for detention.

For further information please contact Ruth Diaz-Ufano, Community Links Project Manager, JRS Ireland.

## JRS Slovenia celebrates 5th birthday

On 19 June, the eve of World Refugee Day 2007, JRS Slovenia celebrated its 5<sup>th</sup> birthday.

We started our feast with a thanksgiving mass celebrated by the auxiliary bishop of Ljubljana, Mgr. Anton Jamnik. Around 60 people attended the mass, including many JRS friends, volunteers, supporters and benefactors. Official delegations came from the asylum house (Ljubljana) and from the detention centre (Postojna). Fr. Marijan Šef, the first country director, Fr. Robin Schweiger, the current country director, and Jesuits connected to the work of JRS celebrated with the bishop. In his homily the bishop praised the JRS mission of serving refugees, asylum seekers and people housed in detention centres, while revealing God and his love to the needy. He hoped that we can continue to serve our brothers and sisters with the help of our many supporters.

After the mass we had a presentation of the work undertaken by JRS Slovenia over the past five years. Fr. Peter Rožič presented the early work of JRS in Slovenia, while Fr. Robin and Mrs Milena Frank highlighted the work carried out in the last school year in the asylum home and in the detention centre, with the help of volunteers. They pointed out the importance of computer courses for refugees and asylum seekers provided by JRS. Fr. Robin also spoke about the media work, which raises awareness about refugee issues through radio shows on Radio Ognjišče, a national Catholic radio station, and articles in many newspapers. A father of a refugee

family, who was present with his three children, spoke about their life in their new 'home' country after receiving refugee status in Slovenia and the help he received from our office. At the end a short speech was given by the chief of the detention centre in Postojna and a representative from the asylum home. We finished our feast at the table while sharing our joy and thanks for all that has been achieved in the past five years by JRS in Slovenia.



*5th birthday celebrations*

Many people offered their congratulations and wished us all the best for our future work. JRS was grateful to receive a special letter from Mr. Janez Drnovšek, the President of Slovenia.

**Fr. Robin Schweiger SJ, JRS Slovenia**

## Pope Benedict XVI marks World Refugee Day 2007

"Welcoming refugees and giving them hospitality is for everyone a vital gesture of human solidarity, in order to help them feel less isolated by intolerance and disinterest. For Christians, moreover, it is a concrete way to express evangelical love.

It is my heartfelt wish that these brothers and sisters of ours, who have suffered such harsh trials, may be guaranteed refuge and the recognition of their rights, and I invite the leaders of nations to offer protection to all those who find themselves in such delicate situations of need."

**Pope Benedict XVI, 20 June 2007**

### HOW TO HELP.....HOW TO HELP.....HOW TO HELP.....

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