MAKING OUR DREAM CONTAGIOUS:
CREATING CORNERS OF HOPE & RECONCILIATION
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Turning points in reconciliation

1 February 2014: A friendly encounter with one of the elders in Kashuga camp near Mweso in eastern Congo (see above). The smile reflects neither the harsh reality of the camp nor the overall context of violence and despair. Such ‘complex reality’, in the jargon of the UN and humanitarian agencies, is made up of multiple factors that are all painful realities in North Kivu: the global arms trade; poor governance, corruption and absence of the Congolese state; the struggle over minerals and natural resources and the international interests behind; the internationalization of the conflict; the exploitation of ethnic tensions; the impunity of perpetrators of rape and other human rights abuses. Where do we start to break the vicious circle of violence and despair? It is almost impossible.

But perhaps just a smile can be the beginning: the smile that Sr Regina, Fr Felipe, Francisca, Sr Paola, Prosper, German and their team members evoke when they meet displaced people. They reach out to those who are elderly and vulnerable, as well as women and young people in JRS-supported schools and training centres in Masisi, Mweso and Goma.

Then there is the welcoming smile of host families who belong to the Welcome Network in France; the smile of a little girl consoling her grandmother over the loss of her son in Colombia; the smile on the face of several thousand children in a provisional school in the midst of violent chaos in Bangui, Central African Republic.

A simple smile in a seemingly unchangeable complex reality can be the turning point in recreating right relationships. The elderly woman in Masisi (see cover) smiles after writing the correct word on the blackboard. At her age, she has learned to read and write; surely a turning point in her life. And hopefully, with her wisdom of life and her new-found empowerment, she can tell her sons and grandsons not to fight and despair, but to take up the chalk and learn too. Just as the young men in the carpentry class of Fr Felipe are learning to be professionals and to earn their bread with a good trade. A smile can be a turning point for individuals and communities and, down the road in years to come, could lead to healing and reconciliation.

Peter Balleis SJ | JRS International director
In Masisi, thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs) live in mud huts perched on steep mist-covered mountain sides, with lush forest rising above them. The natural beauty goes unnoticed by most. The people live a precarious hand-to-mouth existence but, for the moment, this place is safer than the villages they have fled. Fr Felipe and Sr Regina, the JRS Masisi team, are familiar faces in the camps, where they coordinate an inspiring project, hand-in-hand with the local staff and students.

Sr Regina from Tanzania is a regular visitor to les vulnérables: the elderly who live alone, the disabled and the sick. As she navigates the camp down the muddy hillside, the faces of her friends light up as she calls them by name. She offers all a hug and some words of friendship. Some show her swollen joints and painful sores. She caresses their feet and hands and reassures them. Just her presence is enough. Fr Felipe, a Chilean Jesuit, jokes that Sr Regina often refers to the people she accompanies as “the venerables”. This is closer to the truth, he says, “because it is they who will be lifted up in the kingdom of God”.

Watching Sr Regina move from house to house, I understand what it means ‘to accompany’ in
its truest form. She goes to visit a six-year-old girl. Three months ago, the little girl was brutally raped by a man in her village. She was severely traumatised and bleeding when her parents found her and carried her immediately to the JRS centre.

Sr Regina went with the child and her parents to hospital that night. Since then, she has supported them daily. With intensive counselling, her parents are gradually coming to terms with what happened. The little girl did not speak for weeks after the attack. Now, she says a few words and radiates sadness, but occasionally Sr Regina manages to tease a smile from her. There is hope that through long-term support, care and ongoing medical checks, the child will experience healing.

This family’s is one of many stories of suffering in a country where brutality is commonplace and respect for human life scarce. Sexual violence is widespread but most crimes go unreported and victims seek no help.

NZULU CAMP, OUTSIDE GOMA

Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. (Matthew 15:30)

Throughout my visit to IDP camps in North Kivu, I am reminded of this biblical image time after time, but nowhere more than on a visit to Nzulu camp, an hour from Goma. As the JRS car arrives at the camp, people approach from all directions. Within 10 minutes, a large crowd surrounds us, bringing their sick children and hungry elders, showing their wounds and scars, pleading for help. Some lean on sticks, others crawl on hands and knees. They bring orphaned babies and toddlers and children with severe disabilities. They tell stories of violence, loss and fleeing to stay alive. Many have been displaced countless times.

Later that day, reflecting on what we have seen, I realise that there were small signs of hope amid the desolation and hardship of the camp. We met a blind...
Eastern DRC is plagued by chronic warfare involving the Congolese army and several rebel and militia groups. It is an extremely complex conflict and seemingly unsolvable, not least due to illegal intervention from neighbouring countries. While ethnicity, or rather the exploitation of ethnicity, plays a significant role in the violence, this is ultimately a political and economic conflict in which politicians, military leaders and others manipulate group identity for their own ends.

Civilians are frequently caught in the crossfire and face severe human rights violations. The UN estimates that there are more than 1.6 million internally displaced people in North and South Kivu, with thousands fleeing new outbursts of violence from one day to the next. They live in miserable conditions in scattered sites, often lacking even the basic necessities. JRS visits some IDP sites to offer support to especially vulnerable people; literacy and livelihood activities for women and youth; and formal education through teacher training, school construction and the supply of materials. Emergency aid also forms part of the JRS response, especially when there are new displacements.

**INFO POINT**

A young Congolese woman called Franciska is a key member of the team. She has a constant smile and greets everyone with a hug. As she leads us to meet the people of Mweso, she jokes that the job of her team is to “be the hands and feet of JRS”. As I watch them work, I am convinced that the teams in Mweso, Masisi and Goma are much more than this: they are the very heart of JRS.
Mohammed was fuming when he walked in the JRS office for our interview. “I don’t want to say anything on camera that will make refugees want to come to France,” he said. He was pacing back and forth and not one of the five of us in the small basement office was going to cross him. His tone and posture suggested we couldn’t sway him so I figured the interview was going to be cancelled for the day.

I had gone to France to find out more about the JRS-run Welcome Network that links refugees like Mohammed to French families or religious congregations who offer them a place to stay. But that day, Mohammed, a Palestinian journalist and writer who recently fled his home in Syria, didn’t want to talk about that because he didn’t feel like he had benefited from anything. He wanted to talk about “the reality of Paris” and he allowed me to record and write as long as it was the truth.

“People don’t have space in their minds for refugees,” he said. “It is not their responsibility to think about my problems; they have their own problems.”

Mohammed looked closed off from the rest of the world under his coat and scarf. His dark eyes and hair barely peaked out from his flat newsboy’s cap. “I don’t want anyone to feel sorry for me. Even if I am living in the streets, I don’t want pity. The family I am staying with now, they are a nice family. They are good, but it is not their responsibility to take on my problems.”

Mohammed said he was born cursed because he was born a refugee, he never lived in Palestine – 10 years in Libya, 16 years in Syria, one year in Lebanon: “I have always been the ‘other.’” In the past, when he faced big problems in life, he would write about it. Long, sarcastic prose helped him express himself. Now... nothing.

“When I came here, I couldn’t write. I didn’t have space in my mind to write. We transform something material into imagery or metaphors on paper. You have...
the reality around you, but your brain can’t work to transform it,” he said.

“Now in France I cannot accept that Syria is on the same planet I am living on. I cannot accept that I see some man on the street going to his work, and someone in Syria is running away from a bomb, rocket, a plane or whatever. Is this the same planet?”

By this time, Mohammed had sat down, but he was frustrated because explaining his situation to people with no experience of war or seeking asylum was like talking to a brick wall. In France, he said, the entire asylum process is in French, and just organising and filing your requests is a full-time job.

What happens tomorrow? “You have to go to the government office at 5am and stay all day. Then you wait for the interview. You have to get a mailing address for yourself. You have to go find a place to stay. You have to get medical assistance for yourself and at the same time you are supposed to learn French. When?”

JRS tries to help; offering French courses, a roof over someone’s head, some local assistance in getting around and organising papers, so what else is needed? A colleague asked Mohammed what turned out to be the last question he would answer. What will it take for you to have some semblance of satisfaction?

“I cannot be 100% satisfied when my family is still there. I guess I want to sleep without fearing what will happen to me tomorrow. I want to have space to write, to learn new things, to have problems like normal people, like arguing with a boss, to hang out with my girlfriend and discuss the colour of her hair or the scent of her perfume, to hear fireworks without remembering the bombings and gunfire... I was talking to my family on Skype a week ago, my mum and my father were in front of me. They were talking but I wasn’t ‘hearing’. I couldn’t…” Mohammed trailed off and looked away from us.

“So sorry, can we stop a little bit? I’ll have a cigarette.” And the interview was over.

Read more about the Welcome Network on the back cover.
Serving amid the chaos

JRS has set up temporary safe spaces for children in a site for internally displaced people (IDPs) in battered Bangui. Teachers have been recruited and 16 sheds for classes and other activities were erected in early February in a camp at the Monastery of Boy Rabe. The activity is set to run at least until the end of April.

Never an icon of stability and good governance, Central African Republic (CAR) has been falling apart since the Seleka rebels marched on Bangui in March 2013. The mainly Muslim rebels ousted President François Bozize and perpetrated widespread human rights abuses, destruction and looting. Their brief hold on power ended when Christian militia, the anti-Balaka, hit back. Civilians have since been caught in the tit-for-tat violence that has raged across the country.

The unrest forced JRS to stop work that had been under way for years in two provinces affected by previous conflicts. Shortly after Bangui was attacked last year, a core team visited IDP sites there and distributed food. In June, despite the massive insecurity, JRS launched a project in 26 schools aimed at getting children to go back to complete the academic year. The draw was school meals, since hunger as well as danger had stopped parents from sending their children to school.

In January this year, JRS started work on the child-friendly spaces in Boy Rabe camp. Although most of the displaced people at Boy Rabe have now left, presumably to return home, some parents are bringing their children back to attend JRS classes. Some 3,200 children have registered but the number of attendees fluctuates due to insecurity and hunger among other reasons.

JRS is also conducting an assessment into education needs in the rapidly changing security and humanitarian scenario. Certainly the crisis in CAR is far from over. As of mid-March, some 600,000 people were internally displaced and up to 300,000 more had escaped to neighbouring countries. Muslims have been displaced in droves, fleeing vicious reprisal attacks by the anti-Balaka. The few Muslims left in Bangui are under the protection of foreign troops – the rest have gone.

Although Bangui is now somewhat calmer, the situation in the city remains volatile. Crime is on the rise and food prices have soared amid shortages and worsening malnutrition. Across the country, the humanitarian response remains inadequate despite efforts on the ground, and attacks on aid agencies have increased. Regional and French peacekeeping troops badly need reinforcements to bring the situation under control. The priority is to restore security but right now, the fate of CAR is hanging in the balance and many think it will likely get worse before it gets any better.
My greatest need is peace! From my perspective as a Catholic, my Church is playing a significant role in this crisis by preaching peace and discouraging people, especially Christians, from taking up arms. The Church has also been preaching forgiveness, reconciliation and religious tolerance. It is however unfortunate that some people, for selfish interests, are giving the conflict religious undertones.

I live and work in Bangui. Recently I witnessed horrible scenes of desolation: people beaten, mutilated by machetes, the pillaging of shops and destruction of homes, women and children running in all directions in search of a safer place. I have been living in permanent fear, locked up at home during the day and always on the alert at night in case of attacks. I put together a self-defence committee in my neighbourhood, gathering Christians and Muslims to tell people to return home and to see that badly intentioned people do not infiltrate the neighbourhood to sow disorder. I try to keep my serenity and not to give way to panic.

I am a high school student, I was displaced to another part of Bangui and the war has been a very traumatising experience. I saw innocent people killed with machetes and guns, houses and belongings burned down and looted and profound misery in IDP sites. I was constantly afraid for my family because we were displaced in different places. We young people realise we are living a very sensitive moment for the future of our country and that politicians are manipulating us. Christians and Muslims used to live in harmony before the infamous date of 24 March. The archbishop and imam of Bangui have been doing everything so that peace may reign and have warned us many times not to allow ourselves to be manipulated by politics and politicians. My hope is that peace and security will return to my country.
Frightening images and reports from CAR show mob rule and blind revenge threatening to take over. Beyond the immediate task facing the international community to restore security, there is an increasingly urgent need for community reconciliation. This is what ordinary people want, if views shared with JRS in Bangui are anything to go by. The people strongly asserted that this was not a religious but a political conflict and here is what they said when asked what they would do if political power was in their hands:

- Call for national reconciliation and forgiveness.
- Organise a national conference for peace and reconciliation.
- Organise an ecumenical service to reconcile Christians and Muslims.
- Put in place strong and independent institutions.
- Disarm all those who do not have the right to be armed.
- Appeal to all politicians and manipulators, national and international, to think of all the innocents who have been killed, of the blood they have on their hands.
- Make sure everybody has a share of the national cake.

Recreating right relationships

In June 2013, as part of an ongoing collaboration between JRS and the Centre for Human Rights and International Justice at Boston College, JRS workers from across the world met with academics at the Metta Karuna Reflection Centre in Siem Reap, Cambodia. The aim of the workshop was to reflect on the role of reconciliation in JRS, and to articulate the underlying principles and elements of our work in this area. Participants spent a week reflecting together on their experiences of reconciled and unreconciled communities in Cambodia, Colombia, Indonesia, Syria, the Philippines and DRC. They also looked at the practical experience of JRS in the light of different reconciliation models and heard what world religions have to say about forgiveness, peace and reconciliation. To get a copy of the manual capturing the insights of the workshop, write to servir@jrs.net.
Asking for my son’s forgiveness

Miguel Humberto Grijalba SJ, JRS Colombia coordinator for reconciliation, & Elías López Pérez SJ, JRS consultant on reconciliation

“How many times I have asked for my son’s forgiveness. How often I have cried with him... and so many other times alone. How wrong I have been! I thought that by taking up arms I was going to leave my son a better country. But now I see: nothing has changed. The same violence and structural injustice has continued through all those years of armed struggle. So many deaths – and for what? And now here I am, in prison, for the crimes I committed during my time as a guerrilla.”

Andrés told us of his suffering during one of our visits to a penal institution on the outskirts of a city in Colombia. We were with a professor from the Javeriana University who was starting a peace course for ex-combatants in the prison – one of many initiatives aimed at healing the wounds of a region considered to be among the most violent in the world: Latin America. This is the region where organised crime – with its violent domination of land, business, the exploitation of natural resources and human trafficking – claims the highest death toll.

Huge gap between rich and poor

Latin America suffers the violence of distributive injustice. Just walk the streets of any large city and you will see evidence in the growing disparity between rich and poor. It is an injustice that kills and forces vulnerable people to move in search of a place where they can feel safe. Andrés took up arms against this injustice, believing one kind of violence could be solved by another. This belief is common in the human heart and currently sustains dozens of armed conflicts worldwide.

We urgently need to disarm the belief that drove Andrés to fight, to demobilise the militarised culture that, almost unknowingly, we adopt in our behaviour and attitudes. Violence has seeped in through the wounds of the human heart and it is time to heal it through forgiveness and reconciliation at personal and political level.

Working with people affected by violence, JRS has adopted reconciliation as a specific mission: “to recreate right relationships with others, with ourselves, with nature and creation that suffer the violence of our materialism, and with God – source of the love that recreates all”. From the moment a victim of violence knocks on our door, reconciliation becomes a strategic and cross-cutting aspect of everything that we do.

Reconciliation Colombia

In Latin America, especially in Colombia, JRS has spent three years learning how to carry out this mission. Now we are applying our experience and discernment to the national situation through the Reconciliation Colombia project. This initiative is promoted by the UN with more than 30 partners and three central protagonists: private enterprise, local and regional government, and social organisations. It is an alliance that fosters dialogue as “a long-term process of rebuilding trust between people, communities, sectors of society and authorities that will successfully restore the fabric of society and build a future through an acknowledgment of the past, and through emotional and psychological recuperation of
victims and perpetrators”.

JRS organises workshops on reconciliation for its teams and for the communities we serve. Our added value is being able to work on healing through the spirituality or “sources of life” that every person or group possesses. This deep and personal level of healing is connected with community, social and political levels of reconciliation in workshops on transitional justice.

TURNING THE PAGE

Transitional justice seeks to turn the page of history, leaving behind past human rights violations to go towards a society at peace. There is the quest for truth, justice, the reparation of wrongs, and reconciliation between conflicting parties. We are not advocating impunity. Rather we try to transform lessons learned by our teams and displaced communities into concrete action that is incorporated into each local project.

The first step towards reconciliation is to listen to the wisdom springing from the pain of the people: “Reconciliation is to leave vengeance and prejudices behind, to join the lost path again, to put aside rancour and open the heart to new possibilities.” Carmen is one of many people who managed to do this. She told us we were seated exactly where they had killed her son – on the veranda of her house. His widow could not bear the pain of his loss and went away, leaving her daughter behind.

“GRANNY, DON’T CRY”

Carmen had to care for her granddaughter despite being struck down by a depression that confined her to bed. She rarely left the darkness of her room, only going out at night to visit the cemetery. There she would cry and cry, kneeling by the grave of her son until just before daybreak. Then she would return to her bed. But her granddaughter would slip into her room and say: “Granny, don’t cry. My daddy is alive in heaven.”

We are not advocating impunity. Rather we try to transform lessons learned by our teams and displaced communities into concrete action that is incorporated into each local project.

This changed Carmen. She was compelled to fight for the life of her granddaughter, because the girl was fighting for hers. She started to pick herself up and, little by little, to recover her life.
Carmen went on to set up an association, Mothers for Life, with the widows and mothers of men who had been killed. They work to help one another overcome their pain and seek reconciliation. Carmen told us her story a few days before the fourth anniversary of her son’s death. She said: “These days around the anniversary are still hard for me so now I go more often to the priest’s house because it lifts my spirits. They killed all his family too.”

We have learned reconciliation is not easy. It is a labour that spans decades – and generations. And it is children, the next generation, like Carmen’s granddaughter, who inspire action. Some say: “Reconciliation is a hope, a new opportunity for us and our children. Reconciliation is the hope that they can enjoy what we have been unable to enjoy.”

**PREVENTIVE RECONCILIATION**

We call the impetus coming from future generations “preventive reconciliation”. Children of victims and perpetrators can play together and be friends today, so that tomorrow they will produce reconciled families and communities. They can work miracles in breaking the cycle of violence.

We asked a mother whose husband had been assassinated whether she could take a few small healing steps if they would help give her children a better future. Although she was clearly reluctant to consider reconciliation, she quickly replied: “A mother will do anything for her children.”

Reconciliation Colombia calls on parents to consider their children and those of others and to ask themselves: Who will take the initiative? Who will dare to ask for forgiveness? This is the kind of reconciliation that Jesus promotes. On the cross, he asks his Father to forgive his executioners. Pope Francis says Jesus acted like a lamb and adds: “What does it mean for us today, to be disciples of Jesus, the Lamb of God? It means replacing malice with innocence, replacing power with love…” What Jesus does might seem paradoxical: to be like a lamb to fight a lion. We cannot fight violence in society unless we embody peace; unless we can be the change we want to see.
You can help break the cycle of violence

DEAR FRIENDS,

You can do something to break the vicious cycles of violence that fuel armed conflicts. Give a donation for the reconciliation projects of JRS Latin America and help women, men and children wounded by the violence to heal and to sow seeds for a peaceful future. This is far from easy but people like Carmen and her granddaughter show us it is possible to reconcile. They deserve all our support.

WOMEN

Learning about reconciliation helps Colombian women in Venezuela to recover from the trauma of being displaced and to integrate in their new community. **10 euro** pays for educational materials for a month of training for one.

CHILDREN

In Panama, cultural and educational activities are crucial to prevent discrimination against refugee children. With **25 euro**, one child can enjoy arts activities for a month.

COMMUNITY LEADERS

Refugees need to have a say in the communities they live in, so that they can prevent discrimination and enjoy their rights. With **50 euro**, a community leader can participate in a community-building workshop in Ecuador.

Go to jrs.net for the latest reports and to jrs.net/donate to make an online donation. In some countries, you may benefit from tax deductions by donating through our partner organisations. Our website tells you more.

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Something has gone wrong with the EU asylum system if one would rather be in a war-torn country than in Europe.

“I feel safer in Afghanistan than in Italy,” said a 26-year-old Afghan man we interviewed in Paris. “I would like France to help me rebuild my life. I feel safe in France. If they transfer me to Italy, I’d rather go back to Afghanistan. There, I was not hungry; I was not poor. I came to France only to feel safe.”

His story is not exceptional. It is one of 257 interviews we and our partners did in nine EU countries, contained in our newest report, *Protection Interrupted*. The report documents the extremely difficult circumstances faced by people who came to Europe with the hope of finding protection but who instead found a rigid system bereft of any human element.

**THE DUBLIN REGULATION**

The report’s central focus of analysis is the Dublin Regulation, a law that is at the heart of the EU asylum system. Adopted in 2003, it determines which EU member state is responsible for examining an individual’s asylum application.

The responsible EU country is often the one to which an asylum seeker first arrived. Usually they enter the EU via the southern and eastern borders, in countries such as Malta, Italy or Greece. Under the Dublin Regulation, people are removed to these countries from the interior of Europe.

Taken at face value, nothing appears wrong with the ‘Dublin system’, as policymakers and NGOs usually call it. It is merely a method to guarantee to asylum seekers that a particular country will assess their application, and to ensure that asylum seekers do not take advantage of the EU’s internal free movement area by lodging their applications in more than one country. And to top it off, the Dublin system is based on common EU asylum rules, meaning that all countries adhere to the same standard.

**GAPS IN PROTECTION**

The problem is that not all EU countries, especially those at the borders, actually have the same protection standards. In Italy, for example, asylum seekers are entitled to housing but in practice there is a shortage. So people are left homeless.

“Italy is the only country where I had to sleep on the streets because I could not find a place of accommodation,” said a 27-year-old Nigerian man who was removed to Italy after trying to lodge an asylum...
claim in Switzerland, Germany and Luxembourg. “In other EU countries I have always found a place to sleep.”

But consolation is not to be found in those EU countries that do offer a place to stay. Such is the case for asylum seekers removed to Malta who are sometimes forced by the lack of options to live in cramped metal containers.

“In the summer it becomes really hot,” a Somali woman told our researcher. “And it’s infested with cockroaches and rats.” She felt particularly vulnerable because the men and women restroom facilities were in the same area. “I am scared to walk there alone.”

Yet even in France, a country that has historically extended safety to many, housing is not available for those who fall under the Dublin Regulation as it is for other asylum seekers. Without a room for the night, people are forced to sleep in train stations and in parks.

Access to decent housing is a fundamental right that has an impact on several other facets of an asylum seeker’s life. Aside from being safe and secure, having a fixed address means that important letters can be delivered by post, or that a lawyer or NGO can visit to provide legal and social support.

**DETECTION MAKES IT WORSE**

Many EU countries, such as Belgium and Germany, detain asylum seekers who are in Dublin procedures. Though not homeless, our research reveals that detained asylum seekers are at a significant disadvantage: they are less likely to be informed about their case or to appeal a negative decision and because they are closed in a detention centre, it is hard for them to meet with a lawyer.

The impact of detention on people within the Dublin system tends to be even more negative than it is for others, such as for those awaiting deportation. They report higher rates of severe depression and anxiety, symptoms that are strongly linked to the deep uncertainty of their situation and to having their access to protection impeded by the Dublin Regulation.

“I am tired of being in a detention centre,” said a 35-year-old Nigerian interviewed in Poland. “I cannot freely decide what I should be doing, what I would eat. I cannot work. I cannot continue the search for my brother.”

Worst of all, as a result of the Dublin Regulation, many people are shuffled around Europe without ever getting the chance to submit an asylum application. This is because the EU country transferring the asylum seeker does not examine his application. On average, those we interviewed had been removed from three to
four EU countries, which meant several months of being passed around before any country took responsibility for examining their asylum claim.

This takes its toll. Take the example of 23-year-old Ahmad, from Afghanistan, who came to the EU in 2009 via Greece and travelled through Macedonia and Serbia before getting to Hungary. He made several attempts to travel to Germany, Austria and Switzerland, but each time he was returned to Hungary. He has spent most of his time in Europe in detention. During one of his last times in Switzerland, Ahmad tried to hang himself; luckily he was saved at the last moment by detention centre guards.

**Protection Foreseen?**

For years the EU’s aspiration to develop a standardised asylum system has failed because member states have been reluctant to seriously modify their national systems. The inability to see this aspiration through is the reason why so many protection gaps persist: for an EU asylum system to be sustainable, there must actually be a common level of protection guaranteed across all countries.

This may change. In June 2013, the EU adopted a set of laws that make up the newly established Common European Asylum System, which includes a revised Dublin Regulation. On paper, the new laws contain more stringent guidelines for EU member states to adhere to, which potentially means better protection for asylum seekers.

For those who are caught up in the Dublin Regulation, these changes could have a positive impact. Member states will have to grant Dublin asylum seekers access to lawyers and will have to better inform them about Dublin procedures. Individuals will have improved access to judicial remedies, meaning they can challenge a removal decision to another EU country before a judge. What’s more, the new Dublin Regulation prohibits governments from detaining asylum seekers solely because they are subject to its procedures.

Despite these changes, remaining at the core of the Dublin Regulation is the central factor that impedes so many asylum seekers from gaining protection: the ability of member states to remove individuals to the country through which they first entered the EU. So long as this element is in place, asylum seekers will continue to find their search for protection in Europe interrupted.
It all started with a Christmas card sent to the International Office two years ago by a good friend of JRS. The card pictured no stable or manger, no Madonna and child. Only the stark and striking image of Jesus crucified and embraced by a loving disciple. How odd, it struck me at first, to celebrate the birth of Jesus with the image of him crucified. And yet, that Christmas card was the only card I pulled aside as we stored away decorations. And to this day the card holds a favoured place in my room here in the Jesuit community in Rome.

In many ways the card reminds me of the real meaning of our Christmas story and our work in JRS. The founder of the Jesuits, St Ignatius, stressed the deeper truth of the birth of Jesus when he asked us to consider how our Lord was born in the greatest poverty and died on the cross for us after so many labours of hunger, thirst, heat and cold, injuries and affronts. Ignatius does not whitewash or romanticize the nativity of Jesus. The wood of his manger is an early announcement of the wood of his cross.

The International Office team received another surprise just before Christmas 2013 when an enormous package – too big to be fruit or candies or cookies – arrived at our Rome office when most of our team had already left for the Christmas holidays. The bulky package was carefully wrapped and labelled as “Fragile”. Although we were tempted to open it immediately, we decided to save the surprise and let the team open it when they returned in early January. When we finally opened it together, we were amazed at the gift inside: it was the very sculpture from which our Christmas card of the crucified Jesus and his disciple had been drawn.

We now saw that, more than simply an embrace of love, the sculpture captured the disciple lifting Jesus down from the cross. In a simple note that came with this gift, our dear friend said she had thought many times of sending this sculpture to us because she felt it captured the reality of our JRS teams who accompany refugees and displaced people, reaching out in love to the crucified people of our world.

This gift, placed on the wall as you enter our office, greets our team and visitors alike, reminding us, in the words of our mission statement, that the work of JRS is inspired by the compassion and love of Jesus for the poor and excluded.
Each night, thousands of people sleep on the streets of Paris. Some are asylum seekers and refugees. JRS France has set up a network of families and religious communities to host them until they can find stable housing.

**How did they do it?**
See the Welcome Network through the eyes of both hosts and refugees in new JRS videos. You'll discover why French families have decided to welcome strangers into their homes and what they have learned and gained from the experience.

**Could you do it too?**
Hospitality is catching: the project began with just three people in Paris in 2009 and today is a 150-strong network in 15 cities all over France. As a community, we can get refugees off the streets, one family at a time.

For more information about the Welcome Network, please go to:

- **WEB**: jrsfrance.org
- **YOUTUBE**: youtube.com/JesuitRefugee
- **FACEBOOK**: JesuitRefugeeService