

MOVING FAMILIES

EDITORIAL

The subject of this newsletter – *Moving Families* – is horribly relevant. News from the Sudan tells of more than one million people displaced by violence. Many more may have to flee their homes or be killed before any solution to the conflict is found. Personal stories from the Congo, from Zambia, from Sudanese refugees in Australia, from refugees from Burma and Vietnam in USA and from Kosovo in UK tell of the brutality of armed soldiers, the fear of imprisonment and possible death and the struggle to re-settle in a new land, often not knowing whether close family members are alive or dead. Many nearby countries have established settlements or compounds to receive these uprooted people who often have to live in desperate conditions. Some developed countries are opening detention centres for those seeking to enter their borders and articles make clear the cost to the families, and particularly the children, of the enforced waiting and uncertainty.

Then there are the migrant workers. Recently, headlines in English newspapers told of the tragedy of the Chinese cockle pickers when 23 migrant workers were

drowned on a dangerous beach. Some of the victims had mobile phones and sent desperate messages to their faraway families as they realised they were trapped by the fast rising tide and there was no escape from the sea and the treacherous sands. As with many migrant workers, they were subject to exploitation by unscrupulous employers. The cockles were sold on at a profit of five times the amount the pickers were paid for their dangerous work. The investigation into their deaths discovered that a group of 40 migrant workers lived in one house. Those who survived were frightened and vulnerable. With their papers held by employers and their legal status in England uncertain, they were isolated by fear, in alien surroundings and cut off from the settled Chinese communities in other parts of the country. This newsletter underlines the theme of the exploitation of migrant workers – women from the Philippines and other parts of Asia seeking employment abroad so they can send money home to their families, migrant workers in China, again with no clear legal protection, who move to the cities in search of a better life. Globalisation has added further impetus to such economic migration, with the huge disparities in wealth and opportunity

between peoples and countries a driving force. With their minimal wage, working in conditions with no regard for their safety, the cockle pickers could still earn far more than was possible in their own country. The housing given to them, appalling by English standards, was not so terrible when compared to the conditions they had left behind.

Much of the abuse of migrant workers goes on behind closed doors and is unknown. In England, the deaths of the cockle pickers made some of it visible. The pictures and reports from areas such as the Sudan also make visible the terrible suffering caused to families displaced by war. We hope that this newsletter adds to the knowledge and understanding of the plight of families forced to move – including those whose way of life is travelling. But such knowledge must lead to action: to prayer, to giving, to learning about migrant workers and refugees and travellers in our communities and to taking action to welcome and support them. It must also lead to action to reduce the shameful gulf between rich and poor. The story of the rich man and the beggar (Luke 16: 19-31) is a clear condemnation of indifference in the face of such injustice.

THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The Democratic Republic of Congo is the third largest country in Africa. Ordinarily, people move from one place to another either in search for jobs, green pasture for cattle grazing or good land for agriculture.

The phenomenon of moving families that is experienced today began long before the war started in 1996 to topple Mobutu's regime. Families moved aimlessly from one place to another to save their lives. You would see them moving with heavy loads of the little properties they could carry; women with heavy loads on the head and babies on the back and small children held by hand walking for long distances. Many died on the way from hunger, thirst, tiredness, and sometimes torture and murder by militiamen or rebels. Many women were widowed and children left orphans.

The worst was that men and women were severely torched by soldiers. Women and young girls were raped, sometimes in the presence of their husbands and parents. In some cases fathers were forced, at gunpoint, to sleep with their daughters.

Women were sometimes buried alive. Because of this, thousands of people crossed borders into neighbouring countries for their safety. But there also life was not good. They often lacked shelter, food and sanitary help.

In 2001, there was another mass movement of people caused by tribal wars. This made things worse. There was no time to wait. There was no way to move as a family, for each member ran for safety from where the war found them. Children were found in schools or playing with friends away from their homes. It often happened that members of a family took different directions and it could take a long time before parents knew where the children were.

Many people have run to neighbouring countries like Rwanda and Uganda as refugees, living by God's grace. Some have joined United Nations' camps for refugees and are doing well, but others who are on their own are really suffering.

Family movement was also caused by the

fighting of Rwandan and Ugandan soldiers in the town of Kisangani. This is a city in the equatorial forest, cut off because all the roads are almost non-existent. Vehicles were scarce, most of them having been looted or broken down. People could only enter the forest or cross the River Congo by hollowed canoes to take refuge on small islands in the river. In all cases, families have suffered a lot: children and elders suffered from malnutrition; widows and orphans increased in number; those who are HIV positive increased due to endless rapes; and still those displaced have to move again to their former places if peace is established. These movements have caused much suffering to families as many have lost property and others lost lives especially while crossing Lake Albert which separates Congo and Uganda.

It would be unfair to talk about the fate of others, without mentioning something about myself and my family. Since I was elected to be the Mothers' Union trainer in 1994, we had been living in Bunia. The Anglican Church's provincial office and the Anglican theological college, in which my husband worked as a chaplain and lecturer, were in Bunia. The work was going on well. As a trainer, I was able to initiate and conduct seminars in Boga, Butembo and Kisangani. More seminars and visits were planned. But in May 2003, we were forced to quit Bunia and seek refuge elsewhere. My children and I were lucky to get help from Mary Sumner House. We were flown into Kampala, Uganda where we live in a small house. Our house in Bunia was severely plundered: no doors, windows, furniture, other domestic essentials, books and electrical wiring were spared. Our office in Bunia was also looted. Life as a refugee has greatly hampered the exercise of my duties as the Congo Provincial Mothers' Union Worker and Trainer. It is expensive for us to live in Uganda. We hope to go back to Congo shortly. We need your prayers.

Lastly, thanks be to God for the work of the Mothers' Union throughout the world for they are doing their level best to counsel and help those traumatised by violence. At Butembo in North-Kivu, MU is catering for orphans who got separated from their parents due to the war. In total we have 160 children, of whom three have been diagnosed HIV positive. One child died, 90 of them are in school. But it is hard to find volunteers willing to pay their fees.

ZAMBIA

Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, and is now making a living for himself by running a small shop from a rented container near the city centre. With only 480,000 people in formal employment in a country of nine million people, there is no chance of his being employed as a foreigner. From his small shop he can earn in a month enough to pay his rent, enjoy a reasonable diet, and keep his children in school. He has joined the local Roman Catholic small Christian community where he has been made to feel welcome, his children sing in the church choir, and he enjoys being part of a Burundian drumming group. The Burundian refugees in Lusaka are well organised, unlike in the Meheba Settlement, and students and adults meet in groups from time to time to discuss common concerns and their hopes for the future.

Numbers of Burundians families, together with refugees from the DR Congo and Rwanda, have been resettled in Canada and the United States, but Egide has not applied for resettlement, as he still hopes to get news of his wife. His main problem is that he has no work permit necessary for a refugee to work in Lusaka. Zambia has in the past welcomed urban refugees, but with its deteriorating economy, now puts severe restrictions on them by demanding they invest substantially in the Zambian economy to qualify for a work permit, which for Egide is quite impossible. The consequence is he can be arrested at any time and imprisoned pending forced return to Meheba. Like his fellow refugees in Lusaka, Egide is prepared to take the risk of keeping on working.

He still hopes that he may find his wife. In the meantime his main concern is his three children. As their mother tongue is Kirundi and second language French, they are having to learn English, and study in a foreign language, but are doing well in school with the extra lessons he gives them at home. Margarite is 16 and Egide worries about her future. He is happy that all three children have lessons on HIV/AIDS in school, especially as the Lusaka HIV infection rate is high. Egide will try to ensure that his children feel secure at home even if they know they will always be regarded as refugees, and never be able to assimilate into Zambia as citizens. He is glad still to be alive, and along with other refugees from the Great Lakes region, waits for the time when he and his family may return home in peace.

Egide, his wife Felicite and three children were forced to leave their village in the eastern region of Burundi, in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa, in June 1997 because of continued skirmishes between rebel Hutu insurgents and the Burundian Tutsi-dominated army. They took with them only three small bags containing a few clothes, and some US dollars. After some days trekking through the forests of the Democratic Republic of Congo they came across a larger group of refugees, but tragically were attacked by some marauding militia, and in the panic that followed Egide, who was then with the children, was separated from Felicite who has not been heard of since.

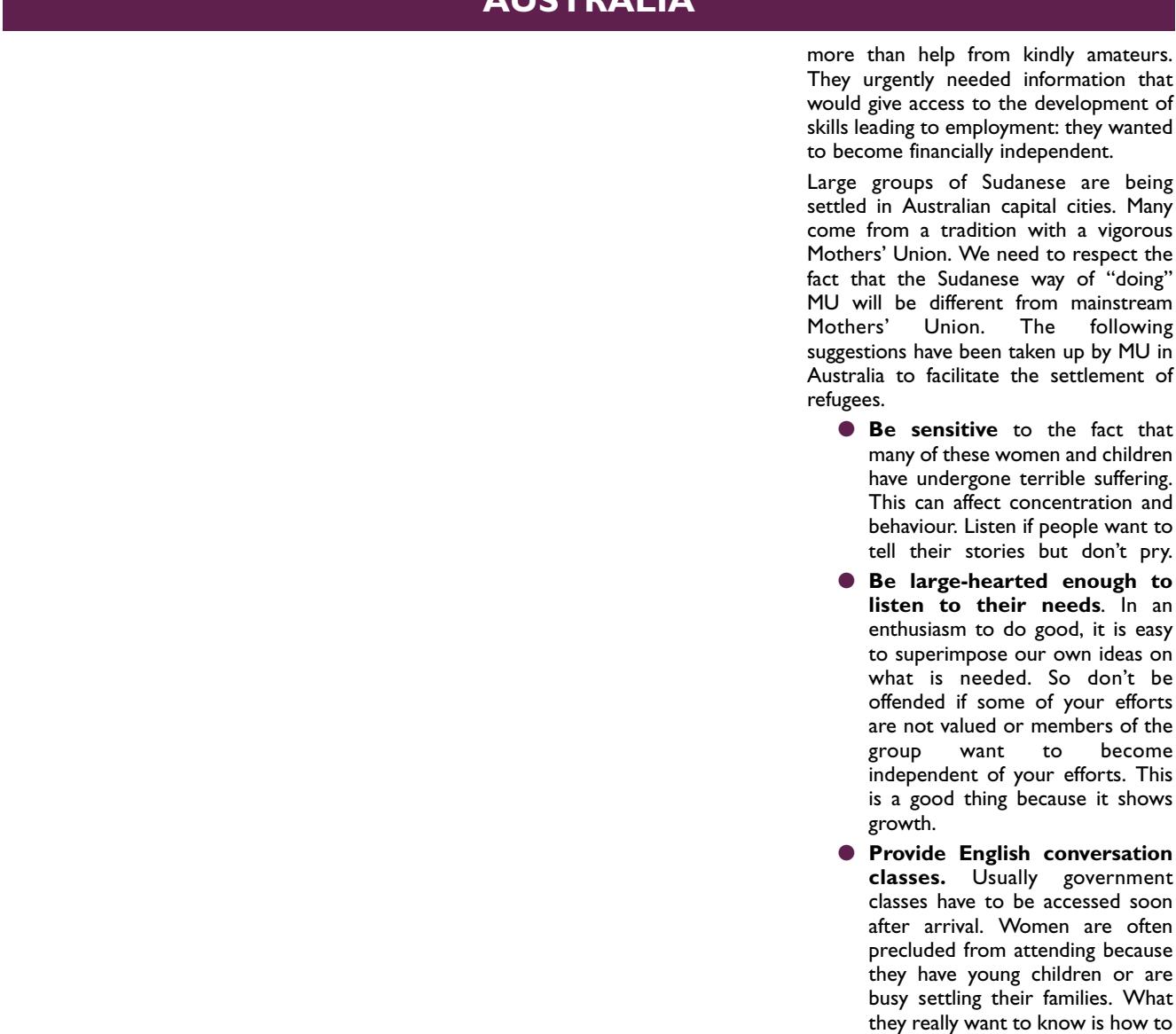
The father and three children were able with the help of friendly villagers to find their way to Lake Tanganyika, from there to Zambia, and eventually to arrive in the large refugee settlement of Meheba. Zambia, like other Southern African countries, has chosen rural refugee settlements as the solution to accommodating large numbers of

refugees. The rural settlements are isolated from the main towns, easy to control, and NGOs like the Lutheran World Federation and Care International provide the needed infrastructure of roads, boreholes, schools and clinics. Refugees are expected to work as subsistence farmers, and after two years to be able to feed themselves and their families.

But for Egide, this was a hardship. By profession he is a secondary school teacher, and he found hoeing the soil day by day excessively frustrating. It did not bring in enough income to help his children to have adequate food, or to provide school requirements and health needs in a malaria-prone area. He had made a house from branches and grass, but it leaked badly in the rainy season, and had to be renewed from time to time. Above all, in that remote place he had little news of the outside world, and had no means of finding out if Felicite was still alive.

After a year of subsistence farming, Egide moved again with his three children to

AUSTRALIA



A Story of Three Women

I met three stately women, one elderly, one middle-aged and one quite young as they made their way, in their brightly hued national dress, through the streets of Melbourne. The peak hour commuters hardly glanced at them. Multicultural Australia has changed much in the last thirty years. We were all heading for the Mothers' Union office to discuss ways in which MU gatherings for Sudanese women could facilitate their settling into Australia.

Each woman told her story with a different perspective on life in Australia. The elderly woman, without self-pity or dramatisation, told of the loss of her husband in the war in Sudan, of the tragic loss of other family members and her own bullet wounds. She was grateful to be safe from war in Australia but grieved for her country and loved ones. Nevertheless she longed to help those settling in Australia.

Her daughter, also, was well educated and

perceptive about Australian culture. Her story concerned the plight of refugee families in Melbourne. Since the majority of the refugees are women, whose husbands are dead or missing, they tend to live together in two-family households to provide mutual support. If they are from a rural background they are not used to handling money and quickly find themselves in financial difficulties living in a large city. Expensive phone bills result from seeking news of families left behind. The young boys do not have males for role models or to discipline them and some get into serious trouble. Everything from the landscape to the food and even the Church is alien.

The third and youngest of the trio sat quietly, listening carefully throughout the proceedings, then spoke passionately. She was grateful for those few dedicated Australian MU volunteers who had set up sewing and conversation classes for the Sudanese MU in a suburban parish. But the younger women were looking for

more than help from kindly amateurs. They urgently needed information that would give access to the development of skills leading to employment: they wanted to become financially independent.

Large groups of Sudanese are being settled in Australian capital cities. Many come from a tradition with a vigorous Mothers' Union. We need to respect the fact that the Sudanese way of "doing" MU will be different from mainstream Mothers' Union. The following suggestions have been taken up by MU in Australia to facilitate the settlement of refugees.

- **Be sensitive** to the fact that many of these women and children have undergone terrible suffering. This can affect concentration and behaviour. Listen if people want to tell their stories but don't pry.
- **Be large-hearted enough to listen to their needs.** In an enthusiasm to do good, it is easy to superimpose our own ideas on what is needed. So don't be offended if some of your efforts are not valued or members of the group want to become independent of your efforts. This is a good thing because it shows growth.
- **Provide English conversation classes.** Usually government classes have to be accessed soon after arrival. Women are often precluded from attending because they have young children or are busy settling their families. What they really want to know is how to function in Australia. How do you tell the difference between junk mail and bills? How do you tell a doctor what is wrong with your child? Why are schools always sending home letters? Why do we have electronic sewing machines when treadle machines are so much easier to repair? These are just a few of the puzzles confronting newcomers.
- **Keep in touch by encouraging, strengthening and supporting them in their family life.** We may be surprised to find that it is not a one-way street of giving and that mainstream MU groups will learn something in return about the reality of Christ's love in the face of suffering.

Baxter Detention Centre

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.
Hebrews 13: 1-2

I, with other members of MU have been privileged to visit Baxter, a detention centre on the outskirts of Port Augusta South Australia and have got to know some of the refugees and their families.

The security for a visit is very stringent. Everything you take in (cake, etc) is x-rayed, you empty your pockets and leave everything in a locker. Having had your identity checked, you walk through a system like the airport, with a wrist band and infra-red stamp on your hand. You are then escorted to the visitors' centre by an officer, and await your visitor. The children go through this procedure each day to go to school.

There are many nationalities at Baxter: refugees from Iraq, Iran, China, Pakistan, Syria, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Vietnam,

Africa. They live in compounds which are built in such a way that they can only see the sky. It is the most demoralising place to visit. Some of the children have been there over three years and know no other life.

Many babies have been born at the Port Augusta Hospital, the few days of freedom soon end with their return to Baxter. The children grow so quickly, and the parents have no photos of their children at the different stages of their lives, as cameras are not allowed at Baxter. Even when released, these families will have great gaps in their lives. Raising teenage children in these circumstances is very difficult.

It is a great joy to join with the ministry team for the Church services. Various denominations take it in turns to take the services. During the break between services, we share cake and tea, and listen to the refugees' sad stories of why they escaped their homeland.

The children going into school speak perfect English and are being put into higher classes, as they learn so quickly. Boredom and depression are two of the biggest problems at Baxter. The women

love to knit, and crochet. MU members have helped in providing many things, such as jigsaw puzzles for the detainees.

Please pray for these families, that a solution will soon be found, and those who can stay will be released into the community.

Migrant and Refugee Network

Due to lack of funding, this Network has not met in recent years. The Chair, Archbishop Ian George of Adelaide, attended the fifth Global Conference on Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees at the Vatican in October 2003. It is clear that a greater level of cooperation between the two communions would be possible. Archbishop George is continuing with the Network for another year and, in retirement, plans to visit the key areas of the Communion where refugee issues are central for Anglicans, in the hope of coordinating Communion concern and cooperation better in the future.

USA

The most tragic consequence of the forcible displacement of millions of persons around the world is the loss of home and all that this embodies. Refugees lose everything. Their movement is violent, involuntary, and filled with painful uncertainty. But with the loss of one's home, refugees lose connectedness to all that nourishes and sustains them. Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM) is the refugee and immigration assistance arm of the Episcopal Church USA. With generous help from parishes in the 26 dioceses in which it operates, EMM moves hundreds of refugees each year from a place of despair to a place of hope. And as church sponsors reach out to refugees in friendship, they find their lives transformed by strangers who became their friends.

Of the over 12 million refugees in the world, only a small number are given a chance for resettlement. Yet the resettlement experience of a few sends the powerful message that new beginnings can emerge from the devastating experience of being a refugee.

A consequence of the tragic events of September 11th, 2001 was a significant downturn in the number of refugees moving to the United States. While the doors have opened a bit, the Episcopal Church – committed to the transforming ministry of resettlement – adds its voice to that of the larger American faith

community in urging the U.S. government to return to a more generous time when doors were opened widely to persecuted persons. This stance reflects both the urgent need to rescue refugees and the belief that church communities are capable of moving families to safety and recovery and, in fact, seek the spiritual enrichment which this ministry offers.

The sharing of journeys is a compelling way to allow the experiences of displaced refugee families to become a part of our understanding of what it means to be

uprooted. These journeys also relay accounts of incredible hospitality and transformation. The stories reflect the diversity of ethnicities and traditions embraced by the resettlement programme. They also offer a glimpse of the different types of parish experiences that sustain this ministry and its impact on both guest and host.

Sharing a family's journey

The Episcopal Cathedral of Saint James in South Bend, Indiana has always been committed to social causes. We decided to take on another challenging project

when we agreed to sponsor a refugee family from Liberia. The Zeon family arrived on a cold and foggy day early last December. We realised how great their needs were when we saw that their luggage consisted of a small duffel bag for the four of them.

We have experienced the joys of getting to know people from a culture very different from our own. We have tasted new, spicy foods; we have listened to the cadences of an English dialect we cannot understand; and we have learned about their life on the farm which they had to abandon. We have also had the fun of introducing them to new experiences in the U.S.

The congregation has been very generous in responding to a lot of the Zeons' material and financial needs. Of course, the challenges faced by our congregation pale in comparison to the challenges faced by the Zeons. The disruption of war has resulted in a number of health and nutrition problems for them.

The congregation of St. James would encourage any church to prayerfully consider sponsoring a refugee family. Scripture is full of admonitions to provide for those who are in need, especially the stranger. Despite the many challenges, we have been blessed by the opportunity to serve as the hands and feet of Christ to this family in our community.

Rhonda Culbertson, a member of St James Cathedral, South Bend, Indiana.

One family, many roads

Around the world, there are so many different kinds of refugees who, not of their own choice and whether they like it or not, are living in many different countries. I am one of those refugees who left my beloved country, family and friends to seek shelter for my life because of my political beliefs.

I left Burma in 1996 and stayed in New Delhi for five years under a UNHCR mandate. While I was living in India, I met my wife, Biak Chin Sung, and we married there.

My wife came to New Bern, North Carolina, on February 13, 2001 and Interfaith Refugee Ministry took care of her and provided whatever she needed. They also helped her to fill out family reunification petition forms and send them to the the U.S. immigration authorities office. Biak was pregnant when she came to the United States and our petition for reunification became an urgent case because she had no way to support herself when the baby was born.

While I was waiting for a letter from the Embassy, the unfortunate news about the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks broke and all my hopes became a nightmare. The U.S. Embassy in New

Delhi was closed and all cases were stopped. I could not even contact the U.S. immigration authorities office for a while and then I learned that all the cases they held were to be inspected carefully from the beginning because of the terrorist alert and would then be processed.

As the time for my wife giving birth was coming closer, I could do nothing except pray to God, as I was a long distance away. In the right time, God provided more friends and supporters for my wife and she gave birth to a lovely son called Benjamin. God continued to bless our family and I was able to go to the U.S. on February 8, 2002, and be reunited with my wife and new baby. It was so great and God had done remarkable things for our lives.

Now we are blessed and saved to stay in the United States and enjoy new food, a new culture, and more. It is a real freedom of life that we never experienced before. I believe that God will bless those who help the needy.

Van Bawi Ven.

"Jesus came from Vietnam"

Little did Janet Dawson of All Saints Church in Atlanta, Georgia know that volunteering to teach English to a Vietnamese family would dramatically alter her.

Janet was introduced to Quy and Tuyet Dang, along with their children, Ngoc, Hoang and Tan through the All Saints' Refugee Ministries tutoring programme.

Her first visit in their bare apartment behind the Federal Penitentiary was eye opening. They had mattresses on the floor and few pieces of furniture. "They had nothing," Janet recalled.

Janet began visiting the family on a regular basis and soon began planning small outings with Ngoc, Huang and Tan. "I can't change the circumstances, but I can show them what's possible," she recalls thinking. The stories flow from her as they would from a proud mother or aunt. This past summer they loaded up the Dangs' van and drove to Ottawa. Last year Janet and Ngoc went on a jaunt to New York City. Her stories also point to the growth Janet has seen within herself.

A key moment in their relationship came shortly before the death of Janet's mother during a visit she arranged with the Dang family. "Quy took my mother by the hand and he and his wife and children were so kind to her," recalls Janet. "So it's me who's had lots of support from the Dangs", says Janet. When articulating the depth of her experience with the Dang family, she tells people that "Jesus came from Vietnam."

Robin Harp, Co-ordinator of Refugee Ministries, All Saints Church, Atlanta, Georgia.

UNITED KINGDOM

Bradford Diocese

The Mothers' Union in the Bradford Diocese has been actively involved with asylum seekers and refugees since the Spring of 2001. (An asylum seeker is someone who has sought legal protection under the UN Convention relating to refugees in another country against persecution in their homeland. If their application is granted they are allowed to stay in the new country indefinitely.) Bradford is one of the areas that asylum seekers and refugees come to because of 'surplus housing' and there are between 2,000 and 4,000 people with different immigration status in the area.

The Mothers' Union saw that there was a need to hold out the hand of friendship to these people "strangers in a foreign land", and after much thought and prayer we started a 'drop-in centre' in one of our Church buildings near to the city centre. With the help of Health Visitors we invited asylum seekers/refugees to the centre and offered them support and a listening ear. Families and others who are alone, from many countries, have come to the centre, and friendships have been built between people of different cultures and faiths. Often it has taken a long time for the refugees to feel comfortable and to be able to share their problems, as they have arrived in Bradford with feelings of insecurity, isolation, fear and loneliness. Many of them have left their families behind and tell harrowing stories of the oppression and persecution that they have suffered. They wonder if they will ever be able to return to the country of their birth and even whether they will see their families again.

We have met Christians from the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Sudan, Zimbabwe and other African Countries; people from Eastern Europe both Muslim and Christian and many others, also Muslims, from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. They desperately want to be accepted into our society and are keen to learn English so that, if their application for asylum is granted, they can seek work and not be dependent on the state. Many of them left highly qualified jobs in their own countries and want to use their skills here in England.

Asylum seekers are provided with a house and a small allowance while they are waiting for their application for refugee status to be dealt with. For various reasons the Government support system sometimes breaks down and Mothers' Union has been able to give the asylum seekers the love and support they need. Practical help with everyday items of clothing, bedding and equipment has been possible because of the generosity of the many Mothers' Union members

and Church families who are sympathetic to our work throughout the Bradford Diocese.

We remember what the Lord expects of us "*To do what is just, to show constant love, and to walk humbly with God,*" Micah Chapter 6 v 8."

to Germany. (They were sent there because that was where they made their original application for asylum in 1991.) Gesim was put in detention, but his wife and the children were allowed to stay in an apartment. Five weeks later, Gesim was released and they were flown back to Kosovo/a.

Gesim had originally gone to Germany because his face was on a wanted poster in Kosovo/a, just for joining a demonstration. When he found out that the Serbs were going to raid his apartment, he fled. His family followed a few months later. But Germany did not grant them asylum. Instead they started sending Kosovars back to Serbia and Kosovo/a just as Milosovic started his murderous purge against Kosovar Albanians. Many Kosovars were imprisoned, or worse, as soon as they got off the plane.

"I couldn't let them send me and my family back to almost certain death, so we got on a lorry and went to England and applied there."

Deportation

The Church Mission Society (CMS) works alongside families seeking asylum in Britain. Here is the story of what happened to one family who were not allowed to stay. (Names have been changed.)

"15 immigration officers turned up at 8 o'clock on a Sunday morning and told us we had 20 minutes to pack – one bag each."

The Burgja family – parents and three children – live in Kosovo/a. They were

deported from Folkestone, UK in September 2002 after living in England as asylum seekers for five years.

In their 20 minutes, the family made some hurried phone calls to friends in Folkestone to arrange dropping off the key so that their belongings could eventually follow them home. Besim, aged 12, quickly packed his computer games but they had to be left behind. His sister ran upstairs pursued by a woman police officer.

"I slammed the door and shouted to her to go away so I could have a few minutes to myself to pack my things. It was horrible."

The family were taken to the Removal Centre in Dover and placed in detention for five days in dormitories: the mother and children in one; the father, Gesim in another.

"We had to ask for food and drink. Besim got left out once – he actually had to beg for a glass of water."

After five days in Dover, they were flown

The German Government then denied threatening to send them home, so the British Government didn't grant them asylum either, and kept them waiting for a decision for five years.

"Every day, for five years, every day we waited for a letter, a phone call. We had just bought Besim his uniform for secondary school. He was really looking forward to going to a new school and making new friends."

But Besim never made it to the new school, and now the family must try and make a new life in Kosovo/a. They have scraped together enough to build a house but Gesim's wage as a translator in the local prison is hardly enough to buy food, let alone everything else needed to rebuild a life in a country recovering from the horrors of war and ethnic cleansing.

ECONOMIC MIGRATION

CHINA

"To get rich is glorious" said Deng Xiaoping, a former leader of China. Since then, China has been pursuing this "glory", implementing economic reforms which have led to unparalleled development and a huge rise in the standard of living for many.

But for most people in China, getting rich is not an option yet. Most of China's huge 1.3 billion population lives in remote rural areas in central and western China which have not yet felt any of the benefits of economic reform enjoyed by the more affluent eastern coastal areas of the country. These people, largely cut off from the rest of the country and still trying to eke out a subsistence existence for themselves from the land, have heard of the great things happening in China's big cities and, where possible, they want a piece of this action.

It is estimated that there are now 100 million migrant workers in China, people who have left the countryside and headed for the cities in search of higher incomes and a better life for themselves. Some 200 million more rural dwellers are said to be "ready to migrate" if the opportunity presents itself. This means a huge body of people on the move, more than the total population of many countries.

Unfortunately, China's migrants from the countryside arrive in the big cities and find their streets anything but paved with gold. Lacking education and skills, most of them end up performing menial tasks in the construction industry or factories, or as street sweepers and garbage collectors. These jobs are popularly characterised as the "Three D's – Dirty, Derogatory and Dangerous", work which city dwellers don't want to touch. Lacking legal registration in the cities (all Chinese people are registered to the place they come from), migrant

workers are often forced to labour without any formal legal contract, often resulting in them receiving only a fraction of the meagre wages owed to them, as well as no legal recourse should they suffer accidents at work. Migrant workers in China arrive in the cities feeling somewhat overwhelmed by the bright lights and fast pace. They often cannot speak standard Chinese and tend to huddle together in shanty towns made up of communities all originating from the same areas of China.

Due to their unregistered status in the cities, migrant workers have no access to education or medical care for their children, so schools for migrant workers' children have now been established in some areas by private individuals and are being subsidised by groups like the Amity Foundation (the organisation I work for). Amity is also supporting legal aid initiatives to offer migrant workers a measure of justice when they suffer industrial accidents or are denied the pay due to them by their employers. China's current economic development is being built largely on the sweat and toil of her migrant workers, and such initiatives attempt to recognise this fact and restore a measure of dignity and human worth to such workers.

Editorial Note: Amity was founded in 1985 by leading Chinese Christians and is a Chinese-run Non-Governmental Organisation based in Nanjing China and with an office in Hong Kong.

PHILLIPINES

Today, the Philippines has the highest rate of unemployment in Asia at 12.2%. For those with jobs, the rising costs of basic goods and services make it difficult for many to meet even the most basic needs. Due to this economic crisis, we are now looking at the worst "brain drain" that the country ever experienced. Professionals like teachers, nurses and doctors are pressed to leave their jobs and take jobs below their credentials.

There is now an increasing and continuing exodus of people leaving the country to work as domestic helpers, construction workers, entertainers and health care providers in different parts of the world. At present an average of 2,400 Filipinos leave the country every day to work abroad – 70% of them are women.

How has this overseas migration affected Filipino families?

Overseas migration physically separated family members from one another. This separation has brought about painful social and psychological consequences and continues to do so.

Obviously, some families have benefited from the increase in income from remittances of family members working overseas. However, the basic question is how was the income spent? While there are quite a number of success stories where families were able to use the income to send their children to school, build decent homes and establish income-generating projects, there are equally the same number of families that misused the hard earned remittances of their loved ones working overseas on antisocial and consumerist lifestyles.

The incidence of broken families among overseas migrant workers is rising. One of the causes of family brokenness is infidelity. Infidelities by any one of the spouses usually exact their worst toll on the children. We have heard of girls who had been sexually exploited by the partners of their mothers while their fathers are away working overseas. In some cases, even with increased family income from foreign remittances, children of migrant workers may still not be able to go to school because the remaining parent spends the money gambling or supporting second families.

Among children, increased income and goods that their parents send them from overseas have contributed to the development of consumerist values. A glaring example of this consumerist value is that of a high school student who told her mother to go back to work as a domestic helper in Hong Kong so that she could buy an expensive mobile phone. Cases of teenage pregnancies and drug addiction are

also becoming common among children of migrant workers. The list goes on but these are just some of the common social problems that arise as a result of the migration phenomenon.

On the other hand, there are families who have gone from poor to poorest of the poor as a result of their desire to look for greener pastures overseas. Recruitment agencies at home charge exorbitant placement fees so that applicants are forced to borrow money at high interest or even sell agricultural lands and farm animals just to pay the fees required by recruitment agencies. Worse, there is also a

proliferation of fake/unlicensed recruitment agencies that prey on unsuspecting and desperate applicants. The suffering does not end here. When migrant workers finally go overseas, some of them suffer exploitation ranging from low and delayed salaries to outright non-payment and physical abuse including sexual abuse by employers especially on women migrant workers.

Migration for overseas employment is going to be a way of life among a lot of Filipinos because of the present Government's policy of labour export. Instead of solving the problem of unemployment locally, this policy encourages Filipinos to seek foreign

employment. The increasing amount of remittances from overseas Filipino workers has helped alleviate the country's balance deficit payments and helped boost the country's Gross National Product (GNP). Unfortunately, the Government has yet to institute protection and welfare services for migrant Filipino workers and their families.

HONG KONG

women) are working under a six-month contract.

Aside from contractual labour, companies also engage in subcontracting which intensifies the exploitation of the home workers because they are paid on a piece-rate basis. Privatisation is also rampant in Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Philippines.

In Nepal, 88% of the population live in rural areas where they have no access to basic services such as health, employment and education. As a wage earner, women's participation is only 17.38 % while the literacy rate stands only at 34%. Meanwhile, workers in Sri Lanka, especially in Free Trade Zones where women usually work, are not even allowed to form unions.

Under these extreme conditions, poor women are forced to flee from their country with dreams of a better livelihood and better working conditions abroad.

Maids in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, most of the migrant workers are women who work as domestic helpers. Most of them come from the poor nations of Asia. Lured by the glittering lights of Hong Kong and the promise of a better life, these women leave their families to work abroad. Even if they come from different countries, women migrants – who are mostly peasants and workers – have one thing in common: unbearable economic hardship that has pushed them hard to seek "greener pastures" away from their homeland.

"Here in Hong Kong, because of my work experience as a janitress, household chores are very easy for me. What I didn't expect was the terrible loneliness that engulfed me."

According to the Hong Kong Immigration Department, there are 216,890 foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong. The breakdown is as follows: 124,720 Filipinos; 83,070 Indonesians; 5,330 Thais, and 3,770 from other nationalities (as of April 2004). 98% of these are women who work as live-in maids on a two-year contract. They work an average of 16 hours a day, six days a week and are always on call for 24 hours.

Cases of abuse and exploitation abound in Hong Kong. These range from physical or

"Being a migrant is very hard because I am not in my own country. Now I am working with my employer but I always worry about tomorrow. I know that being a domestic helper is not a stable job. It's the same if I go back to the Philippines because I know that there's no job opportunity. In the first place, that's why I am here, all because of my children." (Miguela Ramos, 33)

Women migrants share an oppressed and exploited lot. I myself am a woman. I myself am a migrant.

Working with distressed women migrants for almost 17 years now, I have been a witness to the brutality of economic displacement of women from poor countries: women who are forced to take the cudgels of bringing up their families because she or her husband could not find a decent job; women who are forced to live in a foreign land and speak a foreign tongue because the wages they receive back home cannot even afford the basic necessities and education of their children; women who are mothers and sisters who care for the needs of a foreign family and maintain their houses while their own houses remain in shambles and their families are broken up; women who become part of the global sale of

labour of debt-ridden countries perennially in crisis.

Women of developing countries in Asia like the Philippines, Nepal, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand suffer poverty and the travails of living in a neo-colonial state. Women are one of the most vulnerable groups in these countries. They are traditionally the last to be hired and the first to be fired. They are commonly found in labour-intensive industries such as garment and semi-conductor companies, working under inhuman conditions or subjected to discriminatory working policies.

The 1997 financial crisis has resulted in the closure of tens of thousands of establishments, accompanied by retrenchments and mass layoffs. In the Philippines alone, more than 2,000 establishments closed shop within the first 10 months of 1998. Severely affected were women in manufacturing, wholesale and retail trades, and community, social and personal services. Contractualisation of labour is also rampant in these countries as exemplified by giant malls like Shoe Mart in the Philippines where almost 80% of workers (mostly

volunteers – they themselves are victims of maltreatment – for the shelter. The FBH also counts among its members non residents or former clients of the shelter. It is one of the active member organisations of the United Filipinos in Hong Kong.

Meanwhile, the Indonesian residents and their friends have recently formed the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers (AIMW) to answer the burning issues of the Indonesian migrants and have actively assisted Indonesian residents of Bethune House with their cases. It has also actively united with other Asian migrant organisations in various activities for the migrants.

Thais, Sri Lankans, Indians and Nepali migrants also have their own respective organisation and are also actively serving their compatriots.

We are Women, We are Migrants

"I cried many times because I was so frightened of my employer. At the same time, I missed my family terribly, especially my children. Back home I cannot even imagine that I will be forced to work even if I am sick. I really wanted to terminate my contract even during the first month of working here but I really cannot do that because I have so many debts in the Philippines." (Luvelyn Valenzuela, 27, Filipina)

Countless stories about the lives of migrants have been told. Women migrants shall never tire of telling them again and again, for the condition of migrants in general and migrant women in particular have not changed, and have in fact worsened. The basic reason for leaving our beloved countries remains the same. We shall continue to raise our voice as women, as migrants, as humans.

Based on an article first published as "In Bethune House – Voices and Images of Women Migrant Workers," 2003

sexual abuse, substandard living and working conditions, non-provision of days-off, underpayment, illegal work and so on.

Judging from the daily average number of clients at the Bethune House, it can be gleaned that the foreign domestic helpers are treated badly in Hong Kong. Bethune House, on average, houses 30 distressed Asian women migrants per day despite its capacity of a maximum of 20 people only. Bethune House has served as the melting pot of experiences of women migrants of different nationalities who usually have common issues and cases.

Organising for Empowerment

First time residents of Bethune House usually come to the shelter down-trodden,

disheartened, and feeling hopeless. But a lot of them leave the shelter with a stronger conviction and with tremendous belief in the capacity of migrant workers to organise themselves and take up the cause of migrant workers. The experiences of Filipinos and Indonesian migrant workers who are residents of Bethune House are shining examples of this. For the Filipino residents, most of them are members of the Friend of Bethune House (FBH-HK). The FBH was established in 1994 by former and present Filipino residents of Bethune House. Through the years, it was able to make its mark as an active organisation working for the defence of migrant workers' rights and wellbeing. It has also produced

TRAVELLING FAMILIES

A story of modern nomads

When we use the word nomad, we could be forgiven for thinking immediately of tents in the desert, biblical style clothing and grazing flocks. But for the Wilts and Dorset Gypsy and Traveller group, the nomadic lifestyle of the Roma people and of their fellow nomads, the New Travellers, is the issue at the top of agenda. The travelling mode of existence is accepted, we are told in the European Union, as a 'valid' way of life, and yet, as we have found, to be a Gypsy in Britain today is to fall foul of racism, hostility and media aggression. The settled community are those who control the use of land via the planning legislation. For a Gypsy to pull in off the road to stop for a few

nights, is a simple enough procedure but because there are so few places where he can do so legally, he literally becomes criminalised as he does so. There is a perception amongst the settled community that to have a Gypsy encampment near the house, is to devalue its market value. A Gypsy may buy a piece of land. Indeed the Government is encouraging this. However to secure planning permission so that he can legally live on it, is a huge problem. For 90% of planning applications from the Gypsy and Traveller community, permission is refused.

All nomads and Travellers need to stop sometimes, either to access education or

healthcare, or simply to rest. In times past, there were known lanes and familiar pieces of common land where generations of Gypsies would have parked up. However, most of these have now been blocked up, or ditched, to prevent access.

Gypsy and Travellers have needs. They are human beings with aspirations, dreams, gifts and their own rich culture, which is based on oral tradition. They have been in the UK for generations. They are a recognised ethnic minority under the Race Relations Act, entitled to fair treatment under the law and to protection from those who would attack them. They have nevertheless been

Nomads of the Sinai

The nomadic desert Bedu in the Sinai have had an unprecedented decade. The world around them has been catapulted from 2000BC to 2000AD in less than ten years. During the same period a six-year drought has added to the changes they have had to make in the pattern of their semi-nomadic lifestyle. The generation growing up has seen a transition never encountered before in this desert and has an interaction with an information society which is shifting their outlook, their tribal values and their needs.

The Bedu are learning to adapt fast, but the 11th September 2001 and the recent gulf war, with the knock-on loss of trade, especially in desert safari which works in partnership with the desert skills of the Bedu families, has caused another shift.

Many families have once again returned to a nomadic lifestyle which is more sustainable in the present international climate. Water, however, is always the issue. So I tell here a story which tries to show how it is possible for east and west to come together to create a more survivable climate environment for a people who are both looking back to their tribal roots as well as forward to the necessary interaction with the wider 'global' tribe.

I want to take you with me briefly on a journey into the desert. There is much to learn on all sides. A hot summer day and the Bedu and my team from Wind, Sand & Stars were building a series of dams to trap the rare rain and ensuing flood waters to provide a source of water through the spring for some hundred Bedu families in the region.

We had for several days been digging out sand from a deep, granite-based ravine, which when emptied would be the base of our final pool in the dam system to capture some of the winter water. On this day the final full buckets would be hauled up and carried down the valley to be dumped below the irrigation scheme.

Spirits were high as we walked down the valley, the camels laden with our equipment and their beautifully hand-woven multi-coloured saddle-bags swaying with the gait of the camels' walk. The Bedu were calling to each other as they coaxed their beasts up the red granite hillside to the ravine, and our band of Western project workers wandered behind in anticipation of, by about lunchtime, looking into the deep hole we had emptied, and feeling proud of ourselves.

Half a day later, with sweat rolling off us, we stood high on the hilltop, Bedu and Westerners together, and we laughed as we looked down into the cleared granite ravine, 20 foot deep, the work of much

subject to prejudice for centuries and the stories are told to the children. How then can a Christian community stand with them in their fight for justice? If the nomadic lifestyle is a 'valid' lifestyle under European Law, why then is there no land earmarked for their use in the Structure or Local Plan? Why is the fact that 90% of Gypsy planning applications are turned down, not seen as a public scandal?

What is the answer of faith?

In the Salisbury Diocese, a Chaplain for Travelling People has been appointed. He exercises pastoral care and acts as an advocate, for example, challenging the council over the living conditions on the authorised sites. The Social Responsibility Officer for Wiltshire, again appointed by the churches, challenges the Local Authority to address the injustices of the planning system, asks questions about the bullying of Roma children who go to school, the Primary Health Care Trusts for their failure to take account of the Roma culture when delivering health care, the Police for their bullying tactics when carrying out an eviction, the local College Outreach worker who for some reason has not even thought of their needs for education. The list goes on and on and yet, we are making a difference. We are slowly addressing the institutional racism that seeps into relationships

between these modern nomads and those who live in houses. One local church, for example, is now to fund a development worker for a Gypsy site. Others are reviewing glebe land use and are in conversation with a Housing Association about setting up a drug-free site for Gypsies and Travellers who have come out of rehab. The Chaplain visits those who are in prison. Someone else is teaching literacy skills.

Gypsies are proud of their heritage. They are strong, resourceful, optimistic people with a rich culture and language. They too were in the Holocaust. We celebrate the witness of all Christians of goodwill who are working with them to bring in the Kingdom of justice and peace for these modern nomads. We celebrate all those who are fighting racism, as God's workers in the field. Gypsies do not want integration, but they do want recognition and respect. We are honoured by their presence among us and pray God's blessing upon them.

sweat and tears. But as we stood there in the sunlight, a giant boulder wedged in one wall slid very gently, inch by inch, and finally rolled into the vacuum created by the displaced sand.

The sense of light fell to darkness and despair in seconds. Where moments before we had looked into the great hollowed pool with all offending sand removed and had seen a glimpse of a hopeful future, with fresh water glinting back at us in a year's time, we now saw only immovable rock filling our space. The sand and effort became as nothing compared to what now stood in our way.

It was an interesting moment for me, as I watched some 30 people, half nomadic Bedu, half settled Europeans, who had worked together for weeks, suddenly split ways. The Western lads picked up the giant sledge hammers and with the full force of their disappointment stood on the great boulder and tried to smash it by striking with all their might with the metal heads. Not even a chip of the rock came away. The Bedu, however, gathered some twigs from the Acacia tree in the valley, lit a small fire and, with their shoulders side by side, huddled round in a circle to make tea, to share their disappointment and to live out this dark moment together.

An hour later, as the heat from the sky poured down on us and bounced back at us again from the rock, the muscle-weary group were called to by an old skinny Bedu perched on the edge of the ravine above us. He scampered down and with a tiny chisel and hammer in hand he squatted on his

heels on the top of the great boulder, still un-dented, placed the chisel at the centre and tapped. The other Bedouin reappeared, and we sat in the shade and watched together. We watched for hours as the shadows moved, the afternoon wind arrived and cooled our weary brows, and the pink tinge in the western sky heralded the coming of the end of the day.

As darkness crept over us, no one moved. We had come to realise the waiting was not in vain. The surety of the old man in his patient chipping had captured us. And as the young Bedu boy beside me pointed to Venus rising in the sky, the sign for them of another day over, the old man hit the hidden fault line in the boulder. He leapt off the rock and it shattered into a thousand tiny fragments, a pile of movable rubble.

As I walked away that evening from the shattered boulder, with the stars twinkling over head, a young Bedu boy was expressing to me what the day had felt like, what the moment of the rock shattering had felt like. He used an Arabic word I didn't understand. I asked him to explain. So he stopped and acted it out for me. He said, it means to stand tall, to look to the horizon with your head raised, not to feel the need to look behind you, or left, or right, out of fear; not to be hunched because fear is on your shoulders. It is to stand tall and look to the horizon without fear, not to be afraid to move on. Our nearest English word is 'salvation'. He was telling me it felt like a moment of salvation. For the first time in my life, taught to me by a Muslim boy in a nomad's land, I learned in my heart the

meaning of salvation and redemption.

Nomads and the settled, east and west, Christian and Muslim trying to make a life which both holds onto the values of the nomadic tribe while looking to the reality of the future in an information global setting, and brings hope to both. There is some hope out of the interaction that is happening and can give the wanderer and the rooted a sense of the past in balance with the unknown we might walk towards beyond the horizon.

PRAYER

LORD, you have oversight of all things:
we offer all family movements
into your hands.

When forced to move – uphold us;
When lonely in moving – befriend us;
When fearful after moving – protect us.

May the care and companionship of
others sustain all who have had to
move;

May the skills of those who have moved
to a strange country be valued,
and their dignity honoured;

May the blessing of your justice and
peace break as the dawn upon displaced
family lives;

In the name of Christ.

Amen

Revd John Bradford.

THE NEXT FAMILY NETWORK NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter, to be published in the Christmas issue of **Anglican World**, will be on interfaith themes: looking at interfaith marriage, interfaith parenting and families in interfaith communities.

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