
PLACE: Jakarta

DATE: 10 July 2018

Urban Refugees Ponder Challenges and the Freedom to Build a Better Life in a New UNHCR Film

Jakarta, 10 July 2018 – As Liaqat looks at the camera, he quietly notes, “everyone has hopes and dreams.” The compelling story he and his family tell are part of a short documentary film screened earlier today that highlights the challenges faced by urban refugees in Jakarta, as well as in Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok. UNHCR produced the film and organized the screening at the Goethe-Institute Jakarta with funds generously provided by the European Union (the European Commission’s Department for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection/ ECHO). A discussion on challenges and opportunities faced by urban refugees, particularly touching on detention policies in the region, followed the screening.

Liaqat’s family talked about their release from detention in Indonesia. This was possible thanks to a mechanism established by the Government of Indonesia that allows recognized refugees to be transferred from immigration detention centres to community shelters. It is a positive legal provision not found in other countries. UNHCR continues to work with the Government of Indonesia and other partners in the country, including the International Organization for Migration, Church World Service and Tzu Chi Foundation, to establish shelters for more refugees to be freed from detention. As of May 2018, Indonesia hosts some 13,900 refugees from 49 countries in the world. Out of this total population, 17% of the refugees, including some 700 children (21% of the total population of refugee children) are kept in detention facilities across Indonesia, waiting to be transferred. This number however reflects a significant decrease to the previous years’ number of refugees in detention. In early 2015, some 38% of registered refugees in Indonesia were in detention centres. UNHCR hopes the number of those detained will drop even further as the Government continues to implement its new law on refugees, which was signed by President Joko Widodo in December 2016.

“Working together with the Government of Indonesia, partners, and stakeholders, UNHCR hopes that more refugees can be released from detention. In addition, UNHCR will continue to advocate expanding alternative options to include others such as regular reporting and guarantor schemes. Particularly for refugee children and their families, it is very important to live free from detention, so that they can grow to their fullest potential and give back to the community hosting them,” said UNHCR Indonesia Representative Thomas Vargas.

Now Liaqat’s family can concentrate on preparing themselves for the future. At the event, speakers from civil society and the European Union (the European Commission’s Department for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection/ ECHO) interviewed in a talk show format discussed how they are helping refugees and why it is important to get involved. “Once free from detention, they are able to live their lives better, especially children, they will be able to access learning centres or even elementary schools which gives them the confidence to prepare for their future,” said Diovio Alfath,



a speaker in the talk show forum and the founder of NGO Sandiya Institute, which runs several innovative projects to help refugees.

The event marks UNHCR's ongoing work to promote alternatives to detention of children and their families. Rahilla, Liaqat's younger sister recalls in the film how difficult it was to spend their initial period in Indonesia when they arrived in 2015 in detention centres in Indonesia. Rahilla, Liaqat and the rest of their family were given special recognition at the event for sharing their stories.

Numerous studies have reported that detention has adverse effects on children's health and development. Being detained can undermine children's ability to enjoy a range of human rights, including the right to an education, the right to play and the right to expand their opportunities.

UNHCR commends the new refugee law --Presidential Regulation number 125 of 2016 on Handling Refugees--, which allows for local authorities to provide alternative shelters for refugees in the country. As Indonesia is a state party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, refugee children then can also enrol in public primary schools.

MEDIA CONTACT

Mitra Suryono, Associate External Relations/ Public Information Officer.
Email: suryono@unhcr.org.

Triwik Kurniasari, Public Information Assistant.
Email: kurniasa@unhcr.org.