

S H A R E

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FOCUS ~ REFUGEE MINISTRY

The Dwelling of God is with Men

Written by: Lincoln Chong, Jojo Poon

In September 2015, the image of the body of the Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, washed up on the shores of Mediterranean Sea, drew the attention of the globe to the European refugee crisis and the wars in Middle East. Just a month ago in April, the equally disheartening image of a Syrian father holding the bodies of his little twins died from chemical attacks has once again stirred people's sentiments.

"Now the dwelling of God is with men," (Revelation 21:3) This promise was not only applicable to the early Christians under Roman suppression, but also to the victims today who seem to have suffered an unending stretch of tortures and hidings because of the wars; God is there, suffering with them, listening to them, and comforting them.

When they are being trafficked

The self-immolation of a Tunisian street vender over six years ago started the Arab Spring that consisted of multiple civil wars in North Africa and Middle East, rise of terrorism, and the waves of refugees who risked their lives in fleeing to Europe from the regions in conflict, hoping to settle based on the Schengen acquis.

Between 2015 and 2016, over 1.36 million refugees have

crossed the Mediterranean Sea to reach the shores of Greece.¹ A lot of illegal human smuggling groups have earned a fortune from the large-scale migration, where human traffickers took advantage of the situation and abducted those who were vulnerable, especially the children, and turned them into sex slaves and laborers.

About one in every 4 minors among the refugees in Europe in 2015 was unaccompanied, and Europe police agencies estimated that 10,000 individuals within the unaccompanied children population end up missing.

In the face of such crisis, the European Evangelical Alliance and multiple churches and organizations actively responded by being the bridge between the children and Jesus. In England, churches and refugee supporting networks trained the youth workers to serve the children refugees, especially the unaccompanied ones. Christian organizations have also been providing appropriate help to the unsupervised children on the streets of Greece, as it is the gate to Europe.

When they are discriminated against

The asylum seekers accepted by EU might be the lucky bunch in someone's mind, but they were far from reaching the utopia. The scars of war and voyaging last much longer than one could imagine.

The Umar family, coming from Damascus, are some of the luckier Syrian refugees, who were accepted into Germany and allowed to start a new life there. The daughter could continue her education in universities and the son found a job in a local electric company. However, living on the line between life and death during the 7 days in the Mediterranean was traumatic to the family, and they are worried every day for the aged grandparents still in Syria.²

Zinash, a north African, who now lives in Belgium told us that she had lost all her dignity and confidence as a person after going through the torture on her spirit and body on the way to Belgium, and that her only way to find peace and hope was by seeking Jesus.³

Besides the physical and mental toil, the immigrants are also under the threats of terrorism and right-wing cultural discrimination. Muslim women were forbidden to wear their hijabs in some of the French port cities; and there were multiple reports of acts of violence against asylum seekers, Muslims, and immigrants in European countries including Germany and England. Despite those in Germany who would

think that the massive inflow of immigrants could relieve the local shortage of labor force, the Arab migrants are currently at a job-seeking disadvantage due to cultural differences and distrust.

In the light of these challenges, French and German churches have hosted cultural awareness events that helped the refugees to better assimilate to the local cultures and communities. Furthermore, senior frontline workers have provided vocational training and business networking opportunities between the refugees and Christian merchants that created social enterprises and jobs.

When they have nowhere to go

The greatest refugee crisis never took place in Europe, but in the Middle East and North African regions that took in almost 40% of total cross-border refugees globally, and that was excluding the number of internally displaced persons within Syria and Iraq. Most of them are living in temporary camps or abandoned buildings where living conditions are harsh and lack basic survival essentials. Human trafficking was also severe in those areas.

The percentage of displaced population accepted regionally, in descending order (UNHCR, June 2016):

- > Middle East and North Africa 39%
- > Africa 29%
- > Asia Pacific 14%
- > America 12%
- > Europe 6%

Over 50% of cross-border refugees in the world come from the following countries, in descending order:

- > Syria 4.9 million
- > Afghanistan 2.7 million

In 2014, the Integral Alliance (IA)⁴ have prompted its members, including CEDAR, to provide humanitarian help to the Middle East refugees and share the love of God. In the past year, CEDAR have supported 5,827 such families through other members of IA.

One of the members, the Tearfund UK, has been serving the people in the Lebanon refugee camps. They came to know a Muslim woman, Alba (obscured), in a family visit, who experienced the unimaginable through war, the loss of her son, life threats, and extremely poor living conditions in the camp. When listening to Alba's story, the visiting staff couldn't help but wept at her sorrow and hopelessness. As our member's staff "mourn with those who mourn," such friendship broke the wall of race and religion, where Alba wiped the tears off the visitor's face with her hands and requested to pray together. "That was the most beautiful thing I've ever experienced," said the staff.

In the neighboring Iraq, the terrorist ISIS never ceased their invasions and assaults, which forced a lot of Yazidis and Christians to flee to northern Iraq. The Mission East, an IA member, has set up a community center in the Sinjar Mountain in Iraq in 2015 that serves migrant families and adolescents like the 14 years old Yazidis girl, Sarah (obscured). She learned how to sew, make haircuts, and use the computer in the center, which gave her a glimpse of hope in a dark situation. "I like being here. I could open my own hair salon and feed the family when our home is safe again," said Sarah.

Be the Lampstand for the Homeless

In the vision of the re-created world, John saw Jesus walking between seven golden lampstands. The lampstand was to be lit 24/7 in the OT time which would light the way to the seat of God. As Jesus set up a New covenant with us, the church became the lampstand that guides people to the tabernacle of the new heaven and earth. Let us join hands with global churches and Christian workers to keep praying for and supporting the refugees, and be the lampstand that guides them to taste the promise and grace brought by God's dwelling.

1 <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>

2 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2017/mar/01/who-are-europes-newcomers>

3 <http://evangelicalfocus.com/lifetech/1375/>

Show_your_love_for_refugees_but_respect_their_privacy

4 The Integral Alliance (IA) connects 23 Christian relief and developmental organizations, including CEDAR, in the hope of improving their joint efficiencies in response to global poverty.



Photo: Massimo Sestini/Le Italian Coastguard

BACK TO THE BIBLE



Transcending Borders and Time with Grace and Love—a Story of an Ethnic Woman’s Blessings to Foreign Lands

In the OT, Ruth was the very definition of an underprivileged sojourner as she had to leave her home in Moab to Israel, an anti-Moabites community, to take care of her mother-in-law. Ruth was a Moabite who was shunned upon by the God-chosen Israelites. Where racial conflicts in the time of OT were as severe as they are today, CEDAR China Programme Advisor, Dr. Mok Chiu Yau, tried to put Ruth’s story into a perspective which highlighted how a foreign woman faithfully fulfilled her responsibilities and loyally loved her families and those treated her with grace, and how she blessed the people surrounding her, to even blessing the whole society, by leading a God-resembling life.

Dr. Mok pointed out the important and repeated use of the word, “show kindness”, or “Chesed” (the phonetic translation from Hebrew), that was used to describe both Ruth and Yahweh. Chesed means “Loyal love”, where two parties verbally promise or even make covenants about each other’s responsibilities in establishing and sustaining a special relationship, loyally and perpetually. God revealed His loyal love through His works, and the other side of the relationship, the Israelites, shall respond with their loyal love and worship God as the one and only. Moreover, the people of God must also treat each other with the same loyal love under the law, bearing each of his own civil responsibilities that allow a just society.

In the book of Ruth, we could see how the spirit of Chesed tied the whole story together: the loyalty of Ruth towards Naomi, Naomi’s loyal love towards God and two of her daughters-in-law, Boaz’s grace towards Ruth, to God’s unending grace towards Ruth. It exhibited a transcending love between people that tore down racial and cultural walls.

We must remember that to treat the sojourner with love is a basic requirement for Bible-abiding, Christ-following disciples; if “by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2), who is to reject the strangers and subsequently the great potential blessings to oneself and the society? Dr. Mok also reminded us that everyone of us is a foreigner and exile on earth (1 Peter 2:11). We shall never hoard the resources and possessions given to us by God as if they have eternal values. On the contrary, sharing what we have with those in need is easily the quickest way to achieve a loving and just society.

Read full article: <http://bit.ly/cedar-share224-biblestudye>

STEP INTO THE WORLD



CEDAR Supporting the Refugees from South Sudan

Sudan, a south African country, has experienced a political conflict that quickly turned into a nation-wide civil war. The aggravated armed conflicts sent more and more Sudanese refugees to the neighboring Uganda, which accepted over 20,000 refugees in the week of 25 Jan to 31 Jan this year alone. South Sudan has currently passed Somali to become third in refugee crisis severity, trailing only Syria and Afghanistan.

There are currently 700,000 South Sudanese refugees seeking asylum in Uganda, and 64% of that population are children, whose nutrition conditions are continually degrading, not to mention the spiked chances of malaria outbreaks and death rates since the country’s rainy season started in March.

CEDAR is financially supporting the Medical Teams International (MTI), an IA member, in their medical and health services in a north Uganda region housing 50,000 South Sudanese refugees, hoping to raise the health level of the region and provide adequate help to the refugees.

Read full article: <http://bit.ly/cedar-share224-southsudane>



Myanmar Lisu Churches’ Journeying with War-ridden Ethnic Groups

The Myanmar government and the anti-government forces were at war for the past 10 years. As the conflict was

reinitiated in 2016, the estimated number of internally displaced population has reached 660,000. The conflicts in Kachin State alone forced close to 100,000 to flee to Yunnan, China.

The peace-loving Lisu in Kachin State never took up arms, but their crops, livestock, even villagers, became resources targeted by both the Myanmar government forces and the opposing Kachin forces. The great unrest drove the Lisu away from home who became refugees in Thailand, Malaysia, India, etc.; a lot of them fled to other regions of the country and lived in rural refugee camps, where basic facilities were sorely lacking, in addition to being exposed to air-strikes that had already destroyed several camps.

CEDAR's partner, the Kachin Lisu Christian Council (KLCC), has faithfully stayed by the side of the Lisu refugees in Kachin State for the past 7 years.

Read full article: <http://bit.ly/cedar-share224-kachine>



Walking with the Refugees—An Interview with Christian Action

Interviewer and Editor: Lincoln Chong

Refugees are often viewed as a group of aliens in foreign lands who would only appear on the international news occasionally; yet we forget that our society was built by refugees escaping from civil wars. The waves of Vietnamese refugees in 70s to 80s were also an integral part of Hong Kong's history.

In the 70's, waves of Vietnamese refugees escaped due to the Vietnam War. British Hong Kong declared itself the port of first asylum on the basis of humanity. It was during that time that the Hong Kong Christian Aid to Refugees (HKCAR), later the Christian Action (CA), started their services towards refugees.

Few could imagine the living conditions and challenges the first waves of Vietnamese refugees were facing. "Since the majority of Hong Kong citizens were not in touch with the status of the refugees, the HKCAR mainly got its support from the Rotary International and other foreign churches," said Mrs. Cheung-Ang Siew Mei, the Executive Director of CA. HKCAR served the refugees by fulfilling their survival, health care, and basic education needs. They also focused on providing vocational trainings to the refugees who could work, in order to boost their income and provide labor force to the society. These services helped them regaining their dignity as human beings.

In the 90's, HKCAR began to expand its vocational trainings, originally set up for Vietnamese refugees, to help more individuals including new immigrants and other marginalized groups such as the unemployed. The organization was renamed to Christian Action in 1994.

The last service project aimed towards Vietnamese refugees concluded in 1997, but CA's passion in serving the sojourns made them rebooted their services in 2003 towards refugees. They established the Centre for Refugees in the Chungking Mansions, providing basic hot food, clothes, and daily essentials for refugees and asylum seekers; they gave refugee children education opportunities via subsidy programmes, and provided vocational trainings to young adults. "They call this place (CFR) a 'place of hope', because this is where they find it." said Justin, the Director of the facility.

CA currently spends most of its efforts in education and advocacy. "Victim blaming happens every day in our society, hence we shall solve the problem at its cause by educating the people about the refugee situation," said Mrs. Cheung, the Executive Director of CA, "Jesus taught us to love our neighbors, and today the refugees are our neighbors. Nothing beats the kind gestures and open arms we give them when it comes to showing our love to them."

Are you willing to bless the refugees living next to you and give them warmth in this foreign land? You could visit our webpage and read the full report: <http://bit.ly/cedar-share224-hke>

OPERATING STATEMENT

		Jul 16 – Mar 17		
Income	Donations	HK\$	10,285,434	
	Grants		675,228	
	Appeal for Relief		1,065,743	
	Other Income		8,872	
		HK\$	12,035,277	
Expenditure	Projects	Asia	4,673,168	
		China	1,969,348	
		Africa	1,120,324	
	Disaster Relief & Rehabilitation Projects			1,391,626
	Education & Promotion			1,159,801
	Administration			1,022,425
		HK\$	11,336,692	
Surplus/(Deficit)		HK\$	698,585	

Remarks:

- ▶ The annual budget from 7/2016 to 6/2017 is 18,100,608 HKD.
- ▶ There is a total of 9.1 million HKD spendings on projects from 7/2016 to 3/2017.
- ▶ Please support CEDAR's and its partners' work with prayers and donations. 🙏