



# Refugee Voice

Jesuit Refugee Service/USA

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*The basic routine of school demonstrates to students, such as these Somali refugees in Melkadida camp, that people do have a faith in their value and hope for their future contribution to society. (Christian Fuchs — Jesuit Refugee Service/USA)*

## Serving refugees in the Horn of Africa

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) noted that during 2013 the “population of concern” in Ethiopia rose from about 379,000 to 436,000. Most of these refugees arrived at Dollo Ado, a dry and dusty region in the desert southeast near the border with Somalia and Kenya.

Jesuit Refugee Service has programs for refugees in three locations in Ethiopia. In the capital, Addis Ababa, JRS serves urban refugees. In the northeast, JRS serves refugees from Eritrea at Mai Aini refugee camp. In the southeast Dollo Ado region, JRS serves refugees from Somalia at Melkadida and Kobe refugee camps.

The projects in the camps near Dollo Ado are focused on youth, education, livelihoods and psychosocial counseling.

“The livelihoods we give in collaboration with adult education, what we call the functional literacy program. We provide that training in an integrated manner. (The training is) mainly focused on certain skills that we think (are) marketable in this area, like tailoring, masonry work and plumbing. We (also) try to strengthen some skills that already exist in the community. They (have the knowledge) but we try to strengthen them,” said Mulugeta W/Eyesus of JRS Ethiopia.

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### A Note from the National Director

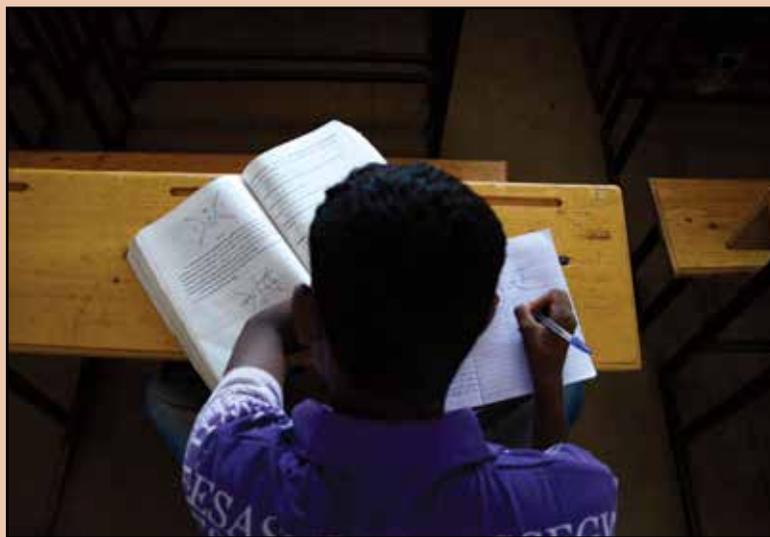
Somalia, Eritrea and the Horn of Africa are at the center of a protracted humanitarian crisis. Years of conflict and regularly recurring droughts have displaced nearly two million Somalis. People fleeing the autocratic regime of Eritrea, and refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan trek to Ethiopia seeking safety.

In addition to providing services for urban refugees in Addis Ababa, Jesuit Refugee Service operates several projects in two of the largest camps for Somalis in Ethiopia’s Dollo Ado region, Kobe and Melkadida. JRS provides counseling, adult literacy and a variety of youth programs. To the north, Jesuit Refugee Service provides programs for Eritrean refugees — particularly unaccompanied minors — at the Mai Aini refugee camp.

We invite you to learn more about our work with refugees in Ethiopia. With every good wish and blessing,

*Armando Borja*

*The Jesuit Refugee Service library at Mai Aini refugee camp enables refugees to keep their dreams of a better future alive by providing access to computers, books and a quiet place to study. "It is important to keep learning, it is a form of trauma healing," says JRS International Director Fr Peter Balleis S.J. (Christian Fuchs — JRS/USA)*



An unusual feature of the Mai Aini camp population is the youthfulness of the residents. Of particular concern are the approximately 1,250 separated or unaccompanied minors presently living in the camp. Troubling is the fact that an additional 500 minors disappeared from the camp between October 2011 and April 2013, many leaving because of frustration at the lack of prospects for a better future, and the unyielding boredom that descends upon refugee camp residents.

Many of these young people move on to Sudan and Libya with the intention of getting to Europe, and end up attempting the unsafe passage across the Mediterranean that has resulted in so many deaths. Others are trafficked into the Sinai where they are sold to criminal gangs and exposed to torture and extortion.

It is believed that some children are encouraged by local family members to leave in order to join family abroad. "It is important to identify these children as soon as possible after arrival and to seek to provide safe routes to reunification," said Mitzi Schroeder, JRS/USA Director of Policy.

Supported by a grant from the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, JRS is working with the UN Refugee Agency and local authorities to fight such departures by improving conditions for children in the camp, and working toward long-term solutions.

"The focus is psychosocial support and we have three programs: counseling, music and theatre, and sports and recreational activities. The youth need some recreational activities. Unless we engage them in sport and recreational activities they will be involved in risky behavior," said Mai Aini project director Fanuel Abebe.

Testimonies from the young refugees demonstrate the importance of these programs to their lives. The programs have offered some the opportunity to nurture their talents in music and theatre with amazing results. A good example is a band formed by graduates of the music and theatre classes. The group now offers entertainment to camp residents during public celebrations; these concerts provide an income to the group members.

"JRS is really doing well. We've been working together for the benefit of refugees," said Kebede Abayneh of Ethiopia's Administration for Refugees and Returnee Affairs in Dollo Ado.

"Refugees are grateful for your programs. I've personally seen (JRS projects) at Mai Aini, as well as here. We use you as an example to others. We tell people JRS is at the frontline of refugee youth programs in Ethiopia."

Secondary movement poses a challenge as it is not easy to encourage these children to stay in the camps when they see no hope of a better tomorrow. That is one reason JRS places such an emphasis on education and recreational activities in the form of theater arts, music appreciation and sports leagues.

Camp life can be brutally dull, and combined with promise of better prospects elsewhere it is easy to see why a youngster may seek to leave. It is important for both their physical and mental well being that children — and adults — be given the opportunity to pass their time in a refugee camp learning and socializing in a healthy way with others.

The basic routine of school demonstrates to students that people do have a faith in their value and hope for their future contribution to society. It allows children to focus on something other than the destruction of war or the dull routine of a refugee camp.

"Learning is a way to nourish, in a situation of utter despair, the hope in people, the hope in children. It is so important to get (displaced and refugee) children into school, to establish a routine of life. It is important to keep learning, it is a form



Melkadida Refugee Camp, about 70 kilometers from Dollo Ado, Ethiopia. More than 44,000 refugees from Somalia, such as the young women below, were registered by UNHCR in Melkadida as of July 31, 2014. JRS projects in Melkadida and nearby Kobe refugee camp — home to more than 38,000 refugees — are focused on youth, education, livelihoods and psychosocial counseling. (Christian Fuchs — Jesuit Refugee Service/USA)

of trauma healing in the midst of a conflict,” says Fr. Peter Balleis, S.J., the International Director of JRS.

While many refugees long to return to their homelands, others have no choice but to seek resettlement in a new country. In either case, education will help them — to either help rebuild their countries after a period of upheaval, or to adapt to a new land and a new home.

JRS/USA has advocated for best interest evaluations to be carried out on these children, to determine which will benefit from this option. This year, 100 children will receive resettlement, most to the United States. Other youth will be released from camp under the Ethiopian government’s “Out of Camp” program, benefiting those who have the skills to support themselves in the city. JRS education programs are invaluable in preparing youth for independent living.

“Forcibly displaced and frequently living on the margins of society, we have seen how education offers refugees the intellectual nourishment to become the leaders of tomorrow. In the midst of conflict and instability, education can be a form of healing to refugees hungry to rebuild their communities,” said Fr. Balleis.

“One of the most challenging things that the refugees face is that need of going back home,” said Tium Debesai, the Psychosocial Coordinator for JRS in Melkadida.

“Hope (to return home) is not yet visible in the near future and this is the most challenging situation they say they are facing. They have flashbacks of what they have seen in their lives, the dear ones they have seen being killed, the rape



situations they have (experienced), and all these situations are a great challenge,” said Mr. Debesai.

Because the hope to return home is a distant one, and the slow resettlement process discourages refugees from remaining in the camp, some refugees turn to smugglers to attempt to reach a third country. They often fall prey to human traffickers. While resettlement is a preferred solution, it is an extremely slow process and many of the refugees are young people who become extremely frustrated by their socio-economic situation.

Jesuit Refugee Service sees a brighter future for those in the camps, whether they are able to return safely to their homeland or are resettled in a third country. Hope for a brighter future drives many of us, and that hope should be nurtured and encouraged in refugees.

# Jesuit Refugee Service in Ethiopia

## *JRS Recommendations for Action:*

- UNHCR must redouble its information campaign to prevent refugee youth from making the dangerous decision to leave the camp on their own.
- While good progress has been made to look for solutions to the refugee's plight, efforts to find new life opportunities for both children and youth must be enhanced, through expansion of the resettlement program, local integration through such initiatives as the Out of Camp program, and through the creation of a mechanism for return for those small children who should be reunited with their parents in Eritrea.
- Camp conditions should be improved by devoting resources to the improvement of recreational activities, education, housing and other facilities.
- Whenever possible, the refugee community, including refugee youth, should be permitted and encouraged to play a meaningful role in camp decisions and their implementation so as to create a sense of community and purpose.



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Past issues of our newsletter: [www.jrsusa.org/refugeevoice](http://www.jrsusa.org/refugeevoice)*

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JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE/USA  
1016 16TH STREET, NW, STE 500  
WASHINGTON, DC 20036  
(202) 629-5943 | [www.jrsusa.org](http://www.jrsusa.org)  
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