

MOBILIZATION FORM

02/08/2007

Identity of the mobilizer:

Louison, 34 years old
Living in Paris, France
Social Worker

The reasons why you chose to become a mobilizer :

I used to live several months in Bangkok, where i was in contact with Tamil exiled community. From time to time, there was an arrest of some asylum seekers, but usually, the refugees were more or less able to negotiate with the local police not to be imprisoned when they were arrested.

Afterwards, the context became harder, and as a new fact, we began to see some arrests of refugees. In January 2007, a first asylum seekers' family with kid was arrested. That time, I went to visit this family, and Saw Sana, 6 years old, wandering from cell to cell during visiting time to convey messages between her mother and her father.

I was not « very worried » for this family, as they were registered as asylum seekers by Bangkok UNHCR office (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), so I was thinking, as they were imprisoned with a child, that their situation would be considered as an emergency by UNHCR, and it would not take more than a few days, maximum a couple of weeks to resettle them in a third country. There also was, at that time, a large mobilization of the Tamil community, to visit the few imprisoned ones, to bring them food, newspapers and news from outside.

Hard to admit, but after 6 months, Sana and her parents are still in jail. I don't know if they still receive visits, if they are still "lucky" enough to go down to the visits cells where formerly, enjoying her "privilege" to be the only imprisoned child, Sana was in the warders' good books and could flit in the visitors' space to try to see her father.

In March 2007, some other families were arrested, but i only knew about one 3 years old boy, whose parents, refugees since a long time, had already filled the resettlement form, which signified they would be able to leave soon.

On the 2nd of July, a frightening SMS « we are arrested by the immigration ». A real police raid, 7 o' clock in the morning, empties a block of flats of all its inhabitants. As a result, 6 families, 34 people including 18 children are arrested. Immigration police, 2 days of negotiations to try to obtain their release, UNHCR informed, appearance before the Court, imprisonment.

That day, flashback. I asked what Sana became. She is still in jail. And the 3 years' old boy also. I asked the list of the detained people, with their status, the age of their kids... the following has already been told. 101 people, 31 children, 62 refugees, 39 asylum seekers, 92 Sri Lankan, 9 Nepalese...

UNHCR, that we contacted, told us they can not intervene because they don't have access to the detention centre. The last time the prisoners saw one of their staff was the 11th of April. So why, in that case, if they still had access to the detention centre till April, the families arrested in January and March are still in jail?

I contacted again UNHCR in Bangkok in July, and heard one of their staff, whose name i won't mention, tell me that "the people who are coming to Thailand illegally or overstaying their visa, do it at their own risks, UNHCR can not do anything for them". A little bit surprised by this statement, I answered that all were registered as asylum seekers and that most of them (62 out of 101) had already been recognized as refugees, some of them since a very long time... "that does not change anything, no matter what is their status, they are illegal in Thailand, we don't have access to the detention centre, we can not do anything...". Suddenly I told to myself that may be I dialed a wrong phone number, so I checked it, but no mistake, it was really UNHCR that just told me that they could not do anything for refugees and asylum seekers imprisoned with their children.

Mobilization seems more than ever essential if we want to avoid that Sana, Nanthini and the other children celebrate their next birthday in jail...

What message would you like to send to the detainees ?

I used to work in Sri Lanka. It is a marvelous country, a luxuriant nature, but above all, a wonderful people. In all of the families I visited, I was most welcomed, with smiles and a cup of tea. Then the family was worrying about if I had already eaten or not. When my moped had a breakdown, I always found somebody to help me to repair it. Sri Lankan people are like that, whether Tamil or Sinhalese, they observe you, and before you ask for any help, they have already identified that you have a problem and are already looking for a solution.

You all, that fled to escape the fighting and the human rights violations' that tear your country that could otherwise be a paradisal island, and who, today, are suffering in jail with your families like common criminals, of whom UNHCR seem not to take care, please know that the fight has just begun.

You, who taught me how to make tea, know that one of these days, it is in my home that you will drink it. Outside, we fight for that.