

OPENING REMARKS

Thomas Vargas, UNHCR Representative in Indonesia

WORLD REFUGEE DAY 2015, Jakarta

Thank you for coming to join us today at the Goethe Institute and thanks to our Friends at Goethe for providing its space for the event. I want to make a few brief remarks explaining why we are here.

UNHCR joins you in marking World Refugee Day with activities that start this morning here in Jakarta. Similar events are scheduled all around the world to mark this day. We do so against a backdrop of multiple conflicts, growing numbers of forcibly displaced people—almost 60 million globally, 4.2 million in the Asia-Pacific-- and a rising tide of intolerance and xenophobia in many parts of the world.

But, luckily for refugees in Indonesia, that is not the case here. As the photos in the exhibit you are about to see show us, Indonesia provides refugees a safe place to stay until a solution can be found for them. In seeing their stories through these photos, we hope you will be touched as we and all other humanitarian workers were who have been involved in helping asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants valiantly brought to safety by Acehese fishermen.

Asylum-seekers and refugees are now being assisted in several locations in Aceh and North Sumatera. And we are working closely with the Government at the national and local levels, as well as with (Mark/other) IOM colleagues and other partners to continue to meet their needs. We are also working with the Government to find solutions for them.

UNHCR is similarly collaborating with partners – Michael and CWS colleagues, UN sister agencies such as (Mark/) UNICEF, all of us under the able leadership of Douglas heading our UN Country Team, and others of you represented here today—to help another 12,000 refugees and asylum-seekers generously being hosted by various communities in Indonesia, including in Jakarta, Medan, Pekanbaru, Makassar, and Tanjung Pinang. As we look for solutions for them, I would highlight the important contributions of countries such as the US, Germany, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, as well as others.

In terms of partnerships, I am pleased to announce that today UNHCR is strengthening its collaboration with one of these key partners – Palang Merah Indonesia – the Indonesian Red Cross. Under the leadership of WaPres Jusuf Kalla and now its Acting Director, Prof. Dr. Ginandjar Kartasmita, PMI is well known for its work to provide social services and other assistance to those in need. We will now work more closely together on various fronts, including to protect refugees – especially children—to promote harmony and understanding within communities hosting refugees, and to help restore family links among separated families. Bapak Ginandjar, it is a great honor to sign this Memorandum of Understanding with you today for the two agencies we represent.

I also want to note my respect for the courage and resilience of refugees around the world, including those of you who are with us here today. Please stand up as we salute you.

Permit me to close by coming to where I started with my remarks. As millions of refugees throughout Asia and the Pacific hope for solutions, the heroic generosity of the community in Aceh perfectly illustrates the true spirit of Ramadhan Kareem and the true spirit of Indonesia's tradition to help people in need of protection, which is very much alive – as these photos show -- and provides an example for other countries to follow.

THANK YOU/TERIMAKASIH