

JAK-POST, 15 Feb '18.

Awaiting resettlement, refugees begin education initiatives

The Jakarta Post

JAKARTA

An uncertain future and painfully long waiting time for resettlement lies ahead for the refugee population of Indonesia.

Indonesia is not a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention and thus the 14,500 refugees in Indonesia are left in a state of limbo, unable to gain citizenship, job opportunities or an education.

They often experience immense grief, frustration and anxiety, as they desperately wait for resettlement. However, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), less than 1 percent of the refugee population will ever get

the chance to be resettled.

Kalsoom and her refugee community are managing to find fulfilment, togetherness and beauty in a time of incredible struggle and uncertainty.

Kalsoom is a Hazara refugee from Pakistan, and over the past four years she has been stuck in limbo in Indonesia, waiting for resettlement. However, she has been determined to help empower and reinstall a sense of purpose and belonging into the waiting refugee population of Cisarua, Bogor.

Kalsoom was forced to flee Pakistan in 2013, after narrowly escaping getting kidnapped by the Taliban and after surviving an explosion that occurred on her street, destroying her house and

taking the lives of 130 people.

After being granted refugee status by the UNHCR in 2014, Kalsoom has been using her time in transit to positively shape the lives of the growing refugee population. She has initiated The Refugee Women's Support Group; a non-for-profit organization where Kalsoom teaches female refugees English and sewing classes from her living room.

Initially starting with Kalsoom and one donated sewing machine, The Refugee Women's Support Group now provides classes to over 40 female refugees, who make clothing under the label Beyond the Fabric.

"It's not just a class for us. It's an environment where we can re-

ally laugh freely and we can forget everything," Kalsoom told *The Jakarta Post*. "This is a place where we can feel like we are alive, and also have a life during this time," she added.

Kalsoom has created an environment in which refugee women can support one another, and gain a sense of purpose whilst in transit. "In these classes they can freely talk and share their problems, and also, they learn from each other's experiences," Kalsoom explained.

Simultaneous to founding The Refugee Women's Support group, Kalsoom was teaching English classes to refugee students from her living room, as they were unable to access formal schooling in

Indonesia.

Starting off with a class of five students and one teacher, Kalsoom's education project has now grown into a thriving school with 100 students and 10 members of staff.

Cipayung Educational Refugee Centre, the school that Kalsoom founded, provides daily English, Math, Science and Arts classes to 45 refugee students, and it also provides daily English classes to a cohort of 35 local Indonesian students. The 10 members of staff are all volunteers from the refugee community in Cisarua.

Kalsoom has also expanded her initiatives to Central Jakarta, where she has taught 25 workshops to over 450 female

refugees, covering the topics of health, mental wellbeing and domestic violence.

Of the 5,000 refugees who live in Cisarua, only 45 families are supported by the local refugee support organization, Jesuit Refugee Service, due to limited resources and a lack of funding.

Kalsoom's initiatives have helped to provide much needed support services for the growing refugee community in Cisarua, and her compassion and drive continues to positively mould the lives of hundreds of refugees in transit.

— Clare McBride-Kelly,
an intern at The Jakarta Post,
wrote the article.