

RESTORING FAMILY LINKS, Reconnecting the Families



Background

Every year, thousands of family members are separated by conflicts, disasters or migration. People suffer terribly when they lose contact with their loved ones and don't know where they are or whether they are safe.

Restoring Family Links (RFL) is a unique service that the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement provides to help people separated from their families to make contact and share news about their well-being.

The ICRC and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies work together around the world to locate people and put them back into contact with their relatives. This work includes looking for family members, restoring contact, reuniting families and seeking to clarify the fate of those who remain missing.

RFL in Indonesia

In Indonesia, the RFL services had begun its service since 1979 from the 'boat people' humanitarian operation on Galang Island, one of the islands located in Riau Island Province. The boat people were coming from the Indo China Sea, consisting mainly from Vietnam, as a result of the war between Vietnam and the USA.

Later on, Indonesia that also known as the laboratory of disasters can be one of the causes of family links separation. The Tsunami that hit the Indonesian territory (Province of Aceh) on 26 December 2004 was also one of the biggest PMI operations, in which RFL services was included.

Apart from accepting cases related to conflicts, disasters or migration, the PMI also accept cases of adoption, mostly from the Netherlands, in which the enquirers are looking for their birth parents in Indonesia. As Indonesia was occupied by the Netherlands in the first half of the 20th century, many children were adopted by the Dutch during this time period. When these children grew up, many ended up approaching the PMI to seek for their birth parents.

Since 2009, the PMI also receives a lot of inquiries related to migration as Indonesia is a transit country for many migrants heading to Australia, mostly coming from countries in the Middle East, Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

As Indonesia is prone to disasters, the PMI has trained RFL focal persons known as RFL Coordinators in all 33 provinces. Supported by the ICRC, the PMI continues to train staff and volunteers in different provinces every year.

PMI also has the RFL Logo which is selected by conducting the RFL Logo competition in 2008. The RFL Logo was produced by one of the PMI volunteer.



The RFL Logo has the meaning as follow:
 - The **green color** means loving father
 - The **orange color** means caring mother
 - The **blue color** means happy child

The three people holding each other reflecta family that



The ICRC and the Indonesian Red Cross work together to provide phone service for migrants in Aceh

Andaman Sea Migrant Crisis

In May 2015, some boats with migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh entered Indonesian territorial waters. The migrants had been on the sea for months, with very limited food and water, in dire health situation. They were gradually rescued and sheltered in different locations in Aceh and North Sumatera Provinces, namely: North Aceh, East Aceh, Kota Langsa, Aceh Tamiang and Medan. PMI volunteers were among the first responders to help the migrants' evacuation, bring them food, water and other basic needs.

The humanitarian situation in Aceh triggered rapid coordination between the ICRC and the PMI to form a joint RFL team dispatched to Aceh. The migrants had not have contact with their loved ones for months and the RFL service responded to an important need that was not covered by other organizations. The priority for providing RFL services were the migrants from Myanmar, especially vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors. The joint PMI/ICRC RFL team provided a free phone call service to family members where ever they may be with conversation restricted to family news. Most of the family members contacted were located in Myanmar and Malaysia.

Salam (not his real name), a fifteen years old boy said, *“It has been months since I left my village and lived on the boat. I am happy that I could finally call my family and told them that I am alive”*

One of the challenges that PMI/ICRC faced in the mission was the compulsory need to rely on interpreters able to speak the local language used by the migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh to exchange with them (migrants had no other language knowledge).

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After two missions in Aceh and North Sumatera (24th May - 30th May 2015 and 14th June - 20th June 2015), the PMI/ICRC team reconnected the migrants with their families through 525 successful calls.

Below is the list of the total number of calls made during the two missions :

TOTAL NUMBER OF RFL PHONE CALLS MADE								
O.	District	Myanmar		Bangladesh		Total Successful (Myanmar & Bangladesh)	Total Unsuccessful (Myanmar & Bangladesh)	Total Phone Calls
		Successful	Unsuccessful	Successful	Unsuccessful			
1	Kuala Cangko, North Aceh / Blang Ado, North Aceh	114	37	-	-	114	37	151
2	Kuala Langsa, Langsa	-	-	-	-	-	-	- *
3	Kuala Simpang, Aceh Tamiang	30	14	14	11	44	25	69
4	Bayeun, East Aceh	180	88	9	4	189	92	281
5	Punteut, North Aceh	-	-	152	42	152	42	194
6	Medan, North Sumatera	26	8	- *	- *	26	8	34
Total Phone Calls Made						525	204	729



“Family is priceless. I may survive the hunger and thirst but I will not survive for not knowing the whereabouts of my family.” (Arifin Muhammad Hadi, Head of Disaster Management Division PMI)