



BOND STREET THEATRE

peacebuilding, empowerment & healing through theatre

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Finding Relief for Refugees in Malaysia

Refugees from across the globe looking for a haven in Malaysia, learn about their rights and find solace through Bond Street Theatre's creative programs.

NEW YORK, NY - July 2017 - In the midst of the current global refugee crisis, Bond Street Theatre (BST) is launching a new project with refugee and migrant populations in Kuala Lumpur in collaboration with Asylum Access Malaysia, and support from Rational Games.

More than 150,000 refugees and asylum seekers are registered with UNHCR in Malaysia, coming from a range of countries and languishing in makeshift housing. Many have fled active conflicts in Myanmar, where Bond Street has been working since 2009, while others have traveled from Afghanistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Iraq and Syria. With the influx of men, women and children from different parts of the world, language barriers, cultural differences, and lack of employment plague refugees who struggle to start a new life.

Malaysia is not a signatory of the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, leaving the country's refugee population extremely vulnerable, without legal protections, and struggling to survive. Considered undocumented workers, it is extremely difficult for refugees to gain shelter, employment and formal education. The few jobs that are found are often dangerous, with refugees facing exploitation and substandard pay if any at all. Without formal housing, refugees often live in overcrowded apartments and houses throughout the country, primarily in urban areas.

"It was a shock to discover the range and conditions of refugees in Malaysia, considering the vast distances that these families had to travel, many via abusive traffickers who abandon them or worse," stated BST Director Joanna Sherman.

BST will collaborate with local artists and aid organizations to develop arts-based programs and workshops to suit the needs of refugee children, youth, and families, while also offering training for educators, health workers, and other stakeholders to maximize sustainability.

As the core of their program, BST will use theatre as a means to bring information to refugees and migrant workers about their legal rights and resources, working in tandem with Asylum Access, an advocate on the international stage for refugee legal rights. BST will also work with a Rohingya Women's Coalition to address issues specific to women's rights and conditions in the Rohingya community.

Asylum Access Malaysia has helped hundreds of refugees successfully navigate the complex legal processes that will allow refugees to live safely and move freely in Malaysia. However, getting information to refugees representing so many language groups and cultural norms is a challenge.

"We found that PowerPoint presentations are a little dry, and so people don't pay attention." said Nazim Bashir, Outreach Coordinator for Asylum Access Malaysia, also noting that the concepts are difficult to understand for those refugees with minimal education. This is where theatre will be useful.

Theatre is an effective way to bring information about complex topics to refugee populations of any age in an entertaining and effective way, while also facilitating conversation and encouraging community action and cohesion.

BST will also work directly with the refugee communities to create small theatre groups to continue this process. Refugee-created performances are a compelling means to amplify the stories of refugees and bring their plight to the public.

The Malaysian government has taken steps to help the recent refugee crises. In 2015, the Malaysian government agreed to admit 3,000 Syrian refugees and, as of March 2017, a new program is in development to allow 300 Rohingya refugees to work legally in the country. However, the need for legal work and resources far outpaces this program.

Bond Street Theatre has a long history of working with refugees -- in Kosovo and Bosnia & Herzegovina, Pakistan, Haiti and Greece -- and in areas of conflict and displacement: Afghanistan, Myanmar, Guatemala and elsewhere. The company's goal in Malaysia is to develop supportive and constructive relationships within displaced populations, encourage compassion and respect, and provide physical and psychological support for people who are struggling for a better life.

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For further information on Bond Street Theatre and interview requests, please contact Joanna Sherman at [\(212\) 254-4614](tel:2122544614) or info@bondst.org.

[Bond Street Theatre](#) has been initiating arts-based projects for conflict resolution, education and empowerment in areas of conflict and poverty internationally since 1984, and working in Afghanistan since 2003. The company collaborates with local artists to enjoy the benefits of creative exchange and promotes the value of the arts in shaping a peaceful future. Recipient of a MacArthur Award, the company also receives support from the Trust for Mutual Understanding, Theatre Communications Group, Mellon Foundation, Ford Foundation, Open Society, Asian Cultural Council, US Institute for Peace, US Bureau of Educational & Cultural Affairs, and US Embassies.

Bond Street Theatre is a non-profit organization and an NGO in association with the United Nations.

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