

EP10 - Aimé Girimana_Marija

00:00:00.000 --> 00:00:03.440

(upbeat music)

Marija

00:00:03.440 --> 00:00:16.680

- Hi, and welcome to Untold Hong Kong Stories,

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Multimedia Narratives from the Margins.

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This is a podcast series where we

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hear the stories of people in our community,

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from Hong Kong's non-Chinese locals

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to marginalized members of our community.

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We hope their stories will make us

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think about how we live ours, creating a more

00:00:34.040 --> 00:00:36.800

inclusive and diverse society.

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My name is Marija Todorova at the Department of Translation,

00:00:40.680 --> 00:00:43.160

Interpreting, and Intercultural Studies.

00:00:43.160 --> 00:00:45.080

And our guest for today's podcast

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is Aimé Girimana, a refugee in Hong Kong

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who is helping asylum seekers.

00:00:50.160 --> 00:00:53.120

Here, he shares his story.

Aimé Girimana

00:00:53.120 --> 00:00:57.000

- As you heard, my name is Aimé Girimana.

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And we introduce myself as a humanity seeker.

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So I came to Hong Kong almost 19 years ago.

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And I have been working with refugees in different NGOs.

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And now I'm working for an NGO called Justice Center.

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So basically, what I do is to advocate

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and to educate the community and let

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them know what exactly refugees and asylum seekers are going

00:01:32.640 --> 00:01:35.160

through here in Hong Kong.

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One of my goal is really-- or one thing that makes me proud

00:01:41.560 --> 00:01:44.320

is to see my achievement.

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One of the things I'm so proud of

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is that seeing a child from the time

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he or she was wearing diapers and seeing him or her

00:01:59.840 --> 00:02:04.200

at university being really or having

00:02:04.200 --> 00:02:06.240

a great grade at university.

Marija

00:02:06.240 --> 00:02:10.800

- I think I can relate to that.

00:02:10.800 --> 00:02:12.760

It's really important.

00:02:12.760 --> 00:02:14.840

And you really see--

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even if you influence just this one person,

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you know that it will stay for the future.

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It will stay after you as well.

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So you said you work with refugees here in Hong Kong.

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And one word that I find really important

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when we talk about refugees is the word "home."

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Because a refugee or an asylum seeker

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is a person who had to leave home and seek for a new home

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that will be safer.

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So I just wanted to ask you, having

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your whole experience, your work, your background,

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what does home mean to you?

Aimé Girimana

00:03:01.200 --> 00:03:04.560

- Well, thank you so much for this question.

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I always say home is home.

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There's nothing really that can compare to home.

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So what home really means to me--

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home, it doesn't mean material thing.

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Home is just a welcoming environment.

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That is home, where you feel like, oh, yes, I am home.

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So at least getting that smile when

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you get in one place or another, that

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makes you feeling like that is home, the acceptance.

Marija

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- I won't ask you whether you feel at home here in Hong Kong.

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But I think we'll get to that through our discussion,

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hopefully.

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I always want to ask about people's--

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what kind of languages they speak

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and how they use these different languages

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in their everyday life.

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So if you can tell us a little bit about what

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are the languages that you speak,

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are you able to speak those languages here

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in Hong Kong with someone?

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And how do you go about your daily life?

Aimé Girimana

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- Talking about language and how I practice my languages

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in Hong Kong, I just want to tell you that--

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just back to this word, home, I didn't speak my mother tongue

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for more than seven years, except when I call home

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or when I'm sending emails to my family back home.

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So basically, I speak four languages.

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My official-- of course, I have my mother tongue,

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which is Kirundi.

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And my official language is French.

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And I speak English.

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And I speak Swahili as well.

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How do I communicate with people in Hong Kong?

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Or do I have any opportunity to use those languages here?

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I would say, yes.

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So communicating with the local people here,

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thankfully, if you speak English,

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you are able to communicate with the community in general.

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That's really something I'm really--

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I can say that it's great in Hong Kong.

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But of course, among the refugee communities,

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there are people who are French speakers.

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There are people who are speaking my mother tongue

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or another similar language.

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And of course, there are people who are speaking Swahili.

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So sometimes, I have to do interpretation

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and/or help them to either call or speak

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to people or landlord.

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So I have not that much opportunity

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to practice my languages except English,

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which is my daily language.

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But of course, I have opportunity sometimes

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to speak or to practice my languages.

00:06:11.680 --> 00:06:13.080

So yeah.

Marija

00:06:13.080 --> 00:06:16.640

- So what do you think are some of the biggest problem

00:06:16.640 --> 00:06:22.760

that refugees and asylum seekers have here in Hong Kong?

Aimé Girimana

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- Just to let you know, I have law background.

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And when I arrived here, I realized

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that refugees and asylum seekers in Hong Kong

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were completely forgotten.

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So people were sleeping at Star Ferry,

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waking up early in the morning.

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They were going to take shower at Kowloon Park.

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Of course, without valid visa or valid passport.

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So they were running away from police.

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So that really just shocked me and pushed my whole being

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to serve and to spend my time and my energy

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to help refugees and asylum seekers.

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That's how I started to be involved

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in helping refugees and asylum seekers.

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I used to say that when people are

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talking about right of refugees, I

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used to say the right refugees have is to know

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that they don't have any.

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What that means is when you live in situation where you have

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no clue about tomorrow, your daily life is eat, sleep, eat,

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sleep, not for one month, not for one year,

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but even for 10 years.

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That is a waste, actually.

00:08:01.560 --> 00:08:02.960

That's a waste.

00:08:02.960 --> 00:08:10.400

So the big challenge is that uncertainty in life,

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and especially for kids, for example, who left home,

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for example, at any age, they have no idea about what

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or how their motherland look like.

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They only know that the land--

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I mean, their home is here in Hong Kong.

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Or the kids who were born here with no future at all.

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So that's the biggest challenge for parents.

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Then you think about parents who are not

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able to provide even a chocolate bar to the son or daughter.

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That's another challenge, because they are not

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allowed to work or perform any paid or unpaid job.

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Technically, no.

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So you are living just as a receiver, a dependent person.

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It's a human being, I mean, destruction.

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So you don't find, actually, or feel whether you

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are a human being or not.

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So again, that's the biggest challenge.

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And the result of that is just psychological problem.

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Psychological problem.

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And thankfully, there are NGOs in Hong Kong

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which are trying to fill in these gaps within the needs

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of refugees and asylum seekers.

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And one of them is Justice Centre, the organization

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I'm working for.

Marija

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- Do you feel comfortable sharing what

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do they need to perform their work

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or for their work to be even more effective?

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They're doing a lot in providing legal assistance

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to asylum seekers and non-refoulement claimants.

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How can their work be even more effective?

Aimé Girimana

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- Thank you so much for this question.

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Just remember, they are doing this job on pro bono basis.

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And think about the number of people

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who are seeking international protection in Hong Kong who

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are not English speakers, who don't speak Cantonese,

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and who have no idea about refugee law.

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So you can imagine how crucial Justice Centre is

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within the refugee and asylum seekers community.

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So what can you do?

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That is a very good question.

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First of all, it's to increase our manpower

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so that we can cope with the demand of the asylum seekers

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and refugees.

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So in other words, it's supporting us financially.

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So because we are not financially supported

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by Hong Kong government, because we are helping

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non-Hong Kong ID holders.

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But of course, spread the word.

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Tell people that there are refugees

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who need really help.

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As I used to say, no one knows who will be the next refugee.

Marija

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- So in fact—

Aimé Girimana

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- You don't choose to be a refugee.

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And you don't choose to be a refugee.

00:12:22.400 --> 00:12:25.360

So that's a simple illustration.

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A few years ago, people were talking

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about genocide in Rwanda.

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And later it was Central African Republic, Egypt, Middle East,

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Yemen.

00:12:44.320 --> 00:12:47.680

Then later it was Syria.

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Later it was Afghanistan.

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Now it is Ukraine.

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So which country are we going to be talking about tomorrow?

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In other words, it's not a choice to become a refugee.

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And I'm very sure, and that unfortunately, it

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can happen to anyone at any time.

Marija

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- Yes.

00:13:14.520 --> 00:13:19.040

You listed quite a number of modern day,

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if I can say, 21st century conflicts that have produced--

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made a lot of people to have to leave their homes

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and everything behind and be scattered around the world.

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I have also witnessed some of that in former Yugoslavia,

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in ex-Yugoslavia.

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So I know exactly what you're talking about.

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If I can go back to the issue of languages,

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since that's one of the things that I'm interested in,

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and kind of also since I have worked as an interpreter

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myself, and I have worked as an interpreter for UNHCR

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and in refugee camps at border crossings

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where there were a lot of refugees and asylum seekers.

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So you mentioned that some of the asylum seekers that

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come to Hong Kong don't necessarily

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speak English or Cantonese.

00:14:24.520 --> 00:14:28.680

So they don't speak the local languages.

00:14:28.680 --> 00:14:31.560

How difficult it is to find support,

00:14:31.560 --> 00:14:34.800

or how easy it is to find support, language

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support for them.

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Are there sufficient interpreters

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to provide this support?

Aimé Girimana

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- Yes, I think I'm talking to the right person.

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You know how expensive interpreters are in Hong Kong.

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And when it comes to NGOs serving refugees and asylum

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seekers, they don't have that financial capacity to pay.

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So we rely on pro bono interpreters.

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So it's very hard.

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And you can imagine if you rely on free interpreters,

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I don't think you get the best interpreter.

Marija

00:15:26.880 --> 00:15:27.920

- Not always.

Aimé Girimana

00:15:27.920 --> 00:15:28.920

- Not always.

00:15:28.920 --> 00:15:29.800

Not always.

00:15:29.800 --> 00:15:31.720

So that's a big challenge.

00:15:31.720 --> 00:15:32.680

That's a big challenge.

00:15:32.680 --> 00:15:39.920

And sometimes we are obliged to rely on interpreters

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from outside.

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So the interpretation session will be online,

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which is very, very hard.

00:15:46.920 --> 00:15:48.440

Very hard.

Marija

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- The need for language, it's not just

00:15:51.840 --> 00:15:59.680

to fill in the forms that you need to file your application,

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your claim, and get legal assistance.

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It's a lot bigger than that, isn't it?

Aimé Girimana

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It is bigger than that.

00:16:07.360 --> 00:16:11.880

It's not just filling the form.

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It's about actually understanding

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what you are doing.

00:16:16.560 --> 00:16:20.160

Because people end up by misunderstanding

00:16:20.160 --> 00:16:21.680

what they are doing.

00:16:21.680 --> 00:16:27.560

And because of the needs, and because of where the system

00:16:27.560 --> 00:16:30.960

put them, it's just like, yes, let me do it.

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Let me do it as fast as possible without understanding

00:16:34.400 --> 00:16:35.880

what you are doing.

00:16:35.880 --> 00:16:39.800

So it's more than filling that form.

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It's also about--

Marija

00:16:40.960 --> 00:16:45.480

- And then the result of your claim also depends on how you

00:16:45.480 --> 00:16:47.480

tell your story and how you fill in the form.

Aimé Girimana

00:16:47.480 --> 00:16:48.320

- Exactly.

00:16:48.320 --> 00:16:51.720

And how you interpret, actually,

00:16:51.720 --> 00:16:52.960

deliver the message.

Marija

00:16:52.960 --> 00:16:55.200

- Right.

00:16:55.200 --> 00:16:58.720

Beyond that, it's probably also--

00:16:58.720 --> 00:17:01.880

if you spend more than one year here in Hong Kong, it's

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way beyond your legal needs.

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It's going to the doctors, going to school, doing your

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everyday life activities.

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So even not knowing English and Cantonese or Chinese also

00:17:21.480 --> 00:17:25.200

limits you in some way and restricts your movement and

00:17:25.200 --> 00:17:28.120

restricts what you can do.

Aimé Girimana

00:17:28.120 --> 00:17:29.680

- Yeah, exactly.

00:17:29.680 --> 00:17:35.160

And of course, given that fact, there are people who

00:17:35.160 --> 00:17:38.760

prefer just to give up or stay home.

00:17:38.760 --> 00:17:43.840

You don't need to be identified as a non-Chinese

00:17:43.840 --> 00:17:50.160

person or somebody who only speak your own dialect.

00:17:50.160 --> 00:17:52.880

So you prefer to stay home.

Marija

00:17:52.880 --> 00:17:54.160

- And then you don't interact.

00:17:54.160 --> 00:17:56.360

And then it's a magic circle, isn't it?

Aimé Girimana

00:17:56.360 --> 00:17:57.040

- Exactly.

00:17:57.040 --> 00:17:59.080

That's what I'm describing.

00:17:59.080 --> 00:18:01.600

I mean, that's how I describe life of refugees and

00:18:01.600 --> 00:18:02.240

asylum seekers.

00:18:02.240 --> 00:18:04.880

It's just eat and sleep, eat and sleep.

00:18:04.880 --> 00:18:08.480

And eating the same thing, sorry.

00:18:08.480 --> 00:18:13.520

Yeah, eating the same thing over and over.

Marija

00:18:13.520 --> 00:18:17.120

- But you mentioned at some point that you haven't spoken

00:18:17.120 --> 00:18:21.760

your native language for seven years with anyone, except

00:18:21.760 --> 00:18:24.160

odd emails back home or messages.

Aimé Girimana

00:18:24.160 --> 00:18:25.120

- Or phone calls.

Marija

00:18:25.120 --> 00:18:27.160

- Or phone calls.

00:18:27.160 --> 00:18:28.400

How does it feel?

00:18:28.400 --> 00:18:36.720

I want to know, how does it feel having to live your life

00:18:36.720 --> 00:18:41.720

and express your identity in a language that's not your

00:18:41.720 --> 00:18:42.760

mother tongue?

00:18:42.760 --> 00:18:47.200

And then not being able to use that mother tongue to talk

00:18:47.200 --> 00:18:50.840

about yourself and to express yourself?

Aimé Girimana

00:18:50.840 --> 00:18:56.960

- That's exactly when you feel like you are really a foreigner.

00:18:56.960 --> 00:18:58.800

You are really a stranger.

00:18:58.800 --> 00:18:59.520

Yes.

00:18:59.520 --> 00:19:01.040

You are really a stranger.

00:19:01.040 --> 00:19:07.680

And that's very dangerous because it affects your mother

00:19:07.680 --> 00:19:08.880

tongue as well.

00:19:08.880 --> 00:19:13.920

So you are tempted to mix or to mess up or to mix languages

00:19:13.920 --> 00:19:16.920

when you are speaking your own mother tongue.

00:19:16.920 --> 00:19:20.680

So your mother tongue is no longer pure mother tongue.

00:19:20.680 --> 00:19:21.920

You have to mix it.

00:19:21.920 --> 00:19:25.200

And people will be, ah, OK.

00:19:25.200 --> 00:19:26.200

What happened to you?

00:19:26.200 --> 00:19:28.000

Or what that means.

00:19:28.000 --> 00:19:28.520

Yeah.

00:19:28.520 --> 00:19:30.160

Or what that means.

00:19:30.160 --> 00:19:33.040

So it affects--

Marija

00:19:33.040 --> 00:19:37.160

So you're not able to express yourself in any of the

00:19:37.160 --> 00:19:38.520

languages, right?

00:19:38.520 --> 00:19:42.480

Because you lose your mother tongue slowly.

00:19:42.480 --> 00:19:48.320

But then you don't feel like the other languages can fully

00:19:48.320 --> 00:19:49.280

express everything.

Aimé Girimana

00:19:49.280 --> 00:19:50.520

- Express what you are feeling, yes.

Marija

00:19:53.960 --> 00:19:58.240

- How do they manage to overcome this difficult period?

Aimé Girimana

00:19:58.240 --> 00:19:59.000

- Yes.

00:19:59.000 --> 00:20:05.880

So yeah, that's a good question.

00:20:05.880 --> 00:20:08.120

OK.

00:20:08.120 --> 00:20:13.680

So basically, if somebody comes to Hong Kong, he or she

00:20:13.680 --> 00:20:18.000

will be either a tourist--

00:20:18.000 --> 00:20:21.440

so having 14 days or three months.

00:20:21.440 --> 00:20:24.080

It depends on where you come from.

00:20:24.080 --> 00:20:28.880

Or he or she will surrender at the immigration

00:20:28.880 --> 00:20:31.080

department at the airport.

00:20:31.080 --> 00:20:33.040

So there are two situations.

00:20:33.040 --> 00:20:40.880

So once you surrender yourself to immigration department, it's very risky.

00:20:40.880 --> 00:20:48.120

Because once your case is rejected, you are likely to be

00:20:48.120 --> 00:20:50.800

sent back home.

00:20:50.800 --> 00:20:57.840

So most of the people are not taking that kind of risk.

00:20:57.840 --> 00:21:05.640

So the majority of them are entering Hong Kong as tourists.

00:21:05.640 --> 00:21:08.240

So the visa then--

00:21:08.240 --> 00:21:15.720

once you have a valid visa, you cannot claim yourself as a

00:21:15.720 --> 00:21:17.680

asylum seeker.

00:21:17.680 --> 00:21:23.640

So in other words, there is no even NGOs which will accept

00:21:23.640 --> 00:21:28.200

you as somebody who is seeking asylum.

00:21:28.200 --> 00:21:32.320

So you have to wait until your visa expires.

00:21:32.320 --> 00:21:37.280

So once your visa expires, basically, the system is

00:21:37.280 --> 00:21:45.480

making those who are seeking asylum becoming offenders.

00:21:45.480 --> 00:21:49.560

So that means you have to breach first your condition of

00:21:49.560 --> 00:21:51.440

stay in Hong Kong.

00:21:51.440 --> 00:21:54.720

And then you surrender to immigration.

00:21:54.720 --> 00:21:59.160

So of course, you can surrender to immigration, or you get

00:21:59.160 --> 00:22:01.320

caught by police.

00:22:01.320 --> 00:22:06.000

So once you go to immigration, or surrender to immigration,

00:22:06.000 --> 00:22:09.200

or get caught by police, obviously, you will be

00:22:09.200 --> 00:22:14.960

detained for breaching of condition of stay.

00:22:14.960 --> 00:22:21.280

So usually, it depends on your situation.

00:22:21.280 --> 00:22:26.600

So usually, they will detain people for at least two weeks.

00:22:26.600 --> 00:22:30.880

And that is actually recent development.

00:22:30.880 --> 00:22:37.680

Before 2008, people were detained for years.

00:22:37.680 --> 00:22:40.760

So anyways, so you'll be detained.

00:22:40.760 --> 00:22:45.480

So they take away all your travel documents, and you will

00:22:45.480 --> 00:22:49.560

sign all your things at immigration.

00:22:49.560 --> 00:22:53.400

Then you'll be granted something they call

00:22:53.400 --> 00:22:55.000

reconnaissance paper.

00:22:55.000 --> 00:22:59.000

That's technically Form 8.

00:22:59.000 --> 00:23:03.360

So you can come then out.

00:23:03.360 --> 00:23:07.440

Then that's the time you can approach NGOs or start,

00:23:07.440 --> 00:23:11.840

actually, your claim.

00:23:11.840 --> 00:23:21.240

So then this is the time Justice Centre will step in.

00:23:21.240 --> 00:23:23.520

NGOs will step in.

00:23:23.520 --> 00:23:28.920

But remember, when you are claiming asylum in Hong Kong,

00:23:28.920 --> 00:23:35.080

basically, you are labeled as somebody who

00:23:35.080 --> 00:23:38.240

illegally entered Hong Kong.

00:23:38.240 --> 00:23:39.640

So you don't have your ID.

00:23:39.640 --> 00:23:41.400

You don't have your travel documents.

00:23:41.400 --> 00:23:48.000

So you have basically no rights.

00:23:48.000 --> 00:23:55.280

But thankfully, the government is providing a little bit of

00:23:55.280 --> 00:23:57.240

assistance.

00:23:57.240 --> 00:24:00.760

That is through Social Welfare Department.

00:24:00.760 --> 00:24:07.400

Again, SWD couldn't provide directly to refugees and

00:24:07.400 --> 00:24:08.640

asylum seekers.

00:24:08.640 --> 00:24:11.720

So they hired another organization called

00:24:11.720 --> 00:24:14.120

International Social Services.

00:24:14.120 --> 00:24:20.560

So there's an ISS, Refugee and Asylum Seekers, which

00:24:20.560 --> 00:24:25.120

is providing assistance to refugees and asylum seekers.

00:24:25.120 --> 00:24:28.360

So what kind of assistance am I talking about?

00:24:28.360 --> 00:24:33.880

So they get \$1,500 for accommodation.

00:24:33.880 --> 00:24:38.520

I don't know where you can get room for \$1,500 in Hong Kong.

00:24:38.520 --> 00:24:43.200

That is per month and for grown-up person.

00:24:43.200 --> 00:24:46.600

A child is half.

00:24:46.600 --> 00:24:48.560

A child is half.

00:24:48.560 --> 00:24:52.960

So they get \$1,200 for food.

00:24:52.960 --> 00:24:54.360

It's not cash.

00:24:54.360 --> 00:24:59.120

And by the way, the money for rent is not cash.

00:24:59.120 --> 00:25:02.760

The money will be deposited to the landlord's bank account

00:25:02.760 --> 00:25:04.000

directly.

00:25:04.000 --> 00:25:09.120

So they get \$1,200 for food.

00:25:09.120 --> 00:25:11.360

That's not cash again.

00:25:11.360 --> 00:25:14.000

It's an electronic voucher.

00:25:14.000 --> 00:25:15.560

It's a card.

00:25:15.560 --> 00:25:20.000

So they can only use it at packing shop.

00:25:20.000 --> 00:25:23.320

So only one supermarket.

00:25:23.320 --> 00:25:29.040

So they have access to public hospitals.

00:25:29.040 --> 00:25:32.800

But of course, since they are not allowed to work,

00:25:32.800 --> 00:25:36.800

so they are not able to pay the hospital fees.

00:25:36.800 --> 00:25:42.280

So the SWD will waive the medical fees.

00:25:42.280 --> 00:25:45.160

So you have to get the medical waiver first,

00:25:45.160 --> 00:25:47.880

which lasts for 24 hours.

00:25:47.880 --> 00:25:50.960

So you go to the hospital, and the hospital

00:25:50.960 --> 00:25:54.040

will allow you to get treatment.

00:25:54.040 --> 00:26:00.920

But just for information, we have so many complaints

00:26:00.920 --> 00:26:05.120

saying that no matter what you suffer from,

00:26:05.120 --> 00:26:08.520

you will only get painkillers.

00:26:08.520 --> 00:26:12.440

Kids from refugee families, they are

00:26:12.440 --> 00:26:16.800

allowed to go to local schools until they are 18 years,

00:26:16.800 --> 00:26:19.200

technically, until they are 18 years.

00:26:19.200 --> 00:26:24.640

So the government pays for the school fees, textbook,

00:26:24.640 --> 00:26:28.520

but no uniform, no stationery, no miscellaneous at all.

00:26:28.520 --> 00:26:32.280

That means you are supposed to send your child to school

00:26:32.280 --> 00:26:35.200

without even a ball pen.

00:26:35.200 --> 00:26:40.480

So in short, that is how life of refugees

00:26:40.480 --> 00:26:45.280

look like in terms of assistance.

00:26:45.280 --> 00:26:47.160

And that's the reason, actually, we

00:26:47.160 --> 00:26:52.480

have NGOs which are stepping in to fill in the gaps, whatever.

00:26:52.480 --> 00:26:56.960

So just a simple example.

00:26:56.960 --> 00:27:01.680

So in packing shop, there is no rice cooker.

00:27:01.680 --> 00:27:03.680

They do sell rice.

00:27:03.680 --> 00:27:05.920

But if you buy rice in packing shop,

00:27:05.920 --> 00:27:09.240

how can you eat the rice without the rice cooker?

00:27:09.240 --> 00:27:12.600

So that's one of the example I used to give.

00:27:12.600 --> 00:27:14.920

So there's no gas stove.

00:27:14.920 --> 00:27:16.640

There's no-- I don't know.

00:27:16.640 --> 00:27:22.160

There's even the room, for example, that you will find.

00:27:22.160 --> 00:27:26.120

You may find an empty room, no mattress, no bed.

00:27:26.120 --> 00:27:28.720

So that's the thing NGOs are doing.

00:27:28.720 --> 00:27:29.320

Yes.

00:27:29.320 --> 00:27:35.000

So basically, not being allowed to work,

00:27:35.000 --> 00:27:43.160

getting only that limited assistance for life,

00:27:43.160 --> 00:27:47.760

not being able to plan your tomorrow,

00:27:47.760 --> 00:27:52.520

that is how life of refugees and asylum seekers look like.

00:27:52.520 --> 00:27:56.760

That means they sleep, eat, sleep, eat,

00:27:56.760 --> 00:28:02.320

unless those kind of NGOs are planning activities

00:28:02.320 --> 00:28:07.280

like classes or outings, things like that.

00:28:07.280 --> 00:28:08.840

That's the time they go out.

00:28:08.840 --> 00:28:13.120

Again, they don't have money to pay transportation.

00:28:13.120 --> 00:28:16.600

So NGOs have to pay the transport money in order

00:28:16.600 --> 00:28:19.720

to attend those activities.

00:28:19.720 --> 00:28:20.440

Yeah.

Marija

00:28:20.440 --> 00:28:23.640

- But that's the mental health supports they get.

00:28:23.640 --> 00:28:30.640

It's really also just giving them something to do in their life, in their everyday life.

Aimé Girimana

00:28:30.640 --> 00:28:31.320

- Yes.

00:28:31.320 --> 00:28:36.240

So how do they overcome this kind of situation?

00:28:36.240 --> 00:28:42.800

Basically, there are two hopes for those

00:28:42.800 --> 00:28:45.320

whose cases are accepted.

00:28:45.320 --> 00:28:54.800

So one hope is they are able to legally work in Hong Kong

00:28:54.800 --> 00:28:59.320

if you are granted refugee status.

00:28:59.320 --> 00:29:04.320

So the second one is if you are granted a refugee status

00:29:04.320 --> 00:29:07.680

through United Nations High Commission for Refugees,

00:29:07.680 --> 00:29:12.920

you can be resettled in the third country.

00:29:12.920 --> 00:29:16.640

So that's one hope or two hopes for one

00:29:16.640 --> 00:29:19.000

group of this community.

00:29:19.000--> 00:29:29.520

And I'm talking about less than 350 within more than 13,000.

00:29:29.520 --> 00:29:40.560

So how do they really overcome this situation?

00:29:40.560 --> 00:29:45.600

So let's say in my case, for example,

00:29:45.600 --> 00:29:55.040

it's just really living here alone without my family.

00:29:55.040 --> 00:29:56.520

My wife is not here.

00:29:56.520 --> 00:30:00.880

My kids are not here for 18 years.

00:30:00.880 --> 00:30:06.400

I can tell you I only have, let's say, two strengths.

00:30:06.400 --> 00:30:07.560

Yeah, two.

00:30:07.560 --> 00:30:10.320

One is my faith.

00:30:10.320 --> 00:30:15.800

I know everything happened for a purpose.

00:30:15.800 --> 00:30:21.240

And my second strength is what I'm doing to the community.

00:30:21.240 --> 00:30:24.920

It helps me when I give.

00:30:24.920 --> 00:30:27.960

And people should really enjoy that--

00:30:27.960 --> 00:30:33.000

I mean, feel that joy of giving to the community.

00:30:33.000 --> 00:30:39.080

So those are really the two main strengths for me.

00:30:39.080 --> 00:30:44.000

But of course, my wife who is supporting me all the time,

00:30:44.000 --> 00:30:48.440

though she's far away, but she's supporting me a lot.

00:30:48.440 --> 00:31:02.560

So for others, I really don't most of the time

00:31:02.560 --> 00:31:05.800

understand how they cope with this situation.

00:31:05.800 --> 00:31:08.720

But of course, that's the reason we

00:31:08.720 --> 00:31:14.120

have our psychosocial program.

00:31:14.120 --> 00:31:19.960

So of course, we do organize our things.

00:31:19.960 --> 00:31:24.840

We do organize some activities just to relax and just

00:31:24.840 --> 00:31:29.760

to get out and to have just less time

00:31:29.760 --> 00:31:31.880

to think about their own problems.

Marija

00:31:31.880 --> 00:31:39.160

We've talked a lot about refugees and asylum seekers

00:31:39.160 --> 00:31:40.720

as a group.

00:31:40.800 --> 00:31:44.560

You're also from Africa.

00:31:44.560 --> 00:31:49.760

How has that been a challenge or a good thing

00:31:49.760 --> 00:31:53.120

about being here in Hong Kong?

00:31:53.120 --> 00:31:57.600

Has that affected your finding home in Hong Kong

00:31:57.600 --> 00:31:59.480

and feeling welcome in Hong Kong?

Aimé Girimana

00:31:59.480 --> 00:32:00.720

Yeah.

00:32:00.720 --> 00:32:02.960

So that's a very good question.

00:32:02.960 --> 00:32:08.040

And I'm really very thankful that things are

00:32:08.040 --> 00:32:10.840

changing in a positive way.

00:32:10.840 --> 00:32:18.560

So when I-- actually, the first surprise

00:32:18.560 --> 00:32:23.640

I got when I came to Hong Kong was somebody

00:32:23.640 --> 00:32:28.120

who asked me whether we have rice at home.

00:32:28.120 --> 00:32:29.880

I was, wow.

00:32:29.880 --> 00:32:31.800

OK.

00:32:31.800 --> 00:32:37.720

So it's really a big--

00:32:37.720 --> 00:32:39.240

it was.

00:32:39.240 --> 00:32:42.760

It's no longer really that horrible.

00:32:42.760 --> 00:32:47.840

But it was really a challenge for dark-skinned people

00:32:47.840 --> 00:32:48.840

to live in Hong Kong.

00:32:48.840 --> 00:32:54.640

And I blame--

00:32:54.640 --> 00:32:56.440

I'm sorry for teachers.

00:32:56.440 --> 00:33:02.160

And I blame really the education system in Hong Kong.

00:33:02.160 --> 00:33:07.720

So most of the community in Hong Kong, local community,

00:33:07.720 --> 00:33:13.760

all they know about Africa is jungle, hunger, whatever,

00:33:13.760 --> 00:33:15.800

which is not the case.

00:33:15.800 --> 00:33:17.640

It's not the case.

00:33:17.640 --> 00:33:22.240

So somebody was shocked when I told him

00:33:22.240 --> 00:33:24.320

that I was driving back home,

00:33:24.320 --> 00:33:25.720

said, 'wow, really?

00:33:25.720 --> 00:33:27.080

So you are not from Africa.'

00:33:27.080 --> 00:33:29.200

Of course, I'm from Africa.

00:33:29.200 --> 00:33:32.280

So it was a big challenge.

00:33:32.280 --> 00:33:33.760

This was a big challenge.

00:33:33.760 --> 00:33:42.040

But for now, as I said, things are changing in a really very

00:33:42.040 --> 00:33:43.840

positive way.

00:33:43.840 --> 00:33:48.560

I have never, never dreamed to see African guys getting

00:33:48.560 --> 00:33:51.040

married to local Chinese.

00:33:51.040 --> 00:33:53.480

But now it's really common.

00:33:53.480 --> 00:33:54.280

It's really common.

00:33:54.280 --> 00:33:59.000

We have a lot, a lot who have been married to local Chinese.

00:33:59.000 --> 00:34:01.560

So it was really a challenge.

00:34:01.560 --> 00:34:02.720

It was a challenge.

00:34:02.720 --> 00:34:07.840

But of course, later on, I really

00:34:07.840 --> 00:34:12.200

realized that it's not really about Africans.

00:34:12.200 --> 00:34:15.680

It's about foreigners in general.

00:34:15.680 --> 00:34:23.960

It's not-- so and I tried to understand.

00:34:23.960 --> 00:34:27.640

And definitely, I think I have understood.

00:34:27.640 --> 00:34:32.560

It's about the culture.

00:34:32.560 --> 00:34:33.560

It's a local culture.

00:34:33.560 --> 00:34:42.280

That accepting foreigners is not really in the culture,

00:34:42.280 --> 00:34:44.160

in the local culture.

00:34:44.160 --> 00:34:47.400

But thankfully, as I said, things are changing.

00:34:47.400 --> 00:34:49.320

Really, things are changing.

00:34:49.320 --> 00:34:56.360

You can see during my basketball game, for example,

00:34:56.360 --> 00:35:00.520

you can see how proud my teammates will

00:35:00.520 --> 00:35:03.680

be when we are talking or speaking in English

00:35:03.680 --> 00:35:07.200

or when they hear me speaking some of the bad words

00:35:07.200 --> 00:35:09.560

in Cantonese.

00:35:09.560 --> 00:35:10.160

Yes.

00:35:10.160 --> 00:35:11.320

So they are so proud of that.

00:35:11.320 --> 00:35:15.400

And basically, if you come across somebody

00:35:15.400 --> 00:35:18.080

who have been outside from Hong Kong,

00:35:18.080 --> 00:35:21.960

it's different from somebody who have never been outside.

00:35:21.960 --> 00:35:28.720

So that's why I say, really, I'm seeing a bright future

00:35:28.720 --> 00:35:31.000

for Hong Kong.

00:35:31.000 --> 00:35:32.800

Just guys, keep on.

00:35:32.800 --> 00:35:34.320

Keep on.

00:35:34.320 --> 00:35:36.760

Tell people that there are really

00:35:36.760 --> 00:35:40.600

forgotten community here.

00:35:40.600 --> 00:35:47.840

And tell people the other story or the other side of Hong Kong.

00:35:47.840 --> 00:35:48.920

Yes.

00:35:48.920 --> 00:35:54.040

So it's an international city.

00:35:54.040 --> 00:35:55.600

And that's the core of--

00:35:55.600 --> 00:35:56.560

I don't know.

00:35:56.560 --> 00:35:59.560

That's the core of Hong Kong.

00:35:59.560 --> 00:36:02.440

It's an international city.

00:36:02.440 --> 00:36:05.520

And that should be really kept.

00:36:05.520 --> 00:36:08.960

That diversity, acceptance of others,

00:36:08.960 --> 00:36:11.080

that should be, again, the core--

00:36:11.080 --> 00:36:14.800

I mean, continue to be the core of Hong Kong.

Marija

00:36:14.800 --> 00:36:16.280

- Right.

00:36:16.280 --> 00:36:18.280

At the beginning, you mentioned, I think,

00:36:18.280 --> 00:36:22.120

that you've been here in Hong Kong for quite some time.

00:36:22.120 --> 00:36:26.080

Where do you see yourself in the future?

Aimé Girimana

00:36:26.080 --> 00:36:29.200

- I see my future, actually--

00:36:29.200 --> 00:36:32.640

or I see myself in the future in a better place,

00:36:32.640 --> 00:36:34.280

actually, in Hong Kong.

00:36:34.280 --> 00:36:40.240

And thankfully, when I look back in 2004 when I came here,

00:36:40.240 --> 00:36:48.360

things have been improving and significantly, actually.

00:36:48.360 --> 00:36:52.160

That's why, for me, I never lose hope.

00:36:52.160 --> 00:36:57.040

So I see myself in a better future in Hong Kong.

00:36:57.040 --> 00:37:05.280

And in fact, I do recall some of discrimination act

00:37:05.280 --> 00:37:13.160

when we were going to look for a place or a house.

00:37:13.160 --> 00:37:19.480

Just looking at you having dark skin, the answer was straight.

00:37:19.480 --> 00:37:21.040

We don't have a house.

00:37:21.040 --> 00:37:23.600

But now, things are changing.

00:37:23.600 --> 00:37:25.720

Things are changing.

00:37:25.720 --> 00:37:30.960

And when I do my outreach at schools and universities,

00:37:30.960 --> 00:37:35.280

I can feel there's a really brighter future in Hong Kong.

00:37:35.280 --> 00:37:44.560

So what we need to do is to keep on bringing awareness

00:37:44.560 --> 00:37:48.840

to this community, especially young people who

00:37:48.840 --> 00:37:56.240

will be taking over whatever us grown-up people are doing today.

Marija

00:37:56.240 --> 00:37:58.680

- It's so good to hear your optimism.

00:37:58.680 --> 00:38:02.920

And it's so nice to hear you say that you

00:38:02.920 --> 00:38:04.960

see a better future for Hong Kong

00:38:04.960 --> 00:38:08.000

and that you have hope for the future.

00:38:08.000 --> 00:38:12.280

So if I can end this interview with something

00:38:12.280 --> 00:38:15.160

that we ask all our interviewees,

00:38:15.160 --> 00:38:19.520

and that's what are three words that you

00:38:19.520 --> 00:38:22.440

would use to describe your life here in Hong Kong,

00:38:22.440 --> 00:38:24.680

just three words without explaining.

Aimé Girimana
00:38:24.680 --> 00:38:26.960

- Thank you so much for this question.

00:38:26.960 --> 00:38:34.320

And Hong Kong has been a learning space for me.

Marija
00:38:34.320 --> 00:38:34.960

- Great.

00:38:34.960 --> 00:38:35.600

Thank you.

00:38:35.600 --> 00:38:36.400

Thank you, Aimé.

00:38:36.400 --> 00:38:37.200

Thank you so much.

00:38:37.200 --> 00:38:53.860

(upbeat music)