

ATTN: SCMP Sports Desk

For Immediate Release

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Refugee runners seek shoes for MSIG Action Asia HK50 Trail Run and Hike

A team of refugee runners from across Africa participating in the MSIG Action Asia HK50 Trail Run and Hike in Hong Kong on Sunday (October 26) are seeking sponsors for their running shoes.

Eight refugees from countries such as Eritrea, Ethiopia and the Central African Republic, all of whom are seeking protection in Hong Kong, will run as part of the 'Run for Justice' team, alongside staff from and supporters of Justice Centre Hong Kong, an NGO that works to protect refugees' rights. Justice Centre is seeking funds to cover the costs of new specialty running shoes for the refugees, at a cost of HK\$500 per head (HK\$4000 total). The team is running to raise money for Justice Centre's Mental Health Assessment and Support Service.

There are around 8,000 refugees in Hong Kong, many of whom have suffered serious physical and psychological trauma in the countries from which they have fled. Justice Centre's Mental Health Assessment and Support Service works with the most vulnerable refugees, helping them recount the traumatic events they have experienced in an effort to support their legal claim for refugee status.

Some of the 'Run for Justice' refugee runners were professional athletes in their home countries. One was a professional footballer. Alongside Justice Centre lawyers, psychologists and supporters, the refugee runners have been training hard for two months at a Causeway Bay running track and on the trails across Hong Kong's country parks in preparation for the race, which kicks off at the Peak on Sunday and covers stages one to four of the Hong Kong Trail. The team's training is being overseen by a professional running coach from East Africa, also a refugee in Hong Kong. For reasons of security, the identities of all of the refugee runners must be protected.

Ding Chen, a lawyer from Justice Centre, who is part of the 'Run for Justice' team, said:

"Many of the refugees we work with here at Justice Centre ran as fast and as long as they could from their torturers and persecutors. They ran for their lives. I am privileged to be joining eight of these amazing people on the MSIG Action Asia HK50 Trail Run, people who literally had to run for their lives before arriving in Hong Kong, arriving here with almost nothing. We hope that this time, we will be running together for different reasons: a better life for refugees here in Hong Kong and just for the sheer joy of running together as a community. Just HK\$500 could cover the cost of one pair of running shoes for one of these guys, HK\$4000 for the team of eight refugees, and help make this happen."

Ravina Lalvani, a trainee clinical psychologist with Justice Centre, who is also running, said:

"Our Mental Health Assessment and Support Service is crucial in helping refugees who have experienced some of the worst human rights abuses to deal with their trauma in order to tell their story as part of their legal claim for asylum. For some refugees, who have blocked their experiences in order to survive, facing up to these events again is incredibly traumatic. For example, people who have experienced persecution become paranoid and it becomes difficult for them to explain their situation in a coherent way."

"The money raised from this run will help refugees get the psychological support they need to tell their story and enable Justice Centre to gather the psychological and medical evidence to support their refugee claim. That could mean the difference between life and death for some of them."

Ja Ja (not real name), a refugee runner from Eritrea in East Africa, said:

"I am really happy to be part of this Run for Justice Team. It gives me focus, fills my time and is something to look forward to. All the Justice Centre officers run with us, like friends. Most of the team is from East and Central Africa. We are used to running at high altitudes and are consequently good athletes. This run is an opportunity to get to know one another, have fun, but ultimately, to win. I am running to win."

To cover the costs of the refugees' running shoes, please contact ding@justicecentre.org.hk.

Notes to Editors:

Justice Centre Hong Kong is a not-for-profit, human rights organisation working fearlessly to protect the rights of Hong Kong's most vulnerable forced migrants - refugees, other people seeking protection and survivors of modern slavery. At our welcoming and comfortable centre, refugees in Hong Kong receive free and independent legal and psychological support. For more information, visit www.justicecentre.org.hk

Through Run for Justice. Justice Centre hopes to raise HK\$150,000 for the expansion of its Mental Health Assessment and Support Service. To sponsor the team taking part in Run for Justice, please visit <http://simplygiving.com/event/runforjustice>

More information about the MSIG Action Asia HK50 trail is available at <http://www.actionasiaevents.com/our-events/2014-msig-hk50/overview.html#content>