

Smartphone app lets user 'walk a mile in a refugee's shoes'

April 25 2017, by Eileen Ng



A staff member displays the mobile application "Finding Home" on her phone during a launch at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Tuesday, April 25, 2017. The U.N. refugee agency and a Malaysian firm have launched an interactive smartphone application aimed at raising public awareness and empathy about the worldwide struggle of refugees. (AP Photo/Daniel Chan)

The United Nations helped launch a smartphone app Tuesday that allows

users to "walk a mile in a refugee's shoes" by simulating the daily struggles of a fictional Rohingya Muslim who was forced to flee her home.

The "Finding Home" app, developed by the advertising firm Grey Malaysia, allows users to simulate the phone of "Kathijah," a fictional 16-year-old who fled persecution in Myanmar and is trying to make a new life in Malaysia.

Users essentially take over Kathijah's phone, answering her calls and texts and scrolling through her photos. In one scenario, she gets a message from her brother Ishak back in Myanmar.

"Kat, r u safe?" the message says. "It was a raid, they found us. Had to run."

Richard Towles, the UNHCR representative in Malaysia, said he hopes the [free app](#) will help people empathize with refugees.

"The refugee story is often a deeply personal one and difficult for people to understand," Towles said. "We hope that this application will allow a viewer to walk a mile in a refugee's shoes in order to understand what they go through every day in order to find safety."

There are more than 150,000 [asylum seekers](#) and refugees in Malaysia, one of the highest numbers in Asia, according to the UNHCR. About a third of them are ethnic Rohingya Muslims, identified by the U.N. as one of the world's most persecuted minorities, who are denied citizenship by Myanmar and chased off their land in repeated outbreaks of communal violence.

"The refugee crisis is everywhere, yet we are inevitably desensitized to it as it has been going on so long," said Grey's creative director, Graham

Drew.



Representative of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees Malaysia, Richard Towle, left, and Executive Creative Director of GREY Malaysia, Graham Drew, right, pose with smart phones displaying the application "Finding Home" during a launch at the UNHCR headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Tuesday, April 25, 2017. The refugee agency and the Malaysian firm have launched the application aimed at raising public awareness and empathy about the worldwide struggle of refugees. (AP Photo/Daniel Chan)



Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Malaysia Richard Towle, left, and Executive Creative Director of GREY Malaysia, Graham Drew, right, shows the application "Finding Home" on their phones during a launch at the UNHCR headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Tuesday, April 25, 2017. The refugee agency and the Malaysian firm have launched the application aimed at raising public awareness and empathy about the worldwide struggle of refugees. (AP Photo/Daniel Chan)



Staff member of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees Izarra Azuddin displays the application "Finding Home" on her smart phone during a launch at the UNHCR headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Tuesday, April 25, 2017. The refugee agency and a Malaysian firm have launched the application aimed at raising public awareness and empathy about the worldwide struggle of refugees. (AP Photo/Daniel Chan)



Richard Towle, representative of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees launches the smart phone application "Finding Home" at the UNHCR headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Tuesday, April 25, 2017. The refugee agency and a Malaysian firm have launched the application aimed at raising public awareness and empathy about the worldwide struggle of refugees. (AP Photo/Daniel Chan)

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