

Withyou

Rising to the Challenge

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“ We welcomed 2017 with renewed hope that with you by our side, we can strengthen our work in protecting families forced to flee, in increasing our capacity to mobilize rapidly and respond effectively to emergencies, and in delivering durable solutions to empower the families and communities we serve. ”

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Now, more than ever, we need to rise to the pressing challenges of global displacement.

This 2017, the plight of those uprooted by conflict, violence and persecution is higher on the international agenda than perhaps ever before. Yet building and maintaining peace has become increasingly difficult, with more than 65 million people now displaced globally as refugees, or within their own countries.

The immediate causes of refugee flows and internal displacement today are armed conflict, violence, insecurity, and persecution. Major conflicts have grown in intensity and are causing many more fatalities. Exacerbating the global displacement crisis are natural disasters and extreme weather events as a result of climate change.

Yet crisis has also given impetus to positive developments.

People uprooted and seeking protection have encountered a remarkable level of solidarity among host communities in many parts of the world. In Canada and the United States, there has been an upsurge in volunteerism and a broadening of civil society engagement on refugee issues, with many people opening their homes to refugees, becoming engaged in community projects and providing direct support.

Against this encouraging backdrop, we welcomed 2017 with renewed hope that with you by our side, we can strengthen our work in protecting families forced to flee, in

increasing our capacity to mobilize rapidly and respond effectively to emergencies, and in delivering durable solutions to empower the families and communities we serve.

Your commitment to give to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees makes all these possible. Your continued support gives us strength to stay the course and press on—despite the tremendous task ahead.

Together, we can rise to the growing challenges of forced displacement here in the Philippines and across the world.

The world has to go back to solidarity. With open arms, open minds, open hearts, we hope to continue to save lives, protect people forced to flee, and help them rebuild futures in dignity and safety.

Yours sincerely,

Yasser Saad
Head, UNHCR National
Office in the Philippines



Neil Gaiman appointed UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador

“There has never been a more important time to stand in solidarity with refugees.”
–Neil Gaiman



Last February, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, announced the appointment of internationally acclaimed author Neil Gaiman as a global Goodwill Ambassador. The announcement comes after three years of close cooperation between Gaiman and UNHCR to raise awareness about the plight of forcibly displaced people and to generate much needed funds.

"I am deeply honoured to take on this role with UNHCR", said Gaiman.

"There has never been a more important time to stand in solidarity with refugees. I've had the privilege

of travelling with UNHCR to Jordan to meet Syrian refugees. In amongst the horror and the nightmares, there were many small and glorious stories of survival and hope, resilience and dignity. If anyone could have the conversations I had, if only everyone could sit and speak to refugees, face to face, they would see that we really are the same, that we really are part of one family. And, at its best, a family does all it can to support each other."

Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees said: "Goodwill Ambassadors play an important role in creating better public understanding and support for

refugees. Neil Gaiman has been a strong advocate of UNHCR and the refugee cause over a number of years and I am delighted to see him joining us as a Goodwill Ambassador."

Gaiman had been working closely with UNHCR since 2013. He has championed UNHCR's work through media interviews and via his social media channels. As well as travelling to Jordan to meet Syrian refugees, he has supported several fundraising initiatives and UNHCR campaigns and events, including #WithRefugees, the #IBelong campaign to end statelessness, World Refugee Day and the Nansen Refugee Award.

UN refugee chief calls for accelerated assistance for Aleppo

Expressing shock at the scale of the devastation in Aleppo in Syria, UN High Commissioner Filippo Grandi has called for accelerated humanitarian assistance for millions of people trying to rebuild their lives in the war-torn nation.

"There are people here – some of them are returning to these ruins – who need help, immediate help. They are cold, they are hungry, they need to work to earn some money. They need the elementary things in life," he declared in a statement after touring the ancient city of Aleppo during his landmark visit to Syria last January.

Grandi added: "We need resources, irrespective of all the politics around this war. This is absolutely necessary and urgent for millions of people in Syria. We saw it in Damascus, we saw it in Homs, we see it in Aleppo ... All the Syrian people need help. We cannot abandon them because the crisis is not over."



The UN High Commissioner for Refugees said that despite following the conflict closely nothing had prepared him for immensity of the destruction he witnessed in Aleppo.

"The level of destruction is much bigger than I thought... I didn't imagine it would be this widespread. You drive for miles and miles you see destroyed civilian houses, destroyed schools, destroyed hospitals. Everything has been ruined," he said.

Calling for "massive investment" for reconstruction, Grandi said peace and stability had first to take hold – and rapidly – saying people could not wait any longer.

RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE THIS 2017: The World's Displacement Drivers

Continuing conflicts around the world – some lasting for decades, some intensifying and very much in the public eye, others virtually forgotten – have forced 65 million individuals to flee their homes, often several times, with no clear-cut solutions in sight.

The entangled conflicts in Iraq and Syria account for almost a quarter of this number, but major crises like the one in Yemen are also major drivers of forced displacement.



SYRIA

The Syrian refugee crisis, which marks its 6th year in March 2017, is the biggest humanitarian catastrophe of our time. The conflict demands a huge surge in solidarity worldwide.

Syrians continue to be the largest refugee population under UNHCR's mandate.

Since fighting started in 2011, more than 4.9 million have fled the war-torn nation and sought refuge in neighboring countries like Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and beyond. Inside Syria, some 6.5 million are internally displaced.



IRAQ

More than 3 million Iraqis have been displaced across the country since the start of 2014 and nearly 220,000 are refugees in other countries. Mass executions, systemic rape and horrendous acts of violence are widespread, and human rights and rule of law are under constant attack.

Conditions also continue to worsen in the western part of Mosul, Iraq's 2nd largest city.

By the end of 2016, it is estimated that over 11 million Iraqis are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.



YEMEN

Fighting in Yemen, already one of the poorest countries in the Middle East, has severely compounded needs arising from long years of poverty and insecurity.

The worsening violence has disrupted millions of lives, resulting in widespread casualties and massive displacement, and the situation is rapidly deteriorating.

Over 2 million Yemenis have already been forced to flee their homes and a staggering 19 million people remain in need of humanitarian assistance across the country.

YOUR DONATION CONTRIBUTED TO THE FOLLOWING:



970,489

Syrians assisted during brutal winter conditions in 2016

2,538,644

Recipients of core relief items inside Syria



18,630

UNHCR Kits containing core relief items (CRIs) distributed to families in camps inside Iraq

10,105

Family plots for about 60,000 people in UNHCR-built camps assigned to internally displaced persons from the city of Mosul



20

Governorates in Yemen where UNHCR is providing emergency shelter and CRIs like mattresses, sleeping mats, blankets, and kitchen sets

9,065

Displaced persons in Hudaydah and Ibb governorates who received core relief items in February 2017

UNHCR'S STRATEGIC DIRECTION FROM 2017-2022

Over the next five years we will place particular emphasis on the following five core directions which, taken together, will advance protection and solutions for refugees, internally displaced and stateless people.

Protect - Respond - Include - Empower - Solve



Protect

We will work to secure and defend the rights of forcibly displaced and stateless people and ensure that they are protected from harm.



Respond

We will maintain and build our capacity to mobilize rapidly, reliably, effectively, in response to emergencies, and to strengthen emergency preparedness.



Include

At a time when displaced families live in long-term marginalization, we will place stronger emphasis on encouraging their inclusion in national services, and mobilizing development interventions to support these efforts.



Empower

We will build on the resilience, knowledge, and skills of displaced and stateless people, recognizing them as agents with the potential to determine and build their own future.



Solve

We will expand and diversify solutions opportunities for refugees and internally displaced families to address the underlying causes of displacement and solve problems of statelessness.

The task at hand may seem insurmountable, but with your continued support, we will be a step closer to achieving our strategic direction's objectives. We rely on your generosity to ensure we can respond whenever and wherever a crisis strikes. Your donations also allow us to shore up resources for critically underfunded operations across the world. On behalf of the communities we serve, thank you for your support.



“Filipinos could show them compassion, we could make them feel that there is life beyond the war and destruction that they have gotten used to.”

–Cora Lagamayo

Get to know Cora Lagamayo, a Filipino humanitarian worker in Damascus, Syria.



Cora Lagamayo (right) joins displaced children residing in Jibreen Collective Shelter in the city of Aleppo, which was besieged at the end of last year. Cora took part in a post-distribution monitoring mission in Aleppo last January 2017.

CORAZON “Cora” LAGAMAYO

Please introduce yourself briefly.

I am Corazon Lagamayo, but most people call me Cora. I am currently in Damascus, Syria serving as an Information Management (IM) Officer for Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFI) Sectors. I completed my studies, both undergraduate and masters, at Ateneo de Cagayan University.

How long have you been with UNHCR? Please take us through your journey towards your assignment as Information Management Officer to be stationed in Damascus.

I joined the IM staff in Mindanao four years ago and ensured that information is cascaded through effective communication channels. This has been my role in every emergency that UNHCR tasked me to respond to, such as the Typhoon Bopha response in Eastern Mindanao, the armed conflict in Zamboanga City, the Level-3 Response to Typhoon Haiyan in Eastern Visayas, and the protracted displacement situation in the Central and Southern portions of Mindanao.

As the burning desire to master my craft while helping others continued, I could not help but accept the next mission given to me: Syria. While the context is different, what remains is the need of these displaced Syrians for our help.

What is an average day like in your office?

My average day in Damascus is

completely different than how it was in Mindanao. Before, I helped monitor displacement movement in Mindanao. Here, I keep an eye on the distribution of basic essential items and shelter support to internally displaced Syrian families.

Part of my daily undertaking is to help keep the sector partners well-informed on available stocks, distribution plans, and their overall achievement to ensure complementarity of efforts.

What are the major challenges in your role?

Primary data gathering, for one. An IM Officer must be well-aware if access is possible. In Syria, this is oftentimes difficult due to widespread conflict and sensitivities involved in gathering data like this.

Understanding the humanitarian and political landscape would balance the attempt to gather first-hand information while protecting the persons of concern.

Why is it important for Filipinos to extend their concern and compassion to refugees and displaced families outside the Philippines?

It saddens me to see that what is considered as taboo is already normal to Syrians. For almost six years now, war has become their morning alarm. Their way of life has been running for their lives. The only thing they know now is how to flee

their homes and not die. The pain of constantly losing their loved ones and belongings eventually made them forget how to live.

Filipinos could show them compassion, we could make them feel that there is life beyond the war and destruction that they have gotten used to. We, Filipinos, are known for being resilient and persevering because of the natural disaster tragedies we have experienced such as the Super Typhoon Haiyan. Our brothers and sisters in Mindanao have been repeatedly affected by conflict for decades now, and yet they remain strong and positive. To the Syrian people, we Filipinos can be examples of hope and strength.

What has been your most memorable experience working at UNHCR?

I consider my UN career a leap of faith. I am happy with my decision [to join], and that I did not change my expertise. I am just in love with information management; I find it fulfilling to help others from backstage.

In the Philippines, it is fulfilling to know that in information management, I am contributing to the delivery of protection and solutions to vulnerable displaced families. The impact of my work make me feel alive. After all, what I do is neither for me nor for UNHCR – this is for the families who remain displaced in their makeshift tents, waiting for somebody to recognize their plight, to alleviate their suffering, and to bring back their dignity.

Former Refugees Acquire Filipino Citizenship

by Faizza Tanggol

The new year has brought new beginnings for two refugees living in the Philippines as they officially became Filipino this January.

Former Iranian refugee Kamran Karbasi took his oath of allegiance to the Philippines in Dipolog City while former Palestinian refugee Maher Mohammed Alraee took his oath in Las Piñas City.

The acquisition of citizenship through naturalization is one of the durable solutions available for refugees. Now that Kamran and Maher have been naturalized as Filipino, they are finally able to enjoy the basic rights offered by the Philippines.

Fifty-year old Kamran came to the Philippines 27 years ago after fleeing Iran. Upon arrival, he obtained refugee status from UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and the Philippine government and has continued to live in the country since then.

He settled in Dipolog City where he met his Filipino wife Cliji, and together, they have two teenage children. Kamran put himself through vocational school and state university then established his own repair shop business in downtown Dipolog.



Kamran repairs a television in his repair shop in downtown Dipolog.
Photo: © UNHCR/F. Tanggol

When the Supreme Court ruled in favor of his naturalization in 2015, Kamran was able to take his oath of allegiance in 2017. Though naturalization procedures remain to be

stringent to foreigners in general, the Supreme Court decision served as a welcome development for refugees and stateless persons in the country.

“I never knew this process will take long. After 15 years, it’s approved. So finally, it’s finished,” said Kamran with relief.

Meanwhile, 64-year old Maher has been residing in the Philippines for 36 years. With his family, he fled Palestine because of the war in Gaza which claimed the lives of his brother and two sisters. He first went to Yemen then arrived in the Philippines in 1990. He was subsequently recognized as a refugee by the Philippine government in 2006.

In the Philippines, he met his wife, Raquel, and they have four children together. He established his food business in the Philippines with a shawarma stall in Las Piñas and he is planning to put up another Mediterranean restaurant in the City of Manila.



Maher prepares orders for customers in his shawarma restaurant.
Photo: © UNHCR/A. Gonzales

Maher filed his petition for naturalization in 2010, which was granted four years later. Maher eventually took his oath of allegiance in 2017.

“I didn’t have any difficulty,” Maher said. “In my over 30 years here, thank God, I didn’t encounter any problems here in the Philippines. Now that I am officially Filipino, I feel free. I have no more worries. I can settle now and concentrate more on my children to support them,” said Kamran.

We Stand Together #WithRefugees



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Now more than ever, refugees need more people like you.

People who are moved to come forward and show solidarity with families forced to flee their homes. People who believe the world should stand together and share responsibility for the greatest refugee crisis in modern times.

The **#WithRefugees** petition stands as a bold testimonial to global solidarity with the refugee cause. We need to keep increasing the numbers, so please encourage friends and family to sign:

unhcr.ph/WithRefugees

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