

# Withyou

## Filipinos' Bayanihan Spirit Knows No Bounds

### What's Inside

- Displaced families in Mindanao benefit from Quick Impact Projects
- Marking *World Refugee Day* amid the greatest humanitarian crisis of our time



## Walking in Solidarity with Refugees and Displaced Families

When we started our fundraising program two years ago, we were optimistic that Filipinos' bayanihan spirit will enable us to save lives and provide durable solutions to families forced to flee their homes due to conflict and natural disasters. You heeded our call to express solidarity with our displaced brothers and sisters in the Philippines and in emergency hotspots all over the world.

Let me personally thank you for your continued support for UNHCR Philippines.

This June 20, we mark World Refugee Day – a chance for all of us to say that we stand with refugees. In your homes and in your community, I invite you to be the voice of the refugees across the world and of displaced families in Mindanao.

I would also like to let you know that by the end of June, I will step down as Representative of UNHCR in your beautiful country. It is my pleasure to have served with you since I took on the assignment more than six years ago.

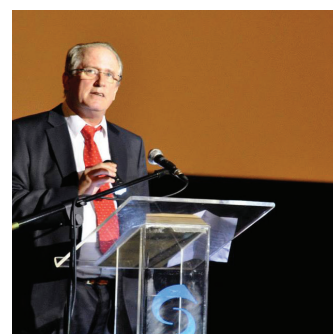
Filipinos have exemplified empathy and solidarity for people forced to flee, especially for those who are persecuted or whose rights have been violated. Though they have problems of their own, Filipinos embrace everyone's common humanity. When many would shut doors, Filipinos are always willing to extend a generous hand. When many would turn their backs, Filipinos are always willing to share the heavy load.

***“When many would shut doors, Filipinos are always willing to extend a generous hand. When many would turn their backs, Filipinos are always willing to share the heavy load.”***

As UNHCR faces unprecedented challenges of meeting the needs of millions of people fleeing conflict and persecution across the world, your continued committed support and generous contributions are vital for us to scale up our work.

There is an African proverb that goes, “If you want to go fast, walk alone. But if you want to go far, walk together.”

As I say goodbye, I thank you for walking together with us at the UN Refugee Agency in the Philippines.



Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'BK' with a flourish.

**Bernard Kerblat**  
UNHCR Philippines Country Representative

## Thousands of lives lost at sea during first five months of 2016



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For the first five months of 2016, an estimated 2,510 refugees have lost their lives while making dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean Sea in search of a better life away from war and violence.

The number is higher compared to 1,855 in the same period in 2015 and 57 in the first five months of 2014.

“This highlights the importance of rescue operations as part of

the response to the movement of refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean, and the need for real, safer alternatives for people needing international protection,” said Spindler.

UNHCR figures also show that so far this year, 203,981 people have made the journey to seek safety in Europe. Almost three-quarters of these had travelled from Turkey to Greece prior to the end of March. Some 46,714 of these travelled to Italy, almost the same as the total recorded there in the

first five months of 2015, 47,463.

With this development, UNHCR has raised the clarion call that more action needs to be taken to tackle smugglers who take advantage of refugees who want to reach safer haven in Europe.

UNHCR is hard at work to provide life-saving aid, protection, assistance, and durable solutions to refugee families forced to flee their homes across the world.

## Displaced families benefit from Quick Impact Projects

Together with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), UNHCR co-leads the Mindanao Protection Cluster to provide protection and durable solutions to families forced to flee their homes due to conflict and natural disasters.

With other cluster members, UNHCR continues to identify communities that are subjected to protracted displacement to ensure that all internally displaced persons (IDPs) are identified and supported with durable solutions to their displacement.

Your support enables UNHCR to provide assistance and deliver **Quick Impact Projects** (QIPs) that help displaced families rebuild their lives. This July, outrigger boats will be provided to the Layag-Layag and Leha-Leha communities in Zamboanga City, where skirmishes between government forces



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and non-state actors took place in 2013.

The boats will serve as transportation for children going back and forth to school in the mainland and can also be used for community livelihood and emergency purposes. UNHCR, together with its partners, has completed assessments, consultations, and coordination for quick impact project implementation at the

municipal and barangay level in nine (9) barangays.

The Protection Cluster continues to monitor new displacement and address protection issues. In April 2016, it monitored over 150,000 IDPs presently displaced and in need of humanitarian assistance and durable solutions.



## Thank you for taking a stand #WithRefugees

Every year, on June 20, the world commemorates the strength, courage, and resilience of refugees.

Around the world today, 60 million have fled their homes due to violence, persecution, human rights abuse, and natural disasters. These are millions of mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers—who are also students, school children, persons with disability, and so much more.

Each day, 42,500 persons make the same hard decision to leave everything behind and risk dangerous journeys.

As a UNHCR donor, your continued support is a powerful manifestation that you stand **#WithRefugees**.

We invite you to read some of their stories.

**65.3 million**  
forcibly displaced  
persons worldwide

**407,937**  
displaced persons in  
the Philippines alone  
in 2015



“We came here for a better life and to find people who might better understand our situation.”

Jihan is a mother of two young boys who risked everything for the safety of her family. Unlike many others, she is blind. While waiting to be reunited with her husband, her boys have become her eyes to the world. She worries about them bearing the burden of her blindness and her status as a refugee. What she hopes is for her boys to have a normal life and be able to go to school again.



“When my parents are not around, I am busy looking after my brother.”

Since she was three, Jehan and her family have been forcibly displaced due to armed conflict, clan feud, natural disasters, and election-related violence in Mindanao. Jehan, now 16, takes care of her younger brother and dreams of going back to school. Her father works as a laborer while her mother works as a street vendor. Times are hard, so Jehan does her best to help at home.



“Before the war my family had the best life.”

Four-year-old Shahad narrowly escaped death before she was pulled from the rubble of her family home. Self-conscious, she often tries to hide the scars on her face. Like many other young children, Shahad still finds delight in the smallest of pleasures. But her father, Yehia, worries that the experience of war will change her and dreams for her to have a normal and happy childhood.

Jihan, Jehan, and Shahad have left everything behind and are starting to build a new life away from fear and violence.

**Your support empowers them.**

Invite your friends to lend their voice by asking them to sign the pledge to stand **#WithRefugees**.

Log on to [unhcr.org/refugeeday/ph](http://unhcr.org/refugeeday/ph).

# Jose Alvin Gonzaga

## Senior Emergency Policy Officer



**“We Filipinos have always been sympathetic to those who are suffering and needing our help because we ourselves have experienced what it feels to be on the other end.”**

For more than two decades, Filipino Jose Alvin Gonzaga has been working to protect refugee families forced to flee war and persecution in their countries of origin. Read his inspiring story.

### *Please introduce yourself briefly.*

My name is Jose Alvin Gonzaga. I am a Filipino currently serving as Senior Emergency Policy Officer in the Emergency Service of UNHCR Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

### *Take us through your journey towards your current assignment.*

I have been with UNHCR for more than 26 years. I started as a consultant in Palawan, Philippines where I processed refugee status determination (RSD) claims for Vietnamese asylum seekers. Two years later, I moved to UNHCR Indonesia. Since then, I was posted to different field offices or duty stations including: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Thailand, East Timor, Australia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Malaysia, and Kazakhstan. My role has been varied but mostly in Protection.

### *What have you learned during your 26-year experience?*

This journey has enabled me to be involved in operations for refugees and internally displaced persons. I have worked from complex emergencies, to camp and urban settings, and to

durable solution programs. I have been fortunate to serve alongside many highly dedicated colleagues.

### *Tell us more about your duties as Senior Emergency Policy Officer.*

My average day involves the management and promotion of UNHCR's Emergency Handbook, which you may view at <http://emergency.unhcr.org>. My day-to-day activities include interfacing with different UNHCR divisions to ensure validity and consistency of the contents of the Emergency Handbook.

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

The Philippines is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. But beyond our country's legal obligations under this Convention, showing compassion to refugees and displaced people is simply the right thing to do. Also, we Filipinos have always been sympathetic to those who are suffering and needing our help because we ourselves have experienced what it feels to be on the other end. We have

been grateful for the compassion of other countries showed to us during the many unfortunate disasters we have faced.

### *What has been your most memorable experience working at UNHCR?*

What always strikes me is the impression on the faces of refugees or IDPs. The look on their faces when they are fleeing: desperate, distrustful, but full of courage. When they arrive in a safer place: exhausted, confused, frustrated, but with sigh of relief and holding on with their inner strength. And finally, the look of hope with an attitude of moving forward when solutions are found for them during voluntary return operations or resettlement. These are the patterns of emotions of people that I always remember.

# Orchestra of the Filipino Youth Supports Refugees



Members of the Orchestra of the Filipino Youth Strings Quorum, represented by Orchestra Manager Federico Frayna (second from right), turn over their donation to UNHCR Philippines Senior Protection Officer Yasser Saad, Representative Bernard Kerblat, and National Officer for Private Sector Fundraising Unit Marmie Liquigan.

Last 26 May, UNHCR Philippines hosted “An Evening with Bernard Kerblat: A Thanksgiving Event” in appreciation of its loyal donors and partners who have been supporting those who are displaced by conflict and natural disasters around the world.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, started its fundraising program in the Philippines in May 2014. To date, 5300 Filipino individuals donate monthly to help UNHCR deliver life-saving assistance like shelter and other core relief items, safeguard fundamental human rights, and develop solutions that ensure people have a safe place to call home.

“You consistently heeded our call for support whether this was an emergency in the Philippines, an earthquake in Nepal, or the refugee crisis in Europe mainly due to the influx of refugees fleeing Syria and other

war-torn countries. We appreciate how Filipinos have extended their goodwill to the rest of the world. We could not have done it without you,” UNHCR Philippines Senior Protection Officer Yasser Saad said at the event.

One of the highlights of the evening was a heartfelt performance by the Orchestra of the Filipino Youth (OFY) Strings Quorum, composed of underprivileged youth scholars from around the Philippines.

In a surprise gesture, the children presented UNHCR with a donation of P5,000.00. “We have pooled together our savings to help refugees and displaced families so they may live safely and in dignity in our country. It’s a humble amount, but we believe that someone out there will be safer with the efforts of our government and UNHCR”.

Speaking on behalf of UNHCR, Mr. Kerblat responded, “We are very honored by this gesture. As we look back to our accomplishments, we recognize that it would not have been possible without all of you, without your commitment to refugees and the displaced, and your selfless donation to UNHCR. Maraming salamat po!”

Representatives from government partners like the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Commission on Human Rights, and the Office of the Political Adviser under the Office of the President also attended the occasion. Supporters from the private sector included UNIQLO Philippines, President Elpidio Quirino Foundation, Nexus Technologies, Inc, and private individual donors.



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We stand together  
**#WithRefugees**

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