

# Withyou

## In Search of Safety

### What's Inside

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- How UNHCR Is Responding to the Ongoing Refugee Crisis
- Hope and Survival in Europe

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**A Syrian girl** walks on the beach wrapped up in a sleeping bag to keep warm, after reaching the shores of Lesbos, Greece with her family. In 2015, thousands of refugees and migrants crossed the Aegean Sea to Greece in overloaded inflatable boats. Nearly 3,500 people never made it to the end of their journey.



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Bound by our ***shared humanity***,  
we are compelled to do  
**what we can, where we can**  
to prevent more tragedy.

## Compassion Knows No Borders

**W**e are living in historic times. 1 in every 122 people on earth are displaced. Mass displacement has featured prominently in the news in recent months, particularly the movement of refugees to Europe.

This is not a new trend. Life as a refugee is difficult, and challenges persist after seeking safety in countries of first asylum. Spending years waiting to be able to return home means exile is no longer an option but an inevitability. It is then that refugees take desperate measures to secure the future of their families. Many refugees perish in dangerous sea journeys to Europe every year.

Bound by our shared humanity, we are compelled to do what we can, where we can to prevent more tragedy. Until peace and lasting political solutions are attained, we cannot allow innocent people to suffer. Global cooperation has been the key to addressing previous large-scale international refugee situations, and it is now time to respond with the same spirit of unity that has prevailed in the past.

While this era has been marked by tragedy, it has also given rise to stories of inspiration and hope. Many have celebrated the courage, resilience, and determination of refugees, and the inspiring action done in support of them. Most notably, the public outcry of citizens in countries such as Germany and Austria led to action from decision-makers and proved that one does not need to rely on leaders to make a difference. And in the Philippines, ordinary Filipinos have supported our call for help, demonstrating that compassion knows no borders.

It is through this solidarity that we can shape a better world for those forced to flee home and for us all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'BK' or similar initials.

Bernard Kerblat  
Country Representative, Philippines  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



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## UNHCR Philippines and San Beda College hold forum on international protection

Last October 21, 2015, UNHCR Philippines and the San Beda Legal Aid Bureau co-hosted “Strangers in Their Own Homes”, a public forum on the protection of and legislation relating to refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and stateless persons.

UNHCR Philippines Deputy Representative Yasser Saad opened the forum with an overview of the legal frameworks on the protection of refugees, stateless persons, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Local agencies such as the Department of Justice and the Commission on Human Rights then led sessions for the audience, comprising undergraduate and law students, faculty members, government officials, and other community stakeholders.

“Strangers in Their Own Homes” highlighted topics such as the national perspective and the policy of the Bureau of Immigration on the protection of refugees and stateless persons, the status of the IDP bill, and the academe’s role in advocating for the bill. Ultimately, it aimed to educate the youth on the challenges facing refugees, IDPs, and stateless persons, as well on various state initiatives to address these issues.

The forum was held as part of the Volunteerism Week of the San Beda College of Arts and Sciences and was hosted at San Beda College in Mendiola, Manila.

## UNHCR Philippines celebrates the UN@70

“Strong UN, Better World” was the resounding theme worldwide as the United Nations (UN) celebrated its 70th founding anniversary last October 24, 2015. In the Philippines, UN agencies and stakeholders marked the milestone with a program and exhibit at the Music Hall in SM Mall of Asia in Manila. The SM Mall of Asia Globe was lit up in blue as part of the “Turn the World UN Blue” campaign, which saw landmarks around the world – including the Sydney Opera House, Pyramids of Giza, and Empire State Building – lit up in UN blue. The program in Manila included musical performances by celebrity ambassadors KC Concepcion and Anne Curtis and Filipino shadow dance group El Gamma Penumbra.

A two-day photo exhibit showcased the Sustainable Development Goals and the accomplishments of different UN agencies in the Philippines, including the emergency response of UNHCR for families displaced by Typhoon Yolanda in 2013. A UNHCR booth also raised awareness about the work of the agency and invited individuals to join its giving program in the Philippines.



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For seven decades, the UN has improved the lives of millions of individuals across sectors such as economic development, social development, human rights, peace and security, the environment, health, and more. Through UNHCR, it has helped millions of refugees and displaced persons around the world benefit from international protection and live in safety and dignity.

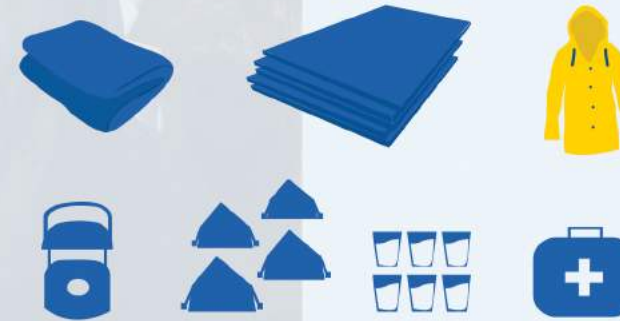


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As of November 2015, over 800,000 refugees and migrants have taken dangerous sea journeys in a desperate bid to reach Europe. Majority of those attempting these crossings are fleeing war and persecution in their homeland. More than half are from Syria. The most vulnerable – children, women, the elderly, and the disabled – are most at risk.

UNHCR is present in multiple countries, leading and coordinating humanitarian action on the ground for refugees on the move. We have:

- Deployed over 440 international and multilingual staff throughout Europe, working emergency response. We are the only UN agency with a 24/7 presence at all border areas.
- Provided life-saving relief, including the distribution of water and high-energy biscuits, thermal blankets, sleeping mats, plastic sheeting for shelter, raincoats, winter clothing, hygiene kits, backpacks, baby kits, and solar lamps, as well as access to urgent medical care.



■ Improved reception conditions, especially in Greece and the Balkans, including by providing additional shelters such as rub halls, refugee housing units, and tents. The winterization of facilities is ongoing and includes improved flooring; installation of plastic covers and heating; site planning; and the enhancement of water, hygiene, and sanitation facilities. UNHCR has also successfully advocated for the opening of additional temporary emergency shelters in Greece.

■ Provided aid to the most vulnerable under its Protection Mandate. UNHCR identifies and prioritizes assistance to vulnerable individuals such as pregnant women; unaccompanied or separated children; women-headed households; the elderly; persons with disabilities and illness; and families suffering trauma from trafficking, exploitation, or tragedy during their journey. UNHCR is also conducting protection monitoring and helping establish special procedures and facilities for children and women-friendly spaces, medical and social services, and registration and transport.



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## 7 Factors Driving Syrian Refugees to Europe

**Majority of those seeking refuge in Europe are from Syria. UNHCR has identified seven reasons driving their move:**

**Loss of hope.** As the Syrian conflict drags on with no solution in sight, refugees have begun abandoning the hope of ever being able to return home.

**Worsening poverty.** In some host countries, refugees are not permitted to work and face sanctions if they are caught. Without income, families use up the last of their life savings and begin to take on debt to survive. After years of high costs and living in exile, many refugee families can no longer afford basic necessities.

**Restricted livelihood opportunities.** The number of internally displaced persons in host countries like Iraq has increased competition for

employment, while refugees in Lebanon must sign a pledge not to work when renewing their residency status. Many refugees resort to informal employment, risking exploitation, unsafe working conditions, or having payment withheld by unscrupulous employers.

**Hurdles to renew legal residency.** Countries that have hosted millions of Syrian refugees for years but have not received enough international support are now imposing new restrictions on refugees. New regulations, such as costly fees and additional documentary requirements, in countries like Lebanon and Jordan have made it harder for refugees to gain asylum or renew residency.

**Shortage of aid.** Global crises have taken their toll on humanitarian agencies, who struggle with chronic funding shortages in their aid programs. As a result, thousands of refugees are missing out on cash assistance, food aid, and access to healthcare – and

are resorting to negative coping strategies such as begging and child labor to survive.

**Children missing out on their education.** Education is highly valued by Syrians, who enjoyed free and mandatory schooling before the war. But a shortage of places for Syrian children across host countries mean many are going without formal education or any education at all. Refugee families struggle with costs related to attending school, and 20 percent of refugee children have abandoned school to work. Many girls are also being forced into early marriage to survive.

**The European image.** Some refugees report feeling unsafe in host countries. The portrayal of a welcoming Europe in the media shows promises of safety, legal work prospects, and education for children. Many Syrians fear that borders will close soon and the only time to travel is now.

**“UNHCR is equipped to respond to any emergency within 24 hours. This is possible because we have what we call the Emergency Response Team, which is on call and ready to be deployed anytime.”**

**Mario Pajarillaga** is the Associate Global Supply Officer at the UNHCR Supply Office in Dubai, UAE. Working behind the scenes, Mario and his unit manage the Dubai Central Emergency Stockpile – one of several existing UNHCR stockpiles of core relief items which are distributed to vulnerable refugees and displaced families during a crisis.



### **Please introduce yourself briefly.**

I'm Mario Pajarillaga, Associate Global Supply Officer at the UNHCR Supply Office in Dubai. I manage the emergency stockpile of core relief items, oversee incoming shipments and track the clearance process, assist in quality control of the relief we have in stock, and provide procurement support to headquarters and field offices. I also assist the Senior Global Supply Officer with establishing the procedures, standards, benchmarks, and tools for the Dubai stockpile of core relief items.

### **How did you begin your career at UNHCR?**

I've been working with UNHCR for seven-and-a-half years now. I started as an International UN Volunteers Supply/Transport Officer posted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia for four-and-a-half years. After serving in Addis Ababa, I now serve in the Dubai duty station.

### **One of the main tasks of UNHCR is to deliver emergency aid in response to global crises. What makes the UNHCR emergency response unique?**

UNHCR is equipped to respond to any emergency within 24 hours. This is possible because we have what we call the Emergency Response Team, which is on call and ready to be deployed anytime. The Emergency Response team is a complete team composed of staff from different UNHCR units working as one: Protection, Camp Management, Security, and Supply. All support that is necessary for any emergency is also pre-positioned in different field offices, such as the one in Dubai where I am presently working. As proof of this readiness, I was called on mission to Cebu after Typhoon Yolanda to manage the core relief items sent there through airfreight, which were 11 flights of B747s.

### **What is a major challenge you encounter in your job?**

A major challenge I have encountered was the need for experienced supply staff in emergencies. This experience was quite tough as we needed to train local staff on how to handle shipments of a large magnitude.

### **What is the most rewarding part of your job?**

The most rewarding part of my job is when I learn that what I have done has had a great impact in emergencies and contributed to saving lives.

### **In your opinion, why should Filipinos extend their compassion to refugees and displaced families who are outside the Philippines?**

It is important for Filipinos to care about crises that happen in other parts of the world so they can prepare themselves if the same thing will happen to them. We will never know if that may happen to us in the future. There is a saying that goes, "It is better to give than to receive, and when you give, don't expect anything in return". It is not easy to be a refugee fleeing your own country. It is not easy to hide from persecution because of war. We're still lucky that what's happening elsewhere in the world is not happening in the Philippines.

### **Can you share a memorable or inspiring anecdote from your time at UNHCR?**

Experience is the best teacher. When I went on mission to Erbil, Iraq, I saw for myself the reality of the arrival of refugees coming from Syria – thousands of them. You could see on their faces the horrible experiences they had due to the war in their country, in addition to the tiring journey from Syria to Iraq just to escape. But this was one of the reasons why I became eager to strive more and do everything, even if it was beyond the call of duty as a Supply Officer. Imagine if the support will not arrive on time. What will happen to those persons of concern who really need your support?

From Ethiopia to Iraq to my last mission in the Philippines, I made it a point that no matter what I am doing, where I am, or what time of day it is, I would respond to any call; every call I receive is an emergency due to the nature of our work. Working as a UNHCR staff member is very challenging, very stressful, and full of responsibility, but it is rewarding knowing that you contributed to the survival of humanity.

Mahmoud plays with his son Jawad in front of a tent built by UNHCR

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# On the Move: Refugee Stories in Europe

**Imagine this:** you are living in a country at war. Your children have missed school for months as schools are now used as shelters. Your local hospital has been destroyed, making it difficult for your ailing mother to receive treatment. You hear stories about armed groups forcibly recruiting the youth, and you worry about your own son in university. At night, gunfire erupts in areas of your hometown. What do you do when, in the blink of an eye, you and your loved ones are no longer safe?

For millions of people, the answer is deafening in their footsteps.

## Forced to flee

"Compared to everything we have witnessed, all the things happening at home, nothing could be as bad. We knew we had to try," says Mahmoud, a refugee who fled Syria with his wife and two young sons. "In Syria, my wife and I ran a women's clothing shop, but with the war we knew we had to leave. In our country, people go to work, and they don't come home. Children go to school, and they don't come home."

Sedo, another refugee from Syria who fled with his wife and four daughters, shared the same sentiments and was particularly worried about the education and future of his children. "There are no schools, nothing is left where we came from, and we just want the children to be educated," he shares. "We are not coming for money – just so our children can be safe and go to school. We won't need help. We can just work."

Thousands of refugees like Mahmoud, Sedo, and their families have risked treacherous sea journeys to Europe, driven by the will to survive, live in peace, and begin a new life. This year, more than 800,000 people arrived in Europe. Over 80 percent of them are refugees, mostly from Syria.

"We took the boat across to Greece, and we did worry about things, but it was our only option," says Sedo. "We waited [in Serbia] until it stopped raining as we had shelter, and we didn't want the children to get sick. They're only small, so we are being very careful." The oldest of Sedo's children is only six years old.

## Help along the way

For many of these refugees, who often leave with little more than the clothes on their backs, it is during times like these when the little things count the most.

"From when we arrived in Greece through Macedonia, Serbia, and now here in Hungary, the only people helping the whole way were UNHCR," says Mahmoud. "At different points, we have been given food, blankets, tents, sleeping bags. It has been a great help. This is the first sturdy tent we have stayed in."

Sedo agrees: "People from UNHCR were very helpful along the way. We were constantly given a supply of water, nappies, baby food, blankets – everything we needed to carry on our journey."

Offering the most necessary and essential of assistance, UNHCR is known to be one of the first humanitarian organizations to help on the ground during a crisis and one of the last to leave – ensuring guidance and protection for displaced persons at every point of their journey.

But for UNHCR and the millions of those displaced, challenges are far from over. While millions find refuge in neighboring territories or countries of asylum, the yearning for home is one that will be carried for years to come.

"Even then, we miss Syria very much – no other country can be Syria," says Mahmoud. "Our family is spread across five countries now, but with God's help we will get through this."

Sedo, his wife Fatima, and their daughters rest in Hungary



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“We should see this time in displacement as the time where we should take the most care, and give the most support. Not because they are vulnerable, but because in fact they are the future stability of all the countries we say we are so concerned about.”

-UNHCR Special Envoy Angelina Jolie-Piit

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