

With you



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Message from the Representative

“Together, we give help, hope, and home.”

To our donor,

Warmest greetings!

I discovered that the holiday season comes early in the Philippines with Christmas carols playing in the malls already. I am looking forward to the last quarter of the year because this is the time that we are able to share with you all the good work that you’ve done for the year.

This issue of WithYou is a preview to that. Here, we share the stories of people who give what they could with other people. The act of sharing is seen even in some of the most dire situations in the world.

There are times in life when we share what little we have to others – not because we feel better about ourselves, not because we get something in exchange, but because it is at the core of who we are as humans. And this is what I would like to share with you all - the spirit of giving.

This thread is something that is evident in our government, corporate, and non-government partners, but especially in you. You have not only shared hope, but you have acted on your kindness everytime you renew your commitment to refugees and displaced families

Maraming salamat po.

Sincerely,

Shinji Kubo
Representative
UNHCR Philippines

In Sarimanok, a few lessons for adults
Two women highlight the importance of sacrifice and learning

The Sarimanok evacuation center in Marawi City remains home to some one hundred families who have yet to move to transitory housing units. In spite of the conditions in the community, resilience is present in the families who still reside in Sarimanok. Among those who rebuild their lives, show this spirit is Jaslia.

She makes ends meet through a small sari-sari store she has set up in front of her tent, and through small amounts of financial assistance she receives from her family outside of Marawi. Every penny goes to her family's needs.

Despite finding herself in a dire situation, she chose to remain here in a bid of sacrifice for the sake of her children's education, as well as to remain a leader figure in a community she has grown to care for.

Out of her five children, only one stays with Jaslia and her husband in the evacuation center. Three of her children stay with their aunt in a nearby municipality, while another resides with relatives on Luzon island.

"I see three of my children every weekend when they come to visit. They stay with their aunt in Pantar, where they go to school," Jaslia said. "Only my youngest who is eight, stays with us here. We sacrifice our needs for hers, just so we can pay for her school fees and the fare going to and from school."

Even though she did not finish formal schooling, Jaslia has taken on other means to continue learning. As one of the community leaders, she regularly participates in workshops conducted by organizations in the area. She is now trained in conflict management and resolution, addressing gender violence, and women empowerment. She translates her lessons learned from these trainings in her day to day management of the evacuation center, often breaking up fights and disagreements.

Her commitment to education has inspired many others in this evacuation center, like Oliko, a mother of two young children. Oliko's children, six-year-old Hakima and eight-year-old Rahima, are enrolled in the school which has set up a learning facility in the evacuation center. Oliko walks her two daughters and their cousin, seven-year-old Nurhana to the makeshift classrooms set up behind the rows of tents at the center.

In the learning facility, [the children sing nursery rhymes](#) in their mother tongue and learn about the alphabet. The classroom setup helps bring back some semblance of normalcy as the families begin to

Hakima and Nurhana are both in Kindergarten while Rahima has started first grade. Their favorite subjects are Math and English. As they spent the last two years of their lives living in displacement, the children



have put some thought into what they want to do when they grow up: to help others who are in need, drawing inspiration from the people who helped them.

Rahima wants to be a doctor, while Hakima—who grew close to the hijab troopers deployed by the government in evacuation centers to teach children about peace—wants to become a police officer. "They are inspired from the people they often see helping at the evacuation center. They want to become like them," said Jaslia.



"In a situation like ours, education is really what we need to give to our children. When it comes to physical riches, I really cannot give anything to them. I can only pass on the gift of education," shared Jaslia.



"Even if the city gets taken away and conflict arises, education will remain and you can rebuild your life with that," she said. "I tell my children to understand the sacrifices we make in order for them to finish their education." Jaslia and Oliko give everything that they

can so that their children are able to have a brighter future.

As part of our community of givers, you enable families like Jaslia and Oliko to rebuild their lives in spite of their sacrifices.



Stories from Camps

Atom Araullo highlights the milestones and challenges of the Rohingya Crisis

The hills are dotted with corrugated roofing, tarpaulins, and bamboo. The streets and dirt roads are busy with men and women going about their chores. This is Kutapalong Camp, the temporary home to nearly a million Rohingya refugees.

National Goodwill Ambassador Atom Araullo surveys the world's largest refugee camp on one of its many hills. This is the second time that he has been here since the height of the influx more than two years ago when Rohingya refugees started entering Bangladesh by the tens of thousands.

In 2017, the Rohingya people were forcibly driven out of their homes due to the mass executions, rape, and persecution. More than 700,000 people were a part of this exodus to Bangladesh, a country facing their own challenges. The world watched as the humanitarian crisis unfolded. To this day, those who fled are trying to regain hope and rebuild their lives far from the only home that they know.

“When it happened in 2017, the eyes of the world were on Myanmar and Bangladesh. More than 700,000 refugees crossed the border. It was a really crazy situation and it is really important to see how the world has responded and how the situation is unfolding,” Atom Araullo said upon laying eyes on the camp again.

“I’ve been here two years ago, 2017. There are have been massive changes most of them are quite encouraging. If you notice that there is a lot of greenery that is something new in the last couple of months. It’s

just one of the many changes that makes life here more liveable,” Atom said.

Brick by brick

Atom sees engineers lined up on the road on his first day at the camp. They were slowly digging and replacing rocks along gutters and side streets under the hot sun. “They are strengthening the soil by the roads,” a humanitarian aid worker translates for Atom.

Community workers and refugees themselves toil to clean out the side of the roads so that it is free of debris that can block drainage. They get a small allowance for the work.

“It is hard work, but we are doing it for the community,” one of the refugees mentioned with a smile. Kutapalong camp is at the mercy of weather patterns. The temperature in Kutapalong camp can reach a scorching



40 degrees during summer. It can get sweltering inside the shelters. While the monsoon season often brings mudslides and diseases making the Rohingya people more vulnerable.

Kutapalong camp sits on a hill, parts of which are on softer soil making sections of the camp prone to landslides during the monsoon season. Trees were cut down for shelter and firewood for cooking. Families occupy different areas each at risk by some natural disaster. Thousands of families living in improvised shelters perched on barren hills are risk of having their homes washed away. For those living in low-lying areas, they face the possibility of having their homes being flooded.

Engineers must create stronger foundations in order to safeguard families at risk. Workers build canals and clean the drains in order to redirect rain water. Humanitarian organizations including UNHCR help save the lives of Rohingya refugees especially during monsoon season by providing them with shelter kits, fortifying shelters, and relocating persons-of-concern to higher ground. All this is to ensure that the Rohingya families will not lose everything that they built in Bangladesh.

“This part of the camp is the most secure among other camps. With time it has changed a lot, the situation is better than before,” said Moktar Amid, one of the elected community leaders in Kutapalong camp.

As easy as 1, 2, 3

More than half of the Rohingya refugees are children. They were torn from their homes and have seen unspeakable acts of violence at such an early age. There seems to be no trace of the trauma that the Rohingya people lived through in one of the temporary learning centers in the camp. The walls are lined with bright visual aids. The kids are often curious about visitors like Atom who teach the children to speak a few words in Filipino. Rohingya children are eager learners mimicking every word they are taught.

“It’s my interaction with kids that struck me the most. Most of the ones here are below 15-years-old. Kids in that type of environment are very eager to learn. Even if there are challenges in giving the necessary education to the students, at least we can see that they are moving forward. They are learning English and a bit of math,” Atom shares.



“Focus on the Rohingya crisis should not be limited to the first few months.”

While the situation has steadily improved, there is still a lot that can be done to provide the children with better education. “55% of refugees here are kids, children, and a lot of them, unfortunately, don’t have proper education and this [classes in temporary learning centers] is something that can provide some help but more must be done,” said Atom adds.

Assessing the current needs

In the past two years, the thought of the future scares the Rohingya refugees. This much is understandable. Driven out of their homes and carrying the scars of persecution, the Rohingya people now face challenges in a foreign land.

“I cannot assess the magnitude of the needs, but there are a lot,” Atom said at the end of day. The needs of the people are often shared by elected community leaders like Moktar Amid. As one of the elected leaders, Moktar goes around camp in rain or in shine listening to the plights and issues of his fellow Rohingya members. He is entrusted by his fellow refugees to elevate their concerns to the proper fora.

According to Moktar, they need basic items such as food, mosquito nets, blankets and other core-relief items. There are regular

distributions in the camp, but they are also hoping for certainty for long-term solutions. Aside from the basic needs, Rohingya refugees are waiting for the chance to go back home safely.

An uplifting two years

Two years since the arrival of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh saw some improvements in their life in Kutapalong. “Walking around the camp today, we see a lot of development that makes life in the camps bearable. For example, they have roads, their homes are more organized. Refugees have formed committees, children are in learning centers, environmental warriors have revived the greenery, and there are places where they can get psycho-social support. Nakakatuwa naman na kahit papaano-gumaganda naman yung buhay nila dito,” he said.

Yet at the same time, we must continue providing humanitarian aid for the most vulnerable families. “I think in some ways, the years that pass when things get a little bit more stable are also the most crucial ones,” Atom concludes.

Cooking for tomorrow

*In the midst of ruin, Maranao women
keep traditions alive*

Two years ago, Rohaina owned a shop in Marawi. At daybreak, she would meticulously chop and mince garlic, chilis, turmeric, and *sakurab*. The paste would be mixed in with different ingredients like coconut and tuna. The result would be a yellow side dish called palapa. Her little shop would get regular customers each in search of that traditional dish.

All this was lost when armed men stormed Marawi two years ago. Rohaina's experience is the experience of thousands of other families who had their homes and livelihoods ripped away because of the conflict. To fully paint a picture, UNHCR Philippines has shared plenty of stories of persons-of-concern who lost everything and face the possibility of a future away from everything that they knew.

This is why humanitarian agencies continue to assist and support the displaced families in Marawi City. Organizations frequently conduct monitoring programs for families to get back on their feet. Livelihood trainings, equipment and grants are just among the projects aimed to provide a sustainable future for the internally displaced.

Those that came before them

Rohaina and the women were given the opportunity to rebuild when UNHCR and its local NGO partner asked them what interventions would be best. "When MMI and UNHCR came to our community, they asked us what IDPs like us need," she said. Upon much deliberation, the women followed in the footsteps of Palapalicious, an older group of palapa makers who were given a government grant to expand their livelihoods. Standing on the shoulders of the women in Palapalicious, Rohaina and 14 others formed their own livelihood collective – Pure Palapa.

Pure Palapa works from a small building with green walls on a busy road. It is also the same building that used to house Palapalicious. Here, they oversee the production of palapa, from harvesting the *sakurab* to cooking, packaging, and marketing of the product. The end dish is a vibrant and delicious dish that carries its own story.

From mother to daughter

Amidst the backdrop of a busy street and ruined buildings, Rohaina and the women of Pure Pala work

to keep their traditions alive. "We decided to ask to restart our palapa business so that our tradition of cooking palapa would not be lost to us," Rohaina said.

Rohaina learned the tradition of cooking from her mother and grandmother. From a very early age, she would stand in the kitchen watching them cook palapa. As a result, she follows no recipe preferring to cook on instinct. She knows that amount of chilis, coconut milk, and spices to put in her tuna palapa. She knows how long it has to sit on the stove so that it would taste its best.

"We learn from our mothers, our grandmothers, and generations before us," she said. Palapa was her family's business. It was through the dish that she was able to go to school. She remembers that when was a college student she would help her mother man the store and sell to her classmates.

Now years later, Rohaina and the women of Pure Palapa continues to turn this food staple into a source of income. Rohaina can now buy milk and other necessities for her own family as Pure Palapa continues. The business will continue to grow as they secure permits to export their product.

A tale of tradition

"This tradition is important to us for us to keep our Maranao identity"

Palapa is a dish that is unique to Maranao families. Each family will have their own recipe, their own secret ingredient, their own way of cooking it to make it special. It is a dish that carries its own place in Maranao culture. One of the secret ingredients in palapa is turmeric. This lends their food a bright yellow, a color

that is found in their buildings and clothing. It signifies how proud the Maranaos are of who they are.

"This tradition, and our identity of being Maranao is very important to us and we cannot let it be taken away from of us. Where ever we are in the world, we are very proud to be Maranao," she said.

Donors and supporters have helped keep the Maranao spirit alive. Through the kindness of individuals in the Philippines, UNHCR and its partners are able to work with Rohaina to help continue making traditional dishes that not only help them earn a living, but also help preserve and share their culture amidst the ruins of Marawi.



*Be the spark of hope.
Give a gift to families.*

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