

With you



**HOPE ON
THE GROUND**

**RESTORING
COMMUNITIES**

**THE SAMA
BAJAU**



Dear donor,

As this year draws to a close, I would like to look back at the difference that you have made in the lives of our persons-of-concern.

As the year progressed we have faced a succession of crises - some recurring like the seven year war in Syria and protracted displacement in armed conflict areas in Mindanao, some deepening like the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, some new like the double disaster in Sulawesi in Indonesia. In the midst of these tragedies, I have seen you stand with the most vulnerable people in their time of greatest need.

I have seen directly how your support has reached families. Just recently, I came from a mission in Mindanao to visit a community that hosts families who had fled because of protracted conflict. Like you, the host barangay shared what they had to provide hope and refuge to the families who were forced to flee.

In that small barangay, we were able to uplift the spirits of the displaced and host communities by addressing their protection concerns and providing clean water. Together, we are able to do the right

thing by bringing hope and help them take the first step in their journey towards recovery.

Your monthly support has been crucial to our operations in Mindanao as well as in other emergency hotspots across the globe. This issue of *WithYou* will share how your donations have renewed the hopes of Filipinos who have lost so much.

As we look back, I would like to thank you for your support this year. Your help has been invaluable in ensuring that UNHCR is able to do the right thing for the thousands who have been displaced by conflict and violence.

Maraming salamat po.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shinji Kubo".

Shinji Kubo
Representative
UNHCR Philippines

“Together, you have helped us do the right thing by bringing hope to the most vulnerable at their time of greatest need.”





Restoring Communities in Mindanao

In different parts of Mindanao, thousands of people remain displaced due to armed conflict, violence, and natural disasters. Some of them have been living in displacement for many years, and while others have experienced being displaced multiple times.

In conflict-affected areas, families flee their homes in fear of being caught in the crossfire. They return to their residences when the security situation improves. But when a new conflict breaks out, the cycle begins again. They face difficulties getting back on their feet, sometimes multiple times in a year.

In Zamboanga City, some 500 families remain displaced where armed conflict took place five years ago, humanitarian assistance has dwindled yet the displaced community continues to face vulnerabilities. To address these, UNHCR distributed core relief items such as plastic sheets and solar lanterns to more than 300 families.

Starting Afresh in Maguindanao

For many, the cycle of conflict and displacement disrupts livelihoods. Recognizing the need to build the resilience of these communities, UNHCR sought to implement low-cost quick impact projects across Mindanao where displacement has become the unfortunate reality for many. These projects aim to deliver basic services to the community, build peaceful coexistence among its members, and improve their conditions.

This community in Shariff Saydona Mustapha in Maguindanao province received farm machines to help them restart their livelihood.



HOPE ON THE GROUND



©UNHCR/ A. Gonzales



Forcibly displaced families are often left with nothing. It is through the support of donors like you that we are able to ensure that the most vulnerable families are able to receive the assistance that they need to be able to improve their lives. This year you have made a significant impact on those who lost everything.

Distribution of core relief items

Additionally, your support has enabled UNHCR to conduct distribution of core relief items in 11 sites. Together, we were able to give more than 15,000 individuals core relief items such as blankets, kitchen sets, plastic sheets, and solar lanterns.

Delivery of Quick Impact Projects

Thanks to your support, UNHCR was able to implement over 20 quick impact projects, benefiting over 20,000 people living in displacement or at risk of displacement in five provinces across Mindanao, covering four sectors.

Provision of legal documents

Families who have been forced to flee leave everything behind. Including documents that would help them access basic services and support. Through your help, UNHCR is currently in the process of assisting families acquire legal documents such as birth certificates.



Data as of October 2018



© UNHCR/A. Gonzales

A story of hope: Jaslia Abbas

“Alam ko na matagal pa bago kami maging okay,” said Ate Jaslia a few months ago in Sarimanok transitory shelter. Back then, she and her family were recently relocated from a camp in Lanao del Sur to another evacuation center in Marawi City.

It might have been more than a year since the conflict in Marawi ended, but its memory is still fresh in the mind of the survivors. Ate Jaslia remembers that fateful day in 2017 when armed men stormed the city.

“May narinig kami na putukan, may bomba pa ata na sumabog malapit sa bahay namin,” she recalls with tears. With their lives in danger, she and her husband took their children and whatever belongings they could bring and fled to safety. Together with some of their neighbors, they fled on foot until finally reaching safety in an evacuation center in Lanao del Sur.

Life in the evacuation center was difficult. Her husband suffered an injury which left him bedridden for months. More than the uncertainty brought about by displacement, Ate Jaslia would often remember losing her home. She wasn't the only one in her family who would recall the pain. Her daughter used to draw photos of the conflict. “Naiisip ko pa yung mga putok ng baril, naiisip ko yung takot ko at ng anak ko. Mabuti at buhay pa kami,” she told us with tears.

For months, Ate Jaslia was hesitant to go back home. The pain of losing her home and the sound of gunfire were fresh on her mind.

Not alone

Ate Jaslia and her family refused to be defeated by their circumstance. Ate Jaslia knew that it wasn't just her family who was suffering. Her drive to help herself and to help others led her to volunteer with a local soup kitchen in the

evacuation center. There she would cook and distribute meals to fellow survivors like herself. “Hindi lang kami ‘yung nabakwit, madami kami na dapat makabangon,” she said.

“Siguro ate ako ng mga nanay dito. Natutuwa ako na nakakatulong ako hindi lang sa mga nanay pati na rin sa UNHCR.”

This sentiment was also reflected in her husband who for weeks was bedridden. “Ayoko na wala akong gagawin kahit may sakit ako, gagawin ko ang kaya ko,” he said. He began helping non-profit organizations during distributions when he was healthy enough to walk. He serves not just as someone who would deliver goods to the most vulnerable, but he also served as a leader helping solve disputes among neighbors.

Initially, they were hesitant when they were relocated. “Nung una madilim dito, walang tubig, at malayo,” they said. Yet support began trickling from government and non-government agencies.

Continuing their good work

Ate Jaslia now serves as a community leader helping UNHCR identify the concerns of those who are still living in displacement. She serves as the alternate for the camp manager and provides a listening ear to the community when the camp manager is not around.



70,000+ individuals still displaced due to the Marawi conflict



The Plight of the Sama Bajau

At 70, Wanita Arajani has no birth certificate. She is one of the more than 2,000 Sama Bajaus in Vale Vista in Barangay Kasanyangan, Zamboanga City who have yet to acquire their birth documents. During a listening session conducted by UNHCR with the community in October 2018, Wanita shared that she did not appreciate the value of having a birth certificate when she was growing up. She shared that when she was young, acquiring a birth document was not a norm in their community. They did not see the importance of having one, and they felt that the process of acquiring one would be costly.

For the Sama Bajaus, going to government offices to get a document or avail of services requires extra effort. “We didn’t have the confidence to go to government offices. We don’t know what to do.” said Wanita.

“We are afraid that we’ll be discriminated because we are Bajaus.”

It was only in 2013 that her perspective on the value of a birth certificate changed. Due to the 2013 Zamboanga conflict, her family was displaced. Men in her family were subjected to security checks but they could not present any proof of identity because they did not have any, not even a birth certificate. It was a turning point for Wanita who realized the value that a single paper held. “I did not know that it was that important until I realized how powerful it was to secure us from being identified as militants,” she said.

For months, Wanita and her family lived in the evacuation center. It was there that she gained the confidence to

interact with other people for assistance. “One day, a teacher convinced me to send my grandchildren to school. At first, I was hesitant but eventually I did. She also asked me if we had birth certificates. When I told her that we did not, she said that it was important for us to have one because it is a requirement for school. She permitted my grandchildren to enroll but she said that we should get one before they complete their elementary schooling,” she shared.

Since 2016, UNHCR has supported the Philippine Government in conducting a series of studies on the Sama Bajaus as part of the preliminary steps in addressing their statelessness issue. A desk research, validation meetings, and listening sessions with the Sama Bajau communities in Zamboanga and Tawi-Tawi have revealed that the lack of documentation of the tribe poses a lot of protection issues for them. These issues include difficulties in accessing basic services such as education and exercising their freedom of movement, as well as threats to their security.

As the listening sessions were about to conclude, participants were asked if there were still concerns that they wanted to share. Wanita, once very meek and only kept to herself, raised her hand and said, “We hope that we may acquire birth certificates the soonest time possible. If it is not possible to accommodate everyone in the community, we would like our grandchildren to be prioritized.”

There was silence for a while and then she continued with tears in her eyes, “My grandchild will finish her elementary schooling in March 2019. She needs her birth certificate to graduate. I hope that we can have it by then. If that happens, I will be the happiest.”

It's the season to share
the Gift of Hope



donate.unhcr.ph

f UNHCRPhilippines
✉ phimapsfr@unhcr.org
🌐 unhcr.org/ph

🐦 UNHCRph
📷 unhcrph