



# **COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN**

**Country: The Philippines**

**Planning Year: 2004**

## **2004 COUNTRY OPERATION PLAN**

### **Executive Summary – The Philippines**

#### **(a) Context and Beneficiary Population**

During 2002, political uncertainty and a volatile security situation dominated national attention and resources. Other developments included the suspension of peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the New People's Army/National Democratic Front, the continuing effects of September 11 and the war on terrorism, an increasing economic downturn and the lack of development, particularly in the southern Philippines. Joint military exercises with the United States in the south targeting Abu Sayaf and other groups identified by the Government as terrorist organisations, and continued low intensity conflict in various parts of the Philippines, resulted in changing displacement. At the end of 2002, President Arroyo declared that she would not seek another term in 2004.

UNHCR's main role in the Philippines in 2004 will be to promote and monitor the implementation of the 1951 Refugee Convention. The Philippines is the only country in south east Asia which is a Convention Signatory and has an institutionalised refugee protection regime. UNHCR will continue to promote the enactment of pending legislation which would amend and revise national legislation on immigration, further recognising the rights of refugees as stipulated in the Convention. UNHCR also aims to promote the ratification of the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, which the Philippines has already signed.

The framework of UNHCR's advocacy efforts will seek to institutionalise legal provisions facilitating the naturalisation of refugees, refining the system for refugee status determination (RSD), ensuring that regulations, policies and practices allow refugees to enjoy social, economic and cultural rights. Enhancing reception standards for refugees and asylum seekers is also an objective. A longer-term goal is the development of a working model that can be used to engage other states in the region to accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

UNHCR will continue to strengthen the capacity of the Philippine Government, particularly the Department of Justice (Refugee Processing Unit) and the Bureau of Immigration, through training and support activities, to protect and assist refugees, asylum seekers and other persons of concern to UNHCR. UNHCR's participation as an observer during RSD or in a formal advisory capacity will be pursued. Access to the RSD procedure, information and assistance in all ports of entry to undocumented aliens seeking asylum will be addressed.

UNHCR also aims to continue developing a broader support base that will advocate for increased refugee protection and further UNHCR's objectives in the Philippines. Members of Government, prominent nationals who were formerly refugees or support refugee issues, concerned NGO networks, the Philippine Bar Association, training and academic institutions influencing Government policy will be engaged to support and complement UNHCR's promotional activities. These efforts will be implemented to raise public awareness and clarify the roles of the Government and UNHCR in the protection of refugees. They will also address the lack of knowledge by the greater public and key stakeholders concerning basic notions of refugee protection and law.

UNHCR will continue to provide protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers and other persons of concern in the Philippines. The urban refugee caseload numbers 110 persons as of 28 February 2003. In 2004, a national NGO implementing partner, Community and Family Services International (CFSI), is expected to work with UNHCR in designing and implementing programmes that will identify durable solutions for urban refugees, primarily through local integration, the acquisition of permanent residency for qualified refugees, and naturalisation. The promotion of self-sufficiency for a limited number receiving financial assistance will also be part of the programme. The needs of newly recognised refugees, vulnerable cases, women and children will be incorporated in all aspects of planning and implementation. Asylum seekers and other persons of concern to UNHCR will also continue to be provided with legal assistance and, on a case-by-case basis, material assistance under a sub-project to be established with CFSI.

UNHCR's presence in the Philippines will also be conditioned by the situation in neighbouring countries, political developments relating to Filipino Muslims and migrant workers in Malaysia and political and military developments in the southern part of the Philippines. In addition to closely monitoring current and potential population displacements, support for capacity building for contingency planning and emergency preparedness activities will be promoted, building on the financial and technical assistance provided by UNHCR to the Government of the Philippines and civil society from 2001 to 2003. The assistance will be maintained to enable UNHCR to monitor conflict areas through extended networks.

UNHCR will continue to work with the Government to address the issue of statelessness facing screened out Vietnamese cases in Palawan and in other parts of the country. UNHCR will continue to pursue the adoption of a pending bill to grant permanent residence to the remaining Vietnamese nationals in the Philippines.

In 2004, the UNHCR office in Manila will continue promoting the inclusion of refugee issues in regional fora with the aim to influence Government policy with respect to the challenges posed by the mixed movements of refugees and migrants. UNHCR Manila, together with the offices in Malaysia and Singapore and the Regional Office in Jakarta (which covers Brunei, Indonesia and East Timor), will contribute to the development of regional strategies encompassing approaches to the common objectives being pursued by the offices in the region.

The office in Manila will continue to participate in meetings organized by the UNDP Resident Representative, who is also the Resident Coordinator for Humanitarian Action in the Philippines. UNHCR will continue to chair the UN Task Force on Disaster Management, through which the UN Country Team determines its institutional response to disasters and emergencies.

In 2004, the UNHCR office in Manila will be downsized, with the discontinuation of the international post in March 2004 to be replaced by the proposed creation of a national officer post as of 1 January 2004 and the continuation of support by a driver and senior finance and administration assistant.

**(b) Selected Programme Goals and Objectives**

<p>Name of Beneficiary Population/Theme:</p> <p>UNHCR's main role in the Philippines in 2003 is to promote and monitor the implementation of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, so that refugees, asylum seekers and others of concern enjoy protection, have access to assistance and a durable solution. The principal activities will include advocacy for the development of national legislation, strengthening the capacity of the Government to protect refugees and undertake RSD, broadening the base of supportive stakeholders, support for emergency preparedness and contingency planning, implementation of assistance activities resulting in durable solutions for refugees.</p>	
<p>Main Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Government adherence under the 1951 Refugee Convention.</li> <li>▪ Refugees in the Philippines are accorded protection under the Convention, and have access to the assistance and durable solutions.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Principal Objectives</b></p>	<p><b>Related Outputs</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Refugees and asylum seekers benefit from national legislation conforming to international standards</li> <li>▪ Stateless persons in the country benefit from the 1954 Convention on Statelessness</li> <li>▪ The capacity of the Department of Justice and the Bureau of Immigration is strengthened to undertake RSD in accordance with international standards</li> <li>▪ Recognised refugees are able to locally integrate and, subsequently, be naturalised</li> <li>▪ UNHCR's objectives and activities are supported and complemented by a network of stakeholders (prominent persons, NGOs, academic institutions, etc) who advocate for improved refugee protection</li> <li>▪ Capacity of the Philippine Government and other actors to respond to a refugee influx or extensive internal displacement is strengthened.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Philippine Immigration law amended to incorporate provisions recognising rights of refugees and asylum seekers under the 1951 Refugee Convention</li> <li>▪ 1954 Convention on Statelessness is ratified by the Philippine Senate</li> <li>▪ Training for DOJ-Refugee Processing Unit and immigration officials provided</li> <li>▪ RSD process supported by UNHCR in observer or advisory capacity</li> <li>▪ Entitlement of refugees to work permits, regularisation of immigration status ensured</li> <li>▪ Refugees are granted permanent residence or are naturalised</li> <li>▪ UNHCR promotional and advocacy objectives are included in efforts of various stakeholders</li> <li>• Government contingency plans describing possible scenarios and identifying resources required for a response are facilitated by support for Emergency Management and Contingency Planning initiatives</li> </ul>