

# **COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN**

**Country: The Philippines**

**Planning Year: 2002**

## Executive Summary

### (a) Context and Beneficiary Population

A change of leadership occurred in the Philippines in January 2001.

From the very beginning of its term, the new Government undertook concrete action to end the all-out war against the secessionist MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) in Mindanao. It is thus very likely that a *de facto* permanent cease-fire will prevail in Mindanao in 2002. Though clashes have been recorded between the Government forces and rebels in other geographically limited areas of the Philippines, these should not have an impact on the political situation of the country in 2002. In line with a policy of reconciliation within the Philippines, the new administration has also invited the rebels to sit at the peace table.

The international community has reacted positively to the change in the Philippine leadership and it is expected that the economy of the country will benefit from the confidence which the new administration seems to inspire in foreign investors.

In view of the above, in 2002, the political situation in the Philippines should remain stable. Law and order will continue to be guaranteed and probably improved, and the Government will abide by the principles of governance spelled out in the Constitution.

In this context, UNHCR's main role in the Philippines, which is the only country in the sub-region covered by the UNHCR Regional Office in Jakarta that has signed the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees, is to promote and monitor the implementation of the 1951 Convention by advocating for the amendment/improvement of national legislation directly or indirectly concerning refugees. The by-product of this broad strategy, which will include, for example, action to facilitate the naturalization of refugees and efforts to develop/refine the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) system, should be a "Philippine policy on refugees" (based on national legislation), which could serve as a model in the region.

UNHCR's presence in the Philippines in 2002 will be also justified by the very unstable situation in neighbouring countries. It is not to be ruled out that this could deteriorate, causing a refugee influx in the region. In early 2001, UNHCR organized an Emergency Management Training Programme in the Philippines which was very well received by the local authorities. If conditions allow, a possible follow up activity should be considered during 2002.

UNHCR is also to ensure that refugees, asylum seekers and other persons of concern enjoy the protection and receive the material assistance they are qualified for and entitled to. There is an urban refugee caseload numbering 156 in the Philippines for whom a durable solution is to be identified and achieved.

Since 1997, UNHCR’s implementing partner in the execution of the project entitled “Durable solutions for the urban refugee caseload” has been Community and Family Services International (CFSI), a Philippine NGO. UNHCR assures its traditional protection functions characterizing the mandate of the Organization, leaving to the implementing partner the responsibility for material assistance to the refugees. In 2002, it is expected that the implementing partner would cooperate with UNHCR in the designing (which may be completed in 2001)/executing of a pro-active strategy aiming at identifying and achieving durable solutions for the refugees and a phase-out of the material (financial) assistance to the caseload.

In 2002, in addition to the above, the UNHCR Office in Manila will liaise with the Asian Development Bank whose Headquarters are located in the capital of the Philippines. Following the nomination of Mr. Rufus Rodriguez to the post of APC Coordinator for a term ending at the end of 2002, the UNHCR Office Manila will also have to regularly liaise with the Secretariat of the Asia-Pacific Consultations (APC).

The UNHCR Office in Manila, together with the Offices in Malaysia and Singapore, is an integral part of the UNHCR Regional Office in Jakarta which also covers Brunei and East Timor. The Head of Liaison Office participates in the regional meetings organized by the Office in Jakarta. It is in that context that the link with other countries is established, aiming to design a regional approach to issues of common concern.

UNHCR takes part in the monthly Heads of UN Agencies Meeting organized by the UNDP Resident Representative who is also the Resident Coordinator for Humanitarian Action in the Philippines. UNHCR’s work in the Philippines does not call for particular coordination of activities with other UN agencies. It is expected that unless there is a major refugee influx from neighboring countries, the situation should not vary in 2002.

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

<p><b>Main Goal:</b> Implementation of the principles of the 1951 Convention</p>	
<p><b>Principle Objectives:</b> To amend, with a view to improve the national legislation dealing with asylum seeker/refugee issues.</p>	<p><b>Related Outputs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smoothing of issuing of identity and other legal documents to refugees.</li> <li>• Smoothing of procedures to naturalize refugees , etc.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Main Goal:</b> Durable solutions for the refugees (urban refugee caseload).</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Principal Objectives:</b></li> <li>• The refugees will be informed of their rights and duties with a view to identify the most suitable durable solution to their problems. Efforts, in particular,</li> </ul>	<p><b>Related Outputs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drafting and/or implementing a strategy for achievement of durable solutions (with phases and indicating various actions to</li> </ul>

<p>will focus on their attaining economic self-sufficiency, local integration and – in the longer term – naturalization.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The legal procedure for the achievement of the identified durable solution will be initiated/followed up.</li></ul>	<p>be undertaken at different phases and time-frame for each phase).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Implementation of the strategy.</li></ul>
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