



*After days of continuous rains and floods, residents of Las Navas municipality, Northern Samar, receives timely food assistance.*

Anastasia Isyuk/ICRC

# NEWSLETTER

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## A BUSY YEAR AHEAD

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Head of Delegation

The new year greeted the Philippines with enduring rains and floods in parts of the country. Global weather pattern changes such as La Niña, associated with lower sea surface temperatures, coupled with manmade environmental degradation, continue to affect the lives of many Filipinos.

Although the ICRC's task consists mainly in bringing aid to people adversely affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence, we also work in partnership with the Philippine Red Cross (PRC) to help people in sensitive areas when calamities occur. Just this month, the ICRC provided a half-month supply of food to around 48,000 people in conflict- and flood-stricken areas of Northern Samar.

This year also opened with the resumption of peace talks between the Government of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front, as well as with the Moro Islamic

Liberation Front. We welcome any steps that may lead to the stabilization of the situation in conflict-affected parts of the Philippines and allow people to lead normal lives. In the meantime, however, many communities still live in fear as internal clan disputes in Central Mindanao, often referred to as *ridos*, persist in causing displacements and loss of lives. Various situations of violence, destruction of property, and kidnappings for ransom are continuing, and pose serious security concerns.

Improving access to healthcare, water and sanitation remains a priority for the ICRC in Central Mindanao, where it assist the most vulnerable people. Rice and vegetable seeds, along with farm tools, were distributed in 2010, allowing more than 3,800 families to resume farming and reduce their dependence on loans. Reduced economic pressure gives people better chances for a fresh start.

While Sulu archipelago remains off-limits to the ICRC due to prevailing insecurity, the organization responds to the needs of people through local partners. A good example is the water project in Indanan, which is currently providing several thousand people with safe drinking water, implemented by local actors with the support of the ICRC.

The ICRC has also begun focusing on the issue of migration, a growing global phenomenon that presents numerous humanitarian challenges. In its first intervention for migrants in the Philippines,

the ICRC helped renovate the Zamboanga migration centre by improving access to water and sanitation, and provided hygiene kits to its temporary residents. This should complement the efforts of authorities in improving the situation of migrants. Many went abroad from Sulu archipelago due to ongoing violence and difficult economic conditions.

The Call for Action (CFA) initiative, which addresses causes and consequences of overcrowding in jails and prisons, has been gradually expanding. Following the example of Manila City Jail, the working group on improvements in the criminal justice process was launched in Tacloban, Leyte.

The new BJMP manual sets national standards for living conditions in jails. Overall, about 25,000 inmates so far have benefited from structural improvements in the framework of the CFA. Innovative solutions, such as the use of solar panels for heating water in jail facilities to help reduce maintenance costs and adverse effects on the environment.

The Philippines remains a key operation for ICRC in South-East Asia. Whatever humanitarian challenges 2011 brings, the ICRC will continue to face them in a neutral, impartial way.



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## WORKING IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS

In Central Mindanao, the ICRC assists the most vulnerable families who were affected by conflict to restore their livelihood. At the end of 2010, over 3,800 families received rice or vegetable seeds and cuttings along with tools to help them revive agricultural production. The ICRC, in collaboration with ARMM Department of Social Welfare and Development and the Department of Agriculture, also provided 46 tiller machines (*kuliglig*) to farmers' associations for community use. This program may be expanded further in 2011.

Responding to the needs of 600 families who were displaced due to the local dispute in

Kabacan (Carmen) area, the ICRC provided food and basic items.

Water-network extension projects, which aim to bring drinking water to nine barangays hosting 11,000 people have started in Pikit, North Cotabato, and will continue in 2011. This is the most ambitious water project the ICRC has ever undertaken in the Philippines.

In order to improve access to healthcare, the ICRC continues to provide medicines and surgical items to 14 hospitals throughout Mindanao, and finance individual treatments in particularly vulnerable cases. It also facilitates

physical rehabilitation and prosthetic support through the Jubilee Center in Davao City, where a gait training area was constructed.

In the Visayas region, where armed clashes between the government forces and the NPA result in people's lack of access to basic services, the ICRC reaches out to the affected and remote communities. In Samar, it helped to improve access to safe water and sanitation for over 6,400 residents through the construction of two new gravity-fed water supply systems. The ICRC also distributed seeds and gardening tools to vulnerable communities in Northern Samar already affected by armed conflict.

## VITAL HELP FOR 48,000 FLOOD VICTIMS IN NORTHERN SAMAR



Some villagers have to go a long way to receive rice, sardines, oil and other items. The distribution point is set in an area accessible by boat, motorcycle or on foot. It takes a boat ride and a jungle walk to reach some remote barangays.

## SUPPORTING THE PHILIPPINE RED CROSS

In February, ICRC transferred food and basic items to the Philippine Red Cross to allow them respond to the needs of flood-stricken communities. Around 15,000 people in Surigao del Sur have been given a half-month supply of food. Each family was given 25 kilograms of rice, six litres of oil, 12 tins of sardines and other items. At the same time, about 7,000 people in Surigao del Norte were provided with a set of basic items.



After weeks of heavy rains, the roads in Las Navas municipality are difficult to pass. One of the Red Cross jeepneys loaded with rice bags got stuck in the mud. Thanks to joint efforts of the drivers, it was quickly pulled out and reached the distribution point.



As distributions carry on, rain gives way to blazing heat. More than 1,000 people are waiting to receive assistance while local authorities help organize the process. Senior villagers and other vulnerable people are given a priority. PRC and local community volunteers assist them to pass through the line and carry heavy items.





*Improvements in Teresa District Jail bring relief to inmates, who now enjoy more air and light inside their cells.*

# A BREATH OF COMFORT IN OVERCROWDED JAILS

Like food and water, air and light are just as valuable for those detained inside overcrowded facilities. In this story, Oliver Ortega tells how seemingly small changes to ventilation brought sighs of relief to inmates in two Rizal jails.

At the courtyard of the San Mateo Municipal Jail where inmates receive visiting relatives, Tony (not his real name) enjoys the brief comfort of moving air outside his cell amidst the midday heat. Above him, the sky is cloudy, with signs of heavy rain approaching.

"Afternoons like this used to be more difficult to take before they widened the windows," said Tony, referring to the 1.5 ft-high window which replaced the mere horizontal slit high above their cell's wall.

The windows lined with iron bars were constructed with the support of the ICRC, which has been working with the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) and Chief Insp. Silas Laurio Jr., warden of the San Mateo jail, to improve the living conditions of inmates.

"Even with several electric fans, it was extremely hot and humid inside their cells. Detainees are human beings who have a right to live decently. That is why we had the windows installed," said Chief Insp. Laurio.

Thanks to proper ventilation, Tony's cellmates agreed that it is no longer as hot as before, the air flow has improved, and they sleep better as it is now much cooler at night.

## Introducing new national standards

In November 2010, the BJMP published its first 68-page manual on habitat, water, sanitation, and kitchen in jails. The manual stipulates the national standards for the living conditions of detainees in the Philippines. It provides, for example, that in all places where detainees are required to live or work, "the windows shall be large enough to enable the detainees to read or work by natural light, and shall be constructed to allow the entrance of fresh air whether or not there is artificial ventilation."

The manual is a product of the BJMP-ICRC working group on upgrading penal infrastructures, a part of the Call for Action process. It is an initiative started by the ICRC in 2007 to prompt the government agencies concerned to address the consequences of overcrowding in Philippine jails and prisons.

"Some of the main problems tackled with jails authorities are overcrowding and dilapidated structures," said Andres Casal, the ICRC's water and habitat coordinator in the country. "By having national standards, the BJMP provides a framework that stipulates what a dignified detention facility should be—one that meets the needs of inmates in accordance with minimum recommended standards."

"Moreover, because adequate funding will be required to meet the standards, the manual will enable the BJMP to present a more accurate picture of the jail situation and argue to facilitate the requirement for further resources," he added.

## Fresh air from the mountains

In another Rizal town, detainees in Teresa District Jail enjoy the fresh breeze of mountain air. Some walls were demolished to give way to windows and iron bars in the small three-story facility.

"A few months ago, it was very dark in here," said Mark (not his real name.) "That's the only window we had," he said, pointing to an almost square-foot hole in the wall across the row of bunk beds but wherein hardly any light comes in.

Through its jail improvement activities, the ICRC in coordination with Supt. Amado Concepcion Jr., warden of Teresa District Jail, helped remove one of the interior walls in Mark's cell and replaced it with iron bars. The ICRC also supported the construction of a new window overlooking the mountains in the municipality of Teresa.

"We began widening the cells and even placed marble floor tiles, which supported the local tile industry here in the town of Teresa, to help alleviate the intolerable conditions of inmates. The ICRC helped hasten the renovations we were doing in our jail," said Supt. Concepcion.

Asked if they were not worried that water may go in when it rains because of the new openings in their cell, Mark and his cellmates joked that they actually run toward the window to feel the rain and get wet.

"We are happy with the changes in our cell," Mark said. The changes brought not only relief to their jail condition, he added. "It also made us feel more human, that it feels good to know that there are others out there who still care for us."

*Oliver Ortega*

# YOUNG REPORTER FROM MEXICO VISITS THE PHILIPPINES



*Mariel gamely picks a piece of cooked sweet potato during her visit to an ICRC-assisted vegetable garden in Datu Anggal Midtimbang, Maguindanao.*

Mariel García Montes, 20, a philosophy student in Mexico City and the winner of ICRC's Young Reporter competition, visited the Philippines in February. She spent a week in Mindanao, talking to young people affected by armed conflict, and met volunteers of the Philippine Red Cross. This is what she shared with us before she left:

"I have learned more about the lives of those who are in a situation of conflict and humanitarian aid by spending 12 days in the Philippines than I did by reading about the same topics for years. Before I came here, I knew conflict existed, but didn't expect to meet people who became amputees because war reached their own backyards. I also knew that there are many people working to change this. I just didn't expect to see it in the form of 16-year-olds running region-wide peace-building programs. My visit to the ICRC and PRC was full of learning opportunities that I aim to share with other young people through my report."

## SILLIMAN TOPS MOOT COURT CONTEST

The Silliman University team outshined 13 other law schools to emerge as champions in last year's national moot court competition on international humanitarian law (IHL). The team from Dumaguete City clinched the top prize in the finals held 20 November 2010 at the Supreme Court en banc session hall. They were adjudged as best team by a panel of judges led by Associate Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno and lawyer Harry Roque. They will be sent by the ICRC to the regional finals in Hong Kong in March.

## AFP LAUNCHES HANDBOOK ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND IHL

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) released its "Soldiers' Handbook on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law" to help guide officers and men about the dos and don'ts of conducting field and combat operations. The 172-page book, which was printed with the support of the ICRC, was launched during the first conference on Human Rights and IHL on 17 December 2010 in Camp Aguinaldo.

The new chief of the AFP Human Rights Office, Col. Domingo Tutaan Jr., said during the launch that they envisioned one book to be given per squad to ensure that soldiers develop a better understanding of why they need to protect and respect both laws. Jean-Daniel Tauxe, head of ICRC delegation in the Philippines, commended the release of the handbook as it showed the AFP's commitment to promote awareness and compliance with human rights and IHL.

## CUSTOMARY IHL DATABASE

In 1996, the ICRC, in consultation with experts from around the world, embarked on a major study to identify rules of customary international humanitarian law (IHL). The resulting publication, which appeared in 2005, has been hailed as a landmark document seeking to identify the common core of IHL binding on all parties to all types of armed conflict.

The study makes it easier to identify and apply customary IHL and therefore to enhance the

legal protection of victims of armed conflict, thereby reducing the human cost of conflict. Since its publication the customary law study has been recognized as an important legal reference with regard to international and non-international armed conflicts including by courts, international organizations and non-governmental organizations.

The ICRC has launched a FREE online version of the study with 50 % more content than the original printed version. The database is easy

to navigate. It will be an essential resource for anyone interested in the application and interpretation of IHL and for any further review of State practice carried out to assess customary IHL.

**For more information, please go to**  
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### International Committee of the Red Cross in the Philippines