



Document #2089945

UNHCR – UN High Commissioner for Refugees (Author)

Unregistered children and their families in Maguindanao receive their birth certificates

More than 600 unregistered children and their families from geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas in the municipalities of Upi and South Upi in Maguindanao were issued with birth certificates on Wednesday, 22 March.

MAGUINDANAO, PHILIPPINES — Over 600 individuals from Upi and South Upi, Maguindanao, received their much-awaited birth certificates on 22 March 2023, in a birth registration initiative spearheaded by the Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD) in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and the local government units of priority municipalities of Upi and South Upi in Maguindanao. The said project is supported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in line with the implementation of the UNHCR-UNICEF Joint Strategy to End Childhood Statelessness. The issuance of birth certificates to unregistered children and their families opens an opportunity for them to fully access their basic human rights and reach their full potential.

Most of the birth registrants were unregistered children and their families who do not have access to birth registration due to their distance from the municipal office. Some of them are also from conflict-affected communities. In the Philippines, there are populations at risk of statelessness due to various reasons and challenges such as lack of access to civil registry systems due to geographical location, lack of awareness on the importance of a birth documentation, unfamiliarity with the birth registration process, lack of finances, and constant exposure to conflict and displacement challenges.

As a signatory to the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, the Philippine Government is working with UNHCR to promote and develop standards and operational responses to address the situation of stateless people and populations at risk of statelessness. This initiative forms part of the Philippines' commitment and pledges during the 2019 High Level Segment on statelessness and a way to support efforts to reduce statelessness globally.

"Statelessness is a global problem," shared UNHCR Philippines Head of National Office Maria Ermina Valdeavilla-Gallardo. ***"There are people who are not recognized as citizens of the State where they live. In the Philippines, there are persons who, because of their recurrent displacement and non-registration of birth, are at a higher risk of becoming stateless."***

UNHCR explained the importance of birth registration to the people of South Upi and Upi, and encouraged them to spread the word about the program to their relatives and friends and to ensure that every child in their families will be given a name and identity.

"Birth registration is one way to address statelessness," she emphasized. ***"The document you will be receiving today will be the basis for your own identity. You can now access all the other documents you will need from the Government."***

There is indeed a need to scale-up birth and civil registration efforts, especially in isolated and disadvantaged areas.

Since 2019, UNHCR together with UNICEF through the UNHCR-UNICEF Joint Strategy to Ending Childhood Statelessness provides support to the Philippine Government, particularly to the Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD) and priority local government units in the implementation of birth registration initiative in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Philippines to provide protection to populations who are at risk of statelessness in the region.

ABOUT THE UNHCR-UNICEF JOINT STRATEGY FOR ADDRESSING CHILDHOOD STATELESSNESS

UNHCR and UNICEF have been implementing birth registration activities in Mindanao since 2019 as part of the Joint Strategy for Addressing Childhood Statelessness. To date, more than 2,000 individuals have been assisted by the program to address their risk of statelessness and facilitate access to basic rights and services.

ABOUT UNHCR'S #IBELONG CAMPAIGN

Launched in November 2014, the #IBelong Campaign aims to end statelessness within ten years, by identifying and protecting stateless people, resolving existing situations of statelessness, and preventing the emergence of new cases. Through legal advocacy and awareness-raising, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) works with government and partners around the globe, including the Philippines, towards achieving the Campaign goals.

Through the [#IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness](#) and the UNHCR-UNICEF Joint Strategy for Addressing Childhood Statelessness, UNHCR hopes to help individuals obtain birth documentation, and in the process, access opportunities that will allow them to build better futures for themselves and their communities.

ecoi.net description:

Maguindanao: More than 600 unregistered children and their families receive birth certificates

Country:

Philippines

Source:

[UNHCR – UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (Author)

Original link:

<https://www.unhcr.org/ph/29113-unregistered-children-and-their-families-in-maguindanao-receive-their-birth-certificates.html>

Document type:

Appeal or News Release

Language:

English

Published:

28 March 2023

Available on ecoi.net since:

13 April 2023

Document ID:

2089945

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Documentation
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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

