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Dear Colleagues and friends,

It is hard to believe that a whole year has gone by since I arrived in the Philippines. What an action-packed year it has been!

Not long after my arrival in late November 2014, the Philippines was hit by Typhoon Hagupit (Ruby). Together with the Chairman and Secretary General, we visited the affected areas in Samar and Leyte to see the damage and meet the local chapters. While some coastal towns were affected, thanks to the very hard lessons learned from Typhoon Haiyan the previous year, everyone was better prepared this time around. The Philippine Red Cross (PRC) local chapters responded quickly and efficiently to distribute relief goods where they were needed and the Canadian Red Cross erected a field hospital for the worst affected areas around Dolores, Eastern Samar.

This year, the world's attention turned to the Philippines as significant historic events unfolded. Among the highlights was the visit of Pope Francis in January (which coincided with Typhoon Mekkhala and shortened his visit to Tacloban). The Papal Mass in Luneta Park attracted more than 6 million people, a record for a mass event.

A highlight for the Red Cross movement included the visit to the Philippines of the IFRC's Secretary General, Elhadj As Sy, which coincided with the PRC's Conference on Labor Migration in May. This important conference, the third in a series that began in 2014, resulted in the signing of the Manila Declaration on Women Migrant Workers. As a result, early next year, the Chairman will inaugurate a lifeline/call centre for migrant workers at the Philippine Red Cross.

In the middle of the year we finally said goodbye to our old office in the Port Area. Along with our Partner National Societies in the Haiyan operation, we moved to the brand new Philippine Red Cross Tower building in Mandaluyong, more or less in the heart of Manila. The Tower was officially inaugurated by PRC Chairman Richard Gordon, Secretary-General Gwen Pang, PRC Board Members, government officials, and myself.

The multi-storey building includes the country's biggest and newest blood centre, open 24 hours a day, and the impressive Operations Centre to boost PRC's disaster management and response capacity. The centre features state-of-the-art monitoring, IT and data capture and is manned round the clock. It is already making a big



IFRC Secretary General, Elhadj As Sy, meets with Philippine Red Cross volunteers. "I salut you for the excellent work you are doing", he stated during the conference. Photo Credit: Cheryl Galalac/IFRC

difference to the PRC's coordination of disaster response teams and information flow from the chapters.

Behind the Tower, the PRC has converted a warehouse into a huge multipurpose hall/logistics and training hub. It has also hosted many events such as the Chairman's 70th birthday, the PRC National Youth Congress for 400 volunteers and staff and other events.

Also in May, all staff in the Tower participated in an earthquake drill to prepare for the long predicted high magnitude earthquake in Metro Manila. For some years PRC has been upgrading its mass casualty preparations by training rescue, first aid and medical teams and building a stock of rescue vehicles and equipment. In September, I attended the IFRC Global Management Conference in Dubai. Here As Sy emphasised the importance for the IFRC as the world's largest humanitarian network to work and act as one team with common standards, processes and services. One outcome from all the brainstorming sessions is that we have all been working very hard in the last part of the year on planning KPIs and budgets for 2016.

Thankfully, the worst typhoon of the year, Koppu, which struck in October, progressively lost strength as it made landfall in Luzon, but still managed to dump record amounts of rain, causing widespread flooding and crop damage.

PRC mobilised 550 staff and volunteers, including water search and rescue teams. They saved 728 people, mostly from floodwaters. PRC chapters have distributed food and non-food items, including pre-positioned IFRC stock, to several thousand of the worst affected families. Livelihood cash will also help those farmers who lost everything to buy seeds for replanting.

In early November Javier Castellanos, our new regional director for Asia Pacific, paid us a week-long visit to coincide with the two-year anniversary of Typhoon Haiyan. Javier joined me and Operations Manager Patrick Elliott as we participated in the Philippine Red Cross 'Caravan' tour of

completed Red Cross projects in Cebu, Leyte and Panay, including IFRC-supported shelter handovers and a job fair for hundreds of skills training graduates. We were also privileged to attend the opening of the Red Cross village in Paypay, Cebu, the Philippines' first fully integrated housing relocation project. Funded by the French Red Cross, the project has seen 124 families rehoused in a safer place where they have access to health, childcare and livelihood opportunities.

Later in November, the Philippine Government also hosted the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit of leaders from 21 member countries. Security was extremely tight for the entire week and delegates were asked to remain in Manila and work from home.

IFRC is also implementing an exit strategy for our Typhoon Haiyan operation by progressively scaling down our Philippine-based personnel as we complete our programs. Some delegates have already left for other missions and duties and more are leaving before the end of the year. This scaling down will be completed by June 2016.

I am very proud of all the achievements of IFRC Philippines during the year. The entire team has shown skill, dedication and a capacity for hard work. Every single person's work counts for humanity and every one of us is a gift for humanity. To be sure, our working days can be intensive and long, but we have done our work with good spirit and are constantly improving ourselves.

Our relationship with the PRC, the PNS, ICRC, and other colleagues in APAC remains strong and we will continue to foster our links with them all in order to strengthen the ONE Red Cross concept in the Philippines to provide community resilience, self-protection and dignity.

Looking forward to next year, for sure there will be much more to do. Our response capacity and support will continue to be tested and challenged. It is a great honour and pleasure to work with all of you. Wherever you are going to be, I do hope Christmas will give all of us the opportunity to have a peaceful and well deserved rest with family and friends. Take care and stay safe!

- Kari Isomaa, Head of Delegation



One of the shelter beneficiaries from the village of Dumaguít leads the ribbon-cutting of the ceremonial turnover of constructed homes in New Washington, Aklan. The IFRC supported PRC in constructing core shelters for Haiyan affected families. Photo by Mary Joy Evalarosa / IFRC



LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT STEPS UP WITH SKILLS TRAINING AND COMMUNITY PROJECTS

For the first time in a Philippine disaster operation, the Philippine Red Cross (PRC) supported by the IFRC, has spearheaded skills training and enterprise development (STED) and community-managed livelihood projects (CMLP) for disadvantaged families and vulnerable communities affected by Typhoon Haiyan.

For the STED program, PRC partnered with technical and vocational colleges in the public and private sector to sponsor vocational training. Since the program started, more 1,000 scholars have graduated and passed the National Certification exams and are now employed in different industries, from the automotive, welding, catering, to housekeeping. So far, 176 of those who graduated last November are now employed.

"One of the many challenges for the STED team is encouraging the scholars during course training and after they graduate," says IFRC's Livelihood Technical Project Assistant in Aklan Vanela Torres. "The scholars are from different parts in Panay and the courses are spread out in different areas too so they would miss their families. Other scholars lose heart after graduation because of the competition with other applicants, so we needed to assure them that we are there to help them through the whole process."

For the CMLPs, selected barangays (villages) were given the opportunity to formulate proposals for livelihood projects designed to collectively benefit the community. Project proposals include plant nurseries, high-value crops, soil and water conservation and fishery initiatives, artificial reefs and mangrove replanting.

"The Red Cross has identified 41 towns for the community projects" says PRC Livelihood Officer Perzeus Jay Luna. "We hope to reach 65 towns by mid-2016. At the moment, eight community projects are already been implemented across the Visayas region."

One of the projects already underway is the Lumaynay Pina (pineapple) Plantation Association in the municipality of Altavas in Aklan. The Red Cross gave a USD 4,000

grant to the association, which covers the purchase of the pineapple sprouts and equipment for 27 association members. Training on pina fibre extraction and weaving it into pina cloth is being supported by Philippine Fibre Industry Development Authority (PHILFIDA). The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has been tapped to help provide the looms after the harvest.

"We chose to cultivate a pineapple plantation because Aklan is prized for its high-quality pina cloth and is part of our age-old tradition," says President of the Lumaynay Pineapple Association Michelle Narte. "Also, no part of the pineapple is wasted: From the leaves to the fruit, everything is used."

The fibre extraction process has remained unchanged in Aklan: Each leaf is scraped with a broken plate to reveal the fibre, which are then washed, sieved, knotted and sold by kilo in markets. Pina fiber cost a minimum of USD 31 per kilo (around 3,000 piña leaves). It is then weaved with silk to make the Filipino formal wear, the barong and saya. "We already know how to properly extract pina fibre from the leaves to make the cloth," says Michelle Narte. "But pina cloth fetches more in the market so we look forward to learn how to weave it into pina cloth."



Altavas, Aklan. One of the members of the Lumaynay Pina Plantation Association, ready to plant the new batch of pineapple sprouts. It will be ready for harvest in a year. Photo by Mary Joy Evalarosa / IFRC

The association has planted 25,000 pineapple sprouts. It will take a year before they can harvest the fruits of their labour, but they are hopeful their first harvest will yield good results.

The livelihoods programme is designed to provide individuals, households and communities opportunities to become self-reliant and to engage in economic activities that will have lasting benefits that outweigh the costs.

Other projects in different stages of implementation in the Visayas region include a mangrove plantation in Cebu, a rice mill in Capiz, squash-noodle production, a rice mill

and water refilling station in Leyte, and an artificial reef and otoshi-ami (fish netting) in Antique.

“The existing otoshi-amis that have been operational for the past ten years in our village sell their catch to the cities at twice the price,” shares Yolito Dagohoy, a councillor for the Sta. Fe Livelihood Association in Antique. “The purpose behind this project is to provide our community with a sustainable fishing livelihood that the whole community can afford and be part of. Everything we catch, we will first offer it to the community. Then we turn it over to the middle man, split the profits and keep the rest for the maintenance of the otoshi-ami.”

MICHAEL ‘Myk’ ANDREW A. RUIZ HAS BEEN A PHILIPPINE RED CROSS VOLUNTEER SINCE JULY 2014

Like many other Philippine Red Cross volunteers, I’m a nurse by profession. I share a house with my mother and two younger siblings in Numancia, a few kilometres from Kalibo, the capital of Aklan Province. My father works in Manila, while my mother is a barangay nutrition scholar and a community (143) volunteer, so she’s well used to coordinating and working with PRC.

Typhoon Haiyan affected my barangay (village), but luckily our house was not badly damaged. However, the storm did destroy our ancestral home. After the typhoon Philippine Red Cross gave us relief goods and now Philippines Red Cross in partnership with Air Asia are building some houses in Numancia.

Before I volunteered for Philippine Red Cross, I was also a volunteer as an Emergency First Responder in Disaster Risk Reduction and the Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary.

I started volunteering for Philippine Red Cross in the Blood Bank. After only a few days they asked me to join the livelihood team as a volunteer. After a short while I moved to water and sanitation. Now I’m the acting technical project assistant for health, based in the Aklan chapter.

As part of the Haiyan recovery operation, IFRC is implementing its biggest yet Community Based Health & First Aid program [in 140 communities]. I consider myself very lucky that IFRC has supported me to do training as a facilitator and master facilitator for CBHFA. I’m the only volunteer so far who is a trained master facilitator.

I do a lot of travelling in my job as the two municipalities in the IFRC health programme are far apart. It’s really



important for us to be in close contact with the Community Health Volunteers for their weekly planning meeting and to supervise the implementation of the work plan. The job also involves frequent visits and joining household visits to the barangays. My other task is to help the IFRC engineer monitor the rehabilitation of the two health facilities in Aklan.

My job was hard at the beginning, what with the responsibility of handling all the activities, dealing with all the internal documentation and the regulations, but now I’ve got used to it! Even so, handling money is a lot of responsibility, and proper accounting and liquidation is sometimes a challenge. I’ve also had to learn about managing time, good planning and budgeting.

In the chapter we laugh a lot. The people there are not only my colleagues and friends, but they’re also good company and I consider them as my second family. I am happy to go to work every morning. My favourite activity is going with the Community Health Volunteers on household visits to far-flung areas. I like hiking and being in the communities where everything is green. As a health volunteer, I try to understand people’s ideas and cultural settings, to encourage them to get a different view on certain things and change their mindset, which ultimately ends in communities changing their behaviour in a good way.

In the Haiyan operation we work with people from different communities, cultures and backgrounds. It’s challenging but also interesting! Thanks to Red Cross I’ve already had experience in many different sectors and I want to continue working here.

RIISING FROM HAIYAN: SHELTER BENEFICIARIES THANKFUL TO RED CROSS FOR NEW HOMES

New Washington, Aklan. The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement is the biggest single humanitarian organisation working on Typhoon Haiyan recovery. Together with the Philippine Red Cross, the Movement has helped built or repaired more than 65,000 homes across the affected areas, where 8,000 of which were for affected families in Aklan alone. In the town of New Washington in Aklan, around 600 homes have been constructed in the past two years.

To mark the second anniversary of super typhoon Haiyan (local name: Yolanda), a simple ceremonial turnover of constructed homes for 13 beneficiary villages in New Washington was led by Philippine Red Cross and delegates from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) who have been working tirelessly in Aklan the past two years.

A few kilometres down the road, residents from Dumaguít village make last-minute preparations for the ribbon-cutting ceremony to commence after the ceremonial turnover.

One of the shelter beneficiaries, Marichu Avincula, 43, took a day off from work to help with the decorations. Wearing a shirt emblazoned with an ‘I’m Incredible’ tag, her new Red Cross home was among the last batch of shelters completed by the Red Cross for this quarter.

A single mum, Marichu gets paid P3,500 every month to clean a relative’s house and do the laundry, a big

improvement from the P100 per day she earn to man a sari-sari store before Haiyan.

‘I’m separated from my husband and my parents have long passed away,’ says Marichu. ‘I only have myself to rely on. I didn’t know what to do when our house got completely destroyed by Yolanda, so I’m really grateful for this new home.’

For now, the house is bare of furniture. The family sleeps on a large piece plywood on the concrete floor. The only semblance of a partition is a large bed sheet adorned with pink flowers that separates the sleeping quarters from the rest of the house.

‘I bought this bed sheet at the market,’ says Marichu, running a hand over it. ‘When I have saved up enough money, the first thing I’ll do is hire someone to make rooms for us and maybe a small table to put all my kitchen utensils and dinnerware. The electricity can come later.’

What Marichu’s house lacked, Nilda Silvestre’s house had in abundance. Her house is located along the main path that runs through the shelter recovery site. Nilda’s house was completely destroyed by the strong winds and the knee-high storm surge brought by Typhoon Yolanda.

The chatty 55 year-old says her core shelter took only 10 days to build, and her 33-year-old son, Cloyd, who’s handy with the hammer, used the leftover plywood and wooden beams from the construction to build a small bedroom inside the house.



‘I didn’t buy anything new,’ says Nilda. ‘I’m lucky I have a son I can ask to make little cupboards and tables.’ Nilda points out to the other upgrades the house had gone through under her son’s carpentry skills: A wooden dinner table, kitchen and bathroom shelves, and a low cabinet made from bamboo slats. More upgrades are on the way; a small shower head is hangs in the bathroom, coiled to the water pipe, ready to be installed.

‘I’m so thankful to Red Cross for giving me this new home,’ says Nilda. ‘I’m especially grateful to the Red Cross volunteers who really made sure that those really affected were given these new, sturdy homes.’

Just behind Nilda’s house lives Estrella Andrade, the only health worker in their community. At 67 years old, Estrella is the oldest shelter beneficiary. She has been a health worker, midwife, and a traditional birth attendant (TBA) in Dumaguít for 26 years now, and like Marichu’s house, only a large green bedsheet acts as a partition between the kitchen and bed.

‘This bedsheet is just one of the many things my husband and I salvaged from the creek after the storm surge,’ says Estrella. ‘Most of the clothes that were too damaged from the mud, I turned them into pillowcases.’

Although it’s been two years since Typhoon Yolanda hit their town, Estrella says there’s still a lot to be done in her home, but she hardly finds the time, since she’s always being called to help at the health centre.

‘Being a health volunteer here is hard work because you’re always on call,’ says Estrella. ‘But I’m happy with what I do, because I get to help others.’

To augment her meagre income, Estrella sells ornamental plants and flowers she and her husband grow in their garden for P40-P100.

‘My bestsellers are my rose plants,’ says Estrella. ‘I sell those for P100 per pot. When I’ve saved up enough money, I’ll buy a nice cabinet for our clothes.’ At the moment, all of their clothes are stored in rice sacks.

Estrella also plans on expanding her home in the future. She and her husband want to make another bamboo bed so that her son’s families have somewhere to sleep on whenever they come to visit.

Under the Shelter Recovery Program, shelter beneficiaries have been encouraged to have their own ‘equity of labour’ by giving them a stake in house construction, and an insight into the build back safer techniques to ensure a lasting, positive effect on the safety and adequacy of houses. Although operations are set to be completed by mid-2016, the Red Cross will continue building stronger, resilient communities.

‘The Red Cross represents humanity,’ says IFRC Philippines Head of Delegation Kari Isomaa. ‘You can trust that the Red Cross will not leave until we are needed.’

NEW FOCAL POINT FOR PRC DISASTER LAW TEAM

The past few months have seen significant developments take place in disaster law work in the Philippines. Philippine Red Cross have formally appointed a disaster law/IDRL focal point, Resty Lou Talamayan, who will be working closely with the PRC and IFRC teams to take disaster law work forward.

On behalf of PRC, Resty attended the fifth Annual Short Course on Law, Legal Protection & Disasters in San Remo, Italy, together with government representatives from the Philippines and from across the world. The course is convened by the IFRC, the United Nations Development Programme and the International Institute of Humanitarian Law, and provides comprehensive training to National Societies, government officials and humanitarian/development partners on key disaster law topics, including International Disaster Response Law and Law and Disaster Risk Reduction, and how to develop and implement these laws at the national level.

PRC and IFRC have also been engaged in key national law and policy processes which are currently ongoing in



the Philippines, including the review of the 2010 Philippines National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act (Republic Act 10121), and the development of an operational guideline for the Philippines International Humanitarian Assistance Cluster. Both of these processes have so far incorporated feedback and recommendations from PRC and IFRC, and we will continue to engage in these processes as they are finalized. Plans for 2016 include preparation and conduct of capacity building training in disaster law and legislative advocacy for PRC, and possibly some key partners as well. PRC joins it fellow National Societies in Southeast Asia as one of the most active regions when it comes to disaster law work.

Lucia Cipullo
Regional Disaster Law Delegate, South East Asia

HEALTH TRAINING EXTENDS TO EPIDEMIC CONTROL



The IFRC health team has been again been busy packing in more training for Philippine Red Cross staff and volunteers. For the first time in the Philippines, the four-day training of trainers on Epidemic control for volunteers was organized for 26 participants from Haiyan affected areas as well as PRC national headquarters.

2015 has been a big year for capacity building at all levels, including master facilitators, practitioners and instructors’ trainings. So far, 557 community volunteers have been trained in Community Based Health and First Aid, while more than 300 shelter volunteers have completed occupational First Aid, more than 400 community health volunteer have completed standard first aid and Basic Life support training and 166 more psychosocial support practitioners’ training.

Globally, the World Health Organisation estimates more than 14 million people die from a variety of communicable diseases that could largely be prevented. An increase in the number and severity of natural disasters has exacerbated the problem. Epidemics are a constant threat to the well-being of communities everywhere, especially in countries with scarce resources.

Health coordinator Dr Bhanu Pratap says: ‘Managing epidemics, or preferably preventing them, is a priority for the Red Cross and Red Crescent .Epidemic control for volunteers is an important step in supporting the national society to prepare for and respond to emerging infections and seasonal diseases such as dengue, malaria and leptospirosis, which have the potential to cause outbreaks and epidemics.

‘The toolkit is designed to guide the response of volunteers. We’ve aimed to make it simple, practical and action-oriented.’

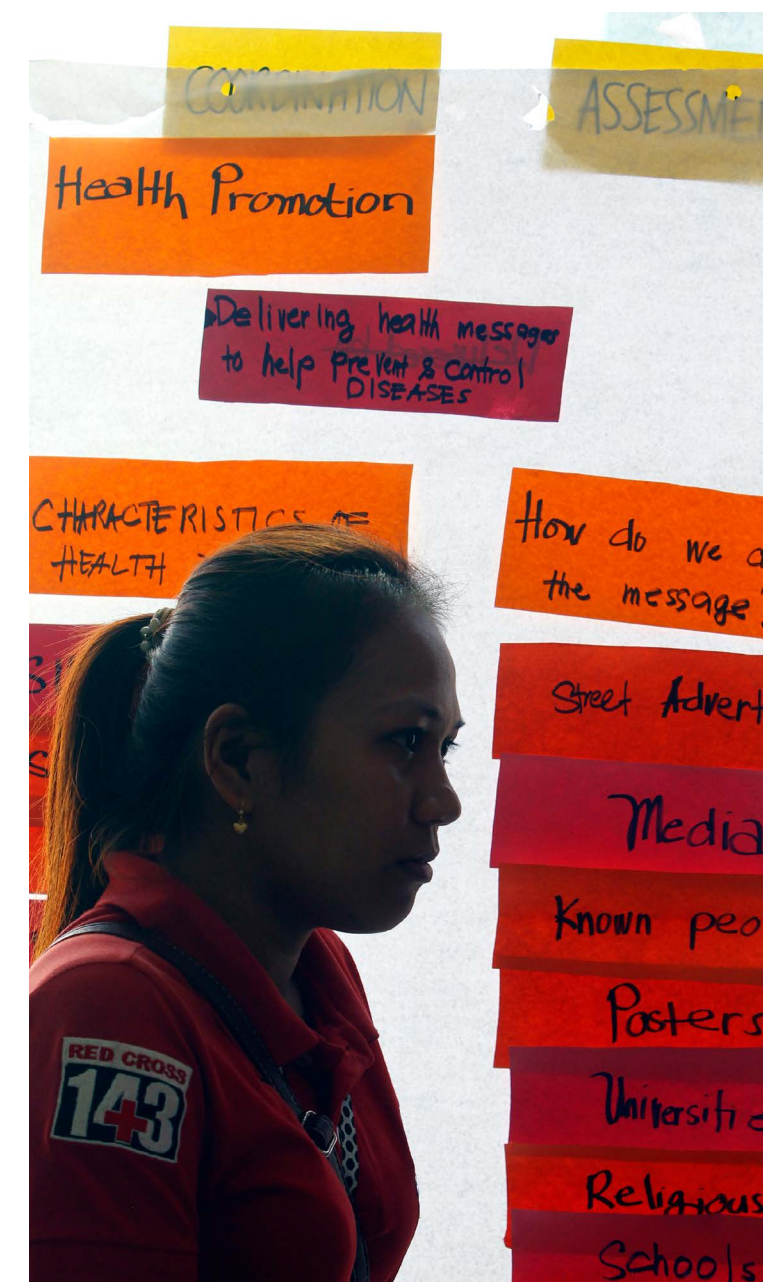
The training is designed to be as practical as possible, including role plays and simulations.

The toolkit includes components on disease, actions in epidemics and community messages of ‘dos and don’ts’ using illustrations and concise texts that can be delivered during prevention activities.

Dr Pratap said the training would create a pool of staff and volunteer trainers to carry out the community-based disease prevention program.

‘Trainers will then develop community epidemic preparedness and response plans based on their local context and trend of health emergencies, and can be activated as and when health emergencies arise.’

IFRC Health delegate Dr Abhishek Rimal said the last day’s simulation exercise exposed participants to different situations (scenarios) such as practising data collection techniques and exposing them to some of the realities in the field. One of the three scenarios used during simulation was to collect data from a camp for internally displaced persons, where participants were exposed to cultural norms that they might encounter in different communities, as well as how to build rapport with the people in the camp to obtain the desired data in a difficult situation.





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International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)
Philippine Delegation

Philippine Red Cross National Headquarters

7th Floor, 37 EDSA Corner Boni Avenue, Mandaluyong City, Metro Manila 1550, Philippines

For more information or to comment on stories contained in this newsletter please contact:
Kate Marshall, IFRC Communications Delegate - kate.marshall@ifrc.org,
Mary Joy Evalarosa, IFRC Communications Officer - maryjoy.evalarosa@ifrc.org
Bhanu Pratap, IFRC Health Coordinator - bhanu.pratap@ifrc.org
Kari Isomaa, IFRC Head of Delegation - kari.isomaa@ifrc.org

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