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## Information bulletin

### Philippines: Mindanao returnees

 International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

<b>Information bulletin n° 1</b>	<b>Date of issue:</b> 17 March 2017
<b>Host National Society:</b> Philippine Red Cross	<b>Point of contact:</b> Atty. Oscar Palabyab, Secretary General
<b>Categorization of crisis<sup>1</sup>:</b> Yellow	

**This bulletin is being issued for information only, and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The Philippine Red Cross (PRC) is currently supporting the affected people. Based on the ongoing consultations on the extent of needs, PRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) will determine whether external assistance is required.**

## The situation

Since 15 February 2017, there has been a rapid increase in the number of Filipino returnees – from the state of Sabah in Malaysia – arriving in Zamboanga City, Mindanao. While repatriations are common, the sinking of a vessel that was previously used for the same prompted suspension of repatriations in September 2016. The suspension led to a backlog of approximately 7,000 undocumented Filipino migrants in Sabah.

The vessel with the first batch of 411 returnees arrived on 15 February, with the second batch (of 430 people) arriving on 1 March. The third batch (301 people) arrived on 8 March, the fourth (423 people) on 12 March and the latest (201 people) on 15 March. The repatriations followed an agreement reached by Philippine and Malaysian governments in November 2016 on the gradual repatriation of undocumented Filipino migrants.



The Philippine Red Cross is providing the returnees with first aid and free phone calls. (Photo: PRC)

In all, a total of 1,766 returnees have arrived in Mindanao since 15 February. More are expected over the next weeks, and based on assessments – conducted through key informant interviews with those who have arrived – immediate needs include temporary accommodation, food, sleeping materials, hygiene items, medical support and psychosocial support.

<sup>1</sup> Based on the IFRC Secretariat's Operational Response Framework. This categorization implies that the response intervention is within the capacity of the National Society of an affected country to manage with resources available in-country. If requested, the IFRC Country Office may provide any necessary technical or management support to the National Society, and if required, the IFRC Regional Office may support the mobilization of regional disaster response tools, with Geneva supporting the allocation of Disaster Relief Emergency Funds (DREF).

## Action by the authorities

The repatriations are being coordinated between the Philippine and Malaysian authorities. Various Philippine government departments are supporting the gradual reintegration of the returnees. These include the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Support provided includes temporary accommodation, medical assessment and assistance, and transportation arrangements for those heading to onward destinations.

## Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Philippine Red Cross (PRC) has found it desirable to devise and provide services that will contribute to improving the health, safety and welfare of the returnees, to complement the assistance being provided by the public authorities. The support by PRC is being provided on one-off basis in view of the scale of returnee needs – following the backlog of repatriations. Otherwise, the National Society does not engage in providing welfare services to returnees in routine repatriations as the numbers are usually within the capacity of the public authorities.

Using resources mobilized locally, PRC is providing welfare services, including hot meals and psychosocial support, to returnees who arrive in Zamboanga City. Specifically, the National Society's Zamboanga City Chapter has mobilized 21 staff and volunteers to provide welfare services to the returnees. As of 17 March, the National Society had provided more than 1,200 people with psychosocial support, supported 126 individuals to make phone calls and send 'safe and well' messages (both local and international calls) to their families, served hot meals to 1,565 individuals and provided first aid to eight individuals.



PRC volunteers and staff serve hot meals to returnees in Zamboanga City, Mindanao. (Photo: PRC)

Red Cross medical technicians are also at hand to undertake triage before referring cases requiring medical assessment and assistance to DOH. The National Society has also placed an ambulance on-standby.

PRC is coordinating closely with DSWD on the provision of immediate relief and with DOH on medical assessment and assistance. Furthermore, the National Society is coordinating with the public authorities in Manila (through its national headquarters) and local government units in Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Zamboanga City (through its chapters) to advocate for adequate support by the authorities for returnee reintegration.

Considering that more returnees are expected over the coming weeks, PRC has developed a plan to ensure the people also receive welfare services and immediate relief. The support will be provided to returnees both at the port of arrival and in their respective onward destinations, which are mainly Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. The main needs are food, safe water, hygiene kits and sleeping items (blankets, mosquito nets and sleeping mats).

The IFRC Country Office is coordinating with PRC and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as well as supporting the National Society to disseminate updates on the response to Movement partners with in-country presence and to the IFRC Asia Pacific Regional Office (APRO) in Kuala Lumpur. Based on the intention of PRC to scale up support, the Country Office – with guidance from the IFRC APRO – is providing PRC with guidance on the development of an emergency plan of action.

PRC is considering to submit a request to the IFRC Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) for scaling up its response. An IFRC-supported response would be delivered in line with International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement policies and guidelines, including the [IFRC Policy on Migration](#) and its [Supplementary Guidance](#).

## Contact Information

### For further information, please contact:

#### Philippine Red Cross:

- Atty. Oscar Palabyab, secretary general; phone: +63 2 790 2300; [secgen@redcross.org.ph](mailto:secgen@redcross.org.ph)
- Resty Lou Talamayan, manager for disaster management services; [restylou.talamayan1@redcross.org.ph](mailto:restylou.talamayan1@redcross.org.ph)

#### IFRC Philippines country office:

- Kari Isomaa, head of country office, phone: +63 928 559 7170; [kari.isomaa@ifrc.org](mailto:kari.isomaa@ifrc.org)
- Patrick Elliott, operations manager, phone: +63 998 960 2140; [patrick.elliott@ifrc.org](mailto:patrick.elliott@ifrc.org)

#### IFRC Asia Pacific regional office, Kuala Lumpur:

- Martin Faller, deputy regional director; email: [martin.faller@ifrc.org](mailto:martin.faller@ifrc.org)
- Nelson Castano, head of disaster and crisis unit (DCU); email: [nelson.castano@ifrc.org](mailto:nelson.castano@ifrc.org)
- Necephor Mghendi, operations coordinator; phone: +60-122-246-796; email: [necephor.mghendi@ifrc.org](mailto:necephor.mghendi@ifrc.org)
- Ezekiel Simperingham, migration coordinator; email: [ezekiel.simperingham@ifrc.org](mailto:ezekiel.simperingham@ifrc.org)
- Patrick Fuller, communication manager, phone: +60 12 230 8451; email: [patrick.fuller@ifrc.org](mailto:patrick.fuller@ifrc.org)
- Clarence Sim, planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting (PMER) coordinator, [clarence.sim@ifrc.org](mailto:clarence.sim@ifrc.org)



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## How we work

All IFRC assistance seeks to adhere to the **Code of Conduct** for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) in Disaster Relief and the **Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response (Sphere)** in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. The IFRC's vision is to inspire, **encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities** by National Societies, with a view to **preventing and alleviating human suffering**, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

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The IFRC's work is guided by Strategy 2020 which puts forward three strategic aims:



**Save lives.**  
protect livelihoods,  
and strengthen recovery  
from disaster and crises.



Enable **healthy**  
and **safe** living.



Promote **social inclusion**  
and a culture of  
**non-violence** and **peace.**

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