

UN hails effort by the Philippines to protect refugees and stateless people



Philippine government representatives and partners assess the protection needs of people at risk of statelessness in Lapu village, South Cotabato. Photo: UNHCR/F.T. Temprosa

6 November 2012 – The United Nations refugee agency today lauded the Philippines for being the first country in the Asia-Pacific region to establish a procedure to protect both refugees and stateless people.

The country's Justice Department recently published a circular that enhanced its current system of determining refugee status and put in place a procedure to know whether a person is stateless.

The new procedure, which takes effect today, is “an important step” to ensure the Philippines meets its obligations under the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) said in a [news release](#).

Last year, the Philippines became the first member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations ([ASEAN](#)) to ratify the Convention, a 1954 agreement that establishes a legal status for stateless people to ensure that they can live in conditions of security and dignity until they are able to acquire a nationality.

“It is particularly useful for addressing the situation of stateless migrants who might otherwise be bounced from one country to another and end up in long-term detention or destitution because no one wishes to take responsibility for them,” noted UNHCR.

UNHCR’s representative in the Philippines, Bernard Kerblat, said the new mechanism is a testament to the genuine humanitarian spirit in the country, and that this unified approach provides the widest possible protection net for refugees and the stateless.

The agency noted that while refugees and stateless people are protected under Philippine law, the new procedure provides a way to unify refugees with extended family members such as grandparents. Asylum-seekers have the right to a lawyer and interpreter during the process, and they cannot be deported while undergoing the procedure, ensuring respect for international law.

Other safeguards to protect asylum-seekers and refugees were integrated in the procedure, such as special measures for unaccompanied children.

The Government also formed a unit dedicated to protecting both refugees and stateless people with its own budget resources and allowing it to coordinate with agencies to reduce and prevent statelessness. A former group handled asylum claims only.

UNHCR added that the Philippines now joins Moldova and Georgia as the only countries in the world to fulfil its pledge, made during a meeting of States last year, to establish a statelessness determination procedure.

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