



## Changing people's lives, from delivering aid to ending need

In time for the World Humanitarian Day, twenty eight faith-based organizations (FBOs), around 60 participants, responding to humanitarian situations in the Philippines gathered last 18 August 2016 to pursue discussions on ways of working together towards a more people-centered, rights-based and sustainable response. Organized by the ACT Philippines Forum, the assembly also served as a venue for sharing feedbacks from the first ever World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) which took place in Istanbul, Turkey last 23-24 May 2016.

"The unique and critical role of faith-based actors, both as first-line responders and key actors in the promotion of long-term community reconciliation has been recognized by the humanitarian community during the Summit," shared by Ms. Minnie Anne Calub, NCCP Emergency Program Manager, representing the ACT Philippines Forum in the event. An outcome document, which includes the commitment to provide humanitarian assistance to all those who need it and contribute to peace and reconciliation, was signed by 160 faith-based leaders and representatives of the world's largest humanitarian organizations.

### Changing people's lives

During the pre-WHS forum last April, the FBOs were inspired by the call of putting people at the center as the mantra of any humanitarian response.

"Humanitarian work has derived its mandate from the compassion of Jesus, for the people and his command to his disciples to give them something to eat and not send them away," said Rev. Rex RB Reyes, Jr., General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines.

Fr. Edwin Gariguez, Executive Director of NASSA/Caritas Philippines of CBCP shared, "FBOs are important since we have a strong link to the affected communities, because we are based in this communities who are suffering. We are

there before, during and after emergencies, ika nga nila, WALANG IWANAN," (we will always be with the communities).

Reyes stated that FBOs are universal in character, possessing natural links to similar organizations around the world, and the united network in the country also provides for a credible witness.

### **From delivering aid to ending need**

Aside from volunteer mobilization and skilled human resources that the FBOs can provide during emergencies, the network of church constituency can help in promoting disaster risk reduction and capacitating the vulnerable communities to better respond to disasters.

"When we harness the faith dimension of humanitarian response, which, means we acknowledge and affirm a faith-based action as driven by love, as putting people at the center and having faith in people as agents of their own rebuilding and resilience, then we should always integrate community organizing in our work, since that is the process through which we help the people empower themselves" as stated by Ms. Maria Rosario Felizco, Country Director of Christian Aid Philippines and Convenor of the ACT Philippines Forum.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development represented by Assistant Secretary Aleli Bawagan, shared a comprehensive and insightful update on the commitments made by the Philippine Government in the WHS. Asec. Bawagan stressed, "The importance of the Department's role is not only during emergency responses but, moreover, the commitment on contributing to ending conflicts in the country by supporting the peace processes, upholding the international laws and norms on human rights, armed conflict and refugees, leaving no one behind as concretely manifested in the passing of Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Act and pushing for the ratification of the Internally Displaced Persons Bill."

"Accelerating the reduction of disasters through open information sharing, proactive partnerships with other humanitarian stakeholders and people on the ground, and investing in humanity by enhancing financial support to the communities while capacitating them to become more resilient," Bawagan added.

### **Opportunities are here now, put words into action**

"We try to ensure that the commitments being made at the international and national level are being implemented, such as the WHS commitments." shared by Ms. Malu Fellizar Cagay, Convenor of DRRNet Philippines and one of the CSO representatives to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC).

Taking off from the commitments made at the WHS, significant points on ways moving forward for FBOs beyond the forum were drawn out through a workshop. Most significant challenges in humanitarian response and some ways to address these challenges, distinctly as FBOs were identified. The participants were also challenged to reflect on the systems and protocols they implement as individual organizations when they respond to disasters.

Ms. Felizco added, "Another way we can work collectively would be to share resources, best practices and standards of humanitarian response, to make sure that we are in constant dialogue as FBOs with the communities we work with. And lastly, building a platform of FBOs."

Wrapping up the session, Ms. Femia Baldeo, Country Director of Lutheran World Relief-Philippines and a member of the ACT Alliance, reiterates that 'CHANGING LIVES' is helping people rebuild their own lives and achieve resilience by treating them as partners rather than mere recipients. "Anchored on the human dignity of the most vulnerable, it is our commitment and our own faith as FBOs that will give us hope and drive."