

CFSI AND URBAN REFUGEES IN THE PHILIPPINES IN 2007**Nearly 26 Years of Cooperation between CFSI and UNHCR**

Community and Family Services International (CFSI) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) signed in Manila in January 2007 a project agreement for services to, and on behalf of, urban refugees and other uprooted persons in the Philippines. This Agreement marks nearly twenty-six (26) years of continuous collaboration between CFSI and UNHCR in the Philippines.

CFSI and UNHCR first entered into partnership in March 1982 in response to the needs of refugees from Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Laos at the Philippine Refugee Processing Center (PRPC) in Morong, Bataan, Philippines. Subsequent agreements expanded the cooperation to include refugee camps in Palawan and Metro Manila. Over the course of the following decades, CFSI entered into partnership with UNHCR for services in Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Myanmar, and—most recently—Timor-Leste (East Timor).

CFSI expanded its cooperation with UNHCR by becoming its implementing partner for urban refugees in the Philippines in 1997. The Project Agreement that was signed in January covers calendar year 2007 and represents the eleventh (11th) consecutive agreement of this nature. "UNHCR's work in many countries around the world is greatly facilitated through cooperation with partners such as CFSI. NGOs, such as CFSI, are a vital component for us to fulfill our mandate and we are grateful for the dedication and commitment of the CFSI staff", said Robert Ashe, UNHCR's Regional Representative, who is based in Jakarta, Indonesia.

The overall aim of this Project is enhanced protection and assistance as well as durable solutions for urban refugees, asylum seekers and other persons of concern in various parts of the Philippines. These include people from Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan, Somalia, Rwanda, Liberia, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Viet Nam, China and other countries.

Most of the "urban refugees" in the Philippines grew up in urban areas in their country of origin, are professionals, and originally came to the Philippines for advanced studies in education, engineering, medicine, or dentistry. Conditions in their homeland changed whilst they were in the Philippines, making it impossible for them to return safely and with dignity. Many of these refugees are now married to Philippine citizens and, therefore, eligible under certain conditions to become naturalized citizens of the Philippines. A significant number have formally expressed interest in naturalization. As such, CFSI will work with UNHCR and the Department of Justice (DOJ) to help them achieve this objective.

Some of the people covered by this Project are new to the Philippines. Their durable solution options include repatriation—when conditions in their homeland allow, resettlement in a third country, or integration in the Philippines. Not married to Philippine nationals and having limited or no in-country social support networks, their situation generally requires greater protection efforts as well as material assistance and technical support. CFSI will work with UNHCR, DOJ, and a variety of other public and private agencies to address the needs of these people.

People who left Viet Nam in the late 1980s/early 1990s, but were determined not to be refugees, are also included in this Project. Whilst the situation of the Vietnamese varies, somewhat, from that of the urban refugees, the commonality is the need for a lasting solution to their plight.

UNHCR is funding CFSI to provide counseling and legal assistance; ensure access to basic services such as education, health care, and social services; and promote greater cooperative effort to the benefit of refugees, asylum seekers, and other persons of concern in the Philippines. These services are consistent with the mission of CFSI: protecting and promoting the human security—specifically, the lives, well being, and dignity—of people uprooted by persecution, armed conflict, natural disasters, and other exceptionally difficult circumstances.

CFSI is trying to raise US\$35,000 from other sources for computer skills training, livelihood projects, job placement, and complementary social services for urban refugees in the Philippines through December 2008.

The Urban Refugee Project is led by Project Coordinator Ofel Mendoza, MSSW.

To learn more about, or to contribute to, the Urban Refugee Project (URP), please contact the Executive Director at CFSI Headquarters in Metro Manila at telephone (632)551-1977 or 510-1046, fax (632)551-2225; or email headquarters@cfsi.ph. For more information on CFSI, please see www.cfsi.ph.

