

Bring them home to a better life!

Two thousand years ago, the newborn Jesus Christ had to flee to Egypt together with his parents to avoid the wrath of Herod. The experience surely was difficult for the refugee family. What joy and comfort it must have been when concerned individuals and families opened up their hearts and homes for the displaced family!

In the Philippines, more than six million men, women and children had to flee their communities — and leave behind their meager resources — to avoid getting caught in the crossfire of the war that raged the Philippine countryside since 1972.

In the past 17 years of bitter conflict, countless families and communities have been permanently dislocated from their residences and forced to face the realities of hunger, unsanitary conditions, illnesses and epidemics, fear, and even death, in various impromptu evacuation centers ill-equipped for humans to live in.

The phenomenon of displacement which escalated in the turbulent years of the Marcos regime has gone largely unchecked. Thus the jubilation of many displaced families when Marcos was ousted from the presidency. They expected that dislocation has also ended with Marcos' departure.

However, the events after the February uprising proved otherwise. From February to October of this year, displacement of families and communities continued and yielded a total of at least 23,449 victim-families in six regions of the country. Reported number of related deaths totalled thirty-nine persons, mostly children. Actual number of deaths is believed to be much higher.

The displaced families, like other basic sectors of our society, have borne the heavy burden of the strife for the past 17 years, long enough for them to expect any chance of a peaceful solution to the armed conflict.

However, for the displaced families and those who have supported them in their struggles to face the realities of war, there is a new reason for hope. Unlike past Decembers, this Christmas season is marked with the signing of a ceasefire agreement between the Aquino government and the National Democratic Front. If the agreement turns to be successful, it would mean more than the cessation of gun fire; it would mean the cessation of forced and bitter flight of families and communities.

The sixty-day ceasefire period is an excellent occasion for all concerned Filipinos to extend a helping hand to those who had been dislocated in the wake of the war. For many of them, the need is to be able to get back to their villages and communities. For others, to rebuild their houses. For still others, to be able to attend to their farms and sources of livelihood. For all of them, however, the need is an assistance to their efforts towards a better life for them and the generations to come.

We hope that the necessary attention be accorded to the plight of victims of displacement, or internal refugees, during and after the ceasefire period.

To achieve our aim of bringing displaced families back to their homes and a better life, we seek:

- * A CESSATION TO THE PRACTICE OF FORCED EVACUATION AND STRATEGIC HAMLETING WHICH BROUGHT ABOUT THE DISPLACEMENT OF ENTIRE CIVILIAN COMMUNITIES.
- * GREATER ATTENTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENT TO THE PLIGHT OF THE DISPLACED THROUGH A DEFINITE PROGRAM OF RELIEF AND REHABILITATION.
- * THE PAYMENT OF INDEMNIFICATION AND COMPENSATORY BENEFITS TO THE DISPLACED FOR THEIR LOST LIVES AND PROPERTIES, INCLUDING LAND.

We urge all concerned individuals and organizations to extend a helping hand in this modest effort of healing the wounds of war. Our contributions of cash, foodstuffs, medicines and used clothes are invaluable to our less privileged brothers and sisters.

SUPPORT THE CAMPAIGN AND PROGRAM FOR THE RELIEF AND REHABILITATION OF DISPLACED FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES!

ECUMENICAL COMMISSION FOR DISPLACED FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES (ECDFC)

CITIZENS' DISASTER REHABILITATION CENTER, INC. (CDRC)

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WHAT WE CAN DO:

- Share and discuss the issue of displaced families and communities with your family, relatives and friends. This paper can be a starting point for discussions.
- Conduct your own fund-raising activities within your organization, among your friends and neighbors, within your parish or school. Call up either the ECDFC and CDRC for coordination.
- Contribute directly to either CDRC and ECDFC — canned goods, medicines, used clothings, or cash.
- Pray for the success of the ceasefire agreement and work for a lasting peace and abundant life for all of us!

Call us up for further information:

ECDFC — Tel. No. 70-27-80 or 79-77-07.
CDRC — Tel. No. 521-97-90