

Jaafar Kimpa: Muslim Rights Through Civil Registration

A one-man registry office ensures that undocumented Muslims are recognized and counted

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Civil registration is a human right that many of us take for granted. For the more fortunate ones, registration is often practically automatic when they are born. It is this process that ensures that one is recognized as a Filipino citizen, and is accorded the benefits of citizenship, especially access to government services.

Registration however is not as easy in the far-flung regions of Mindanao. Here, geography and circumstances – poverty, strife, war, displacement and more – prevent many Muslims from the different tribes from enjoying the rights and benefits many Filipinos enjoy, because of the lack of civil registration.

One man is determined to change all that.



Last October 8, 2015, Jaafar Kimpa – Jeff to his friends – distributed certificates to 243 Muslim children at two temporary settlement sites for internally displaced persons (IDP) in Zamboanga City. Most of the children are from the Badjao tribe, victims of the 2013 siege in the city.

This brings the number of Muslim children that Jeff Kimpa, president of the NGO known as Jabu-Jabu (The Calling), has registered to over 4,000. An amazing feat considering that for the longest time, the retired fisheries technologist, teacher and harbor officer had been doing it alone, going from community to community to register the undocumented.

More than a piece of paper

The certificate is called the Katarrangan sin Paggunting, a culturally sensitive document charting important data, attested to by the parents, the community imam and the civil

registrar's office. Named after the traditional Muslim child-naming rites, it is more than just a piece of paper bearing one's name, it is the pass that allows one access to government services such as education, enabling holders to apply for jobs and more. More than that, it is proof that a displaced person exists in circumstances that renders him invisible.



For the children in the Masepla and Buggoc resettlement sites, it meant receiving food and livelihood assistance from Action Against Hunger – one of the international humanitarian organizations that have been assisting victims of the 2013 attack in the city.

Although it is not a substitute for a birth certificate by the local registrar, the Katarrangan created by Kimpa serves as a supporting document when the standard birth certificate of live birth is later processed.

Sir Jeff and the Katarrangan Sin Paggunting Project

The project to register undocumented Muslims began in late 2006, around the same time of his retirement as Harbor Officer of the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority.

“Knowing that most of the less fortunate Muslim children from different tribes cannot avail of their rights to education due to poverty and identity problems, we started working on the format of this certificate with the help of religious leaders from other faiths,” Kimpa says. “On March 2007 after meetings, seminars, orientations and dialogues with nine mosques’ imams, ustadzes and panglimas of Barangay Sangali, Zamboanga City, we launched the initiative in time for the Mauludin Nabie commemoration.”

His persuasiveness and hard work have led others to help the man with the kindly face and quiet determination. Making friends with the local civil registrars persuaded them to recognize the form and agree to use it as an official document. But he still does much of the hard work alone. At home, he sits in front of his typewriter, carbon paper in between identical forms as he types in details of people’s lives. One copy goes to the local NSO while the other copy is given to the people – the parents, the community imam and the barangay.

And he’s still not done. “There are many Muslim communities still with undocumented children,” he says. “Let’s continue to help people in our own small capacity.”

“Small capacity” may be questionable. It is a fact that he is accomplishing much, not the least of which is teaching us all – in the words of one of his friends, that “every person matters, that each life is worth counting, and that it is for the smallest of these people that we aspire to move mountains.”

Photos courtesy of Jaafar Kimpa

