



Registered association for the promotion
of medical care and social support in
Northern Samar, Philippines

Bugko, August 2021

Dear members, dear friends, and supporters of Mabuhay!

You were just receiving my letter when Typhoon Bising (international name Surigae) hit Northern Samar on April 20th with wind speeds of over 200 km/h and heavy rain. It was a Category 4 storm, and we are fortunate that it didn't make landfall and moved eastward across the Philippine Sea. The typhoon moved relatively slowly, so we had to battle the immense water masses and winds for two days. Once again, there were floods and destruction to the lightly constructed houses. Furthermore, the power went out again for four days. The clinic didn't suffer any major damage to the buildings, only the garden was flooded to a depth of about 1.20m, destroying some of the plantings. So all in all, we were lucky this time, and aid arrived in the surrounding villages faster than usual. This has to do with the elections next year in May, as politicians are already starting to gather votes, and providing aid after a typhoon is a good way to draw attention to oneself.



On May 3rd, we and everyone on the team were finally vaccinated. Unfortunately, as we feared, only the Chinese vaccine Sinovac was offered. You in Germany probably don't even know it. Its effectiveness is described

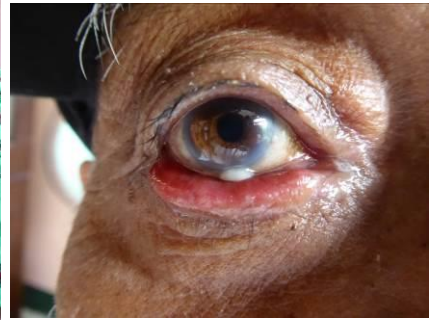
as only 50%, but vaccination is better than not, and it is certainly the right way to combat the pandemic. There was a lot of uncertainty within the team, but in the end, we were able to convince everyone. The good thing about Sinovac is that the vaccine has almost no side effects. The number of positively infected people in the Philippines had already exceeded 1 million at that point.



The numbers on the island of Samar are very fluctuating, and exact figures are difficult to know, as there are always reports of people being declared Covid-positive but actually not. Hospitals receive more funding for Covid cases, as is likely the case in Germany. We cannot test in the clinic, and so there is always a degree of uncertainty, as patients continue to come from all over the province. People often ask whether vaccination is advisable, which is almost always the case, and we hope that as many people as possible will be fully vaccinated as soon as possible. Here, too, there are some who only make one vaccination appointment when two would be necessary. Vaccinations are still being carried out in categories, but the really good news is that vaccines are being flown in regularly, and other vaccines are now available besides Sinovac. There is therefore great concern about the rapidly spreading Delta variant.

In addition to normal clinic operations, the nutrition program continues with 76 children. Unfortunately, dentists and doctors are still unable to come to us because visas are still not being issued. The Philippines is the country with the longest quarantine in the world, as we have been going from one quarantine regulation to the next since March 2020. The conditions are constantly changing, and unfortunately, children under 18 and seniors over 60 are still not allowed to leave their homes. As a result, the children are still not attending school but are completing so-called modules at home without instruction, and the seniors are still unable to come to our retirement home.

Patient numbers are now high again, and we are seeing up to 100 patients a day. They prefer to come to our clinic, as hospitals are always equated with COVID. Unfortunately, we are also still seeing many patients with very serious illnesses because they have waited too long.



The medicinal plant production and processing facility also continues to operate, and demand is high. Our volunteers' children are now helping out here, too. They can get out here because they are our direct neighbors and can sneak over the wall. The children are happy to come to the farm and help.



Despite the typhoons, we've been able to achieve a good harvest on the farm so far, which also helps us meet our own needs. In addition to vegetables like beans, eggplant, squash, etc., we also grow fruit like pineapples and

papayas in the garden. We also get eggs from our chickens every day, and fish from our own pond that would be equivalent to a sea bream here. All the construction, restructuring, and improvements have paid off. Everything is fresh and can be harvested daily.



The new generator arrived in June. As mentioned in the last newsletter, there were delivery delays due to the pandemic. The new 125 kVA generator is enormous and had to be transported into the new generator house on coconut rolls. Afterward, the last wall was closed and fitted with ventilation fans to prevent overheating. We are very grateful to the German Dentists' Aid Organization for making this project possible, as we can now supply the entire clinic with electricity. Due to increasingly frequent and prolonged power outages, this purchase was absolutely necessary, and the clinic is now well supplied. Detailed instructions were given before commissioning, and regular maintenance is also guaranteed.



On July 5th, we set off for Manila. This time by land, which meant a nearly 24-hour drive, but the flights from Catarman to Manila are constantly being canceled, and you need a lot of certificates to even enter the airport. We flew from Manila to Germany on July 11th, albeit with delays and some difficulties. It was a relatively last-minute decision, so we barely informed anyone. The incidence rates in Germany were relatively low at the time, and

the Philippines are classified as a risk area, but are not among the high-risk or variant-affected countries. The timing was therefore well chosen, and once all the paperwork had been completed and the PCR test was negative, the flight to Frankfurt departed without a hitch. After 1.5 years, we were overjoyed.

As soon as we landed here in Ahrweiler, Bad Neuenahr, and Meckenheim, we saw images we've only seen in the Philippines. The heavy rain had caused the Ahr River streams to swell like never before. You all saw the flooding on television. Destruction of immense proportions, the likes of which we've often seen in the Philippines, but would never have expected in Germany. We received many calls from the Philippines, as it was also reported on television there. No one could quite grasp it, and it will take years of reconstruction, if it's even possible. Add to that the human lives that can never be replaced. This event will likely go down in history as a catastrophe of the century. Climate change is felt everywhere, as even the hoped-for summer failed to materialize except for a few days.

Images from the Philippines on the left, from Ahrweiler on the right:



Despite the events, the coronavirus, and the holidays, we were happy to see many of you again. At this point, I would also like to apologize to those we were unable to reach this time, but honestly, we simply couldn't make it.

The return journey was also difficult, as Manila, our arrival airport, went into total lockdown, and we were diverted to Clark, an airport north of Manila. Many forms had to be filled out. On top of that, the German Federal Railways went on strike. A 10-day quarantine awaits us in Clark, which I will write about in my next letter.

The numbers in the Philippines continue to rise, and vaccinations are progressing, but still too slowly. Of the 109 million population, 58 million are to be vaccinated. At this point, only 15 million have been vaccinated. As you can see, it's never boring here. New challenges arise every day, but we can overcome them as a team, thanks to our volunteers who are always there to support us. It wouldn't be possible without your support. Unfortunately,

I have to announce today that our annual general meeting will be canceled again this year, as the pandemic does not allow for larger gatherings.

I wish you all the best for your continued health and that it won't be so long until our next visit. The virus will continue to be with us, but I hope its effects are increasingly brought under control, which the many vaccinations will certainly contribute to.

Best regards,

Yours,

Sabine Korth

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