

## Kuwait Times

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## Focus

INTEGRATING  
REFUGEES ONE  
FRIEND AT A TIME

By Eloi Rouyer

As Germany seeks to integrate over one million refugees and migrants who arrived last year, one Berlin non-profit group argues that the first step is simple: "Start with a Friend". That message is the name of the small but fast-growing organization which teams up newcomers who fled war and misery with local volunteers who can lend them a hand as they start their new lives. "At our first meeting, there were 10 people," said its founder Franziska Birnbach. "And then, when more and more people arrived in Germany... last year, we were literally inundated with offers (from volunteers), and it hasn't stopped since."

The concept mirrors language-study "tandem" partnerships between locals and foreigners, except that the emphasis is beyond swapping vocabulary and grammar tips. In Start with a Friend, the local volunteers also help migrants find internships, jobs or apartments, or to navigate the bureaucratic thicket of German asylum procedures. The aim is to also help them get to know Germany better and, in an exchange of equals, build relationships that are mutually rewarding and long-lasting.

Last year the group facilitated some 200 partnerships, and it aims for more than 1,000 this year. Such has been its success that Birnbach, 27, and her project partner Sarah Rosenthal, 31, have now left their jobs to devote themselves full-time to "Start with a Friend". The group now has seven coordinators and has branched out from Berlin to the cities of Cologne and Freiburg, with plans to also launch soon in Hamburg, Munich and Dresden.

## 'I Have Everything'

In the cosy kitchen of a central Berlin apartment, Nina Winzen, 27, is chatting and cooking with her new Syrian friend Ehab Masood, 26, as "Everybody's Got to Learn Sometime" by British pop band The Korgis is playing. "When I met Nina, I asked her: Why are you doing this for me?" said Masood, speaking in the German he has learnt since arriving in Berlin more than one year ago. "She said: 'I have everything in Germany.'"

Winzen added: "Here we grow up with such a privileged background, we have so much. And, parallel to that, people arrive with nothing and are trying to build a new life." It seemed only logical to her to get involved in the program, she said. "We speak a lot about Syria," said Winzen. "We hear about it every day, we see images on television. But to have direct contact with someone who is actually from there opens up a whole new perspective. "For me, this exchange is a real enrichment, not only because of what I bring to Ehab, but also because of the things he teaches me."

## 'This Can be Done'

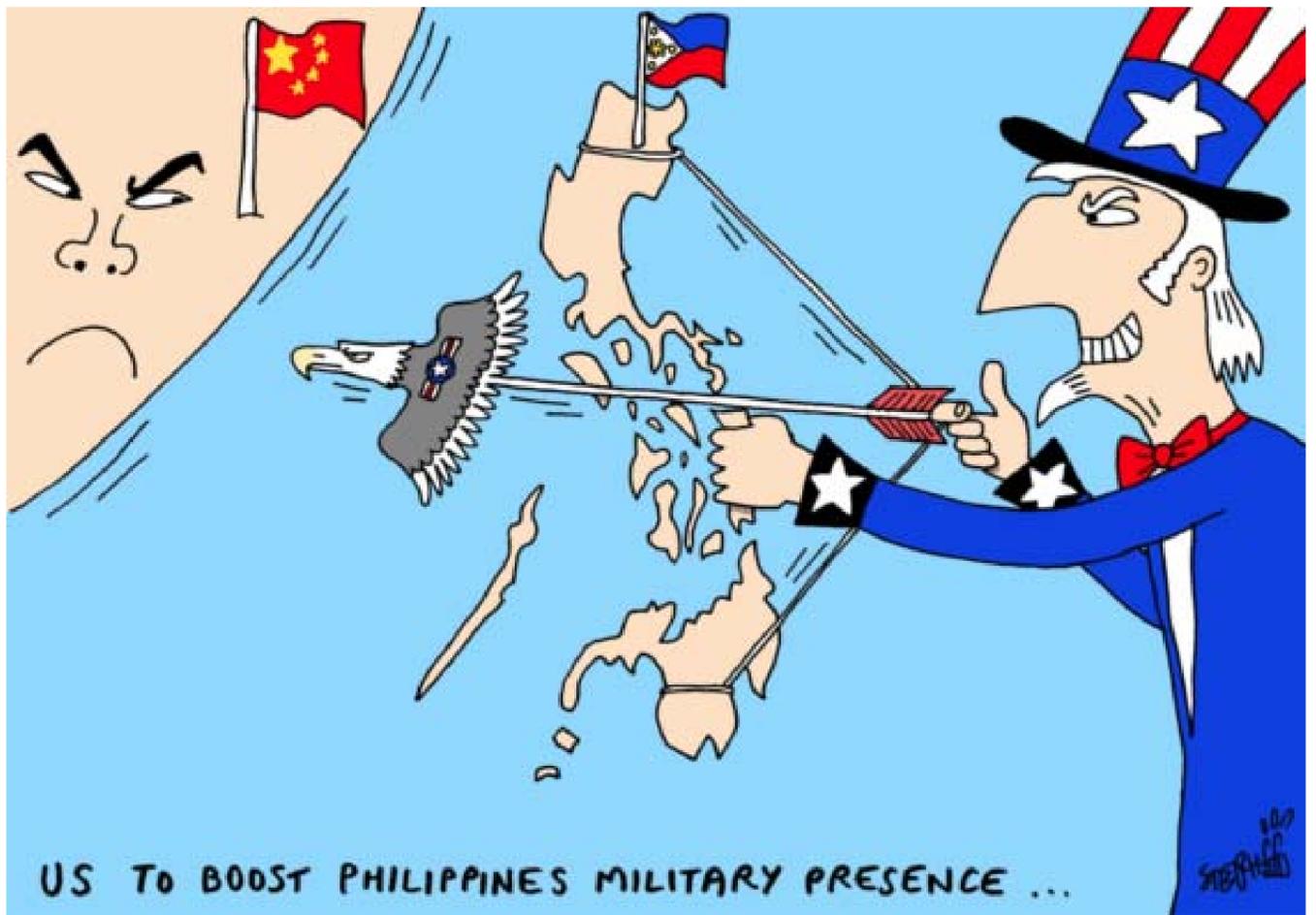
The project in people-to-people cultural bridge building comes as Germany takes a breather from last year's mass influx and searches for practical ways to turn into reality Chancellor Angela Merkel's motto of "we can do it".

Merkel's coalition government last Thursday approved a package of measures governing the integration of refugees, their rights and duties, which she labelled "a first in the history" of post-war Germany. "This can be done," agreed Winzen, insisting however that "this will only be possible together" and "if everybody plays their part".

Merkel's liberal refugee policy has drawn heavy fire from within her own conservative camp and fuelled the rise of the right-wing populist Alternative for Germany party. Rosenthal, of Start with a Friend, said that "this uncertainty which many people feel and that leads some to vote for extreme parties is very much related to a lack of knowledge about new arrivals". She deplored a growing trend toward generalizations about migrants, especially in the wake of sexual and other attacks by mostly North African men against hundreds of women in Cologne on New Year's Eve.

Rosenthal said she hopes groups like hers will help Germans and, more broadly, Europeans "realise that 'I don't have to be afraid'" and understand that a migrant "is a person who is completely normal, like me, who wants to take care of his family and build a future for them". In short, she said, people will understand that a migrant can be no more and no less than "my new neighbor". — AFP

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## DOES PREMATURE PARIS DEAL RISK PAINFUL BIRTH?

By Megan Rowling

When ministers and climate change negotiators from the world's poorest countries gathered in Kinshasa recently, they were dismayed at a proposal from the Third World Network (TWN) urging them not to rush into signing the new Paris climate agreement at a UN ceremony this week. TWN, a Malaysia-based policy group, had suggested developing countries wait a little, to make sure richer nations follow through on existing pledges of funding and technical help for them shift to greener growth, and adapt to more extreme weather and rising seas.

The ministers and officials representing the group of 48 least developed countries (LDCs) instead issued a statement urging all countries to participate in the signing ceremony in New York on Friday. They called on them to ratify the Paris Agreement "at the earliest possible date", in an effort to ensure implementation "as soon possible". Achala Abeyasinghe, a legal expert on climate change negotiations with the UK-based International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), said the 37 or so countries at the Kinshasa meeting all indicated they would head to New York.

With around 155 countries now expected to ink the agreement this week - and a handful of them, mainly small island states, well on the way to ratification - there is optimism that the climate deal will come into force earlier than envisaged. The agreement was negotiated under the understanding it would take effect from 2020. This date was removed from the final text, apparently to create room for the deal to come into effect earlier. "Early entry into force is a positive sign, but there are also some concerns that need to be addressed," said Abeyasinghe, who advises the chair of the LDC group at UN climate talks.

For poorer countries - as for others - signing the agreement is one thing but ratifying it another. The Paris accord will enter into force when at least 55 countries representing at least 55 percent of global emissions ratify or formally join it in another way. But while major emitters, notably China and the United

States, have said they will pursue steps to adopt the agreement as early as possible, domestic politics may make that a challenge.

In some countries, including the United States, leaders are expected to use their executive authority to accede to the Paris deal. But in others, it will have to be discussed in parliament or congress and, in some cases, will require new legislation, Abeyasinghe noted. "For some of our countries, sensitising the parliaments and the parliamentarians itself is a big challenge. The concern our countries have is that it will take time for them to ratify," she said.

Agreement takes effect early - with bets ranging from this year to 2018 - before the bulk of countries ratify it is troubling experts beyond the developing world. According to lawyers with the UN climate change secretariat, only countries that have formally joined the agreement could make decisions affecting it. But those that have not could participate as observers, which may allow them to make interventions and submit proposals on draft texts.

Another option would be to convene the first session of the parties to the agreement, and then suspend it. That would give more countries time to ratify, while discussions on

other parties to the Paris agreement would not very much want the EU to be part of the decision-making for the critical rules under the agreement, so I think a way forward will be found to include them," said David Waskow, WRI's international climate director. Given that all countries have a vested interest in influencing how mechanisms for transparency and compliance with the agreement will work, among other issues, they will likely want to join it as soon as they can, said Michael Dobson, a former advisor to the Marshall Islands at U.N. climate talks. "There is going to be an incentive for countries to ratify once it becomes clear that entry into force is imminent," he said.

## Pre-2020 Promises

Many people think that will come sooner rather than later, especially with China and the United States - which account for around 38 percent of global emissions - having signalled they will adopt it. That makes the Paris deal different from the current emissions reduction treaty, the Kyoto Protocol, which applied only to developed countries. It took more than seven years to come into force in 2005 after Russia used ratification as a bargaining chip to gain EU support for Moscow's membership of the World Trade Organisation.

This time around, the political leverage to be gained from delaying may be minimal. TWN later clarified its controversial advice, saying states should not feel obliged to sign the Paris deal right now if they are not yet ready to put into practice the climate action promises made as their contribution to it. TWN also urged wealthy nations to deliver on things they have promised to do before 2020, when the Paris agreement had been expected to start, such as boosting climate finance to \$100 billion per year. Other experts agree.

Rich governments "have to make some effort to show that even if the Paris Agreement comes into force early, they are not going to forget about their pre-2020 commitments," said IIED's Abeyasinghe. Amid all the fanfare around the signing ceremony this week, it is worth remembering that premature entry into force could yet bring political and technical birth pains for some. — Reuters



A picture taken on April 16, 2016 shows pastoralists looking at animals that died as a result of drought in Sitti Zone in the Somali region of Ethiopia. — AFP

If the agreement comes into force before they can join it, they are worried they may be excluded from making crucial decisions, she added. The LDC group is talking to the Inter-Parliamentary Union about how to raise awareness of the climate change agreement among members of parliament in developing countries, which could help expedite ratification, Abeyasinghe said.

The question of what happens if the Paris

rules and guidelines for the new agreement proceeded under a working group. Experts with the World Resources Institute (WRI) told journalists the European Union is unlikely to be in the first wave of ratifiers because it will require all 28 member states to go through their own processes first before approving the deal as a bloc - a process that could take some time.

"It is hard to imagine a situation in which

## CAN BRAZIL OPPOSITION LIFT THE NATION?

By Sebastian Smith and Rosa Sulleiro

Firing confetti, singing and cheering, Brazilian opposition politicians were in party mood after voting to authorize an impeachment trial of President Dilma Rousseff. But the hangover looks painful. Sunday's vote by the lower house of Congress to send Rousseff to the Senate for an impeachment trial left her just two steps from being forced out of office. As early as next month, the Senate could launch impeachment proceedings, at which point Rousseff, only in the second year of her second mandate, would have to step temporarily aside.

She could still survive the ensuing trial, but most analysts say the Senate would surely follow the lower house lead and drive her out - permanently. No wonder Rousseff opponents grinned on Sunday as they raised placards up to television cameras reading: "Goodbye sweetie."

## Revenge Scenario

The immediate winner is Rousseff's vice president, Michel Temer, who has become her leading opponent and under the constitution would take power the moment a Senate trial started. Temer clearly sees himself as a president in waiting, even

accidentally releasing a recording of himself practicing his first speech to the nation. But the reality of the top job might not be so attractive. Deeply unpopular with most Brazilians, the unelected Temer would face a credibility problem.

Analysts say the constitutional lawyer and his PMDB party would find themselves facing a bitter, vengeful opposition if Rousseff were forced out by the Senate. And that would be before he even tried to address the structural problems at the heart of Brazil's worst recession for decades - a slide that has transformed Latin America's biggest economy from emerging markets darling into investment horror story.

## 'Nightmare'

"The crisis will continue. In fact it will become even more serious because the losing side will use all instruments at its disposal to block the winners. Brazil will wake up worse tomorrow," independent political analyst Andre Cesar told AFP. Temer has talked of establishing a national unity coalition, but "this will not be easy. It will be a nightmare," Cesar said.

Diego Werneck, at the Getulio Vargas Foundation, a think tank, pointed out that Temer

may even find himself fighting to stay in power. Allies of Rousseff have lodged an impeachment petition against him, alleging that he is just as involved as Rousseff in the allegedly illegal accounting practices that are at the base of the case against her.

Although impeachment proceedings would be unlikely to move quickly - Temer's close ally Eduardo Cunha is in charge as speaker of the lower house - they would dog him. Possibly more seriously, Temer is named along with Rousseff as a target of a case at the Supreme Electoral Court contending that their 2014 election ticket was partly funded by bribe money. In theory, the court could declare the elections void and call new polls, stripping Temer of his post.

## No End to Crisis

The most immediate hurdle, though, would be governing such a fractured nation. Rousseff has ended up almost powerless inside her presidential palace as relations with Congress break down and her personal popularity plummets, leading to huge street demonstrations.

Temer, analysts say, would risk some of the same problems. His PMDB is a mishmash of ideologies and has always played a kingmaking role, not even presenting a presidential candidate since 1994.

With potential partners also eying 2018, when the next elections are scheduled, alliances might prove fragile. Temer's "eventual government will be in a better position than Rousseff's but still with a lot of complications," Werneck said.

Sylvio Costa, who heads the specialist politics website Congresso em Foco, told AFP that Rousseff was nearly sure to go, but that more trouble lies ahead. "Whoever loses will keep protesting in the streets," he said. "What's certain is that the crisis will not end today." — AFP

