

“People-to-People Movement” emerging in absence of state assistance in Merapi disaster

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SITUATION ANALYSIS by Team News Jalin Merapi- Friday, November 12, 2010 (translated and abridged by Zoe Kenny)

Merapi disaster refugees are suffering physical and mental fatigue due to having to constantly move between the refugee camps. Changes in conditions, especially after the large eruption on November 5, have caused thousands of residents of Mount Merapi to exodus to locations as far and as safe as possible. Areas exposed to the disaster which was originally concentrated in certain areas, has expanded to cause more people to be displaced in places previously unimaginable. Thousands of refugees are being forced to take care of themselves independently as the government's efforts are slow and de-centralised.

According to the records of the National Agency for Disaster Management (BNPB) the number of refugees reached 136,562 people in Yogyakarta and Central Java reached 233,466 people. The victims of the eruption of Mount Merapi are spread over 635 points in camps in various districts of Yogyakarta Special Region and Central Java.

Tens of thousands of refugees are scattered in farflung regions. Refugees coming from Magelang regency, Central Java, have had to switch to Kulonprogo, Purworejo, Municipality of Magelang, Wonosobo and Kendal. Jalin Merapi Volunteers have recorded more than 10,000 refugees in the District Gunungkidul located 50-60 km away from the peak of Merapi (11/11/2010).

Meanwhile no less than 95,000 people are being accommodated in individual homes, makeshift buildings and open fields. There are homes that house a single family of refugees, but there other homes where 40-70 refugees are sheltering. In Muntilan and Mungkid, Magelang regency, the empty homes have been turned into temporary shelters for refugees who come from the Shaman and Sumbing, Magelang regency.

Distribution Pattern

Why did they get here? Refugees from the slope and the foot of Merapi are generally moving independently in waves due to the rain of volcanic material that is more dense than previous days. In such situations, they also have a “social memory” about their first experience of living in the camps and shelters after the first eruption of Merapi (26 October) and this is accompanied with feelings of anxiety and trauma.

The desire to quickly return to their homes must meet with the real condition that the activities of Mount Merapi have still not subsided. The dilemma is borne in mind when these refugees have to move again toward a more secure location.

Volunteer Information Jalin serving in various areas have found two patterns of movement. The first

pattern, relatives and friends become a place of reference. The contacts of relatives, friends, or acquaintances in other areas not exposed to catastrophic eruption of Merapi, are a mainstay for the destination of the refugees. No matter whether these places are far away from their home village, these places provide a sense of security and calm that they are seeking, which the camps cannot provide. They arrived at the homes of relatives in Klaten, Boyolali, Municipality of Magelang, Sleman, Yogyakarta, Kulonprogo, Bantul, Gunung Kidul even. Of course, they do not come alone because of the neighbors from their home villages also participated.

The second pattern, refugees become stranded on the roadside until finally rescued by local people. Many of these survivors fled in panic conditions but eventually became confused because they did not have a place of destination. Seeing groups of people stranded on the outskirts of this road, some residents took the initiative to open the door of their homes, school teachers to accommodate them in schools, volunteers set up a new post and direct them toward these posts.

People to People Movement

People opening the doors of their homes for the refugees is a phenomenon that is not necessarily found elsewhere in this world. The number of refugees is not just one or two people, but dozens of in every house, and throughout the region this phenomenon translates into tens of thousands of people. In this condition, there is no social distinction in a structural form of the dichotomy of "citizen-refugees" - the conditions of the home-occupants and displaced residents becomes intertwined, each experiencing the difficulties of the situation. In their language, "tunggal dhewe", the refugees become part of the family itself.

This situation is a manifestation of "social capital" which means that the society as a whole takes ownership of the handling of the aftermath of disaster. In the eyes of social movements, what this community is another form of so-called "people to people" movement. Namely, a social movement in the spirit of "people helping people".

However, in the eyes of others, especially the disaster management perspective, this situation also invites serious criticism about where the actual roles and responsibilities of the state. Because, after nearly a week in the refugee camps scattered, they have not been monitored or recorded, and there are even some sites that have not received basic assistance. In fact, this is the right of refugees to receive protection and assistance for a dignified life as mandated by the Humanitarian Charter and the principles of Minimum Standards in Disaster Response.

If this is not immediately we anticipate together, social capital in the form of "people helping people" would be counterproductive because it will turn into a situation of "orang dibenturkan dengan orang", or, when will conflict begin to manifest between the refugees and host families? A simple example, if the residents or homeowners must bear the needs of the refugees who live in her house, until when will the host families be able to survive economically? Even if residents who collectively serve the needs of the refugees, until when will this collectivity be able survive? What about the host families privacy, or the privacy of the refugees themselves?

Civil society is mobilising to aid in this disaster situation*, which has and will have effects on the environment, society, culture, and the economy. Omission of the state means creating a potentially conflictual situation as people try to solve the refugee problem, which is expanding rather than dissipating, independently. We wait for the state to mobilise in a rapid, appropriate way to join together the people who are eager to help each other.

Situational Analysis was prepared by Team News Jalin Merapi.

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* The Alliance of People's Struggles (ARM) which is a coalition of womens', students', labour and peasant organisations, is a part of the community effort to aid refugees from the Merapi eruptions, please support their efforts (see donation information on www.armformerapi.blogspot.com).

P.S.

* Posted by KPRM-PRD Indonesia:

<http://kprm-prd-english.blogspot.com/2010/11/people-to-people-movement-emerging-in.html#more>