

Mindanao (Philippines): The situation of the Internally Displaced Population (IDPs) affected by the ongoing armed conflicts and the solidarity needs

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Mindanao Humanitarian Action Network against Disasters
(South-Central Mindanao Region)

UPDATES ON THE STATUS OF THE INTERNALLY DISPLACED POPULATION (IDPs) AFFECTED BY THE ONGOING ARMED CONFLICTS IN MINDANAO

As of 18 March 2015

CURRENT SITUATION:

(Source: Protection Cluster Report)

Over 24,714 families (123,537 persons) were displaced in 15 municipalities of Maguindanao. This is the biggest displacement since the 2008 MOA-AD debacle. The number of displaced persons reported by the government includes those IDPs who have sought refuge with host families. However, the figure of home-based IDP's is only from 6 out of 15 municipalities. There are at least 75 reported evacuation sites as of this report. Some families have been displaced for more than a month now without adequate humanitarian assistance. Distribution of food packages, some health and education support are part of the coordinated assistance that is being provided by government authorities. The conduct of psychosocial activities and a small amount of non-food items have been distributed by NGOs, ICRC, and UN Organizations to targeted populations.

According to reports, people are fleeing because of fear of being hit during AFP ground operations and air strikes. Some IDPs are having difficulty finding refuge in host barangays if they are perceived to have affiliation with the BIFF. Three weeks into the offensives, there is no clear and consistent information provide to IDPs as to what areas are safe to move to or return to collect belongings and food, including accessing their livelihood which is essential to their survival. March through April is the harvest season in Maguindanao.

There is growing concern over the duration and scope of the Military offensives, causing anxiety, distress, exhaustion and confusion among the IDPs. The AFP is present in communities, in houses, madrasahs, and other government structures such as schools and barangay halls including in some distributions sites even after the fighting has transferred to other areas. There are identified 'no go areas' restricting movements of civilians. In Barangay Penditen, Datu Salibo, 6 men held by military from morning until late afternoon. There are reports of strafing or indiscriminate firing in some areas where people try to return to their houses/farms and person detained as suspected BIFF members, including school teacher. IDP's are highly mobile depending on where they can access and

basic services and where they feel safe.

Government authorities are trying to cope with displaced population but they are overwhelmed by the large numbers. Out of 75 identified evacuation centers (ECs) across 15 municipalities, only 1 EC have camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) set up. No systematic registration system of IDP's has been put in place; therefore there is little disaggregated data and identification of vulnerable persons with specific needs amongst the population. The earliest disaggregated data will be available is next week based on Disaster Assistance and Family Access Card (DAFAC) which the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) started to distribute. The large majority of the IDPs are women, children and older persons; including 2,288 pregnant women. A substantial number of female headed household are also evident as those are wives of MILF fighter who had to leave their communities to give way to the government's law enforcement operations. There is huge lack of data on IDPs that are staying with host families. With entire barangays evacuated for fear of being caught up in the AFP operation, families have no access their livelihoods and they are tormented by the high possibility of looting and destruction and burning of their houses and personal goods left behind including most of their farm animals.

Other protection issues and humanitarian conditions reported are the following:

- Presence of AFP in distribution sites causing fear among population of Barangay Linantangan < sheriff Saydona Mustapha Municipality.
- There is no electricity and light at night time. Some IDPs depends on solar lights whole others are on oil lamps that increase the risk of fire in evacuation centers.
- Newly displaced families live in makeshifts houses made of laminated and tarpaulins. IDPs in Manggahan are exposed to extreme elements during day and night.
- Order in the evacuation camps remains a challenge with listing and issuances of Family Access Card were delayed due to lack of forms and personnel to conduct registration of IDPs.
- ECs are highly congested, children and families are sleeping on cartons and blankets while IDPs in Manggahan, Barangay Sampao, Guindolungan are staying in a open field here they are exposed to the sun and rain.
- Reports of houses of civilians and local infrastructures are damaged and burned due to mortar shelling and air strikes.
- Estimated 70% of the IDPs are women and children and 30% are considered elderly.
- Female headed households have difficulty in lining up for assistance during distribution as they have to tend to their young children and elderly members of the family.
- IDPS are dependent on food assistance provided by the government and host communities. However, with the large number of IDPs, food remains inadequate. There IDPs who were not able to avail of food assistance including IDPs who are living with host families who also do not have proper food source.
- Food provision by government is good only for 2 days per ration: 3 kilos of rice, 2 canned goods and 4 instant noodles.
- The conflict happened in times of harvest. Farmers who have invested their meagre resources in farming have lost most of their anticipated harvest/income. IDPs also sold their animals and live

stocks.

- Host barangays are now starting to complain. They are not displaced, yet their livelihood activities were also affected particularly by the “no-go-policy” (i.e. in Barangay Butilen were local officials raised this concern given that most of their constituents are fishing families.)
- Most IDPs received food assistance only once from ARMM Heart Food Packs provided to them last week and were already consumed and they are now having difficulty in finding food and other daily needs.
- Safe drinking water remains scarce. IDPs are exposed to risks when fetching water. IDPs are forced to use non-drinkable water for cooking. Not all IDPs are able to buy drinking water at Php 5.00/galloon. The lack of safe drinking water is a potential source of water borne diseases.
- Available latrines are being shared by at least 300 families per latrine. IDPs are forced to defecate on open field and irrigation systems will most likely affect the health of IDPs. In Mamasapano, there is only 1 latrine for more than 1,000 IDP families.
- There is a need for a culturally adaptive psycho-social intervention for distressed families especially children.
- There is no reported outbreak of severe diseases yet, however, there are several reported cases of cough, cold, fever, skin diseases, gastric pain and diarrhoea.
- Humanitarian agencies have difficulty monitoring the location and condition of the IDPs. Currently, they rely on government data on the number of displaced population. However, after several visits revealed a lot more complication of the situation. As mentioned, the home-based IDPs are not included in the assistance provided. IDPs are highly mobile depending on where they can have access to food and basic services for survival.

MIHANDs Initial Responses and Appeal for Solidarity and Support

On February 19, 2015, Mi-HANDs Teams in South-Central Mindanao Region convened and conducted Rapid Damage Needs and Capacity Assessment and initially installed communication lines for the fleeing families from the Municipalities of Pagalungan, Pikit and Datu Montawal. Initial preparations for Psycho-social and health intervention were made ready by each team (PSS, Health and Relief and Advocacy Teams) as well as the launching for intensive campaigns on the protection of the IDP rights and the cessation of hostilities.

Mi-HANDs in collaboration with Alyansa ng mga Mamamayan para sa Karapatang Pantao (Peoples' Alliance for Human Rights or AMKP) have also put in place human rights violation (HRVs) monitors to track down and document human rights violations and to ensure that the IDPs rights are protected, attended to and indemnified. Part of the strengthening of these HRV monitoring teams is by launching series of Human Rights Monitoring and Documentation Training beginning next week. Mi-HANDs volunteers come from different grassroots people's organizations and non-government organizations in less vulnerable areas in South-Central Mindanao who are most willing to get mobilize and offer voluntary humanitarian actions in an event such as this ongoing armed conflicts in Mindanao.

Thus, MI-HANDs appeal for coordination, support and partnership with philanthropic organizations, groups and individuals who have the heart to extend any help and humanitarian assistance the IDPs affected by the current armed conflicts in Mindanao.

BELOW ARE THE MOST URGENT NEEDS OF THE IDPs:

- Food (enough to sustain for 3-5 days)
- Clean drinking water & water containers (jerry cans)
- Medicines and hygiene kits (bath soap, detergent, towels, toothbrush & toothpaste, nail cutter, super scent oil, alcohol, sanitary napkin, etc.)
- Non-food items (tarpaulins, blankets, mosquito nets, sleeping mats, flashlights, kitchen utensils, etc.)
- Psycho-social support
- Alternative livelihoods (including for women)
- Support for the installation of camp coordination and camp management and information help desks in evacuation centers.

For your support, you can contact us at the telephone number and email addresses above or at any of our identified sub-centers and affiliate organizations in Cotabato City that you are familiar with.

1. Tri-People's Organizations Against Disasters (TRIPOD) Foundation, Inc.
2. Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM)
3. Kaagapay OFW Resource and Service Center
4. Lumad Development Center, Incorporated
5. Mindanao Tri-People Women Resource and Service Center (MTWRC)

P.S.

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