

Iligan, Mindanao (Philippines): Continuing support to the IDPs victims of the Marawi Siege

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VolunteerTales|What Sendong Taught Me



Michael Quirante, 25, knows too well the harsh realities of experiencing a disaster. After all, he was one among the fortunate people who survived 2011's world's deadliest storm, tropical storm Washi or locally known as Sendong. He heard how the rain and the wind pounded on their house's roof and saw how the flash flood turned some parts of his village in Brgy. Tubod, Iligan City into rubbles. His home, was in shambles; leaving him and his family desperate for a place to stay in after the rain died down.

The whole experience shook him. Having close to nothing left him and his family vulnerable after the disaster. Even though nowadays, he and his family enjoys the comfort of a home as part of the rehabilitation assistance project of the Duyog Iligan solidarity initiative for Sendong survivors, Michael understands clearly what victims of disasters feel and go through. His experience as an internally-displaced person taught him a valuable lesson. In times of disaster, empathy matters. Understanding and sharing another person's experiences and emotions foster human connection that is sometimes lost in the hustle and bustle of the disaster operations.

In those times, Michael recalled how Duyog Iligan volunteers encouraged him to share his thoughts which brought back the positivity that he had lost. This courage was most helpful in building for him and his family a new life. He went on to do informal jobs such as selling ice cream in the streets, wrapping and packing goods in a department store, pumping gasoline and doing construction work.

However, the inspiration of the disaster volunteers he met after Sendong was with him all throughout this time. When an earthquake hit Surigao on February 2017, he was first among the many who volunteered for Duyog Surigao. The organizers of the solidarity campaign, especially his neighbour, Luzviminda Blasabas of the Ranaw Disaster Response and Rehabilitation Assistance Center (RDRRAC) saw his potential.

“As a survivor himself, I believed at that time that he could be an effective facilitator of psycho-social support activities. He knows that survivors feel and need emotionally”, she said.

So on April 21, Michael was among a group of volunteers who were trained by Miss Blasabas and her colleagues on first-aid psychosocial support. Confident with his new skills, he joined fellow volunteers to provide 9 psycho-social support sessions to children earthquake survivors in Brgy. Poblacion, Brgy. Honrado and Brgy. Diaz, San Francisco, Surigao del Norte.

“It was then that I realized that to help and inspire others is my passion. Even though it is a huge responsibility, I love the fact that I helped people going through a tough time, especially the children to feel happy despite their situation”, he shared.

Today, Michael finds himself juggling work and volunteering for the survivors of the Marawi displacement. When they wrapped up their last sessions in Brgy. Tubod and Brgy. Ubaldo Laya, he felt relieved to be able to help Muslim children ease their trauma from their experience of war. He admitted that it was a learning experience to support survivors of a human-induced disaster and to break barriers of culture, religion and language.

“I’m glad that I helped our Muslim brothers and sisters. In times of disasters, it is important to strengthen relationships of solidarity. When typhoon Sendong displaced us, people in Marawi helped us. Now it is our time to help them”, he said.

Lyne Grace Vergara

July 13, 2017

VolunteerTales|Graduating as Survivors



Tenny Junson Andam, left and Phil Valerie Malinis, both #DuyogMarawi volunteers graduate with science degrees in Forestry and Social Work respectively at MSU-IIT on July 13.

Phil Valerie Malinis and Tenny Junson Andam could hardly believe that they were finally wearing their graduation toga, cap and hood. They joined the throng of more than 2,000 graduates of the Mindanao State University-Marawi City who gathered at the MSU-Iligan Institute of Technology gymnasium for the rites of what was now coined as the “bakwit” graduation on July 13.

It had been almost two months since the day their academic life was disrupted when Marawi City was laid into a siege that is still far from over. Tenny was in the College of Forestry and Environmental Science and scheduling his appointment for thesis defense. Meanwhile, Phil Valerie was packing her books for her Social Work board examination review.

For the past 55 years, the MSU Marawi campus is known among the alumni as the home of survivors because of the academic challenges students have to overcome to graduate. Hence, the phrase “I survived MSU” became a popular expression among graduates.

Survival had been instilled among the students but nothing prepared them for the chaos caused by the continuous sound of bombs being dropped and gunshots being fired. Though Tenny and Phil Valerie had packed clothes, they weren’t able to secure enough food to last them in the two days they were trapped in the university.

With safety in mind, they braved the long exodus of people to nearby Iligan City on May 25. After 9 hours on the road, they reached Iligan City and was welcomed by warm food by the College of Arts and Social Sciences of the MSU-IIT. In there, they saw the dire situation of other evacuees and decided to help those who were affected by the displacement.

They joined the #DuyogMarawi solidarity initiative of the Ranaw Disaster Response and Rehabilitation Assistance Center and MiHANDs as volunteers. They assisted in the preparation of halal food for survivors and distributed food packs and hygiene kits in the evacuation areas as well as those who were home-based.

Tenny hails from Brgy. Saray in Iligan City but spent years as a forestry student in Marawi City and therefore, knows how important the warmth of home is for those who are far from it.

“I felt their difficulties of being displaced. That’s why I decided to help”, he said.

Phil Valerie, however, is a resident of the campus and for 21 years, she considered it her home and M’ranaos, the people of Marawi City, as neighbors and friends. She shared that in the emergency response for Marawi, the usual problem is language barrier because some M’ranaos find it difficult to speak in dialects aside from their own.

“I grabbed the opportunity to volunteer so that I could help in the translation and make communication easier between volunteers and survivors”, she said.

Tenny and Phil Valerie graduated under their batch name, Pagsidan which translates to “bringer of hope”. As they await the schedules of their licensure examinations this year, they hope that their determination to overcome challenges, may it be academic or disasters, would propel them to pass and succeed.

Wendy Perocho Salva

July 13, 2017

Displaced children enjoy happy moment with clowns, balloons and games



In the dark and cramped corners of an evacuation building in Iligan City, a refreshing sound of giggles and laughter broke the silence and the sadness that have long blanketed the place. Children were in a frenzy as clowns bearing balloons walked inside. Young men excitedly jumped in and joined the basketball and volleyball games.

The children aging from 2 to 17 years old were among the thousands who fled the guns and bombs when their home city, Marawi was laid under siege on May 23. For a month since that tragic day, their experience kept haunting them even in their sleep.

To relieve their distress, the psycho-social support volunteers of the Ranaw Disaster Response and Rehabilitation Assistance Center-MiHANDs led a “happy moment” which was designed like a parlor party. It was filled with games, drawing and singing for the children. The volunteers painted their faces to look like clowns and gave out balloons to the delight of the younger children.

Eva Mae Paling, one of the volunteers said that the activity was the last of the series of the psycho-social first aid intervention that they started since the first week of June.

“Our purpose was to help them express what they feel so that they could ease the shock and the stress they experienced as early as possible to prevent further psychological complications”, she shared.

Amrodin Amron, 9, one of the children who participated in the games admitted that he still have nightmares of the night when they were sleepless and afraid of the gunfight that kept going until the day they escaped.

“I enjoyed the games. It felt good to be able to feel this way again”, he said.

Meanwhile, Jamila Madrigal, 29, looked on as two of her children were playing with their friends. She was relieved to see them laugh and run around like nothing was amiss.

“Their innocence kept them safe from knowing the long lasting effect of what happened. They can learn from what you did for them today”, she said.

RDRRAC-MiHANDs continue to conduct psycho-social interventions for Marawi survivors in Iligan City

SGarangan

July 5, 2017



Junairah finds comfort in the support of her family in an evacuation center in Brgy. Ubaldo Laya, Iligan City. (06/12/2017)

"I was shattered with what I had to do. It felt like I was taking off who I am as a person", Junairah Mangoda, 24 said of being forced by circumstances to remove the abaya, a loose black garment that covers her whole body and the niqab, the veil that covers her head and face except for her eyes.

For years, she committed herself in covering up as a religious custom. But since the armed militants who occupied and laid siege in her hometown, Marawi City connected themselves to Islamist fighters, her abaya and niqab became a security risk.

She remembered the stares that pierced through her when she and her family fled their home in Marawit, Marawi City to the safety of nearby Iligan City. She noted the suspicion in peoples' eyes as she walked passed by them.

"I wondered if I did them wrong because they looked at me as if I did a crime", she shared.

When she arrived in an evacuation center and reunited with her relatives and neighbors, she was told by them to take off her veil and don clothes that wouldn't draw attention.

"I was shocked that they would suggest such a thing. As a Muslim woman, it is my duty to praise Allah in modesty. But they insisted it was just for my safety so I followed", she said.

When she unveiled, she couldn't help but cry. It was heartbreaking to do something that she didn't want to do. She felt strange and insecure with her new self. But her parents and siblings had been with her and kept her stable.

"They make me feel hopeful even though we don't know what will happen to us in the future", she said.

She was glad that they are all alive because when they left their house, bullets pelted on its walls. When the bombs rained on their neighborhood, her father, told her mother, siblings and her to pack up and leave. He insisted to stay and guard their properties but they convinced him to come with them.

There was never a day in their displacement that she didn't long for the day that they could go home to Marawi. She wondered if the mosque where her family goes to pray every Friday was spared from the airstrikes. She thought about the madrasah where she assisted Arabic teachers in teaching Muslim children about Islam.

"We taught them that Islam is a religion of peace. I hope that non-Muslims would understand that we Muslims didn't wish for this war to happen", she said.

LG Vergara

July 1, 2017

Iranons welcome M'ranaos with a feast



Iranons and M'ranaos prepare the food for the Eid'l Fitir feast in Brgy. Sigayan, Sultan Naga Dimaporo, Lanao del Norte on June 26.

Lala, Lanao del Norte- M'ranaos who survived the Marawi siege got a warm and festive welcome from their Iranon hosts at the Nurolhuda Al-Islamiah, Brgy. Sigayan, Sultan Naga Dimaporo, Lanao del Norte on June 26.

In a *kanduri* or thanksgiving feast in celebration of the Eid'l Fitir, Johnny Balindong, a council member of the Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement and a leader in the village formally invited and welcomed the M'ranao families as part of their community.

"This event is important so that they don't feel isolated and to also make them feel comfortable among us", he said in an interview.

He shared that their experiences in the past marred the relationship among the two tribes. But in this crisis, they learned that it is important to rebuild unity and solidarity so that they could live together.

Ustadz Alamin Usman, a religious leader who attended the kanduri emphasized that the people in Brgy. Sigayan don't treat the M'ranaos as evacuees.

"You are guests here. We share what we have with our guests", he said during the feast.

The kanduri brought at least 40 families together in the preparation and the sharing of the food. The men blessed and offered in thanksgiving two goats. The women chopped the ingredients and cooked the traditional rendang and vermicelli noodles.

Among them was Aquisa Abdul, 48 from East Marinaut, Marawi City. She said that since her arrival in the community, she didn't feel uncared for. The Iranons have been kind to her and her family by sheltering them in the madrasah and sharing their food and clothes.

"Our fasting during the Ramadan would have been difficult without their help. They made us feel home despite our circumstances and it felt good", she said.

The Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement and an anonymous Manila-based resident of Brgy. Sigayan took turns to provide food for breaking the fast for the survivors on May 17-23. RDRRAC-MiHANDs donated the two goats for the kanduri. The events were part of the #DuyogMarawi solidarity and peace-building initiative for the Marawi siege survivors.

June 27, 2017

Muslims continue to endure displacement on Eid al-Fitir



Survivors continued to worry about their properties as they browse through posted photos of Marawi City in social media as they waited for their relief goods at the social welfare office in Rarab-Magsaysay, Lanao del Norte on June 24.

Lala, Lanao del Norte- As Muslims in the Philippines welcome the end of the holy month of Ramadan, the survivors of the Marawi siege still find it difficult to celebrate the Eid al-Fitir on June 25.

Eid al-Fitir means “festival of breaking the fast” which brings together the ummah or the Muslim community into a day of merriment and thanksgiving. Muslims celebrate it with family, relatives and friends joining the congregational prayer, preparing a feast, wearing new clothes and giving gifts.

However, for the displaced Muslim families like that of Hijara Samad, 47 from Brgy. Bacong, Marantao, Lanao del Sur, the feast will not be of the delicacies they cook traditionally for the Eid. They will be breaking their fast with instant noodles and canned food that they received as aid.

“We could barely eat the rice that they gave because it tastes old and smells old. But we had to make do with what we have right now”, she said.

Hijara and some of her children and grandchildren escaped from the gunshots and bombs and fled to the comfort and safety of her relative’s house in Rarab-Magsaysay, Lanao del Norte.

“It is our first time to celebrate the Eid al-Fitir separately. One of my children is in Balo-i (Lanao del Sur) and the other is in Valencia (Bukidnon). It saddens me that we could not be together”, she said.

She said that they also had to explain to the children that there would be no new clothes and gifts for them on this day because they have no money to spare. They also have no clothes to wear for the congregational prayer known as Salaat al-Eid.

Meanwhile, in Iligan City, Junairah Mangoda, 24 prepares for the Salaat al-Eid along with her fellow evacuees. She dons her long black dress that covers her whole body and the niqab that covers her face except for her. She felt the familiarity of the clothes that she was forced to shed for her security. Because of the siege, Muslims who fled for safety, became a target of suspicion and discrimination from other people in their host communities.

“I was shattered that day when I took off my niqab, my veil and my dress and put on clothes that I don’t normally wear. It seemed like I was giving up who I am. I often asked myself if I have done something wrong because they looked at me as if I was a criminal”, she lamented.

She said that when she and her family left Marawi on June 2, they passed by the mosque where they used to pray and the madrasah where they used to study Arabic and Islam. She hoped that these establishments will be spared from the bombs that were still being dropped on the day they left.

Despite having declared June 26 as a holiday in observance of the Eid al-Fitr, Muslims followed the tradition and declared June 25 as the breaking of the fast when the crescent moon was sighted yesterday. The unilateral ceasefire from 6 am to 2 pm today is yet to be observed.

Meanwhile, members of the United Imam of the Philippines who fled to Cagayan de Oro City called for the fighting and the airstrikes to stop especially on Eid al-Fitr so that Muslim civilians who opted to stay in Marawi City could pray and feast together despite the crisis.

“We really wished that we could have the Salaat al-Eid in our mosques in Marawi. We pray for the bombings to stop and for peace to come so that we could return to our homes and start rebuilding our city”, an ulama said in an interfaith peace dialogue in Iligan City on June 19.

MNorbe and LGVergara

June 25, 2017

Organic farmers share produce for #DuyogMarawi



Iligan City- The Kahugpungan sa mga Mag-uuma ug Mamumuo sa Kabanikanhan (KASAMMA KA), an organization of farmers and farm workers in Zamboanga del Sur harvested and donated their organic produce to the #DuyogMarawi solidarity initiative for Marawi siege survivors on June 20.

They collected 64 kilos corn rice, 17 kilos squash, 60 kilos sweet potato, 48 kilos root crops, 55 kilos banana and 4 kilos soya coffee from their members in Lapuyan, Pitogo and Tigbao, Zamboanga del Sur. Meanwhile, the Convergence of NGOs and POs in Zamboanga del Sur for Rural Development (CONZARRD) also pooled in 100 kilos of organic rice to the donation

KASAMMA KA and CONZARRD are advocates of sustainable and ecological agriculture and ensures that consumers are being fed healthy and safe food since 2009.

Gregoria Fajardo, KASAMMA KA’s Chairperson shared that their decision to send organic produce for the Marawi survivors was because they saw that most of the relief food items were canned goods.

“Kani nga mga bugas og utanon, wala ni gigamitan og mga kemikals. Mao nga maayo gyud ni sa panglawas kompara sa mga de lata nga naa nay mga preservatives (These rice and vegetables were grown without using chemicals. That’s why they are good for the body compared to canned food

which has preservatives)", she said.

KASAMMA KA and CONZARRD are part of the network of NGOs and peoples' organizations that came together as one for the #DuyogMarawi initiative.

June 21, 2017

P.S.

* <https://rdrrac.wordpress.com/>