

From the Philippines to ESSF donors: “Maraming Salamat” (Many Thanks)

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Maraming Salamat

(Many Thanks)

To our Magnanimous Benefactors at ESSF,

Pleasant Greetings!

The year 2017 has been full of challenges for the people of Mindanao, Philippines. On May 23, 2017, we had experienced the most violent attacks in recent history of conflicts in Mindanao when the ISIS-inspired terrorist groups – the Abu Sayyaf and the Maute took over Marawi City; an attack that received an equally (or even more) violent response from the government forces with airstrikes and ground assaults altogether. A terribly horrifying armed conflict that turned the entire city into a battleground for five (5) months with houses and infrastructures burned and crashed down to ashes. According to official report 1,132 are the accounted deaths and the internally displaced population reached nearly 400,000 mostly Maranaws who are now living in dire suffering under makeshift shelters, over-crowded evacuation centers with some of whom are lucky enough to be in houses of friends and relatives. Due to this event, President Rodrigo Duterte declared Martial Law and suspended the writ of habeas corpus in Mindanao until today.

With this heartbreaking event, MiHANDs has been responding untiringly to the needs of the affected population by doing various humanitarian interventions while at the same time vigorously campaigning for the protection of the people’s human rights. Especially that the country had suffered much under the dark period of martial law few decades ago. More than 200 volunteers from all over Mindanao have been mobilized and have taken turns in volunteering. Hence, MiHANDs has been able to extend help to 20,359 families (101,795 individuals) with cooked and uncooked food packs, clothing, hygiene kits, water purifiers, children’s toys, psycho-social support, herbal medicines and other alternative health services. We have also conducted consultations among the Internally Displaced Populations (IDPs) regarding their takes on the relief and rehabilitation plans and programs of the government and other humanitarian agencies. By working together with ALTAHR, MPPM and other human rights and peace groups, MiHANDs has accompanied the affected population in their persistent push for their rights to active participation in all these processes.

While the huge work on the Marawi Crisis is ongoing, another tragic event happened just before Christmas when Super Typhoon Vinta (International codename: Typhoon Tembin) struck and washed away 1,914 houses and thousands of hectares of farmlands of 14,302 households mostly farmers and fishers in Lanao del Norte alone. The same event also devastated Lanao del Sur. These two provinces have hosted a number of evacuees from the Marawi Crisis. Among the families heavily affected are the farmers and fisher folk members of grassroots organizations affiliated to MiHANDs. Under this emergency condition, MiHANDs volunteers in Lanao, mostly farmers and fishers (men, women, young and elderly) became part of the typhoon-affected population. Yet, they chose to rise

up from being survivors to be able to help their neighbors and other affected families.

Within the same period (December 26), the sacred mountain (part of the ancestral domain) of the Teduray and Lambangian tribes called Mt. Firis in Maguindanao was under violent attack by another terrorist group, the so-called Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF). Members of these Indigenous Peoples (IPs) were harassed by gun-firing and burning of houses. Sixty-one (61) families (204 individuals) have evacuated. Like the IDPs in Marawi City, they run for their safety empty handed. MiHANDs Cotabato-Maguindanao cluster organized the humanitarian missions to help the IP survivors of this armed conflict.

All these great humanitarian missions conducted by MiHANDs helping survivors in these multiple disasters to be able to help themselves would not have been possible without the selfless commitment of our volunteers all over Mindanao and generosity of many kind-hearted benefactors from local and international communities.

Among the most consistent solidarity support we have received in the past 10 years is that coming from Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF), France. ESSF does not only support us with cash donations which amounted to 20,512 euros for 2017 but has also helped in promoting the issues and struggles of the peoples in Mindanao since the beginning.

The cash donations from ESSF helped support the functioning of MiHANDs as a network of 52 grassroots organizations, in the strengthening of the different clusters and in providing means for food and non-food relief materials for the survivors of disasters. During the Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) response, ESSF supported MiHANDs works with the survivors in Ormoc and Leyte from emergency relief assistance up to the rehabilitation phase of communities and their newly formed people's organizations. To date, the nine (9) people's organizations supported are now duly registered and managing their own organizational affairs and livelihood activities.

Such warm and robust spirit of solidarity has all these years given MiHANDs not only the means to continue helping the people in disaster-stricken communities but also the hope that we shall overcome our difficulties and one day our people will rise beyond our current state to stand firm with capacity and resilience enough to face any future disasters. And because of that we cannot thank you that much.

Long Live ESSF! Long Live our strong spirit of International Solidarity!

Sincerely yours

Yennah Torres

Chairperson of the Board

MiHANDs, Incorporated

10 April 2018
