

10 June 2011

## PHILIPPINES

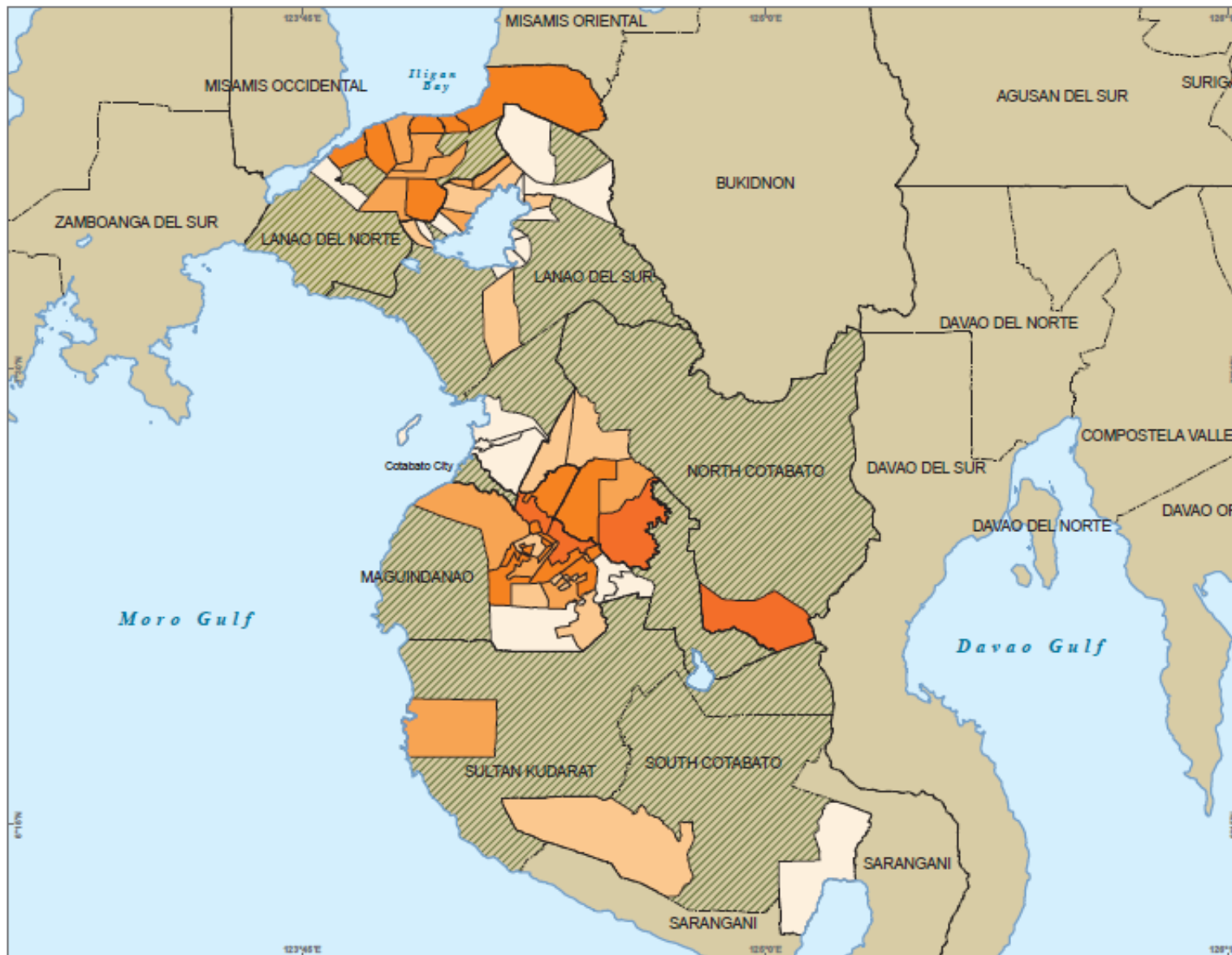
# Durable solutions still out of sight for many IDPs and returnees in Mindanao

Nearly two years after the end of hostilities between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the government, up to 5,000 displaced families are still thought to be living in camps and relocation sites in southern Mindanao, most of them in the province of Maguindanao. There are also an unknown number of people, some of them possibly included in this figure, displaced by clan violence (known locally as rido), which has been on the rise since the 2009 ceasefire. Rido is now the main cause of displacement in Mindanao. Other internally displaced people (IDPs) are still living in informal settlements or with host communities in both rural and urban areas, but as they are not included in official government data, their number and their needs are for the large part unknown. Many of those still living in camps are waiting for a final peace agreement and better security guarantees before returning home, while others stay because they have better access to basic facilities and livelihood opportunities there than in their home areas.

The majority of the estimated 750,000 people displaced between August 2008 and July 2009 have now returned or resettled elsewhere, but many remain in need of humanitarian assistance and support to help them rebuild their homes and lives. Most of those who returned in 2010 and 2011 face similar problems to the earlier returnees - limited access to agricultural assets, education, health care services and water and sanitation facilities. Having lost their household and productive assets and accumulated significant debts as a result of their displacement, most cannot afford to replace lost livestock and tools or to buy essential agricultural items such as seeds, pesticides and fertilisers. Not all of those who return manage to regain access to their land or homes, many of which have been severely damaged or destroyed. In some areas, unexploded ordnance and the volatile security situation are further obstacles to sustainable returns.

With most IDPs and returnees now in need of recovery rather than emergency assistance, a number of new programmes and plans were launched in 2010 and 2011. In 2010, the government of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) launched an Early Recovery Plan that covers 196 communities or barangays, and focuses on 46, all of the latter in Maguindanao. At the end of 2010, the new Philippine government announced a three-year peace-building, reconstruction and development initiative that covers all conflict-affected areas in Mindanao and incorporates assistance for IDPs. In February 2011, the UN and its partners launched a humanitarian action plan (HAP) seeking \$34 million in funding for 2011. These initiatives signal a real effort to go beyond the provision of immediate relief and pay more attention to IDPs' long-term needs. However, with the emergency phase now over and donor's attention again moving away from Mindanao, there is concern that many projects will remain un-implemented and therefore fail to make a real difference to IDP's lives.

# MINDANAO - Displacement Population of the six provinces covered by the HAP as of 7 September 2008



— Shoreline  
 — Regional boundary line  
 — Provincial boundary line

IDP Population as of 7 Sept 2008 by Municipality by Province

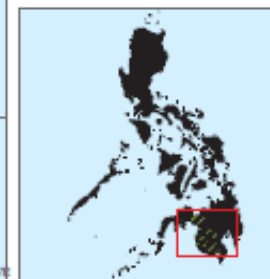
- 0 - 2,000
- 2,001 - 6,000
- 6,001 - 10,000
- 10,001 - 20,000
- > 20,000
- ▨ Conflict Affected Provinces

Map Doc Name: PHL-OCHA-ConflictAffectedMunicipalities\_100903\_A4\_v2.mxd  
 Creation Date: 23/09/2010  
 Projection/Datum: UTM/WGS84 Datum  
 Web Resource: <http://www.un.org.ph/weapon/>  
 Nominal Scale at A4 paper size: mindanao 1:1,600,000

0 10 20 30 40 kms

Map data source(s):  
 Administrative boundaries - GEODATA, Inc.  
 POCDES - National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB)  
 NDCC - Situation Report dated 7 September 2008

Disclaimer:  
 The boundaries and names shown and the designation used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.



Source: UN OCHA  
 More maps are available at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)

## Background

Armed conflict and human rights violations have displaced millions of people in the Philippines over the past three decades. Most of the violence and displacement have taken place on the island group of Mindanao in the southern Philippines, where the government has been fighting insurgent groups in current conflicts since the 1970s. In 1976 the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the government signed the Tripoli Agreement, which established a degree of autonomy for 13 provinces and nine cities in the southern Philippines. After only limited success in implementing the agreement amid continuing conflict, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was formally established in 1990. Six years later, the MNLF entered into a final peace deal with the government, leaving the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) as the country's main insurgency.

Mindanao is the poorest region of the country, and the conflict there has its roots in under-development, poor governance, inequitable wealth distribution and the marginalisation of Muslim (or Moro) and indigenous people in an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic nation. Of the six regions that make up Mindanao, ARMM has tended to suffer the worst in terms of conflict, displacement and lack of development. Most of the estimated two million people displaced between 2000 and 2007 were concentrated in ARMM provinces, all five of which are in the bottom ten of the national human development index (HDI). Life expectancy, school enrolment, literacy and income levels are among the lowest in the country.

In August 2008, the collapse of a land reform deal sparked renewed clashes between MILF and the Philippine armed forces. Over the next 11 months, the fighting displaced at least 750,000 people across several Mindanao provinces, with ARMM particularly hard-hit. (DSDW, 15 May 2009). By the time hostilities ended in July 2009, hundreds

of thousands of people were living in collective centres and camps (known by the government as evacuation centres), resettlement sites or with host communities. The ensuing ceasefire has allowed most of the internally displaced people (IDPs) to return to their home areas. For others, however, security concerns such as the absence of a peace agreement, the continued presence of armed groups and sporadic violence caused by escalating clan wars (known locally as *rido*) are serious obstacles to return and in some cases have caused new displacements.

## Peace talks resume

After months of delays while President Benigno Aquino's new government formed a negotiating team and disagreement over the appointment of a facilitator was resolved, MILF and government representatives met formally for the first time in Malaysia in February 2011. The International Contact Group (ICG) consisting of four third-party governments and four international NGOs also joined the peace talks. The ICG, established in September 2009, is intended to serve as a mediator between the parties and a guarantor of the negotiations (USIP, 28 April 2011, p.1; ICG, 21 December 2009, p.11). The meeting in itself was a positive step, but the two sides' very different visions of a future Bangsamoro entity – originally home to the sultanates of Mindanao and in territorial terms an extension of ARMM - prevented any substantial progress being made. The government proposed an enhancement of ARMM, while MILF sought the creation of a sub-state "in association" with the Philippines (ICG, 24 March 2011, p.1).

The protracted nature of the negotiations and the lack of progress has tried the patience of MILF members and many people of Mindanao alike, and this frustration has helped to foment more radical attitudes among the younger generation. The May 2010 defection from MILF of Umbra Kato, a key commander and advocate of a stronger

stance for independence, raised questions about the group's command and control structure, its ability to enforce any future peace agreement and its legitimacy among the Bangsamoro people (ICG, 24 March 2011, p.8). This was one of the main concerns the government raised at the following round of peace talks held at the end of April 2011, in response to which MILF tried to play down the importance of Kato's split and its impact on the peace process (AFP, 29 April 2011). The next talks are scheduled to take place at the end of June.

Peace talks with the NDF, the political wing of the NPA, have also been revived (ICG, 14 February 2011). The government and the NDF met in Norway in February 2011 and agreed on an 18-month timeframe to complete a number of agreements related to socio-economic, political and constitutional reforms and on the end of hostilities and disposition of forces. Both parties hoped to reach a final peace agreement within the first three years of Aquino's administration (GRP, 22 February 2011).

## Ongoing displacement

Since 2009, *rido* has been the main cause of displacement in Mindanao, triggered mainly by land disputes and political and economic rivalries. It has contributed to instability in the region and added to the suffering of people already impoverished by past conflicts who are struggling to recover their livelihoods in a context of persistent insecurity (IRIN, 3 February 2011). At least 70,000 people were displaced in 2010, with the largest displacements taking place in June when an estimated 20,000 people fled their homes in Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat provinces (The Inquirer, 2 July 2010; Zambo Times, 13 June 2010). Between January and March 2011, *rido* and fighting between rival rebel commanders displaced at least 20,000 people in North Cotabato and Maguindanao provinces (NDRRMC, 15 March 2011, 2 March 2011). During April and May, more

than 2,000 families were displaced, mainly in Maguindanao province, by several *rido* incidents (OCHA, 10 June 2011, p.2)

Other causes of displacement in the Philippines include the armed forces' counter-insurgency campaigns against the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), which is mostly active in Sulu and Basilan provinces, Western Mindanao, and is known for its kidnapping activities; and against the communist New People's Army (NPA), which maintains a presence in most provinces of the country. In January 2011, renewed violence in forced more than 7,000 people to flee their homes in Basilan (NDRRMC, 28 January 2011), where access remains limited for international agencies. Over the past 18 months, clashes with NPA have taken place for the most part in remote areas of provinces such as Negros Oriental, Surigao del Sur, Davao del Norte and Compostela Valley, causing sporadic and small-scale displacement (ICG, 14 February 2011, pp.21-22). People have also fled political persecution linked to the counter-insurgency effort against NPA and the militarisation of communities suspected of providing assistance to the rebels. In his April 2011 report on children and armed conflict, the UN Secretary General noted four incidents involving the armed forces' detention of children and alleged torture that led families to flee for fear of being targeted as NPA members (UNGA, 23 April 2011, p41).

## Long-term displacement in Mindanao

Reliable figures on the number of IDPs are hard to come by, both because population movements in Mindanao are frequent and because official registration has been incomplete. IDPs in informal settlements have often not been recognised as such, and entire municipalities affected by the conflict have simply been ignored. The government has generally considered anyone leaving evacuation centres as returnees, and has failed to

include some IDPs still living in evacuation centres or relocation sites on its register (Mindanews, 16 November 2009). IDP figures have also been inflated by double counting or failed de-registration, some IDPs returning home but maintaining an official presence in camps to continue benefiting from assistance.

As of early 2011, the number of IDPs living in camps in Maguindanao was estimated at around 12,000, down from 130,000 a year earlier. Another 5,000 people were thought to be living in relocation sites or with host communities (OCHA, 4 February 2011, p.11). This sharp reduction in the number of IDPs was partly due to the return of IDPs to their homes during the year but it was also the result of the work of the Information Management Technical Working Group (IM-TWG), established towards the end of 2010 to reconcile conflicting IDP figures. The main variation in the IDP figures and the definitions of displaced came from different methodologies applied by IOM and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). From 70,000 individuals in December 2010, the number of IDPs in evacuation centers dropped to 2,100 families in January 2011 (OCHA, 10 June 2011, p.2).

In May 2011, data from the ARMM Programme Management Office showed that more than 5,000 families remained displaced in 54 evacuation centres in Maguindanao (MB, 5 May 2011, IRIN, 16 May 2011). The figures were not broken down to show how many were displaced by the 2008 to 2009 conflict between government forces and MILF, and how many by *rido* during 2010 and 2011.

In other provinces of Mindanao, such as Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, North Cotabato, South Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat, all those displaced by the 2008 to 2009 conflict are considered to have returned. As of late 2010, however, these provinces were still hosting some 30,000 people displaced by *rido*. The latest available statistics, from September 2010, showed 9,445 IDPs in

North Cotabato, 7,020 in Sultan Kudarat, 6,958 in Lanao del Sur, 4,386 in Lanao del Norte and 1,405 in South Cotabato (OCHA, 4 February 2011, p. 11).

## Obstacles to return

Nearly two years after the end of the 2008 to 2009 conflict, many IDPs are still reluctant to return home. They are discouraged on the one hand by the absence of a final peace agreement, the continued presence of armed groups, unexploded ordnance and violence associated with *rido*; and on the other by the fact that access to income-generating opportunities and basic facilities such as shelter, water and sanitation are often better in the camps than in their home areas (MPC, 25 February 2010). Many IDPs, particularly men, choose to visit their homes during the day to farm and collect fruit or firewood and then return to the camps at night for safety reasons (OCHA, 4 February 2011, p. 12).

An assessment conducted in early 2010 by the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and Community and Family Services International (CFSI) showed that the majority of those still displaced did intend to return, but were unable give an exact timeframe for doing so. Most said that they were waiting for the security situation to improve. Nearly 30 per cent of the IDPs who remained in camps, however, said they had no intention of leaving as they had secured new livelihoods. More than 70 per cent of those surveyed who had returned or resettled elsewhere said that they had no intention of moving again, though a significant proportion did not rule the possibility if they were to find better opportunities elsewhere (WFP and CFSI, 5 March 2010, p. 29). An IDP study undertaken by the World Bank (WB) and WFP in late 2010 and to be published in mid-2011 will hopefully improve humanitarian and development organisations' understanding of IDP's choices and decision-making processes in their search for durable solutions.

## Integration and settlement elsewhere

Many IDPs have chosen to stay in their host communities, where they have secured new livelihoods, enrolled their children in school and created new social networks. Others have decided to stay in evacuation centres that have become permanent settlements. Some cite the lack of clear property rights in their home areas and the absence of mechanisms for restitution and compensation for lost property, which means that livelihood opportunities cannot be guaranteed, as a further reason for staying put or moving on elsewhere (WB, March 2011, p.8).

In an attempt to escape the poverty brought on by the loss of their property and livelihoods, some IDPs have moved to urban areas such as Cotabato City, Marawi City (Lanao del Sur), Isabela City (Basilan) and Jolo (Sulu), where tens of thousands of displaced households and other migrants have settled since 2000 (UN Habitat, 2010). Conflict and displacement are significant factors driving rural-urban migration in Mindanao.

The influx has placed a significant burden on host communities in urban areas, which find themselves catering for the majority of IDPs' needs. Members of these communities, often relatives of the displaced, share their already meagre resources, including food, water and housing space with the newly arrived. A 2010 study commissioned by UN Habitat showed that the main challenges facing urban host communities were increased competition for local jobs brought on by the arrival of new labour and a shortage of facilities to meet the IDPs' housing, health and sanitation needs (UN Habitat, 2010, p.6).

IDPs in urban areas have only limited access to employment opportunities, and work mainly in the informal sector where they earn a subsistence living as petty traders and motorcycle taxi or *trisykad* (rickshaw) drivers (UN Habitat, 2010, p. 4).

Some build houses in their relatives' compounds, while others live in shanties on vacant public or private land, river banks and roadsides (UN Habitat, 2010, p. 30). Most do not own the land their homes are built on – a significant obstacle to improving their living conditions - or hardly have any resources for starting sustainable businesses (WB, March 2011, p.8). The Cotabato City municipality, in cooperation with the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) and local NGOs, has made some efforts to help the displaced address their most pressing needs and secure new livelihoods, but most urban IDPs remain unidentified and unassisted (Cotabato City, 12 February 2009).

## IDPs' and returnees' humanitarian needs

The 2008 to 2009 conflict devastated productive assets and livelihoods in areas where most people were already experiencing high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition and where access to clean water, sanitation, education and health care was already very limited (WFP, 31 May 2008, pp.2-3). Infrastructure, schools and homes were destroyed or severely damaged, and many communities still trying to recover from previous fighting and displacement were forced to start from scratch again. IDPs have often suffered much worse than the rest of the population in this sense. They have lost their livelihoods and access to their homes, and prolonged stays in overcrowded IDP camps or with host families have left them facing extreme hardship and heavily dependent on external assistance to meet their most basic needs.

All displaced groups, including those who have returned home, continued to have significant humanitarian needs in 2010 and 2011, with returnees sometimes worse off than those who remained in camps or managed to resettle elsewhere.

### *Food insecurity*

A 2010 emergency food security assessment

(EFSA) conducted by WFP in areas of displacement and return in several Mindanao provinces showed that approximately 70 per cent of IDPs and returnees were food-insecure. Within this group, 40 per cent were considered as highly or moderately food-insecure (WFP, July 2010, p.5). The EFSA also underlined the fragility of the situation for many IDPs and returnees. It found that many food-secure households were susceptible to falling into insecurity as they struggled to make ends meet. Indeed, most IDPs buy their food on credit, usually borrowing from friends and relatives and pushing their households further into debt (DOH, UNICEF, WFP, January-March 2009, p. 8). Other coping strategies include eating less of their preferred foods and limiting the size of their meals. This reduces the diversity of their diet and increases the risk of malnutrition. IDPs in camps were found to have better food security than returnees, as they received more government support and were able to spend more money on food (WFP and CFSI, 5 March 2010, pp. 19-22).

An assessment carried out by Save the Children in displaced communities in Maguindanao and North Cotabato in early 2010 confirmed that malnutrition was a serious problem. It showed that 50 per cent of children in the communities surveyed were suffering from chronic malnutrition (SCIPHL, 8 August 2010, p. 24). It also revealed a global acute malnutrition (GAM) rate of 8.4 per cent and a severe acute malnutrition (SAM) rate of 0.5 per cent in central Mindanao. These figures are much higher than both the national average and the situation pre-2008 (SCIPHL, 6 August 2010, p. 20). With communities unable to intervene, IDPs with poor nutrition remain highly dependent on international agencies for assistance (OCHA, 4 February 2011, p. 65). WFP estimates that 500,000 IDPs and returnees in Mindanao, including 330,000 children, will continue to require food assistance in 2011 (WFP, July 2010, p.10).

*Access to clean water, sanitation and health care*  
Unhygienic practices and a lack of clean water are

more detrimental to IDPs' health than poor nutrition, and access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities remains inadequate at most IDP sites. The situation in return areas is often worse. There have, however, been substantial improvements since 2009, when assessments showed that 42,000 people living in evacuation centres and relocation sites in Maguindanao were forced to share 61 water points and 165 latrines, that is one water point for every 680 people and one latrine for every 252 (Philippines WASH Cluster, August 2009, p.34). There are now twice as many WASH facilities in the province.

Most returnees draw their drinking water from untreated sources such as wells, river or lakes, and the majority make no attempt to purify it before consumption (WFP and CFSI, 5 March 2010, p.11). It was estimated in mid-2010 that only 61 per cent of schools in conflict-affected areas had access to working sanitation facilities and only 58 per cent had access to clean water (OCHA, 4 February 2011, p.85). More than a third of the 65 host and IDP communities surveyed by Save the Children in Maguindanao and North Cotabato in early 2010 reported "scarce" or "very limited" access to clean water.

Many IDPs and returnees have only limited access to health care, either because facilities are too far away or because medicine is unavailable or unaffordable (SCIPHL, 6 August 2010, p. 12). The 2008 to 2009 conflict put further strain on already depleted health resources in many host communities and hampered the implementation of public health programmes. Access to reproductive health services has been significantly reduced, with displaced pregnant women particularly affected. There has been a rise in the number of sexually-transmitted infections, especially syphilis, among displaced women (OCHA, 4 February 2011, p.59).

Despite the above shortfalls, there have been no major disease outbreaks reported since 2009.

## Access to education

The 2008 to 2009 conflict is thought to have disrupted the education of 70,000 children (OCHA, 4 February 2011, p. 47). The situation for displaced children is particularly acute, because any disruption is longer-lasting and their parents tend to have suffered greater economic losses during the conflict.

Nearly two years after the end of the conflict, most of the displaced children have managed to return home and have resumed school. Others, however, have dropped out after being away from school for too long, because their parents are no longer able to afford to send them or because the schooling they received during displacement is not recognised by the education system. Other ongoing obstacles to education include overcrowded classrooms, a lack of teachers and materials, inadequate water and sanitation facilities, poor health and insecurity (OCHA, 4 February 2011, p.48).

Despite the end of the 2008 to 2009 conflict, children are still exposed to violence and exploitation in conflict-affected areas of Mindanao. *Rido* and the armed forces' campaign against NPA and Abu Sayaff pose a direct threat to children's physical and psychological well-being. There was an increase in the number of reported child casualties in 2010, with 38 children killed and 40 injured. The number of attacks on schools and hospitals also rose, from ten in 2009 to 41 in 2010. Eleven teachers were killed, and schools have been burnt down and targeted with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) (UNGA, 23 April 2011, p.41). Unexploded ordnance has also been found near schools.

Reduced access to school and livelihood opportunities, and weakened community-based protection networks both in camps and return areas has increased the risks of displaced children being exploited as domestic workers, factory labour

and prostitutes. An increase in child trafficking was also noted in 2010 with reports of vulnerable families sometimes selling their children to traffickers to pay off their debts (OCHA, 12 August 2010, p.8; OCHA, 23 August 2010, p.6).

## Challenges for returnees

Return movements in 2010 and 2011 were concentrated in Maguindanao. Most of people displaced by the 2008 to 2009 conflict in other Mindanao provinces managed to return or re-settle elsewhere in the weeks or months following their displacement. More IDPs in Maguindanao returned in 2010, encouraged by the continued adherence of both MILF and government forces to the July 2009 ceasefire, their commitments to ensure safe returns, the presence of a Malaysian-led international monitoring team (IMT) and the launch of an early recovery plan by the ARMM government and humanitarian agencies. Greater attention has also been paid to the protection of civilians in conflict-affected areas, particularly IDPs. The IMT's mandate includes a civilian protection component, and in April 2010 both the government and MILF agreed to work together for the swift return of the remaining IDPs and the removal of unexploded ordnance (GRP-MILF, 5 May 2010; Mindanews, 23 April 2010).

Returnees continue, however, to face significant challenges and to require assistance from government and humanitarian agencies. Most of those who returned or resettled elsewhere in 2008 and 2009 did so spontaneously and without assistance, and found themselves faced with limited access to agricultural assets, education, health care services and water and sanitation facilities. In early 2010, it was estimated that nearly half of them had failed to recover from their displacement. Upon return many IDPs found that resilient weeds and pests had taken over their land and that they were unable to afford to buy agricultural items such as seeds, pesticides and fertilisers or



to replace lost livestock and tools. As a result, agricultural production has dropped significantly, which in turn means that many returnees have been unable to support themselves or pay off their debts (WFP and CFSI, 5 March 2010, p.16). Adverse weather conditions brought on by *El Niño* also damaged crops in a number of provinces.

#### *Loss of assets and lack of land ownership*

Most of those who returned in 2010 and 2011 faced similar problems, having lost their household and productive assets and accumulated significant debts as a result of their displacement. Losses have included livestock, bicycles, tricycles and motorcycles, as well as radios, jewelry and televisions, and many returnees are unable to afford replacements (WFP & CFSI, 5 March 2010, p.12; OCHA, 4 February 2011, p.55). Some returnees received a return package consisting of a two-month food ration and non-food items to help them during the recovery period most didn't receive any assistance (OCHA, 4 February 2011, p.33).

Nearly half of the returnees do not own their farmland, but rent it in exchange for crops and sometimes cash payments (WFP & CFSI, 5 March 2010, p.17). This further limits their ability to cope with external shocks. Some returnees did not manage to secure access to any land at all, while others who owned land prior to displacement found their holdings much reduced. A survey conducted in early 2010 showed that only 68 per cent of returnees and those who resettled elsewhere had access to land, and that the average plot size had decreased from 1.46 hectares to 1.15 hectares (WFP & CFSI, 5 March 2010, p.16).

Nearly 15 per cent of those who returned in Maguindanao in 2010 went back to their communities or *barangays*, but not their actual homes. An assessment conducted by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) at 66 IDP sites in the province at the end of 2010 showed that this was the case for 1,281 families out of 9,430 families surveyed (OCHA, 4 February 2011, p. 33).

For many, this was because their homes had been damaged or destroyed. At least 3,800 houses suffered this fate during the 2008 to 2009 conflict, of which nearly 70 per cent were in ARMM (DSWD 15 May 2009), and displacements continued to be accompanied by the destruction of property in 2011. IDPs who fled fighting between an MILF and a MNLF commander in Kabacan, North Cotabato in early 2011 returned in March to find that their crops had been destroyed by rats and 64 houses had been burned down (The Inquirer, 4 March 2011; Bantay Ceasefire and MPC, 15 February 2011). To help them rebuild their homes, they received shelter repair kits of nails and local building materials (IOM, 15 April 2011).

As part of its early recovery plan, the ARMM government announced in May 2011 that it would provide 2,400 displaced families with new homes, or core shelters, to be completed within six months, at ten resettlement sites in Datu Anggal Midtimbang, Datu Piang, Datu Salibo and Datu Saudi Ampatuan (ARMM government, 4 May 2011; MB, 5 May 2011). Transitional shelters were also provided to a number of displaced families in urgent need of better accommodation but unable to return to their homes in Maguindanao. The shelters are intended for use as community infrastructure once the IDPs are able to return (IOM, April 2011).

## **National response**

The Philippine government generally acknowledges its responsibility to IDPs, or at least to those who fit its relatively restrictive criteria for registration as such. It has made serious efforts to meet their immediate needs, particularly during the emergency phase. Since August 2008, it has provided significant emergency assistance to IDPs fleeing the conflict with MILF in Mindanao and has shown itself willing to cooperate with the international community to complement and improve its response. In May 2011, the government

estimated that it had provided IDPs with assistance worth a total of nearly \$27 million, with the DSWD, the main agency responsible for delivering assistance to IDPs, providing \$15.9 million and the UN and other international organisations \$10.3 million (Mindanews, 7 May 2011).

While it focused on immediate humanitarian assistance in 2008 and 2009, the government paid little attention to IDPs' long-term reintegration and recovery needs. Most IDPs who left evacuation centres or host families to return or resettle elsewhere did so with little if any assistance to help them rebuild their lives. Neither was much effort made to ensure that IDPs were consulted on matters related to their return, or that alternative durable solutions were offered. In some cases, assistance was simply stopped or IDPs' status revoked as a means of pushing them to return.

#### *The ARMM early recovery plan and the PAMANA programme*

In 2010 there was a shift in the context in which humanitarian organisations in Mindanao were operating, with the majority of IDPs having returned home and most agencies gearing their efforts towards early recovery.

The ARMM government launched its first coordinated return and recovery initiative in May 2010 (MB, 20 May 2010), and in mid-2010, it published an early recovery plan aimed at bridging "the gap between immediate relief and reconstruction" (OCHA, 4 February 2011, p. 2). Developed in consultation with international agencies from the cluster system, the plan was submitted to the national government in August 2010 with a request for funding. The plan covers 196 ARMM communities or *barangays* identified as conflict-affected, and prioritises 46 of them, all of the latter in Maguindanao.

At the end of 2010, Aquino launched the Programme for Communities in Conflict-Affected Areas (known by its Philippine acronym PAMANA),

a three-year peace-building, reconstruction and development initiative that covers all conflict-affected areas in Mindanao and incorporates assistance for IDPs (MB, 25 December 2010). The programme is to be coordinated by the Office of the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process (OPAPP), which has a broad mandate to oversee, coordinate and implement a comprehensive peace process.

#### *Policy and legislation*

Local authorities have only a limited understanding of protection concerns related to displacement, and of their responsibilities to IDPs. This lack of awareness, which extends in some cases to IDPs' basic human rights, is fed by unclear policies and mechanisms at the national level (OCHA, 4 February 2011, p. 71). The government has faced several displacement crises over the past decade, but it has failed to establish comprehensive action plans, to put in place an effective legislative framework or to take measures that might help to prevent internal displacement in the future. Its criteria for recognising IDPs as such, the absence of a national institution responsible for all matters relating to displacement and the subsequent lack of coordination across national ministries and with ARMM institutions are of particular concern (OCHA & UNHCR, July 2010).

On a more positive note the government restarted work on drafting national legislation based on the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. In November 2010, two congressmen introduced an internal displacement bill to the House of Representatives (MB, 2 November 2010). Both the House Committee on Human Rights and the Senate's Technical Working Group approved an amended version of the bill in March 2011. Both houses must approve the bill when the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress begins in July 2011 before the president can sign it into law.

Despite official commitments both the armed forces and insurgent groups continue to flout

IHL (Gulf News, 1 June 2011), and the government has largely failed to implement existing laws and mechanisms that might offer IDPs better protection. Extra-judicial killings are still frequently reported, most of them attributed to state or para-state forces, and those responsible are rarely brought to justice. On average only one per cent of cases are solved. This level of impunity is explained by flaws in the judicial process, both at the investigation and prosecution stages, and by the absence of an effective witness protection programme (Parreno, September 2010). Both government-supported armed groups and rebel groups have policies of not using child fighters, but they still recruit children to their ranks, mostly for non-combat duties (UNGA, 23 April 2011). The recent adoption by the Philippines Houses of Representatives of a bill that criminalises the use of children in armed conflict is a positive development although its application may prove difficult (Reuters, 3 June 2011).

## International response

The international presence in Mindanao, which was limited during the 2008 to 2009 conflict, has grown significantly, though in the past year a shortage of funding has forced some agencies to reduce their presence and curtail their activities. Between 2009 and 2010, the focus of assistance shifted from emergency to early recovery and development. In February 2011, the UN launched a humanitarian action plan (HAP) covering activities in six Mindanao provinces, for which it is seeking \$34 million in funding for 2011. Donor response, however, has been poor, raising only five per cent of the total in the first six months of the year.

The cluster approach was extended to Mindanao in 2008, with the Mindanao Humanitarian Team (MHT), based in Cotabato City, as the main coordinating body. The MHT is made up of UN agencies, international organisations and international and local NGOs. The ARMM government and MHT

coordinate their humanitarian and early recovery actions through eight clusters, each co-led by a government department and a UN agency or other international humanitarian organisation.

In July 2010, UNHCR established a presence in Mindanao and took over leadership of the Protection Working Group (PWG), which now operates as the Protection Cluster (PC). In addition to its work in developing a long-term protection and advocacy strategy for the province, the PC has chosen to focus on five issues it has identified as urgent. These are the lack of IDPs' participation in the design and implementation of assistance and return programmes; the lack of formal mechanisms by which humanitarian organisations can share and validate information and data; the lack of a policy framework for returns; the lack of access to education; and the lack of a common strategy to prevent human rights violations (OCHA, 4 February 2011, p.73).

The European Commission has been by far the largest humanitarian donor, contributing €14.5 million (\$21 million) between August 2008 and December 2010 to assist the conflict-affected people in Mindanao (EC, 27 January 2010; The Inquirer, 27 February 2010). An additional €4 million (\$5.8 million) was approved in late 2010 to support IDP's long-term rehabilitation assistance over a two-year period (EC, 4 January 2011). In 2010 and 2011, the main other donors supporting humanitarian assistance in Mindanao include Australia, Japan, Canada, the United States, Spain and Germany. Since August 2008, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has provided more than \$17 million to IOM and UN agencies working in Mindanao.

**Note:** This is a summary of IDMC's internal displacement profile on the Philippines. The full profile is available online [here](#).

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## About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people.

In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

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