

PHILIPPINES:

More attention needed on protection of IDPs

A profile of the internal displacement situation

14 March, 2007

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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.

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OVERVIEW

More attention needed on protection of IDPs

Executive summary

An estimated 100,000 people were displaced from their homes in the Philippines during 2006 as a result of armed conflict and human right abuses. The main displacement movements occurred in the southernmost island of Mindanao where, in two separate incidents, close to 70,000 people were forced from their homes in Maguindanao province following clashes between Muslim separatist rebels and security forces. In addition to these new displacements, which have been mainly temporary, tens of thousands of people in Mindanao remain unable to return or are living in situations akin to displacement due to previous conflicts. Due to the fluidity of the displacement situation, with frequent clashes and short-term displacement movements, there are no accurate figures available on the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). In July 2006, WFP launched an emergency food operation and estimated the number of vulnerable IDPs at 120,000.

The majority of the displaced are living in the Muslim-populated areas of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), where most of the fighting between the government and insurgents of the MILF secessionist group has concentrated in the past few years and forced close to two million people from their homes since 2000. Under-development and the destruction caused by years of fighting have further impoverished an already disadvantaged population, with the displaced particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, health risks and unemployment. The needs of IDPs are generally addressed as part of wider development and rehabilitation programmes conducted by the government in partnership with the United Nations and donor countries and institutions. Sporadic skirmishes between the government forces and the MILF rebels and territorial issues have continued to block the signing of a peace agreement during 2006, while also obstructing the implementation of programmes aimed at rehabilitating and developing the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao. Focusing largely on a developmental approach, the international aid community needs to pay more attention to protection and human rights issues, which are particularly at risk in the context of the government's "war on terror".

Background and main causes of displacement

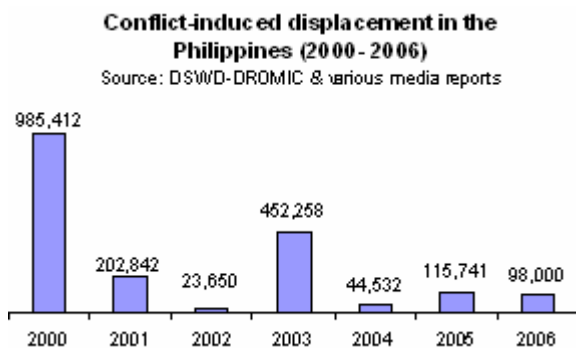
The Philippines is one of the most natural-disaster-prone countries in the world, with hundreds of thousands of people displaced each year due to floods, storms, earthquakes or volcanoes. Development projects such as mines, roads or hydro-electrical dams are also major causes of displacement in the country, mainly affecting the poor and indigenous populations. At the end of 2006, the Philippines was designated by the Geneva-based Centre on Housing Rights and Eviction (COHRE) as one of the top three countries violating housing rights, with hundreds of thousands of people displaced because of development or "beautification" projects (COHRE, 5 December 2006).

As regards, conflict-induced displacement, the focus of this overview, armed incidents between government forces and rebel groups, and in particular those involving government forces and the communist rebels of the New People's Army (NPA), sporadically affect all regions of the country. But heavy fighting and large-scale displacement is mainly concentrated in the southern island of Mindanao where Muslim separatist rebels have fought government forces since the 1970s. The conflict in Mindanao is rooted in the general underdevelopment of the region, the unequal distribution of wealth, and the lack of sufficient effort by the central government to integrate the Muslim (or "Moro") minority into the political and institutional fabric of the overwhelmingly Roman

Catholic country. Central to the conflict are also conflicting claims over land between, on the one hand, Muslims and indigenous people who held their land on communal ownership basis and, on the other, the government who imposed the Regalian doctrine of property ownership, which did not recognise ancestral land claim or ownership. As a consequence, many Muslims and indigenous people were deprived of their land largely to the benefit of Christian settlers. The fighting and displacement is mainly concentrated in the Muslim-populated areas of central and south-western Mindanao, where rich reserves of untapped natural resources and raw materials have been an added factor in the government's fight against Muslim secessionist movements. Other causes of insecurity in Mindanao include armed incidents between government forces and the communist rebels of the NPA, widespread banditry and clan disputes (or "rido"), which sometimes degenerate into wider armed incidents involving armed militias, the military and Muslim armed groups.

In 1996, a peace agreement between the government and the rebel Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) – the first Moro armed separatist group – was signed, allowing for the implementation of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement; this established some degree of autonomy in 13 provinces and nine cities in the southern Philippines. The agreement was, however, rejected by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a splinter group from the MNLF established in 1984 with a more religious agenda (USIP, 31 January 2005, p.5). The MILF, nevertheless, agreed to open discussions with the government and a ceasefire agreement was signed in 1997. It was, however, repeatedly violated in the following years.

Between 2000 and 2006, armed conflict in the Philippines caused the displacement of nearly two million people. The majority were displaced in Mindanao by two major military operations launched by the government in 2000 and 2003. A ceasefire agreed in July 2003 put an end to the fighting and allowed for the return of most of the displaced, despite conditions that were often not conducive to sustainable reintegration. Since then, improved dialogue and confidence-building measures established between the government and the MILF have prevented sporadic armed skirmishes and army operations against criminal gangs from turning into larger armed confrontations. Also, a Malaysian-led international monitoring team has been deployed in Mindanao since October 2004 and has helped to maintain the ceasefire.



Despite a third year in a row without a major armed confrontation between the government and the MILF, continued tension and intermittent armed clashes have during 2006 continued to displace tens of thousands of people, further delaying the signing of a final peace agreement. The main bone of contention continues to be the issue of ancestral domain, or the territorial coverage of the future Moro homeland. While armed encounters between the government and the MILF have been decreasing since 2003, those with the communist rebels of the NPA have been on the increase, in particular during 2005 and 2006 when President Gloria Arroyo declared an "all-out war" against the NPA. Peace talks between the communist insurgents and the government have stalled since August 2004 and look unlikely to resume anytime soon.

100,000 people newly displaced by fighting during 2006

With more than 18,000 people displaced by intermittent clashes between MILF rebels and government forces in Midsayap, North Cotabato between January and March, 2007 appears to have started on the same basis as the previous year. During 2006, conflict-induced displacement was mainly the result of armed confrontations between government security forces and Muslim rebels in Mindanao or communist insurgents elsewhere in the country. It is estimated that close to 100,000 people were displaced during the year, mainly in the Muslim-populated areas of Mindanao. The two largest displacement incidents occurred in and around Mamasapano municipality, in Maguindanao province. In late January 2006, a week of fighting involving security and paramilitary forces against MILF rebels resulted in the evacuation of 32,000 civilians. In late June 2006, fighting between the Muslim rebels and the pro-government militias erupted again in Shariff Aguak town in the same province. This time the clashes displaced close to 40,000 people. As was the case six months earlier, the majority of the displaced managed to go home shortly after the fighting ended two weeks later.

Elsewhere in the country, thousands of people were displaced due to armed clashes between the government and the communist NPA. In October 2006, more than 5,000 people fled their homes in Calatrava, Negros Occidental province following counter-insurgency operations against NPA rebels (DSDW, 25 October 2006). Fighting and displacement also resumed in Sulu province, where the government deployed some 7,500 troops in August in the hunt for another small Muslim rebel organisation, the Abu Sayyaf group (ASG). At least 3,000 people were displaced on Jolo island between August and September 2006 by the military operations (DPA, 3 August 2006; eBalita, 15 September 2006). The ASG, allegedly linked to al-Qaeda, has since 2001 resisted several large-scale military operations conducted by the Philippine government forces with support from the United States. These operations, carried out in the framework of the global "war on terror", have been met with scepticism and cynicism by Moro civil society groups who see it as a justification for continued warfare on the Muslim population leading to further human rights violations and displacement (Mindanews, 6 August 2006; Davao Today, 9 September 2006). The adoption by the Congress, on 19 February 2007, of an anti-terror bill, known as the "Human Security Act" raised concern among Moro groups that it would further curtail civil and political rights in Mindanao (Davao Today, 11 February 2007).

Sporadic clashes, constant movement of people and poor monitoring of returns make it very difficult to estimate how many people remained displaced at the end of the 2006. While the majority of the displaced generally manage to return to their homes in the aftermath of the fighting, many are unable to do so mainly because of the destruction of their houses, means of livelihood or because of continued military presence in or around their villages. This is a common feature of displacement in the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao with new waves of displacement just adding new layers of displaced persons to those created by previous clashes. Returns during a year are generally offset by new displacements, creating a permanent IDP caseload consisting of tens of thousands of people living in evacuation centres or with relatives. In addition, many people who have managed to return in past years have not been able to recover economically or socially from their displacement and remain living in situations akin to displacement with acute assistance and rehabilitation needs. The UN World Food Programme estimated in 2006 that there were 120,000 vulnerable IDPs in need of food assistance in Mindanao (WFP, March 2006, p.3).

Protection and humanitarian needs

Armed confrontation between the MILF rebels and the government tends to be of a conventional positional type, often affecting the same communities who live near the MILF camps over and over again. With the fighting often taking place within the villages themselves, clashes with the MILF also often result in large civilian casualties and destruction of property as well as large-scale displacement of people who often need to be accommodated in evacuation centres. Although large armed confrontations such as the 2000 and 2003 wars have been successfully avoided in the past three years, fighting incidents leading to population movements have occurred with an alarming regularity in Mindanao. Often triggered by land or clan disputes, many small incidents degenerate into wider confrontations involving paramilitary groups, rebel groups and government forces. Caught in the crossfire, civilians and displaced people in particular are vulnerable to a range of direct threats to their physical security including stray bullets or bombs, but also harassment and physical abuse by the military. In January 2007, four IDPs displaced by fighting in Midsayap, North Cotabato were reportedly apprehended by a military unit and subjected to physical abuse while attempting to return to their homes to fetch food and other personal items (Luwaran, 5 February 2007). In November 2006, two women aid workers visiting displaced families in the same province were abducted and sexually molested by Philippine soldiers (Davao Today, 13 November 2006).

Whereas displacement caused by armed encounters between the NPA rebels and government forces tends to be comparatively smaller in scale than those involving MILF rebels, mainly because the incidents tend to take place at some distance from the villages, the protection needs of the civilians and displaced population tend to be as important. Indeed, counter-insurgency operations conducted by the military frequently result in human rights abuses against civilians suspected of supporting the insurgents. According to a UNICEF study covering the period 2001-2005, the military strategy of the armed forces during counter-insurgency operations against the NPA has tended to explicitly disregard the distinction between combatants and civilians. Even more alarming, the official military strategy against terrorism appeared to consider anyone suspected of associating with terrorists as legitimate military targets (UNICEF, October 2006, pp. 35-36).

In addition to human rights abuses resulting from counter-insurgency operations, it should be noted that politically motivated extra-judicial killings in the country during 2006 reached their highest level since 1986 with more than 180 people killed, including human rights activists, trade unionists and leftist militants. This dramatic deterioration of the human rights situation prompted the UN special rapporteur on extra-judicial killings to visit the Philippines in February 2007 (UN, 21 February 2007).

The daily environment of the majority of people living in conflict-affected areas of Mindanao, most of which are in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, is one of constant economic as well as physical insecurity. Already living in the provinces that rank the lowest in terms of human and economic development (incidence of poverty in the ARMM region is 63 per cent), people at risk of displacement due to fighting tend to belong to the poorest strata of society. Most of the close to two million people displaced in Mindanao since 2000 are Muslims or indigenous people, the latter being often caught in the crossfire or displaced from their lands by government-sponsored development projects. As such, the displaced are the immediate but also the long-term victims of the conflict between the government and the various insurgent groups active in the Philippines. The recurrent nature of fighting and displacement in Mindanao means that the assistance needs of the displaced range from immediate humanitarian relief, characteristic of short-term emergency situations, to more development-oriented assistance schemes such as those needed in post-conflict settings.

Need for reintegration and development assistance

While many IDPs have been able to return in the days or weeks following their displacement and managed to restart their lives with their property, land and means of livelihood left relatively intact, hundreds of thousands of people have not been so lucky. In the wake of the large-scale military offensives of 2000 and 2003, heavy fighting caused widespread destruction of houses and property and forced the displaced into prolonged stays in hastily set-up evacuation camps or with friends and relatives. The majority of those displaced in 2003 had already gone through the same predicament three years before and they were further weakened by renewed displacement. Although the ceasefire agreement signed by the MILF and the government in July 2003 had a clear positive effect on the overall stability of the region and prevented the eruption of large military confrontations, return and reintegration remained elusive for many IDPs. In early 2007, it was estimated that some 20 per cent of the estimated 40,000 people evacuated due to fighting in Maguindanao province had been unable to return to their homes, nearly six months after being initially displaced (Oxfam, 24 January 2007). The length of displacement in the Philippines can vary considerably from a few days to several years. In May 2006, it was reported that more than 4,000 people displaced by military operations six years earlier were still displaced in Sulu province (Inquirer, 2 May 2006).

Frequent clashes continued to occur on a regular basis in areas in Mindanao with high concentrations of rebels and government forces and created new layers of displaced people, while undermining reintegration efforts of the recently returned IDPs.

Poverty exacerbated by recurrent conflict is the major factor constraining access to education in Mindanao. Literacy rates in the ARMM region stand at 71 per cent for males and 69.4 per cent for females compared to a national rate of 93.7 and 94 per cent respectively. Elementary and secondary enrolment rates are also significantly lower, with only half the rates observed at the national level. In some conflict-affected parts of Mindanao and the ARMM region, overall dropout rates reach an alarming 23 per cent and only one out of ten children completes high school in time (WB, July 2006, p. 4). For many displaced people impoverished by the loss of means of livelihood, the depletion of assets and forced to start from scratch when they return, education becomes simply unaffordable.

National and international response

The attitude of the Philippine government towards the problem of internal displacement is two-sided. On the one hand, it is by far the main agent of forced displacement, mainly resulting from military and security operations against various rebel groups and their suspected sympathisers, but also from economically-motivated forced evictions. On the other hand, the national authorities do generally acknowledge that, as a consequence of their military activities at least, people are forced from their homes and in need of protection and assistance. The acceptance of this responsibility has, however, mainly translated into the provision of immediate humanitarian assistance to the displaced with generally insufficient attention paid to the long-term reintegration needs. Also, no concrete steps have been taken to set up a national body to deal with the issue of internal displacement or establish appropriate institutional structures at all levels of the government, including the designation of clear IDP focal points (PCHR, 2006, p. 16). Further, the government has so far not developed specific IDP policies and laws.

Local non-governmental organisations, volunteers and other representatives from civil society, including IDP themselves, have traditionally played a critical role in assisting the internally displaced and in advocating for their rights in Mindanao, and elsewhere in the country. In 2005, the Commission on Human Rights Philippines (CHRP) and the non-governmental organisation Balay organised a series of regional consultations among local stakeholders and IDP

communities, which culminated in a First National Multi-Stakeholders Forum on IDPs held in December 2005. In addition to creating public awareness on the issue of internal displacement, one of the concrete outcomes of the conference was to gather support for a bill on internal displacement. Indeed, one year later, in December 2006, a draft bill known as the “Internal Displacement Act of 2006” and which comprehensively addresses the needs and rights of IDPs in the different phases of displacement, was presented to the Philippines Congress.

The response of the international community is largely focused on the development and rehabilitation needs of the displaced as a vulnerable group within a larger population with needs living in Mindanao’s conflict-affected areas. Far less attention is paid to their protection needs. Working closely with the government, UN agencies and donors, but also most international NGOs, agree that the development approach should be prioritised and prefer not to engage the government on sensitive human rights issues (JHA, February 2007, pp.22-24). The “war on terror” waged by the Philippine government with the active support of the United States and the political backing of some of the main donors, including Japan and Australia, also contributes to shaping the agenda of some of the main international aid actors. Protection of civilians tends to be seen more as a peace and development issue rather than as a human rights one.

In the wake of the 1996 government-MLNF Peace Agreement, the international community established a Multi-Donor Programme (MDP) to assist with the realisation of agreement. Associating the Philippine government with the UN and donor countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands, the MDP consisted mainly of development-oriented programmes and peace-building activities. Throughout its successive phases, the MDP also included a humanitarian relief component to address the immediate needs of the civilian population affected by the conflict between the government and the MILF and in particular of the hundreds of thousands of people regularly forced to leave their homes to seek refuge in evacuation centres. As part of the fourth phase (2005-2009) of the MDP, a UNDP-EU funded IDP programme aimed at addressing the relief and rehabilitation needs of the displaced was implemented between October 2004 and January 2006 in Mindanao and provided assistance to more than 25,000 families (UNDP, 13 February 2006).

In March 2006, the first phase of the World Bank-administered Mindanao Trust Fund (MTF) was launched (WB, 27 March 2006). The MTF is a development and reconstruction programme aimed at assisting with the social and economic recovery of the conflict-affected regions of Mindanao. Its design is based on inputs provided by a comprehensive Joint Needs Assessment conducted during 2004 in Mindanao and which estimated the cost of the reconstruction and development needs at more than \$400 million (Government of the Philippines, International Funding Agencies, Mindanao Stakeholders, December 2005, p. xiv). This initial phase is aimed at establishing the organisational set-up and piloting a few test programmes. Phase 2 should see the full implementation of the MTF, but it will not start before a formal peace agreement is reached between the government and the MILF.

While the signing of the peace agreement has been repeatedly postponed since 2003 due to regular ceasefire breaches and disagreements over the territorial coverage of the future Moro homeland, the conflict-affected people of Mindanao and in particular the displaced are now in need of immediate and concrete assistance measures to help them return and re-establish their livelihoods. Already living on the edge of subsistence, most returnees in Moro areas face the accumulated effects of conflict and displacement, which have resulted in a state of perpetually arrested development. In addition to humanitarian interventions needed to prevent a further deterioration of their living conditions, it is important to ensure that genuine efforts are made to tackle the underdevelopment and widespread poverty, affecting primarily the Muslim-populated areas of Mindanao.

Clearly, more attention should also be paid to the protection needs of displaced people and civilians living in Moro areas, but also elsewhere in the country where civilians are often considered by the military as legitimate targets because they are suspected to provide support to "terrorist" groups (UNICEF, October 2006, p. 35). The UN special rapporteur on extra-judicial killings, who visited the country in February 2007, attributed most of the upsurge in political killings to the military, which he described as remaining in a "state of denial" on the issue (UN, 21 February 2007).

Poverty and economic marginalisation of the Moro and indigenous population, which have been a root cause as well as a consequence of the conflict, must be addressed urgently, but this cannot be achieved without also tackling issues related to claims for territorial and political autonomy. In addition, the human rights of all Philippine civilians need to be safeguarded and the government held accountable for past and present abuses against civilians. The current "war on terror" should not be used as an excuse for curtailing fundamental civil and personal liberties, nor should it serve as a repressive tool against ethnic or religious minorities.

CAUSES AND BACKGROUND

Background

Background to the Moro struggle in Mindanao

- Spanish control came quite late and remained tenuous in southwestern and western Mindanao.
- Mass migration of Christian settlers during 1950s and 1960s altered the demographic balance to the detriment of the Muslims or 'Moros'.
- During the early 1970s, the secessionist MNLF started waging war against the government in the Sulu archipelago.
- An agreement was reached in Tripoli in 1976, but its contested implementation led to the emergence of other armed groups (MILF).
- The 1996 agreement signed between MNLF and government allowed for the implementation of limited autonomy in the Muslim-populated provinces of Mindanao, but has failed to satisfy popular expectations.
- MILF has drawn on these frustrations and has continued the armed struggle against the government.

East-West Center Washington, 2005, p. 63

"The Philippines traces its unique status as Asia's sole Christian-majority state to more than three centuries of Spanish colonial rule (1565–1898). Ninety percent of the country's 82 million people profess Christianity today, but in the southwestern provinces of the Sulu archipelago and western Mindanao, where Spanish control came late and remained tenuous, indigenous state formation proceeded much further than anywhere else in the country, undergirding a tradition of resistance to alien rule. Muslim sultanates in Sulu (from about 1450), Cotabato (c.1515) and Lanao (c.1600) retained varying degrees of independence well into the nineteenth century, only becoming fully incorporated into the Philippines under the aegis of American colonialism (1898–1946), and giving rise to a transcendent, multi-tribal "Moro" identity. In the final decades of U.S. rule, and accelerating through the 1950s and 1960s, mass migration from the Christian North to the Mindanao frontier fundamentally altered the demographic balance in the South, today leaving Muslim majorities in only five of the region's twenty-five provinces. This shift coincided with a revival of Islamic consciousness beginning in the 1950s.

Intensifying electoral competition in the newly vote-rich South between 1967–71, combined with proliferating land disputes and armed militias, led to a spiral of sectarian polarization. Beginning in Cotabato province, at the forefront of postwar Christian in-migration, in early 1970, militia skirmishes spread rapidly to Lanao in 1971 and Zamboanga in early 1972. President Ferdinand Marcos, facing the end of his final term in office, cited this disorder in imposing martial law on the country in September 1972 and overthrowing the constitutional system. By December, the armed forces were locked in full-scale civil war with the secessionist Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) on the island of Jolo, and by early 1973, mainland Mindanao was also at war. The intercession of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, lead by Libya, helped bring about a cease-fire and autonomy agreement in Tripoli in December 1976, but the subsequent splintering of the MNLF into a number of contending factions, and disputes over Tripoli's implementation, have continued to draw the conflict out. To date, possibly 120,000 have died in the fighting, and millions have been displaced.

A "final" autonomy agreement mediated by Jakarta in 1996 now embraces all five Muslim-majority provinces, but has failed to satisfy popular expectations, or the demands of three main armed factions. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which broke away from the MNLF after Tripoli, commands widespread support among Maguindanao and Maranao Muslims in the Cotabato and Lanao regions, and is engaged in a fragile peace process supported by Malaysia and the United States. An MNLF faction lead by imprisoned founding chairman Nur Misuari is strongest in Sulu. The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), centered on the Sulu and Basilan islands, is far smaller, but highly mobile, and draws on kinship ties with MNLF and MILF members to seek refuge from government forces. At other times ASG and government elements may act in collusion. Further complicating this volatile situation are transnational terrorist networks linked to Jemaah Islamiyah and al-Qaeda, which view the Southern Philippines as a key front in their wider regional and global jihad."

Mindanao's conflict is largely concentrated in resource-rich, under-developed, Muslim-populated areas

- Muslim provinces are largely under-developed compared to the rest of the country.
- The Moro (Muslim) areas in Maguindanao, Sultan Kudrat, North and South Cotabato, Basilan and the Sulu islands have rich reserves of untapped natural resources, raw materials and, cheap labor.
- Mindanao represents 48 per cent of gold production, 63 per cent nickel and 18 per cent charcoal in the country's total reserves.
-

WB, February 2005, pp. 1-2

"The conflict in Mindanao has been only one of five major conflicts in the Philippines since independence. It has largely been concentrated in the Muslim-majority areas of central and southwestern Mindanao, which consists of three of today's administrative regions (Region IX—Western Mindanao; Region XII—Central Mindanao; and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, or ARMM) and of four provinces in Region XI—Southern Mindanao (Davao del Sur; Sarangani; South Cotabato; and Sultan Kudarat).

Resistance to central control and resentment at the increasing number of Christian settlers, as well as the logging and mining activities, which had become important sources of export earnings, was at first organized under the aegis of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), formed in the late 1960s and until the 1990s largely accepted as representing the interests of Mindanao's Muslim population. Despite the formation of ARMM in 1989 and the formal acceptance of the 1996 peace accord between the Government and the MNLF, the armed conflict continued. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) emerged as the Government's main opponent. The MILF, as the name suggests, is more religion-oriented than the nationalistic-oriented MNLF, but is in no way comparable in attitudes or practices to Islamic fundamentalist organizations elsewhere in East Asia. The Moros have benefited from the support of the Organization of Islamic Conferences, and have maintained close relations with Muslims in Indonesia and Malaysia. However, MILF relations with the small terrorist (and largely criminal) group Abu Sayyaf and the Indonesia-based Jemaah Islamiyah have been sporadic and loose, and in the context of the ongoing peace discussions the MILF has distanced itself completely from those organizations.

Overall, although religious differences have partly shaped the conflict, the roots of the conflict have been the clash of interests in land and other natural resources, and the identity issues emerging from the de facto second-class status of much of the Moro population. Complicating the

picture, a number of non-Malay indigenous peoples (collectively referred to as "Lumads") have historically been pushed aside in turn by Spanish and American colonizers, Christian settlers, and the Moros themselves. They were first displaced from the lowlands to the highlands (mainly in the Cotabato-Sarangani area); then put under pressure from the outsiders' rush to exploit the timber and the gold of the highlands; and today are viewed as inferior (including by the Moros themselves), and lack a role and a voice in the peace negotiations. Yet, loosely paralleling the situation in the Amazon basin, the involvement of indigenous people in the peace process and their active cooperation with its implementation will be important not only in itself and for a lasting political solution, but also for a healthy environmental protection strategy.

As inevitable in a brief summary, the situation on the ground is more complex than indicated here. There are three major complicating factors. The first is the vast difference in economic interests among Christians themselves between the economic and commercial elite and the majority of Christians. The other two are more directly relevant to the violence. Chronic conflict among different "clans" (sometimes erroneously referred to as "tribes") within the Muslim population, generates some part of the violence and sporadic flare-ups—often drawing in military reaction. Also, ordinary but widespread banditry confuses both the origin of violent attacks, extortion and kidnapping and the often indiscriminate response of the Philippine military. To some extent, the internecine conflict among Muslim "clans" have been suppressed or hidden by the nationalist-religious organized rebellion, and the existence of a common "outside" opponent. To that extent, therefore, peace might allow them to bubble up to the surface, and a significant qualifier should be appended to the probability of realization of the dynamic benefits and potential peace dividends listed later in this paper. On the other side of the ledger, however, peace would also contribute to restoring law and order and improving overall security in central and southwestern Mindanao."

February 2003 attacks on MILF camps seen by local groups as part of a strategy to expropriate Moro people from their lands
NCCP & MCPA, 21 February 2005, p. 7

"'Poor people in a rich country' is the sad and ironic reality for both the Filipino and the Bangsamoro people. A serious look at the situation of the Bangsamoro specifically in their traditional homeland will bring one to understand why their communities remain a battlefield between people in resistance and forces who want to subjugate them and expropriate their lands.

To give us a glimpse:

Davao, Cotabato, Basilan, Sulu and Zamboanga are host to a number of rubber, timber, banana and pineapple plantations that bring wealth to a number of big corporations operating in the Philippines. These are the same provinces where one finds Bangsamoro communities who, amidst a backdrop of wealth, still remain in abject poverty;

The Philippines has the capacity to produce 8 barrels of oil and natural gas every day and as much as 500 to 600 barrels of crude oil every day. More than 60% of these resources can be found in Mindanao.

According to the Philippine Contracting Round (PCR) conducted by the Department of Energy (DOE) on August 2003, there are 3 major oil sites in the Philippines namely the Palawan Waters, Sulu Sea Basin where the Reed Bank and Cotabato Basin could be found. Upon U.S. President Bush's State Visit last August 2003, the Arroyo government promised to open more than 46 "oil and exploration contracts" in the South China Sea and Mindanao. Not coincidentally, Liguasan Marsh, which is part of the Reed Bank and Cotabato Basin, was the target of the AFP-led attack in 2003 ostensibly to flush-out the MILF guerillas. Sulu now is under heavy military operations. Palawan is also home to a number of Bangsamoro communities."

"All-out" war in 2000 attributed to the presence of vast natural resources in Mindanao's Moro areas

Oxfam November 2000 pp. 4-5

"Mindanao spreads over 94, 229 sq km/34 percent of country's land area and provides a substantial contribution to the country's economy. The moro areas in Maguindanao, Sultan Kudrat, North and South Cotabato, Basilan and the Sulu islands have rich reserves of untapped natural resources, raw materials and, cheap labor. The GoP's all-out war against the MILF has mainly been because of these resources.

As many observe, Mindanao is the 'Land of Promises' and in fact is the 'Rice Bowl' of the Philippines. The land is characterized by fertile soil suitable to cultivate a variety of crops and has a timberland of nearly 39 per cent of nation's forest cover, despite massive deforestation. These areas, especially those within the MILF camps have potentials for super profits.

Mindanao represents 48 per cent of gold production, 63 per cent nickel and 18 per cent charcoal in the country's total reserves. The Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC) is eyeing on a marshland in the said area for natural gas extraction. The Moroland Sugar Corporation is planning to establish a milling facility within a 25,000 hectare land area which will traverse six municipalities. The Consunji concession and a Malaysian corporation are planning to log and to put up a palm oil tree plantation respectively in the town of Buldon. These are but examples of the region's potentials as an investor's haven. The MILF is a deterrent to the government's program of attracting more foreign investors in the region."

Competing claims over land is one of the root cause and trigger of conflict in Mindanao (January 2007)

- Introduction of the Regalian Doctrine on Property Ownership, led to the widespread displacement of Lumads and Muslims who held their lands on communal ownership basis.
- A great majority of lands in the CAAs are now titled or under some form of private ownership, making it difficult for ancestral land claims or ownership to operate in these areas.
- Rights of IP to hold lands under ancestral claims or ownership are officially recognized by the IPRA, but it is not yet operational in the ARMM region and does not apply to Muslims.
- According to the JNA study, 3 distinct domains will have to be delineated to find a workable solution to competing land claims in the Mindanao CAAs. These are the ancestral domain claims of the Muslims, the ancestral claims of the IPs or Lumads, and the claims of private landowners.
- Land disputes among and between Moro clans are often triggers of conflict today in Mindanao. In January 2007, a land dispute involving many individuals belonging to various Moro clans led to fighting between the MILF and members of a paramilitary group.

Government of the Philippines, International Funding Agencies, Mindanao Stakeholders, December 2005, Integrative Report, p. 41

"Competing claims over land in the CAAs has been one of the root causes and triggers of conflict in these communities. The introduction of the concept that the state has ownership of all natural resources, known as the Regalian Doctrine on Property Ownership, led to the widespread displacement of Lumads and Muslims who held their lands on communal ownership basis. Christian settlers, because of their knowledge of the law, were able to obtain titles to lands previously cultivated by Muslims and Lumads. In some cases, large tracts of Muslim and Lumad lands were fraudulently acquired by people occupying key positions in the government.

There is a geographical pattern to the displacement of the Muslims and IPs. Coastal and low-lying areas, which are the most fertile lands, were occupied by Christian settlers while the Muslims and IPs were pushed to inland and upland areas. Moreover, a great majority of lands in the CAAs are now titled or under some form of private ownership, making it difficult for ancestral land claims or ownership to operate in these areas.

The government has passed the IPRA as a means of recognizing the right of Indigenous Peoples to hold lands under ancestral claims or ownership. The Muslims, however, refuse to be categorized as IPs. In fact, IPRA is not yet operational in the ARMM region."

Government of the Philippines, International Funding Agencies, Mindanao Stakeholders, December 2005, Rural Development Report, pp. 70-72

"The fundamental point of contention regarding the land problem in Mindanao is that the Regalian doctrine of property ownership imposed by the Christian government in Manila has effectively deprived many Muslims and Indigenous People (IPs) of their land claims due to its non-recognition of ancestral land claim or ownership. Private individuals knowledgeable about the law were able to title lands under their names (in some instances, fraudulently), and some of these lands were traditionally owned by the Muslims.

Because of the conflicting land ownership frameworks, the Muslims are demanding that their traditional lands be returned (particularly, if fraudulently acquired) or that they be compensated adequately. On the other hand, many Christian settlers feel that these properties were acquired through legitimate market transactions between buyers and sellers acting in good faith. Thus, they object to any move that the lands they possess be returned to the Muslims.

Apart from the Regalian doctrine of property ownership, there are more recent legislations enacted that conflict with the land ownership claims of both the Muslims and the Lumads in Mindanao. For instance, PD 705 or the Revised Forestry Code provides that land of the public domain with slopes of 18% or higher cannot be classified as alienable and disposable. However, in most cases, particularly in the CAAs, the Muslims and IPs have occupied and utilized lands with slopes greater than 18% for agricultural production.

Another recent law is the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA). It is an attempt to recognize the IP's claim to their ancestral land and remedy the inadequacies of previous land laws. Unfortunately, IPRA contains inconsistencies highlighted by its stipulation that while recognizing customary tenurial systems, it at the same time guarantees the protection of the bundle of rights associated with landownership under the Regalian doctrine.

In the JNA consultations, key informants have articulated the sentiment that the Bangsamoro people were not recognizing the IPRA. Consistent with this view is the fact that IPRA does not operate within the ARMM. Muslim respondents also emphasized that they do not consider themselves as IPs. Necessarily, IPRA, which is the only legal framework that provides the mechanism for ensuring access to and ownership of ancestral land, is meaningless as far as they are concerned.

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM

Three distinct domains will have to be delineated to find a workable solution to competing land claims in the Mindanao CAAs. These are the ancestral domain claims of the Muslims, the ancestral claims of the IPs or Lumads, and the claims of private landowners. Apparently, there are overlaps among these claims. A resolution of these competing claims will require consideration of the mode of their acquisition, the geographical location of the land, and the extent or prevalence of private land ownership in a particular area.

Fraudulent Land Transactions

The demand for the re-acquisition of the ancestral lands of the Muslims in Mindanao has been dramatized mainly by anecdotal evidences of fraudulent and malicious land transactions. Some cases reportedly involve highly systematic and elaborate schemes where high government officials, in collaboration with Bureau of Lands officials, would title huge tracts of land under their names without prior knowledge and consent of existing occupants and claimants.

Another technique employed was direct private transactions between indigenous landowners and Christian settlers, which due to asymmetry in market information, would put the former at a disadvantage. In some instances, the heirs to these lands acquired through fraudulent and malicious transactions, have sought legal remedies to recover their ancestral lands.

In a number of occasions, these cases trigger conflicts that go beyond family feuds. It is obvious that for lands acquired maliciously and fraudulently, the government should affirm the right of the Muslims and IPs over these properties.

Displacement and Land Use Rights

Prior to the armed conflict in the late 1960s, Muslims and Christians were living in relative harmony. For example, there was peaceful co-existence between the Muslims and Christians inhabiting the two Lanao provinces then. When the conflict escalated, the religious and cultural divide was highlighted by the geographical separation of the two groups of people. The coastal areas of the provinces became predominantly Christian and the inland areas, Muslim.

Consequently, Muslims had to abandon their lands in the coastal areas while Christians in the inland areas had to transfer to coastal areas. A similar situation prevailed in the other conflict-affected provinces, such as North Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, Zamboanga del Sur, and Basilan.

While displaced landowners from both sides may have ownership rights over land in their original communities, they may no longer be interested in exercising their usufruct right over their lands because of demographic changes. Further, due to geographical and psychosocial constraints, displaced landowners from both sides are now uncertain as to the legal and factual status of their abandoned lands. For practical reason, it might no longer be feasible to return untitled lands in these areas to their original claimants."

Complex land dispute is the root cause of fighting and displacement incident in Midsayap, Cotabato

Bantay Ceasefire, 29 January 2007

"Everyone agrees that the root cause of the conflict is land dispute, but not everybody knows it is a deep-seated and very complicated problem that involves a lot of individuals, some of them are economically and politically powerful. Except for a 19-hectare parcel of land, the residents do not know exactly how vast all the parcels of disputed land, except by pegging that it could be more than 3,000 hectares.

What complicates the problem are disputes over parcels of land between and among Moro clans that caused some existing ridos (family feuds) among themselves, some of them are even close relatives. And, aside from disputes over parcels of land among the Moros themselves, who are all local inhabitants of the place, are a number other land disputes between Moro families in the area and claimants who are not residents of the village. These other non-Moro claimants are from the town of Carmen, also in Cotabato Province, and the city of Koronadal in South Cotabato province. (Names are available on request basis)

Compounding the complication is a Voluntary Offer to Sell arranged by a non-resident of the village who listed down some Muslim residents of Mudseng as VOS beneficiaries, including some who were actually not working in any of the parcels of the disputed land, while failing to list down some who have actually been working there for quite a time already. (Names are available on request basis)

Some of those not listed VOS beneficiaries, who are relatives of the late Tugal Barangay Chair Tubog Pulalon, reportedly occupied and worked on some parcels of land they have laid claims by "using force." They are known to have powerful firearms. (Names are available on request basis)

These problems was reportedly raised already in a forum held in Rangaban some time ago and Midsayap Mayor Romeo Arana and the local Department of Environment and Natural Resources have reportedly ordered a status quo pending resolution of the conflict in a proper venue, but since the resolution of the problem had taken so long, some claimants have taken the law into their hands. Status quo, according to the understanding of the residents, means the actual occupants of the contested parcels of land would be allowed to till the land while the dispute is still being resolved. This decision was, however, perceived by some claimants as "unfair."

The MILF also claimed it already started a process of resolving this conflict, but the recent armed conflict has stalled it."

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)

- Following the Jabitah Massacre of 1968 where around 28 Tausug youth were killed, 13 ethnolinguistic Islamized tribes eventually came together into the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1969.
- The MNLF began as an armed revolutionary movement of the Moro people espousing the right to self-determination and, in particular, struggling against the Philippine Republic and for the creation of an independent Bangsamoro homeland.
- The MNLF entered into the Tripoli Agreement with the Philippine government in 1976 under the prodding of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). This sparked a rift in the Moro leadership and led to the formation of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 1984, which built its armed camps and communities in mainland Mindanao.
- The MILF particularly distinguished itself from the secular MNLF, under its chairman Misuari, by pushing the Islamic character of the Moro struggle for a Bangsamoro homeland to the fore.

UNICEF, October 2006, pp. 32-33

"At the turn of the last century, while the nationalist intelligentsia and disaffected peasants and workers in the islands of Luzon and the Visayas fought the struggle for liberation against Spain, Muslim-dominated Mindanao remained independent of colonial rule. Three-and-a-half centuries of Spanish colonialism's "Sword and Cross" strategy had failed to thoroughly colonize the islands, and Muslim resistance particularly in the Sultanates of Maguindanao and Sulu remained strong. Moro warriors and their families successfully frustrated Spanish attempts to subdue them and the colonizers were restricted to limited enclaves of heavily fortified Spanish garrisons in the northern coastlines of Mindanao. The MILF's struggle today claims the legacy of protecting the ancestral domains of the Moro sultanates.

Mindanao was included in the sale of the Philippine islands to the US by Spain in the 1898 Treaty of Paris. But unlike the war of occupation that American troops fought against the Katipunan in the North, the US initiated a Peace Treaty with the Sultanates through the help of the Caliph of Saudi Arabia. Under the treaty the US paid allowances to the Sultans. US colonial rule saw the

deepening of encroachments into erstwhile Moro territories: US corporations gained control of vast tracts of land and forests; and there was a purposeful effort to populate Mindanao with Christian settlers as a tactic to quell Moro resistance.

Organized armed Moro resistance had begun at least as early as 1902, with Maranaos attacking a US cavalry detachment near Cotabato. The resistance quickly escalated and the Americans responded with a bloody campaign of repression. This included such incidents as the infamous 1906 Bud Dajo massacre in Jolo where a thousand men, women and children holding their ground against US troops were massacred. The last great Moro defiance was the battle of Bud Bagsak in 1912, where the decisive US victory involved the killing of five hundred men, women and children.

The US succeeded where Spain had failed. It combined brutal “scorched earth” military tactics with divisive policies of Moro elite cooptation – “dollar diplomacy” and courting selected quarters of the Moro leadership with scholarships, foreign trips and domestic privileges – and the pseudo-benevolent building of schools and hospitals.

In 1935, the Commonwealth government’s “Quirino-Recto Colonization Act” paved the way for the massive and uncontrolled entry of settlers from Luzon and the Visayas where Mindanao was projected as the new frontier and “the land of promise”. All these resulted in the massive displacement of Moro people by corporations and Christian settlers who, through government sponsorship and land acts, obtained land titles even for areas Moros had occupied for generations.

This situation did not change when the US passed on the reigns of governance of the entire country, including Mindanao, to the Filipino elite after the Second World War. In the decades that followed, US transnational corporations (TNCs) and the domestic elite retained their claims on and control of the island’s resources. Settlers continued to be encouraged to go to the Mindanao frontier as part of official state policy to contain growing peasant unrest in Luzon and the Visayas. It was only a matter of time and circumstance before the Moros mustered their forces and once more waged armed resistance.

The precipitating incident was the Jabidah Massacre of 1968 where around 28 Tausug youth being trained by the Philippine military for a clandestine commando operation to annex Sabah were killed, for still unclear reasons, when their mission was aborted. The Marcos regime was said to be eyeing the rich resources of Sabah which was part of the Sultanate of Sulu (for which Malaysia continues to pay rent to the Sultan) and still had extensive ties with the southern islands of Sulu. The massacre deeply affected a generation of Moro students studying in the secular universities in Manila and Islamic universities in Cairo, Egypt. Radicalized by the nationalist movements of the 1960s which coincided with Egyptian Pan-Arabic assertions at the time, these young students were to lead the armed Moro resistance in the next decades. The incident galvanized the Moro Independence Movement (MIM) and the eventual coming together of 13 ethnolinguistic Islamized tribes into the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1969: the Tausug, Maguindanaon, Maranao, Iranon, Yakan, Samal, Kalagan, Kalibugan, Molbog, Sangil, Palawani, Jama Mapun, and Badjao.

The MNLF and its military arm, the Bangsa Moro Army (BMA), began as an armed revolutionary movement of the Moro people espousing the right to self-determination and, in particular, struggling against the Philippine Republic and for the creation of an independent Bangsamoro homeland. The Moro struggle has ever been an assertion of political and military control over territories in Mindanao based on the premise of a historical Bangsamoro homeland with a strong Islamic tradition.

The MNLF leadership as represented by their two leaders, Nur Misuari and Hashim Salamat, reflected the distinction between secular-nationalist and Islamic revivalist leanings within the MNLF. This distinction would bear on the subsequent development of the Moro struggle in the years to come.

Fighting became fierce in Muslim Mindanao especially after the declaration of Martial Law in 1972 and casualties quickly reached tens of thousands. The MNLF entered into the Tripoli Agreement with the Philippine government in 1976 under the prodding of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC); this agreement would supposedly henceforth be the framework for resolving the basic Moro issues. Fighting still went on sporadically for the next few years, but, more significantly, the agreement sparked a rift in the Moro leadership and hierarchy. Ideological and organizational differences within the MNLF eventually led to the formation of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 1984 headed by then MNLF vice-chairman Salamat. The MILF built its armed camps and communities in mainland Mindanao. The Bangsamoro Islamic Auxiliary Force (BIAF) was also formed. The MILF particularly distinguished itself from the secular MNLF, under its chairman Misuari, by pushing the Islamic character of the Moro struggle for a Bangsamoro homeland to the fore.

The MNLF had meanwhile accepted a Final Peace Agreement with the Philippine government in 1996 which involved political accommodation with the Philippine government. Prof. Misuari became the governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and chairman of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), while the whole of the MNLF-BMA was integrated in the AFP and the PNP. However mutual accusations of violations and non-implementation of the agreement as well as allegations of corruption soon emerged in the years that followed.

Moreover, the Philippine government declared an “all-out war” against the Moro armed struggle in 2000 that gravely affected the communities of both the MILF and MNLF across Southern Mindanao. The contemporary US-declared global war on terror has also renewed focus on armed Islamic groups as a potential threat not just to the Philippine Republic but to US security as well. This has resulted in renewed military offensives including the major 2003 AFP offensive against the MILF’s Buliok Complex headquarters. Moro communities in Sulu and elsewhere have also been bombarded and attacked under the pretext of military operations against the bandit Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and Pentagon Gang.”

The New People's Army (NPA)

- The CPP was founded on December 26, 1968. Its armed wing, the NPA, was in turn established on March 29, 1969 with less than 60 fighters and only 34 firearms, just nine of which were high-powered rifles.
- The CPP condemns the “semicolonial and semifeudal” character of present-day Philippine society and says it is currently waging a “national democratic revolution” which, upon victory, will proceed to the “socialist revolution”.
- In its struggle, the CPP also includes the revolutionary forces constituted by the people. This concept of a mass-based struggle goes far in explaining the relationships the CPP-NPA-NDFP aims to build with local communities through its land reform, health, education and other “mass campaigns”.
- Expanding rapidly during the 1970s, the armed struggle intensified during 1980 and 1992. It contributed to bringing down the Marcos regime in 1986.
- Due to tactical errors and military adventurism, the NPA gradually lost its influence and capacity and by the start of the 1990s, the Ramos administration declared “strategic victory”.

- From 1992 to 1998, the CPP conducted its so-called “Second Great Rectification Movement”, or an essentially ideological campaign to reaffirm the CPP-NPA-NDFP’s adherence to basic revolutionary principles. This was apparently successful and the revolutionary armed Left grew steadily and gradually in the latter part of the 1990s.
- In early 2006, the NPA reported “operating in more than 120 guerrilla fronts, which cover 800 municipalities in 70 out of 79 Philippine provinces”.³ Public statements of defense officials and military officers of NPA strength tend to vary and estimates over the period 2001-2005 ranged from some 8,000 to 11,000 troops armed with 6,000 to 8,000 high-powered rifles.

UNICEF, October 2006, pp. 30-32

"Peasant and, later, worker movements have been a long-standing feature of Philippine history. There were hundreds of spontaneous armed uprisings across the country throughout Spanish colonial rule. These culminated in the Katipunan-led Philippine Revolution of 1896. However, efforts to realize an independent Philippine nation were thwarted by the intervention and colonization of an ascendant and expansionist United States (US). Nonetheless, nationalist peasant and worker uprisings continued in the face of determined US attempts to crush all dissent and rebellion. The Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP) was established in 1930 during American colonial rule.

The current armed struggle of the CPP-NPA-NDFP claims continuity with this narrative of struggle. According to Amado Guerrero, founding CPP chairperson, the democratic demand of agrarian reform and the nationalist demand to free the nation from neocolonial rule remain necessary to redress enduring conditions of exploitation and oppression. The CPP was founded in Tarlac province, Central Luzon on December 26, 1968 (the CPP also uses the term “re-establishment” to emphasize its repudiation of the earlier PKP). The NPA in turn was established on March 29, 1969 with less than 60 fighters and only 34 firearms, just nine of which were high-powered rifles.

The CPP condemns the “semicolonial and semifeudal” character of present-day Philippine society in which the Filipino people suffer from “foreign and feudal domination”.¹ It says that it is currently waging a “national democratic revolution” which, upon victory, will proceed to the “socialist revolution”. The class lines of the struggle are clearly drawn. On one side is the “joint class dictatorship of the comprador big bourgeoisie and the landlord class subservient to the foreign monopoly bourgeoisie” and on the other the “basic oppressed classes [of] the working class and the peasantry”; there is also the “intermediate social strata [of] the urban petty bourgeoisie and the middle or national bourgeoisie”. The integral components of the “protracted people’s war” are also made explicit: “revolutionary armed struggle, land reform and mass-base building”.

Significantly, the mainstream revolutionary Left does not conceive its struggle as waged merely by the armed forces of the NPA. Rather, it also includes the “motive forces of the revolution” that are organized to overthrow their class enemies: “the working class comprising about 15 percent of the population; the peasantry, at least 75 percent; the urban petty bourgeoisie, about eight percent; and the middle bourgeoisie, about one percent.”² This is pertinent to the study at hand because this concept of a mass-based struggle goes far in explaining the relationships the CPP-NPA-NDFP aims to build with local communities through its land reform, health, education and other “mass campaigns”.

The 1970s was a decade of laying the foundations of an armed struggle that would prove resilient for decades to come. Despite the declaration of Martial Law in 1972, the revolutionary armed Left continued to expand nationwide. By the mid-1970s it had reached: the Cordilleras, Cagayan Valley, Southern Tagalog and Bicol in Luzon; Negros and Samar islands in the Visayas; and Davao in Mindanao. Consolidated guerrilla zones covering entire municipalities and, in some

areas, even stable guerrilla bases started to become more defined. The NDFP was formally established on April 24, 1973.

The period from the 1980s to around 1992 at first saw an intensification of the armed struggle. Fighting in the countryside and the political struggle by progressive and Left forces in the cities combined to bring the Marcos dictatorship down in 1986, by which time the NPA had some 6,100 high-powered rifles. By the late 1980s, however, the NPA began to engage in military adventurism under a framework of "strategic counter-offensive" (SCO) comprised largely of the premature regularization of large military formations which engaged in ever-larger military actions in the countryside at the cost of neglecting organizing work and building mass support.

Also within the SCO framework, the NPA engaged in reckless partisan operations in urban centers even in the National Capital Region (NCR) and Metro Manila itself. These weaknesses were exploited by the Aquino administration's "Total War" implemented through consecutive military operational plans reaching into the Ramos administration: Oplan Lambat Bitag I, II and III from 1989-1994. Overall, by the start of the 1990s, the revolutionary movement had so diminished in intensity that the Ramos administration declared "strategic victory" and turned over primary responsibility for counter-insurgency from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to the Philippine National Police (PNP).

The CPP, however, repudiated the SCO and other tactical "errors", and from 1992-1998 conducted its so-called "Second Great Rectification Movement", or an essentially ideological campaign to reaffirm the CPP-NPA-NDFP's adherence to basic revolutionary principles. This was apparently successful and the revolutionary armed Left grew steadily and gradually in the latter part of the 1990s. The cumulative growth eventually led to a general acknowledgement that the government's earlier declaration of "strategic victory" was premature.

It appears that recent years have seen the resurgence of the revolutionary Left. The NPA identifies three strategic phases in its armed struggle: defensive, stalemate and offensive. In early 2006 it reported "approaching and developing the middle phase of the strategic defensive" as well as "operating in more than 120 guerrilla fronts, which cover 800 municipalities in 70 out of 79 Philippine provinces".³ Public statements of defense officials and military officers of NPA strength tend to vary and estimates over the period 2001-2005 ranged from some 8,000 to 11,000 troops armed with 6,000 to 8,000 high-powered rifles.

In any case, the AFP recognizes that the guerrilla fronts within which the NPA maneuvers have reached beyond forest hinterlands and now cover large portions of the land area of entire provinces and even regions, extending even to more populated areas and town centers.⁴ The CPP-NPA-NDFP also claims to have created clandestine "organs of political power" in the countryside in the build-up to eventual seizure of state power on a nationwide scale. All these have prompted the recent reaffirmation by government officials that the armed revolutionary Left is the country's greatest national security threat, and calls by the Arroyo administration for "final blows" to it. Primary responsibility for counter-insurgency has been returned to the AFP and formal mechanisms have even been created for erstwhile civilian social and economic projects to be much more closely coordinated with the military. Meanwhile, peace talks between the Philippine government and the NDFP have remained stalled since 2004 amidst NDFP accusations of government non-compliance with previously agreed upon processes."

Causes of displacement

Conflict and displacement in Mindanao (1996-2000)

- Nationhood among Islamized ethnic groups in the south is based on specific ethnic identifications unified by Islamic tradition that first influenced the Sulu islands in the 13th century.
- The 1996 peace agreement between the MNLF and the GRP has not prevented the resurgence of armed conflict and the emergence of new representations asserted by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf (Father of the Sword) Group in Mindanao.
- In 1997, an attack by government forces on MILF's Rajamuda camp led to the displacement of 75,000 people.
- In 2000, all-out armed confrontations between government forces and the MILF, as well as the Abu Sayyaf, escalated in 9 municipalities of Maguindanao, 5 in Cotabato, 3 in Lanao del Sur, 1 in South Cotabato and in the cities of Cotabato and General Santos.
- By August 439,000 people had evacuated of whom 340,265 were housed in evacuation centers

Oxfam January 2001, pp. 5-6

"The Philippines has various ethnic minorities within the larger Christian-Filipino society. While the state has appeased most of the more than eighty ethno-linguistic groups nationwide, it has not made peace with the Islamized ethnic groups in the south. Nationhood among Islamized ethnic groups in the south is based on specific ethnic identifications unified by Islamic tradition that first influenced the Sulu islands in the 13th century. In the most recent phase of the Muslim struggle for nationhood, the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) made peace with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1996.

Despite high expectations, the peace agreement has not prevented the resurgence of armed conflict and the emergence of new representations asserted by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf (Father of the Sword) Group in Mindanao, now renamed as the Al-Harakatul-ul-Islamiya (Islamic Movement).

Barely a month after the signing of the Peace Agreement, the MILF prepared for war and began to reassert its own representation of the demands of the Moro people. In a display of mass strength during the Bangsa Moro People's Assembly in Cotabato City on 3-5 December, 1996, it declared its rejection of the Peace Agreement and reaffirmed its commitment to Islamic independence.

Four years later, all-out armed confrontations between government forces and the MILF, as well as the Abu Sayyaf, caught domestic and international public attention. Hostilities escalated in 9 municipalities of Maguindanao, 5 in Cotabato, 3 in Lanao del Sur, 1 in South Cotabato and in the cities of Cotabato and General Santos.

Refusing to recognize the MILF as a legitimate representative of the Moro people, the Philippine government engaged in dual tactics: military confrontations and piece-meal negotiations. Initial meetings between the MILF and the GRP in April, May and June of 1997 were bogged down by continued fighting. In June 1987[sic], government forces attempted to seize control of Camp Rajamuda, the MILF's second biggest camp, resulting in the displacement of around 75,000 people.

Intense fighting continued until July after which the GRP and MILF signed an Agreement on the General Cessation of Hostilities (AGCH). This was followed by the signing of the Implementing Administrative Guidelines on the AGCH on September 12, 1997. By November, the two parties had signed a Ceasefire Agreement.

Upon the election of Estrada to the presidency, his government appointed a new negotiating panel to talk peace with the MILF. What followed was a rough process that swung from war to negotiations finally leading to the government's all out offensive in April 2000.

Two days after the government offensive, the MILF unilaterally suspended talks with the government. By May 7, 2000, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) reported that the clashes in Maguindanao, Cotabato and Lanao had already affected 23,031 families (123,758 persons of whom 74,691 were housed in evacuation centers). By August 439,000 people had evacuated of whom 340,265 were housed in evacuation centers."

Nearly one million people displaced by government's war against the MILF (2000)

- During 2000, increased militarization and fighting between the army and the MILF in Mindanao led to the destruction of over 6,000 homes and the internal displacement of nearly one million persons.
- Large-scale military operations have also been undertaken in Basilan and Jolo as part of search and rescue operations for Abu Sayyaf hostages.
- UNDP notes that only 10% of the persons whose homes have been destroyed desired to return to their place of origin as of October 2000, mainly because of the presence of the military around their homes.
- In Mindanao the evacuee camps were in a crisis situation during months with high mortality rates, especially among children.

UNDP 13 November 2000, pp. 4-5

"The militarization of the conflict in the course of the year 2000 has led to deterioration in the peace and development situation. The government has successfully reasserted control over areas previously held by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The break-up of the territorial bases of the MILF has led to the fragmentation of its permanent forces into decentralized and at times independent guerrilla commands. Large-scale military operations have also been undertaken in Basilan and Jolo as part of search and rescue operations for Abu Sayyaf hostages held for ransom and as human shields. Terrorist tactics have been utilized by insurgents in central Mindanao and by the kidnapping gangs in Basilan and Jolo.

Increased militarization has led to more civilian than military fatalities. In the period of maximum combat in the year 2000 (January-August), there were 218 soldiers and militiamen killed and 354 civilian fatalities, as well as 457 MILF killed. The government also reports that more civilians died in the evacuee centers than in combat. That figure of over 700 civilian deaths in combat or in evacuee centers is greater than the combined soldier, militia, and MILF losses of 677 in the same period. Increased militarization has also led to the destruction of over 6000 homes and the internal displacement of nearly one million persons, 300,000 of whom were in that status in October 2000. The National Peace Forum identified two cases that they consider to constitute intentional destruction of housing by the Army (Nalapoan Pikit, North Cotabato and Matanog, Maguindanao). The same representatives point out that this should not be considered a pattern in that other cases have not been identified. However, the tactics employed did objectively lead to a large number of houses destroyed and a massive displacement of civilian population. The type of displacement produced is also qualitatively different from those seen in recent years. There now

exists a tendency toward longer-term displacements for the first time since the 1970's. Only 10% of the persons whose homes have been destroyed desire to return to their place of origin as of October, 2000. In some cases relocation is being undertaken. The displaced persons do not wish to return to the locations of their previous homes due to the presence of the military, not because they fear the soldiers, but rather because stationary or in transit military draw MILF attacks that frequently place civilians in cross-fire situations. The net result is that human security in the areas affected has deteriorated as a result of militarization.

The levels and types of population displacements produced by militarization have the potential to reproduce the armed conflict through the expansion of the pool of potential insurgent combatants. In insurgencies with social and political support, acute or chronic civilian casualties, widespread destruction of property, and massive population displacements increase the pool of potential insurgents. New combatants may enter either established groups or form new ones. Evacuee camps, especially when they become permanent, often become insurgent recruitment centers. The most critical group is quite obviously young unemployed men whose families have been affected by the conflict.

In Mindanao the evacuee camps were in a crisis situation in June as evidenced by high mortality rates, especially among children. The crisis has subsequently subsided but conditions in many camps remain overcrowded and deficient. Some people are being permanently relocated and some of the housing now considered temporary will most probably become permanent. Most all of the people in the camps can be considered poor in that people with more resources generally find other accommodations. All have suffered economic setbacks as a result of their displacement."

Government's military operation against the MILF displaces some 400,000 people in 2003

- During 2003, the government's war against "lawless elements" resulting in a resumption of fighting with the MILF caused the displacement of 400,000 in Mindanao, mainly in the Muslim ARMM region.
- The conflict degenerated when in November 2002, massive deployment of government troops near the Liguasan Marsh and later in December fighting between military and MILF caused residents to flee their homes.
- In January 2003, massive evacuation of civilians started with at least 1,100 B'laan and Maguindanaon (indigenous peoples in Mindanao) families fleeing from seven barangays in Marang, North Cotabato.
- In early February, some 7,000 families or 42,000 persons, more than half of Pikit's population, fled their homes to avoid the clash between the MILF and the military.
- On February 11, a major offensive was launched by the government against the MILF.

TFDP January 2004, p. 2

"In 2003, two years after PGMA said that the task of rebuilding Mindanao, of achieving peace and oneness as a people, as a nation, should begin, renewed fighting broke out. The PGMA government publicly declared a war against "lawless elements" but whose real objective was revealed later as an offensive against Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) forces allegedly massing up in the Buliok complex. The military eventually wrested control of the area from the MILF and even trumpeted the capture of the safe house of the MILF chairperson, Hashim Salamat. But the guerillas responded with ambushes, raids of military detachments and toppling of transmission towers.

This war was launched despite ongoing peace talks with the MILF and while agreements for a ceasefire was tenuously in place.

As a result, 400,000 human beings were displaced; their lives and livelihoods in shatters, and their children forced to abandon their education. As of July 2003, hundreds have yet to return to their homes and farms.

In June 17, it was reported that the refugee death toll has risen to 215, with 43 infants and children below 10 years old who had died of easily treatable diseases like measles, pneumonia, diarrhea and dehydration."

ACT 4 March 2003

"As early as November 2002, massive deployment of government troops has been reported near the Liguasan Marsh. There were also reports of fighting between government troops and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front last December 6, 2002, prompting some 300 residents of Sitio Lagao, Brgy. Langgapan, Sultan sa Barongis to flee their homes. Accounts from residents, say that the village was having a "*kanduli*" (Muslim thanksgiving festival) when around 100 soldiers came and burned at least 11 houses.

On December 7, 2003, Army soldiers picked up a Barangay council member from his house in Brgy Muslim, Talayan Mindanao. His body was later found that afternoon in the nearby village of Balabag. In the evening, more Army soldiers entered the village and clashed with MILF rebels. OV-10 planes also bombed Brgy Katibpuan.

On January 4, 2003, around 300 armed persons were sighted to have entered in the remote communities along the tri-boundary of Carmen, President Roxas and Arakan, all municipalities of North Cotabato, particularly in the municipalities beside the Pulangi River. This prompted the people in the community to move out from their homes and seek refuge to safer places. A few days later, the massive evacuation of civilians started with at least 1,100 B'laan and Maguindanaon (indigenous peoples in Mindanao) families fleeing from seven barangays in Marang, North Cotabato.

On January 25, more than 1,000 members of the 40th IB of the Philippine Army based in Carmen, North Cotabato conducted an operation in the area to check on the reported sightings of an armed group. A running battle ensued, which resulted to the killing and wounding of at least 17 persons.

On January 27, the Provincial Governor of North Cotabato backed up by a number of military men entered to check on the incident. Not less than 150 families evacuated to safer grounds. The military build-up starting February 7, 2003 prompted more families to move out from their homes. Evacuation of people was remarkable in Pikit, North Cotabato, where at least five tanks and 10 six-by-six trucks of soldiers or 3,000 government troops from the 602nd Brigade along with several Marine and Navy battalions were deployed. This forced the evacuation of at least 7,000 families or 42,000 persons, more than half of the town's population, to avoid the clash.

On February 11, 2003, an all-out-war offensive against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) was launched by the Armed Forces of the Philippines. According to the military, the assault was purportedly launched to weed out the Pentagon Gang, a notorious kidnap-for-ransom gang, alleged to be hiding in the said area. However, the military through no less than Defense Secretary Angelo Reyes later claimed that the campaign, which is one of the biggest since government and the MILF began peace negotiations, is directed at the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and not against the Pentagon Gang. Moreover, some legislators claim that the ultimate game plan for the renewed military offensives in Mindanao might be the seizure of untapped

resource-rich areas than to counter terrorism. Sen. Aquilino Pimentel and Rep. Gerry Salapudin said in separate interviews that the big natural gas deposits in the marsh might be the target of the military offensives.

It has been two weeks since the intense bombardment, but it seems that there is no respite in sight. Almost everyday, there are reported cases of hostilities. The heavy fighting affected at least 97 barangays in 24 municipalities from the four provinces of North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao and Sulu.

According to the February 20, 2003 Update Report of the government's Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), a total of 34,745 families or 199,283 individuals were affected by the government's all-out-war. The evacuation of families and communities continue as the MILF launched retaliatory attacks."

Philippine's 'war on terror' in Sulu creates large-scale displacement (2005-2006)

- A large-scale military operation was launched by the government against Abu Sayaff and members of a split group of the MNLF in Sulu in February 2005.
- By March 2005, an estimated 58,000 had fled their homes. The municipalities of Indanan and Patikul were the most severely affected.
- During 2006, new offensives by the military created further displacement with at least 3,000 people fleeing their homes between August and September 2006.
- At the end of 2006, an additional 2,000 troops were sent to Sulu to re-inforce the 6,000 strong battalion.

NCCP & MCPA, 21 February 2005, p. 1

"Intense fighting started on February 6, Monday upon the alleged joint offensives of some 500 members of an MNLF Breakaway Group (MBG) together with some Abu Sayyaf elements against an army post in Panamao town in Sulu. On February 8, the AFP ordered the bombardment of alleged Abu Sayyaf lairs in Sulu hinterlands claiming that MBG gunmen have tied up with some 400 elements of the ASG (Quoted from Brig. Gen. Braganza, 17 soldiers killed in Sulu, PDI 2/9/05).

Aimed at pulverizing the MBG and the Abu Sayyaf, the military geared for war. SouthCom Chief Braganza was hence quoted as saying "I have ordered air strikes to punish these renegades... They have asked for it and they will get it (17 soldiers killed in Sulu, PDI 2/9/05)."

AFP troops reached about 3,000 at the earlier stage of fighting aided by howitzers, helicopter gunships, and OV-10s. Like wildfire, the fighting escalated and terror has spread to seven municipalities --- Panamao, the current center of action, Patikul, Panglima Estino, Indanan, Talipao, Luuk and Maimbung."

Mindanao Peaceweavers, April 2005, p. 14

"Reports gathered from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC) – Sulu Chapter revealed that as of March 24, 2005, the internally displaced persons (IDPs) affected by the Sulu war was 9,879 families or about 57, 900 persons. This number is slightly reduced from the reported 15% of the total population (536,000) who rushed to safety during the height of the fighting in early February.

The DSWD admitted that at least 10,000 IDPs, who did not go to designated evacuation centers and instead sought refuge with their families and relatives are yet to receive assistance from the government. On this note, comes the impression that the data on the actual number of the IDPs may have been uncertain or inaccurate, in any case understated.

The largest number of the reported IDPs came from the municipality of Indanan, with 2, 963 families or 17, 778 persons; followed by Patikul with 606 families or 5, 611 persons; and then Panglima Estino with 956 families or 4, 577 persons. The biggest evacuation center in Sulu is in the elementary school of Panglima Mamah, which has no water source. The rest of the IDPs are from Panamao, Jolo, Parang, Kalingalan Caluang, Luuk and Maimbung towns."

DPA, 3 August 2006

"Thousands of people fled their homes as fighting between government troops and al-Qaeda-linked Muslim Abu Sayyaf rebels raged for the third day on a southern Philippine island, the military said Thursday.

Colonel Antonio Supnet, chief of staff of the armed forces' Southern Command, said more than 2,000 people have stayed in two evacuation centres since the fighting broke out Tuesday in Indanan town on Jolo Island, 1,000 kilometres south of Manila."

E-Balita, 15 September 2006

"Military offensives against Abu Sayyaf militants and alleged members of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terror group hiding in the hinterland of the Philippines province of Sulu have displaced almost 1,000 civilians. Abdulwatan Mohammad, provincial director of the Filipino government's social and development office, told Adnkronos International (AKI) that the evacuees have yet to receive any relief assistance from the state.

"This is one of our big concerns. The people seem to be increasing in number but we have yet to deliver them some meaningful assistance," he said.

Evacuees told AKI about their fear and worries. "Our living depends on our small farm but it is dangerous for us to go back to Patikul [the town in Sulu province]," said Welda Silban, 36, who left her home soon after the military operation began more than a month ago.

Silban said she was very worried about her husband who had decided to stay in Patikul at their farm despite the war. "We had no choice. If he came with us, we would all die of hunger," she said while her 13-year old son, Alsiri, hoped for a quick return to normality.

A similar story was told by Rahma Saptula, 41, from Indanan town, who had to leave her husband behind to take their three children to safety. "It was not possible for all of us to go because our little farm and our livelihood are there," she said.

The residents in Jolo were sympathetic towards the plight of the displaced people.

"The military should consider the civilians because they suffered most in this situation," Edmund Gumbahali of the civil society group known as the Concerned Citizens of Sulu said. "I don't think they can get the Abu Sayyaf just by the use of guns," he added.

The 45-day old military offensive in Sulu has left almost 100 dead, both soldiers and rebels."

Reuters, 4 December 2006

" The Philippines sent an additional 2,000 Marines to the southwestern island of Jolo to bolster an offensive against Muslim rebels Abu Sayyaf sheltering members of regional militant group Jemaah Islamiah.

Since Aug. 1, about 6,000 troops have been fighting several hundred Muslim rebels in the latest bid to flush out Islamic militants on Jolo, a remote Abu Sayyaf stronghold in the south of the mainly Roman Catholic country.

"We need fresh legs in the hunt for our high value targets," Lieutenant-Colonel Ariel Caculitan, a Marine spokesman, told reporters a day after the 2nd Marine Brigade arrived.

"The arrival of fresh Marines on Jolo would boost efforts in cornering and finishing off these terrorists."

The Abu Sayyaf's leader, Khaddafy Janjalani, is believed to be hiding on Jolo with two Indonesians suspected of carrying out the 2002 Bali bombings after they were driven out of nearby Mindanao island by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)."

Other causes of conflict and displacement in Mindanao: banditry, clan conflict and the communist insurgency

- In addition to Muslim/Christian communal or Islamic separatist groups, banditry, communist rebels and clan conflict also contribute to violence in Mindanao.
- The Abu Sayyaf group and the Pentagon gang are the most visible kidnap-for-ransom groups active in Mindanao. Military operations against these groups often endanger ceasefires with the MILF.
- Communists NPA rebels are only active in some areas of Mindanao, mostly in areas with little Muslim presence.
- Clan conflicts (or 'rido') are a constant feature of life in Mindanao. These clashes have the potential of triggering ethnic conflict and even military confrontation.

East-West Washington Center, 2005, pp. 4-7

"The conflict situation in Mindanao is quite complex. To understand the effect of civil society's efforts to end the long-running separatist war, we need to sketch this situation. It must be remembered that violent conflict in the southern Philippines is not only of the Muslim/Christian communal or Islamic separatist varieties (though they are the focus of this study). There is banditry (focusing on kidnapping), a communist insurgency, and endemic clan conflict. All three impinge on efforts to resolve the long-running separatist insurgency.

Kidnapping, in fact, plagues many places in the Philippines, and the Filipino-Chinese community is the most frequent target. The phenomenon came to international attention with two kidnappings of foreign tourists—first from the Malaysian island of Sipadan and then from a Filipino resort in the province of Palawan. The notoriety, resources, and reaction these exploits brought to the Abu Sayyaf (including the dispatch of American troops to train Filipinos pursuing the kidnappers) overshadowed a history of kidnapping that has occurred regularly in Mindanao, often linked to "lost commands" (military or insurgent units no longer under the control of their nominal superiors). Foremost among these is the "Pentagon Gang," which operates in localities that are also part of the base of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Operations by the Philippine government's security forces against this gang often endangered cease-fires with the MILF given their forced entry into communities hosting MILF forces. In May 2002, the government and the MILF signed an overall agreement to handle the pursuit of criminal gangs—an agreement that

has yet to be fully operationalized. Still, when the leader of the Pentagon Gang, Tahir Alonto, was killed in military operations in August 2004, the operation had been signaled beforehand to the coordinating committees on the cessation of hostilities—and the MILF had interposed no objection (Mindanews: August 14, 2004; August 19, 2004).

The communist New People's Army (NPA) is active in Mindanao, as it is in many parts of the Philippines, though its areas of operations are more often in Christian or Lumad (indigenous peoples) communities than in areas occupied by Muslims. There are some overlaps—Tulunán, in North Cotabato, for instance, is a peace zone formed after an NPA raid that has also persuaded the MILF not to establish a presence (Rodil 2000: 146–47). The Philippine military on occasion asserts that there are joint operations between the MILF and the NPA (Mindanews: February 9, 2004). The NPA itself refers to an operational agreement with the MILF stipulating they do not operate in each other's territory (Sindapan 2003). Though the MILF has repeatedly denied any link to "terrorist organizations" (meaning Jemaah Islamiah and al-Qaeda), it has been quoted as admitting an understanding with the NPA (Villaviray 2003). Whatever the degree of interaction between the NPA and MILF armed components, the presence of a long-running leftist opposition to the Philippine government has effects on the politics of civil society and conflict management. The National Democratic Front supports the "selfdetermination of the Bangsamoro People" (Muslims) and their direct involvement in all forms of decision making affecting their interests. (It does not support an independent state for Muslims.) Civil society groups in Mindanao sympathetic to "national democratic" analyses of the Philippines tend to use oppression of the Bangsamoro as one bone of contention with the Philippine government. Government policy, along with military operations and alleged human rights violations in Muslim areas, are subjects for political statements and targets for continued mobilization by these groups. The issue of political coloring of civil society activities recurs throughout this study.

Another widespread form of conflict is intracommunity clan conflict. Again not unknown in other parts of the Philippines, this phenomenon remains important as the Philippine government has not been able to enforce laws and maintain order. Thus civilians take disputes into their own hands. Feuds between families often lead to tit-for-tat retaliation organized along family lines.

(...)

To complicate matters, endemic clan conflict sometimes triggers ethnic conflict and even military confrontation. What begins as a dispute between families can end with organized armed forces clashing as parties to the dispute persuade others to become involved—or the Philippine military may mistake a clan clash for a separatist operation and intervene on its own. Consequently, community-level peacemaking must address clan conflict along with ethnic violence. One of the most famous examples of community peacemaking, in the barangay of Maladeg, Sultan Gumander, Lanao del Sur, has expended since the late 1990s at least as much energy on rido (clan conflict) as on Muslim/Christian animosities. Even with these caveats, the fact remains that conflicts due to Muslim separatism form the main challenge to peace and development in Mindanao. There is no evidence, for example, that clan or family conflict was any less prevalent in the past than it is now—yet times of relative peace on the separatist (or communal) front have yielded economic growth in Mindanao. The communist armed threat is not insignificant, but the Muslim threat is geographically concentrated and thus has a greater impact on the areas of central and western Mindanao than does the NPA threat elsewhere in the country."

Government-NPA confrontations on the increase since 2003 (October 2006)

- According to a UNICEF study, armed confrontations between the CPP-NPA-NDFP and state forces have been increasing since 2003, particularly intensifying in 2005, while those against the MILF-BIAF (and MNLF/ASG) have been decreasing since 2003.
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UNICEF, October 2006, pp. 5-39

"The study covers mainly the period 2001-2005. Armed confrontations between the CPP-NPA-NDFP and state forces have been increasing since 2003, particularly intensifying in 2005, while those against the MILF-BIAF (and MNLF/ASG) have been decreasing since 2003. It is relevant that during the period covered the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP)-NDFP peace talks were suspended in 2004 while the GRP-MILF talks continued.

Incidents of fighting with NPA: 90 (2001), 55 (2002), 130 (2003), 157 (2004), 298 (2005)

Incidents of fighting with MILF: 55 (2001), 7 (2002), 82 (2003), 8 (2004), 9 (2005)

IBON monitored 1,061 armed confrontations between the AFP and the various armed groups in the period 2001-2005, for an average of 0.6 armed confrontations per day. The number of incidents and the armed groups involved were: 730 (NPA), 161 (MILF), 6 (MNLF), 166 (ASG). Though increasing in number over the period covered, the fighting was relatively sporadic and scattered considering the breadth of areas in which these armed groups are present. Less quantifiable, but anecdotally observed, is the intensification of counter-insurgency operations by the AFP.

There were 343 civilian casualties (199 killed, 144 wounded) during armed encounters in the period 2001-2005.¹ The ratio of civilian casualties to armed confrontations was lowest in the case of the NPA (1:8) followed by the MILF (1:5), MNLF (1:2) and ASG (1:1). Likewise, the ratio of civilian to combatant casualties is lowest in the case of the NPA (1:28) followed by the MILF (1:11), MNLF (1:5) and ASG (1:8).

There were 195 armed confrontations in the eight provinces covered by the study, with some 50 civilian direct casualties.

The study found evidence to conclude that a significant factor underlying the differential impact of armed conflict on both the vulnerabilities and capacities of communities is whether guerrilla or positional wars are being waged.

The study team also came across many firsthand accounts of a wide range of non-military activities particularly of the NPA. These included small-scale health, education, cultural and socioeconomic projects, and arbitration in intra-community conflicts."

Military operations, displacement, evictions and development projects (January 2007)

- Community respondents to the UNICEF study reported that the motives of some military operations were to clear the way for development projects.
- At the end of 2003, the Philippines was designated by COHRE as one of the top three country violating housing rights.
- According to COHRE, some 145,000 people from Metro Manila and Bulacan province were evicted from their homes between 2005 and 2006 due to the rehabilitation of the Philippine National Railways. A total of 400,000 individuals are to be evicted and displaced by the project – the largest government-initiated displacement of communities in the history of the Philippines.
- The last quarter of 2006 marked the entry of government troops in urban centers particularly in communities planned to be demolished by the government, according to the urban poor group Kadamay.

- According to InPeace, a Mindanao-based human right group, the government has intensified military operations that have been causing massive dislocation of people in areas targeted for mining and other forms of business activities.

UNICEF, October 2006, p. 38

"The intensity of AFP military combat operations against the NPA and MILF in the communities visited by the research varied. This was reflective of the differences between AFP responses to guerrilla and positional warfare. AFP military operations are invariably larger and longer in the case of attacks on fixed positions. The residents in the various areas have estimated these to involve anywhere from about a dozen soldiers to some 400-500 soldiers entering on foot, in jeeps and trucks, or with armored personnel carriers. Sometimes these operations were backed by fighter planes, helicopter gunships and artillery fire. The soldiers sometimes encamped in forested areas far from residents, but also stayed in village centers and homes. Their visible presence in the communities lasted anywhere from a few hours during the day to as long as 3-5 months, even as there have been cases of residents monitoring secret military operations in the outskirts of their villages.

But community respondents also shared their perceptions of other motives behind military operations outside of any immediately precipitating incident. The military's entry has for instance been regarded as clearing operations to pave the way for disadvantageous "development projects" in the community. There were respondents in almost all the research areas – Abra, Capiz, Surigao del Sur, Compostela Valley, North Cotabato and Maguindanao, with the exception of Mindoro Oriental and Leyte – who said they noticed the parallel entry of mining explorations and military forces into their communities."

Davao Today, 2 January 2007

"Aside from battling poverty and hunger, the people of Baseco have yet another pressing concern. They might lose their homes as soon as the privatization of the Manila North Harbor gets underway. Residents here said their community along the shore would be turned into a commercial district similar to that of Baywalk along Manila Bay. In fact, construction was underway when Bulatlat visited the place.

Baseco is only one of seven communities affected by the privatization of the Manila North Harbor. The urban poor group Kadamay (Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap or Mutual Help Association of the Poor) estimated that about 849,000 individuals would be affected by the said government project.

Geneva-based Centre on Housing Rights and Eviction (COHRE) this year named the Philippines as one of three recipients of the Housing Rights Violator Award "for their systematic violation of housing rights and continued failure to abide by their international legal obligations." Nigeria and Greece likewise received the dubious distinction.

COHRE said in a statement issued last Dec 5 that 145,000 individuals or 29,000 families from Metro Manila and Bulacan province have been evicted from their homes since early 2005 due to the rehabilitation of the Philippine National Railways, called the North Rail-South Rail Linkage Project. No less than 80,000 families (400,000 individuals) would be evicted and displaced by the project – the largest government-initiated displacement of communities in the history of the Philippines.

Meanwhile, 3,000 people have been left homeless in Metro Cebu since September in preparation for the 12th ASEAN Summit to be hosted by the Philippines in January. Forty two families (210

people) were left homeless when their houses situated in front of the Shangri-la Mactan Island Resort and Spa in Mactan Island, were demolished by the police in preparation for the summit.

COHRE also reported that more than 600 homes were also demolished in Mandaue City and Lapu-lapu City since September 2006, also in preparation for the summit. Of the 600 families (3,000 people) rendered homeless by these demolitions, only 100 families were moved to a temporary relocation site. The temporary relocation site has no basic services such as electricity and water.

Each year, COHRE bestows its Housing Rights Violator Awards on three governments or public institutions guilty of particularly serious housing rights violations in the preceding year. COHRE has issued its Violator Awards since 2002.

Demolitions

The urban poor group Kadamay, meanwhile, estimated that about half a million urban poor dwellers would be affected by the government's privatization and modernization projects in the National Capital Region, Central and Southern Luzon.

In a statement, Kadamay said 80,779 families living along the railways from Central to Southern Luzon would be affected by the North Rail-South Rail Linkage Project. For the port privatization, the homes of 65,000 families near the Manila North Harbor would be demolished, while 65,216 individuals would be affected by the Batangas City Port Expansion.

Thousands of families are also expected to be evicted when the rehabilitation of the New Bilibid Prisons in Muntinlupa is implemented while about 100,000 families would be affected by the privatization of the Laguna Lake and the C-6, STAR and CALABARZON projects.

In Kadamay's conservative estimate, the number of dislocated families along the railways of Bulacan, Makati City, parts of Caloocan and Manila has already reached 18,500. Added to this are the 500 families who were rendered homeless after their houses were violently demolished in Taguig City middle of this year.

This number, Kadamay said, did not include "pocket demolitions" in several urban poor communities in the country's key cities.

Militarization

The last quarter of 2006 marked the entry of government troops in urban centers particularly in communities planned to be demolished by the government, Kadamay said. In a press conference held last Dec. 23, Kadamay secretary general Ed Legson said their group has monitored at least eight barangays in Metro Manila where soldiers are holed up in barangay halls or in day care centers.

Legson said their local chapters have monitored the presence of soldiers in full battle gear in four barangays in Quezon City (Holy Spirit, Payatas, Batasan, and Commonwealth) and four others in Manila (Pandacan, Baseco, Parola, and Smokey Mountain).

Urban poor dwellers fear that soldiers in the communities would be used to "tame the villagers" and worse, serve as "demolition crews," Legson said. He added that soldiers may also be used against progressive partylist members who will be campaigning for the 2007 mid-term elections."

Davao Today, 16 December 2006

"What she experienced, she said, was part of Oplan Bantay Laya (OBL), a military directive reportedly issued by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in 2001 to wipe out the revolutionary

movement within a span of five years. But instead of going after armed New Peoples Army (NPA) guerillas waging war in the countryside, this directive — now extended beyond its five-year deadline — has been targeting progressive people's organizations, human-rights activists and professionals deeply involved in the "people's struggle."

InPeace, one of the groups Musni is closely identified with, has been active among grassroots groups of Christians, Muslims and indigenous peoples working for a just and lasting peace and opposing the entry of mining and multinational companies in Mindanao.

No wonder, according to Musni, that the killing of political activists in the country remains unchecked because Arroyo government's approach to development involves "killing people, especially those critical of the administration."

Massive Dislocation

But a more savage face of OBL has been rearing its head in Mindanao, where intensified military operations have been causing massive dislocation of people in areas targeted for mining and other forms of business activities.

"Human-rights groups see a clear pattern in Oplan Bantay Laya as a military strategy to clear the way for the coming in of foreign monopoly capital," Musni said. "It's not simply bulldozing the area but massively dislocating people in the community as well," she said.

Oplan Bantay Laya, she added, is "not just a simple counter-insurgency measure because majority of the victims are part of the civilian population who are active members of people's organization in the area."

The European Union (EU)-funded Citizens Disaster Response Center (CDRC) reported over 180,503 persons displaced in Mindanao in the last two years alone, when the government intensified its war against the Moro and Communist New People's Army (NPA) rebels in areas known for their rich mining deposits and other business prospects.

Intensified military operations triggered forced evacuations in San Luis, Agusan del Sur, Surigao del Sur and Bukidnon, known for rich mining potentials and where big logging and banana plantations operate; and in Santa Cruz town of Davao del Sur, where a big power firm owned by Aboitiz is planning to put up a hydropower plant within the ancestral land of the indigenous Bagobo-Tagabawa tribe.

A fact-finding team that went inside Santa Cruz in September this year was told how peasant families were ordered to buy only one kilo of rice every day at the height of the military operations which also destroyed crops in the area, depriving whole communities of food, water, shelter and medicine."

Natural disasters are the main causes for displacement in the Philippines (February 2007)

- Philippines face an average of 20 typhoons annually. Typhoons trigger landslides, mudslides, floods and are the largest killers in the country.
- The three typhoons hitting the country between 25 September and 9 December 2006 killed a thousand people, destroyed 180,000 homes and displaced a total of 440,000 people.
- More than half of the displaced returned in the following weeks, but at least 3,000 families remained displaced in February 2007, two months after the disaster struck

OCHA, 15 December 2006, pp.1-8

"The Philippines was hit by three extreme weather disturbances (typhoons) in a span of 10 weeks from 25 September to 1 December 2006, then another lower order typhoon on 9 December. These events triggered landslides, flash floods, mudslides, widespread flooding and together with the associated high winds, caused destruction and damage to homes, community buildings, communications, infrastructure, roads, bridges, agricultural crops and fishing farms.

Typhoon Reming (also called Durian), which hit on 30 November, was the most destructive, severely affecting the provinces of Albay, Catanduanes, and Camarines Sur in southeastern Luzon Island, although significant damage was also recorded in Mindoro Oriental, Marinduque, Batangas, Laguna, Mindoro Occidental and Romblon provinces. Most of the severely affected areas are coastal and farming municipalities and towns located around the periphery of Mt. Mayon Volcano.

Over a thousand lives are estimated to have been lost, and over 180,000 houses have been totally destroyed by Reming alone. While not scientifically verified, it is clear that the cumulative impact of these events has contributed to the scale of devastation inflicted by Typhoon Reming. As of 12 December, close to eight million people were affected to varying degrees. Cumulative economic losses are estimated at US\$ 300 million¹. Estimated damages arising from earlier disasters before the four deadly typhoons is \$439million.² Overall estimated losses to the country for 2006 amount to \$1,614 million.

On average, the Philippines faces about 20 typhoons annually, with five of them expected to cause major damages to life and property. These very facts warrant special attention of the international humanitarian community and hence this Appeal which addresses the cumulative impact of the four devastating typhoons that hit the country over a period of three months, two of which were category 4 super typhoons with maximum sustained winds of more than 200 km/h.

A total of 62 of the country's 79 provinces were affected by the typhoons' impact. No doubt, the estimated volume of cumulative damages to housing (\$867 million), infrastructure (\$127 million), agriculture (\$119 million) and school buildings (\$62 million) bears a clear testimony to the gravity of impact.³ Total estimated losses from these typhoons amount to \$1,175 million. Recovery from such massive losses will require sustained and collaborative measures. Community-based approaches will be critical to these projects.

Typhoons remain the largest killers in the Philippines⁴, followed by earthquakes, volcanoes and floods. Typhoon deaths alone in the country total 28,812 with \$5,653 million in damages in the 20th century (World Bank and National Disaster Coordination Council (NDCC), 2004).

(...)

As of 12 December, there were 942 reported dead, 2,838 injured and 850 missing. Government estimates of cumulative damages are as follows:

Total population affected by the four typhoons: 7.9 million

Displaced population: 439,429

Houses damaged: 711,382 (\$355 million)

Houses destroyed: 512,184 (\$512 million)

Damage to infrastructure: \$127 million

Damage to agriculture: \$119 million

Damage to school buildings: \$62 million

(...)

It is encouraging to note that the large majority of affected people are leaving evacuation centres, but those remaining need immediate care. The number of internally displaced people remains high with 190,565 people staying in 652 designated evacuation centres."

OCHA, 12 February 2007, p.1

"Two months after the typhoons, which struck the Philippines in late 2006, emergency relief needs have scaled down and early recovery activities have initiated with the strong involvement of the government, local organizations and the international community. While most people have returned to their homes and started restoring their livelihoods, over 3,000 families continue to find refuge in evacuation and transit centers. With displacement estimated to extend for the next six months, sufficient assistance for basic necessities, improvement of living environment conditions, livelihood and psychosocial support must be provided to ensure the right of displaced families to a dignified and humane life."

Peace efforts

Peace negotiations between the government and the Moro rebels (1970-2005)

- The 1976 Tripoli Agreement between MNLF and government provided for a ceasefire and the creation of a Muslim autonomous region, which only started to be implemented 9 years later.
- 1996 peace accord between MNLF and government put an end to the armed struggle of the MNLF and allowed for the implementation of the Tripoli agreement, namely the creation of a Muslim autonomous region. A Southern Philippine Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), headed by the MNLF leader, was created to oversee the Special Zone for Peace and Development (SZOPAD).
- In April 2000, the government declared an all-out war on the MILF, a breakaway group from the MNLF, which resulted in the displacement of nearly 1 million people.
- New president, Arroyo first showed peaceful intentions with the MILF, but resumed with a militaristic approach when, in February 2003, MILF camps were assaulted in central Mindanao.
- Since the July 2003 ceasefire, MILF and government have held several rounds of exploratory talks and agreed on several confidence-building measures to maintain the ceasefire.

WB, February 2005, pp. 2-3

"Successive Philippine political administrations starting from then President Ferdinand Marcos have attempted to forge a negotiated peace settlement of the conflict with the Moro rebels realizing that a purely military solution to the problem was not feasible. At the height of the MNLF rebellion in the 1970s, the Marcos regime sought the intercession of Libya in the signing of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement with the MNLF. The accord provided for an immediate cessation of armed hostilities between the two parties and established the framework for an autonomous region for the Muslims in Mindanao. However, the provision on autonomy was not implemented by Marcos because it meant carving out 13 provinces from Mindanao to constitute the autonomous region. It was not until President Corazon Aquino came into power in 1986 that this provision was fulfilled, but with the crucial condition that it should follow the Constitutional process of holding a plebiscite to determine which among the provinces specified in the Tripoli Agreement would opt to become part of the autonomous region. Expectedly, only 4 of the 13 provinces, where the Muslims are a majority, decided to join the autonomous region. The MNLF accused the government of violating the Tripoli Agreement and continued its armed struggle, although on a much smaller scale due to its, by then, waning influence.

President Fidel Ramos continued the policy of his predecessor and met success with his peace initiative when the MNLF leadership, under Chairman Nur Misuari, signed a peace accord with the government in September 1996. The Agreement provided for the establishment of an interim

institution called the Southern Philippine Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), to be headed by Chairman Misuari, which would be responsible for supervising and coordinating development projects in an area designated as the Special Zone for Peace and Development (SZOPAD). SZOPAD covered all the provinces specified in the Tripoli Agreement. After three years, a plebiscite would again be conducted asking the provinces in the SZOPAD whether they would like to join the “expanded” autonomous region for the Muslims. However, due in part to the disappointing performance of the SPCPD, only one additional province and one additional city joined the autonomous region—leaving the problem to fester in the other provinces.

By the time of President Joseph Estrada’s election in 1998, the threat was no longer emanating from the MNLF as most of its leading officials had joined the government or were elected local government officials with tacit support from the central administration. The new challenge was emanating from the MILF, a breakaway group from the MNLF, headed by Hashim Salamat and operating largely in Central Mindanao. With little understanding of the peace initiatives of his predecessors, and in response to alleged atrocities committed by the MILF, President Estrada declared an “all-out war policy” in April 2000 and mobilized a large military contingent to capture several MILF camps, including its main headquarters in Camp Abubakar. Although the assault was successful on the surface, it failed to crush the MILF which chose to avoid direct confrontation by splintering into smaller groups and hiding in the remote areas of the region.

In contrast, the administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo initially declared an “all-out-peace” policy toward the MILF but was forced to temporarily abandon it when the military launched another assault of MILF-controlled territories in February 2003 in pursuit of “criminal elements” operating there. By the middle of that year, peace was again restored when the new and more pragmatic leadership of the MILF under Chairman Murad Ebrahim, who succeeded the late Hashim Salamat, forged a ceasefire agreement with the government. Exploratory talks between representatives of the government and the MILF were immediately held under the auspices of the Malaysian government. The Government-MILF Joint Ceasefire Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (JCCCH) was tasked to monitor any violation of the ceasefire agreement. It was also agreed during the exploratory talks to welcome an International Monitoring Team, led by Malaysia, to complement the work of the JCCCH and strengthen the peace process at the ground level. The formal peace talks are expected to resume soon. At their center, as in the past, will be the strong desire of the Moros for a geographical area where they can promote their culture, religion and way of life."

For a chronology of peace developments in Mindanao, see Joint Needs Assessment for Reconstruction and Development of Conflict-affected Areas in Mindanao, Annex 1: Chronology of events on the Mindanao conflict,
A. Path to formal peace accord between the GRP and the MNLF [[link](#)] (pp. 60-61)
B. The MILF struggle and the road to peace [[link](#)] (pp. 62-65)

GRP-MNLF Peace Process (February 2007)

- Peace process between the GRP and the MNLF started in 1976. A peace agreement was signed in 1996.
- The government’s position is that it has complied with the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement.
- GRP policy has subsequently been to recognize ARMM and its governor as the sole representatives of the Bangsamoro people
- The two principal MNLF factions are not in agreement with the decision to declare the formal, interactive first phase of the peace process finalized.

- The faction loyal to Nur Misuari has a confrontational position in relation to the government, and it considers itself to be completely excluded from the peace process.
- The EC-15, recognized by the GRP as the leadership of the MNLF, questions R.A. 9054 and the August 14th plebiscite, and it also requested the postponement of the elections.
- Election of a non-MNLF leader as ARMM governor in August 2005 and the lack of development in ARMM region has further undermined 1996 peace deal with MNLF leaders sending signals that they might resume armed struggle.
- Government and MNLF are to meet in March 2007 to review the 1996 peace accord.

UNDP 23 September 2002, pp. 22-25

"The peace process between the GRP and the MNLF spans a quarter of a century having began in 1976. Six years of implementation processes have now elapsed since the 1996 Peace Agreement. The GRP is now declaring that it has complied with the terms of the peace agreement, thus finalizing "Phase One" of the process. This position is not shared by any of the factions into which the MNLF is divided. The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) has yet to pronounce on the issue.

The government's position is that it has complied with the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement with the passage of Republic Act 9054 "An Act to Strengthen and Expand the Organic Act for the Autonomous Regional in Muslim Mindanano" on February 7, 2001 which lapsed into law on March 31, 2001 without the signature of the President, in accordance with Article VI, Section 27 (1) of the Constitution.

The GRP also holds that it complied with the agreements through the holding of the plebiscite on the "Expanded Autonomous Region" per Article II Section 1 and Section 2 of the Republic Act 9054 on August 14th 2001. The results of the plebiscite were certified by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) in its resolution No. 4561 of 28th August 2002. On the question of acceptance of the amendments to Republic Act No. RA 9054 by the existing ARMM provinces, including the question of the expansion of ARMM, the vote was overwhelmingly positive in all four provinces.

On the issue of ARMM expansion only the province of Basilan and Marawi City voted to join the expanded ARMM, while even the provisional capital and non-ARMM enclave of Cotabato City and Isabela City, the capital of Basilan, voted negatively. The two closest provinces in the vote, Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato, voted 5 x 1 and 10 x 1, against inclusion. All other provinces and cities voted over 10 x 1 against inclusion with the extreme cases of rejection being with votes of over 100 x 1 negative.²³

The GRP also holds that it has completed the GRP-MNLF peace process by holding elections for Governor, Vice Governor, and the ARMM Assembly subsequent to the plebiscite on November 26th 2002. The elections demonstrated a bipolar tendency with only two candidates for governor and vice governor receiving an overwhelming majority of the votes. Even the third candidate has only a nominal vote for each of the two posts:

On the basis of Article XVIII, Section 16 of R.A. No. 9054 that provides that the Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD), the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCD) and the Consultative Assembly are deemed to be abolished and should cease to exist as of the date of the approval of R.A. 9054 in a plebiscite, Malacañang issued Executive Order No. 80 of March 11th, 2002. It orders the abolition and winding up of the aforementioned entities, transfer of the functions, responsibilities, and qualified staff to ARMM and SPDA.

GRP policy has subsequently been to recognize ARMM and its governor as the sole representatives of the Bansamoro people (replacing in that role the MNLF per the 1996 peace agreement). It also will channel all developmental assistance through ARMM in its jurisdiction and to SPDA outside of the ARMM area, as well as through foundations and cooperatives.

There is no doubt about the legality of the GRP position in relation to formal compliance with the 1996 Peace Agreements. This consists of generating a new ARMM law, holding a plebiscite and a new ARMM election, or abolishing SZOPAD, SPCPD, and the Consultative Council as a result of the new election. There is also no doubt that it can channel further assistance to former Muslim insurgents from both the MNLF and MILF through ARMM, SPDA, and a group of foundations and cooperatives to be founded for this purpose. Legally and administratively the situation is clear.

The issue raised, however, is not legal or administrative. It is rather whether a peace process can be successful if the other party to the accord is not in agreement with the decision to declare the formal, interactive first phase of the peace process finalized. This question is further complicated by the fact that the MNLF is no longer unified but clearly divided into different factions. However, none of those factions is in agreement with the actions taken by GRP without the consent of the MNLF. The positions of the two principal MNLF factions are now described.

The MNLF under Chairman Nur Misuari rejects Republic Act 9054, the plebiscite held under it, and the ARMM elections. Indeed, Misuari led some of his forces into rebellion in Jolo and Zamboanga City in November 2001 in an apparent attempt to disrupt the electoral process. He was destituted as governor, became a fugitive, was subsequently captured, and is currently on trial as a result of this chain of events. This faction now has a confrontational position in relation to the government, and it considers itself to be completely excluded from the peace process.

The MNLF Executive Council of 15 named Governor Misuari "Chairman Emeritus" after a critique of his leadership style and assumed control of the organization. The GRP recognized the EC-15 as the leadership of the MNLF. The EC-15 has chosen Mr. Hatamil Hassan as Interim Chairperson. The EC-15 like the rest of the MNLF questions R.A. 9054 and the August 14th plebiscite, and it also requested the postponement of the elections. EC-15 MNLF Secretary General. Mayor Muslimin Sema of Cotabato City was the initial favorite for the post of ARMM Governor but after the negative vote of Cotabato city for inclusion in ARMM his candidacy was no longer viable.

Finally, MNLF Foreign Minister and EC-15 member Parouk Hussin was elected governor. However, the MNLF has a marginal position in both the MNLF ARMM assembly with 1 out of 24 seats. Likewise, in the Cabinet, the MNLF has three seats with the Governor assuming the post of Regional Secretary of Public Works, while other MNLF members have the posts of Regional Secretary of Interior and Local Government, Regional Secretary of Science and Technology and Regional Secretary Social Welfare.

Given this situation described the EC-15 faction of the MNLF feels marginalized from ARMM despite the governorship. This sense of marginalization is due in part to Governor Parouk Hussin having wisely (in the view of the author) decided to form a balanced government that reflects the political realities of the ARMM region and Assembly. He has also correctly decided to govern as the representative of all of the citizens of ARMM and not just those of one politico-military force.

The sense of marginalization throughout the MNLF is also due in part to the fact that the MNLF has not recreated itself opportunely. It has been apparent for several years that the MNLF must undergo a metamorphosis and convert itself into a political party and/or civil society movement and/or cooperative movement, and preferably all of the above. The same holds for MILF as its peace process proceeds. The lack of organization as a political party limits the capacity of MNLF to participate in elections and negatively conditions the results achieved. The GRP supports the

process of formation of political parties, foundations, and cooperatives by the politico-military organizations as part of the full integration of ex-combatants. The transition from being a politico-military organization to the other organizational forms is a task that the MNLF has postponed too long, and for which it is paying a high political and administrative price.

Both of the major MNLF factions opposed the abolition of the Southern Philippines Council on Peace and Development (SPCPD). However, one of its members and former SPCPD Director, Mayor Muslimin Sema of Cotabato City, has been named to the post of Chairman of the Board of the entity that has assumed SPCPD functions outside of ARMM, the Southern Philippines Development Authority (SPDA), a statutory entity. Both of the faction of the MNLF that opposes the government, and the faction that the government supports, opposed RA 9054 as violating the "spirit and letter of the 1996 peace agreement". Consequently both opposed the timing of the plebiscite, and both asked for the postponement of the elections."

Reuters, 13 September 2005

"The Philippines has put a nine-year-old peace deal with separatist Muslims at risk, a former guerrilla leader said on Tuesday, accusing the government of failing to implement genuine self-rule in the south.

Parouk Hussin, outgoing governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and a leader of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), warned that Muslims might carry on their struggle for self-determination.

"The peace agreement is now in serious jeopardy," Hussin told a forum in Manila on democratisation in Muslim communities in Southeast Asia attended by politicians, academics and civil society leaders."

DPA, 5 February 2007

"The Philippines will seek the disarmament of thousands of members of a Muslim rebel group that signed a peace agreement in 1996 after they held 20-member government team for two nights in their camp, an official said Monday.

Jesus Dureza, presidential peace adviser, said the government would bring up the matter with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) when they meet to review the 1996 peace pact in Saudi Arabia next month.

Dureza noted that the 11-year-old peace agreement with the MNLF had no provision for disarmament of the group's fighters, many of whom continue to hold camp on the southern island of Jolo, where the government team headed by a marine general and a defence undersecretary were held on the weekend.

"We will look into these things when we sit down next month," he told reporters a day after Major General Benjamin Dolorfino, Defence Undersecretary Ramon Santos and their companions were released by the MNLF. "

GRP-MILF Peace Process (December 2006)

- The "Agreement on Peace" signed by the MILF and the government in June 2001 is currently in the process of operationalization. Two complementing documents were agreed upon since:
 - 1) the 'Implementing guidelines on the security aspects of the Tripoli peace agreement of

2001' signed in August 2001 and 2) 'Implementing guidelines on the humanitarian, rehabilitation, and development aspects' signed in May 2002.

- The May 2002 agreement stipulates that it will safeguard the observance of international humanitarian law, respect for internationally recognized human rights, and fundamental freedoms for all persons.
- the major pending agenda items between the GRP and the MILF are the questions of ancestral domain and the disposition of arms and forces.
- the GRP agrees to relieve the evacuee situation and allow a return to the places occupied prior to 'All Out War', as well as to pay reparations for properties lost and damages sustained. In sum, a reversal of the effects on the population of the 'All Out War'.
- The MILF accepts working with ARMM in its area and other government agencies outside of ARMM (SPDA in effect), through MILF civil society organizations, including the MILF-led Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA).
- From November 2002 to June 2003, resumption of war in Mindanao put the peace process on hold. As of July 19, 2003, government and MILF agreed on a mutual cessation of hostilities.
- During 2004 and 2005, both parties agreed that Malaysia play a facilitating role in the peace process, hosting the successive exploratory talks, but also leading an international team tasked with monitoring the ceasefire.
- Both parties met in September 2005 for the 9th exploratory talks seen as successful. The issue of ancestral domain and the related issue of governance in the Muslim-populated areas of Mindanao remain the main stumbling block.

UNDP 23 September 2002, pp. 19-21

"The GRP-MILF peace process began in 1997 and reached a breakthrough with the 'Agreement on Peace' of June 22nd, 2001 signed at Tripoli, Libya. That agreement is currently in the process of operationalization. First there was the 'Implementing Guidelines on the Security Aspect of the Tripoli Peace Agreement of 2001' signed August 7th, 2001 at Putrajaya, Malaysia. More recently there was the agreement 'Implementing Guidelines on the Humanitarian, Rehabilitation, and Development Aspects of the GRP-MILF Tripoli Agreement of Peace of 2001' signed May 7th, 2002 at Putrajaya, Malaysia.

The latest agreement on humanitarian, rehabilitation, and development issues stipulates that it will safeguard the observance of international humanitarian law, respect for internationally recognized human rights, and fundamental freedoms for all persons. These are the criteria and standards that should guide the monitoring mechanism of Article VI of the agreement to be undertaken by the joint Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH).

The agreement also assures full access for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) 'in accordance with ICRC's standard operating procedures'. It stipulates that 'in conformity with international humanitarian law, each party shall provide information, through the tracing mechanism of the ICRC, to families of all persons who are unaccounted for.'

They also agree that the 'parties shall pave the way for the immediate return of evacuees to their places of origin and provide all necessary financial/material and technical assistance to those evacuated for them to begin a new life. The GRP shall award reparations for the properties lost or destroyed by reasons of the conflict upon reasonable proof thereon as mutually verified and acknowledged by both parties.' (Article V, Numeral 3).

The only political and institutional issues deal primarily with project implementation and monitoring modalities. The MILF 'will establish a project implementing body, which will have the

power and function to receive and disburse private and GRP funds.' (Article V, Numeral 1). The MILF also recognizes established institutions for project management, as per GRP policy:

'Consistent with GRP's resolve to task the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) as its primary implementing agency for development, the ARMM shall enter into contractual relations within its charter, pertaining to rehabilitation and development with the MILF project implementing body. Likewise, with other government development agencies outside ARMM areas.' 19 (Article V, Numeral 2).

In a second agreement known as the 'Joint Communique Between the GRP and the MILF' signed May 6th 2002 at Cyberjaya, Malaysia, the two sides agreed to 'the isolation and interdiction of all criminal syndicates and kidnap-for-ransom gangs, including so called 'lost commands' operating in Mindanao.'

Given these agreements, the major pending agenda items between the GRP and the MILF are the questions of ancestral domain and the disposition of arms and forces. The question of the ancestral domains of Muslim communities is complex and difficult, especially in light of conflicting interests and claims between indigenous and Muslim small holders, large Muslim landowners, Christian settlers, plantation agriculture corporations, timber and mining interests, and oil and gas exploration groups. The legal rights of indigenous peoples contained in Republic Act 8371 'Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997' have already been guaranteed by law and should not suffer a roll-back in the subsequent negotiation process to guarantee other groups their rights as well. An MNLF policy statement maintains that both the MILF and the MNLF agree that RA8731 on indigenous ancestral domain should also apply to the Bangsamoro people. The government has yet to pronounce on this claim.

If the security, humanitarian, rehabilitation, development, and ancestral domain aspects of the GRP-MILF Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001 are successfully concluded, the disposition of MILF arms and forces should not present major difficulties. However, if the policy and institutional arrangements on these issues do not prove effective, and especially if the ancestral domain issue leads to acute conflicts over land, the demobilization of MILF combatant could prove very difficult.

In sum, both the GRP and the MILF have demonstrated political will and flexibility. This has translated into the capacity to rapidly reach 'implementing guideline' agreements. On one side the MILF has restricted its agenda to economic and social issues and demands feasible relief, rehabilitation, and development projects. The institutional arrangements are those necessary to implement the projects. The MILF accepts working with ARMM in its area and other government agencies outside of ARMM (SPDA in effect), through MILF civil society organizations, including a foundation, the recently founded Bangsamoro Development Agency. It has also agreed to collaborate with the government in the persecution of criminal elements that inhabit the same inaccessible areas utilized by the MILF, especially in the Maguindanao marsh areas.

On the other side the GRP agrees to relieve the evacuee situation and allow a return to the places occupied prior to 'All Out War', as well as to pay reparations for properties lost and damages sustained. In sum, a reversal of the effects on the population of the 'All Out War'. Of course, the MILF as an organization would not return to the situation 'antebellum' in that there would be no resurrection of the armed camps, exclusion of the State, and MILF territorial control.

The MILF and GRP are moving into a new relationship based on collaboration in relief, rehabilitation, and development, as well as in the improvement of the law and order situation in Mindanao. The MILF is demonstrating more interest in economic and social development than in political institutions."

In February 2003, talks were suspended when fighting and displacement resumed in Mindanao. The Mutual cessation of hostilities was signed on 19 July 2003. A downgrading of the actions of the military as well as the lifting of the warrants for the capture of MILF officials was ordered by the government. Malaysia was invited to facilitate the peace talks and oversee the monitoring of the ceasefire (Mindanews, 18 July 2003)

In September 2004, the government and MILF agreed to establish a Malaysian-led peacekeeping force (IMT) to oversee the implementation of the ceasefire in Maguindanao (Mindanews, 6 September 2004).The first contingent of the IMT arrived eight months later in October 2004.

In December 2004, during the 6th round of exploratory talks, both sides agreed a a certain number of points:

Government of the Philippines, February 2005

"1. The 6th round of Exploratory Talks held in KL last December 20-21, 2004 reflects the steady momentum of the Government's peace process with the MILF.

2. Among the highlights of the informal talks include the adoption of the interim guidelines to operationalize the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) pursuant to the GRP-MILF Joint Communiqué of May 6, 2002. This Mechanism is tasked in the interdiction and isolation of criminal and lawless elements found within MILF communities.

3. The Panels also adopt Guidelines for Observers in the GRP-MILF Formal Talks outlining the general role and conduct of accredited observers who will participate in the formal peace negotiations.

4. Both sides acknowledge the formal completion of two (2) major confidence building measures for the resumption of the talks, namely: (a) the phased redeployment of AFP troops from the Buliok area, and (b) the dropping of charges filed against several MILF leaders and members implicated in the Davao City bombings of 2003."

In April 2005, MILF and government met or exploratory talks where the issue of ancestral domain was high on the agenda (Mindanews, 20 April 2005). Both sides agreed to meet again to further discuss a negotiated settlement in the coming months.

Postponed in July 2005, exploratory talks between MILF and government held in September 2005 were deemed as highly successful:

Mindanews, 16 September 2005

"The two-day exploratory talks in Kuala Lumpur between the government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) ended Friday with a "breakthrough" on governance, the last topic on the ancestral domain agenda.

"We scored a breakthrough in governance," MILF peace panel chair Mohagher Iqbal said in response to a query sent by MindaNews through text (SMS). No other details were immediately available.

(...)

Iqbal in an interview in early May this year, said the MILF was considering four governance possibilities in reaching a negotiated political settlement: federal, commonwealth, association of free states and independence.

Iqbal said at the time that they had not presented to the government peace panel their "exact position" on any of the four possibilities but ruled out autonomy as an option. "That's out of the question. We will not discuss autonomy. It's a failure," he said.

(...)

The discussions on ancestral domain, the last of the three major agenda items aside from security and rehabilitation, were earlier divided into four strands – concept, territory, resources and governance. A breakthrough on the first three strands happened in the 7th round of exploratory talks in April.

The Joint Statement said the addition of the ancestral domain agreement to the two previous agreements signed – Security in 2001 and Rehabilitation in 2002 – 'completes the requirement of the Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001.' "

MILF and government fail to agree on ancestral land rights

DPA, 8 September 2006

"Peace talks between Muslim rebels and the Philippine government were at an impasse as both sides failed to agree on crucial ancestral land rights, officials said Friday.

Presidential spokesman Ignacio Bunye said the government's two-day meeting with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Kuala Lumpur failed to resolve the issue of ancestral domain, or which areas in the southern region of Mindanao would be included in an expanded autonomous Muslim region.

"There is a continuing impasse on territorial issues," he said, adding that government negotiators will still have to consult with senior cabinet members to discuss the matter.

Eid Kabalu, MILF spokesman, said the government panel offered 600 villages to be added to the existing Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), but his group wanted the inclusion of more than 1,000 additional villages.

The ARMM currently covers five predominantly Muslim provinces and the Islamic city of Marawi."

MILF ready to resume peace talks

AFP, 12 December 2006

"Muslim separatists waging a decades-old armed campaign in the southern Philippines said Tuesday they are ready to resume stalled peace talks with Manila early next year.

The two sides held fresh consultations in Malaysia and agreed in principle to resume formal negotiations, chief Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) negotiator Mohager Iqbal said.

Malaysia hosted the talks that ran into difficulties over the past few months. They had stalled over which areas the Muslims, who make up a large minority in the south of the mainly Roman Catholic nation, could claim as their "ancestral domain".

The concept would entitle them to a share of the proceeds from the economic use of the land. "We are always optimistic and we agreed to resume the peace talks early next year in Kuala Lumpur. We may discuss the issue on ancestral domain," Iqbal told reporters here.

Negotiations stalled in September due to the MILF demand that 1,000 parcels of land on the southern island of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago be set aside as "ancestral domain" under special control of the minority Muslims. Manila has said it can only give 600 parcels and that such a move would be subject to congressional approval."

See also:

Status of the GRP-MILF Peace Process, 8 February 2005

The Mindanao Peace Talks: Another Opportunity to resolve the Moro Conflict in the Philippines, USIP, 31 January 2005

Status of the GRP-MILF Peace Process, 8 February 2005

Full text of the "Implementing Guidelines on the Humanitarian, Rehabilitation and Development Aspects of the GRP-MILF Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001"

'Terrorism' and the peace process (February 2007)

- According to ICG, reported links between the MILF and the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) put the peace process at risk.
- The independent nature of MILF units makes it difficult to establish clear links between its leadership and terrorist groups. Links may only be at the local/personal level with the leadership unaware of these links. ICG thinks that this demonstrates a lack of control by MILF leadership over their troops, which will make it difficult to implement peace.
- Moro civil society groups claim that the terrorist threat and terrorist actions are used both as an excuse and a tool by the government to fight insurgents groups.
- In August 2006, Senator Pimentel challenged claims by the government of the presence of Al-Quaeda linked terrorist groups in Sulu and asked government to produce evidence.
- In February 2007, an anti-terror bill was passed in the Philippines. Human rights groups expressed concern that it would be used by the government to curb civil liberties and to fight against political adversaries.

ICG, 13 July 2004, p. i

"Persistent reports of links between the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terror network overshadow and put at risk the peace process between the MILF and the Philippine government. While the MILF leadership continues to deny any ties, all evidence points to ongoing operational and training links. What is uncertain is whether top leaders are aware of the activity and unwilling to admit it, or whether members of JI and other like-minded jihadist groups have established their own personal ties to individual MILF commanders without the knowledge of the MILF leadership.

JI, now notorious for its activities especially in Indonesia, established a foothold in the southern Philippines in 1994, building on ties formed with the secessionist MILF in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Personal relationships between founding MILF chairman Salamat Hashim and JI leaders like Abdullah Sungkar and Zulkarnaen allowed it to set up training camps under MILF protection, replicating the Afghan camp system in which the organisation first took shape, and transferring deadly skills to a new generation of operatives.

As well as replenishing JI ranks in Indonesia depleted by post-Bali arrests, some of these graduates have carried out terror attacks in the Philippines in concert with local elements from the MILF and the Abu Sayyaf Group. ICG information suggests that the architect of many of these recent attacks was a Javanese graduate of the Mindanao camps, named Zulkifli. He was captured in Malaysia in late 2003, but not before overseeing the Davao bombings of March and April 2003, which killed 38 and remain a major obstacle to the peace talks.

The JI-MILF relationship is clearly continuing, but in a much more decentralised fashion. Since the Philippine army overran major MILF camps in 2000, MILF forces have been dispersed into smaller, more autonomous units, sometimes disavowed by the MILF leadership as "lost commands". The MILF has always been loose-knit, but its units became more independent following the offensive of 2000 and after Salamat Hashim's death in July 2003.

It is unclear at this stage how the new MILF leadership around Hashim's successor, Al-Haj Murad, regards the ties to JI. The MILF officially disavows terrorism. Given what is now known about JI-MILF ties, therefore, there are three possible interpretations of this official stance, all of which bode ill for the peace process. If top MILF leaders engaged in peace negotiations are unaware of local level cooperation with JI or if they follow a "don't ask, don't tell" policy that leaves local commanders to their own devices, the lack of central control suggests it might not be possible to implement an agreement. If at least some top MILF officials are not only aware of JI ties, but see them as a crucial element of a "fight and talk" strategy, the good faith necessary for successful negotiations would be called into question. All three possibilities may be related to factional divisions within the MILF that appear to have deepened since Salamat Hashim's death."

The anti-terror bill, the national ID and the Abu Sayyaf connection
NCCP & MCPA, 21 February 2005, pp. 9-10

"It must be remembered that on February 14, at the height of the fighting in Sulu, a series of bombings occurred in General Santos City, Davao City and Makati City in Manila that killed and wounded scores of innocent civilians. The Abu Sayyaf quickly claimed responsibility for the mayhem through a radio interview with a certain Abu Solaiman. On February 22, 2005 the police claimed to have arrested the perpetrators.

Whether this Abu Solaiman is real or whether the Abu Sayyaf claim that the mayhem is true, the reality is it played up favorably to the government's long dream of legally instituting repressive actions and measures such as the implementation of a National Identification System (National ID) and the legislation of an Anti Terror Bill. With a long notorious record of the police on arresting any Tom, Dick and Harry or any Jafar, Mustif and Susukan or anyone with an Arabic sounding name, even on unfounded evidence, these measures send a chilling message not only to the Moro people but to every sensible Filipino.

One cannot help but to think that whenever the government intends to make a very unpopular move or whenever it finds itself in a thick of a political crisis, the public would always wake up to the scare of a terrorist bombing. In 1999 for example, before the military's all-out offensives against the MILF's Camp Abubakar, a series of bombing rocked several malls and parks of Manila. This was aggravated by the Sipadan kidnapping of foreigners by the criminal elements being led then by Kumander Robot. In year 2000, at the height of the impeachment trial of then President Estrada, a commuter train in Manila was bombed, killing a number of civilians. In April 2003, after Davao City Mayor publicly announced that Davao is a terrorist-free city and thus U.S. troops were an unnecessary addition to the place, Davao Sasa wharf and Davao Airport were bombed. At the end of the day, Duterte made a turnaround on his position.

One can't help asking that while the government has long proclaimed its victory against the Abu Sayyaf --- for the capture of Robot, the killing of its top leaders including Abu Sabaya, the arrest of more than a hundred alleged Abu Sayyaf in Basilan --- why does the government and the military still conveniently use the bandit group as an invincible bogeyman to the people? And while everyone knows that genuine Islam has a strong teaching against harming civilians, persons like Abu Solaiman would come out of nowhere using Islam as the pretext to committing a deplorable deed?

And one can't help thinking again that while the war rages only in Sulu, the government would want to introduce draconian measures in the form of a national ID and an Anti Terror Law for all the people in the Philippine archipelago. And this has been the government's idea since the time of President Ramos. It has been an open secret that the Abu Sayyaf was at the AFP's employ when it was demonizing the MNLF in the 1970's. But we all know that that was long ago. Or so we all thought."

Mindanews, 6 August 2006

"Reacting to the fresh wave of military offensive in Sulu against suspected elements of the Jemaah Islamiyah, Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr. today challenged military authorities to present "credible proof" that the Indonesian-based group was in the island province and not make the alleged presence of the Indonesian-based group an excuse for "continued warfare in Mindanao."

"It is their job to show the people there is basis for their saying there is a Jemaah Islamiyah cell in Sulu. In the absence of that, they cannot expect us to support the ongoing hostilities in Sulu," Pimentel said in a statement.

He said knowledgeable sources have informed him that there are no JI agents in Mindanao.

"Nobody says they gave any Al Qaeda or JI agents training anybody in Muslim areas of Mindanao. I am apprehensive there may be some ploy behind the alleged presence of the JI to widen the war and lay the basis for the continued warfare in Mindanao. And I think if the US authorities say there are JI from Indonesia, they should produce evidence for that," he said.

The senator said such information contradicted the claim of a military official that Indonesian terrorists Omar Patek and Dulmatin were moving in the company of Abu Sayyaf bandits in Sulu.

Pimentel said the military operation has forced some 500 families in Indanan town to evacuate."

Anti-terror bill approved in February 2007

BBC, 20 February 2007

"An anti-terror bill has been passed in the Philippines aimed at tackling militants in the south. The Human Security Act was approved by the House of Representatives late Monday and now goes to President Gloria Arroyo to be signed into law. Ms Arroyo hailed the bill as a "potent weapon" to shield the country from the "global scourge" of terrorism. Manila has long been urged by the US and other Western countries to bring in anti-terror legislation.

The bill - which was ratified by the Senate two weeks ago - was watered down after opposition from some politicians and rights groups who feared the legislation would endanger human rights.

Crackdown fears

Under the new law, security forces have the power to detain suspects without warrant or charge for up to three days. It also allows authorities to access bank accounts they believe are being used to launder money for terrorist purposes. A conviction for terror offences could result in a 40-year jail sentence.

In a bid to allay fears of rights violations, people who are wrongly detained will be offered compensation. However, even a watered down version has not satisfied the bill's opponents, correspondents say. They fear Mrs Arroyo - already facing criticism over hundreds of extra-judicial killings in the country - will use the law to curb civil liberties and to crack down on her

political adversaries. The government said the terror bill is necessary to give it the teeth to fight militants in the south of the country, particularly the Muslim extremist group Abu Sayyaf."

GRP-CPP/NPA/NDF Peace Process (September 2005)

- NPA/NDF remains a serious armed threat to the government with an estimated strength of around 12,000 members (as of September 2002).
- Through four Presidencies, the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) has undertaken various peace initiatives geared at peaceful settlement of the armed conflicts in the country, including the Communist insurgency.
- The Estrada term saw the collapse of the talks with the NDF. In May 1999, the NDF unilaterally withdrew from the talks following the ratification by the Philippine Senate of the RP-US Visiting Forces Agreement.
- Under the Macapagal-Arroyo administration, peace negotiations between the GRP and the NDF were resumed on April 2001 in Oslo, Norway.
- The talks continue on "recess" status. Informal meetings in May and June 2002 have centered on a possible mutually acceptable formulation for the final peace accord. Despite the US government's designation of the CPP-NPA-NDF as a foreign terrorist organization, the Peace Panels of both parties maintain open lines of communication geared at agreement on measures to facilitate the resumption of the talks.
- During 2004 and 2005, little progress was made but in September 2005, both sides agreed to resume the talks.

UNDP 23 September 2002, pp. 27-29

"The Communist insurgency - led by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), its armed group, the New People's Army (NPA), and its political arm, the National Democratic Front (NDF), or the CPP-NPA-NDF - has been the most enduring of the Philippines' armed rebellions, and remains the most serious threat to national security. It finds its roots in a colonial past and a system of unjust and unequal socioeconomic and political conditions that has perpetuated an elite few while the majority of Filipinos continue to live in poverty. From a small group of less than a hundred when it was founded in 1968, the movement's strength peaked to an estimated 25, 000 members nationwide in 1987. Political repression and worsening economic conditions had fueled its rapid growth during the Martial Law regime under Ferdinand Marcos; the period of political transition when democracy was restored under Corazon Aquino also saw a growth in the NPA's strength. Although it had declined to about 6,000 members in 1995, it has been steadily increasing to reach a current (September 2002) estimated strength of around 12,000 members.

Through four Presidencies, the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) has undertaken various peace initiatives geared at peaceful settlement of the armed conflicts in the country, including the Communist insurgency. Corazon Aquino pursued shortlived negotiations towards a peaceful negotiated settlement with the CPP-NPA-NDF. A 60-day ceasefire was signed effective 10 December 1986, but talks collapsed on 22 January 1987, amid accusations of ceasefire violations and disagreements over the negotiation framework. Fidel Ramos embarked on a comprehensive peace process (The "Six Paths to Peace") which included, among others, the active pursuit of peace negotiations with the armed opposition groups.

During the Ramos administration, the CPP was legalized to set the stage for the resumption of peace negotiations. Negotiations began with the Utrecht-based NDF leadership in August 1992, resulting in the signing of the Hague Declaration in September 1992 which provided the basic framework for formal negotiations. A joint communiqué was signed outlining four substantive

agenda for the talks: human rights and international humanitarian law; social and economic reforms; political and constitutional reforms, and end of hostilities and disposition of forces.

Following the Hague talks, GRP-NDF meetings were held erratically over a two and a half year period, with efforts focused on forging agreement on terms and processes for the conduct of formal negotiations. Three agreements were forged during this period: 1) the Breukelen Joint Statement of June 1994, which documented areas of agreement, disagreement and issues requiring further discussion; 2) the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG) of February 1995, which provides safety and immunity guarantees to all NDF duly accredited holders of documents of identification; and 3) the Joint Agreement on the Ground Rules of Formal Meetings (also February 1995).

Between June 1995 to March 1998, a total of six rounds of formal talks and six rounds of discrete and informal talks were conducted. The talks were invariably suspended or recessed over this period, due to issues relating to sovereignty and JASIG implementation. These series of formal and informal talks paved the way for the completion of the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CAR-HR/IHL), which was signed by both Panels on 16 March 1998 in The Hague.

The Estrada term saw the collapse of the talks with the NDF. Talks were stalemated when the NDF rejected the mode of implementation of the CAR-HR/IHL stipulated by President Estrada, that it be in accordance with the Republic's constitutional and legal processes. In May 1999, the NDF unilaterally withdrew from the talks following the ratification by the Philippine Senate of the RP-US Visiting Forces Agreement. With the termination of the peace talks, Estrada issued Executive Order # 115 in June 1999, localizing the peace talks with the communist insurgents.

Under the Macapagal-Arroyo administration, peace negotiations between the GRP and the NDF were resumed on April 2001 in Oslo, Norway. Confidence-building measures were discussed, as well as the modality of implementation of the CAR-HR/IHL implementation, and the mechanics for conducting negotiations on the Comprehensive Agreement on Socio Economic Reform (CASER). A second round of talks in Oslo in June 2001 was suspended following a protest by the GRP on the NDF's issuance of a congratulatory note to the NPA's Fortunato Camus Command after the political assassination of Cagayan Congressman Rodolfo Aguinaldo during the conduct of the talks.

Since the recess of the talks in June 2001, back-channel talks have been conducted by GRP Panel Chair Silvestre Bello, Speaker de Venecia, Presidential Peace Advisor Eduardo Ermita, and Presidential Management Staff Silvestre Afable Jr with the NDF leadership. In a meeting in the Netherlands and Norway on November 29 - December 3, 2001, both sides agreed on an accelerated negotiation process, from an 18-24 month timeframe to 4-6 months completion period for the negotiations. However, the GRP Panel was instructed by the President to obtain NDF agreement to its proposal for a final, comprehensive peace accord. In line with the President's directive, the GRP Panel proposed an enhanced process whereby both Panels will complete a final peace agreement that will contain the remaining substantive agenda for the talks, within end in view of bringing logical conclusion to the negotiations towards the attainment of a just and lasting peace. On April 15 2002, the NDF sent a letter rejecting the GRP's proposal.

The talks continue on "recess" status. Informal meetings in May and June 2002 have centered on a possible mutually acceptable formulation for the final peace accord. Despite the US government's designation of the CPP-NPA-NDF as a foreign terrorist organization, the Peace Panels of both parties maintain open lines of communication geared at agreement on measures to facilitate the resumption of the talks."

Peace process revived in February 2004

BBC, 30 March 2004

"In February 2004, the peace process was revived with representatives of the NPA meeting government officials in the Norwegian capital Oslo.

The two sides agreed a series of measures to move towards a formal peace deal. They included setting up a joint commission to examine human rights abuses on both sides, and working together for the removal of the NPA from the US and EU's list of terror organisations."

Government and communist rebels agree to resume pace talks (September 2005)

DPA, 7 September 2005

"The Philippines and communist rebels have agreed to resume formal peace negotiations next month, but no specific dates were set for the talks, a government statement said Wednesday.

The statement said both sides have also "agreed to a nationwide ceasefire during, and in connection with, the days when formal peace negotiations are held".

"The resumption of the formal peace negotiations was reached after a cordial exchange of letters between the parties following informal talks in Oslo, Norway," said the statement from the office of presidential adviser on the peace process.

Two Norwegian officials visited Manila last month and urged the government to explore the possibility of resuming peace negotiations with the communist rebels.

Norway has been brokering the peace negotiations between the government and the communist rebels since 2004.

But the peace negotiations bogged down in August last year, after the rebels unilaterally postponed a scheduled round of formal talks due to the refusal of the United States to remove the guerrillas from its terrorist list."

POPULATION FIGURES AND PROFILE

General

The majority of the displaced are Muslim and indigenous people (December 2005)

- According to the JNA study, the largest proportion of IDPs are Muslim - up to 85%, followed by Lumads (IP) and then Christians.
- Oxfam estimates that 85 percent of those affected by conflict were Muslims, 17 percent were Christians and 7 percent were from non-Muslim indigenous populations.
- Most of the fighting between the military and the MILF were in camps that were located in towns that had predominantly Muslim populations.
- The ethnic composition of the displaced population is more or less reflective of the overall ethnic composition of the areas directly affected by the armed conflict.
- 60-70 % of the population in affected barangays is Muslim and they tend to stay longer.

Government of the Philippines, International Funding Agencies, Mindanao Stakeholders, December 2005, p.35

"The IDPs represent various religious and ethno-linguistic groups. The largest proportion of them – some suggest at least 85% – are Muslims, followed by Indigenous Peoples (or “Lumads”), and then Christians. Many of the Muslim IDPs are related by blood or affinity to the combatants, sympathetic to the cause for which they fight and/or widely assumed to be supporting them. Addressing the needs of the Muslim IDPs is, therefore, one way of reaching out to the combatants, one way of building confidence in the peace process.

Indigenous Peoples (IPs) also constitute a significant proportion of the IDPs. They have often been caught in the “crossfire” between the parties to the conflict. In addition, they are sometimes manipulated or mobilized to serve as a buffer between, or complement to, the combatants. Their needs, as well as distinctiveness of their cultures and the depth of their community resources, are frequently lost in “big picture” analyses. For this reason and others, the IPs are demanding a greater “voice” in the conflict affected areas of Mindanao and, specifically, the peace process.

The displaced also include Christians who are living within or in nearby communities predominantly inhabited by the Muslims or Lumads. They are the IDPs with whom the decision makers in Manila can most easily relate. They provide an attractive entry point for those who could ultimately become more sympathetic to, and supportive of, the broader Mindanao situation."

WB 3 March 2003, pp. 12-13

"Majority of people who were displaced as a result of the conflict in Mindanao that erupted in 2000 were Muslims. Oxfam estimates that 85 percent of those affected by conflict were Muslims, 17 percent were Christians and 7 percent were from non-Muslim indigenous populations. The reason for this pattern is that much of the fighting between the Philippine troops and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) were in camps that were located in towns that had predominantly Muslim populations. The displacement by Philippine military personnel of communities has also created a new kind of tension and is one reason why Muslims find it hard to return to their homes. There are also Christians that stayed in government evacuation centers, but they were able to return to their homes more easily. This is partly because the evacuation centers had to be located further away from Muslim communities and were logically nearer the Christian settlements."

Oxfam January 2001, pp. 19-20

"Of Mindanao's 17 million population, 64 % are Christians, 23 % Muslims and 18 % Lumads. Ethnic preponderance varies in former Moro provinces where Christians have migrated. In Maguindanao, Muslims (60%) predominate over Christians. In Cotabato, Christians (71%) predominate over Muslims (18%) and Lumads. Armed skirmishes, aerial bombing and artillery fires usually occur in interior villages where Muslims and Lumads predominate. The ethnic composition of the displaced population is more or less reflective of the overall ethnic composition of the areas directly affected by the armed conflict.

However, more Muslim evacuees tend to go into and stay longer in evacuation centers than Christians. A social worker from the Pikit MSWDO observes that Muslims preponderate among the evacuees, reflecting the fact that 60-70 % of the population in affected barangays is Muslim and they tend to stay longer. Most Christian evacuees, on the other hand, do not stay very long in the evacuation centers because they usually come from barangays closer to the locations where the hostilities are not so drawn-out. (...)

Lumads are also severely affected by the displacement resulting from the armed conflict. This is exemplified by the case of the evacuees in the Macatactac evacuation center (barangay Liliongan, Carmen municipality) – comprising of around 300 families all belonging to the Aromanon Manobo tribe. These evacuees have been in the said evacuation center for one year already."

General demographics in ARRM and conflict-affected areas (2003)

- As a result of colonial and post-colonial state policy, Muslim population in Mindanao between 1903 and 1999 declined from 76 to only 19 percent.
- Muslim ethnic groups of Mindanao have been largely marginalized by the pace and form of development.
- Tausug and the Maguindanao have been the most politically dominant ethnic groups. Tausug inhabit the volcanic island comprising the Sulu province while the Manguindanaoans live in the often inundated plains of the Cotabato provinces along the Rio Grande of Maguindanao.
- The conflict-affected areas in Mindanao are the poorest among the 77 provinces of the Philippines.
- The highest levels of dissatisfaction with government services are found in Mindanao, especially in the conflict-affected areas.

WB, 3 March 2003, pp. 9-11

"Muslims and the influx of Settlers

From making up 76 percent of the population in 1903, the Muslim population in Mindanao had declined to only 19 percent by 1990. This is a direct result of colonial and post-colonial state policy of opening Mindanao to settlers from the islands of Luzon and the Visayas. There is multi-ethnicity at the regional, provincial and municipal levels but at the village level one will mostly find homogenous ethnic communities. Muslim ethnic groups in Mindanao speak related languages, and practice many customs that are similar. Many Muslim ethnic communities-also collectively called Moros –live in close proximity to Christian and other non-Muslim Filipino groups. However, these Muslim ethnic groups remain separate from the "majority" in the Philippine nation-state not only by religion but also by the presence of political movements animated by the idea of belonging to a "Bangsa Moro"- a separate Moro nation. This distinction is enhanced by an imbalance in economic development. The Muslim ethnic groups of Mindanao have been largely

marginalized by the pace and form of development carried out by the colonial governments and during the republic's post-colonial period.

Muslim Ethnic Affiliations

Of the 13 Moro ethnic groups, the Tausug and the Maguindanao have been the most politically dominant for it is from them that the Mindanao Sultanates emerged. The spheres of influence of their early sultanates extended over the communities of the other Moro groups and the Lumads or non-Muslim indigenous groups. The smaller groups are: the Samal, Yakan, Badjao, and the Jama Mapun, of the Sulu archipelago who were once subject peoples of the (Tausug) Sulu sultanate; the Kalangan, Sangil, Kalibugan and Iranun whose settlements were once under the sphere of influence of the Maguindanao sultans; and the Palawani and Molbog of South Palawan.

The Tausug inhabit the volcanic island comprising the Sulu province while the Manguindanaoans live in the often inundated plains of the Cotabato provinces along the Rio Grande of Maguindanao. The Maranao comprise the largest Moro group in terms of population. They live in the plains around Lake Lanao. The smaller groups occupy more or less distinct territories scattered in Mindanao and the Sulu islands, though in some instances their living spaces are penetrated by families belonging to the larger groups.

Approximately five percent of the total population of the region, the Lumad groups are individually known, as: Ata (or Ata Manobo), Bagobo, Banua-on, Batak, Bla-an, Bukidnon, Dibabawon, Higaunon, Mamanwa, Mandaya, Mangguwangan, Manobo, Mansaka, Matigsalug, Pala'wan, Subanen, Tagagkoalo, Tagbanua, T'boli, Teduray and Ubo.

Poverty in ARRM and the Conflict-Affected Areas

The conflict-affected areas in Mindanao are the poorest among the 77 provinces of the Philippines. These are also the poorest provinces in Mindanao. With the exception of North Cotabato and Davao del Norte, the incidence of people falling below the poverty line and depth of poverty in these provinces rose dramatically from 1997 to the year 2000. The El Nino phenomenon and the fall in the price of copra and rubber contributed to the worsening of poverty in the region.

Without exception, all the conflict-affected areas fall in average per capita incomes from 1997 to 2000. The fall in averages incomes of both the poor and the non-poor populations was most severe in Basilan and Tawi-Tawi.

The Annual Poverty Indicator Survey conducted in October 1999 shows that social services coverage in the conflict-affected provinces of Mindanao compare unfavorably with the typical or median province in the country. The recently completed Filipino Report Card found the highest levels of dissatisfaction with government services in Mindanao, especially in the conflict-affected areas."

Global figures

120,000 people remain displaced in the Philippines (December 2006)

- There is no accurate figure available on the total number of people currently displaced. In March 2006, the UN (WFP) estimated that 120,000 people remained displaced in the Philippines (Mindanao) due to armed conflict. This total included people displaced during the 2000 and 2003 wars and who had not been able to return home due to security problems or have not been rehabilitated.
- Between January and December 2006, an estimated 98,000 people have been newly displaced by armed conflict, mainly on Mindanao island. 178,000 people were estimated to be displaced the previous year (2005). The number of returns during 2005 and 2006 is unknown, although most displacement tend to be only temporarily.
- According to the government, nearly 2 million people have been displaced by fighting between 2000 and 2006. Displacements in 2000 and 2003 accounted for 80 per cent of all displacements during that period.

How many are currently displaced?

In the absence of a systematic monitoring of displacement and return movements, and in the context of constant and ongoing displacement movements, there is no accurate figure available on the number of people currently displaced. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), which launched an emergency operation in July 2006 to assist the conflict-affected population in Mindanao, the number of 'vulnerable' IDPs is estimated at 120,000. This figure includes some of the people who have been displaced since 2000, mainly in the ARMM region of Mindanao and who haven't been able to return since due to persistent security problems or have not been rehabilitated. This should be considered as a conservative estimate. Using a wider IDP definition*, a Joint Needs Assessment (JNA) conducted during 2004 (and spearheaded by the World Bank), but published only at the end of 2005, estimated the IDP population in Mindanao to stand at 930,000.

Between January 2005 and December 2006, it is estimated that a total of 231,811 people have been displaced by armed conflict. 178,716 people were displaced in 2005 and 98,000 people were forced from their homes in 2006. It is unknown how many of these IDP are still displaced, but it is believed that the majority managed to go home after a relatively short period of displacement.

The total IDP figure should be seen as a rough estimate in the context of a very fluid displacement situation with frequent short-term displacements.

***For the purpose of the JNA, IDPs were defined as those in Mindanao who fled their homes at least once since 2000 as a result of armed conflict. The JNA was conducted during 2004 and aimed at providing input for the design of the Mindanao Trust Fund-Reconstruction and Development Program (MTF-RDP), a programme that would address the reconstruction and development needs of the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao.**

Total number of displaced

WFP, March 2006, p. 2

"Primarily, this [Emergency] operation would contribute to the resolution of the conflict by assisting the resettlement of 120,000 vulnerable internally displaced people (IDP); 822,000 people living in communities affected by the conflict; 3,000 patients under treatment for tuberculosis (TB); and 4,000 ex-combatants and demobilized soldiers and their family members (24,000 estimated beneficiaries) to facilitate reintegration into their communities."

Government of the Philippines, International Funding Agencies, Mindanao Stakeholders, December 2005, p. 35

"For purposes of the JNA, IDPs were defined as those in Mindanao who fled their homes at least once since 2000 as a result of armed conflict.²⁵ This definition recognizes the recurrent nature of displacement in conflict-affected Mindanao and evolved out of consultations with IDPs and other stakeholders. It narrowed the scope of the assessment to a manageable size but still resulted in an IDP population of at least 930,000 persons – a number most specialists would consider conservative. This study population included:

- those persons displaced by the war of 2000;
- those displaced by the AFP offensive of 2003 – virtually all of whom were also displaced in 2000;
- and,
- those who were displaced by flooding after first being displaced by armed conflict since 2000.

The precise number of those who remained displaced at the time of the JNA field visits (August/September 2004) could not be determined but was estimated by stakeholders to be roughly 18,000 families (90,000 persons)."

Displacement incidents in 2006-2007

date	province	nb. displaced	source
3-Jan	Sultan Kudarat	677	DSWD
24-Jan	Maguindanao	32,000	Bantay ceasefire
3-Feb	Tarlac	3,000	CDRC
15-Feb	Surigao del Sur	567	DSWD
5-Mar	Davao City	3,700	Davao Today
22-Mar	Samar	1,200	Balay
12-Apr	North Cotabato	702	DSWD
14-Apr	North Cotabao	1,585	DSWD
4-May	Davao del Sur	3,436	DSWD
7-Jun	Quezon	334	DSWD
14-Jun	Quezon	765	DSWD
28-Jun	Bukidnon	766	DSWD
29-6/18-8	Maguindanao	39,934	DSWD
16-Jul	Occidental Mindoro	555	DSWD
17-Jul	Sultan Kudarat	774	DSWD
4-Aug	Sulu	2,000	Reuters
14-Sep	Sulu	1,000	Arabnews/E-Balita News
11-Oct	Negros Occidental	5,635	DSWD
Jan-Dec. 2006		98,630	

Sources: DSWD-DROMIC, Monthly reports, January-December 2006 [[Link](#)], Arabnews, E-Balita News, Balay, Bantay ceasefire, DPA [[link](#)]

Where are the displaced located?

The majority of the displaced (both those displaced in 2006 as well as those displaced in previous years) are located in the Muslim-populated areas of the ARMM region (Mindanao) and in Central Mindanao. Click on the map below to see which provinces of the country are most affected by conflict and displacement.

During 2006, the main displacement incident took place in the three Maguidanao municipalities of Mamasapano, Shariff Aguak and Datu Unsay with nearly 40,000 displaced between July and August. No details are available on the number of IDPs by municipalities.

For more detailed information on where displacement took place in 2005, which provinces/municipalities were most affected and where the IDPs were sheltered, see "[178,000 people displaced by armed conflict during 2005](#)"

For more details on the number and location of 930,000 IDPs identified by the Joint Needs Assessment in Mindanao, see [Annex 9 of the Joint Needs Assessment for Reconstruction and Development of Conflict-Affected Areas in Mindanao](#), December 2005 (pp. 89-92)

What has been the internal displacement trend in previous years?



Based on figures provided by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and news media (for 2006), it is estimated that a total of 1,922,435 people have been displaced by armed conflict in the six years (2000-2006). Nearly 80 per cent of all displacements during that time took place in 2000 and 2003.

Main conflict-induced displacement incidents in 2007 (March 2007)

- Up to 4,000 people were displaced in early March following more clashes around Midsayap.
- Some 2,500 people were displaced in mid-February following a military pursuit operation against prison escapees in Cotabato and Maguindanao province.
- At the end of January 2007, up to 6,000 people were displaced by skirmishes between MILF rebels and members of the Civilian Volunteer Organisation (CVO) near Midsayap and Datu Piang, Maguindanao.

Bantay Ceasefire & Mindanao Peoples Caucus, 20 February 2007

"Barely has all of over 7,000 evacuees of Midsayap town in Cotabato Province have gone back home when a chain of displacement was again reported, this time, expanding to other towns of Cotabato and some municipalities of Maguindanao.

(...)

But if the Midsayap case had been caused by skirmishes between government troopers and Moro Islamic Liberation Front guerrillas, this time, the displacement is an offshoot of military pursuit operation against 52 inmates of the Cotabato Provincial Jail who escaped from prison last February 2, 2007. Aside from common criminals, authorities said that the escapees included MILF members who allegedly took refuge.

(...)

In Langayen, Pikit are 57 families, its members mostly children who walked around three hours all the way from Rangaban-2 and Rangaban-3 in Midsayap to the house of Langayen Barangay Councilor Datuan Jamali, who is a relative of most of the evacueefamilies. They left their respective residences on February 2, 2007 following a military operation against suspected MILF rebels who allegedly killed a military deep penetrating agent identified as Untong Abdul.

The evacuees are among around 30% of the residents of Rangaban who are yet to return home. They have not been served by any relief organization as of February 15. Among their needs include food relief, kitchen utensils, plastic laminated sacks for tent and medicines for children and women sick of diarrhea, cough, colds fever and skin disease.

Except for Rangaban, Mudseng and Tugal, where 30-40% of their residents are yet to go back to their respective homes, 90% of the residents in all other barangays of Midsayap have already gone back home.

In GSKP, a total of 487 families composed of 2,274 individuals vacated their houses in Barangay Pidtiguian and Liguasan. Records of the local Welfare and Development Office bared that the evacuees are scattered in houses of relatives in the barangays of Lao-Lao, Panosolen, Lasangan and Midpandacan."

Bantay Ceasefire, 29 January 2007

"It was reported that early in the morning of January 25, 2007, Thursday, an armed encounter occurred between Bantay Bayan Forces, also known as Civilian Volunteers Organization, and alleged some members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The encounter, which was reportedly triggered by a land dispute, happened at Sitio Taboboc, Barangay Rangaban early in the morning of that day. One Bantay Bayan members died in the incident that subsequently triggered fiercer fighting between government and MILF troopers.

(...)

Around 1235 families, or some 6,000 individuals have abandoned their homes and temporarily took shelter in schools, houses of relatives and other structures like turugan (meeting place). Many families also stayed only under the trees along the highway connecting Midsayap and Datu Piang of Maguindanao. The exact number of evacuees could not be ascertained as many were considered "mobile evacuees" who had their sleds and tractors parked under the trees along the highway that served as their temporary shelters. Despite the fact that January 27, Saturday, was

not a working day, a few government officials and employees were monitored visiting the affected villages, but there was no way to gather exact data on the number of evacuees as movements to the evacuations areas were still ongoing until dusk. There was apparently no specific pre-identified evacuation area for emergency cases similar to this. The process of evacuation was obviously disorganized as there were no enough government officials, employees or NGOs ushering the fleeing villagers to where they should go. While the government figure presents no estimate on the number of families affected, the LGU's estimated figure on the number of individual-evacuees matched that of the Bantay Ceasefire's figure of 6,000."

Close to 100,000 people displaced by conflict during 2006

32,000 people displaced by fighting between MILF and paramilitary groups in Mamasapano, Maguindanao province in late January 2006

Bantay Ceasefire, 2 February 2006

"Armed Engagements between BIAF under 105th Base Command and Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) and Civilian Volunteers Organization (CVO)

(...)

The armed clashes have resulted in the evacuation of nearly 32,000 civilians. Bashir Iskak, 9 year old boy was hit by stray bullet in Brgy. Timbangan, Shariff Aguak. There is also unconfirmed reports of a 7 month pregnant woman who died of shock during the first salvo of the fighting in Brgy. Kayakaya, Datu Abdullah Sangki on Jan. 25, 2006.

Displaced Civilians

Several barangays were totally displaced as a result of this weeklong fighting between the 105th Base Command of the MILF and the paramilitary CAFGU's and CVO's. These communities were Koloy, Tapihan, Lepok, Bagongupam, Nabundas, Tina, Bialong, in Mamasapano and Barangay Kayaya in Datu Abdullah Sangki. The evacuation areas are in Poblacion Shariff Aguak , Poblacion Mamasapano, Libutan and Tukanalipao, Mamasapano; Dapyawan and Kitango, Datu Saudi Ampatuan. Humanitarian agencies and NGOs have difficulty in locating evacuees as most prefer to stay in their relatives houses.

DSWD Maguindanao officially recorded a total of 6,395 families or 31, 975 individuals displaced civilians from four municipalities of Mamasapano., Shariff Aguak, Datu Abdullah Sangki and Rajah Buayan. The Mindanao Emergency Relief Network (MERN) is in the process of validating and locating the evacuees at present."

3,000 people displaced by counter-insurgency operations against NPA rebels in Sta. Ignacia, Tarlac province

CDRC, 3 February 2006

"Described as the military's biggest operation in Tarlac, the offensive against the New People's Army (NPA), leading to a 10-hour gun battle and air strikes early this week, caused the immediate evacuation of an unaccounted thousands from three villages in the municipality of Sta. Ignacia.

At least 3,000 residents or approximately 550 families have yet to return home due to what the military say as clearing operations in the areas."

An estimated 3,700 people (or 746 families) displaced by paramilitary groups in Davao **Davao Today, 5 March 2006**

"The human-rights group Karapatan blamed the military over the weekend for the displacement of some 746 families from Paquibato as a result of a series of attacks allegedly by Alamara bandits in the hinterland district of the city.

In a statement, Kelly Delgado, Karapatan-Southern Mindanao's acting secretary-general, said three Paquibato residents, one of them a village councilor, were allegedly murdered in February by members of the paramilitary group Alamara.

Following the attacks, which Delgado described as vicious, members of the Alamara wrought more havoc in Paquibato by harassing civilians, leading to the evacuation of the affected families.

"The Alamaras lord it over the helpless civilians," Delgado said. They "sow terror, loot the houses and kill innocent individuals." Some of the residents, he said on Sunday, have since returned to their homes.

Delgado blamed the Task Force Davao and the 73rd Infantry Battalion for the attacks and for the ensuing displacement. He said the military has been continuously supporting and controlling the Alamara, which has been helping in the military's counter-insurgency operations. He accused the armed forces violated domestic and international agreements on human rights and international humanitarian law."

See also "[Army says NPA camp captured](#)", The Inquirer, 8 April 2006

More than 1,500 people displaced by fighting between the MILF and paramilitaries in Carmen, North Cotabato

DSWD, 14 April 2006

"A total of three hundred eighteen (318) families composed of 1,585 individuals were displaced when the gun battle between Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Civilian Volunteer Officers (CVOs) forces occurred at the abovementioned address. No casualty was reported.

Displaced families took temporary shelter at their friends' and relatives' houses in the nearby Sitios at Barangays."

An estimated 3,500 people displaced by armed incident in Davao del Sur

DSWD, 4 May 2006

"Six hundred seven (607) families composed of 2,932 dependents were displaced and took temporary shelter with their friends' and relatives' houses due to the incident.

No reported casualties.

DSWD Field Office XI and the City Social Services Office are in the area assessing the needs of the affected families.

UPDATE As of May 19, 2006

A total of eight hundred fifty-nine (859) families composed of 3,436 individuals coming from the three (3) barangays were affected."

Up to 40,000 people displaced in by fighting between MILF and paramilitary group in Shariff Aguak, Maguindanao (28 June-18 August 2006)

DPA, 8 July 2006

"At least 30,000 people have fled their homes in southern Philippines to escape clashes between pro-government militiamen and Muslim rebels, a social welfare official said Saturday.

Ruby Sahali, a regional chief of the social welfare department, said the evacuation continued amid an uneasy truce between the militiamen and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebels in Shariff Aguak town in Maguindanao province, 960 kilometres south of Manila.

Sahali said that late Friday suspected MILF rebels from unknown location fired two mortars in the nearby town of Mamasapano, but no one was hurt in the attack.

"The people continue to leave their homes because every now and then both parties are trading gunfire," she said. "There was no truce because they are still fighting in the area." "

DSWD, 18 August 2006

"Seven thousand nine hundred fifty-one (7,951) families composed of 39,934 persons coming from eighteen (18) barangays of the seven (7) municipalities affected in Maguindanao were displaced.

Thirty-one (31) evacuation centers were utilized to shelter 4,867 affected families with 23,836 persons. To date, thirteen (13) evacuation centers still exist and temporarily sheltering 1,008 affected families or 4,412 persons while 588 other families composed of 3,204 persons are being served outside evacuation centers."

Up to 3,000 people displaced in Sulu by military operations against Abu Sayaff Group between August and September 2006

DPA, 3 August 2006

"Thousands of people fled their homes as fighting between government troops and al-Qaeda-linked Muslim Abu Sayyaf rebels raged for the third day on a southern Philippine island, the military said Thursday.

Colonel Antonio Supnet, chief of staff of the armed forces' Southern Command, said more than 2,000 people have stayed in two evacuation centres since the fighting broke out Tuesday in Indanan town on Jolo Island, 1,000 kilometres south of Manila."

E-Balita, 15 September 2006

"Military offensives against Abu Sayyaf militants and alleged members of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terror group hiding in the hinterland of the Philippines province of Sulu have displaced almost 1,000 civilians. Abdulwatan Mohammad, provincial director of the Filipino government's social and development office, told Adnkronos International (AKI) that the evacuees have yet to receive any relief assistance from the state."

More than 5,000 people displaced by armed conflict in Calatrava, Negros Occidental

DSWD, 25 October 2006

"One thousand one hundred thirty-three (1,133) families or 5,635 coming from the five barangays were affected and displaced.

Seven (7) evacuation centers were opened to temporarily shelter 236 families or 1,180 persons. Others joined their relatives' and friends' residing in the nearby barangays.

(...)

§ A total of five hundred (500) families composed of 2,497 persons coming from the six (6) barangays were affected and displaced.

§ Two hundred thirty-six (236) families or 1,180 persons sought temporary refuge at the six (6) barangay halls and a Day Care Center while others joined their relatives' and friends' residing in the nearby barangays.

(...)

§ Most of the affected families returned to their respective places of origin as the peace and order situation was restored and ensured by the police authorities. Others, however, are still staying with their relatives' houses for fear of another fire fighting. "

See "[Army troops scored for alleged torture, harassment in Negros](#)", Bulatlat, November 2006

PATTERNS OF DISPLACEMENT

General

Length and circumstances of displacement vary depending mainly on type of armed confrontation causing the displacement (October 2006)

- UNICEF study shows that the length of displacement and pattern of displacement tends to vary considerably depending on the cause of displacement.

UNICEF, October 2006, p. 6

"The experience of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) covered by the study has varied mainly in terms of length of displacement and partly in terms of circumstances. In terms of length of displacement these lasted up to: eleven days (Surigao del Sur), two weeks (Compostela Valley), running up to eight months so far at the time of field research (Leyte), about a year (North Cotabato), and nearly five years (Maguindanao).

The main difference in circumstances is between the Leyte bakwit (or evacuees) and those of the other provinces: the estimated 200-250 Leyte bakwit left their community family-by-family over the span of six months to escape perceived military attacks against them, and not en masse following a major battle. Interviews indicate that such phenomena of bakwit also occurred at different periods for other provinces affected by armed conflict, although this was not directly monitored by the research team.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development's (DSWD) records estimate a total of 1,025,436 IDPs for the period 2001-2005, almost 70 percent of whom were in the ARMM and Region IX.2 The Global IDP Database in turn estimates 908,000 IDPs."

Patterns of displacement of armed conflict-IDPs (October 2006)

- Mass evacuations due to military operations tend to be on very short notice, leaving the displaced with little or no time to take anything with them.
- Some displaced communities can rely on strong and effective local networks to assist them during the evacuation, while others prefer to rely on individual family initiatives.
- Depending on the level of trust with the government, some displaced communities would avoid the evacuation centers and seek refuge closer into MILF territory.
- Temporary evacuation centers for IDPs are usually schools, churches, gymnasiums and other public structures large enough to accommodate many people.
- Most displacements caused by the fighting between the rebel MILF and the military follow and rural-urban migration pattern.
- Usual, the displaced make prolonged stops in 2-3 places before reaching their final evacuation center, which consists of schools, public buildings or tent cities, where conditions are generally inadequate. In most cases, the IDPs end up residing permanently in the host communities.

- The type of displacement produced since 2000 is qualitatively different from those seen in recent years. There now exists a tendency toward longer-term displacements for the first time since the 1970's.

UNICEF, October 2006, pp. 118-119

"All the mass evacuations were immediately driven by AFP offensive operations. Judging from respondent accounts, coordination between the military and civilian authorities has been uneven. LGUs down to the barangay level are seldom appraised of impending military operations. Respondents claimed this to be the case as well for such relevant agencies as the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) and even the Office of Civil Defense (OCD), although the research team could not confirm this. Some respondents surmised, however, that the practice is due to the military's desire to have the the element of surprise on their side.

The worst problems during evacuations occur during the frenzied departures of residents while under fire, and the difficulties of travelling to evacuation sites, when family members are sometimes even separated temporarily. Some residents of conflict areas left their homes with only the clothes on their backs, leaving everything else behind.

The existence of traditional social organizations and POs helps establish a level of capacity to address community crisis situations. These POs usually have direct knowledge of the needs of their communities, are familiar and trusted, and are thus in a better position to mobilize and coordinate internal resources to meet immediate challenges. This was apparent in the case of the Surigao del Sur and Compostela Valley evacuations in which residents themselves systematically worked out the safe evacuation of the community. The North Cotabato and Maguindanao communities presumably would have benefited the most from strong local organizations if only because of the scale of resident displacement. However, they apparently relied more on individual family initiatives – with many resorting to the decades-old practice of independently dispersing and going to other Muslim communities where they have relatives – and on the local government.

(...)

North Cotabato respondents volunteered that their most recent evacuations were to some extent a qualified success because they were given enough advance notice to prepare for it. The Moro areas have already become accustomed to evacuation and have developed ways to fend for themselves such as by going to relatives in nearby provinces. Yet for the first time in 2003, say the displaced residents, the government was able to rapidly provide significant relief assistance soon after the military offensives started. Some of the former IDPs said they heard about possible AFP offensives first from mass media – which reported the movement of troops, tanks, artillery and war materiel – and then from local government officials, human rights organizations, and peace advocacy groups. To some extent this seems to have helped them prepare psychologically. But it also had a practical side. Some women in the FGD recalled that the first trucks sent by the LGU arrived to fetch them three days before actual hostilities ensued and brought them to evacuation centers in various nearby towns. This prompted a few to favorably comment that, war notwithstanding, the occasion at least saw the first efforts by the government to organize an evacuation they could remember for being better than than past ones. Some respondents were grateful that the government social welfare agency and donor institutions had been on hand to somewhat mitigate the humanitarian costs of the displacement on tens of thousands of civilians.

Yet in both North Cotabato and Maguindanao there were still many Moro civilians trapped in their communities as the shooting, air strikes and artillery bombardments ensued. Some respondents averred that many of them still refused to leave despite warnings of impending danger to their lives because they could not bear to just leave their homes and land. For others it seemed that

the decisive factor was their distrust of outsiders and the government. There were families that, instead of proceeding towards the highway and away from where it was announced there would be much fighting, opted to go the other way to seek shelter deeper into acknowledged MILF territory. It is possible that the orderly and timely evacuation of civilians would have been further facilitated if there were trusted and prepared internal community-based organizations already in place instead of families' being left basically on their own to decide when and where to evacuate, relying on information relayed by "outsiders".

The experience of the Surigao del Sur village visited is an IDP situation on a smaller scale but still provided some insight into the benefits of strong community-based organizations. When the sounds of shooting came closer, the community organization acted on the basis of their perception of the military and residents quickly assembled in one area to help ensure their security. The idea was to minimize abuses against those who remained in far-away isolation in their homes. When the military imposed strict controls on their movements and on the amounts of food they could bring in, residents pooled their limited resources and rationed rice gruel and what few viands they had, particularly prioritizing children, pregnant women and nursing mothers as the supplies dwindled. The organization also actively took steps to facilitate the intervention of the LGU and the local church diocese. When they were eventually forced to evacuate, there was a clear physical and social center where the residents of the community could get information, continue coordinating efforts, and negotiate for material and logistical support from the LGU and the diocese.

Temporary evacuation centers for IDPs are usually schools, churches, gymnasiums and other public structures large enough to accommodate many people. When there is insufficient room, temporary tent shelters of plastic are built in public spaces such as the grounds of government offices and even the roadsides. These makeshift structures are invariably made of light and improvised materials that provide insufficient protection from the elements. On the other hand, those who are placed in buildings not intended to be lived in immediately have to cope with confined spaces and inadequate ventilation. Some evacuation centers had been transformed into semi-permanent resettlement areas because the armed conflict in their home communities had been going on for months and even years."

Notre Dame University & Commission on Population, 2004, p. ii

"The rural-urban migration in Cotabato and Maguindanao provinces is generally caused by the conflict between the Moro Fronts and the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Families are uprooted from their homes due to armed-conflict in their communities of origin. They left their homes and property and settled in the poblacion or in the nearest city. Regarding their experiences, most IDPs had to make prolonged stops in two or three places prior to their final encampment. The shortest stop in one place was 60 days and the longest 1,080 days.

Conflicts generally arise when the host communities are not ready or prepared to address the needs of the displaced persons. Most often the IDPs are housed in schools, gymnasiums and temporary tents/shanties, which are usually overcrowded and not well maintained. These conditions usually last from two to three months or even longer. In most cases, the IDPs end up residing permanently in the host communities. Several reasons may be attributed to this permanency of residence by the IDPs. First, the heads of the displaced families have found employment in the host communities and that the families have regular source of livelihood. Second, the displaced families have their children enrolled in schools of host communities. Third, these families have already adjusted to the life in the host communities. They are able to establish good rapport with their new neighbors. The presence of the displaced persons in the host communities is considered a case of migration, particularly for those who opted to stay permanently in the area."

Tendency to long-term displacement

UNDP 13 November 2000, p. 4

"Increased militarization has also led to the destruction of over 6000 homes and the internal displacement of nearly one million persons, 300,000 of whom were in that status in October 2000. The National Peace Forum identified two cases that they consider to constitute intentional destruction of housing by the Army (Nalapoan Pikit, North Cotabato and Matanog, Maguindanao). The same representatives point out that this should not be considered a pattern in that other cases have not been identified. However, the tactics employed did objectively lead to a large number of houses destroyed and a massive displacement of civilian population. The type of displacement produced is also qualitatively different from those seen in recent years. There now exists a tendency toward longer-term displacements for the first time since the 1970's. Only 10% of the persons whose homes have been destroyed desire to return to their place of origin as of October, 2000. In some cases relocation is being undertaken. The displaced persons do not wish to return to the locations of their previous homes due to the presence of the military, not because they fear the soldiers, but rather because stationary or in transit military draw MILF attacks that frequently place civilians in cross-fire situations. The net result is that human security in the areas affected has deteriorated as a result of militarization."

'Mobile' evacuees do not take refuge with family and avoid evacuation centers (January 2007)

- While many of the 6,000 people displaced at the end of January 2007 by skirmishes in Midsayap sought refuge in evacuation centers and other with families, many families opted to do neither and they stayed "mobile" under a tree or along a road.
- In July 2006, many of the displaced in Maguindanao stayed "mobile".

Bantay Ceasefire, 29 January 2007

"Around 1235 families, or some 6,000 individuals have abandoned their homes and temporarily took shelter in schools, houses of relatives and other structures like turugan (meeting place). Many families also stayed only under the trees along the highway connecting Midsayap and Datu Piang of Maguindanao. The exact number of evacuees could not be ascertained as many were considered "mobile evacuees" who had their sleds and tractors parked under the trees along the highway that served as their temporary shelters. Despite the fact that January 27, Saturday, was not a working day, a few government officials and employees were monitored visiting the affected villages, but there was no way to gather exact data on the number of evacuees as movements to the evacuations areas were still ongoing until dusk. There was apparently no specific pre-identified evacuation area for emergency cases similar to this. The process of evacuation was obviously disorganized as there were not enough government officials, employees or NGOs ushering the fleeing villagers to where they should go."

Mindanews, 14 July 2007

"A total of 4,456 families were displaced, according to a consolidated report of humanitarian agencies as of July 11. As of July 13, there is no information as yet exactly how many evacuees have remained in the evacuation centers, with their relatives, or have continued to be mobile and how many have returned home. "Mobile evacuees" are those who do not stay in evacuation centers or relatives' houses but carry with them makeshift tents which they pitch under a coconut tree in the villages or by the road in the town's poblacion."

IID, 13 July 2007

"The many mobile evacuees, who stay under the trees with their sleds and hand tractor-driven trailers are also very vulnerable especially that some areas where they sought refuge are flooded. A report reaching Bantay Ceasefire accounted that four children have already died in the evacuation areas."

IID, 2 July 2006

"The estimate of 2,000 evacuee-families, though rough, is based on an average of 200 families in each of the nine barangays where houses have reportedly been abandoned by residents, some of whom do not even feel safe evacuating to the town center.

But the so-called mobile-evacuees, in this case, believe they are in a better situation compared to their relatives and neighbors who have been left trapped between the two warring groups."

People fleeing political persecution and counter-insurgency tactics are largely invisible (October 2006)

- According to a UNICEF study, counter-insurgency operations are responsible for an "invisible" form of displacement.
- Civilians are forced to move away from their sources of livelihood, relatives and communities to escape political persecution. This type of displacement is reported to have increased between 2001 and 2006.

UNICEF, October 2006, p. 42-43

"Interviews with church and human rights workers indicate that the phenomenon of "invisible" evacuees also occurs at different periods in other provinces affected by armed conflict, although these could not be directly monitored by the research team. This disorganized and dispersed but nonetheless steady stream of civilians forced to move away from their sources of livelihood, relatives and communities to escape political persecution has been occurring since the 1970s but, it seems, has swelled in the last five years.

Counter-insurgency victims

Compared to IDPs, not as many civilians alleged to be supporting or joining the armed groups are affected at any one time in the course of military counter-insurgency operations. The phenomenon nonetheless deserves attention because it seems to be a distinct feature of the military response to the protracted guerrilla war being waged by, in particular, the CPP-NPA-NDFP. Fighting frequently happens in sites relatively distant from the communities although military operations also seek to undermine civilian support for the NPA. The relatively dispersed incidence and low-intensity of these cases make them "invisible" to the media and other observers. It is also difficult to get precise information on these incidents as they tend to occur in remote rural communities and many go unreported and undocumented. However it is important to get an idea of the pervasiveness of the phenomenon and it is still possible to get a sense of the situation with the data at hand.

If we take the number of apparent killings of unarmed civilians tagged as "supporters" or "fronts" of the rebel groups as a rough proxy, there were more civilian deaths outside of armed encounter incidents than are caught in the crossfire during encounters. For the 2001-2005 period, the independent human rights group Karapatan recorded 596 killings of unarmed civilians nationwide that were alleged to be related to the AFP counter-insurgency program; 52 of those killed were under 18 years old, and 63 were women. This is three times the 199 civilians killed in the crossfire during encounters between the AFP and the various armed groups. There is an

alarming increase in these figures in the first half of 2006, when Karapatan recorded 113 killings, of which five (5) of those killed were under 18 years old and 12 were women.

The situation is worse in the case of casualties from assassinations among legal Leftist groups. The number of civilian activists, leaders and members of mass organizations tagged as "Communist fronts" who were allegedly killed by state forces during the 2001-2005 period (239 people) is over five times the number of civilians killed in the crossfire during AFP-NPA encounters (42 people). The Leftist political party Bayan Muna alone suffered 81 deaths among its leaders and members in that same period – with the total reaching 113 deaths by mid-2006.

Karapatan also monitored some 35,941 individual victims of violations of the right to life (resulting in deaths or injury) and some 54,952 individual victims of threats, harassment, intimidation, and illegal arrest/detention in the 2001-2005 period. This was out of a reported total of 4,992 cases of human rights violations affecting 283,097 individuals and 34,961 families in 420 communities.

The Children's Rehabilitation Center (CRC) in turn reported 819 incidents of human rights violations involving children as victims from 2001 to April 2005. These cases included 142 victims of killings, 24 victims of physical assault, 775 victims of threats, harassment and intimidation, and 112 victims of arbitrary arrest and illegal detention. There were 75 children orphaned when their parents were killed. CRC also estimates that 45 percent of the direct victims were 15 years old or younger."

Pattern of displacement of 'invisible' politically persecuted IDPs makes them more difficult to assist (October 2006)

- Invisible displacement takes place with pockets of families displaced member-by-member or family-by-family over a relatively extended period of time as a result of threats due to counter-insurgency operations.
- The plight of these "invisibly" displaced is somewhat different from the more conventional IDPs, with many victims of trauma from threats, harassment and violence even before the actual displacement itself.
- They receive less attention by humanitarian donors probably because they move as a steady trickle rather than as a massive cataract of evacuees, their plight is not dramatic enough.
- Their return is also more difficult and hard to determine since it is not just an end to fighting that they need but also an end to the perceived military threat to them.

UNICEF, October 2006, p. 122

"The phenomenon of pockets of families displaced member-by-member or family-by-family over a relatively extended period of time as a result of threats due to counter-insurgency operations deserves special mention. These are not nearly as visible as the large-scale displacements in the well-publicized war zones of Central Mindanao, but the humanitarian consequences, when added up across the entire country, are arguably comparable. In just one area visited by the research team in Leyte province, it was estimated that some 200-250 individuals had left contiguous barangays to move to the National Capital Region (NCR) over the second semester of 2005. This estimate did not include those who had moved elsewhere in the Visayas or to the nearby Bicol region.

The ordeal of these "invisibly" displaced is somewhat different from the more conventional IDPs. To begin with, they had gone through the harrowing experience of being intentionally targeted by the military – or at least the perception that they were being intentionally targeted – for being supporters of the NPA or for having family members who are with the NPA. They may be leaders

of the local POs the military has labeled "Communist fronts", parents or children of NPA fighters, or otherwise reputed to be active NPA supporters. But they may not even be any of these, and have merely been arbitrarily tagged as one or the other. Thus there is already mounting trauma from threats, harassment and violence even before the actual displacement itself.

When beleaguered families finally make the decision to evacuate, their peculiar circumstances may militate against accessing external support from mainstream sources. Their cases can be seen as too "political" for government welfare agencies. Perhaps because they move as a steady trickle rather than as a massive cataract of evacuees, their plight is not dramatic enough for the usual humanitarian donors. Meanwhile human rights groups that may be sympathetic tend not to have the resources or experience for any sort of sustained relief or rehabilitation work. The tendency of such evacuees to be dispersed also makes any organized or centralized effort to assist them a costly affair. There may also be security considerations insofar as close family members may really be associated with or are actually with the NPA, in addition to their being suspected of themselves being NPA "fronts."

These evacuees' return to their communities can also be hard to determine. It is not just an end to fighting that they need but also an end to the perceived military threat to them. Moreover, even if they brave a return to their homes, the threat to their security and welfare may last as long as counter-insurgency operations continue in their area."

Better coordination between MILF and military allowed for improved evacuation of civilians in 2005, but people continue to flee without prior warning (August 2005)

- During 2004 and 2005, improved communication between MILF and government allowed for better planned and coordinated evacuation of civilians, although the latter have remained at risk of sudden displacement.
- During 2003, people have generally fled the fighting between the government troops and the MILF.
- Villagers are sometimes ordered by the military to leave their villages to allow elbow room for troop maneuvers, or villagers are driven out by the fear of being caught in the crossfire, or the terror of being accused as sympathizers in whichever side of the current conflict.

Enhanced cooperation between military and MILF allows for better planned evacuations of civilians

Mindanews, 19 August 2005

"Since July 1, the Philippine Army has been trying to find and attack a band of the Abu Sayyaf Group or ASG who are reportedly in Maguindanao. Under harassment by continuing AFP operations, the ASG has split into small groups.

Not to endanger the peace process and the ceasefire, the MILF and the government agreed to cooperate in the evacuation of more than 1,500 civilians in the affected barangays in Guindolongan (Brgy. Ahan, Upper Muti, Datal Pandan and Lambayo) and Talayan (Brgys. Pukol, Marader, Timar).

The MILF meanwhile has agreed to temporarily move out from two of their camps in Maguindanao, Camp Badar and Camp Omar, to give government troops the leeway to operate in their areas. The MILF fighters move out under a guarantee of security by the government. A search operation, planned first for 72 hours, is extended several times when the army is still unable to make contact with the group of terrorists.

(...)

Some of the evacuees have been allowed to enter the area of search operations on the west side of the Ahan river. But they are only allowed in the area from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., a mechanism agreed on between the MILF and GRP. Eight hours. But it already takes the farmers some six hours just to reach their farms! Six hours from the allowed eight!

(...)

Some farmers return to their farms and stay there overnight, accepting the risk to remain in an area that has not been declared "cleared" of terrorist elements. We talk about the security question for the evacuees— how will their security be ensured? It is a difficult question: Have you ever chosen between your personal security and the necessity to be able to feed your family in the coming months?"

Without prior warning, people in Maguindanao leave their homes to the sound of the air strikes and bombs (January 2005)

Bantay Ceasefire, IMT, GRP-MILF CCCH, 28 January 2005, p. 1

"At around 9:00 o'clock in the morning, January 27, 2005, residents of barangay Tee, Andabit and nearby barangays were shock when an OB-10 bombers, helicopter gunship suddenly open fire and dropped several rounds of bombs in their place. According to one of the resident, she was fishing that time when incidents happen. She jumps from her little "banka" and hide in thick "baumbong" a tall grass for safety. When the bomber planes left she hurriedly went home and carried all her siblings to barangay Butalo. She don't even know if there were houses being burn or destroyed because she left at that moment for fear if the bomber planes will return.

According to Barangay Captain Marcus Manunggal of Barangay Tee, an estimated of 400 families from his barangay were displaced. He could not ascertain how many houses and properties being destroyed when the air strike hit the area because they left their villages at the height of the bombing. Barangay Captain Dimalon Silvando of Barangay Andabit also said that more than 100 families were affected from his barangay. Barangay Captain Silvando added that a 14-year-old child and four (4) adults was wounded in the attack."

Evacuees usually leave their homes before fighting either because they are encouraged to do so by the military or out of fear of being caught in the crossfire

"Some 4,000 families or 20,000 residents, most of them Muslims, have fled 11 villages in Pikit, North Cotabato since Saturday afternoon, fearing a crossfire between government forces and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

As of 5 p.m. today (Sunday), 22 truckloads of Marine troopers have arrived in Pikit, Fr. Roberto Layson, OMI, Pikit parish priest, said. Armored personnel carriers rolled into Pikit Friday night, he said.

(...)

Fr. Layson the evacuees from Barangay Rajamuda and 10 other villages along or near the Pulangui River, are now in the poblacion of Pikit or neighboring towns of SK Pendatun and Pagalungan in Maguindanao.

The deployment of "25 battalions" according to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in Maguindanao, and the arrival of armored personnel carriers in Pikit Friday night, have evoked a war scenario here last seen in June 2000.

But Major Julieta Ando, spokesperson of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said the evacuees fled their villages after seeing "some 2,000 MILF" (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) forces massing up in Barangays Buliok and Cabasalan." (Mindanews, 9 February 2003)

TFDP, July 2002

"Many regions in the Philippines are today highly militarized, and with increased military presence, the number of reported human rights violations has risen.

(...)

Military campaigns are usually followed by massive displacement of communities. Villagers are sometimes ordered by the military to leave their villages to allow elbow room for troop maneuvers, or villagers are driven out by the fear of being caught in the crossfire, or the terror of being accused as sympathizers in whichever side of the current conflict."

PHYSICAL SECURITY & FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Physical security

AFP's counter-insurgency approach tends to disregard any distinction between combatants and civilians (October 2006)

- According to a UNICEF study, a textual analysis of official AFP documents on military strategy and tactics tends to indicate that the distinction between combatants and civilian noncombatants is not just blurred but explicitly disregarded.
- The official AFP strategy against terrorism also seems to consider everyone suspected of associating with alleged terrorists – even unarmed civilians – as legitimate military targets.

UNICEF, October 2006, p. 35

"Given the on-going guerrilla war of the NPA and the apparent shift towards guerrilla mode on the part of the MILF – following the attacks on its major camps in 2000 and 2003 (although there is a mutual ceasefire in place since July 2003) – it is important to pay special attention to how the state's counter-insurgency approach against guerrillas treats non-combatant civilians. A textual analysis of official AFP documents on military strategy and tactics tends to indicate that the distinction between combatants and civilian noncombatants is not just blurred but explicitly disregarded. Unless there is a radical change in core AFP doctrines, this disturbingly points to continuing, and, given recent declarations of intensified attacks on the NPA, ever greater numbers of civilian victims of military operations in the near future.

(...)

AFP doctrines clearly understand the CPP politico-military or political infrastructure to be community-based and distinct from the NPA military forces. At the same time, it also seems that despite such a civilian and non-combatant character the AFP entertains the use of lethal military force against them. AFP-PNP operational guidelines for instance regard the "CTM's political infrastructure [as] dismantled as a result of... the identification and neutralization of the leaders and members" of the following formations, all of which are civilian and unarmed: People's Organizing Committee (POC), People's Organizing Group (POG), Party Group, Solid Mass Association (MASSO), Komiteng Balangay/Grupong Balangay and Local Party Branch.¹⁵ It is moreover made explicit that: "The term 'neutralization' means preventing the dissident terrorists from accomplishing their objective of seizing state power through violent means. The process of neutralization can be effected through killing, capture, apprehension, surrender, conviction or exposure."¹⁶

The AFP also acknowledges the civilian character of community support structures elsewhere when it says: "The insurgent gets the majority of his logistical support from the population."¹⁷ An official AFP publication has been even more specific: "In areas where NDF organizations cannot be fully established Bayan Muna, on the pretext of being a political party, successfully established party organizations, which later can be transformed into a Communist Terrorist Movement (CTM) politico-military infrastructure."¹⁸ Among the recommendations is that: "SOT operations should include identification and neutralization of Bayan Muna members in the barangay." Yet Bayan Muna is a duly registered national political party which currently has the maximum three seats possible for any single party-list group in the House of Representatives.

(...)

The official AFP strategy against terrorism likewise seems to consider everyone suspected of associating with alleged terrorists – even unarmed civilians – as legitimate military targets. The

AFP Military Strategy for Combating Terrorism identifies the NPA as a terrorist group “[enjoying a wide and deep] range of support from various sectors aside from its mass base, even within the government.”²² The same document identifies each NPA support element as a “potential node or critical vulnerability [that after identification] would be the focus of preemption or swift and decisive retaliation since such attacks would hurt the enemy the most. If the latter proves resilient, the attacks would be sustained until the terrorists are neutralized and their support structure dismantled. Whether through a single strike or a succession of blows, the important thing to consider is to hit the critical node or nodes.” This approach intentionally “seeks to strike the enemy where, when and how he is most vulnerable, physically and psychologically.” ”

MILF-AFP positional war results in larger civilian casualties and displacement than NPA-AFP confrontations (October 2006)

- According to a UNICEF study, a significant factor underlying differences in the impact of armed conflict on the vulnerabilities and capacities of communities is whether guerrilla or positional wars are being waged.
- The MNLF and the MILF have been oriented to a combination of more conventional positional warfare and armed uprising by Moro communities.
- The NPA on the other hand has from the beginning waged mobile guerrilla warfare, even allowing for fine-tuning following early experiments with developing mountain strongholds.
- AFP use of its full logistical superiority in sieges of MILF fixed bases has resulted in civilian casualties and large-scale displacements to evacuation centers at regular intervals.
- Fighting between NPA and AFP has also largely tended towards small-scale ambushes, raids and sniping with much lower incidences of physical displacements and evacuations compared to displacements due to positional fighting in MILF areas.

UNICEF, October 2006, pp. 33-35

"Both the MILF-BIAF and CPP-NPA-NDFP begin from the premise that they are waging revolutionary armed struggles in the interest of their declared constituencies. It is thus integral to their struggles to politically mobilize the Bangsamoro people or the country's oppressed and exploited classes, respectively. Also essential to both is the approach of developing, cultivating and nurturing their respective geographic areas and communities of influence. These territories and the people within them thus become very much exposed not only to the revolutionary movements but also to the political work of the MILF or the NPA. The rebel armed groups have evidently built up much influence through the years and these areas have become areas of contention vis-à-vis the established Philippine state which responds with counter-insurgency operations.

When “war” or “armed conflict” visit these communities it is concretely in the form of fighting – shootings, bombings and the like within or near their boundaries – and the presence of the armed groups involved. A significant factor underlying differences in the impact of armed conflict on the vulnerabilities and capacities of communities is whether guerrilla or positional wars are being waged.

The MNLF and the MILF have been oriented to a combination of more conventional positional warfare and armed uprising by Moro communities. The NPA on the other hand has from the beginning waged mobile guerrilla warfare, even allowing for fine-tuning following early experiments with developing mountain strongholds. The military response by state forces has differed accordingly.

The MILF's positional tactic of setting up sprawling camps is consistent with its secessionist demands and laying claim over territories; its objective is to establish a genuinely autonomous Bangsamoro Republic through decolonization of these areas from the Christian-dominated and Manila-based Philippine government. By the year 2000, the MILF for instance had 13 major fixed camps and 33 secondary ones – although it has since apparently been forced to shift to a more guerrilla mode, albeit still using field base camps that are just more remote or hidden than before.⁶ Camp Abu Bakr alone has been reported to cover some 100 square kilometers straddling six towns in two provinces; it was self-sufficient with small businesses, public markets and agricultural lots as well as a system of government based on Shariah law.⁷ With concealed support from groups in Arab nations, the MILF is well-trained and well-equipped with arms, including artillery and reportedly even surface-to-air missiles, and it has used these to defend what they have openly declared as MILF territories.⁸

Yet these fixed communities-cum-camps are susceptible to conventional battles and, most recently in 2000 and 2003, became the targets of massive AFP military operations including air strikes, bombings and artillery bombardments. The AFP is also predisposed to large-scale conventional warfare against the MILF-BIAF because of its essentially “outsider” status in closely-knit Moro communities and, especially, in clearly circumscribed MILF camps-cum-communities. This means difficulties in free entry and exit as well as in establishing any kind of long-term and sustained presence. As might be expected, AFP use of its full logistical superiority in sieges of MILF fixed bases has resulted in civilian casualties and large-scale displacements to evacuation centers at regular intervals.

This is not the situation with the CPP-NPA-NDFP whose declared guerrilla fronts, zones and bases are amorphous in the way they overlap with established Philippine territories. Their strategy of “protracted people’s war” (PPW) in “guerrilla fronts” has provoked a very different response from the AFP. The armed revolutionary Left generally has no long-term fixed bases as the MILF does and its forces are essentially perpetually mobile, shifting from forest or mountain encampments to the communities that it deems part of its ever-expanding mass base. NPA forces are also spread across the archipelago and its basic military formations are mostly platoon-size formations of around thirty fighters that operate in areas covering two to three (2-3) municipalities depending on the terrain. In addition they are often occupied with organizing work and other relatively invisible non-military activities: health, education, cultural and socioeconomic projects, collective labor arrangements, and arbitrating in intra-community conflicts. NPA officials in the field say that their rule of thumb is “90 percent mass work and 10 percent military work”.

The AFP tactic against the NPA's people’s war is “low-intensity conflict” (LIC) which combines military means with political, economic and psychological-informational-propaganda warfare in an integrated counter-insurgency (COIN) package. LIC acknowledges that the contending parties to the armed conflict effectively compete in the same territorial and community space, unlike in conventional warfare where battle lines and fronts are more clearly drawn. It also acknowledges that the NPA relies on the voluntary participation of communities for logistical support and for new fighters where its room to maneuver is critically dependent on how much of this is forthcoming.

Nevertheless, LIC remains a fundamentally military tactic and, for all the supposed stress on bringing the struggle to the plane of competing principles and ideologies as well as providing development alternatives, it has proven to easily degenerate into a thin veil for abusive state military and paramilitary forces. This has been the experience with LIC not just in the Philippines but also in other similar localized conflicts across Asia, Latin America and to a lesser degree Africa.

Having no large fixed NPA encampments to target, the AFP and its paramilitaries have taken to continuous combat patrols and maintaining a presence in communities through military detachments or outposts. Actual fighting has also largely tended towards small-scale

ambuscades, raids and sniping by the NPA which means much lower incidences of physical displacements and evacuations compared to displacements due to positional fighting in MILF areas. However, the current research finds that LIC against the NPA seems to have been accompanied by purposeful and often violent efforts by state forces to undermine or discourage civilian support for the NPA who operate largely unseen."

Military accused of disregarding human rights of civilians in Sulu offensive against Abu Sayaff (February 2007)

- The western Mindanao's Commission on Human Right held the military responsible for the 'senseless' killing of 8 people in a village in Patikul, Sulu, including a 14-year old boy.
- A fact-finding mission conducted in Sulu in March 2005 by civil society organisations concluded that although no civilian casualties had been reported during evacuation, the military had nonetheless made use of excessive force against the MNLF rebels.
- MNLF accused military of the following "acts of terrorism": poisoning of water sources, taking cover in civilian homes, "hamletting" or hostageing of a community, use of civilians as perimeter defense, and then "kidnapping" of cows, goats and other farm animals.
- Another civil society mission, led by Kalinaw Mindanao, reported the following violations: denial of medical treatment to civilians, indiscriminate aerial bombing and shelling on civilian populations, summary executions, desecration of remains, divestment and destruction of properties, looting, strafing, violation of domicile, grave/threats/intimidation and harassments.

The Inquirer, 22 February 2007

"Malacañang and the military are not the only ones complaining about the preliminary report made by United Nations special rapporteur Philip Alston on the extra-judicial killings and human rights situation in the county.

Human rights advocates in this city and Sulu said they were unhappy that Alston failed to include in his investigation the killings of innocent people in the island-province and the war crimes the military has allegedly been committing in the area.

Claretian missionary priest Angel Calvo, executive director of the Peace Advocates Zamboanga (PAZ), said Sulu was left out of Alston's investigation and documentation.

"The incidents in Sulu were kind of left behind (in the investigation)," Calvo said, adding that the military has been justifying some of the killings as part of the government's anti-terror campaign.

Temojen Tulawie, a human rights activist based in Jolo, said innocent people are dying in the military's hands.

"A large number of people have died, many were left homeless because of the military's abuses," Tulawie said, without providing figures."

The Inquirer, 9 February 2007

"The Commission on Human Rights (CHR) in Western Mindanao has faulted member of the Philippine Marines for the January 18 bloodshed in Patikul, Sulu, which triggered tension between the government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

Jose Manuel Mamauag, CHR Western Mindanao director, said the clash in the village of Timpook was an "utter disregard of human rights that resulted in the senseless killings."

The government rights agency's probe showed the incident was an offshoot of "unprovoked attack perpetrated by troops of the Philippine Marines in the subvillage of Tandu Batoh, Timpook village," Mamauag said.

The military had said it was an encounter between the Marines and members of the Islamic extremist group Abu Sayyaf. At least 10 bandits and three soldiers were killed during the clash.

But based on its investigation, the CHR said only eight people from the village were killed, one of them a 14-year old boy."

Davao Today, 9 September 2006

"A Moro rights group echoes fears that the unabated military operations in Sulu and in other areas of operations of the joint US-RP military will lead to human rights violations against Moro civilians.

(...)

The Moro leader said the media blackout in the operation areas, and the narrowing democratic space for human rights organizations, may heighten the danger of military atrocities against civilians.

"Now monitoring human rights abuses in these 'no-man's lands' have been very difficult. Early this year, the Commission on Human Rights in Region 11 made a public statement that there are six deaths relating to the US-RP Balikatan Exercises and until now we don't know what the Philippine government will do about this case or if it will just keep a blind eye to all these abuses," Ropeta stated.

Ropeta also lambasted the abduction and terror-tagging of Muslim civilians and religious scholars and leaders which has been prevalent based on reports from the Kawagib, a Mindanao-based human rights group."

Bulatlat, 16 June 2006

"Signs that Sulu is now on the way to recovery and development are yet to come, with random bombings and killings devastating this war-torn Southern Mindanao archipelago. "Unless the government begins reviewing its security policies and stop its overblown war against terrorism, Sulu will remain in its current state, ravaged and impoverished," said Jolo Councilor Cocoy Tulawie.

April 14 bombing

At midnight of Prophet Mohammed's birthday, called Maulid en nabi, locals of Indanan town heard explosions in at least four villages. The explosives, believed to have been dropped from a high-flying bomber, pounded the villages of Balimbayan, Masjid Putih, Tambak and Subah Timauh. The bombings capped the celebration, which fell on a Good Friday for Christians.

Nine villagers were immediately killed including five women, three men and an eight-year old boy. The blasts also wrecked houses, recalled a local official.

"There was something unusual about the bombings," said Jolo Councilor Cocoy Tulawie. He said that the four explosive devices bore "unusual" shrapnel. "We suspect the military is pilot-testing these bombs," he said. He further believed that the devices were provided by U.S. troops who have been joining the local military in supposedly conducting "assessments" of the conflict area.

Amirah Lidasan, chair of Suara Bangsamoro Party-list, confirmed that her group received reports that U.S. missiles were fired at Indanan on April 14.

Sowing fear

Atty. Ulka P. Ulama, chair of the Concerned Citizens of Sulu (CCS), said his group submitted the findings of their investigation regarding the April 14 bombing to the regional office of the Commission on Human Rights in Zamboanga."

Sulu Peace and Solidarity Mission reports no civilian death during first ten days of combats but points to possible use of excessive force by military

Mindanao Peaceweavers, April 2005, pp. 8-9

"Whether led by the MNLF or on their own after some pre-warnings, the large number of evacuees, reaching around 70,000 at one point, though with no reported deaths in evacuation, are among the real casualties of this war, along with the combatants killed and wounded in action.

(...)

The absence of civilian casualties during the ten-day war might also be attributed to the conscious efforts of both sides to avoid such.

(...)

It was the impression of the mission that the general level of understanding of international humanitarian law (IHL) is low on both sides.

(...)

There are questions of IHL and the rules of war which arise on both sides. A major one has to do with the heavy firepower used by the AFP, especially howitzer rounds (of at least 155-mm.) and aerial bombs (of at least 500 lbs.). Is this already "excessive force," legally or morally inappropriate for an internal armed conflict between brother Filipinos? Should that firepower not be reserved instead for foreign invaders? The way war is waged may have some bearing, for better or for worse, on the subsequent peace which has to be waged. According to some accounts, howitzers were fired from school grounds and caused nose-bleeding and vomiting among school children. Col. Pajarito says these weapons were issued to them by higher headquarters and they will naturally use what is at their disposal to accomplish their mission. He speaks instead of "overwhelming force" which is needed to discourage the enemy so that the situation in Sulu does not spread to other areas. But it is precisely the overkill which could generate sympathy in other areas.

Among other MNLF complaints in the AFP's conduct of the war were the poisoning of water sources, taking cover in civilian homes, "hamletting" or hostaging of a community, use of civilians as perimeter defense, and then "kidnapping" of cows, goats and other farm animals which they likened to "acts of terrorism" of the Abu Sayyaf. AFP complaints of MNLF conduct tend to involve beheadings and other mutilations, and atrocities against innocent civilians. The mission did not have enough time to make a more thorough inquiry into the possible violations of the laws of war by both sides."

Kalinaw Mindanao mission reports that serious human rights violations were committed by military during Sulu offensive

Kalinaw Mindanao, April 2005, pp. 6-7

The following are the specific observations of the Mercy Mission:

(...)

9. An estimated 100 bombs were released by military elements for ten consecutive days (February 7 -17, 2005.)

10. Private dwellings of Moro people were used for military purposes without permission endangering the lives of civilians.

11. Denial of medical treatment both to the civilians and combatants alike were also committed.

12. Children remain traumatized. It was noticed that low self-esteem is felt by most of the children because they don't have money, no food. Their parents are all farmers, most of the time they cried because of their being poor.

13. Human rights violations committed against the community such as indiscriminate aerial bombing and shelling on civilian populations using artillery, mortar and cannons resulting to massive evacuation and displacement of the communities in the municipalities of Panamao, Indanan, Patikul, Maimbong and Parang were documented.

14. Serious specific human rights violations were also documented such as summary executions, desecration of remains, divestment and destruction of properties, looting, strafing, violation of domicile, grave/threats/intimidation and harassments.

15. Perpetrators were identified: 53rd IB, 6th IB, Scout Rangers; and the Task Force Comet under Brig. General Agustin Demaala.

Considering all the data gathered of the Mission, including that of the advance party sent to Sulu on March 1-3, 2005, the Mercy Mission has the following conclusions:

1. There is a continuing and intensifying human rights violations and grave disrespect of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines to the International Humanitarian Law as it deals with the internal armed conflict in Sulu.

2. The human rights violations documented by the fact-finding mission in 2002 continued to be committed by the AFP giving credence to the claim by the MNLF that continuous violations of the peace agreement of 1996 remained and is one of the reasons to the recent conflict in Sulu.

3. As it was in 2002, civilian communities have been the deliberate targets of intense military operations. Apparently, it has been part of the military strategy to attack civilian communities. Airpower and artillery bombardments have been excessively used during the military operations, resulting to the unnecessary destruction of private properties, and causing casualties and injuries among civilian populations. No distinctions have been made between armed elements and non-combatants. It became more apparent when major public chattels such as water installation and public schools, instead of being protected, were deliberately destroyed to sow terror amongst the people.

4. The military units have bragged on martial rule as these have shown no respect for civilian authorities in areas where the operations were conducted. As a matter of fact, even the Mayor of Patikul could not guarantee our safety should we enter his municipality, because of the restrictions military units have imposed."

MILF rebels accuse military of abuse against 4 IDPs (February 2007)

- According to the MILF, 4 IDPs were apprehended by the military when attempting to return to their homes to fetch food and some items to bring back to the evacuation centers. Two of them were reported to have been physically battered.

Sun Star Network Online, 6 February 2007

"In a report posted at its website luwaran.com, the MILF said four civilians were apprehended by the reconnaissance unit of the Philippine Army in Barangay Ulandang of Midsayap. One of the civilians was seriously battered.

"Another physically battered civilian known as Haron from Barangay Kapimpilan, Midsayap was brought to a hospital in Cotabato City by another civilian who saw that Haron could just barely walk. The four civilians were identified as Mira Matelendo, 29; Tho Alim, 24; Bahnarin Alim, 18; and Endong Alim, 16. They...were uprooted by the recent clashes in Midsayap and seeking refuge at Datu Gumbay Elementary School in Datu Piang, Maguindanao," the report stated.

The MILF said that another civilian, identified only as Omar, was arrested by the elements of the 7th IB of the Philippine Army last February 2 at Barangay Rangeban, Midsayap.

Omar is reportedly being held in detention at the Philippine National Police- Midsayap.

"The MILF-Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities and International Monitoring Team (IMT) was allowed to visit him yesterday at the office of the Chief Police of Midsayap. The MILF-CCCH relayed to luwaran that Omar was being forced to admit that he was an intelligence officer of the MILF. Omar said he is not MILF but an Imam (leader) of the Mosque in Rangeban," luwaran reported."

Luwaran.com, 5 February 2007

"Four civilians were apprehended yesterday by the Reconnaissance Unit of the Philippine Army at Barangay Ulandang of Midsayap, one was seriously battered physically. Late afternoon yesterday, another physically battered civilian known as Haron from barangay Kapimpilan, Midsayap was brought to a Hospital in Cotabato City by another civilian who saw Haron who could just barely walk with his feet. The four civilians were identified as Ms. Mira Matelendo (29 years old), Tho Alim (24), Bahnarin Alim (18), and Endong Alim (16). They are IDPs who were uprooted by the recent clashes in Midsayap and seeking refuge at Datu Gumbay Elementary School in Datu Piang, Maguindanao.

Accordingly, they were on their way to their residence in Barangay Kadingilan, Midsayap to take some materials including food which they badly needed to survive their hardships in the evacuation center (Datu Gumbay Elementary School).

During their ordeal in the hands of the elements of the Reconnaissance Unit, they were being asked questions such as where are the locations of the MILF forces? Also, they were being forced to admit that they are MILF members. The hapless civilians could only reply "we do not know because we are not MILF but evacuees."

Tho Alim even confided to the MILF Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) that his head and body were hammered and that he was physically harmed by the soldiers of the reconnaissance unit.

He also pointed out that they had been hearing a lot of alleged abuses by the military against Muslim civilians who were passing that road. But still, he said, they need to brave their way back home passing that road just to secure some badly needed materials."

Male youth in Mindanao see the presence of government forces as a threat to their safety (July 2006)

- Young males interviewed in Mindanao identified the withdrawal of AFP soldiers as an important step to improve safety in their communities, since 'no one will feel safe as long as the AFP is present in the region.'

WB, July 2006, p.13

"An overwhelming majority of the male youth in the communities visited was of the opinion that they cannot do much to improve safety and security and it is the task of the national and local governments to ensure their safety. All FGD participants wanted peace to prevail above all and expressed their willingness to volunteer if necessary to help the peace process take roots, and cooperate with barangay leaders and elders in maintaining peace and order. An important step

identified by them to improve safety in their communities is withdrawal of the AFP since 'no one will feel safe as long as the AFP is present in the region.' A young man in a barangay of Siocon in Zamboanga del Norte was more specific "the continuous harassment by the AFP is making us all desperate. If the government does not heed our pleas to stop the operation it will lead to the formation of a new group searching for the truth."

Nearly all FGD participants wish to become responsible citizens and contribute to peaceful development of their communities. Cooperative activity and networking with youth and youth organizations was also mentioned as beneficial to peace and security. Many of the youth interviewed said that their faith in God and prayer helped them get over their fears. In some FGD sites, the participants felt that independence and the establishment of an Islamic republic are the only solutions that can ensure lasting peace and security."

Military counter-insurgency operations result in high number of abuses in affected communities (February 2007)

- UNICEF study noted an increase in counter-insurgency operations resulting in human rights abuses against alleged supporters of rebel groups.
- The human right NGO Karapatan recorded 596 killings of unarmed civilians nationwide in the 2001-2005 period that are alleged to be related to the AFP counter-insurgency program.
- In February 2007, following the visit of the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial killings who attributed most of the upsurge in killings to the military, the government was forced under international pressure to release the "Melo" report, which backed the findings of the UN official.

UNICEF, October 2006, p. 6

"The research team also encountered civilians adversely affected in the course of military counter-insurgency operations in their communities for being alleged supporters of or joining the CPP-NPA-NDFP or MILF-BIAF. Compared to IDPs, not as many civilians were affected as drastically, but the phenomenon is nonetheless pervasive, has been occurring for decades, and is apparently intensifying.

Precise information on these incidents is difficult to come by especially since they tend to occur in remote rural communities and many go unreported and undocumented. The research team itself heard numerous anecdotal accounts. The independent human rights group Karapatan recorded 596 killings of unarmed civilians nationwide in the 2001-2005 period that are alleged to be related to the AFP counter-insurgency program; 52 of the victims were under 18-years-old and 63 were women. That number of deaths is three times the 199 civilians monitored killed in the crossfire during encounters between the AFP and various armed groups.

Karapatan also monitored some 35,941 individual victims of violations of the right to life (resulting in deaths or injury) and some 54,952 individual victims of threats, harassment, intimidation, and illegal arrest/detention in the period 2001-2005. This was out of a reported total of 4,992 cases of human rights violations affecting 283,097 individuals and 34,961 families in 420 communities.

The Children's Rehabilitation Center (CRC) in turn reported 819 incidents of human rights violations involving children as victims from 2001 to April 2005. These cases include 142 victims of killings, 24 victims of physical assault, 775 victims of threats, harassment and intimidation, and 112 victims of arbitrary arrest and illegal detention. There were 75 children orphaned when their parents were killed. CRC also estimates that 45 percent of the direct victims were 15 years old or younger.

Communities are sensitive to how they are spoken to, how their personal homes and properties are treated, how cultural practices and even simple local standards of decorum are respected, and especially about any violence inflicted on them whether recently or happening many years ago. The research team observed that communities distinguish between armed groups and do not have a common adverse reaction to the presence of armed men and women in their villages. Children and women perceive the NPA and the MILF as providing concrete benefits for the communities, as defending their interests and as being respectful of them. On the other hand there is distinct apprehension about the presence of government soldiers. These attitudes have been formed over three decades of dealing with the armed rebel groups and the military's presence in their communities.

Nonetheless there was still some anxiety expressed at the presence of the NPA or MILF out of fear that government soldiers may arrive and fighting might suddenly erupt in the community."

Sun Star Network Online, 22 February 2007

"Malacanang released Thursday the Melo Commission report a day after UN special rapporteur Philip Alston asked the Arroyo government to release the results of the probe on extrajudicial killings in the country.

(...)

Both Malacanañg and the Armed Forces said the UN report is one-sided and unfair.

Alston said Wednesday the military "is in a state of almost total denial of its need to respond effectively and authentically to the significant number of killings, which have been convincingly attributed to them."

(...)

Alston's investigation was backed up by a fact-finding commission headed by former Supreme Court Justice Jose Melo, which was released to the public Thursday under international pressure. It also found the military complicit in the deaths. It said "a small military group" was behind the rash of killings of left-wing activists and that "the 'purge' theory cannot be accorded credence."

The report was submitted to Arroyo last month but the government had initially refused to make it public, saying it was incomplete.

(...)

Local rights group Karapatan says more than 830 people have been murdered for political motives since Mrs. Arroyo came to power in 2001 -- many of them leftists, and some of them accused by the Army of links to the guerrillas.

The military on Thursday shifted blame to the communist insurgency for the spate of political killings in the country after separate investigations by a United Nations envoy and a Malacañang-formed commission blamed it for most of the murders."

IHT, 21 February 2007

"A United Nations human rights expert criticized the Philippine military and government Wednesday for not doing enough to solve a wave of political killings, many of which he said could be linked to government security forces.

"The armed forces remain in a state of almost total denial of its need to respond effectively and authentically to the significant number of killings which have been convincingly attributed to them," Philip Alston, the UN's special rapporteur on extrajudicial killings, said at a news conference at the end of a 10-day fact-finding mission in the Philippines.

The Philippine Army has been battling rebels of the Communist New People's Army for nearly four decades, in addition to a more recent struggle against Muslim separatists, and Alston said that the recent increase in extrajudicial executions can be attributed to the military's intensified counterinsurgency program."

Fighting and insecurity in Mindanao disrupt economic and social life and threatens people's physical security (July 2006)

- In Mindanao, security problems stem from various types of violence—the 'main conflict', rido,¹⁹ political and economic rivalries and inter-ethnic conflicts—fuel security issues.
- Most youth interviewed witnessed the burning of their homes and villages, survived attacks on themselves and their families, and experienced forced displacement and the misery of life in evacuation centers.
- A fact finding mission led by Kalinaw Mindanao in March 2005 observed widespread abuse of human rights by the AFP, including deliberate targeting of civilians during periods of intense military operations. Indiscriminate aerial bombing and shelling of civilian population, summary executions, desecration of remains, destruction of property, looting, violation of domiciles, threats, intimidation and harassment were reported as routinely employed by the AFP as part of their strategy to contain the conflict.

WB, July 2006, pp. 10-11

"In Mindanao, various types of violence—the 'main conflict', rido,¹⁹ political and economic rivalries and inter-ethnic conflicts—fuel security issues. The presence of a large number of armed groups and the easy availability of arms and ammunition are two major factors that have a bearing on security issues. These conditions create a very unsafe environment that discourages normal economic activity and the delivery of services such as health and education. As in most other conflict-affected areas, it is the poorest that are most severely affected. Many have had to leave their homes or even migrate in search of work, while others join one of the several armed groups in the region or get recruited as drug peddlers and eventually adopt a life of crime.

(..)

Fear in various forms dominates both public and private spheres among the youth surveyed. A majority of them has witnessed the burning of their homes and villages, survived attacks (Box 4) on themselves and their families, and experienced forced displacement and the misery of life in evacuation centers. Describing what he called "hell on earth," one FGD participant stated, "We were at the municipal hall until some relief organization distributed plastic tents for us to transfer to the municipal grounds. It soon started raining, and rained heavily, and all our tents were submerged in water. We moved once again to higher ground near the highway. We were hungry most of the time. There was never enough food in the evacuation center. We felt like beggars living on alms." In the absence of a peace agreement, young people continue to live with fears of outbreaks of violence that could shatter the present calm.

Abuse of Human Rights

A fact finding mission led by Kalinaw Mindanao in March 2005 observed widespread abuse of human rights by the AFP. The mission also noted that civilian communities were deliberately targeted during periods of intense military operations. Indiscriminate aerial bombing and shelling of civilian population, summary executions, desecration of remains, destruction of property, looting, violation of domiciles, threats, intimidation and harassment were reported as routinely employed by the AFP as part of their strategy to contain the conflict.

While most FGD groups agreed that they felt "safer" now, they also identified the following threats to their physical security:

The presence of the AFP in the region.

Arbitrary arrests especially of young Muslim males who are all viewed as rebels and terrorists by the government and the AFP. All FGD groups expressed complete lack of trust in the local law enforcement agencies many of which, according to them, are in league with the criminal gangs. Increasing militarization and easy availability of firearms. Besides the armed conflict, the region is plagued by clan violence, political and economic rivalry, and a deep-rooted belief in revenge. Since all groups resort to violence to settle their scores the need for self-protection is paramount and hence the availability of cheap firearms. For many young males possessing a gun signifies an easy means to redress their vulnerability and at the same time an opportunity to gain power, status and respect.²⁰

Rising lawlessness. The local governments and their law enforcement systems and agencies have little or no credibility among the groups surveyed who consider them part of the problem. Easy access to drugs and rising use of drugs among male youth was highlighted by every FGD group as a major problem (Box 5).

Unexploded ordnance especially in farms is yet another major threat to security in the region. Communities most affected are those that were the scenes of heavy shelling such as Pikit in North Cotabato. News reports of casualties are fairly common and add to the level of insecurity of the population (Box 6)."

Local NGOs report grave human rights violations against IDPs committed by the military in Surigao del Sur (June 2005)

- KARAPATAN, a national human rights NGO reported in May 2005 on human rights violations, including torture, reportedly committed by the military against displaced civilians suspected of belonging to the NPA rebel group. The incidents took place in Surigao del Sur
- Another human right source reported that a wounded displaced person died before reaching the hospital because of lengthy military checkpoints

AHRC, 26 May 2005

"The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has received information from a coalition of churches and human rights organisations in Surigao del Sur, Mindanao, regarding serious human rights violations against civilians and indigenous people (IPs), which took place during a military operation against insurgents between 28 April and 12 May this year.

Reports from KARAPATAN, a human rights non-governmental organization, disclosed that a 27-year-old civilian, wounded in a shooting, died when the military allegedly prevented him from being taken to hospital. Twelve farmers and evacuees were allegedly tortured separately by the military over suspicions they were either rebels or rebel sympathizers. Three of them are young men and were used as human shields and guide against their will to locate rebel positions. The disappearance of seven people and the massive evacuation of civilians, also took place."

Bulatlat, 29 June 2005

"Jessica Bacasmas, a young mother at the age of 21, returned to Emerald without her husband, Jessie, who was shot reportedly by soldiers and made to bleed to death without medical attention during the evacuation last May 12.

Jessica, along with her mother-in-law Rosita, remembers the ordeal of trying to bring her husband to the nearest hospital. A one-hour ride to the town center turned into a four-hour torment as their truck was stopped by three checkpoints going down from their village. Soldiers frisked through every evacuees belonging, ignoring the condition of Jessie.

In one of the checkpoints, soldiers held Jessie's family for questioning. Rosita said the soldiers were pressing that the wounded Jessie might be a New People's Army (NPA) rebel. They were only made to pass after half an hour. Jessie eventually died when they arrived at the barangay health center in Diatagon.

In tears, Jessica said, 'My husband is not an NPA. Just look at his hands and you will see his hands hardened by threshing abaca. His death was senseless, and I want justice for the killing of my husband.' "

See also:

["Troops force Manobos to flee Andap Valley"](#), Bulatlat, 28 May 2005

Freedom of movement

Military restrict movements of IDPs out of evacuation centers (October 2006)

- IDPs in Surigao del Sur complained that soldiers were stationed around the camp and discouraged their entry and exit.
- In June 2006, IDPs in an evacuation center in barangay Zamboanguita were imposed a curfew by the soldiers who issued "safe conducts" to IDPs for "their safety".

UNICEF, October 2006, p. 121

"A hovering military presence can also add to the tensions of already stressful conditions. The Surigao del Sur evacuees reported that soldiers were stationed around the center they were staying in and discouraged their entry and exit. They also complained that the military took videos of them despite their protests."

Mindanews, 26 June 2006

"Although continued fighting took place in only a few villages in Barangay Zamboanguita, residents from other villages and even in the barangay center were also affected, according to Barangay Councilor Denia Tajones. She said many residents have farms and relatives in those areas.

Tajones said the military has issued "safe conduct" passes to residents, especially those who move from one village to another. She said this was for the safety of the residents to avoid being mistaken for rebels.

Movement of people was being restricted though residents could still go back to their farms with caution, she said. The military has imposed a curfew beginning at 3 p.m everyday so farmers have to move fast and return to the evacuation center early.

Tajones said the restrictions posed economic difficulties for residents. Most of the evacuees depended on what they could gather from their small farms planted to root crops, fruits and vegetables."

Displaced people forced to return to their homes (August 2005)

- During a fact-finding mission conducted in March 2005 in Sulu, it was reported that displaced civilians had been pressurized by government officials to return to their homes although they estimated conditions were still insecure.
- As of August 2003, there is a feeling of fear and insecurity among evacuees who returned to their barangays in Pikit, mainly because of the presence of soldiers and MILF near their homes.
- Many residents claimed in interviews that they were forced by the Pikit local government to return to their communities.
- Some 18,475 evacuees have left Pikit's evacuation centers since April, but many have returned to the camps due to continued fighting.
- Military is constructing "community-based convertible structures" for the remaining 22,000 evacuees.
- Government has denied forcing the evacuees to return as was claimed by a group of evacuees that said that many evacuees were told to leave ahead of President's visit to Mindanao.

**IDPs in Sulu reportedly pressured to return
Mindanao Peaceweavers, April 2005, p. 15**

"The government through the military has started to build houses in Panamao. However, IDPs continue to stay in the evacuation centers or with their relatives. They expressed fear that the lack of hostilities in Sulu is temporary and the situation is still volatile. Evacuees are one in saying that their province is very small and the probability of an encounter between the military and the MNLF is very high. They stated that unless their villages are safe and secure enough for them to resume their daily life, they are not about to go back to their places of origin.

DSWD and PNRC officials conveyed the problem of dwindling resources in the current evacuation centers, thus pressuring the return of the IDPs to their villages. Already, there were reports about "the government forcing the people to leave the evacuation centers," the reason given is the peaceful situation in the areas of conflict and the emergent inability of the government to support their needs."

Residents claimed they were forced by the Pikit local government to return to their communities

Bantay Ceasefire Investigative Mission 1 August 2003

"There is a general feeling of fear and insecurity among evacuees who returned to their barangays in Pikit since June 9. Residents claimed in interviews that they were forced by the Pikit local government to return to their communities even if there was no bilateral ceasefire yet at the time. The return was imposed upon the evacuees combining promises, persuasion and threats such as stopping relief supply in the evacuation centers, bulldozing the centers, non-provision of core shelters and even physical harm. The DSWD and the local government assured returnees that weekly relief supplies will be provided to them in the next three months. As of July 15, 2003, around 80% of the evacuees in Pikit have already returned.

Back in their communities, the civilians face a bigger problem—living side by side with military troops whose camps were put up within the barangays. The mission members saw that Marine camps are approximately located from 50 to 100 meters from the core shelters built by government. Given this proximity, it is very likely that civilians will be caught in crossfire in the event of armed clashes with the MILF.

The relationship between returnees and the Marines in Pikit and Pagalungan is generally good. Residents said that the Marines are disciplined and respectful to them and so far, no abuse has

been reported. The Marines meanwhile said they initiated confidence-building measures towards the civilians, among them assisting civilians in transporting their harvest to the poblacion and buying fish and vegetables from civilians at prices higher than the market rates.

But even with this good relations, civilians say they still prefer these troops to immediately reposition away from their communities so that they could go back to normal lives. War trauma is still present among the returnees. Families cannot sleep well at night. Children are hesitant to return to school because they want to be with their mothers in case bombings and fighting return and they need to evacuate again."

Government denies forcing people to return

The Inquirer 12 June 2003

" 'There is no truth to the issue that thousands of evacuees in Pikit, North Cotabato were told to pack up...and were forced to return to their villages with no assurance of security because President Macapagal-Arroyo was going to be in the area,' Soliman said in a letter to the Inquirer.

A total of 18,475 evacuees have left the refugee camp and returned to their communities since April, she said. Some of them, however, had gone back to evacuation centers due to sporadic fighting between military and Muslim rebels, she added.

There are still 26,730 people in evacuation centers and the military is currently building "community-based convertible structures" for them, according to Soliman.

Each of the structures will have an area of 154 sq.m., enough to augment the number of school buildings currently housing the evacuees, she said.

'If our intention was to force them to return to their own communities, then why are we building these CBCS which are semi-permanent in nature?' she asked in the letter.

Displaced residents had accused the government of forcing them back to their war-torn communities to "sanitize" Pikit in time for the presidential visit."

Displaced persons accuse government of forcing them to return ahead of President's visit

The Inquirer 9 June 2003

"Ahead of the President's visit, however, thousands of evacuees in Pikit town in North Cotabato province -- site of recent fighting between government forces and the MILF -- were told to pack up their belongings Monday and return to their villages.

Not all of them are going home. An evacuee, Soraida, said talk was rife they were being forced out of the evacuation centers in an attempt by the government to "sanitize" Pikit. She said this was being done because President Macapagal and members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which groups Muslim-governed countries -- were coming this week.

A nongovernmental organization worker said the evacuees were being forced to return to their homes even if they were not psychologically ready. 'Are they prepared? Psychologically, they're not,' said the worker, who requested anonymity. 'We would be happy if they could finally go home. But what's happening is different. I think the process is wrong.' He said some of the evacuees who were forced to load their belongings on government trucks were crying "because they were really afraid."

The transfer of the evacuees from Pikit to neighboring Pagalungan town will create a humanitarian crisis because the Pagalungan evacuation camps are not being supplied with

regular relief assistance, the NGO worker said. There are at least 14 evacuation centers in Pagalungan currently sheltering 19,104 individuals, he said. The problem of food will be aggravated with the addition of the evacuees from Pikit, he added.

The Buisan warehouse in Pikit, the biggest evacuation camp in the area, which housed 3,000 refugees, was cleared of evacuees Monday. An evacuee said they had to leave the warehouse or 'suffer the consequences.' "We were told that if our houses were still up tomorrow, these would be bulldozed," she said.

She said the local government gave the evacuees until Tuesday to pack up their things and leave the warehouse. Another evacuee at the Pikit parish gymnasium said they were told they were being given two options by the local government: Leave or get hurt. 'Many of us are already old. We don't want to be hurt. We also don't want to hurt anybody,' he said. Many of the evacuees did not return to their villages. At least 200 families transferred to other evacuation camps in Pagalungan.

Soraida, a resident of Bulol town, said it was hard to believe the government when it said it was safe for them to go home. The presence of military troops in their villages is a clear indication that they will be in great danger once they return to their homes, she said."

SUBSISTENCE NEEDS

General

Basic needs and access to livelihood opportunities seen as most pressing needs (October 2006)

- The most pressing problems articulated by women generally related to immediate basic needs rather than to matters related to armed conflict.
- Most linked their poverty to the on-going armed conflict and blamed their displacement for their losses in economic capital, difficulties in finding livelihoods, and problems with their children's schooling and health.
- The IDPs all said they needed to secure livelihoods somehow either through finding jobs or getting the capital for small businesses.

UNICEF, October 2006, pp. 105-106

"The women were very clear in expressing their hopes, dreams and aspirations. Despite the qualitative data-gathering being in areas of armed conflict, the most pressing problems articulated generally related to immediate basic needs rather than to matters related to armed conflict (which reflected the difference in the types of internal armed conflicts in the Philippines as already discussed in an earlier chapter). Although armed conflict situations were in their consciousness, the women seemed most focused on addressing the daily poverty they faced.

It was the women of Central Mindanao who most systematically linked their poverty to the on-going armed conflict. They blamed their displacement for their losses in economic capital, difficulties in finding livelihoods, and problems with their children's schooling and health. This was similarly the case with the evacuees from Leyte. The women of Abra, Mindoro Oriental, Capiz, Surigao del Sur and Compostela Valley – and especially the direct victims themselves – in turn decried the disruption of their lives due to military operations even as the poverty-related problems they faced became more pronounced daily.

A notable recurring hope of the mothers in all the research areas relates to their children's education – that if only their children could finish even just elementary school, their children would not have to experience the poverty of their parents. Related to this was their demand for schools in their community, good quality teachers, scholarships for their children and day care centers.

However, also persistently mentioned as needs were those pertaining to their economic life. The women cited a range of economic needs: farm tools (shovels, plows, sprayers, threshers, etc.), work animals, tractors and irrigation; poultry and livestock; higher prices and wider markets for their products; lower prices of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides; jobs and livelihood opportunities (including credit, capital, sewing machines); and even soil analysis to understand why their yields are so low. Reflecting the gross inadequacies in their communities, the women also expressed needs for health centers, doctors, nurses and other health personnel; pre-natal and family planning; medicines and vitamins; more accessible clean water; electricity; better transport systems and roads.

(...)

The current and recent IDPs also expressed particular needs related to their displacement. All said they needed to secure livelihoods somehow, be this through finding jobs or getting the

capital for small businesses. Those who have been able to return to their villages – the Central Mindanao evacuees – still expressed needs for food support while they still do not have sources of livelihood, and for help in recovering basic household items they lost as a result of their displacement (clothing, kitchen items, pails, wash basins and the like). Despite acknowledging housing “rehab” projects, the women still said they needed homes, housing materials and carpentry tools. Scabies apparently continues to be a scourge and they have also asked for more knowledge about it as well as cures.

The primary need expressed by the still-displaced Leyte evacuees was straightforward: to be able to safely return to their homes and farms; to be reunited with their families and relatives. In the meantime, having become aware that there are so many of them in similar circumstances, they have also expressed their desire to set up an organization of IDPs from their province.

The women also poignantly articulated other visions: an end to war and fighting for more peaceful communities, peace for the lumad, and a change in the social system; Bangsamoro communities for themselves and according to the Q’uran."

Conflict and displacement in Mindanao have increased threat to human security: JNA study (December 2005)

- The JNA found the following to be the most pressing needs of people living in the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao: many people are still displaced, prevalent food insecurity leading to malnutrition, limited access to potable water and sanitary facilities, limited number of health facilities, workers, medicines and supplies.
- Other threats include: houses damaged by conflict, limited access to education, youth vulnerable to recruitment in armed groups.

Government of the Philippines, International Funding Agencies, Mindanao Stakeholders, December 2005, pp.0-34

"The Philippine government, optimistic about signing a peace accord with the MILF, requested the World Bank for assistance in the establishment of the multi-donor Mindanao Trust Fund for the reconstruction and development of the CAAs in the island. The conduct of the JNA to determine the needs and priorities of the CAAs was seen as an important step in establishing the MTF.

The JNA Team found that the recent armed conflict and displacement of people have increased the threats to human security – specifically, the survival, well-being, and dignity – of the already highly disadvantaged population in the CAAs.

Some of the survival threats are as follows: Significant numbers of people are still displaced, with many concerned about security and the presence of the military in their communities. Food insecurity is a prevailing condition in many areas, with risks of malnutrition and childhood-related developmental delays. Access to potable water and proper sanitary facilities is severely limited, thus increasing the risks of disease and death. Infectious diseases are prevalent and not quickly contained due to the limited number of health facilities, workers, medicines and supplies compounded with logistical challenges.

Other threats to the well-being of the people are the following: Many homes, school buildings, and other facilities damaged by the armed conflict are still awaiting repair work. Children and youth do not have access to basic education due to displacement, poverty, the distance between home and school, the need to work, and the insufficient number of classrooms, teachers and school

supplies. Young people, particularly males, with little education and few marketable skills, are vulnerable to recruitment by armed elements and drug dealers.

Among the threats to dignity that were noted are the following. Human service providers are not often sensitive to vulnerability for displacement or socio-cultural and gender differences. Gender biases remain hurdles for women, and many adults are not literate and have few marketable skills. Livelihood opportunities are limited making it difficult to break out of grinding poverty especially to those who belong to different ethno-linguistic groups, such as the indigenous people, that have long experienced discrimination and marginalization.

(...)

Government of the Philippines, International Funding Agencies, Mindanao Stakeholders, December 2005, Human Development Report, pp.16-24

"Protect the rights and address the humanitarian needs of IDPs still living in the evacuation sites and/or the homes of relatives and friends.

Negotiate the removal of the AFP from the residential areas of the CAAs, thus allowing the IDPs to return home in safety and with dignity.

Ensure access to culturally sensitive and appropriate psychosocial services that build on traditional coping capacities.

Prevent and address sexual and gender-based violence.

Provide assistance for the reconstruction of houses and public infrastructure, but allow the affected populations to build these facilities in their home communities in accordance with their own needs and standards.

Ensure basic services potable water, food security, education, and health care are accessible to all, particularly the poorest and most marginalized.

Provide start-up livelihood assistance and/or farm animals.

Devote greater attention to the needs and aspirations of unskilled and unemployed youth.

Recognize the roles played by women during, and after, conflict.

Provide both opportunity and resources for collective activities undertaken by women.

Increase access to information.

Appreciate the diversity of the populations living within the CAAs and ensure interventions are programmed accordingly.

(...)

1. Protect human rights
2. Provide basic assistance for those currently displaced (e.g., food/non-food relief items; shelter, livelihood, psychosocial services, and protection/assistance for the youngest children)
3. Negotiate the withdrawal of the military from the residential areas of communities of origin
4. Provide culturally sensitive psychosocial services that build on the traditional coping capacities of the people
5. Improve and institutionalize local disaster response, management, and mitigation capacities, both immediately and over the medium-term.
6. Prevent and address sexual and gender-based violence
7. Provide resources for the rebuilding of homes and public infrastructure.
8. Ensure basic services – potable water, food security, education, and health care – are easily accessible, particularly for the most vulnerable.
9. Provide start-up livelihood assistance.
10. Provide farm animals.
11. Focus on the situation of unskilled and unemployed youth.
12. Recognize, and build on, the roles played by women, during and after conflict.
13. Provide opportunity and resources for activities undertaken collectively by women.
14. Increase IDP access to information.
15. Plan interventions with an appreciation for the diversity of the populations living within the conflict-affected area.

16. Promote a "a culture of peace" and local conflict-mediation capacity building."

Survey shows armed conflict, poor water & sanitation and lack of access to health are the main vulnerability factors (June 2004)

- ACH's survey conducted near Liguasan Marsh in central Mindanao revealed that 3 main factors contribute to significant vulnerability in the area:
- the long term affect of the presence of armed conflict in the area. Uncertainty linked to this affects adversely the economic, educational, and social development of these communities.
- water and sanitation facilities are sub-par with many families suffering from lack of access to good quality of water.
- marginal access to health and the low level of health awareness by the communities affects quality of life.

ACH, June 2004, pp. 6-60

" The present degree of 'vulnerability' is moderate in terms of food security and access to livelihood. Though incomes are relatively low the source of income (fishing) is readily available and access is potentially expandable with additional inputs. Food consumption is maintained at an acceptable level, sufficiently close to Philippine standards for an active life. Access to water and sanitation however is poor and below standard as evident by high level of sickness related to water quality and poor hygiene. Access to health is also poor as local health workers are few in number and poorly equipped. Most families rely on traditional sources of health care for general medical needs and birthing assistance. In general preventive health is not practiced.

(...)

Ten Barangays were visited. Eight are from the heavily affected areas of the focal point of Buliok, Pagalungan. The remaining two barangays visited were not within the conflict zone though they did receive displaced persons. Generally there was a high level of destruction and loss of property, homes, household wares, and fishing and farming equipment within 8 of the 10 barangays visited. Length of displacement was on average 7 months; many families returned in July 2003 for the fishing season. Of the 8 barangays heavily affected by conflict 17% (1071 families) of pre-conflict population remains in displacement. The majority of families gain daily income throughout the year from fishing, though the corn crop provides a significant seasonal sum. Many of these families own water buffalo for farming and canoes for fishing though an estimated 20% the poorest have neither. They generally eat three meals per day purchasing 75% of consumption need, mostly rice. Use of food coping mechanisms is highest in January with the start of the corn planting season and the required expenditure for seed and inputs cuts into the food budget. Seeking loans from relatives is also significant means to cope with short falls in cash. The water sources are mostly hand dug open wells though 25% reportedly drink directly from the marsh. There is a high level of bacterial contamination at most water sources. Low use of sanitation facilities as preference is still use of river and latrine. Poor access to health care is affected by low education and distance to services. Periodic flooding of the marsh is a seasonal occurrence and though high rainfall years can cause loss of crops it does not significantly hinder income from fishing.

The results of the survey conclude that 3 main factors contribute to significant vulnerability in the area. First and foremost is the long term affect of the presence of armed conflict in the area, which is compounded by the history of armed conflict, and the perceived potential for a renewed conflict and with it displacement, loss, and hunger. This uncertainty affects adversely the economic, educational, and social development of these communities. Secondly, the water and sanitation facilities are sub-par with many families suffering from lack of access to good quality of water. Bacteria contamination tests conducted at 217 family water sources found a high number

of sites to be contaminated. Most families choose to drink water from hand dug open wells which are shallow and unprotected. And, thirdly the marginal access to health and the low level of health awareness by the communities affects quality of life. The primary rural health unit is located at municipal centers and far from most of the communities assessed.

Finally, though there is presently no emergency situation the need to provide support for local communities is essential. The low access to safe water, minimal health care, and the long-term effects of armed conflict increase the potential risk of families. There is a high need to reinforce local capacities of governments, local NGOs, and at the household level to offset the potential vulnerabilities.

(...)

The 3 types: Unaffected, IDP and Returnee

The 'unaffected' families are better-off as they lost minimal, if any, assets or property during the recent conflict. They have better water and sanitation and health as they are closer to the main towns and they have received more infrastructures as a result. They access more jobs, and are affected less by the flooding. Their food security can be said to be stable as their livelihoods remain undisturbed. The IDPs in the assessment area are mostly 'homebased' sharing housing with extended families. The majority is living in areas close to Pikit and Pagalungan and many are accessing labor jobs in these towns, or land for farming. Their intention to return is dependent on the departure of the military from the area.

For the returnees, reestablishment of livelihoods is ongoing. The loss of personal property and assets as a result of the conflict was high, as was the destruction of barangay schools, and religious buildings. During displacement families were unable to access their land or fishing areas and thus relied on family or expended personal savings. Most families returned in July 2004. They are largely accessing the same livelihoods as before, and appear to be maintaining food consumption comparable to before the conflict. They access fish regularly, as an income source and for consumption. In terms of health, they are poorly served by health services as the communities are isolated. They are at high risk to water born infections as water sources are unclean. The practice of sanitation is poor, with high levels of diarrhea and skin disease."

Food

To avoid going hungry in the evacuation centers, some villagers prefer to stay near their home to harvest their crops (August 2005)

- Despite the fighting and the risk, some farmers have reportedly preferred to stay near their homes to ensure that they could harvest their crops and feed their family

AHRC, 26 August 2005

"Hundreds of villagers in Barangay Ahan, Guindulungan, Maguindanao are facing threats of starvation and hunger after they were unable to harvest their crops when fighting between soldiers and bandits broke out in early July this year. Out of desperation, the villagers also refused to leave their homes and farms despite the sporadic air strikes and mortar shelling, for they feared that should they leave, they would have no available means to provide for their livelihoods.

The villagers in Barangay Ahan depend on their farm crops for their food and livelihoods. When the military operations started in early July, the villagers were supposed to harvest about 196

hectares of corn, rice and sesame seed crops, however were unable to do so because of the fighting and violence in the area. Failure to harvest their crops means the villagers could potentially face at least three months of hunger. Thus, while the villagers attempt to harvest amidst the violence, many are left with little food for their consumption.

The villagers do have the option to move to designated evacuation centers as the fighting and random air strikes continue, however many have refused to move because of the meager relief assistance victims are receiving from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and the poor conditions that await evacuees at the centers. This situation has greatly discouraged the victims to flee as they will continue to struggle for food at these evacuation centers."

Health

Children and elderly's physical health at risk in the overcrowded evacuation centers (February 2007)

- In February 2007, a sick 60-year-old displaced woman died in an evacuation center in Midsayap, North Cotabato
- Displaced children interviewed described very difficult conditions in the overcrowded camps including lack of food, poor water & sanitation conditions, poor shelter exposing them to rain and wind. These poor conditions caused many children to fall sick.
- At the end of August 2005, 3 children reportedly died of diarrhea while in displacement near Pikit, North Cotabato
- Lack of nutritious food and adequate diet make the most vulnerable, the children and elderly, subject to infectious diseases.
- A few days after the start of the 2003 February war, some 25 per cent of the IDP children in evacuation centers were affected by upper respiratory tract infections.
- As of May 2003, 80% of the deaths reported in evacuation camps were children aging 2 to 6. Diarrhea was the main cause of death.

The Inquirer, 6 February 2007

"A sick 60-year-old woman died in one of eight evacuation centers here as displaced families continued to refuse to return home for fear of more clashes between Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) guerrillas and government forces.

The residents, according to the authorities, want an assurance they will be safe in their homes. Councilor Vivencio Deomampo, a physician who is also chairman of the town council's health committee, could not say when exactly the woman died, only that she was already ill when her family fled the fighting two weeks ago.

At least six persons -- three of them rebels -- have died in clashes in at least three villages here since January 25.

The fighting sent about 6,000 people fleeing to cramped evacuation centers where they remain despite a localized truce reached last week.

Deomampo said they fear more evacuees could get sick because of the conditions in the evacuation centers. "They need safe water, clothing and food. They are in a very deplorable situation," Deomampo said."

UNICEF, October 2006, pp. 63-64

"The research team did not come across any accounts of health infrastructure (i.e. health centers, clinics or hospitals) being destroyed or damaged during fighting or otherwise. Nor did any community respondents attribute problems in health service delivery to armed confrontations. The general lament was insufficient health services and how difficult it is to find medical help, or how expensive it can be, whenever a family member gets sick. Similarly, none of the local government officials spoken to pointed to the armed conflict as causing problems in their delivery of health services.

As with education, health problems were greater for IDPs in evacuation centers than for those who remained in their communities. Whether coming from respondents in Maguindanao, North Cotabato, Compostela Valley or Surigao del Sur, the respondents described conditions in evacuation in vivid, harrowing detail.

The displaced remembered the meager rations and lost family livelihoods and incomes. Too often there never seemed to be enough clean water to drink or bathe with. Unhealthy conditions seemed the norm. The centers were overcrowded, the water was dirty, sanitation poor, and the evacuees were exposed to the evening chill, winds and rain. Many families lacked even sleeping mats and slept on cardboard boxes or bare floors. Thirteen-year-old Ramon of Surigao del Sur said that he will never forget how he and his family never ate properly the entire length of their stay.

Rachma, 15, of Maguindanao remembered missing meals and sometimes not even having any rice to eat. Fifteen-year-old Nawal also recalled sleeping without mats on a cement floor that was hot during the day and cold at night, living just a wall away from a dumpsite, getting a ration of five kilos of rice for five days from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and ten kilos a month from OXFAM, going into debt, no longer playing outside, and drinking dirty water. She says: "I got sick then with fever and colds. My siblings also got sick because it was so crowded. (Nagkasakit ako noon, ubo at sipon. Mga kapatid ko nagkasakit din dahil masikip ang lugar.)

The thick suffocating smell of heat and perspiration mingling with the stench of human and animal waste was also a recurring tale. Children inevitably came down sick and were often afflicted with scabies, chicken pox, measles, diarrhea, coughs, colds, and fever. The members of Moro communities in particular recalled how so many of them were afflicted with severe cases of scabies, with its parasite-driven rashes and infections painfully spreading throughout their bodies. A mother in North Cotabato mentioned the case of a nine-month-old baby, one of twins, dying because of scabies-related infections. Yet families were unable to afford medical treatment and were forced to rely on often inadequate or over-burdened health services provided by local governments and NGOs.

Elsewhere, affected families have had to deal with problems feeding their children which will ultimately have detrimental effects on their health. Evacuees from Leyte recalled being unable to afford anything else but rice. Teresita, a struggling mother, shared how her children foraged from garbage for food to go with rice and how they sometimes settled for rice gruel, "because it's easy to swallow even without anything to go with it... just add salt." (Minsan naglulugaw dahil madaling lunukin kahit walang ulam. Lagyan lang ng asin.) Another mother, Tarits, sadly added: "My children would ask for bread but I would have none to give. I would just cry." (Nanghihingi ng

tinapay ang anak ko, wala naman ibigay. Iiyak na lang ako.) She said her children were having a difficult time but that they risked being killed if they returned home."

Mindanews, 14 July 2006

"At least two civilians and a still undetermined number of combatants were killed between June 28 and July 5. On July 12, Father Roberto Layson of the Mindanao Peoples' Caucus told MindaNews he received reports four evacuees died – two infants, one seven-year old boy and an adult – from diarrhea and dehydration – at an evacuation center. The names of the four were not immediately available.

Jean-Luc Joliat of the International Committee of the Red Cross told MindaNews they were told of a similar report although he clarified the evacuees died not in the evacuation centers but in their relatives' houses."

AHRC, 19 September 2005

"The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) is deeply concerned by reports that at least three children displaced due to fighting in southern Philippines have died from malnutrition-related illnesses. The small children were all reported to have died on August 28 from diarrhea caused by inadequate food and unsanitary water.

The three dead infants were among hundreds of villagers forced to flee and stay at evacuation centres due to fighting on the southernmost island of Mindanao who have reportedly not received adequate food relief and other emergency assistance from the concerned government authorities."

Mindanews, 2 September 2005

"It has been two months now since the military operation was launched by the AFP against suspected ASG (Abu Sayyaf Group) elements in the tri-boundary of Guindolongan, Talayan and South Upi in the province of Maguindanao.

The number of displaced families in these three municipalities could not be fully accounted since many of the evacuees are staying in the homes of their relatives. But there are at least 500 families who are staying in several evacuation centers in Guindolongan and Talayan.

(...)

Since Monday, three children have already died of diarrhea which is a preventable disease. Some of the patients have been brought to the hospital in Shariff Aguak with the help of the International Monitoring Team."

Janet M. Arnado & Mary Ann M. Arnado, 15 November 2004, pp. 61-64

"The vicious cycle of social displacement and life reconstruction take its hard toll on the well-being of men, women and children. Children's health is mostly endangered in the evacuation centers, while women, the caregivers, are silently coping with the mental stress of war. In this section, we examine the health impact of wars in the intertwining lives of women and children.

In the course of their displacement, the IDPs' health is a risk. Due to lack of nutritious and adequate diet, their immune system is compromised. As a result, infectious and sanitation-related diseases spread in the evacuation camps, such as upper respiratory tract infections, diarrhea and scabies.

A few days after the war broke out on February 11, 2003, 25% of the 6,000 children evacuees as of February 16 were diagnosed with upper respiratory tract infection.

(...)

Unsanitary condition in the evacuation camps often results in diarrhea among infants and children. It is not uncommon for children with diarrhea to die. Focus group participant, Jalika, reported that her grandchild died in the evacuation camp due to diarrhea. In fact, diarrhea was the main cause of death among children. As of May 2003, 80% of the deaths reported in evacuation camps were children aging 2 to 6.

(...)

The crowded condition in evacuation camps is conducive to the spread of scabies. The focus group participants in Pikit all claimed to being infected with scabies whenever they were in the evacuation centers. Because this skin condition normally occurs during military encounters, the women believe that the bullets coming from the military firearms cause it.

(...)

The socio-economic effects of social displacement compound the mental anguish of these IDPs. Women's mental health is greatly affected by their dislocation, yet women ignore the symptoms of mental illness. For instance, when we asked them a general question regarding the effects of war, their narratives focused on economic, not psychological, aspect. Zoraya from Pikit tells about the effects of war, "Effect? It's really about livelihood. When you are an evacuee, how can you look for means of livelihood, when all you do is avoid the bullet?"

(...)

Women's mental health is intertwined with their children's health. Many women show resilience in highly stressful situation such as war and displacement. However, when their children's health or safety is endangered, their resilience is challenged and their mental well-being is at risk."

Notre Dame University & Commission on Population Regions XII, pp. 34-35

"A big number of respondents (52% from Parang and 46% from Pikit) claimed that some of their household members got sick during displacement. Around 122 or 12% of 1,197 household members became ill at the EC. Most of them (25%) were children. The common ailments suffered by the IDPs and the number of persons affected were fever/flu (37), skin disease (20), cough (17), measles (16), diarrhea (9), typhoid fever (5), and tuberculosis (2).

The sick members of the displaced families were brought to hospitals (39) and Rural Health Units (45), while 31 administered their own treatment. Seven (7) did not receive any treatment at all for their illness.

The respondents (18 from Parang and 4 from Pikit) said that they have HH members who died during displacement. The group reported 28 deaths – 24 from Parang and 4 from Pikit. The causes of deaths in Parang were attributed to measles (2), heart attack/stroke (4), typhoid fever (3), tuberculosis (2), and birth delivery (1).

A large number of those who died belonged to age groups 1 year and below (7 children); 2 to 4 years old (6 children); 12 to 17 years old (4 persons); 30 to 42 years old (5 persons); and 50 to 72 years old (6 persons). (Table 18)

"

The Manila Times 29 May 2003

"A total of 80 people, most of them children, have already died in evacuation centers in Mindanao since the outbreak of war between the military and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) last February.

In a telephone conference with defense reporters Wednesday, Social Welfare Secretary Corazon Soliman said 58 of the 80 dead came from evacuation centers in Pikit, North Cotabato, the scene of one of the most devastating military operations against the MILF in recent years.

Soliman said the 80 dead came from 162 evacuation centers in four regions covering 11 provinces in Mindanao.

(...)

Soliman said that around 80 percent of the dead are children aged two to six. The usual causes of deaths, she added, were bronchopneumonia, ulcers, diarrhea and measles.

The welfare chief added that measures are being taken to prevent the outbreak of more diseases at the evacuation centers. These include conducting health classes and basic health training for the evacuees."

Cyberdyaryo 28 May 2003

"In Pikit, at least 30,000 persons are still in 16 different evacuation camps, and 61 have already died, most of them from complications arising from diarrhea.

Fr. Robert Layson, parish priest of this predominantly Muslim town, said although the number of evacuees has dropped to 30,000 from 40,000, the food and medical supplies are still in short supply. Layson, also the coordinator of the Interfaith Dialogue of the Archdiocese of Cotabato, said inadequate food and medicine supplies are forcing them to cut back the frequency of distribution of relief goods in order for all of the evacuees under their coverage to be able to receive food supplies.

Balik Kalipay's Dr. Ernest Ryan Guevarra, one of the attending physicians here, said they also need medicines to prevent the spread of the different diseases in the evacuation centers. Guevarra cited diarrhea as the number one cause the deaths of the children in the evacuation centers.

'Of the 61 evacuees who have died here, 80 percent were children and 60 percent of the cause was diarrhea,' he said adding that other causes of death were upper respiratory infection and measles. For now, the 25-year-old doctor said that they have enough IV Fluids for diarrhea and they need more Contrimoxazole-a broad range medicine. 'This (Contrimoxazole) is a very useful medicine and this is what we need. We are using this for upper respiratory infection and bacterial infections.'

Guevarra also added that the spread of diarrhea in the evacuation camps was not due to contaminated water sources, but rather to unsanitary conditions in the camps.

'It is due to the unhealthy environment or atmosphere. Because if it was due to the water source, all of the refugees at a certain camp could have suffered it but it was not. Diarrhea hit only selected families,' he explained." (Cyberdyaryo 28 May 2003)

Displaced and conflict-affected children both affected by psychosocial problems (October 2006)

- War and displacement expose children to violence – to themselves, their family and friends – and the disruption of normal routines also creates abnormal environments to grow up in.
- Children in Moro communities have been exposed to much higher levels of fighting, more frequently, and have witnessed the destruction of their homes and villages. Displacement distances them from the immediate violence but also makes their struggle for economic survival more intense.
- Children in NPA guerrilla tend to be spared the displacement, but have to deal with the pervasive effects of state forces' entering their communities while on counter-insurgency operations.
- Particularly notable among the Moro IDP child is a lingering sense of loss and hopelessness.

UNICEF, October 2006, pp. 8-66

"Outside of direct or indirect physical harm to children, armed conflict situations have implications on their socio-psychological well-being. War exposes them to violence – to themselves, their family and friends – and the disruption of normal routines also creates abnormal environments to grow up in. These difficult circumstances can have effects on the children, on their relationships and on the myriad aspects of their daily lives. The study documented various manifestations of psychosocial trauma: nervousness, sleeplessness, lack of appetite, staring blankly into space, silence, absent-mindedness, recurring nightmares, depression, mood swings, impatience, irritability, withdrawal and attempted suicide. Children also complained about what in many cases may well have been stress-related illnesses especially insofar as there were precipitating abnormal events: headaches, muscle pains, cramps, chest pains, nausea and fever.

There are various levels of impact. The most severe effects are on those whose family lives have undergone drastic transformations – because of dislocation or the loss of close family members – or who have themselves been direct victims of serious and deliberate violence. There are also those who have been affected by the stressful nature of armed conflict situations such as fighting in or near their villages and of the presence of unfriendly military forces in their communities.

The distinction between the effects of war in MILF areas and in NPA guerrilla fronts is again marked. Children in Moro communities have been exposed to much higher levels of fighting, more frequently, and have witnessed the destruction of their homes and villages. Displacement distances them from the immediate violence but also makes their struggle for economic survival more intense. Children in NPA guerrilla fronts, on the other hand, are exposed to less intense fighting and generally remain in their communities. However, they have to deal with the pervasive effects of state forces' entering their communities while on counter-insurgency operations.

The child IDPs of Central Mindanao went through particularly traumatic events including evacuating their villages amidst artillery fire, air strikes, and soldiers shooting in the air and burning their homes. In many cases they managed to bring only a few articles of clothing with them, as they sought shelter along riverbanks and under the trees. And even when they were able to make their way to crowded evacuation centers, they had to deal with hunger, unsanitary conditions, sickness and death.

The Moro communities including the children have even developed a vocabulary to capture the myriad effects of such traumatic experiences: "stress". Likely learned from their experience with medical personnel and other service providers in evacuation centers, the term was often used to describe various sicknesses resulting from war situations. During the FGD of children in North Cotabato, for instance, respondents used the term to refer to mental health problems that could not seem to be resolved. They told of friends and family members who "weren't crazy but just stared blankly into space" (*laging tulala pero hindi naman baliw*). They became unresponsive and stopped talking, or cowered in fear when they see men in fatigues or hear helicopters and planes flying overhead. Ishak, 12, was thrown in the air by an explosion while his family was fleeing their

village in 2003. When he reached the evacuation center he apparently developed a high fever and had convulsions. Since then he occasionally has what seem like epileptic seizures (including once during the research team's field visit). Friends say Ishak has become aloof and slow to react, although he has yet to be checked by qualified doctors because his family cannot afford it.

Particularly notable among the North Cotabato and Maguindano child IDPs is a lingering sense of loss, with many fond of reminiscing about how their homes, play time, studies and communities were before fighting broke out. Many lamented, even years later, the loss of personal belongings like pencils, notebooks and bags. Fifteen-year-old Asria of Maguindanao recalled: "I felt sad for our home which soldiers burned down – they wore bonnets and all you could see were their eyes." (*Naawa ako sa bahay namin, sinunog ng mg sundalo – naka-bonet ang mga sundalo, mata lang ang nakikita.*) Zaida, 14, recalled soldiers burning their home, their belongings, her birth certificate and "even the Q'uran" (*Sinunog rin maging ang Koran*). Musrifa, 9, of North Cotabato said that she will never forget their home burning down and the loss of her shoes, bag and toys: "It hurt, I cried and cried. I also saw *Nanay* (mother) and *Tatay* (father) cry." (*Masakit, umiiyak ng umiiyak. Nakita si nanay at si tatay nang umiiyak.*) Manna, 11, remembered being carried by her mother and running and running. Her father tried to bring as much of their belongings and food as he could but "*Tatay* (father) had to leave them behind because he was getting too tired to carry them" (*Lahat noon ay naiwan sa mga paligid kasi hindi kaya ng tatay ko kasi napapagod din*). There was also a strong sense of invasion and intentional destruction of their family or home space and many children repeatedly decried the looting and burning of their homes, the slaughter of their animals, and the destruction of their trees and crops.

There also seemed to be a discernible sense of hopelessness among the Moro children, with many skeptical about their future. This deep sense of lack of control over events, even despair, reflects what was more openly articulated by Moro adults. A later chapter discusses the discouraging and demoralizing effect of the perceived cycle of destruction and reconstruction of Moro communities since the 1970s."

(...)

The following emotional and psychological effects on children were observed (both for those who were displaced and those who remained in their communities):

Various manifestations of trauma: nervousness, sleeplessness, lack of appetite, staring blankly into space, silence, absent-mindedness, recurring nightmares, depression, mood swings, impatience, irritability, withdrawal, drug addiction and attempted suicide

Anxiousness triggered by sudden loud noises or seeing fatigue uniforms

Anxiety, sadness, anger and vengefulness after seeing abuses on family, friends and neighbors by government soldiers

Anxiety over the presence of government soldiers and what they might do to perceived supporters of their enemy

Stress-related illnesses: headaches, muscle pains, cramps, chest pains, nausea, fever

Constriction of personal space due to parental restrictions on mobility

Lingering sense of loss of homes, personal belongings, farm animals, crops (especially for Central Mindanao IDPs)

Confusion, deep sense of lack of control over events, despair, skepticism about the future (especially for Central Mindanao IDPs)"

WB, July 2006, pp. 14-15

"Adolescence is a stage in life when individuals undergo significant physical and emotional development. It is a period of transition between childhood and adulthood marked by vulnerability as young people struggle to create their own identity. In conflict-affected areas, this individual vulnerability is aggravated by the insecurity created by the hazardous environment. As observed in several other conflict-affected areas, in Mindanao, too, protracted armed conflict has had far

reaching effects on the psychosocial development of its youth. Thus some youth join an armed group to feel safer and satisfy their quest for identity while others take to a life of crime or to drugs. Many others struggle with their changed circumstances and try to cope with their new responsibilities to the best of their ability.

Young people in Mindanao are growing up in an environment shaped by guns, bombs, killings, and the constant fear of war. No aspect of their young lives has been left untouched by the conflict that has broken down traditional community structures, weakened authority figures, disintegrated cultural norms and coping mechanisms and destroyed community networks that used to provide support in times of crisis. Young people report being constantly worried about losing their homes, their families, and uncertain over their future. The only coping mechanism repeatedly mentioned was faith in Islam and God, and the support of peer groups.

(...)

Young males report feelings of hopelessness, isolation, and a diminished sense of self worth that they attribute to a variety of causes as detailed below:

Trauma caused by loss of family members, especially parents or a relative.

Destruction of homes and in some cases wholesale destruction of their village.

Repeated displacement and being forced to live in the evacuation centers for several months.

Disruption of their education and dreams of a secure future.

Loss of control over their lives and frustrations over having to start all over 'from zero.'

Loss of self esteem and, therefore, of self worth, especially among older youth, and

Not having 'anything to do.'

The participants in the FGDs offered the following suggestions to improve the situation:

Peace, access to education and livelihood opportunities, and livelihood-skills training programs were identified as the first steps in resuming control of their lives.

A frequently expressed need across all FGD locations was 'a basketball court and/or other venues for recreational activities, because if youth have something to do then they do not engage in illegal activities like selling or using drugs.'

They also wished to establish contact with youth in other barangays in the region and network.

FGD participants in the communities visited were eager to take part in any activity that would improve their lives or enable them to contribute to their communities. Nearly all the FGD groups were willing to volunteer time and effort if required to do so.

All FGD groups accorded great importance to religion in their lives and expressed a need for spiritual development activities."

Forced evacuations bears considerably on women's health (October 2006)

- Conflict and displacement resulted in the following effects on women's health: reduced livelihoods and hence food intake; exposure to acutely stressful events; and being in the unhealthy conditions of evacuation centers.
- The main stress factors on women were actual fighting and the presence of soldiers. The most jarring situations were those that IDP families of Central Mindanao faced: of evacuating with children under fire, seeing their homes damaged and destroyed, and seeing people wounded and killed.

UNICEF, October 2006, pp. 96-97

"The women approached by the research team were already in precarious social and economic conditions to begin with. The adverse effects of armed conflict can in the worst cases compound their difficulties many times over with immediate impacts on their health and emotional well-being. In the research areas the effect on women's health include reduced livelihoods and hence food

intake; exposure to acutely stressful events; and being in the unhealthy conditions of evacuation centers.

At the very least the mothers have to take care of their children under more difficult conditions, which is more difficult the younger and more dependent these children are. It is extremely significant that the mothers are also their children's primary caregivers and play vital roles in their growth, survival and development. Poor health on the mother's part inevitably affects not only the birthing process, in the case of pregnant women, but also in the kind of caregiving that they can give their children most especially during the stages of early childhood. And women are the caregivers not just of their children but of the entire family including husbands, the elderly and the sick. The burdens on women in times of turmoil are multiple and compounded. The strain and pressure on women is visible and manifested in various physical and psychosomatic illnesses.

Mothers' malnutrition can be a significant contributing factor in complications in the periods before, during and after pregnancies. The fetus in the womb directly suffers. However, so too do infants in their critical first months of life if the mother's lactation is affected or if the militarized situation in any way affects her ability to breastfeed. The research team also came across some incidents where the extent of distress due to armed conflict had adversely affected pregnant women.

The main stress factors on women were actual fighting and the presence of soldiers. The most jarring situations were those that IDP families of Central Mindanao faced: of evacuating with children under fire, seeing their homes damaged and destroyed, and seeing people wounded and killed. For instance Suhayda, 42, of Maguindanao recalled how their group of 15 women scampered for safety under coconut trees during the shelling of their village in 2000. With explosions everywhere and nowhere to go, "We just fell to the ground and closed our eyes. I thought we were going to die because I didn't know where the bombs would fall. One exploded at my feet. I thought I was dead... I cried and cried in fear. Up to now I still feel like crying when I think about it." (*Nahiga na lang kami sa lupa at pumikit, inisip ko na mamatay na kami kasi di ko alam kung saan tatama ang bomba. Bumagsak ang bomba sa paanan ko. Akala ko patay na ako.... Umiyak ako nang umiyak sa takot. Hanggang sa ngayon pag naaalala ko naiiyak pa rin ako sa takot.*)

The process of evacuation and relocating to centers bears considerably on the health of women and their families. In Maguindanao, 35-year-old Najiba said she prematurely gave birth to her first child, at just eight months, due to the assorted stresses of displacement, only to subsequently lose her child to diarrhea. She got pregnant again while displaced and while her second child was born full-term, the baby still died a day after being born. Sauda came down with a bad case of scabies on her hands and body for two months: "It was revolting, and I could not even wash my hands or cook because of it." (*Halos mandiri ako, ni hindi ako makapaghugas ng kamay at hindi makapagluto dahil dito.*) Her situation was made even worse by her distress at her children being so badly infected with scabies that their toenails and fingernails fell off. All the women in the FGD recalled how difficult it was to take care of their children who could not get enough to eat and were getting sick, with at least two of their children reported dying."

High mortality and low life expectancy in conflict-affected areas due to a lack of health centers (December 2005)

- JNA study found that in addition to a lack of health centers in rural areas, health service delivery also suffered from a lack of medicine and qualified health workers.
- High mortality rates and low life expectancy were observed in barangays without health centers, which amounted to nearly 70% of all barangays surveyed.

- ACH survey showed that one of the main issues faced by people living in displacement-affected area is the minimal access to health.
- Rural health units are generally situated far away.

Government of the Philippines, International Funding Agencies, Mindanao Stakeholders, December 2005, p. 56

"In general, aside from the lack of health centers to serve communities in far-flung barangays and sitios, the insufficient delivery of health services is compounded by the lack of medicines and the absence of qualified health workers in barangays where there is a health center. The problem can be attributed to the lack of capability of the LGU concerned to operate and run such a basic facility.

There are few health centers in the barangays covered by the JNA. About 190 (69.10%) of the 275 barangays in the 12 municipalities have no barangay health stations (BHS). Consequently, high mortality and low life expectancy rates are observed in these areas."

ACH, June 2004, pp. 51-53

"Access to health is minimal. The rural health units is located within Poblacion, Pikit, and Poblacion, Pagalungan, nearly 2 hours commute for many of the families within the marsh communities. Local traditional medical personnel depend on herbal lore for the majority of medicaments both for general sickness as well as child birth. The majority of women give birth within the barangay assisted by the traditional midwife. A local barangay health worker provides health information and consultations but as the barangay is a wide area access is marginal. Immunizations of children are conducted by the barangay health worker but reportedly children have not been immunized because of fear, lack of information. The majority (61%) go to the health center in Pikit to get their child immunized, though a significant number are immunized locally by health workers. The poorer families generally access the traditional health worker as the fees are low and are accessed locally. Moreover many do not want to bear the extra cost of transport to the health units in Pikit. Those barangays closer with more immediate access are more able to access health within Pikit. Batulawan and Linandangan are highest, and Rajamuda is middle as it is closer to the main road and more immediate access. The others are more isolated and therefore dependent on health workers locally. Overall the limited access to health care is compounded by the limited access to clean water and inadequate hygiene practices, which can be seen in high rate of infectious disease.

Key Points

Access to health centers is minimal at the barangay level

Distance to health facilities is prohibitive; those in the marsh area have at least a two hour commute to access health facilities in Pikit.

No Rural Health Unit in barangays, only at municipal centers

Disease the leading cause of death

46 (21% of respondents) families have children which are not yet fully immunized

(...)

Below is the list of complaints concerning access to health and medicine within the barangay. This information was collected during the PCVA discussion meeting with 10 women from the poorer group of the community. There was not a ranking but just a listing of problems.

Access to health centers

No health center in the barangay

Rural health workers not approachable

High cost
Distance from health centers
Lack of medical knowledge of health worker
Irregular service
Health centers are too focused on women and children

Access to medicine
Unaffordable
Cost of medicine, plus donation
Irregular availability
Distance to drug store
Can't get medicine unless they pay for it

The difference in access between the wealth group's amounts to those better off more often accessing the medicines as they can afford the 'donation'. When you go to the rural health unit there is an established price for medicines. The price of medicines is the same for rich and poor. Apparently there are few subsidies to access health care for the poor.

Distance is a regular complaint of many poor families concerning access to health. In Barungis it was reported that a health emergency requiring transport to Pikit requires 450 pesos for the pump boat to the midway point at Buliok and then 150 pesos skylab to Pikit. If you take the skylab the whole distance from Barungis to Pikit, a 1 hour trip will cost you 800 pesos. Thus, when the average daily income for a fisherman is 40-50 pesos per day it is easy to imagine the difficulty of accessing health care especially in the event of an emergency. For this reason most of the poor access the rural health practitioner (Herbolaryo).

Available health services within the barangay are local traditional herbal medicines. These services are accessed for the normal sickness; flu, cough, skin disease, diarrhea, head ache, sore eyes, toothache, stomach ache, etcetera."

Water and sanitation

Water and sanitary conditions in evacuations centers grossly inadequate (October 2006)

- The situation in the overcrowded evacuation centers is described as singularly unhealthy, lacking in particular potable water and toilet facilities.

UNICEF, October 2006, p. 121

"The situation in these temporary evacuation centers is singularly unhealthy. Evacuees describe them as unsanitary and unhygienic, extremely overcrowded, exposed to the elements, and grossly lacking in food, potable water and toilet facilities. Health services are also far from adequate in meeting the needs of so many people in such unhealthy conditions. The North Cotabato and Maguindanao IDPs recalled the presence of government health workers in their evacuation centers, but also said that they were just too few, too overworked and too lacking in medical supplies to service the needs of so many. All these resulted in malnourishment, sickness and even death especially among the very young and the very old. Diarrhea and fevers were common, with the crowded conditions also encouraging the spread of scabies, coughs, colds and other illnesses. The longer the evacuees stayed, the more the conditions deteriorated."

Hygiene problems and poor sanitation cited as most common health problems linked to displacement (June 2004)

- ACH survey shows that the health problems most often cited during displacement were hygiene problems relating to overcrowding and poor sanitation.
- Clean and safe water in the area was hard to find, with 91% of all water points currently in use tested positive for bacterial contamination, and 94% of the tested water containers tested positive for bacterial contamination.

ACH, June 2004, p. 22

"Movement is clearly an important factor contributing to increased vulnerability to food insecurity, sickness, and death. In the survey we have looked at the history of displacement. It seems that generally the larger portion of families were displaced 2 times reflecting those who were displaced during Estrada's all out war in 2000.

Looking at the number of displacements, those who are displaced 1 time are families outside the marsh area who are currently IDP families within Batulawan. Those displaced 2, 3, and 4 times are those families who were once or twice displaced during Estrada's 'all out war' and those who were displaced again during the recent unrest in February 2003.

The length of displacement has been anywhere between 3 -10 months with the average of 7 months. To get a look at living conditions of families during displacement we asked families to comment on sickness they suffered during their displacement. Hygiene problems relating to overcrowding and poor sanitation are the most often mentioned. It was also a perception of families that an increase of skin disease increased as a result of the war.

(...)

All areas surveyed severely affected by inadequate access to clean water

Clean and safe water is hard to find in the marsh. For those families within the marsh area 91% of all water points currently in use tested positive for bacterial contamination, and 94% of the tested water containers tested positive for bacterial contamination. The dominant water source is the hand dug open well with minimal protection. Families in the areas less isolated have a greater number of hand pumps and therefore less general contamination. Access is further affected in the rainy season when families are forced to drink from the marsh directly as many open wells are flooded. The differences in level of available sources between the communities sees the higher rank of Batulawan and Linandangan as they have access to closed hand pumps. The lower end is Buliok and Barongis who are more often drinking directly from the marsh. Still those who are drinking from open wells appear to be in no better condition considering the water contamination results. Thus on the whole, excluding Batulawan and Linandangan, the 8 barangay within the Marsh area are severely affected by inadequate access to clean and healthy water.

Key points

71% of all water points tested during HH survey showed positive for bacterial contamination
89% of all water containers tested showed positive for bacterial contamination
55% of 217 families interviewed take drinkable water is taken from open wells throughout the year
29% of families interviewed are taking water from pumps, primarily from barangays, Batulawan, Linandangan
25% of families drink water from the marsh
Taste of the water is a significant factor in determining the choice of family water source"

Shelter & non-food items

Makeshift structures hosting IDPs seldom provide sufficient protection from the elements (October 2006)

UNICEF, October 2006, p. 121

"Temporary evacuation centers for IDPs are usually schools, churches, gymnasiums and other public structures large enough to accommodate many people. When there is insufficient room, temporary tent shelters of plastic are built in public spaces such as the grounds of government offices and even the roadsides. These makeshift structures are invariably made of light and improvised materials that provide insufficient protection from the elements. On the other hand, those who are placed in buildings not intended to be lived in immediately have to cope with confined spaces and inadequate ventilation. Some evacuation centers had been transformed into semi-permanent resettlement areas because the armed conflict in their home communities had been going on for months and even years."

IDPs request to be consulted prior to the implementation of shelter projects to maximise chances of success (December 2005)

- Most IDPs live either in informal resettlement areas, with relatives or in government buildings. Most of them live in squalid conditions with no basic amenities.
- Core shelters were built for the displaced, but many remained empty because the displaced refused to resettle in these structures built far away from their original places of residence and therefore away from their sources of livelihood. In addition, some were built near military detachments which they consider as security risks to them.
- The displaced wished to be associated closely to any upcoming shelter program so as to avoid these problems.

Government of the Philippines, International Funding Agencies, Mindanao Stakeholders, December 2005, p. 55

"Internal mass displacement of residents brought about by a series of armed conflict in majority of the towns visited is common. This is particularly true in the towns inhabited by Muslims and ethnic groups in the provinces of Sultan Kudarat, North Cotabato, Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte.

Conflicts in these areas are often due to armed confrontation between government forces and rebel groups, family feud (rido) and simple criminal acts like cattle rustling. This internal displacement has compounded the problems of the local government concerned. Some LGUs had become unwilling hosts to these IDPs as they witness their already scarce and limited resources drained. On the other hand, other LGUs experienced a sudden reduction in their population. IDPs in most areas live either in informal resettlement areas, with relatives or in government buildings. Most of them live in squalid conditions with no basic amenities.

Several government line agencies and NGOs have introduced core-shelter housing projects to these IDPs. Among these line agencies and NGOs are the DSWD (both National and ARMM), Tabang Mindanao, I Sincerely Love All Muslims (ISLAM), and several others.

It is notable, however, that some of these core-shelter housing projects in other areas or towns are uninhabited. Some beneficiaries refused to resettle in these structures due to various reasons. One reason is that some core shelters were built far away from their original places of

residence and therefore away from their sources of livelihood. In addition, some were built near military detachments which they consider as security risks to them.

Residents in areas visited expressed the common view that they do not know, as of the moment, if the government has programmed projects to address the housing needs of the IDPs. If ever the government or NGOs wish to address this need, the affected residents are one in saying that they should be consulted first in determining the best location for the housing projects."

At least 7,000 houses damaged during the February 2003 fighting (May 2005)

- UNDP-government IDP programme has during 2005 contracted the construction of 241 core shelters in the provinces of Cotabato, Zamboanga del Norte, Maguindanao, Sulu and Basilan.
- Some 7,000 houses were damaged by the conflict in 2003, 5,846 of them completely destroyed.
- The government had provided 2,315 shelters units by May 2004, leaving some 3,000 families without shelter.
- Only one third of the amount required to rebuild all houses has been reportedly forthcoming as of May 2004, according to the ARMM-DSWD director.
- As of 1 April 2004, DSWD recognized that the construction of some 2,564 houses (all of them in Maguindanao province) had not even been funded .

"After years of seeking refuge in distant evacuation centers, internally-displaced Moro families have finally returned home in a remote barangay here previously affected by armed conflict with a set of new housing units from a donor-funded government program to start on rebuilding their lives.

Twelve newly-completed core shelters built by the GOP-UNDP Programme on Rehabilitating Internally Displaced Persons and Communities in Southern Philippines or IDP programme were recently turned over to internally-displaced families in Brgy. Natutungan, one of the farming communities in the municipality of Matalam, North Cotabato that has suffered setbacks from the running battles between government forces and rebel groups in 2000.

The construction of core shelters in Brgy. Natutungan is one of the program's high-impact initiatives to speed-up rehabilitation of IDP communities by providing the necessary basic services for the resettlement of IDPs.

(...)

As of March this year, the IDP Programme has provided food and non-food packages to 18,720 displaced families as well as medical and dental assistance to 1,265 individuals. It has also contracted the construction of 241 core shelters in the provinces of Cotabato, Zamboanga del Norte, Maguindanao, Sulu and Basilan." (Government of the Philippines, 23 May 2005)

"From January to October 2003, the armed conflict damaged 7,108 houses, 5,846 of which were totally damaged" (Janet M. Arnado & Mary Ann M. Arnado, 15 November 2004, p. 56)

Launched by in April 2003, the Mindanao National Initiatives Program seeks to address the continuing peace and order problem in Mindanao, by providing assistance on the rehabilitation of Muslim Mindanao, in particular to the to the conflict-affected areas. The Office of the Presidential Adviser for Peace Process (OPAPP) serves as the oversight agency and provides overall policy guidance/strategic directions for the implementation of the Program, while the MEDCo Secretariat serves as the secretariat for the Program.

Among the achievements of this program, by May 2004, are the provision of 2,315 units of core shelters in North Cotabato, Maguindanao, Bukidnon, Zamboanga del Norte, Lanao del Norte, Sultan Kudarat, and Basilan (MEDCo, August 2004).

In May 2004, the government announced that at least 35 million pesos had been allocated for the construction of 4,715 core shelters to benefit people displaced by armed conflicts in the ARMM region. The director of DSWD ARMM has requested three times more, or 119 million pesos from the government to fund the total number of core shelter needed in 2004 (Mindanews, 4 May 2004).

As of March 31, 2004, the DSWD reported that some 2,564 houses, all in Maguindanao province, were still not funded. (DSWD 31 March 2004)

"Close to 3,000 families displaced by last year's war between the military and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front have remained homeless even as the government is yet to finish rebuilding the houses of people affected by ousted president Joseph Estrada's all-out war in 2000, a senior official of the Department of Social Welfare and Development today said.

Citing the department's 2003 year-end report, Vilma Cabrera, DSWD Program Management Bureau director, said that of the targeted 5,816 core shelter units for last year's war in several parts of Mindanao, only 2,935 houses were completed, or just a little over 50 percent.

'We need more additional funding to complete the construction of our remaining target. For the record, we have yet to build 2,881 housing units for the war victims,' she told MindaNews.

Cabrera said the houses destroyed by the war last year were scattered in parts of western, northern, southern, and central Mindanao, the region worst affected by the war.

She said at least P70.8 million is needed to rebuild the remaining houses, which were totally destroyed when the military launched an operation in Buliok complex in February last year." (Mindanews 28 January 2004)

See also: ["4,700 housing units to be built in the ARMM region during 2004" \(May 2004\)](#)

Vulnerable groups

Needs of male youth are often forgotten (July 2006)

- Male youth in conflict-affected areas in Mindnao are in dire need of assistance in the sector of education, health and agriculture. However, they tend to be seen as combattant and are seldom seen as a target group.
- More efforts should focus on this group to show them that they have not been forgotten.

WB, July 2006, p. 17

"The FGDs and other interviews conducted as part of this study show that despite growing up in an environment shaped by violence, young males in Mindanao continue to hope for change for a better life. The harrowing experiences they have been through, such as destruction of their

homes and communities, loss of a parent or sibling, repeated displacement, life as a refugee in their own country and the associated loss of self esteem, have not stopped them from hoping for lasting peace in Mindanao. Most of them have managed to stay out of the cycle of violence and revenge and display considerable courage and resilience in the face of grave threats to their lives and aspirations. They yearn for opportunities to equip themselves with the education and skills that their peer in other parts of the country have access to. They are very receptive to new ideas and approaches, and constitute an important resource group impatiently waiting to participate in rebuilding their communities.

As discussed above there are a number of interventions in the education, health, and agriculture sectors but only a few of them are youth focused. In an attempt to be gender sensitive many of these interventions are women-oriented and tend to ignore male youth. Further, until very recently, male youth were viewed as combatants and therefore part of the problem. The unique situation of young males in the context of armed conflict still remains to be addressed by most programs. While the Peace Agreement between the GRP and the MILF will no doubt be the first step in any effort to address the problems of the conflict-affected population of Mindanao, including its male youth, it is important that immediate efforts, along the following lines, are undertaken to demonstrate to the young people, especially young men, in conflict-affected areas of Mindanao that they have not been forgotten."

Children, women and elderly hardest-hit by displacement (December 2005)

- According to the findings of a workshop held in evacuation sites in Pagagawan and Pagalungan (Maguindanao) in May 2004, the war negatively impacted on the children's capacity to envisage the future positively.
- Interviews of members of war-affected community show "crisis of the children" was identified as one of the most significant consequences of war.
- Negative impact of the war on children include: interrupted studies, trauma, poor health, and the need for child labour.
- Women were also among the most affected by the war. Loss of family members due to the war and additional responsibility to care for the family has had a deep impact on them.
- Weakened by advancing age and illness, the elders have had difficulty coping with the displacement as many had to find work to support themselves and their immediate relatives.

Government of the Philippines, International Funding Agencies, Mindanao Stakeholders, December 2005, p. 36

"Based on consultations between IDPs, local government officials, humanitarian assistance organizations, and the JNA Team, the IDPs at highest risk at present are those who have experienced secondary displacement owing to natural disaster, specifically flooding. Others at high risk include orphaned children, widows, female-headed households, the elderly and the differently-abled. Their plight and that of the IDPs in general, deserve special attention as displacement is concrete evidence of violence and fear, a reminder of past hurts, and a basis for continued mistrust and skepticism. Thus, the success of any assistance program will, in the final analysis, be judged on the basis of whether the needs of the IDPs were addressed and their situation improved."

Kalinaw Mindanao mission concludes February 2005 military offensive in Sulu led to high level of trauma among children Kalinaw Mindanao, April 2005, p. 7

"5. The military operations have aggravated the already deplorable economic condition of the people. Sickness and diseases have reached untenable levels, especially in areas of the military operations. The women and children bear the brunt of the all-out war policy. Children directly affected by the armed conflict have been traumatized by aerial bombings, the presence of government soldiers and high-powered firearms. This has affected their psychosocial wellbeing such as the erosion of self-esteem and self-confidence. Their development is adversely affected by the inculcation of a culture of war and violence at their early age."

Save the Children, 2004, p. 105

"Children are the most vulnerable among all the sectors, yet their needs are also the least attended to in current aid programmes. Most of those who were affected by both 2000 and 2003 wars no longer have a fair chance of full childhood development before transcending to adulthood. Superficially, children seem to have coped with stressors before, during and after conflict periods. However, the long-term effects of war on their lives are still unknown. There is also no long-term study on the children who failed to adjust to the war and its aftermath. Moreover, many of the children who seem to have coped have already suffered from irreparable losses in their childhood development."

Workshop shows war negatively impacted on the children's capacity to envisage the future positively

The Manila Times 19 June 2004

"Physical displacement from their communities may be traumatic, but it is not the worst of experience of children in conflict areas in Mindanao.

The most painful thing is that the children are losing hope for a real peace and sustainable development, according to findings of a workshop conducted by the Community Resource Development Center in partnership with the United Nations Multi-Donor Program.

The workshop was held in evacuation sites in Pagagawan and Pagalungan in Maguindanao province. It sought to gauge how the young feel about their situation and determine what they want to achieve in the near future.

The workshop was dubbed Culture of Peace: Enchanting the Role of Internally Displaced Youth and Children in Conflict-Affected Areas through Psychosocial and Peace Education.

In the workshop, which was held last month, affected children were urged to express their peace visions, concerns and how they cope with the trauma of being in the center of an armed-conflict area. Specifically, the three-phase workshop was held in the Sitio Tinga emergency evacuation center, then in the Layog mosque in Pagalungan, and in the Layog rehabilitation center in Pagagawan.

Maguindanao was among Mindanao provinces severely affected by massive evacuations sparked by sporadic clashes between the government forces and the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The first workshop focused on tracing back prior-to-conflict situations; the second delved on their present condition; while the third established peace visions. The children in attendance expressed their sentiments in the workshops through drawings, songs and dances, and verbal expressions.

"The workshop produced substantive understanding of the children's situation and clear relevant visions," Rashid Manahan, CRDC executive director, said in a summary report. While the workshop ferreted out hidden pains among the children, their trauma blurred their visions of the future.

"The war not only displaced them physically from their communities, but also displaced their hope to have a real peace and sustainable development," said Manahan. Manahan said results of the workshop showed the need for similar process of continuing advocacy with different institutions working in conflict-affected areas. "

Study on the effects of armed conflict on children show that 94% suffered from trauma symptoms

WB, January 2005, p. 6

"A study of the effects of armed conflict on children was conducted by Balik Kalipay, a Project of the University of the Philippines in Pikit, North Cotabato in the third quarter of 2002. This was part of Balik Kalipay's psychosocial needs, assessment, and community mapping of Pikit, aimed at gathering baseline data for the Project Team's psychosocial services in the area.

A total of 1,200 children who were attending the Balik Kalipay play therapy were studied through individual interviews with their respective parents. Using the combination of a modified version of the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire and a self-reporting (in this case, parent-reporting) health questionnaire designed for the purpose, eight trained local community interviewers interviewed parents in Pikit's 12 barangays, using a randomized household survey sampling method.

Basically, the interviews focused on calamity and war-related experiences of the children that included loss, torture, death, and displacement; symptoms of trauma; and self-report on the daily social functioning and health status of the children. At least four trauma related experiences with corresponding trauma symptoms were deemed indicative of trauma among the children.

Preliminary results indicate that over 94% (1,128) of the children manifest trauma symptoms. Of this number, 12% (150) children were found to be severely traumatized including the 2.8% (34) who were found to be torture survivors. Balik Kalipay is planning a rehabilitation program for these children."

Interviews with members of war-affected communities reveal the negative consequences suffered by children to be their main concern

CFSI October 2003, p. iii

"The effects of displacement on several vulnerable groups were documented through interviews, case studies, and the analysis of survey data. For example, it was found that children and youth suffered from such consequences of displacement as interrupted studies, trauma, poor health, and the need for child labour. Many have also been polarised, and are likely to harbour strong feelings against "opposing" communities, by the experience of conflict and loss. Some of the community members interviewed discussed the "crisis of the children" as one of the most significant consequences of war and displacement, with very troubling implications for the future.

Moreover, as in most cases of displacement, women are among those who have had the heaviest burden to bear. They have had the responsibility of trying to hold their families together even as social structures have eroded, family resources and livelihoods are lost, and family members are forced to disperse in order to find work. Above all, the loss of family members due to war has had a tremendous psychosocial impact, affecting the women physically, psychologically, and emotionally.

The elderly as well were not spared the tragic consequences of displacement, especially with respect to its effect on their health. Weakened by advancing age and illness, they too had to find work to support themselves and their immediate relatives. Given their long memory of the past and the realities of the present, some of the Muslim and Christian elderly have developed fear

and mistrust towards each other's group. As elders, they wield enormous influence in transmitting and reinforcing or eliminating cultural prejudices and biases.

The indigenous Manobo IDP community, as with other impoverished communities in the region, also suffered the consequences of displacement, particularly with respect to their access to land. Basically a farming community, their attachment to land and its resources had been cut off, marginalizing them further. The experience of violence on the part of the Manobo women and children is reported to have resulted in notable psychosocial trauma and fears."

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

General

Displaced children's education is disrupted for a longer time than for children who remain in their community (October 2006)

- UNICEF study found that in terms of schooling, IDP children are generally the worst affected by armed conflict. The tendency for children to stop schooling for at least the length of their displacement is great for many reasons, including the uncertainty of their situation, schools are too far away, their families can no longer afford it, or because they have had to find work to help support the family.
- The displacements in the areas covered by the study lasted anywhere from a week to well over a year. Children have reported stopping schooling from anywhere from a year or two years to stopping entirely.
- At the end of January 2007, skirmishes between soldiers and Moro rebels in Midsayap forced some 6,000 from their homes. Many sought refuge in public buildings, including schools. As a consequence, classes in at least 3 vilages were suspended.
- While the majority of the 358 children surveyed in Parang and Pikit managed to transfer to other schooling facilities after displacement, some 18% either stopped their schooling or dropped out.
- The main reason for not allowing their kids to resume school was that parents wanted their children to study only in their place of origin, or more generally because of the conflict situation. Only 9% of the parents said they needed the children to help them with livelihood activities

UNICEF, October 2006, p. 7

"There were evident impacts on the education, physical and mental health, and general well-being of conflict-affected children. The study also noted distinct differences in the impact of armed conflict on children who remained in their communities and were affected by on-going military operations compared to those who were displaced along with their families.

The following were the effects on children's schooling:

1. For those who remained in their communities

They temporarily stopped going to school from a few days to as long as over a month because they were:

Afraid of leaving their homes or being away from families while fighting was going on

Afraid of encountering government soldiers on the way to school and being accused of going to help the NPA (ex. of bringing food, of passing information)

Afraid of encountering soldiers and being asked or obliged to guide them

Rendered incapable by stress/trauma-related symptoms

Displaced when their schools were used as temporary camps by government soldiers

Forced to change schools because of perceived threats to them or their families from government soldiers

While at school, they are distracted by:

Noise from shooting, explosions, helicopters and planes in nearby fighting

Worries about the lives of family and even of the NPA

The intimidating or otherwise disruptive presence of AFP soldiers
Inconvenienced by being forced to take longer routes to school or to find a place to stay nearer school (i.e. relatives, friends, rented) to avoid encountering AFP soldiers
Having to balance schooling with paid work to support family incomes disrupted by armed conflict and/or military operations
Classes suspended for up to a month because of teachers' fear of returning

2. For those displaced

Stopped going to school during the period of displacement because of:
Insufficient funds following lost incomes and livelihoods
Need of children to find work to help support the family
Distance of evacuation center from school
General uncertainty of situation particularly for how long the displacement will last
Schools destroyed in the fighting

In the child patient survey conducted during the area medical missions it was found that only 6.4 percent of 3-5 year-olds were enrolled in day care.

(...)

In terms of schooling, IDP children are generally the worst affected by armed conflict. The tendency for children to stop schooling for at least the length of their displacement is great for any combination of reasons: because of the uncertainty of their situation, because schools are too far away, because their families can no longer afford it, or because they have had to find work to help support the family. The displacements in the areas covered by the study lasted anywhere from a week to well over a year. Children have reported stopping schooling from anywhere from a year or two years to stopping entirely.

The most recurring reason appears to be displacement undermining families' economic means. Evacuation sites are notoriously far from regular and sufficient livelihood sources. Children's studies are among the first to be sacrificed when families try to reduce expenses. Laga, 14, of Maguindanao said that she and her siblings all stopped going to school during their year-long stay in an evacuation center because their parents could no longer afford it. This was essentially the situation faced by many others such as 12-year-old Musrifa of North Cotabato and her family.

Dire economic straits have also pushed children not only to stop school but to enter paid work to help their families. The FGD of child self-evacuees from Leyte, for instance, found that all the participants had stopped studying and that most of them were working. Mike, 14, foraged through the infamous garbage mountains of Payatas; Jerick, 16, sold fishballs off a street cart; Joyet, 17, worked in a factory cleaning bottles; Cesar, who just turned 18, worked in a bakery seven days a week from early morning until midnight. Also from Leyte, a mother lamented how her 10-year-old son had gone from attending school in their rural village to scavenging for nails and other scrap metal in Manila.

There are also added factors compromising the education of displaced Moro children – some big, some small, but all disruptive. Some children said they had a hard time enrolling simply for lack of documentation. In Maguindanao, Nahla, 11, said that she and her eight-year-old sister had not been able to re-enroll because their school report cards and birth certificates were among the many things they lost when soldiers burned down their home. Unable to finish even the second grade, she is angry for this: "I'm upset with the soldiers because I can't continue with my studies. If I could get even with them I would have done so already." (*Naiinis ako sa mga sundalo dahil hindi ko na mapagpatuloy ang pag-aaral ko. Kung pwede nga lang na gumanti, ginantihan ko na ang mga sundalong iyon.*)

There is also apparent demoralization from having to repeat grade levels over and over again. The fighting that broke out in North Cotabato in February 2003 was a month shy of the end of classes, so even those who were able to return to school while in evacuation centers the following June had to repeat the entire school year, expenses and all.

Ramlah, 15, bewailed being prevented from graduating from the elementary grades at the very last minute: "As children, our experience of war is having to stop school. The reason we're still at low grade levels despite our ages is that we keep stopping. I want an end to war so that we children can continue studying." (*Ang matinding karanasan naming mga bata sa gera ay paghinto ng aming pag-aaral... Kaya ho ngayon ay malaki na kami mababa parin ang grade dahil pahinto-hinto. Gusto ko pong hindi na maulit ang gera para tuluy-tuloy ang pag-aaral naming mga kabataan.*) Mahade, 16, also remembered how she and her friends were so happy and looking forward to finally graduating, even already preparing their things for the ceremony. But then, "It turned out I was mistaken because I never felt what it was like to graduate from elementary school. I told myself that I got the opposite of happiness. I remember how sad I felt. I cried..." (*Nagkamali pala ako ng akala dahil hindi ko man naramdaman ang pagtatapos ng elementarya. Ang nasabi ko sa aking sarili ay ang kasiyahan pala ay kabaliktaran. Tandang tanda ko pa ang lahat malungkot. Umiiyak ako...*)

Eleven-year-old Racma, the middle of five children, recalled even the colors of the flames that engulfed their home when soldiers torched it. But it is the effect of war on her studies that has made the greatest impression on her. "The experience I will never forget is about my schooling which is always interrupted. Since I was in the first grade, war has always interrupted my schooling. One time we were already so close to the end of the year but when war came we had to stop again." (*Ang karanasang di ko malilimutan ay tungkol sa pag-aaral dahil sa pag-aral ko ay palaging natitigil. Noon grade one pa ako palaging natitigil nandahil sa gera. Mayroon pang isang pasukan na malapit na talaga kami mag-klusing pero nang dumating ang gera natigil na naman.*)

The lament among many Moro children over the perpetual interruptions in their studies is also an appeal for a return to daily routines and some kind of stability in their lives. Yet the physical damage to the educational infrastructure in their communities reminds them how elusive this goal is. Children from North Cotabato poignantly recalled bullet holes in the Philippine flag in their school as well as the damage to their classrooms which made them unusable. The evacuees of Maguindanao returned home, but the school in their community was still so damaged that elementary students had to walk for over an hour every day just to get to the nearest alternative school. (There were no equivalent accounts of schools being damaged or destroyed in the NPA areas.)

Rohamie, 15, was clearly pained: "Why did this have to happen to us? What did our village do that we were attacked even if they had nothing to gain from it? This is what made us stop studying, because we were in evacuation [centers]..." (*Bakit pa kasi nangyari ito sa amin ang ganito? Ano ba ang kasalanan ng aming lugar dahil iyon pa ang kanilang lumusob subalit ay wala naman silang makukuha doon? Kayo ito ang dahilan ng aming pagtigil sa pag-aaral dahil nasa evacuation na kami...*)

When evacuations take place not only the schooling of children from affected communities is interrupted. So is the schooling of children of the community whose schools are temporarily used as evacuation shelters. In Compostela Valley, some 100 evacuating families moved into a nearby school, stopping its operations from two weeks to around a month. "

The Inquirer, 31 January 2007

"Classes in at least three villages here -- where pocket skirmishes between soldiers and Moro rebels erupted last week -- have been suspended for the past three days after parents refused to send their children back to school.

(...)

Efren Mantawil, schools district supervisor, said aside from the villages of Rangaban, Mudsing and Sambolawan, classes were also suspended in nearby areas because school buildings were being used as shelters for the more than 6,000 people displaced by the three days of fighting.

At least three rebels and three militiamen were killed while two soldiers were injured in the skirmishes. "Once the situation returns to normal, we will resume classes," Mantawil said."

Notre Dame University & Commission on Population Region XII, 2004

"Prior to their displacement, 78% of respondents from Parang and 67% from Pikit asserted that their school-age children were in school. The total was 358 children. Those in the primary accounted 11%; elementary 53%; and secondary 32%.

During displacement, about 82% of 358 in-school children were able to transfer to other schools near their EC. But 15% stopped their schooling, many of whom came from Pikit. Another 3% dropped out from school.

Displaced families of those who quit from their studies had varied plans for them. About 42% or 55 families would allow their children to resume schooling upon cessation of armed conflict in their area. Forty-seven percent (47%) wanted their children to study only in their place of origin, while 9% (all from Pikit) wanted their children to help in livelihood activities for the subsistence of the family."

More than 4,400 additional classrooms needed in conflict-affected areas (December 2005)

- JNA study estimated needs for 4,400 additional classrooms in conflict-affected areas of Mindanao

Government of the Philippines, International Funding Agencies, Mindanao Stakeholders, December 2005, p. 55

"Inadequacy and lack of school building in areas visited are very common. In areas where there are school buildings, most of them are up to primary level only. However, most of these structures either need immediate repair to make them conducive to learning or need additional classrooms to address the perennial issue on multi-grade accommodation in a single classroom.

In most cases, classrooms are without decent furniture such as desks, chairs and even blackboards. Most barangays, especially those in far-flung areas, do not have school buildings at all. Students from far-flung sitios have to travel by foot along mountainous trails just to reach the nearest schools, which are commonly located in barangay centers or poblacion.

In some cases, school buildings in CAAs are abandoned, burned or occupied by IDPs. Those abandoned can be rehabilitated and made operational while those burned during the conflict need to be re-constructed. Based on DepEd's Basic Education Information System's (BEIS) recent count, there is an estimated need for 4,408 additional classrooms (combined elementary and secondary schools) in the identified conflict affected municipalities.

As of end August 2004, the total enrolment for all CAAs is 419,340 (combined ES and SS), with only 5,054 existing classrooms or an average of 83 students per classroom which is way above the desired 45:1 student-classroom ratio."

Obstacles to education

War and poverty are the main obstacle to education (July 2006)

- Poverty exacerbated by conflict and displacement is the main factor affecting education.
- Literacy rates and school enrollment rates were significantly lower in the Muslim-populated areas of Mindanao as compared to the rest of the country.
- The February 2003 war and subsequent displacement has caused a decrease in the enrollment in Pikit.
- Reasons for not attending are: relocation of families, child labour to raise the family income, trauma and uncertainty of school during war.
- In Pikit, there is a shortage of class rooms, school buildings, teachers and schoolbooks and other school material.
- In Pagalungan, where many have not yet returned as of October 2003, schools have not opened or are still destroyed.
- Provinces of Central Mindanao, due to severe poverty, were reported to be among the most education-deprived areas in the country, creating a situation of uncertain access to education for many internally displaced children.

World Bank, July 2006, pp. 4-5

"Studies on education in Mindanao have repeatedly asserted that poverty exacerbated by recurrent armed conflict is the single most important factor affecting education in the region. While the country as a whole boasts a literacy rate of 93.7 percent for males and 94 percent for females, Mindanao presents a very different picture. In 2003 the literacy rates for Central Mindanao were 85.9 percent for males and 88.8 percent for females, while in ARMM it dropped to 71 percent for males and 69.4 percent for females⁹ (Table 3).

The elementary net enrollment rate in 2001 was 82 percent as compared with the national average of 96 percent, while the completion rate of 40 percent is just above half that of the rest of the country. The secondary school enrollment rate was the lowest in the country at 39 percent as compared with the 12 percent, compared to 6.1 percent and 7.3 percent respectively for Luzon and Visayas. Conflict affected parts of Mindanao and ARMM have dropout rates of 23 percent. A study on education in Mindanao conducted by the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP)¹¹ observes that in any given year, only three to four out of ten children enrolled will finish high school. In ARMM only one out of ten children is likely to complete high school on time. Most of them will probably manage to complete only Grades 1 and 2. Out-of-school youth as a percentage of the 6-24 year old population (23.1 percent) is also the highest in Mindanao¹³ (Table 4).

Bantay Ceasefire Investigative Mission, 1 August 2003

"Schools opened nation-wide on June 16 this year. Schools also opened that day in the war-affected barangays in Pikit, except for Brgys. Bulol and Kabasalan. To the credit of the DepEd, a school was opened in Brgy. Bulod for the first time since, although it is only for first grade.

Expectedly, there was a decrease in enrollment in Pikit as a direct effect of the war in February. Some families have relocated; some children need to help out their parents livelihood, some are still too traumatized to go to school (where they are away from parents). Still another reason is that parents chose not to enroll their children because of the uncertainty of school during war. When evacuee families do return, other immediate concerns like food and housing crowd out education as the priority.

Like many other areas in central Mindanao there is in Pikit a shortage of classrooms, school buildings, teachers and schoolbooks (estimated book-user ratio is 1:10). Students especially the children of evacuees lack notebooks, ballpens, pencils, writing paper and other classroom materials.

Education is a problem in the Pagalungan side because evacuees have not been able to return, villages have been abandoned and no schools have opened. Many of the schools have been damaged by the February 2002 war (either from direct hits by artillery or by bombs dropped from planes or gunships, as in the case of Sitio Balongis, brgy. Kalbugan, Pagalungan) or from disuse in the last five months (Brgys. Kudal and Bgo-Inged which were abandoned since 2000). But residents said have not been told of specific rebuilding plans or budgets.

In some cases, soldiers wanted to encamp beside the school (the case of Brgy. Inug-og central elementary school where Marines approached school officials of their plan)."

**Severe poverty in Central Mindanao makes access to education uncertain for IDPs
CHR 3 February 2003, p. 13**

"As in most countries affected by displacement, women and children make up the great majority of the displaced population in the Philippines and experience additional vulnerabilities. The provinces of Central Mindanao, due to severe poverty, were reported to be among the most education-deprived areas in the country, creating a situation of uncertain access to education for many internally displaced children. In areas of return, internally displaced persons reported that classrooms were in poor condition and the number of teachers were inadequate. Moreover, displaced children often experienced difficulty in attending the public school system due to lack of financial means for transport and other necessities."

Youth in Mindanao identify education as their top priority and conflict & poverty as the main barriers to schooling (July 2006)

- The youth surveyed viewed education as a top priority and one of the only solution to a better future.
- The main barriers to education were the following: insecurity and violence discourage the parents to send their children to school, poverty makes the financial burden of education unaffordable, schools are too far away, teachers are absent and material is lacking and difficulty in going back to school after several years of interruption.

World Bank, July 2006, p.6

"The youth surveyed placed education at the very top of their list of priorities. They consider it the main solution to their problems and the passport to a better future. They view education as the only means of securing the skills and qualifications necessary to achieve gainful employment and

a better quality of life for themselves and their families. Education, according to them, will also help them earn respect and prestige in their communities, will give them better opportunities to participate in community organizations and aspire to leadership positions, increase their self esteem and self confidence, and act as a catalyst for change and promote peace. Many FGD participants expressed an interest in resuming their studies and sought help from the government and NGOs. Older youth were keen on non-formal education and skills training that would help them get remunerative employment.

The chief barriers to schooling identified by the FGD participants are:

Threats of violence posed by the continuing low intensity conflict in various locations in the region discourage parents from sending their wards to school. Parents also fear that schools may serve as popular recruiting grounds for the MILF or the other armed groups.

Impoverishment caused by the long drawn out conflict is a major deterrent. The financial burden imposed by schooling in the form of books, uniforms, transport costs, etc. are unaffordable. Further, youth, especially male youth, are required to contribute to the family income in whatever manner they can. Some youth who have lost both parents have become de facto heads of their families and would prefer to concentrate on making a living.

Schools are too far from home and transportation is often not available, or unaffordable. The other structural obstacles highlighted include inadequate and overcrowded classrooms with as many as four classes taught in the same classroom, irregular attendance by teachers and poor quality of teaching, and irrelevant curriculum (Box 1).

Teachers are often absent and the quality of teaching has deteriorated. The perceived marginal return of education is an important deterrent.

Many of the older youth who have missed out on several years of schooling are uncomfortable about attending school with classmates who are far younger.

The FGD groups offered the following suggestions to improve enrolment and attendance in schools:

Complete cessation of hostilities;

Financial incentives such as scholarships, subsidized school lunches, uniforms, textbooks and supplies, and transportation allowances;

Construction of additional school buildings and classrooms, provision of improved facilities, and improved training of teachers;

Adoption of flexible timings and schedules so that students have the option to work and study; and

Revisions of the curriculum so that it is relevant to their cultural and religious values and will help them get remunerative employment after graduation."

Mindanews, 26 June 2006

"The armed skirmishes were taking their toll on children, who had just returned to school after the summer vacation.

Virginia Flores, of Malaybalay City's social welfare office, said the experience was traumatic to the elders but it was worse to the children who shivered at the sight of soldiers and the sound of gunfire.

Children comprise more than half, or 191, of the 360 evacuees in the Zamboanguita evacuation center, the Malaybalay City's social welfare office reported. The report also estimated the same ratio in the St. Peter site.

The problem is not only limited to children evacuees. Tajones said that around 400 pupils of Zamboanguita Elementary School were also displaced. Since June 19, the Department of Education had suspended classes in Zamboanguita to accommodate the evacuees in the classrooms.

By then, the pupils were just on their fifth day in school since classes opened only on June 13.

Tajones' niece, 11-year old Andrea Mae Demegillo, a Grade 6 pupil, was initially happy when classes were suspended. But she was afraid when she saw the evacuees. Then, she began to worry if they could still hold classes and if ever the evacuees would return to their villages. She saw one of her teachers attending to the evacuees.

On June 24, George Madroñal, Department of Education supervisor for Malaybalay East district, told MindaNews over the phone that the "small war" in the area has disrupted the children's learning but there is nothing they can do about it.

"We plan to resume classes on June 26. But we are not yet sure about that. We have to listen to the advice of the military and the local school managers," he said.

If classes resumed and the fighting continued, Tajones said, the plan might be to move the evacuees out of the classrooms at daytime and return them there at night for sleep."

Many children reported to volunteer to join the MILF with support from their parents and community (July 2006)

- While recruitment of minors is denied by the MILF, it is reported that that minors are recruited to undertake a variety of roles for the rebels.
- Many children also volunteer to join the MILF, often with the support and encouragement of their families, community elders and relatives.

WB, July 2006, p. 12

"In some of the barangays visited, male youth were of the firm conviction that that there are only two ways of becoming influential in their communities: one is through arms and the other is through education. "Adolescents in these war-stricken areas submit themselves to warfare. They learn how to carry guns and how to use them. They are exposed to the danger of being injured and even being killed in battle. For them, this is the only way to survive."²¹²² Some of the combatants interviewed reported joining the MILF because of 'what the government was doing' to their people, while others said they had 'to fight the enemies of Islam (Box 7).' A young man from Buldon, Maguindanao, who is currently a combatant, was encouraged by his parents to join the MILF. He was assigned several tasks including guarding the camp. Despite his convictions he did not wish to encourage others to follow his example, because it is not easy "to sacrifice your future."

While recruitment of minors is denied by the MILF, several sources emphasize that minors are recruited to undertake a variety of roles for the rebels. The MILF reportedly uses high school students from Cotabato City and Maguindanao to "purchase and transport medicines intended for Muslim rebels who were wounded in the armed hostilities with the government forces. These children used as couriers are mostly third and fourth year high school students, whose parents are regular MILF members."²⁴ Schools and colleges were important recruiting grounds for the MILF in the past²⁵. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable, especially those who have relatives in the MILF. Many volunteer to take up arms for their homeland or against enemies of Islam, often with the support and encouragement of their families, community elders and relatives who believe

that it is sanctioned by their faith. Some parents also feel that besides serving the cause of Islam, their young people will keep occupied and escape the drug trap that is seen as a major problem by all communities visited. The death or arrest of a parent or a close relative by the AFP is also a strong motivating factor."

ISSUES OF SELF-RELIANCE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Self-reliance

Accumulated effects of conflict and displacement result in near arrested development in conflict-affected areas (October 2006)

- Most IDPs were already extremely poor and in debt prior to their displacement. Upon return, many return to nothing with their houses and livestock destroyed and most are in dire need of assistance.
- Sporadic and protracted nature of the conflict means that IDPs are returning to situations of ongoing uncertainty and insecurity and are hesitant to make investments with long gestation periods .
- Intermittent returns are important because communities need to re-establish claims over their homes and farms that can be taken over by other people.
- Poverty among IDPs has various dimensions: their skills are limited, public services are unavailable, limited education and isolation from important urban labor markets, inputs markets are monopolized by a few traders who also happen to be the main source of credit, farm implements are rudimentary and within communities indebtedness is very high.
- Before the war, 67,7 percent of the families in the Muslim-dominated areas had availed of credit. After the conflict, this figure dramatically went down to 49,3 percent.
- After the conflict, there was an obvious decline in farm equipment access for the IDPs.
- Support coming from government agencies is generally very limited and families sought other ways of coping –distant relatives provided living space, women and children sought odd jobs.
- There was an increase in the number of IDPs who earned incomes from farming after the conflict, but the average household income has decreased.

UNICEF, October 2006, p. 107

"The accumulated effects of armed conflict are most conventionally seen in terms of the tallying the number of individual victims and extrapolating the sum of the adverse effects on them. This is the case for instance when counting over a million IDPS, some 43,000 victims of conflict-related human rights violations, and 343 civilian casualties of armed encounters over the period 2001-2005 – and then giving more depth to these numbers through qualitative accounts. Aside from the effects on children and women already discussed earlier, there are four points particularly regarding economic effects and social capital worth emphasizing:

The people reached by the research were mainly engaged in subsistence low-input agricultural production with extremely low productivity. Their families were perpetually on the knife-edge of subsistence: earning just enough to survive and meet their most basic needs and not generating any surplus. They were in a delicate equilibrium easily upset by theft, health emergencies, adverse weather and the manifold disruptions to lives by armed conflict.

Accumulated losses in personal economic capital can be considerable for those directly affected. Respondents were particularly burdened by the costs of rebuilding homes, replacing livestock, and restoring crops and farmland. IDPs were most adversely affected. Also, the communities covered by the study already suffered from bad roads, and water, power, telecommunication, education and health infrastructure problems to begin with. There have been anecdotal accounts

of significant and sustained damage to these due to fighting in MILF camps, but with no such accounts emerging in NPA-influenced areas.

Aside from evident economic losses, victims of armed conflict also suffer losses in social capital that has been painstakingly built up. These include disruptions not only in the usual family support networks but also in community-based organizations. Armed conflict situations have rendered these untenable for various reasons and in varying degrees.

The momentum of recovery begins after fighting and when the disruptive presence of abusive soldiers recedes. This is relatively quick for those who remain in their communities and much more difficult for IDPs who are unable to quickly regain or rebuild the accumulated economic capital they have lost due to armed conflict. The problem is most severe in the Moro areas which have seen cycles of war since the 1970s. This has resulted in a situation of perpetually arrested development.

Shooting battles and military operations thus have interrelated consequences on the safety, security, health, education and economy of civilian communities. All have negative effects on children and women as part of the civilian, non-combatant population."

ACH, June 2004, p. 60

"The impact of armed conflict has long term consequences. The short term impact of the armed conflict has been detailed within the report as seen in significant destruction and loss of houses, property, income, life, security, and well-being. All these are further compounded while families are in displacement, as sickness, food insecurity, and loss of income increase the longer the displacement continues. As the majority of returnees will have been back a year this July 2004 the recovery of some of these short term losses has taken place. However, it is the long term impact of the effects of conflict which are less easily quantified and harder to offset. The repeated displacements and repeated loss from armed conflict suppress' economic, educational, and general initiative to advance as families find it increasingly hard to replace or regain what was lost. Even if many families have regained some of what they lost in the recent conflict, they had little to regain. The presence and potential threat of repeated conflict will continue to inhibit growth. Expanding production is hampered by the perceived level of risk felt by local communities. Many farmers ask 'Why bear the cost of fertilizer and thus bear greater risk of higher loss, if the potential of renewed conflict exists?'"

CRS 23 April 2003

" 'Beyond the immediate trauma of displacement and humanitarian need, the long-term impact of this conflict on local farmers, if it's not addressed, could be catastrophic,' said Ryan. 'When it's safe to go home, these families, most of whom live on poverty's edge or are in debt already, will return to trampled, ruined farmlands, many having abandoned or sold their livestock, and they will need assistance.'

In Central Mindanao, 70 percent of families derive their livelihoods from agriculture, with most incurring debt at the start of each growing season. The Philippines Department of Agriculture estimates the recent troop movements and fighting has destroyed crops on more than 37,000 acres of prime agricultural land. CRS estimates economic losses in the agriculture sector could be as high as \$10 million."

WB 3 March 2003, pp. 15-19

"In general, the difficult return to normalcy will be indicated by the hesitation of populations to make investments with long gestation periods. Hence, it may happen that poverty can rise significantly where the decision to return remains tentative for extended periods. Public interventions in these areas will probably have to be a mix of continuing relief, confidence building

and development initiatives. Intermittent return will, however, be important because communities need to re-establish claims over their homes and farms as soon as possible. It has happened in the past, that local governments officials, military men or other ethnic groups have squatted, and subsequently, established a claim on land that was not theirs.

The sporadic and protracted nature of the conflict in Mindanao means that refugees and displaced people are returning to situations of ongoing uncertainty and insecurity, the longer it will take for private investment to resume. Joblessness, especially in Mindanao, where light weapons proliferate, feeds continuing violence, social dislocation, family breakdown, and insecurity.

Some of the young people in the Buluan cluster interviewed for the Social Assessment think that the construction of permanent structures of houses will change the attitude of people. The prospect of losing an investment could strengthen the wavering commitment of some elders to peaceful solutions to conflict.

(...)

The Social Assessment results show various dimensions of the poverty among the displaced communities. The population's employable skill set is limited; public services are unavailable; limited education and isolation from important urban labor markets virtually remove temporary migration from the set of risk mitigation mechanisms that people affected by an income shock can normally tap; inputs markets are monopolized by a few traders who also happen to be the main source of credit for rice and corn production; farm implements are rudimentary; and non-farm income comes mainly in the form of raising ducks, swine (in Lumad areas), chicken, goats and carabaos in the yard to augment farm incomes. Within communities indebtedness is also very high with farms and home lost being mortgaged to creditors.

Displacement overloaded informal systems of mutual support

There is a weakening of mutual support systems as communities are dispersed. Significant numbers of individuals report being separated from their families for months. (...)

The immediate economic trauma of the war is felt as an income shock, in terms of incomes lost when unharvested crops were abandoned and when planting seasons passed by with workers unable to work their farms. One direct consequence of this war-induced crop failure is that loans advanced by traders could not be paid. The extent to which this might cause the flow of credit to be disrupted is not clear. What is clear is that both the manner and amounts of loans from outsiders given for farm production purposes have been reduced.

Even where communities are intact, the mutual support systems will have been exhausted at some point, because the need for support arose nearly concurrently for all families that had to give up their livelihoods all at the same time. In peaceful times, misfortunes like sickness or loss of income seldom happens to everyone at the same time. Neighbours or families belonging to the same clan have occasion for borrowing funds from each other to buy food or medicine. The impact of the war on systems of mutual support within communities is seen in the fact that of 1,526 people surveyed, the number of people who borrow funds for food went down from 733 before the conflict to only 538 after the conflict (table 5).

Before the war, 67,7 percent of the families in the Muslim-dominated areas had availed of credit. After the conflict, this figure dramatically went down to 49,3 percent. Average amounts borrowed by IDPs clustered around Baranguays Peditad, Molao, Natutungan, Ilian and North Cotabato and Maguindanao before the conflict was P2,394. This figure went down significantly to P1,571 after the conflict.

Productive assets were destroyed because of the war

(...)

A Nutrition and Household Economy Survey among IDPs in Central Mindanao conducted by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in June 2001, reveals that the loss of livestock continued to happen even when the displaced families were already staying in evacuation centers. In the ICRC's survey, the number of households owning carabaos was 20.7 percent right after the conflict in October 2000. However, this number fell to 12.1 percent by June 2001.

The extent of the loss of farm implements is seen by comparing Figure 2a and 2b. Before the conflict, there was basic parity between IDPs and non-IDPs; after the conflict, there was an obvious decline in farm equipment access for the IDPs. The information above is the result of a survey of 400 IDPs and 400 non-IDP households in Maguindanao and North Cotabato.

Key informants revealed that the support coming from government agencies is generally very limited and families sought other ways of coping –distant relatives provided living space, women and children sought odd jobs. In many instances, assets that were not destroyed by the war also had to be sold. There is some evidence that depletion of productive assets also took place because men-folk decided to exchange their assets for weapons “to protect their women and their property”. Thus, in conflict areas and in areas of potential conflict, the civilian population also used up resources to arm itself. The cost of one firearm is an amount equivalent to several months of a poor family's income.

For populations that will return to the war-affected areas, the loss of productive assets makes it unlikely that they will hit the ground running in a manner that allows them to resume the pace of their lives and livelihoods before the eruption of conflict. Second-round economic effects will also be felt in terms of the disruption of the flow of informal credit for production due both to conflict-related loan defaults and possible perceptions by creditors, that some households may need to divert such loans intended for the purchase of production inputs in favor of more immediate needs, like attending to the needs of the sick, paying-off other loans or repairing houses. The creditors themselves will probably be in distress, with their funds loaned out to families who may be too deep under the surface to be able to offer any prospect of helping improve the creditors' cash position.

Communities played host to people unwilling to return home

Displaced persons unable to return home were forced to call on resources of inter-community systems of support. The Social Assessment revealed the presence of safety nets among groups connected through kin or ethnic affinity. Many communities played host to displaced persons who are unable or unwilling to return to their places of origin. The surveys managed to reveal mostly the immediate economic effects of the crisis. But much less is known about the adequacy of the safety net provided by host communities, about the effects of the new entrants on the well-being of the receiving communities, and about the nature of the reciprocal obligations that the resettled populations will have to bear in acknowledgment of the generosity of their hosts.

The datu-landowners as a class in Maguindanao provided employment to the IDPs as farm workers in a very substantial scale. The datos and IDPs informants observe that people who stayed for prolonged periods in evacuation centers have suffered relatively greater economic displacement because of a complete loss of their livelihood.

The household survey data shows that there was an increase in the number of people who earned incomes from farming after the conflict, but the average household income has decreased. This is consistent with accounts about datu-landlords who hired IDPs who resettled in their lands. At the same time, it is also consistent with the intuition that when households are in desperate straits, their members must take whatever work is available to them and even mobilize secondary income earners, including women who used to be fully occupied with care-giving tasks

and children who used to be in school. Some landowners say that they expect assistance from the government in order to continue absorbing farm labor workers for the IDPs."

Conflict and displacement has increased poverty and reduced livelihood opportunities (July 2006)

- In ARMM alone poverty has increased from 50.7 percent in 1991 to 66 percent in 2000.
- Agriculture and fishing, the two main sources of livelihood in the region have been seriously affected by the repeated conflicts

WB, July 2006, p. 8

"Mindanao has the dubious distinction of having four of the five poorest regions and six of the ten poorest provinces in the Philippines. All the ARMM provinces fall in the latter category. In ARMM alone poverty has increased from 50.7 percent in 1991 to 66 percent in 2000. Disruption of agricultural production, and destruction of infrastructure, both social and economic, have deterred economic activity at all levels and thereby impoverished an already poor region. Agriculture, which is the main source of livelihood in the study area, has been seriously affected by repeated conflict and the uncertain peace and order situation. For instance, nearly half the farm animals and agricultural implements were destroyed or lost in the conflict affected barangays¹⁷. In the coastal barangays, and those located around the Ligawasan marsh, where fishing is the most important activity, most communities have reported loss or destruction of the tools of their trade.

(...)

All youth, whether in school or out-of-school, are working to supplement the income of their families. (According to the Department of Agriculture statistics more than a third of the household members aged 10 – 24 are engaged in agriculture in Western Mindanao, 44.6% in Central Mindanao and 15% in ARMM.) Most of them are engaged in agriculture, either in their own family farms or as agricultural labor. They also try to supplement the household income by working at nearby rice mills, as skylab¹⁸ or tricycle drivers, as sidewalk vendors, or as contractual labor.

(...)

Recurrent armed conflict has adversely affected livelihood and earning capacity as described in Box 2 and detailed below:

Losses of farm animals in the conflicts of 2000 and 2003 have significantly affected livelihoods. Those who do not own water buffaloes, for example, are forced to rent them at high costs, or resort to planting late and risk losing their crop due to seasonal flooding.

Similarly, in barangays where fishing is the main source of livelihood, bancas (small boats without outriggers), fishing gear (fishhooks and fish lines), and fishnets were destroyed during the conflict. Many FGD participants reported that they had to enter into disadvantageous rental arrangements with fish traders by promising them a portion of the catch.

Inputs such as fertilizer, pesticides and good quality seeds are beyond their reach.

They do not have access to post harvest facilities such as corn shellers, solar dryers or warehousing.

The absence of link roads denies them access to nearby markets.

Water for irrigation was frequently mentioned as a problem in the upland barangays.

In some barangays unexploded ordnance lying buried in the fields makes farming a very risky activity.

The only credit available to them is from local moneylenders who charge usurious rates of interest. Several FGD participants narrated their experiences in this regard and consider access to credit facilities as the single most important requirement to improve their livelihoods (Box 3).

(...)

The FGD groups offered the following suggestions to increase and improve livelihood options:

Access to credit and resources was identified as the single most important factor that would help expand livelihood options.

All FGD groups expressed keen interest in opportunities for livelihood skills training. The skills identified as required are tailoring, soap-making, slipper/sandal-making, printing, signboard-making, carpentry, driving (to work abroad), radio and television repair, jeepney, bicycle and tricycle repair, cell phone repair, poultry farming, computer skills, native products making, sari-sari stores, seaweed farming and marketing, and better farming techniques.

Construction of farm to market roads and irrigation facilities were suggested by a number of groups, particularly those in remote areas and in the uplands where availability of water for irrigation and other purposes posed serious challenges.

Several FGD groups asked for both technical and financial assistance for creating farmer cooperatives in their communities."

Displaced women and men forced to engage in irregular, low-paid work to make ends meet (October 2006)

- In the difficult conditions of war, militarization and displacement, the already multiple burdens of women have been compounded and have become heavier.
- Women in evacuation centers reported having to take on several irregular, low-paid work such as laundrywoman or househelp to make ends meet.
- Dependent on external aid, the displaced find it difficult to find alternative means of livelihood. Because they have no land, they cannot farm, because they have no fishing equipment they cannot fish.
- A number of displaced nevertheless manage to find livelihood activities, including gardening, fishing, farming, harvesting, collecting firewood and metal to sell, and working in a construction firm.
- IDPs, especially women become sources of extremely cheap labour and the money they make is often far below the minimum necessary to survive.
- 96% of the displaced interviewed in Pikit and Parang managed to secure some form of livelihood, but most emphasize the inadequacy of their earnings

UNICEF, October 2006, pp. 101-102

"But the field data gathered also established the capacities and efforts of women in dealing with the adverse effects of armed conflict as well as in trying to increase their control over the situation. Women have tried their best to continue performing their daily household tasks and family responsibilities. Women have also taken on much of the burden of maintaining some normalcy despite disruptions, and of keeping the family together. In the difficult conditions of war, militarization and displacement, their already multiple burdens have been compounded and have become heavier.

Mothers in Abra and Capiz recounted having to bring their children to and fetch them from far-away schools whenever they hear reports of military presence in the area because they fear that their children may be accosted and harassed. And then they face a dilemma – soldiers have been known to enter and ransack unattended houses.

The women have had to bear even heavier economic burdens. Hasna, 38, of Maguindanao said that her family's life was so difficult in the evacuation center that many times they ate only twice a day, sometimes only managing one meal. She was forced to work as a laundrywoman, leaving home responsibilities behind, just to try and get by and to feed her six children. Out of 15 women in the FGD, three had left to find work as househelp and four as laundrywomen – for as little as

P500-P800 a month. They say that even their young daughters had left to find work in nearby town centers. Yet even when they were able to return, they found their farmland overgrown with weeds and their coconut trees and homes burned down: "It's like we were starting over again." (*Para kaming nagsisimula uli.*)

Asima, a mother in the North Cotabato FGD, recounted her ordeal in going back to her store to try and retrieve goods for her family. Not only did she find that looters had emptied her store, fighting also suddenly erupted while she was in their village and she scrambled frantically to safety and made her way back to the evacuation center. On the way back she says she was able to catch a live chicken to bring to her family. When she got back to the center she realized that she was so scared that she had crushed the chicken to death with her bare hands and that her fingers had bored into it.

Leyte women evacuees and Capiz residents have had to venture into the same sorts of uncertain, irregular and lowly-paid work: washing clothes, working as househelp, repacking detergent materials, manicuring, preparing smoked fish, vending street foods like fishballs, ice scramble and cassava cakes, and others. But at least one displaced woman from Leyte had given up hope: "Didn't we leave so that we wouldn't get killed? Here we'll die from poverty. So we've decided to go back home. So that if we die, at least it'll be there [at home]." (*Di ba umalis kami para di mapatay? Dito mamatay kami sa hirap. Kaya ang desisyon namin ay umuwi na. Para kahit mamatay kami, doon na.*) Another was angry and vengeful: "I won't say how hard it is because we all know that. What I want is to get even with those responsible. Our livelihoods were destroyed." (*Hindi ko na sabihin ang hirap alam na natin yon. Gusto ko magganti sa taong may gawa. Nasira ang kabuhayan namin.*)"

Janet M. Arnado & Mary Ann Arnado, 15 November 2004, pp. 60-61

"Because they lost their properties and means of livelihood, they became dependent on relief goods. They go hungry when the relief goods get delayed or run out of supply. Slowly, they rise up and find other means of livelihood, but there are many social barriers. Since they do not have land, they cannot farm; they do not have fishing equipment, so they cannot fish. From time to time, though, they go to their home village to gather fruits and vegetables, and when there is any opportunity for paid work in the area, they are able to earn money.

Although not everyone is constantly employed or actively searching for ways to earn a living, a number of them report of various livelihood activities. These include gardening, fishing, farming, harvesting, collecting firewood and metal to sell, and working in a construction firm. Others do not find any work and remain in the evacuation center.

Since they do not have land and farm/fishing implements, these IDPs are often dependent on small capitalists to give them jobs. As if social displacement was not their worst destiny yet, these IDPs, especially women, face another form of victimization, as they become sources of extremely cheap labor. This is a concrete example of the "tatlong kahig, isang tuka" phenomenon. Since there is an oversupply of wage workers, the pay becomes very low.

Men are engaged in fishing, farming, and construction work. Women, on the other hand, are into land preparation, harvesting, dressmaking, and selling bananas. Collecting firewood is done by both men and women. Men usually earn 100 pesos a day, or a little over 200 pesos if they are lucky. Women, however, receive very little, a mere 30 pesos a day for cleaning and harvesting in the cornfields. This is way below the minimum wage for agricultural work set at 130 pesos a day for the ARMM. Other women earn a little bit more by cooking and selling fried banana. Still others are engaged in dressmaking.

Displaced women are very vulnerable to economic exploitation both in the private and public spheres. In the private sphere, women become men's "reserve force" in the event that the latter lose their usual means of livelihood. They will be asked to seek for meager employment. In the public sphere, small-scale capitalists offer women an extremely low wage, which is not sufficient to support themselves, much more their families. This assertion is illustrated in the following scenario.

One male IDP left his fishing net at home. Because he did not have any fishing equipment, he could not fish, so he remained in the evacuation camp. To bring food on the table, he sent his wife and seven daughters to work in the cornfields. Each earning Php30 a day, the 8 women brought to the evacuation center Php240 at the end of the day. This combined wage of 8 women is still lower than the Php250 minimum wage, set by the government for the national capital region. This is not an isolated scenario. The women in our FGDs showed us their hands that turned rough and scarred from working in the cornfields."

Notre Dame University & Commission on Population Region XII, pp. 37-38

"While staying at the EC, almost all the respondents (96%) continued to engage in productive work and earn a living for their families. A big number of them engaged in farming (46%); driving (18%); micro merchandising (12%); paid farm labor (6%); sari-sari store (5%); vending (4%) and fishing (4%). It must be stated, however, that such income-generating activities depended on the presence of needed opportunities and availability of resources.

From these economic activities, the IDPs reported monthly incomes ranging from P300 to P12,000. Many IDPs in Parang had income of P 3,000. Those in Pikit had income of P 1,500. The mean monthly income of IDPs in Parang was P 3,759; whereas, in Pikit, it was P 2,890.

(...)

More than one-half (76% from Parang and 55% from Pikit) admitted the inadequacy of their earnings to enable them to maintain the same standard of living they had prior to their displacement. Given the fact that the IDP families averaged 4 children, their monthly earnings would hardly suffice to provide even for their most basic needs. Families without income survived through begging and asking monetary assistance from their relatives."

Public participation

IDPs in Mindanao form effective advocacy groups to prevent fighting and displacement (December 2006)

- Three-year cycle of war was broken during 2006, largely thanks to the efforts of the joint ceasefire committees of both warring parties, but also thanks to the involvement of IDPs themselves who prevented incidents from deteriorating further.
- In July 2006, local NGOs created the Task Force Tabang Maguindanao to promote an end to hostilities and assistance to the displaced
- In 2003, thousands of IDPs in Central Mindanao demonstrated for peace and convinced the government to agree on a ceasefire. The Mindanao Peoples Caucus became an important advocacy tool for the displaced.
- IDPs also established the Bantay Ceasefire Movement, a mechanism to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. In addition to preventing small armed incidents to degenerate into wider confrontation and mass evacuations, Bantay Ceasefire also assisted with the return of IDPs.

- A coalition of peace groups -the Mindanao Peaceweavers- has proposed to the government and the MILF to involve representatives of the displaced communities and indigenous groups in the peace process as observers.
- The coalition suggested to develop a feedback mechanism that would ensure the dissemination of information down to the community level.

Mindanews, 31 December 2006

"Although several times on the brink of war, government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) forces managed to stand down and pre-election year 2006 is ending with the three-year cycle of war in Pikit, North Cotabato and neighboring areas, finally broken. Father Roberto Layson, former Pikit parish priest, now head of the Oblates of Mary Immaculates' Inter-religious Dialogue and vice-chair of the Mindanao PeaceWeavers, noted the three-year cycle of war in the area since 1997, the year he was assigned to Pikit.

(...)

Layson attributes the breaking of the cycle to the efforts of the "joint ceasefire committees of the government and MILF peace panels, the Malaysian-led International Monitoring Team, the grassroots-led Bantay Ceasefire and other civil society organizations."

(...)

Mary Ann Arnado, secretary-general of the Mindanao Peoples' Caucus, said "part of the credit goes to the vigilance and efforts of grassroots leaders who stood their ground to prevent war from happening in their communities, dared to hold Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the MILF accountable to the ceasefire and peace talks. Ordinary people who were otherwise perceived as collateral damage, took charge of the peace that they rightly deserve.""

Mindanews, 7 July 2006

"Non-government organizations working for peace in Mindanao announced the creation of the Task Force Tabang Maguindanao Thursday morning as thousands of evacuees have not yet accessed humanitarian aid nine days since the hostilities broke in four Maguindanao towns on June 28. The task force, created on July 4, was formed to continue calls to stop the hostilities and to bring together people with resources so that humanitarian assistance could be brought to around 4,138 displaced families, said Guiamel Alim of the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society, a member organization of the Mindanao Peaceweavers (MPW) network.

(...)

Datu Quiambao Ayag, from the Agong Peace Network, supported the MPW calls and expressed worry that if the hostilities will not be averted, it might reach and affect the indigenous peoples' ancestral domain in some parts of Central Mindanao proximate to the conflict areas.

The MPW called for the immediate cessation of hostilities and "allow a more rational conflict settlement to take place."

The MPW urged the creation of a joint government-NGO massive relief, medical and rehabilitation missions in areas affected by the war.

They have called for the installation of a peace-keeping force between the forces of Ampatuan and the MILF, to be composed of Army personnel, the Joint Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (JCCC), and the Bantay Ceasefire with representatives from non-government organizations working for peace in Mindanao.

The peace network also sought for the conduct of a fact-finding probe by the ceasefire mechanism of the government and the MILF to look into the June 23 bombing that triggered the clashes so the perpetrators could be brought to the "bar of justice." "

PCHR, 2006, p. 11

"The amalgamation of these sad stories and experiences by the IDPs provided the impetus for the people of Mindanao to organize. The Mindanao Peoples Caucus is one such organization. The mettle of the Caucus was tested in 2003 when after the Bulyok bombing of an Islamic Center in Pagalungan, Mindanao, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) unilaterally declared a ceasefire to all armed conflicts, an initiative not reciprocated by the government forces. Dismayed by the government's stubborn pugilism, thousands of IDPs in Central Mindanao marched to the national highway demonstrating before the government their collective appeal for a ceasefire. This activism resulted in the bilateral agreement between the government and the MILF. Bolstered by this victory, the IDPs organized audiences with the President of the Philippines, the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines and the Department of National Defense to bring to the fore the issues and concerns of the IDPs. They also appeared before seventeen European diplomats and the OIC Commission of the Eight presenting their demands.

The most significant response of the IDPs was the creation of the "Bantay Ceasefire Movement". The Ceasefire Watch is a mechanism to monitor the implementation of the agreement between the government and the MILF. A concrete intervention of Bantay Ceasefire was its verification of reports that there were Jemah Islamiyah training activities in a known MILF camp. Their efforts in going up one of the mountains of Lanao del Sur risking their own lives and eventually debunking these intelligence reports undoubtedly diffused a potentially volatile military strike. Indubitably, this pro-active contribution protected the valued ceasefire agreement and prevented needless mass evacuation.

Another contribution of the Bantay Ceasefire Movement is its 'indirect arrangement' with the kidnap for ransom group known as the Pentagon with the latter acceding to the request of the IDPs to cease illegal activities especially if the kidnapping would lead to a military intervention and necessarily result in displacement.

The speaker named another effort of the Movement in Dingalongan, Maguindanao where three municipalities were evacuated due to military activities against the Abu Sayaf Group (ASG). The Bantay Ceasefire, using the institutional mechanisms of the ceasefire agreement between the government and MILF and in coordination with the international monitoring team, assisted in the return of these IDPs. The mobilization of the returnees was such that the combative action between the ASG and the military was pushed back decisively allowing the successful return of the IDPs to their residence."

Mindanews 19 February 2004

"A coalition of peace groups in Mindanao has asked the peace panels of the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front to allow lumad and refugee representatives as observers in the duration of the peace negotiations.

In a letter sent Wednesday to Silvestre Afable, Jr. and Mohagher Iqbal, government and the MILF peace panel chairmen, respectively, the Mindanao Peaceweavers strongly urged the inclusion of observers from the two sectors.

The Mindanao Peaceweavers is composed of the Mindanao Peoples' Caucus, Agong Network, Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society, Mindanao Solidarity Network, Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement, Mindanao Peace Advocates Conference, Peace Advocates Zambonga and Initiatives for International Dialogue.

'We propose that at least eight representatives of our network be accredited as observers, subject to the standard requirements of accountability and responsibility in the handling and dissemination of information,' the group wrote Afable and Iqbal.

'Our observers will be process observers who will represent indigenous peoples (lumads), Bangsamoro civil society, displaced communities, women and peace and human rights advocates in Mindanao,' it added. If granted, the Mindanao Peaceweavers said it would bring information on the peace process to the grassroots level.

The group also said it will develop a feedback mechanism that will ensure the dissemination of information down to the community level. It said information through public consultation and the radio networks will increase public awareness and support for the peace negotiations."

WB household survey shows 93 percent of IDP household do not belong to any organization (March 2003)

- Of 1,526 respondents from conflict-affected communities in Davao del Norte, South Cotabato, Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat, 84 percent do not belong to any organized group.
- 93 percent of IDP households and 75 percent of non-IDP households are not involved in any organization.
- The purpose of establishing organizations is generally to receive assistance.

WB 3 March 2003, p. 28

"Despite or because of the disruption in their lives, people in conflict-affected areas have remained unorganized. Of 1,526 respondents from conflict-affected communities in Davao del Norte, South Cotabato, Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat, 84 percent do not belong to any organized group. Of the remaining 16 percent, around one-third claim affiliation with the MNLF, while the other two-thirds belong to different Islamic, religious, political and youth organizations. Less than one percent belong to cooperatives.

The household survey results in Muslim communities affected by conflict reveal that 93 percent of IDP households and 75 percent of non-IDP households are not involved in any organization. In contrast, almost all of the indigenous people (IP) households surveyed are involved in some group or organization with the majority affiliated nominally to the Manobo Lumadnong Panaghi-usa (MALUPA). In general, those who belong to organizations do not seem to know the objectives and activities of their organizations. Not one person can recall the last organizational meeting they attended. But leaders of the organizations were more responsive to the general purpose why the organizations were formed –typically it is to receive assistance."

Access to land

Presence of armed groups or military limits IDPs' access to their lands (August 2005)

- During 2005, IDPs forced from their homes by military operations in Maguindanao province were not given enough time to go back to their homes and work on their lands.
- Because of this and the risk of not having enough food for their family upon return from displacement, some farmers accept the risk of staying overnight in their villages.

Mindanews, 19 August 2005

"Since July 1, the Philippine Army has been trying to find and attack a band of the Abu Sayyaf Group or ASG who are reportedly in Maguindanao. Under harassment by continuing AFP operations, the ASG has split into small groups.

(...)

In Barangay Timar, we see a destroyed school, a mosque without spiritual life, military checkpoints. The village is dead. At the school we meet a group of women and children evacuees, all with serious faces. They don't expect help from us, but our inability to change their situation makes us sad.

Our attempt to laugh seems to be out of place here. What can you say to people who have fled their houses and their livestock and will be far from their fields when harvest time comes?

Some of the evacuees have been allowed to enter the area of search operations on the west side of the Ahan river. But they are only allowed in the area from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., a mechanism agreed on between the MILF and GRP. Eight hours. But it already takes the farmers some six hours just to reach their farms! Six hours from the allowed eight! To harvest, two hours is simply not enough. And with our new experiences with the Philippine kitchen, it is also clear that giving each family five kilos of rice is not enough government support to the evacuees.

(...)

It is evening and we are at the Notre Dame Peace Center in Cotabato City with some 40 Bantay Ceasefire members. We are discussing the situation of the farmer evacuees of Barangay Timar. Some farmers return to their farms and stay there overnight, accepting the risk to remain in an area that has not been declared "cleared" of terrorist elements. We talk about the security question for the evacuees— how will their security be ensured? It is a difficult question: Have you ever chosen between your personal security and the necessity to be able to feed your family in the coming months?"

Bantay Ceasefire, 28 July 2005

"As of July 28, 2005, despite the military operation in the area, some of the residents numbering to 137 individuals went home to harvest their farm products. The residents are allowed to enter and harvest their farm produce from 7:00 o'clock in the morning until 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Each individual will log their names to the outpost located in Sitio Project, Barangay Tamar, Talayan.

IDPs are poised to danger themselves just to harvest their products in order to survive. According to one of the barangay captain, their farm products are due for harvest this months and if ever the military operation still pursuing their mission and hampering them to go into their farms, he is afraid that their crops will be putrid and will result to hunger among themselves."

Most IDPs surveyed access agricultural land through tenant or sharecropping situations (June 2004)

- ACH survey shows that most IDPs living near Ligusan Marsh tend to access land through tenant or sharecropping.

ACH, June 2004, pp. 24-25

"Access to agriculture land and fishing water is widespread though the means of increasing production in both farming and fishing activities is affected by level of access to equipment and inputs. There are indications that the growing population has reduced the average size of the family plot.

In the table below we see that of the 217 families 183 are accessing land. Of those not (34 family) 19 are IDP families originally from Baguinged and now at Inug-ug. The land owners represent those families who access what they say is their own land and thus rent fee. These families are not sharecropping, nor are they using other means to access land. The '50/50' families are those who are sharecropping, with owner and partner sharing the cost of inputs and profit. The 30/70 is a rental arrangement wherein the cost of access to the land is 30% of the profit from the crop. Though all families may not hold title they are recognized as owner within the community. It is noticeable that the IDPs are accessing land through tenant or sharecropping situations.

Of the 217 respondents 183 said they had access to land.

Table 14. Land tenure situations

The average land accessed for farming is 1.04 hectare. Families in the poorer class are more likely to access .5 hectare or less. The families who have the greater risk are those with land that is at the lowest elevation and closest to the marsh, thus when the rising of the water they are the first to be inundated and the last to get dry.

Table 15. Land access

Land Access; Classification	Avg. size of land area, ha.
unaffected	1.05
IDP	0.80
Returnee	1.3
average	1.04

source: HH survey

In regards to fishing areas:

The marsh fishing area is freely accessed by all families. The area apparently is sufficiently large so as not to warrant control of the area. Reportedly net fishermen can go wherever they want within the barangay area of the marsh to fish. However many fishermen coordinate there positioning of the nets within the marsh."

ISSUES OF FAMILY UNITY, IDENTITY AND CULTURE

Identity and culture

Displacement undermines social ties within a community (October 2006)

- Cycle of war and displacement has a very negative effect on the community's social ties.
- Sudden and large infusions of humanitarian aid can have the unintended consequence of stoking differences within the community and creating frictions between families and individuals.

UNICEF, October 2006, p. 122

"The research team also found that one of the most crucial periods for intervention is during the post-evacuation stage when displaced communities are beginning to rebuild. This is most difficult in prolonged cases of displacement where the community is damaged both physically and psychologically. The cycle of wars in the Central Mindanao areas has not just destroyed much of the economic infrastructure in the areas of conflict, it is also straining to the breaking point the social ties that bind people together as members of a community. Indeed, some accounts indicate that among the unintended consequences of sudden and large infusions of well-meaning humanitarian and rehabilitation aid are the stoking of differences within the community, the fostering of individualism and, in effect, the undermining of existing community structures while exacerbating existing frictions between families and individuals.

The usual opportunists preying on the desperation of a people who had lost almost everything were also in evidence. Maguindanao FGD participants, for instance, mentioned the various pyramiding scams targetting the already desperate poor, which falsely promised quick pay-offs in exchange for "membership fees".

Moro people surveyed describe AFP soldiers as showing little respect for their culture and religion (October 2006)

- Displaced Moro children surveyed depict AF soldiers as external aggressors who place the community's belief, livelihood and safety at risk.
- Men see AFP soldiers as showing extreme disrespect for the culture and religious belief of the Moro community.
- Large majority of the 440 Madrasah concentrate on Islamic and religious teachings, are not accredited by the catholic-dominated government and doesn't prepare well for integration into the Filipino employment market.
- The government public school system is seen as tools to propagate the dominant Christian and western values.

UNICEF, October 2006, p. 55

"Another unique implication which is particularly important given the centrality of Islam to the MILF and their communities is that these villages are also the site of mosques and madrasah (Arabic schools). When Moro children were asked to map their communities before, during and after war visited them, their respective mosques were prominently placed at the center of their

drawings. AFP soldiers were drawn attacking these, with MILF mujahideen engaging them in battle in apparent defense of the mosques. These drawings depict the ideological dispositions of the Moro conflict as seen from the eyes of children, women and members of the Moro communities: government forces are regarded as external aggressors who place their community's beliefs, livelihood and safety at risk.

The frequent references to the effects of war on community mosques in the accounts of FGD respondents reflects the importance of Islam in their lives. Buka, 52, a farmer from Maguindano recalled that "The soldiers also ransacked our mosque and madrasah. They got the roof and wood, and used them to build their camp." (Sinira din ng military ang aming moske at madrasah. Kinuha ang atip at mga kahoy at ginamit nila sa paggawa ng kampo nila.)

For the Moro men respondents, the military clearly not only stole their properties and carelessly left unexploded ordnance and mines in their communities; they also showed extreme disrespect to the culture and beliefs of the community by destroying mosques. A great insult was apparently added to an already serious social injury when the military, according to the respondents, even forced them to work on building a military outpost using the materials of their revered and holy structure. This particular structure was also especially significant for being the mosque of Hashim Salamat's youth, where he first learned of the teachings of Allah.

Mosques and the madrasah have a special relevance for the communities: they symbolize and materially manifest the culture, beliefs, and struggles of the Moro people. Like the adults of their communities, the children also accord special meaning to their mosques and likewise speak about their destruction during the war. Ahmed, 11 years old, regarded the destruction as one of his unforgettable experiences: "When fighting took place here, we evacuated. Our house was burned and we were sad that the chickens were lost and that our house was riddled with bullets. We went back here in 2003. We were not able to forget our mosque." (Nong nag ka-gyera dito, nagbakwet kami. Nasunog ang bahay namin, malungkot kami na nawala ang manok pero tinamaan ng bala ang bahay. Nagbalik kami dito noong 2003. Hindi namin makalimutan ang moske.)"

WB, July 2006, p. 7

"An important aspect of education in Mindanao is the Madrasah that offers religious and cultural teaching with Arabic as the medium of instruction. There are 440 such schools in Mindanao with a pupil population of 90,000. A small proportion of these schools (44) are accredited by the government and offer the national basic education curriculum along with traditional religious education. The large majority, however, concentrate only on Islamic and religious teachings. Graduates of these schools typically find it difficult to find employment because they are weak in Filipino, English and numeracy¹⁴. The majority of the FGD participants highlighted the importance of Madrasah education and indicated that they consider it essential to ensure the preservation of their religious and cultural values. The common perception among most of the communities visited is that the curriculum followed by the public school system will, over time, submerge their distinctive culture and values beneath the dominant Christian and Western values¹⁵. An FGD participant from Bangco, Matungao, Lanao del Norte commented, "The DepEd (Department of Education) model of education is actually a trap designed to westernize our young people and wean them away from their culture and traditions. It is a government program to entice Muslim youth away from the teachings of Islam." "

Family unity

Displaced children face the risk of family-fragmentation during displacement (October 2006)

- During the sudden evacuations, parents and children can be momentarily separated.
- Fragmentation of families also occur when displacement follows individually perceived threats in the context of counter-insurgency operations against the NPA.

UNICEF, October 2006, p. 59; p. 96

"The situation of IDPs is extremely difficult. Fighting engulfs people in their own villages and forces them to evacuate. Residents are driven out and flee for their lives amidst automatic gunfire, air strikes, artillery bombardments and deafening explosions. They scamper for cover even as they leave behind homes, fields, crops, animals and many other things essential for their economic survival – with little guarantee that these will be recovered when and if they are able to return. Parents and children are even momentarily separated. Yet while the refuge they find in far-off evacuation centers may be free from fighting, they face new struggles against unsanitary conditions and disease, and indeed for their very survival.

In these cases, family and kinship structures have to some extent shown some resilience. Displaced residents have in some instances been able to move and re-settle together, although there are also families which have been fragmented in the course of displacements. Displaced people have also found themselves alone in unfamiliar locales and away from social and economic networks of support. These are most often the situations when families rely even more on children entering into paid work. Unfortunately, even those who are eventually able to return to their homes and farms may find these destroyed or overgrown, and they face the difficult task of rebuilding the economic and social capital that their families had painstakingly built up but lost in the turmoil.

(...)

The research team also heard accounts of mothers separated from husbands and sons fleeing to avoid perceived threats against them. In Mindoro Oriental, the young teenager Sam regularly helped the NPA whenever they were in or near their barrio. As a result, according to his 50-year-old mother, Lita, the military started asking around for him so they made him move elsewhere. Lita said that she has not seen him for over a year since he left their village and that she has mixed feelings about this: "I want my son to come home, but I [also] don't want him to because I'm still scared... I want to be with him again..." (*Gusto ko sanang pauwiin ang anak ko, ay ayaw ko, takot pa rin ako e... Gusto ko na siya makasama...*)

There are also mothers among the evacuees from Leyte who have become separated from their children. Buding, 39, and her husband left hurriedly when they were warned that soldiers were coming for them. In Manila she wept: "I feel sad that I haven't seen my baby who was only seven months old when I left." (*Nalulungkot ako sa hindi ko pa nakikitang anak kong nawalay sa akin. Seven months lang noon.*) Rose, 49, is in the same situation and said that she and her husband left so hastily that they did not even get a chance to see their three children. She recounted how she spoke to them over the cellphone and, crying, they likened the atmosphere in their home to that of a wake for the dead. "

War & displacement often fundamentally changes family roles (2005)

- Displacement tends to cause important changes in family roles.

- Men in evacuation centers often lose their authority and have to deal with a greater dependency. This sometimes results in frustrations, depression and loss of self-esteem among men.

WB, January 2005, p. 9

"Displacement causes fundamental change in the lives of displaced individuals and their families. For example, the roles of family members usually change, at least temporarily if not permanently. Men in the evacuation centers find themselves in situations of very limited authority and great dependency. Generally unable to work, afraid of being labeled "rebel" by the military, they often become depressed, anxious, and aggressive within their household and domestic circles. Domestic violence, excessive smoking/alcohol intake, and, in some cases substance abuse, are signs of their distress and frustrations.

In the evacuation centers, more and more frequently, food and other relief supplies are being delivered through women who are considered by providers to be more efficient and less likely to allow the supplies to be diverted, stolen, and/or misused. Women and girls must often wait in line to obtain food rations, assist with food distribution, fetch water and/or do the laundry, prepare meals, and provide care for their children as well as their husbands and/or elderly dependents. In addition, they are often the 'target beneficiaries' of both public and private service providers, as well as peace educators and advocates. Their already long and busy days before displacement become doubly long and busy upon displacement. Assistance is generally provided to men and women alike in evacuation centers, often with little regard as to gender-appropriateness when it comes to the nature of the relief supplies."

Effects of war on men and women

Save the Children, 2004, pp. 40-41

"The physical effects of the war on the family, on persons, and on property, is of primordial concern to men. Men are less candid on the emotional effects of the war on themselves and on other men. For example, while men recognize that the women are afflicted with the fear of losing their husbands, a man may find it difficult to express his own fear of losing his wife or child.

In contrast, women are more candid about the effects of the war on their physical state and emotions and on their social and economic life. Women talk about how the war led to their physical separation from their men. They express their anxiety over the loss of support from their men and the possible association of the men with armed groups. They also bring to the fore the multiple burden of reproductive and productive duties of women that remain constant even in times of war.

It is the culturally-prescribed role for men to be economic providers for the family. That is why the loss of economic resources is traumatic to them. When the displaced persons of Saranay (Takepan, Pikit) lost their livestock to MILF rebels, it took time for the men to accept the loss. "Ang mga tigulang dili na intawon makatuo nga wala na silay mga kalabaw. Mangmata lang tawon sila mga alas 3 sa buntag unya magdanguyngoy na dayon sa hilak." (Our elders could not really believe that their carabaos were gone. They would wake up at 3am and would start crying.)

Women across ethnic groups are collectively concerned about the welfare of their children, primarily on the matter of the disruption of their studies. This basically means that in times of war, child space in terms of the school building, is always violated.

One hardly articulated effect among men is the loss of self-esteem. For Maguindanaon Muslims in particular, it is a downgrading of their maratabat or self-worth if they are forced to feel helpless. Like the fear affecting displaced persons across sexes and age groups, however, men are

affected by the fear of dying. They overcome this fear by taking a proactive mode, either by taking up arms or seeking substantial information with which to estimate the chances of survival."

PROPERTY ISSUES

General

Destruction of crops, homes and property is recurrent during fighting and displacement (October 2006)

- Rural assets such as land, livestock and plants are often threatened by armed conflicts and prolonged displacement. Damage can be a collateral effect or come in the form of intentional looting and destruction.
- The destruction of homes, generally accompanied by the looting of property by government forces, is a common feature in conflict-affected provinces such as Cotabato and Maguindanao.
- Temporary disruption of agricultural production cycles due to displacement can compromise entire harvests.
- Close to 200 houses were burnt during the fighting that took place in Maguindanao province in July 2007.
- Many farmer-evacuees also lost their farm implements and animals
- IDPs displaced from their homes in Surigao del Sur in May 2005 returned home a few weeks later to find their properties either stolen or destroyed

UNICEF, October 2006, p. 108

"Rural assets such as land, livestock and plants are products of months and even years of agricultural labor by a rural family and the community. Months of unrelenting labor in clearing, cleaning and irrigation is invested for land to start being productive. Significant efforts are also needed to maintain the land's productivity with, for instance, a sudden overgrowth of weeds sufficient to ruin a harvest many months of toil in the making. The same is true of farm animals and livestock and it takes months or even years of feeding and looking after chickens, goats, pigs and carabaos before they are economically useful.

Destructive armed conflict threatens to wipe out this hard-earned capital and to divest poor rural families of critical sources of livelihood not just in the immediate period but also far into the future. This may come in the form of collateral damage. Coconut trees are felled by bombs, carabaos are shot, and crops abandoned as residents flee communities that have become war zones. Unfortunately, the damage also comes in the form of widespread looting or even intentional destruction of crops, livestock, agricultural machinery and homes. Almost all the research sites visited lamented the military's reckless trampling on their crops (in the countryside, relatively open fields are the easiest paths to take instead of having to navigate roundabout narrow paths or thick foliage).

The loss of homes is economically and psychologically painful. The accumulated value of whatever savings earned through hard work these embody is lost. But the destruction of homes is also tantamount to families' losing the single biggest physical manifestation of their permanence in the community. This was particularly observed in North Cotabato and Maguindanao. Communities have also reported being divested of their property, with their produce harvested by others either for their own consumption or for sale. The poor rural families encountered by the research team invariably blamed government forces for these.

There is also a particularity to agricultural production cycles that needs to be considered. These production cycles are quite extended – lasting months for temporary crops and years for permanent crops – but are so delicate that a disruption at any point can compromise entire harvests. In the research sites of the current study these disruptions have taken many forms and ranged from temporary forced neglect of farmlands to actual destruction of crops and livestock. In any case it was clear that even in the “mild” cases of a few weeks of suspension of livelihood activities such as farm work, the disruption was often enough for damage to become irreversible until the next planting or cropping season.

The permanent loss of a harvest invariably results in families – living hand-to-mouth existences to start with – being pushed deeper into crisis and debt. Or, at the very least, harvests for consumption or sale are reduced because less time working the fields reduces output and productivity. This can happen due to curfews or restrictions in mobility, either enforced by the military or self-imposed by fearful farmers. Peasant respondents in Abra, Mindoro Oriental, Capiz, Surigao del Sur and Compostela Valley shared many experiences on this problem."

Mindanews, 14 July 2007

"A total of 4,456 families were displaced, according to a consolidated report of humanitarian agencies as of July 11. As of July 13, there is no information as yet exactly how many evacuees have remained in the evacuation centers, with their relatives, or have continued to be mobile and how many have returned home. “Mobile evacuees” are those who do not stay in evacuation centers or relatives’ houses but carry with them makeshift tents which they pitch under a coconut tree in the villages or by the road in the town’s poblacion.

Those who returned to their villages to find their houses still standing are lucky. A total of 192 houses were burned, including a ceasefire monitoring post in Barangay Tapihan, Shariff Aguak.

Owners of burned houses are still awaiting."

IID, 13 July 2007

"Now that peace, albeit fragile, is in place in the 13 conflict affected villages in four towns of Maguindanao, the MPC and the Bantay Ceasefire once more appeal to President Arroyo to immediately order government line agencies, particularly the Social Welfare, Health, Education, Interior and Local Government, and Public Works and Highways, to immediately and collectively address the relief, medical, rehabilitation and other needs of over 22,000 individuals (4,000 families) displaced by the nine-day fighting.

(...)

There also are some 200 houses burned and many farmer-evacuees have lost their farm implements and animals to the armed men who have either carted their farm machineries and equipment away or butchered their farm animals.

At least four rice mills were burned by armed men who allegedly took the rice mills’ engines before setting the buildings on fire. There were reports of hand tractors owned by civilians that have also been stolen by these armed men. We can only surmise who these armed elements are."

Mindanews, 8 July 2006

"The outpost was just one of at least 188 houses burned when government militia and MILF troops clashed between June 28 and July 6 when a “no movement on all sides” agreement was made, ensuring no provocative movements from the CVOs and CAFGUs (Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU), the military and the MILF, to allow for the IMT and the Joint CCCH

to do their work of investigating and assessing what really happened, what triggered the armed skirmishes that displaced some 4,000 families in several villages across four of Maguindanao's 28 towns.

(...)

The eight-vehicle convoy of the IMT-JCCCH-Bantay Ceasefire, passed by at least 20 houses made either of light materials or concrete, a rice mill among them, burned, along Barangay Lapuk in Mamasapano town. Many more houses were razed to the ground along Barangay Takipan in Shariff Aguak and barangays Iginagampong and Kalut in Datu Unsay.

(...)

While some evacuees were seen returning to their villages in Liati, Barangay Pusau from the evacuation center in Dapiawan, Datu Saudi Ampatuan, the rest of the villages the assessment team passed were a desolate landscape of either abandoned or burned houses, lands newly-planted to rice or lying fallow, awaiting the return of the farmers.

The skirmishes began at the onset of the planting season. In most of the fields the convoy saw, rice seedlings were obviously newly-planted when the sounds of gunfire forced villagers to flee, again."

Bulatlat, 29 May 2005

"More than 2,000 Manobo indigenous peoples were forced out of their village in the wake of military operations. Upon returning to their homes, they were shocked to see most of their properties either stolen or destroyed. Though uncertain of what the future holds for them, the Manobos are demanding justice for what the military did to them.

(...)

On May 18, 33 families or 280 people from Emerald were the first batch of evacuees to return home following the local government's order. Initially relieved at seeing their homes still standing, the residents were later incensed when they found out that their village was looted.

Finding the roof forced open, the cooperative store was near empty as soft drinks, cigarettes, shampoo, canned goods and noodles were stolen. According to the cooperative management, P8,000 (\$147.06, based on an exchange rate of P54.40 per US dollar) worth of goods were stolen.

Outside, they found empty cans of sardines and softdrinks scattered around houses where freshly dug foxholes were made by the soldiers. In the grinding shop, electrical wires were cut off. A chainsaw was damaged as well. The water hose was also damaged, temporarily cutting the village's water supply. At the moment, the residents had to fetch water from a nearby river. To the relief of parents and school teachers, the school was left unharmed."

AHRC, 26 May 2005

"On 28 April 2005, military forces involving elements of the 58th Infantry Battalion, Philippine Army and the 6th Scout Rangers Company, intensified their counter-insurgency operation in the remote areas of Lianga, San Agustin, Marihatag and Cagwait, in the province of Surigao del Sur.

(...)

On May 18, moved by the evacuation of civilians in six municipalities, the Provincial Peace and Order Council convened. The provincial officials, church leaders and military officials attended the meeting. It was agreed that the civilians in Km. 9, Emerald, Diatagon, were allowed to return to their communities. The returning evacuees then discovered that their cooperative store had been ransacked, their corn mill forced open, their milling machine destroyed, their water hose cut into pieces, and their houses dug with foxholes."

ACH, June 2004, p. 21

"The survey interviewed 147 families (IDPS and Returnees) who were displaced due to the conflict. The displacement forced many families to abandon assets in the rush to evacuate. Houses of course were lost to destruction as well as a number of animals. There was a reported high loss of kitchen equipment, essentially pots and utensils. We see also that 70% reported losing kitchen equipment while 55% reported losing a house. This is explained; that as many people leave assets behind and untended many things are lost to looters. It can also reflect that many IDPs never regained their equipment after displacement.

We also looked at those families who were forced to sell assets; though not as significant as 'loss' it nonetheless causes loss of income as the families have to take a price less than the value of the animal for example. It is notable that 31 families were able to sell their animal prior to displacement. It seems that within the barangay that there are water buffalo traders who have the means to purchase the animals as well as to move them out of danger. This also could reflect mechanisms that have developed due to families having dealt with displacement before."

Low-intensity fighting in NPA guerrilla fronts leads to smaller-scale destruction, although property and livestock of IDPs is often looted (October 2006)

- Confrontations between the AFP and the NPA tend to be of a low-intensity nature with fighting taking place away from populated centers. As result, recovery from attacks and displacement is relatively easier if compared to AFP-MILF positional fighting.
- Shorter periods of displacement make the return and recovery easier and a greater degree of normalcy can more quickly be restored in the NPA guerrilla front areas in the absence of intrusive military operations
- The exception is Leyte evacuees, who chose to semi-permanently displace themselves because they felt threatened for being identified as supporters of the NPA and who move into urban areas with little perspective for return.
- In October 2006, Karapatan, a human right NGO, reported that AFP soldiers in hunt for NPA rebels had turned five villages in Calatrava into no-man's land and committed widespread looting of the displaced property and livestock

UNICEF, October 2006, pp.110-111

"The impact on civilians in areas of guerrilla warfare is qualitatively different even if sharing some essential similarities with the situation in areas of positional conflicts. "Recovery" in the sense of rebuilding economic capital generally seems relatively easier because the scale of destruction due to fighting or of deterioration due to forced abandonment tends to be less. The much lower intensity of fighting away from populated centers – compared to prolonged massive attacks on MILF fixed camps-cum-communities – also means less damage to personal properties and village infrastructure.

Shorter periods of displacements mean shorter periods of abandonment of farms and, assuming that a return to regular work routines is possible, mean less work to get these back into working order. At the same time, however, short-term IDPs have also complained about returning to their communities to find livestock stolen and produce consumed; stores ransacked and personal belongings stolen. Indeed there were those who said that government forces brazenly did these before their very eyes even before they had started evacuating (Surigao del Sur).

None of the non-Moro areas have yet been visited by hostilities on the scale and regularity seen in Central Mindanao so there does not yet seem to be the demoralizing feeling of perpetually arrested development. However the particularity to the areas in NPA guerrilla fronts is the pervasiveness of military counter-insurgency operations. As already noted elsewhere in this

study, state forces are unable to enter, stay in and exit MILF camps in the way that they can do so, more or less, in NPA guerrilla fronts. Hence notwithstanding the “lesser” impact in terms of the consequences of direct fighting, there are instead the pervasive and lingering effects and insecurities associated with long-drawn-out military operations.

While there is more space for recovery insofar as the effect of relatively “low impact” armed conflict is mitigated, this has to be qualified by whether or not there are military counter-insurgency operations in the area and whether these are still at the “clearing” and “holding” stages which seem to correspond to harsher treatment of civilians suspected of supporting the NPA. In any case, it does seem that a greater degree of normalcy can more quickly be restored in the NPA guerrilla front areas in the absence of intrusive military operations.

The exception to this is in the case of the Leyte evacuees who felt threatened for being identified as supporters of the CPP-NPA-NDFP and so packed up and left. These were families that did not face severe shooting battles in their communities, but who nonetheless chose to semi-permanently displace themselves, some leaving as hurriedly and frantically as if there was on-going fighting in their midst. Whatever the specific details, the common result is a drastic change in these families’ futures where they have left behind or even sold their homes, productive farm land, and other income-earning property to take their chances in urban centers in the Visayas region or as far away as in the National Capital Region (NCR)."

Bulatlat, November 2006

"Karapatan, which conducted a three-day fact finding mission in the affected villages, reported that troops of the Philippine Army's 11th Infantry Battalion, Scout Rangers, and suspected members of the Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPA-ABB) bombed, scoured, and emptied the five hinterland villages of Calatrava in the “hunt for NPA rebels” from Oct. 11 to 13.

Citing local testimonies, Karapatan said that an oversized platoon of army troopers arrived in Barangay (village) Telim, Calatrava at dawn on Oct. 11. Disguised as NPA guerrillas, they asked local folks where their NPA comrades were. Made to believe that they were NPA guerrillas, some local folks pointed to a nearby hill. After a while, the local folks overheard successive bursts of gunfire.

At around 8-11 a.m., two Huey helicopters hovered over the place and started strafing suspected rebel lairs. This was followed by a Tora-Tora fighter plane which bombed the place.

From Oct. 11 to 13, the army troopers scoured the villages of Telim, Cruz, Malanog, Mansaka and Malatas, and forced village folks to leave their houses and farms and evacuate to village centers to avoid being caught in the crossfire.

‘No man’s land’

Army troopers practically turned the five villages into a “no man’s land,” said Cana.

Gaspar Villamor, a 55-year-old farmer of Sitio (sub-village) Pagtaguan, Telim who stayed in his house and farm said that “my house and that of my brother-in-law Alfredo Ilegar were turned by the military (into) their post while operating against alleged NPA rebels in surrounding areas.”

Villamor said a platoon army troopers and RPA elements occupied their houses during the operations, and prevented them from going around and attending to their farms.

He further alleged that 15 fighting cocks he’s been breeding for sale, a kaldero (cooking pot) and shoes worth P500 sent by his daughter working in Bacolod were also stolen by the troopers.

Cana also denounced the military operations, which he said have resulted in mass dislocations and evacuations of innocent civilians, and disrupted the farming and other economic activities in the villages of Telim, Malanog, Cruz, Mansaka and Malatas, all in Calatrava."

8 out of 10 communities surveyed near Liguasan Marsh lost house and property during the 2003 conflict (June 2004)

- More than half of households surveyed by ACH in 10 communities in Liguasan Marsh lost their houses to the conflict
- DSWD statistics show more than 7,000 houses were damaged in Mindanao by the 2003 fighting
- During the 2000 fighting, some 6,300 houses were destroyed in Mindanao

ACH, June 2004, pp. 20-21

"8 of the 10 communities lost house and property. A number of these families have received assistance from the government by way of housing materials to rebuild. Many have not received; how many is hard to establish, but according to reports 1235 houses were built in the area. Data from barangay leaders report that 2352 houses were reportedly heavily damaged. Data from the HH survey of the 120 families reportedly receiving assistance 13% said they had received shelter assistance. Talitay and Kabasalan report that highest level of destruction with over 600 houses destroyed. Rajamuda, Barongis, and Bulol are least all below 30.

(...)

Of the 10 barangays included in the assessment 8 were heavily affected by the conflict. Typical housing is most often constructed of local building materials including bamboo and nipa palms. The loss of housing is the most readily obvious effect of the conflict. Unfortunately we do not have a number of total houses existing prior to the conflict so it is hard to get an accurate picture of overall destruction. The estimated 39% provides a rough estimate but does not account for the fact that many families share housing. From the HH survey 55% reported losing a house because of the conflict.

Public health services were also damaged or destroyed in the conflict. Housing, public, and private business, schools, religious buildings have also been damaged in the conflict. "

According to the statistics of the DSWD, the conflict between the military and the MILF in Mindanao has, since January 2003, damaged some 6,908 houses. Of these, 5,666 have been totally destroyed

Balay January 2004

"According to the DSWD, as of October 9, 2003, there was a total of 422 civilian or non-combatant casualties of the armed conflict documented since the onset of the disaster in January 2003. Of this figure, 238 are dead, and 184 injured. Alongside this, 7,108 properties and houses were damaged of which 5,846 are totally damaged and 1,262 are partially damaged.

"

Government agrees to award reparations for the properties lost or destroyed by reasons of the conflict (September 2002)

- The agreement on humanitarian, rehabilitation, and development issues stipulates that the government shall award reparations for the properties lost or destroyed by reasons of the conflict upon reasonable proof thereon as mutually verified and acknowledged by both parties.

UNDP 23 September 2002, p. 19

"The latest agreement on humanitarian, rehabilitation, and development issues stipulates that it will safeguard the observance of international humanitarian law, respect for internationally recognized human rights, and fundamental freedoms for all persons. These are the criteria and standards that should guide the monitoring mechanism of Article VI of the agreement to be undertaken by the joint Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH).

The agreement also assures full access for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) 'in accordance with ICRC's standard operating procedures'. It stipulates that 'in conformity with international humanitarian law, each party shall provide information, through the tracing mechanism of the ICRC, to families of all persons who are unaccounted for.'

They also agree that the 'parties shall pave the way for the immediate return of evacuees to their places of origin and provide all necessary financial/material and technical assistance to those evacuated for them to begin a new life. The GRP shall award reparations for the properties lost or destroyed by reasons of the conflict upon reasonable proof thereon as mutually verified and acknowledged by both parties.' (Article V, Numeral 3)."

PATTERNS OF RETURN AND RESETTLEMENT

General

Return and recovery in Moro areas compounded by widespread sense of uncertainty and helplessness (October 2006)

- Climate of fear due to military presence discourage return and prolong the recovery process.
- Moro areas have seen cycles of destructive large-scale shooting wars since the 1970s that have resulted in a situation of perpetually arrested development making it more difficult for returnees to recover from their displacement, in particular after long-term displacements.
- Significant number of IDPs will not return to their places of origin after leaving the evacuation centers but will instead seek accommodation in other communities. Others intend to return but will wait until the chances to regain a livelihood increase.
- Further depletion of their livelihoods will have to be avoided by hard work and inclusion of women, children, and even the elderly in the labor markets.
- Unfinished character of the conflict means that the uncertainty of life in areas in and around former MILF camps will continue to shape people's decisions even after the displaced families have returned to their homes and farms.
- Planning horizons of people in these communities will tend to be short and long-term investments in farms and communal facilities will be limited.

UNICEF, October 2006, pp. 109-110

"Recovery can only begin when the community's situation is more or less stable – certainly not before actual fighting ends and in many cases only after the deeply disruptive presence of military operations. This disruptive presence is most brazenly manifest in active and outright violations of human rights. These need not even be violent although deadly physical attacks in any case apparently do happen. They can include such military control measures as a community "census" where soldiers go house-to-house listing family members and probing for indications of being NPA supporters (Mindoro Oriental); having farmers sign the barangay logbook so that the military can keep track of their movements (Leyte); and remote households being forced to move into a common area near the village center for closer monitoring (Capiz). The general climate of fear also discourages an immediate return to more normal work and social habits and patterns, thus prolonging the recovery process.

The return to some level of normalcy is most difficult in the case of long-term IDPs who are unable to quickly regain or rebuild the economic capital they had previously accumulated but had lost due to the outbreak of fighting in their villages.

Arrested development

The problem is most severe in the Moro areas which have seen cycles of destructive large-scale shooting wars since the 1970s that have resulted in a situation of perpetually arrested development. The damage to farms and property is severe, which means that much greater effort is needed to rebuild them. However, the effort to rebuild itself often becomes half-hearted because of the fear (or expectation) that the inevitable outbreak of fighting again will just destroy any hard-earned gains anyway.

Indeed, the cycle of war for the past three decades seems to have set a new low and lasting level of “war-time normalcy” compared to the pre-1970s situation. Economic and social recovery in MILF camps seems not so much a return to some pre-war peace but rather to a situation more akin to a momentary lull in fighting. Community members have lamented that they feel like repeaters in school perpetually stuck in “grade one” and unable to move forward; the collapse in morale is palpable. Already long-suffering from conditions of poverty which breed these conflicts in the first place, they are pushed by large-scale fighting even further into a state of destitution. And when the fighting ends all they have to return to is at best the low-level equilibrium far beneath anything that might be realizable during a genuine extended peace.

A parent in North Cotabato articulated their predicament: “Because of the conflict here in Mindanao, we always begin with nothing. We are attacked, we lose our properties; our homes, mosque and madrasah are burned. When we return, then we start over with nothing. People will say, how will these people govern when all they have to show for themselves is the single piece of cloth that they wear. Yes, but only because our situation here year in and year out is that we are in the midst of war.”

(...)

The sense of uncertainty and helplessness that sometimes emerged in the war-torn Moro communities visited is stark and had no comparable equivalent in the less war-afflicted non-Moro areas. Respondents told of the loss of family members, the burning of homes, uprooting from communities, damage to crops and fields, destruction of roads and agricultural infrastructure, absence of basic social services, and a persistent marginalization from “mainstream” political, economic and national life. They also spoke of outright violent attacks against them precisely because of the most deeply felt center of their identities – being Muslim. The sense of despair has not spared even children and 15-year-old Nasriah of North Cotabato said with resignation: “I really don’t know who’s at fault because it’s a difficult question. Even if I ask my parents, they don’t know either. They just keep quiet because they can’t do anything about it. Yes, I accept that when there’s fighting again we’re going to evacuate, and we’re going to accept everything that happens. There’s really nothing we can do.”(...)

WB 3 March 2003, pp. 33-34

"An important feature of the major GRP-MILF confrontation is that it was in the nature of an attempt by the Philippine military to displace the MILF from its camps and strongholds. But these camps also happened to be nested in Muslim communities. The displacement of armed MILF combatants, thus, also led to the displacement of civilian populations. At the end of 2001, close to one million people were displaced by the GRP-MILF war. It is now necessary, however, to help the civilian population return to these places of former conflict and rebuild their communities and livelihoods.

Findings from surveys in Central Mindanao reveal that a significant number of IDPs will not return to their places of origin. After leaving evacuation centers, these people will seek to be accommodated in other communities. Others will return only once they see that the chances of restoring their livelihoods have increased. The first welcome step that the Government has done in this respect is to rebuild homes that have been destroyed. Bridges, road madrasahs, public schools, health centers, potable water systems and farm implements, however, were also destroyed. Carabaos and harvests have been lost or else sold or depleted during the interim when people had to flee their homes. Until normalcy returns to rural economies, people will need to work very hard just to prevent the further depletion of their livelihoods in a setting where rural credit flows have been disrupted by failures in harvests, and as a result of the knowledge of creditors that many have sunk too far below the surface to make the repayment of past and new loans a priority. The Social Assessment reveal that women, children, and even the elderly have had to join the labor markets in response to the disaster brought about by the disruption of their livelihoods and communities.

A second important aspect of the recent conflict is its largely unfinished character. Many displaced people worry about their security and about the possibility of a repeat of the armed conflict in their communities of origin. This must be particularly so for those whose communities are within marching distance of the dispersed MILF bands or of troops of the Philippine military stationed in the former rebel camps. Communities in and around former MILF camps remain precarious because, being strategic locations, these will continue to invite contest between the warring parties. Meanwhile, the uncertainty of life in these areas will continue to shape people's decisions even after the displaced families have returned to their homes and farms. Planning horizons of people in these communities will tend to be short and long-term investments in farms and communal facilities that would otherwise be worthwhile may be forgone. Yet, it is also probably true that communities that have been assisted in investing in their livelihoods and communities will be more hesitant than others to engage in activities that would increase the risks of another disruption –e.g., participating in aggressive pre-emptive moves against groups and forces that are perceived to be hostile. This is an idea that comes from young people encountered by the Social Assessment teams."

Return

Slow return of IDPs in Sulu (May 2006)

- In May 2006, some 4,000 IDPs originally displaced in 2000 were reported to have been unable to return due to military restrictions.
- Following the conflict that displaced some 85,000 in Sulu between February and April 2005, there are contradictory reports as to the number of people who remain displaced.
- A Moro women's group reported in September 2005 that thousands of families remained displaced.
- ICRC's visit in June reported that the vast majority had returned to their homes, although it didn't give any numbers.

4,000 people still displaced in Sulu 6 years later

The Inquirer, 2 May 2006

"More than 4,000 people have failed to return to their homes in four villages in Patikul town, five years after they were displaced by military offensives against the Abu Sayyaf.

In September 2000, Maj. Gen. Romeo Tolentino, chief of the 7th Infantry Division, ordered the offensives against the Abu Sayyaf bandits involved in the kidnapping of 20 mostly foreign tourists from a beach resort in Sipadan, Malaysia.

More than 117,000 people were displaced by the military operations in the towns of Patikul, Indanan, Parang, Panglima Estino, Talipao, Maimbung and Panamao.

No man's land

But Maydelyn Bahjin, social welfare and development provincial director, said a number of villages continued to be isolated or considered "no man's land" at night.

Bahjin said at least 4,000 people had not returned to their homes in Barangays Kabuntakas, Kandabal, Maligay and Darayan in Patikul. "Some of them are still residing in Danag, Kantipat

and Jolo towns and until now we are still working for the (military) clearance so the residents could already return to their places," she said."

Moro women group claims thousands of families are still displaced in Sulu (September 2005)

Mindanews, 3 September 2005

"The Moro women noted that "thousands of families" are still displaced in Sulu because of the military operations but the manifesto did not indicate the estimated number of remaining evacuees.

It also noted that what added "alarm" in Sulu was the "unannounced movement of heavily armed US military forces in the area this month. The sight of the Americans and their weapons, the manifesto said, "frightened our children."

"We are already traumatized by decades of armed conflict, now the American soldiers are harassing us from behind a façade of development packages," the manifesto said."

DSWD reports 8,000 IDPs left as of June 2005

DSDW-DROMIC, 9 June 2005

"Thirteen thousand four hundred forty (13,440) families composed of 85,532 persons were affected. A total of 1,601 families composed of 8,475 individuals are still being served inside and outside of the evacuation center.

To date, one (1) evacuation center remained open at Timbangan, Indanan sheltering 15 families composed of 68 individuals while 1,586 families composed of 8,407 individuals are still being served outside."

ICRC's visit in Sulu concludes majority of displaced have returned home (June 2005)

ICRC, 21 June 2005

"The joint ICRC-Philippine National Red Cross team was well received by local authorities who were anxious to impress upon the visitors that normalcy had returned to the island. The ICRC and National Society representatives took part in a series of meetings with local community and religious leaders and with representatives of women's organizations in order to inform themselves about any need for protection or assistance that might exist.

The ICRC's first priority was to assess the situation of the approximately 30,000 people displaced at the outset of the fighting. In places where the displaced had previously taken refuge the team observed that the vast majority had returned to their homes."

Policy

Tripoli Peace Agreement of June 2001 provides for the return of evacuees and their rehabilitation (September 2002)

- In May 2002, the GRP and MILF signed the "Implementing guidelines on the humanitarian, rehabilitation and development aspects of the GRP—MILF Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001" and committed to ensure the return of IDPs to their homes with all necessary financial/material and technical assistance to make the return sustainable.

- The GRP also agreed to award reparations for the properties lost or destroyed by reasons of the conflict upon reasonable proof thereon as mutually verified and acknowledged by both parties.
- Return of evacuees and reparations were not the original product of the Implementing Guidelines of May, 2002 but rather stemmed from the Tripoli Peace Agreement of June 2001.
- In June 2001, both parties signed the Tripoli Peace Agreement where explicit reference was made to the need to assist IDPs return and recover.

UNDP 23 September 2002, p. 20

"The latest agreement on humanitarian, rehabilitation, and development issues stipulates that it will safeguard the observance of international humanitarian law, respect for internationally recognized human rights, and fundamental freedoms for all persons. These are the criteria and standards that should guide the monitoring mechanism of Article VI of the agreement to be undertaken by the joint Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH).

The agreement also assures full access for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) 'in accordance with ICRC's standard operating procedures'. It stipulates that 'in conformity with international humanitarian law, each party shall provide information, through the tracing mechanism of the ICRC, to families of all persons who are unaccounted for.'

They also agree that the 'parties shall pave the way for the immediate return of evacuees to their places of origin and provide all necessary financial/material and technical assistance to those evacuated for them to begin a new life. The GRP shall award reparations for the properties lost or destroyed by reasons of the conflict upon reasonable proof thereon as mutually verified and acknowledged by both parties.' (Article V, Numeral 3).

(...)

On the other side the GRP agrees to relieve the evacuee situation and allow a return to the places occupied prior to 'All Out War', as well as to pay reparations for properties lost and damages sustained. In sum, a reversal of the effects on the population of the 'All Out War'. Of course, the MILF as an organization would not return to the situation 'antebellum' in that there would be no resurrection of the armed camps, exclusion of the State, and MILF territorial control.

(...)

On the other side, some national and local officials, broad sectors of the AFP and ex-President Estrada, all protested the return of the evacuees to their places of origin and the payment of reparations. A role for an MILF entity in rehabilitation and development was also questioned. It was argued that these measures would make in vain the sacrifices of AFP comrades in arms who fell on the field of battle to take the MILF camps as part of the All Out War policy. It was also seen as rewarding the MILF despite their defeat in the All Out War. The return of evacuees and reparations were not the original product of the Implementing Guidelines of May, 2002 but rather stemmed from the Tripoli Peace Agreement of June 2001 (Literal B 'Rehabilitation Aspect, Section 3').

See also:

§ Full text of the "[Implementing Guidelines on the Humanitarian, Rehabilitation and Development Aspects of the GRP-MILF Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001](#)" (May 2002)

§ Full text of the [Tripoli Peace Agreement](#) (June 2001)

Obstacles to return

Absence of peace and security is often the main reason for not returning (March 2007)

- According the media sources, less than half of the 6,000 people displaced by rebel-military fighting in Midsayap, Cotabato province have returned to their homes 5 weeks after being displaced. Main obstacle to return is continuous insecurity.
- In July 2003, 5 months after the start of fighting, the municipalities of Pikit and Pagalungan remained highly militarized with MILF and AFP troops.
- The repositioning of troops further away of the barangays, as suggested by residents, would ease the return of the displaced as it would diminish the risk of them being caught in the crossfire.
- According to a World Bank assessment, the main reason for not wanting to return home among IDPs displaced around North Cotabato was the lack of peace and security

ABS-CBN, 5 March 2007

"Less than half of the almost 6,000 Muslim and Christian evacuees displaced by rebel-military encounters here have returned to their villages.

Ramil Timan, chairman of Barangay Mudseng where soldiers and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebels figured in running gunbattles last Jan. 25 to 27, said Mudseng has since remained a "ghost town," because evacuees were reluctant to return to their homes due to marauding Moro gunmen reportedly bent on grabbing their lands.

Timan said he has told Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Jesus Dureza during a dialogue Thursday that they want the joint ceasefire committee, the police and the military to establish a "peace-keeping contingent" in the area to ensure the safety of villagers.

"My constituents are so afraid of returning to their homes because they don't feel secure from armed groups," Timan told reporters Saturday.

Officials of Barangay Nes here, among them Muslim village leaders, said tension in their villages and in Mudseng escalated anew last Wednesday after gunmen straffed houses at the boundary of the two areas, seriously wounding a mother and her nine-year-old child."

Notre Dame University & Commission on Population, p. 31

"An overwhelming number of respondents (85%) in Parang expressed intention to stay permanently in their present site but only 29% in Pikit declared the same intention. Among the reasons mentioned were the destruction of their houses and means of livelihood at the site of origin; livelihood and education of children at the host communities; and fear of recurring armed conflicts at their sites of origin.

Lack of security was a major reason for not wanting to return. This was an obstacle pointed by Balay Inc. as it cited the presence of landmines, the activities of the para-military units and the recruitment of CAFGUs, the burning of houses and government buildings by the rebels and the "anti-terrorist" operations of the military (IIAHR)."

Bantay Ceasefire, 1 August 2003

"The mission notes that at the time of the mission on July 13-15, five months after the February assault in Buliok, the municipalities of Pikit, Pagalungan and even the adjacent municipality of Pagalungan remain highly militarized. There are three Marine brigades in Mindanao; two Marine brigades (the First and Second Brigades) were deployed to Pikit and Pagalungan (the Third Marine Brigade is in Sulu). Even if the Marine officers claim the deployed brigades are undersized, the mission was not able to get exact deployment figures.

The army's 40th Infantry Battalion also maintains headquarters in Pikit poblacion.

Pikit, Pagalungan and Pagagawan are also under the operational area of the MILF's 105th Base Command which claims to have 20,000 armed regulars. However, the 105th Base Command's area also extends to North Cotabato (Tulunán, Matalam, Carmen, Kidapawan, Banisilan and Alamada); Sultan Kudarat (Columbio) and Maguindanao (Sultan sa Barongis, SK Pendatun).

Aside from these armed groups, the local government units are also recruiting and training CVOs in Pikit, with the first batch of 150 CVOs completing their training last June 26. CAFGUs are also being trained under the army's 40 IB.

In contrast, Pikit, Pagalungan and Pagagawan have an estimated combined population of about 140,000 or roughly 15,000 families.

Confronted with this militarization, many residents proposed to the mission that the military eventually withdraws or at least reposition away from civilian communities. Kagawad Ismael Usman of Brgy. Kudal said: 'Now that there is a ceasefire, the military and MILF should go back to their camps so that the civilians can also go back to their own barangays.'

The presence of troops render meaningless the March 4, 2003 declaration by the Cabinet of 15 barangays in Pikit as 'zones of peace', and the well-publicized June 13, 2003 declaration by the President of Brgy. Inug-og, Pagalungan, as a 'sanctuary of peace'."

WB, 3 March 2003, pp. 13-14

"Government data does not provide a sense of the number of affected populations that have not returned to their places of origin. Results of the Social Assessment provide some indication (see table 4).

In November and December 2001 internally displaced persons (IDPs) coming predominantly from the North Cotabato towns of Kabacan, Carmen and Pikit were clustered around the Muslim-dominated barangays of Pedtad, Moloa, Natutungan and Ilian. More than 60 percent were in resettlement sites while the rest were in evacuation centers and rehabilitation sites. Fifty-seven percent of these IDPs said they did not have plans to return to their places of origin, while the remaining forty-three percent said that they still had plans of going back. Those who had no plans of going back to their places of origin were those clustered around the barangays of Natutungan and Ilian in North Cotabato.

Majority of survey respondents with no plans of going back said that the absence of peace and security led them to their decision of 20.5 percent. The comfort experienced living in their current residence relative to their places of origin and the loss of livelihood and property in the area of origin convinced the others to avoid going back.

Among those who still had plans of returning to their original homes, around three-fourths said they wanted to go back because it was "their place of birth and they have a farm there".

Twenty percent of the respondents said that nothing would convince them to return to their original communities. Ten percent of the respondents said that going back would depend on whether there is a good source of livelihood in their place of origin."

Poverty and lack of livelihood opportunities seen as the main obstacle to sustained returns (October 2006)

- When returnees manage to go back, most face harsh economic conditions, diminished community support and the assets left are soon depleted.
- Those lucky to have obtained rehab shelters describe them as inadequate (too small) .
- The main problems identified by the displaced themselves in Pagalungan and Pagagawan are: lack of job and livelihood opportunities, lack of housing, lack of health and sanitation facilities and access to these, lack of education and lack of roads from their villages to markets.

UNICEF, October 2006, p. 121

"If life in evacuation centers is difficult, so is returning to their communities. Most returning evacuees are haunted by feelings of uncertainty regarding their security because of continuing military presence. But even when back in their communities, the evacuees still must face the harsh consequences of military confrontations. Especially in the Central Mindanao areas, the returning IDPs confront badly depleted economic resources with the usual community support networks also undermined inasmuch as all are in the same precarious situation. In the Muslim areas where the most severe fighting has taken place, entire communities are barely able to make any headway in recovering from their losses in crops, farm implements, farm tools, farm animals and store inventories. They frequently face mounting debts and are hampered by debilitating sicknesses. It is common for former IDPs to spend less on everything including such essentials as food and schooling. What remaining assets they have are soon depleted as they are gradually sold for much-needed cash.

Some respondents complained about the aid-constructed shelters ("*rehab*") replacing their homes as too small and uncomfortable. Others said they were among those who did not get even that. The physical aftermath of war and abandonment is immediately jarring, said respondents: the ruins of their homes, the burned stumps of once-productive coconut trees, and the overgrowth of weeds and plants in their farm lands. There was even one account of a farmer seriously injured in September 2005 when he accidentally detonated a leftover military landmine while clearing a grassy area by the mosque."

CFSI October 2003, p. 14

"Although the IDPs [in Pagalungan and Pagagawan] were able to return to their sites of origin (SOOs), the returnees face formidable barriers to rebuilding their lives, and a number of immediate problems and needs have been identified for their return. These problems and needs are related to the following, among other concerns:

Sources of livelihood

Lack of jobs and working places (for women, men and children)

Housing facilities

Child labour (as a response to poverty, and the lack of educational facilities)

Health and sanitation

Potable water systems

High percentage of illnesses, especially in children, women, and the elderly

Inability to sustain medical treatment (due to expensive medications)

No access to health centers

No access to education, inability to pay for children's education

Inability to provide recreation to children

Problems created by lack of farm to market roads and transportation systems

Generally, the male respondents in the sites of origin (SOOs) regard the problem of livelihood and the lack of jobs as very essential. The women similarly consider the lack of livelihood as their main problem, aside from concerns related to their primary responsibilities within their homes, including rearing their children. As previously noted, education is seen as the first and foremost need.

The SOOs are highly dependent on farming and fishing as the main sources of livelihood. However, farm productivity is hampered by such problems as the lack of capital, farm roads, means of transportation, and the lack of technical knowledge about farm production. On the other hand, the lack of fishing gear (e.g., fishnets and bancas) and the use of illegal fishing practices by others, have been limiting their fishing activities. Child labour is also a problem in the community for the children have no choice but to help their parents earn a living."

Landmines and UXOs impede return of displaced (2006)

- ICBL observed a sharp increase in landmine casualties in 2005. Landmines are seen as a serious threat to civilians and IDPs in areas of conflict.
- Peace advocates and groups working for the rehabilitation of areas torn by the war against the MILF in February 2003 have warned about the danger posed by unexploded bombs near villages where people are returning.

ICBL, 2006

"The Philippines has consistently denied in its Article 7 reports that any area is mine-affected, asserting that wherever landmines and IEDs are found, they are immediately removed. However, the sharp escalation in casualties in 2005 showed that the use of landmines and IEDs in areas of conflict between government and a variety of non-state armed groups poses a threat to civilians as well as the military.

There are still landmines planted in the mountains of Misamis Oriental, Surigao and Agusan, according to a peasant leader in the area communicating with Landmine Monitor on the basis of anonymity. He said it was very difficult to get details because of NPA operations in these areas. The Philippine Red Cross also reported facing difficulty reaching evacuees in eastern Sulu in February 2005 because of landmines reportedly planted by rebels."

The Inquirer 19 March 2004

"The greatest fear of families displaced by recent armed conflicts in Pikit, North Cotabato has come true. On Tuesday, a dud explosive left during the Buliok war of 2003 went off, killing a farmer and seriously injuring his brother. Eighteen-year-old Norhamin Toga said he and his elder brother Solayman, 22, were plowing their field when they hit the bomb, which was buried in the farm. He said the explosion mangled Solayman's body. 'I think it was an 81-mm mortar,' Norhamin said from his hospital bed here.

Peace advocates and groups working for the rehabilitation of areas torn by the war against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in February 2003 have been issuing appeals to both the military and the rebels to clear the villages of unexploded bombs.

They said unless these explosives were removed, the lives of the residents, who agreed to return to their villages, continue to be in danger."

Bantay Ceasefire, 1 August 2003

"A major war leaves many unpleasant residues, among them unexploded bombs, land mines, ordnance and booby traps in the communities, thus endangering returning civilians. Many villages in Pikit and Pagalungan were the battlegrounds in the February war and both MILF and AFP officers acknowledged the strong possibility of becoming victims of unexploded war materials in the communities.

Hadji Faisal, Intelligence Officer of the 105th Base Command of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF), claimed that there are unexploded .105 mm., 81 mm. shells and bombs dropped from OV-10 Bronco air force planes in Kudal, Pagalungan; and in Barangays Bago Inged and Kabasalan, both in the Pikit and Pagalungan side. He said communities need to be cleared by bomb experts to defuse or deactivate any remaining bombs.

The Marine 7th IB commander assigned in Pagalungan also saw the need to conduct clearing operations to secure the civilian areas from these hazardous war implements.

The mission documented reports to show that the threat is real. Last June in Barangay Talitay, Pikit, a returnee named Tatuan Mamadra was injured when a 105 mm. howitzer shell exploded in his farm. Mamadra was burning dried grasses to clear his farm for replanting when the blaze apparently set off the shell hidden on the ground.

In Sitio Butilen, Kabasalan, Pikit, three civilians- Budsal Sambalang, Nards Maulana and an unidentified resident of Butilen - were injured when they accidentally stepped on booby traps (likely punji sticks) placed near a Marine camp.

Some of the Marines interviewed by mission members said they have in fact requested civilians to coordinate with them as there are still specific locations planted with land mines."

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

General

INGO's tendency to rely on mainstream implementing partners runs risk of biased aid distribution (February 2007)

- Most international NGOs in Mindanao work closely with the government in providing humanitarian assistance. This close partnership runs the risk of discrimination against IDPs seen as close to the MILF.
- It is reported that during the displacement incident in Shariff Aguak in June-July 2006, thousands of reportedly pro-MILF IDPs were not recognized and enrolled as beneficiaries in the early phase of the humanitarian response
- Much of the aid was reportedly distributed to non-IDP civilians close to paramilitary groups linked to the government and the provincial governor of Maguindanao.
- At the height of the fighting, civil society groups tried to form a 'Joint force' to halt the fighting and displacement and provide assistance to trapped civilians. This also included a petition, which most IO and INGOs reportedly refused to sign invoking risks of losing their neutrality.

JHA, February 2007, pp. 15-16

"INGOs in Mindanao are not as constricted in having to stick to government and its agencies as partners, but in practice, most of them imitate the IOs on this matter because the state holds the keys to distribution of many donors' finances and has the ability to make continuation of INGO programmes difficult. Mindanao Emergency Response Network's (MERN) role in proffering humanitarian relief in the initial days of the mini-war in Shariff Aguak and surrounding municipalities in June-July 2006 was controversial and violence-fuelling due to its partnering with the GRP's Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). The "evacuation centres" (IDP camps) that housed civilians considered loyal to the CAFGU and CVOs (paramilitary units fighting on behalf of the Provincial Governor of Maguindanao) were neatly planned and organised by DSWD employees to distribute emergency supplies from MERN. However, thousands of reportedly 'pro-MILF' IDPs in madrassas and makeshift shelters were not even recognised or enrolled as beneficiaries in the distribution until the discrimination was pointed out by local civil society.⁵¹

When I visited Mattaa evacuation centre during the Shariff Aguak crisis, most of the aid beneficiaries did not look like IDPs who travelled great distances to flee mortar shelling by the CAFGU-CVOs on one side and the MILF on the other. Away from the supervisory gaze of the DSWD bureaucrats, one civilian in tears confided to an activist accompanying me the following story: "This is a very sad day for me. My wife works for the DSWD and she told me that almost the entire aid was being distributed to family members of the CAFGU and the CVOs who are coming from totally unaffected and safe villages to Mattaa to impersonate as IDPs. The CAFGU and CVOs who initiated heavy shelling of MILF positions are being encouraged to continue the bombardment because the fight is proving very beneficial economically, thanks to the humanitarian aid which is brazenly partial. The more houses of civilians they burn, the longer it will take for the genuine IDPs to return to their homes and the greater will be the opportunity to stock more food aid for the killing machines of CAFGU and CVOs."⁵²

As the crisis unfolded, proactive local civil society members formulated a new movement- 'Tyakap Maguindanao' (Save Maguindanao)- and composed a petition appealing to the warring parties for an immediate halt to fighting, humane treatment of civilians caught up in the violence and for allowing access to areas that were cut off due to heavy artillery fire. None of the IOs or INGOs signed it despite requests from the locals that the weight of international organizations would make the appeal for peace and respect of human rights formidable. OXFAM's name was initially on the list of signatories, but it was later removed upon the protest of the organisation's higher-ups. CFSI, Save the Children and CRS- the core members of MERN- did not support this initiative either on the grounds that "organisational rules did not permit them to indulge in advocacy." There was no second thought on the part of MERN members on this matter. It was a routine decision based on organisational rules and precedents- symptoms of Barnett and Finnemore's "bureaucratic culture" thesis.⁵³ The hidden hand of government partnerships was of course the main external cause.

At one brainstorming meeting of local activists and representatives of IOs and INGOs during the crisis, Bantay Ceasefire- a proactive local monitoring organisation- proposed forming a 'Joint Force' to interposition between the two warring parties and halt the fighting and forced displacement. The plan was to "use humanitarian aid as an entry point and assert the stand of local civil society to disengage the CAFGU-CVOs and the MILF and ensure the safety of civilians trapped in the buffer zones."⁵⁴ The reaction of the entire IO-INGO family was lukewarm because they felt such an action would compromise their "neutrality."⁵⁵

Mindanews, 7 July 2006

"Non-government organizations working for peace in Mindanao announced the creation of the Task Force Tabang Maguindanao Thursday morning as thousands of evacuees have not yet accessed humanitarian aid nine days since the hostilities broke in four Maguindanao towns on June 28. The task force, created on July 4, was formed to continue calls to stop the hostilities and to bring together people with resources so that humanitarian assistance could be brought to around 4,138 displaced families, said Guiamel Alim of the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society, a member organization of the Mindanao Peaceweavers (MPW) network. Heavy fighting in the last six days, Alim said, limited the access of humanitarian action groups to the evacuation sites. He said they have also enjoined in the task force the cooperation of the GRP and MILF Coordinating Committees on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH), the International Monitoring Team and representatives from Maguindanao Gov. Andal Ampatuan, so they could penetrate all areas where relief goods are needed."

DPA, 5 July 2006

"At least 780 families have been trapped in fighting between pro-government militiamen and Muslim separatist rebels in the southern Philippines, a social welfare official said Wednesday.

Ruby Sahali, a regional social welfare department official, said the families were unable to flee their homes in the remote village of Tapihan in Shariff Aguak town, Maguindanao province, 960 kilometres south of Manila, amid the fighting.

"They are at risk," she said. "Our social workers cannot penetrate the area because the fighting is still ongoing. We fear that they (social workers) might be hit by stray bullets."

"Right now, we don't have any idea regarding their (trapped families) situation because we have no workers there," she added."

Personal safety of humanitarian workers at risk (November 2006)

- In November 2006, two women NGO workers assisting IDPs were reported to have been abducted, interrogated and sexually abused by Philippine military in North Cotabato
- NGOs say that delivering aid to the displaced has at times been difficult and dangerous for aid workers.
- This was the case in Basilan where the aid workers were accused by MNLF commanders of giving the food and non-food items only to Christians.
- There is often a risk of being mistaken by any of the opposing forces.
- MERN NGOs engaged in humanitarian are now required to pass the standardized training on personal security, health and safety.

Davao Today, 16 December 2006

"But while programs like the AUPP help uprooted people take roots in their communities again, CDRC network groups in the provinces are fast becoming targets of military harassments, illegal arrests and killings.

Federico Anor, a community leader in barangay Tulatulahan in Kapatagan, Lanao del Norte, who was involved with the project, was killed on June 4 this year while Jovito Pinakilid, a former BREAD project area staff in Buenavista, Agusan del Norte, was shot in September this year.

On April 22 last year, Ramil Gomomit, who has been involved with the CDRC project in Lanao del Norte through his organization Halad, was held for questioning by the a unit of the Philippine Marines out of suspicion that he was a member of the Communist New People's Army (NPA). Gomomit has denied the charge.

The most recent case was the Nov. 4 abduction of Lourilie Naiz and Mary Bernadette Solitario, area field staff and community teachers of the nongovernment relief group Direct, who were held for a night of questioning and were sexually harassed by members of the 39th IB of the Philippine Army who tried to force them to admit that they were members of the NPA.

In August, two people belonging to the indigenous Matigsalog tribe in a village of Naboc, in Compostela Valley's town of Montevista, were arrested by 40 combined forces of military and paramilitary forces in Monkayo after they attended a health training as part of an EU-funded project. Rey Gimboloy, chairman of a local people's organization in Naboc, said the soldiers tried as well to force him to admit that he was a member of the NPA.

Both Gimboloy and Rossie Mantiquinon, 25, were part of the indigenous Matigsalog tribes frequently uprooted by war in the area, struggling to take roots in their communities again but in doing so, they were harassed by the military, said Daday Sanchez, executive director of the Mindanao Interfaith Services Foundation Inc. (Misfi), one of the groups carrying out the CDRC project in the area."

Davao Today, 13 November 2006

"The two women NGO workers allegedly abducted and interrogated by the Philippine military in Tulan, North Cotabato, last week were also sexually abused by soldiers, the women's group Gabriela said Monday.

In a statement, Gabriela said:

The militant women's group GABRIELA revealed that the two young women-workers of a non-government organization in North Cotabato were also sexually molested by their military abductors.

According to reports submitted to GABRIELA, on November 4, 2006, Lourilie Naiz, 22, and Mary Bernadette Solitario, 21, both staff of Disaster Response Center (DIRECT) were abducted by plainclothes men armed with .45 caliber pistols. DIRECT is a community-based disaster management institution where Naiz is its field officer in charge of its socio-economic programs for internally displaced peasant families, while Solitario is one of the DIRECT's literacy-numeracy teachers.

The reports stated that the armed men were not only in civilian clothes but they rode motorcycle without a plate number. Naiz and Solitario were forced to get inside a pick-up truck, which also did not have a plate number, and were brought to Camp Sumabat of the 39th Infantry Battalion in Makilala, North Cotabato Province. The motorcycle followed the pick-up truck but turned left and entered the 27th IB Camp at Brgy. New Panay, Tulunan Town of the same province.

The two were blindfolded and detained in separate rooms. Both were interrogated without the presence of a lawyer with interrogators insisting they were members of the NPA. Bernadette, accused by her interrogators of having a hand grenade in her bag and of having participated in the Makilala bombings of October 10 this year, experienced minor physical assault as she was beaten. She was commanded to take off her clothes.

Lourilie, on the other hand, was threatened to be buried alive if she will not admit to her membership with the NPA and her participation in a detachment attack in Brgy. Bituan on November 1. Their interrogation continued overnight.

On the following day, they were forced to take off their clothes while blindfolded. After an hour, Lourilie was transferred to another place about 15 minutes travel from the camp and again, she was interrogated. Bernadette was informed that Lourilie was already buried and was threatened to be the next if she will not admit to being an NPA member. The two met again in the afternoon, and were brought to a physician for a medical check-up, and then they were turned over to the Tulunan Police at around 8 p.m. A certain George Reyes of the ISAFP signed the PNP logbook.

The families of Naiz and Solitario reported to the police about their missing daughters in the morning of November 5. And with their town mayor, they went to the 27th IB camp in Brgy. Kablon, Tupi, South Cotabato, however, the commanding officer of the military unit denied having the two women inside their camp.

Still according to the reports, Lourilie suffered trauma and is still in a state of shock. She is frightened whenever she sees men in uniform, and tinted cars, pick-up trucks and motorcycles. She still trembles every time she recalls her interrogation, her hand being pulled, her transfer to an unrecognized place and how she was made to undress while blindfolded and the hands of her abductors touching her body. Lourilie was also psychologically harmed by the incident especially that the military took a photo of her holding a small placard with "CAPTURED" and as "FSMR LIAISON OFFICER OF THE NPA" on it."

PRWeb 9 March 2004

"One of the pressing concerns of MERN member organizations is to ensure IDPs' access to food, water and non-food commodities. But this is easier said than done. Fairudz (Rose) Ebus, Project Coordinator of Mindanao Tulong Bakwet, said 'At times, our personal safety and security were at stake even though it was made clear that our efforts are purely humanitarian'.

'In Basilan, for instance, we were threatened that we can never leave the place alive if we do not give our load of food and non-food items to the alleged local MNLF militia leader who blamed us of giving only to Christians', she narrated. 'I told them I am a Muslim and our program calls that we give to Muslims and Christians alike. That in this war, there are no Muslims nor Christians but only people in need', she recounted. The statement made the local militia leader release her and her staff.

Besides threats to life, rural development workers of NGOs under MERN have to reckon with sudden and unfortunate events that surface beyond their control. The tragic and untimely death of Theresa B. Marquez, the finance officer of SC/DPR Mindanao, who drowned in Bulioc River, Maguindanao while providing humanitarian service underscores this reality. Two other SC staff narrowly escaped death's ugly head in that freak incident.

It is not also easy to penetrate many areas where evacuees are without danger of losing life and limb. In Datu Piang, Maguindanao, for instance, Raymundo Tabudlong, Core Facilitator of Kids for Peace, a MERN member said 'much as we would like to go and bring humanitarian goods, it is difficult for NGOs to penetrate because anyone can be caught in a crossfire and that there is always the possibility of being mistaken by any of the opposing forces'.

As such, SC advocates for a "Safety First" approach for its workers and NGO partners. (SC Safety First Handbook) SC aims to help NGOs working in areas of armed conflict to protect their staff more effectively, by following the:

- 1) Basic principles, such as the concept of 'risk management' and the importance of non-partisanship.
- 2) Safety conscious' management practices.
- 3) Practical security measures relating to:
 - staying healthy
 - radio and satellite communication
 - using vehicles and aircraft
 - dealing with munitions and the military
 - the threat of landmines
 - self-defense against armed attack

For MERN, it has considered strategies that Integrate workers' security and welfare in humanitarian work to ensure their security and safety. Each personnel of member of a MERN NGO engaged in humanitarian is required to pass the standardized training on personal security, health and safety.

NGO workers' hardships sometimes also go to naught. Tabudlong said there were instances when supplies went to the wrong hands. 'In some cases, food supplies have not gone to the evacuees for their needs but to people who were not the intended beneficiaries. Some non-food commodities intended for war victims have been seen being sold in local markets', he said."

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

National response

National response

The attitude of the Philippine government towards the problem of internal displacement is two-sided. On the one hand, it is by far the main agent of forced displacement, mainly resulting from military and security operations against various rebel groups and their suspected sympathisers, but also from economically-motivated forced evictions. On the other hand, the national authorities do generally acknowledge that, as a consequence of their military activities at least, people are forced from their homes and in need of protection and assistance. The acceptance of this responsibility has, however, mainly translated into the provision of immediate humanitarian assistance to the displaced with generally insufficient attention paid to the long-term reintegration needs. Also, no concrete steps have been taken to set up a national body to deal with the issue of internal displacement or establish appropriate institutional structures at all levels of the government, including the designation of clear IDP focal points (PCHR, 2006, p. 16). Further, the government has so far not developed specific IDP policies and laws.

Gaps in assistance and shortcomings resulting from a lack of capacity of national and local institutions

The Philippine government has most of the time acknowledge its responsibility vis-à-vis IDPs and has assisted them through the various stages of displacement. It has done so mainly through the National Disaster Coordinating Council, which coordinates the actions of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Office of Civil Defence, the [National Red Cross](#) and local governments. At the provincial level, relief efforts are being coordinated by the provincial office of the Dept of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and at the local level by the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO). The Local Government Units (LGUs) generally facilitate and coordinate the response to IDPs and formulate Disaster Management Plans with the active participation of the Municipal Disaster Coordinating Council (MDCC), composed of the different agencies and NGOs responding to the needs of the displaced.

As was noted by the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Internal Displacement when he visited the country in 2002, there are often gaps between the positive intentions and statements made by the government on behalf of the evacuees and their practical implementation on the ground (CHR, 3 February 2003, p.12).

These shortcomings reportedly resulted from a lack of capacity of national and local institutions to effectively deal with the scale of displacement and from a lack of funding, making local authorities, especially in the poorest areas of Mindanao, dependent on external aid to assist the displaced. The LGUs often have very limited means to deal with the scale of the displacements and have to rely on the assistance provided by local and international NGOs. It has been noted that in many cases the assistance provided was short-term, temporary and inadequate to meet the needs of the displaced (Notre Dame University & Commission on Population Region XII, January 2004, p. 48; CFSI, October 2003, pp.16-19). A lack of coordination and information sharing between key aid organisations such as NEDA, PNOC-EC, DENR, AFP and the LGUs was also reported. Poor coordination was reported between the central government and the regional autonomous government, LGUs and the regional line agencies (Janet M. Arnado & Mary Ann M. Arnado, 15 November 2004, pp. 10-11). According to ACH, there is a clear need for

improved disaster preparedness to deal with the consequences of armed conflict. (ACH, June 2004, p. 61).

Other limitations of the assistance efforts include the cyclical nature of war and displacement in Mindanao, which tend to render rehabilitation efforts unsuccessful, as well as the limited coverage of assistance programmes. Many evacuees for instance did not benefit from the government's core shelter assistance although their houses were destroyed by the fighting (Janet M. Arnado & Mary Ann M. Arnado, 15 November 2004, p. 75). There have also been reports of corruption and misuse of funds intended for the reconstruction of housing for the displaced (Sun Star 5 February 2004). It was also reported that core shelters built for the displaced remained empty because the displaced refused to resettle in structures built far away from their original places of residence and therefore away from their sources of livelihood. In addition, some were built near military detachments which they consider as security risks to them (Government of the Philippines, International Funding Agencies, Mindanao Stakeholders, Human Development Report, December 2005, p. 55).

The GOP-UNDP Programme on Rehabilitating IDPs and Communities in Southern Philippines (2004-2006)

Between October 2004 and January 2006, the government and the United Nations, through the EC-UNDP Trust Fund, implemented a resettlement and rehabilitation programme that benefited some 15 provinces among the most affected the 2003 fighting and population displacements. Out of the target of 10,000 IDP families, the IDP programme was able to provide relief and assistance to 25,726 families, of which 16,798 families were assisted to return home or resettled elsewhere (UNDP, 13 February 2006). The government's Mindanao Economic Development Council (MEDCo) was the overall implementing agency. Click [here](#) to see the coordination/management structure.

More details on this programme are available under the "International response" section.

Both parties committed to the return and rehabilitation of IDPs, but stalled peace process prevents implementation of guidelines

The set of guidelines for the cessation of hostilities agreed upon by the government and the MILF in August 2001 provides for the safe return of IDPs to villages of origin. In May 2002 the government and the MILF further consolidated the agreement by signing the "Implementing Guidelines on the Rehabilitation aspect of the Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001" (GRP-MILF 7 May 2002). In addition to the safe return of IDPs, the agreement provides for financial and technical assistance to the displaced to rebuild their houses and livelihoods and reparations awarded by the government for the properties lost and/or destroyed by the conflict. The May 2002 agreement also established the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) as the MILF's project implementing body tasked to "determine, lead and manage rehabilitation and development projects in the areas affected by the conflict." (Mindanews 30 March 2003). Since 2001 ceasefires have been repeatedly violated and fighting and displacements have prevented the full implementation of the guidelines.

Civil society organisations fill the assistance gap and actively advocate for the rights of IDPs

Local non-governmental organisations, volunteers and other representatives from civil society, including IDPs themselves, have traditionally played a critical role in assisting the internally displaced and in advocating for their rights in Mindanao, and elsewhere in the country.

Complementing the efforts of the government, many civil society bodies, including local NGOs and church organisations, participate in the relief and rehabilitation efforts, often filling the assistance gap. Many also actively advocate for the rights of IDPs. During 2006, non-government organizations involved in peace activities established the Task Force Tabang Maguindanao in an effort to bring attention to the plight of thousands of displaced who had not been able to receive humanitarian aid nine days after the hostilities broke out in Maguindanao province at the end of June 2006. A coalition of NGOs in partnership with the UN, donors and INGOs established in 2003 the [Mindanao Emergency Response Network](#) (MERN). This network, composed of 36 organisations, most of them local NGOs, intends to help consolidate the response to emergencies by providing emergency management training to its members and by delivering assistance to the displaced (PRWeb, 9 March 2004). MERN also been active in promoting the application of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as well as the SPHERE standards for humanitarian assistance.

In 2005, the Commission on Human Rights Philippines (CHRP) and the non-governmental organisation Balay organised a series of regional consultations among local stakeholders and IDP communities, which culminated in a First National Multi-Stakeholders Forum on IDPs held in December 2005. In addition to creating public awareness on the issue of internal displacement, one of the concrete outcomes of the conference was to gather support for a bill on internal displacement. Indeed, one year later, in December 2006, a draft bill known as the “Internal Displacement Act of 2006” ([see an advanced draft of the bill](#)) and which comprehensively addresses the needs and rights of IDPs in the different phases of displacement, was presented to the Philippines Congress.

Other initiatives from civil society include the Bantay Ceasefire, a network of grassroots organisations that has since January 2003 conducted investigative missions of armed incidents and has established early warning networks in the field capable of preventing small incidents from turning into larger confrontations. (Mindanews, 19 August 2005). Academic institutions are also involved in conducting assessments, research, training, monitoring, and evaluation. The universities of Mindanao State University, Notre Dame University, and Ateneo University have all established peace institutes for the training of future peace builders (Government of the Philippines, International Funding Agencies, Mindanao stakeholders, December 2005, p. 12). .

For more information on the role of the civil society in the peace process in Mindanao, see **"Forging Sustainable Peace in Mindanao: The Role of Civil Society", East-West Center Washington, 2005** [[Internet](#)]

International response

International response

The response of the international community is largely focused on the development and rehabilitation needs of the displaced as a vulnerable group within a larger population with needs living in Mindanao's conflict-affected areas. Far less attention is paid to their protection needs. Working closely with the government, UN agencies and donors, but also most international NGOs, agree that the development approach should be prioritised and prefer not to engage the government on sensitive human rights issues (JHA, February 2007, pp.22-24). The “war on terror” waged by the Philippine government with the active support of the United States and the political backing of some of the main donors, including Japan and Australia, also contributes to

shaping the agenda of some of the main international aid actors. Protection of civilians tends to be seen more as a peace and development issue rather than as a human rights one.

In the wake of the 1996 government-MLNF Peace Agreement, the international community established a Multi-Donor Programme (MDP) to assist with the realisation of agreement. Associating the Philippine government with the UN and donor countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands, the MDP consisted mainly of development-oriented programmes and peace-building activities. Throughout its successive phases, the MDP also included a humanitarian relief component to address the immediate needs of the civilian population affected by the conflict between the government and the MILF and in particular of the hundreds of thousands of people regularly forced to leave their homes to seek refuge in evacuation centres. As part of the fourth phase (2005-2009) of the MDP, a UNDP-EU funded IDP programme aimed at addressing the relief and rehabilitation needs of the displaced was implemented between October 2004 and January 2006 in Mindanao and provided assistance to more than 25,000 families. The programme, entitled **Rehabilitating Internally Displaced Persons and Communities in Southern Philippines** was implemented in some 15 provinces among the most affected the 2003 fighting and population displacements. Out of the target of 10,000 IDP families, the IDP programme was able to provide relief and assistance to 25,726 families, of which 16,798 families were assisted to return home or resettled elsewhere (UNDP, 13 February 2006). For more information on the achievements of the programme during 2005, see [GOP-UNDP IDP Programme: accomplishments as of 31 December 2005](#) (MEDCo, 31 December 2005) and [GOP-UNDP-EC Programme on Rehabilitating Internally Displaced Persons and Communities in Southern Philippines](#) (MEDCo, 31 October 2005).

Multi Donor Trust Fund for Mindanao (2004-2006)

While the political aspects of the ongoing peace talks between the government and the MILF need time to find a solution, it was seen as crucial that the peace talks be strengthened by a plan that would seek to comprehensively address the socio-economic concerns of MILF rebels and communities living in the areas most-affected by fighting, destruction and displacement in Mindanao. Following a request by the Philippine government, the World Bank agreed in 2004 to prepare the establishment of a Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Mindanao (MDTF) also known as the Peace Fund. The Peace Fund, which is spearheaded by the [World Bank](#), received support from the [European Commission \(EC\)](#), the [United Nations \(UNDP\)](#) and [Australia \(AusAID\)](#).

The main objective of the MDTF is the reconstruction and development of areas affected by conflict in the past years in Mindanao (comprising mainly Maguindanao, North Cotabato, Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, Basiland and Sulu). It is hoped that improving the socio-economic conditions in these areas will pave the way for successful peace talks and sustainable peace.

In order to identify priority reconstruction and development programs in conflict-affected communities, a [Joint Needs Assessment \(JNA\)](#) was conducted towards the end of 2004. In addition to better identifying the rehabilitation needs of MILF combatants, MILF communities and Indigenous People (IPs), the assessment was expected to provide more information on the location, profile and socio-economic needs of the displaced and affected communities. Previous social assessments of displaced populations (namely "[Social Assessment of conflict-affected areas in Mindanao](#)", WB, March 2003), conducted in 2002-2003, had shown the main needs to revolve around security, livelihood project and access to basic services and infrastructure. The JNA estimated the cost of the reconstruction and development needs at more than \$400 million (Government of the Philippines, International Funding Agencies, Mindanao Stakeholders, December 2005, p. xiv).

See the final reports of the JNA study:

Joint Needs Assessment for Reconstruction and Development of Conflict-Affected Areas in Mindanao. Integrative Report Volume I [[Internet](#)]

Joint Needs Assessment for Reconstruction and Development of Conflict-Affected Areas in Mindanao. Human Development Report. Volume II [[Internet](#)]

Joint Needs Assessment for Reconstruction and Development of Conflict-Affected Areas in Mindanao. Rural Development Report. Volume III [[Internet](#)]

The final establishment of the Multi-Donor Trust Fund is conditional upon a successful peace agreement between the Philippine government and the MILF rebels. In March 2006, the first phase of the World Bank-administered Mindanao Trust Fund (MTF) was launched (WB, 27 March 2006). This initial phase is aimed at establishing the organisational set-up and piloting a few test programmes. Phase 2 should see the full implementation of the MTF, but it will not start before a formal peace agreement is reached between the government and the MILF.

During 2006, the UN food agency, WFP, launched an US\$ 27 million food aid operation to assist up to 2 million people living in the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao. WFP hoped to be able to assist an estimated 120,000 vulnerable IDPs (WFP, March 2006, p.2).

Main donors involved in the assistance to IDPs

Japan, the United States, the European Commission and Australia are key donors for Mindanao. Japan and the United States do not contribute to the Multi Donor Trust Fund, as they have their own on-going programmes.

The United States, while offering financial and logistic support to the government's "war on terror", has on the other hand committed itself to help rehabilitate the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao. Japan co-chairs, together with UNDP, the Mindanao Donor's Group Meeting where donors exchange views and information on their development efforts in Mindanao. Donors are concerned with the following issues (1) smooth implementation of already-pledged assistance has to be the top priority; (2) the absorptive capacity of the Government of the Philippines and the peace and order situation in Mindanao hinder effective assistance. Japan has revised its ODA in late 2003 to set peace-building efforts with a view to preventing conflicts as a priority. Japan has committed 400 million dollars of development assistance to improve living conditions in Mindanao over the next five years. (AFP 26 February 2004). In May 2005, Japan announced that it had already completed around 40 per cent of its support package (USD 160 million out of USD 400 million) and had approved an additional USD 38 million (Government of the Philippines, 31 May 2005).

The European Commission (EC) has provided aid (€6.7 million) for displaced civilians in Mindanao since 2001, through an "Uprooted people" budget line. In addition, more than €2.2 million worth of assistance has been provided by the Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) and channelled through an NGO to support people displaced by armed conflict since 2000. In July 2004, the EC provided a grant from a minimum of € 500,000 to a maximum of € 1.2 million to non-profit making non-government organisations to help returning IDPs and those who have been displaced for a long period meet their immediate social and economic needs (EC 22 July 2004). In February 2007, the EC launched a € 12 million health programme to improve health service in the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao (EC, 15 February 2007).

Australia has been the largest donor to the first and second phases of the GOP-UN/Multi-Donor Programme (Government of the Philippines, 25 May 2005). In early February 2005, Australia announced that it would collaborate with the UN and commit new funds to a five-year Action for

[Conflict Transformation for Peace Programme \(ACT for Peace\)](#). The programme will contribute to the consolidation of peace and development in Mindanao through continued assistance to Peace and Development Communities (PDCs). (UNDP, 4 February 2005; UNDP, 31 May 2005). See also [AusAID Development Cooperation Strategy \(2004-2008\)](#).

Other international actors involved in the assistance and rehabilitation of the displaced in Mindanao include Japan, the United States and a number of international aid organisations including among others ICRC, Oxfam-GB, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Save the Children, VSO-UK, Accion contra el Hambre (ACF Spain), World Vision and Movimondo-Italy.

UN Country Team implements the cluster approach to assist the government in the wake of the December 2006 typhoon

Following the devastating three typhoons that hit the country between 25 September and 9 December 2006, killing a thousand people, destroying 180,000 homes and displacing a total of 440,000 people, the Philippine government requested the UN Resident Coordinator's Office to coordinate and facilitate international assistance in response to the emergency. On 15 December, the UN launched a US\$ 46 million Appeal to assist the government deal with the emergency. The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) decided to implement the cluster approach, which aims at improving the predictability, timeliness, and effectiveness of humanitarian response, by strengthening leadership and accountability in key sectors where gaps in humanitarian response have been identified.

References to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

Known references to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as of December 2006

- Reference to the Guiding Principles in the national legislation
- Other References to the Guiding Principles (in chronological order)
- Availability of the Guiding Principles in local languages
- Training on the Guiding Principles (in chronological order)

Reference to the Guiding Principles in the national legislation

Efforts by civil society to move forward the incorporation of the UNGPID in the national legislation (2000-2006):

There have been several efforts by the civil society, mainly NGOs, to push for the adoption of a resolution regarding the adoption of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement by the Philippine Congress as a first step towards their complete or partial incorporation into national legislation.

In December 2006, a Senate Bill No. 2548, entitled "An Act Improving Philippine Commitment to Human Rights Promotion and Protection by Providing the Necessary Mechanisms for the Prevention of the Occurrence and Protection from the Adverse Effects of Internal Displacement and for Other Purposes," or 'Internal Displacement Act of 2006' was filed by Senator Aquilino Q. Pimentel, Jr. [See [advanced draft text of the Bill](#)]

The bill was first in in November 2004, by [Congresswoman Rosales Etta](#) in the House of Representatives.

In February 2002, House Resolution No. 449 entitled "Resolution urging the Philippine Government to adopt in full the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as a concrete step in the promotion and protection of human rights in the country." was filled by Congressman Roseller Barinaga

A resolution with the same content and title was approved by the house of representatives on December 4, 2000. The original resolution was filed through Congressman Barinaga, Congresswoman Etta Rosales and Congressman Dilangalen.

Assessment of the use of the GPID in the Philippines by the UN Secretary General's Special Representative on Internal Displacement

CHR 3 February 2003, p. 16

"The Representative was impressed by the commitment of the authorities to make use of the Guiding Principles in the formulation of policies and legislation addressing the problem of internal displacement. He was also pleased to learn, during his meeting with the Speaker of the House of Representatives, that a number of resolutions had been submitted calling for the observance of international humanitarian law. In addition, he learned that several training courses on the Guiding Principles had been carried out, including for the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), and that organizations working in the affected areas were also promoting their application by insurgent groups. Various organs of the Government, such as the Department of Foreign Affairs, the DSWD, the Senate and the House of Representatives, all expressed interest in convening a national meeting on internal displacement and the Guiding Principles. In discussions with the authorities, the need to address the issues of displacement and migration through cooperation among the countries of the region was also stressed. In this connection, the Representative expressed his support for the initiative of the Government to consider the possibility of convening a regional seminar on good practices in addressing internal displacement."

Other References to the Guiding Principles (in chronological order)
Dissemination of the Guiding Principles

Balay, 30 October 2002

"On November 21, we shall be launching the Cebuano and Filipino translations of the Handbook on Applying the Guiding Principles in Davao city. The UN Information Office in Manila is our partner for this activity. We shall replicate this in Midsayap in Central Mindanao and in Zamboanga City.

Balay has initiated a signature campaign to call the Arroyo government to adopt the UNGPID. We have also obtained the resolutions of at least five conflict-affected villages in North Cotabato whose official have endorsed the UNGPID. These villages are part of the space for peace rehabilitation project where Balay is one of the partner-NGO. Our contribution is in raising awareness on IDPs rights, psychosocial healing of traumatized persons and families, livelihood and education support for survivors, youth development, disaster management training and peace advocacy.

Another resolution was also passed by the Provincial Government of Cotabato supporting a bill in Congress for the passage of a law indemnifying victims of forced displacement. Religious leaders, such as priests and bishops, community folks, educators, members of various NGOs,

peoples organizations (Lumads, Muslims and Christians) have supported our signature campaign. I have talked to Vice President Guingona and gave him a copy of UNGPID and a briefing paper on internal displacement. He said that he will look into the documents and study if the government could move for its adoption. A good news is that the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has referred to human rights and international humanitarian law as their framework for relief and rehabilitation of conflict-affected areas.

Balay has also initiated two regional consultation-workshops in Central Mindanao and Southern Mindanao in an attempt to come up with a proposed legislation and other advocacy actions for human rights protection of displaced families and communities. We are also behind filing of a resolution in the National Anti Poverty Commission for the government to adopt UNGPID."

Balay, 12 November 2001

"The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (UNGPID) is gaining attention and acceptance in strife-torn areas in Mindanao. Our institution, Balay, has produced a primer (Tagalog and English versions) on the phenomenon of displacement and the rights of those affected. They have been distributed in evacuation centers; some copies were sent to government authorities and NGOs. We also held workshops on IDPs rights among the evacuees, and developed a trainor's pool to reach out to more IDPs. Just recently, we were asked by the UNDP in Mindanao to provide the inputs on IDP's rights in the formulation of disaster management plans of local government units. A position paper of civil society organizations addressed to the peace panel of the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) was based on the UNGPID."

Other relevant documents:

Balay Module on Basic Human Rights Orientation Course and the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), Balay, 13 March 2001

Practical Guide in Promoting the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Balay, March 2001

Availability of the Guiding Principles in local languages

The Guiding Principles have been translated into three Philippine languages (Maguindanaon, Tagalog and Cebuano) by the Ecumenical Commission for Displaced Families and Communities (ECDFC), United Nations Information Center (UNIC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Source: ECDFC, UNIC and UNHCR

Date: 2001

Documents:

[UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in Maguindanaon](#), pdf 35 kb

[UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in Tagalog](#), pdf 40 kb

[UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in Cebuano](#), pdf 40 kb

Training on the Guiding Principles

NRC Training Workshops

In November 2004, the Global IDP Project of the Norwegian Refugee Council conducted a three-day training on the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement for the Human Rights Commission in Mindanao. The general objective of the workshop was to enhance the capacity of the CHRP key personnel in promoting and protecting the rights of IDPs, especially women and children, thereby strengthening the agency's role as a national human rights institution in advocating for IDPs' concerns.

A training-workshop on the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement was held in Quezon City, Philippines, from November 22 to 24, 1999. It was organized by the Ecumenical Commission for Displaced Families and Communities (ECDFC), in cooperation with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

Documents:

[Action Plan from the November 2004 workshop](#)

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