

***UNRAVELING STORIES OF HUMAN RIGHTS
VIOLATIONS IN LANA DEL SUR, LANA DEL
NORTE, NORTH COTABATO AND
MAGUINDANAO PROVINCES: A Report***

October 12-22, 2008

Organized by:
Task Force Civilian Protection (TFCP),
Alyansa Ng Mga Mamamayan Para Sa Karapatang
Pantao (AMKP)
Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM)
and Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates
(PAHRA)

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fact-finding Mission has been conceptualized in order to gather first-hand and authentic information on the incidents of war in Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, and North Cotabato provinces that were attributed to the failure of the Government of the Philippines to sign the MOA on Ancestral Domain with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) due to the adverse reactions of the people, especially the Christian and Indigenous Peoples communities. The mission also aims to document cases of human rights violations and atrocities committed by both the Armed Forces of the Philippines and its para-military forces, and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and to validate informations gathered beforehand.

Said mission was organized by SALAM, Inc - Task Force Civilian Protection (TFCP), the Alyansa Ng Mga Mamamayan Para Sa Karapatang Pantao (AMKP), the Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM) and the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA). There were fifty-two (52) participating organizations from the local and national levels, mostly members of the TFCP, AMKP, MPPM and PAHRA networks, represented by eighty (80) participants.

A press conference was held in Iligan City on October 12, 2008 to inform the general public of the fact-finding mission to be conducted and its projection for continuity activities. This was supported by TV and radio interviews both in Iligan City and Cotabato City. Another press conference was organized on October 21, 2008 to present the initial results of the fact-finding.

Simultaneous fact-finding activities were done in North Cotabato and Maguindanao areas, and in Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte and Iligan City areas affected by war. In each area, participants were divided into teams to facilitate speedy data gathering and validation. Buddy system was utilized during interviews and focus-group discussions among victims and survivors, and with the LGUs and concerned line agencies.

Furthermore, the fact-finding mission results shall serve as basis to determine possible actions to respond to the situation and to the needs of the affected communities. Long-term interventions of the service providers shall anchor on the results of the fact-finding.¹

The war has affected thousands of helpless civilians, thousands were displaced, and many were reportedly illegally arrested, tortured and then killed. AFP and MILF operations had likewise caused tremendous damages to homes, farms and properties, and the peoples' means of livelihood. The military established bases in schools and in civilian communities in Piagapo, Lanao del Sur and Mamasapano, Maguindanao and camped in Masjid/Mosques, houses and integrated themselves into the communities. Mortar shelling, presence of landmines and indiscriminate firing are continuously done by the AFP in Muslims areas. These are obvious examples of the human rights violations committed against the affected communities at large.

The war had furthermore resulted to psycho-emotional trauma of the victims, particularly women and children, had caused moral damages to victims of mutilation and arrest and detention and had interrupted the normal functioning of the community in terms of livelihood of farmers, closure of some business establishments, and schooling of children. This had also affected the trust and harmonious relationship between the Moro and Christians. Vigilante groups were revived in Christian areas due to failure of the AFP to protect the civilians.

In evacuation centers, the IDPs were not yet able to return to their respective home due to continuous militarization and inability of the government to secure the people and their means of livelihood and to take a serious effort in attaining a genuine peace for Mindanao. Outbreak of Sickness, malnutrition and death are already occurring in evacuation centers because of congestion, overcrowding, lack of food supply and flimsy shelters which offer no ample protection against the extreme heat during the day and cold at night. Furthermore, the lack of water, insufficient relief goods and medical assistance added to the deplorable situation of the IDPs.

¹ Annex A - Concept Paper and Rationale of the Fact-Finding Mission.

Among communities in Mamasapano, Maguindanao and in Christian communities in Lanao del Norte, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) committed numerous atrocities to the innocent civilians. The Christian communities affected appeal to the government to permanently detail military forces in the hinterlands of these areas to protect civilians from any possible MILF attack.

On the other hand, among Moro communities in Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao (including Mamasapano) and North Cotabato, human rights violations were extensively committed by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The Moro communities urge the government to stop the senseless militarization and to pull out the military forces in their areas in order for them to continue their normal and peaceful way of living.

Christians and Moro people alike are both calling for **justice for the innocent civilians!**

II. PARTICIPATION AND SCHEDULES

There were 80 individuals from forty-one (41) various organizations² from the civil society, NGOs, and media who joined the fact-finding mission, most of whom are members of Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM), Task Force Civilian Protection (TFCP), Alyansa Ng Mga Mamamayan Para Sa Karapatang Pantao (AMKP) and Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocate (PAHRA) network. These organizations were convened to discuss and plan for the said activity. Participants were divided into two (2) teams to facilitate speedy documentation covering areas in Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur, while FFM is also simultaneously conducted in Maguindanao and Cotabato provinces affected by both military and MILF armed operations.³ Other Lanao participants proceeded to Cotabato and Maguindanao. Press conferences were held before and after the actual fact-finding mission to inform the people about the mission to be conducted and its rationale, and to present the validated results of the fact-finding.

III. PRESS CONFERENCES

A press conference was held at JY Dimsum, Aguinaldo St., Iligan City on Sunday, October 12, 2008. The purpose of which is to inform the people, through the media about the Fact-Finding Mission that is to be conducted for one week that would start October 13, 2008 and end on October 16, 2008.⁴

The said Fact-Finding Mission aims to find out the real incident directly from the victims themselves in order to be able to inform the general public about the real situation in Lanao, Cotabato and Maguindanao Provinces and the violations to the rights of the victims. The FFM results shall be the basis for future actions for peace-building and human rights protection and legislative advocacy.⁵

Panelists came from various FFM participating organizations and those coming from the network of Task Force Civilian Protection (TFCP), the Alyansa Ng Mga Mamamayan Para Sa Karapatang Pantao (AMKP) and the Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM).

Workers from the tri-media attended the said conference. There were also participants from the civil society organizations and other concerned groups. There were interviews right after the conference among the panelists by ABS-CBN Northern Mindanao.

² Annex B.- List of participating organizations and representatives.

³ Annex C - Fact-Finding Mission Itinerary.

⁴ Annex D - First Press Conference Statement.

⁵ Annex E - Press Conference Proceedings.

There was also a corresponding radio interview of Valtimore Fenis of AMKP, Amabella Carumba of MPPM and Elizabeth M. Padilla of SALAM, Inc. at DXMS, Cotabato City on October 18, 2008.

Another Press Conference on October 22, 2008⁶ was organized in Iligan City to present the initial results of the mission.⁷ Panelists were the organizers and convenors of the FFM. Media personalities and other interested parties such as the NGOs and CSOs attended the conference.

IV. FINDINGS AND VALIDATION RESULTS

The methodologies used in data gathering and validation of initial data were focus group discussions (FGDs) and individual interviews with victims/survivors, their relatives, the local Barangay and Municipal officials, local officers of the national line agencies and the military and PNP.

Mamasapano, Maguindanao⁸

In an interview with the local officials of Mamasapano and some evacuees, it was learned that the conflict between the 75th Infantry Battalion of Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the 105th command of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) forces under Ameril Umbra Kato and some members of the 106th command of the same front started on August before the month of Ramadhan. The conflict was heightened in the second week of September in Sitio Manggapang, Barangay Manungkaling when three mortars were fired resulting to the destruction of the housing project in said Barangay.

On October 12, 2008, Sunday, the AFP entered Brgy. Tukanalipao. A bomb exploded at the road followed by strafing and air strikes from nine to ten o'clock in the morning. Five planes were seen dropping bombs. Civilians were trapped in the area with only one exit available at Libutan, Mamasapano. Life was spared but a farm animal particularly a water buffalo owned by Ismael Aliman was hit and killed by a bomb from an airplane. On the same day, a motor boat engine Lantop 13 owned by Ibrahim Aliman of Brgy. Pimbalakan was looted by unidentified person/s in Brgy. Tukanalipao when he left the boat due to fear of strafing and bombing.

The latest MILF and AFP encounter was on October 14, 2008 in Barangay Tukanalipao. Mortar shelling started at four o'clock in the afternoon and ended at quarter to six o'clock in the afternoon. It started when a soldier stepped on a landmine, causing it to explode. It caused panic among other soldiers who indiscriminately fired their guns thinking that the explosion was from the enemy resulting to death of one person and a water buffalo, burning of the house of a certain Hadja Sumina Gaka, and massive evacuation of the community. In fact, even before the shelling incident, the Barangay Captain of Tukanalipao ordered evacuation of his constituents. This merely implied that local executives already had a hint of the tremors that would take place in Mamasapano.

Military forces occupied some critical areas and established its 75th Infantry Battalion base in Mamasapano High School, a few meters from the main road, the municipal hall and from the civilian homes. Two mortar cannons were even found within the vicinity of the aforementioned school. Meanwhile, in Brgy. Tuka, a few meters from the evacuation center and integrating with the civilian populace is the 61st Reconnaissance Company outpost. The municipality itself is highly militarized with the 75th, 68th, and 64th Infantry battalions as well as the Reconnaissance military group, local police and auxiliaries, standing guard. The AFP declared that its military operations in these areas were legitimate. This suspended all normal activities of the municipality.

⁶ Annex F - Second Press Conference Statement.

⁷ Annex G - Second Press Conference Proceedings.

⁸ Annex H- Documentation of interviews and FGDs conducted with the victims and local government officials in Maguindanao

A water tank and the walls and roof of the house of the Mayor of Mamasapano including the roof of the grandstand of the Mamasapano High School were hit and destroyed by mortars of the military. Traces of pit where the mortar landed was also found at the back of the grandstand.

Presence of the military forces under the 75th Infantry Battalion and local police were felt while the ocular inspection was being done.

As of the date of the interview, some schools in Mamasapano, namely, Linantangan Elementary School, Lusay Elementary school, Dugengen Elementary School and Mamasapano High School had suspended their classes. They were either in the conflict zones or used as evacuation areas or occupied by the AFP forces and used as their base.

Datu Saudi and Datu Piang, Maguindanao

Aerial bombings were visible and audible from the highway while the team was having lunch along the highway of Brgy Dapiawan, Datu Saudi.

1st Lt. Stuart Turaray of the Delta Company, 38th Infantry Battalion, Pagaten II Detachment in Datu Saudi, Maguindanao permitted the team to inspect the burned and destructed houses lined up after the detachment. There were more than twenty houses along the highway which had been destroyed and burned. Some had been really burned down to ashes with only the posts remained. The health center that was obviously ransacked and used as a defensive base because there was a string tied around it with bottles and cans to sound off if someone approaches. The presence of the military is very obvious given the fact that within just 5-7 meters from the 1st detachment is another detachment in the Barangay hall and adjacent to the mosque. Members of the team even saw a soldier walking in and out of the mosque which implies that somehow somehow, they are using the mosque in whatever purpose this may serve them. A military base was also established near the Sta. Teresita Parish in Datu Piang, Maguindanao.

In an effort to pay courtesy to the local chief executive of Datu Piang, the team was brought by their local contact to a place where the Mayor was. Believing that the team was guided towards the Municipal Hall, the team was brought to a place where the municipal mayor and some of the municipal officials were mahjong on an office hour and in a working day. He just sent his DSWD officer to accompany the team to the municipal hall to meet with the municipal administrator who would answer the queries of the team.

The team along with the DSWD officer of Datu Piang proceeded to the municipal hall, passing along the way some evacuees who had established their temporary shelters on the side of the roads. The municipal administrator who is also the coordinator for the Internally-Displaced Persons (IDPs) met the team after a few minutes. He shared that the conflict between the MILF and the AFP started in Dapiawan on August 21, 2008 and then escalated months after. This situation brought about a multitude of both military personnel and IDPs from the surrounding villages and communities. Military forces occupying the Datu Piang and the nearby Datu Saudi are the 54th Infantry Battalion in Upper Salbo(Datu Saudi) and 64th Infantry Battalion in Gumbay as well as the newly dispersed troops, Reconnaissance military group of the 62nd infantry Battalion.

Asked if the LGU ever tried to influence the GRP and MILF to stop the ongoing conflict and go back to the negotiating table, the municipal administrator merely said that the greatest concern of the LGU of Datu Piang is "*how to give solution to the needs of the IDPs*" However, there were efforts on the part of the Municipal Council to call for a cessation of hostilities thru a resolution and there had been initiatives to use the radio and the television media projection to send their messages to both parties. He also shared that on October 23, 2008 there will be a meeting in Datu Piang with high public officials to talk about the situation.

As to the rehabilitation of the IDPs, the LGU of Datu Piang had tried asking the military for the access of civilians to their left-behind communities but the latter could not assure security because there was no command from the higher echelons of military power to allow such access.

Thus, the LGU of Datu Piang had planned to start a rehabilitation program for the IDPs while they are still not allowed to go back to their communities. They also seek the help of the DSWD Secretary for the construction of bunkers for the IDPs to transfer to as the center of the municipality have already become very congested. The threat of an outbreak of disease has become imminent. The putting up of bunkers will also allow for classrooms to be used again for classes for children. He also shared that the MPDC and municipal engineers are coming up with a plan of rehabilitating communities through infrastructures. Meanwhile, the municipal agriculture officer is surveying the extent of damaged crops to be the basis of rehabilitation plan for the damaged livelihood of the evacuees who mostly depend on agriculture as their source of economic sustainability.

After which, the team proceed to the municipal plaza which hosts a multitude of evacuees to have an ocular view of the situation of the IDPs as well as talk to them in person. Illnesses and deaths were occurring in the evacuation centers due to lack of food and nutrition, water and sanitation. The IDPs were so congested in the evacuation areas.

In an interview with the Municipal Health Officer, Dr. Elizabeth Samama, she expressed concern of the lengthened stay at the evacuation center of the IDPs especially for those coming from Aleosan and Midsayap. A relocation site of the evacuees should be considered by the municipality the soonest possible time. An outbreak of several diseases has already been recorded by their office which resulted to the deaths of a number of evacuees: women, children and the elderly. At the time of interview, two children beset with measles were brought to their office. One of the kids whose elder brother already died of measles a few days ago is also on the same route. In fact, the next day, two kids were reported to die at the evacuation center due to measles.

These are some of the glaring situation of the IDPs in Maguindanao. Also depicted were pictures of victims of bombs shelling targeted at the evacuation center in Maguindanao.

A.

North Cotabato

At exactly 9:00 in the morning, on October 16, 2008 the team, composed of 13 individual representatives from different NGOs, GO, Academe and other institutions went to the extension office of the Provincial Capitol to pay courtesy call to the Mayor of Aleosan, North Cotabato. They have spoken with Hon Loreto V. Cabaya, the Municipal Mayor of Aleosan, North Cotabato.

When asked if it's safe for the team to visit the affected communities. Mayor Cabaya said that it is safe except Barangay Tubac because MILF harassed the detachment of Tubac at around 6:00 in the morning of the same day. He shared that until now, barangay officials of affected barangays in Aleosan are not yet in their areas. They will only visit the Municipal Office to claim their IRA.

When asked if he's in favor of arming of civilians. Mayor said that he is in favor of arming civilians as long as there is control, "*hindi lahat ng civilians kayang i-secure ng military that's why we're arming ourselves*". The mayor confirmed that even civilians that are not member of CVO armed themselves. He said that before they distribute the weapons, CVOs undergone the process of trainings before holding arms and later turning this armed CVOs into Police Auxiliary. He added that each barangays are allowed to have a maximum of 6 armed CVOs.

When asked about his opinion of the on-going military operation, he answered "*I am in favor of the continued military operation dahil wala ng ibang solution*" and added "*you have to respect our rights*".

When asked what type of assistance they have provided to the IDPs, Mayor said that there is on-going assistance provided to the IDPs that are in Barangay Dualing.

According to the Mayor of Aleosan, the military that were detailed in their area are from 40th IB.

The team then went to the respective barangays to gather information from the concerned respondents.

The fighting between the MILF troops and the military started on June 2008 in areas part of North Cotabato, according to Hon. Kadato Taya, Barangay Captain of Barangay Tapodoc, Aleosan, North Cotabato. (*Barangay Tapodoc, is the only barangay part of Aleosan which were surrounded by barangays that are part of Pikit, North Cotabato, most of the population here are majority Muslims and only 20 families were Christians*). The clashed continue on August 8, 2008 at 5:00 in the morning until the following day and on noon time of August 10, the MILF withdrew, there were 5 houses hit by 105 and other artillery. Kadato Taya said that he was not aware that there's an encounter between the two troops (MILF & AFP). He told the Fact Finding team that the first troops to come in are the MILF under the command of Commander Umbra Kato. He said he have spoken to the troops and informed them that there were no military in the area and appealed to them to withdraw but they refuse to leave until the following day. The barangay chairman told them if they will not withdraw, he will request all his constituents to leave and vacate the area. Residents followed the request of their barangay captain, leave the area and went to Pikit, North Cotabato. According to the barangay chairman there were an estimated number of 250 MILF who came in their place.

When asked about the total population if his barangay, he told the team that there are a total of 345 households. He confirmed that there were no civilians caught in the crossfire because the residents left before the hostilities started.

When asked what kind of assistance did they received, Kadato Taya said that on August 12, 2008, Mayor Loreto Cabaya, Jr. called Mr. Taya in the his office to return to their the barangay and to instruct his constituents that it is safe to go back to their respective places. He added that after residents have returned to their area there were some belongings that remained in place and some were missing, they cannot identify who are the suspects. He said that the Provincial Office provided an initial assistance of Php 5,000.00 to those totally damaged houses and Php 2,000.00 for partially damaged houses while some NGOs distributed food assistance. He admitted that until now, there were residents that do not wish to go back and went to other areas like Pikit and Maguindanao.

When asked if his CVOs have guns, he told the team that the Province have distributed 7 guns for Barangay Tapodoc.

When asked if he favor of military presence in the area: He said that it is okay if there are military in the area for the protection of civilians as long as they stay in higher grounds and not close to them.

When asked if there were MILF members in his community. He confirmed that there were MILF members living in his barangay before but they already transferred to other area and those are not under the command of Umbra Kato. He told the team that there is no problem in terms of Muslim-Christian relationship in his area.

According to Mr. Raymund "Rene" Calibayan, Teacher In-charge, Tapodoc Elementary School the number of students have decreased after the incident, out of 100%, only 25% of children remained. He asked the team to help lobby to the provincial or municipal LGUs to make a resolution declaring that it is already safe to go back to school.

Barangay Captain of Barangay Bagolibas, Aleosan, North Cotabato also shared that that there was an ambush of 1 military personnel in Brgys. Tubac at 6:00 in the morning of the same day the interview was done. The name of ambushed victim was Sgt. Benedicto of 40th IB AFP.

When asked how was the situation in the area, he said it is okay and back to normal. He told the team that the displacements of IDP started on June 14, 2008 when a group of farmer went to the rice field to sow seeds saw the presence of armed groups close to the farm. The following day, the farmers (men and women) were strafed by MILF troops. He added that the farmers reported to the police and made a blotter of the incident. There were no casualties reported during the strafing. Barangay Captain himself told the team that his men (CVOs) were the one who fight the estimated 100 MILF (in uniform and other wears half uniform and half civilians with tubao on their neck) because they have arms. He said that before the incident, there was information that MILF under commander Umbra Kato will attack. After the incident in his barangay, the attack follows in Barangay Rangaban. He shared that MILF member conveyed through hand held radio saying "*Kauban mo ni Piñol, pauli mo sa Iloilo kay amo ang Mindanao*" and added that "*kon dili pirmahan ang MOA walay kalinaw sa Mindanao*". He said they were talking Cebuano, tagalog and Maguindanao language. He said that for three (3) months, CVOs kept an eye on the area, they were thankful because there were military deployed in the area. He added that during the time of encounter, they called for military and police assistance and right away they responded, there were 4 wounded and 1 died from the military during the encounter. He added that there were also casualties from the MILF but they cannot estimate as to how many. He added that Second week of July when the military started bombing the area using the OV10 plane where there are sightings of MILF.

Hon. Manuel M. Rabara, DDM. Municipal Mayor of Midsayap, North Cotabato also shared during the interview that the MLGU is trying to establish a good working relationship with the Muslims in the area. He said that they want Muslim brothers to feel that government is for everybody.

When asked what is his opinion about BJE. He said that their desire to have their own government is okay but the problem there is the vested interest of the few. He then continued that they have repaired the farm-to-market road in Muslim communities so they realized that there is government.

When asked when did the harassment started. On June 27, 2008 harassment started but before that MILF troops were sighted passing these detachments in the areas but they were not stopped because of the respect for peace process.

When asked what is his recommendation. He strongly suggested that they should go back to a negotiating table but needs to consult the local. He then shared that North Cotabato organized a Peace Commission to talk with MILF brothers but that was only local. He also added that MILF members must follow orders from the leadership because in his observation, MILF have no control of their people.

When asked about the Muslim-Christian relationship in the area. He said that 15% of the population is Muslim and added that the relationship with them is very harmonious and admitted that after the harassment there had been changed especially when they heard the revival of ILAGA, they are afraid.

Judy Badua, 34 years old, married with 4 children and a resident of Purok 2, Barangay Rangaban, Midsayap North Cotabato on July 27, 2008 armed groups in uniform came to the area and instructed every resident to go out from their houses, the residents from Purok 1 and Purok 2 was forced to go out because if they will not go out, they will be shot. They were held near the rice field for 1 hour and ordered not to make any noise.

When asked to describe the type of weapons that armed groups were holding. She said that they were holding long arms and they were wearing camouflage. She told the team that her 5 year old son was in high fever right after the incident, he was traumatized. Every time he hears blast,

he is shaking and then cries. *(The team observed the child's reaction during the time when one member of the team about to take photo of him, he ran inside the house and never came out).* She said that houses were searched by the MILF to look for guns but they found nothing, She also told the team that her sari-sari store were ransacked by the MILF and took the money worth 2,000.00 in the cash box plus 2 loader cell phones with 1,000 loads each. She also told the team that she was almost raped by 1 member of MILF. She narrated that one member of MILF asked for cell phone load, as she entered the room where the cell phone is, she was grabbed closed to the guy (MILF), luckily she was able to hold the door knob and run away from the house.

After June 27, 2008, Joint Monitoring Action Team (JMAT) installed a detachment in Barangay Rangaban but the LGUs respect their (MILF) existence in the area. Christian dominated areas in Barangay Rangaban were being harassed by MILF troops and did malicious acts to some women, strapping and hostage of civilians for more than an hour. Because the military cannot move due to the ceasefire agreement, it was the CVOs who fight to the MILF troops. He added that The DILG Sec. Germogenes Esperon gives an ultimatum to the MILF to withdraw within 24 hrs. and was extended for 28 hours before the military operation started. During the operation, MILF troops from Upper Lapas positioned in the area, burned the chapel and destroyed the images of saints that is why the community reacted and fight back.

When asked if his in favor of arming civilians. He said he is in favor of arming civilians as long as with the accordance of the law. Sec Puno is distributing arms for Police Auxiliary but it was not in his area although he is in favor for CVOs to become Police Auxiliary. He added that each barangays allowed having 25 trained PA. Confirmed by Mayor Rabara that civilians in the affected areas brought their own arms, he added that people their gives priorities of acquiring an arms for their protection rather than having their houses repaired.

When asked if these CVOs were trained on how to use guns. He said that their CVOs were trained. *(During the interview, Mayor Rabara showed to the team the Armed Civilians Memorandum of Receipt of Equipment, including in the memorandum is the type of arms they have received).*

When asked if his in favor of the continued military operations. He said "Palagay ko, hindi na ipagpatuloy. Tama na yon". He added that there were already CVO detachments installed in these areas. He then added "ayaw ko na ng indiscriminate firing dahil narinig ko ang civilians na umiiyak at ayaw ko non. Kahit pa Muslim community yon, civilians pa rin sila". In Barangay Rangaban, there was a fire back to the military from that area. He then added that he heard civilians cried as the Barangay Captain called for help to stop the firing. There were no reported casualties during the incident.

Lapayan, Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte⁹

Before the August 18, 2008 attack

Before the attack, the relationship of the Muslims and Christians in Lapayan was very smooth and harmonious. However, after the issue on the failure of the Government of the Philippines to sign the MOA-AD that led to several attacks in Cotabato and Maguindanao areas by the MILF, intelligence and text information spread so quickly around the area on the possible attack by the MILF. The information came out since June, 2008. Even on August 17, hearsay regarding the attack rapidly spread in the area. It was also noticed by residents that a few days before the attack on August 18, Moro residents already evacuated from the place, an indicator of possible MILF attack. Despite hearing this information, they stayed in the area because they were not prepared

⁹ Annex I - Documentation of interviews and FGDs conducted with the victims and local government officials in Lapayan, Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte.

to evacuate and they relied on the promise of the military (PA) and CVO-SCAA counterparts to support them whenever there would be MILF attack.

On the night of August 17, 2008, the Barangay Captain already asked for military assistance but the military only replied that "there is no MILF. If you want to sleep close your eyes!", and then left.

The military assigned in Lapayan, Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte, which is the 32nd IB led by Capt. Bahea and under the command of GX7 PA Captain Maamo Alonto, was only supervising the CVO's SCAA in the areas of Lapayan and Tacub, all of Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte. On the same night, the military patrolled over our area and at 11:00 pm, they left for Maigo. The people believed that there were military assigned in the area as what Capt. Jabinez promised. But the military were only stationed in Napo.

▪ August 18, 2008

It was around 4:00 to 4:30 am when the very first and loud gun fires were heard in Lapayan followed by firings in Tacub. There were about 100 men or more MILFs passing through the highway who were responsible for the firings. They spoke in Tagalog but it was very clear that their intonations were that of Maranaos.

Houses were burned, properties damaged and looted, civilians were held hostage, many were tortured, hacked and mutilated resulting to death of many persons. Civilians first gathered in the auditorium but a Maranao woman told them to leave the place since the MILF men were approaching. They were forced to evacuate to the coastal areas bringing with them nothing. Majority proceeded to Iligan City through motorboats and stayed the evacuation centers for several days. Many have already returned to the area at the time the fact-finding mission was conducted but there are also those who really transferred to other places.

During the attack of the MILF-BIAF, 32nd IB was not present in the area, except the CAFGUs and CVOs-SCAA. There was no counter action because they CVOs/CAFGUs were briefed by the military officers to wait for an order before they would make an action. The PNP officers assigned in the detachment in Lapayan did not also make any counter action because they were outnumbered and instead removed their uniforms and ran to the shore with the civilians. There was a gap of more than 5 hours before they responded to the crisis situation. The military only came around between 9:00 to 9:30 am. when there was no more MILF, to rescue wounded civilians and bring them to hospitals in Iligan, and to retrieve dead bodies and also bring them to the funeral homes.

According to the respondents/participants of the interview and FGDs, there was a total of sixteen (16) persons killed, some suffered from hacking before they were shot to death. There were also eight (8) persons who suffered multiple hacking/wounded, the left ear of one of whom was mutilated. Eleven (11) persons were held as hostages and two (2) others were forcibly taken in exchange of P50,000.00 cash and one (1) M16 armalite rifle. Twenty-two (22) houses including a total of P5,000.00 cash. Grocery items/goods in store worth P50,000.00, P45,000.00 cash, 5 pairs of branded shoes and 1 cell phone were also looted. Other properties lost were unaccounted.

Tacub, Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte¹⁰

Before August 18, 2008

Before the incident, the relationship of Muslim and Christian in the area was harmonious. There were several intermarriages between Muslims and Christians in the area.

¹⁰ Annex J - Documentation of interviews and FGDs conducted with the victims and local government officials in Tacub, Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte.

There were already warnings that the MILF would attack if the government would suspend the signing of MOA-AD. Upon hearing the information, the MDCC already made some preparations.

August 18, 2008

Between 4:30 - 5:00 am, loud gun shots were heard. There was an estimated number of 600 MILF-BIAF who attacked the area. They were believed to be Maranaos because they spoke Tagalog but had Maranao intonations. According to some respondents, some spoke in Bisaya. There are those who were mestizo-looking and were wearing earrings.

The municipality requested for military back up to protect the first defense. According to the military, in 10-15 minutes they would respond but they did not arrive. There were standby military armored car beside the municipal hall but they chose to guard the municipal hall. The community noticed that the military only observed the incident and did not respond to protect the civilians. Accordingly to the respondents, the military assigned in the area belongs to the 32nd IB PA, 1st Inf. Tabak Division.

There came a military reinforcement but they came too late on the same day at about 9:00 am. The information about the MILF attack was already reported to the military but they wouldn't respond because there is no order yet, even if there were already dead. Present in the detachment was the 43rd IB who just arrived to substitute to the 32nd IB who replied "there was no order." The MILF was not yet far that time, they could have reached the MILF. The 43rd IB is now transferred to Barangay Bagong Bayan, Kauswagan.

Before the military came, the civilians fought back resulting to on-the-spot death of five (5). If the civilians did not fight back, many more houses might have been burned by the MILF. There were fifteen (15) people who were held hostage including the family of the Barangay Captain.

The MILF committed many atrocities, ranging from killings, serious physical injuries, burning of houses, and looting of cash and properties, against the helpless Christian civilians.

The people ran to the shore and escaped to Iligan City via motorboats. Majority brought nothing with them. They were then taken to the evacuation centers.

A total of twenty-one (21) civilians were killed and another one (1) died of cardiac arrest during the attack, four (4) were wounded and twenty-one (21) persons were held hostage (six farm workers were forcibly abducted, one of which died while he was fleeing and fifteen (15) others were held hostage inside their house). There were also a total of twenty-one (21) houses burned affecting forty-seven (47) families. The total number of evacuees in Tacub reached to more than seven hundred (700) families. Several properties such as forty (40) large cattle, mostly carabaos, 1 digicam, 4 cell phones, jewelries and P40,000.00 cash were looted.

Information spread that the MILF guides were only residents of Tacub. Although their faces were covered, residents could identify them because of their built and ways. The MILF members were spotted at the house of these persons on the night of August 17, 2008 with so many hanging rice (puso). In the morning of August 18, the same men were seen together with the armed men but their faces were still covered. One was captured but the other one was able to escape.

Few days after the attack, Oscar Macalonto, representative and husband of Barangay Captain of Delabayan, who attended the POC meeting, was shot and killed. The suspect was unidentified who wore only sleeveless shirt.

Kolambugan, Lanao del Norte¹¹

Prior to August 18, 2008

Since June 2008, an armed group allegedly called “Tonda Force” was already operating in the hinterlands of Kulasihan, San Roque and Palao, Kolambugan. This group was responsible for hostage-taking while looting the cash, properties and livestock, multiple cases of robbery and killing of civilians.

On June 17, 2008, there were about thirteen (13) heavily armed members “Tonda Force” that came and took with them a total of 26 hostages, including children, from Kulasihan up to San Roque and Palao while the victims were forced to tug their own livestock towards the mountainous area. They took with them everyone they passed by as they went up to the mountains until they reach Balintad, Munai. The victims just followed the order of the armed group, otherwise they would be killed. They were released late in the afternoon of the same day and were fetched by the government truck late that night. A total of 1 carabao, 9 horses, cassette, cellphones, footwears, pants, belts, and P2,000.00 cash were taken from the civilians.

LGU’s actions prior to August 18, 2008

According to Mayor Lumaque, there were no known incidents of rido/conflicts between the Maranaos and Christians. In fact, there were agreements between the Maranaos and Christians to protect each other but because of the incident that agreement was not carried out.

On July 31, 2008, MPOC meeting was called by the Mayor. Assurance was obtained from the 32nd IB Commander Col. Respicio that the military would always make themselves available in times of insurgency and emergency.

Two weeks before the attack, there was already sightings of armed men. Right after the Ramadhan, the Mayor asked the military about strength of the Armed Forces detailed in the area but it seemed that their response was not so reliable. When asked about the MILF force of about 1,500, the military promised to double the number.

On August 12, 2008, another MPOC meeting was held. According to intelligence report (based on sightings and information by informers), target of MILF attack is Maigo and not Kolambugan. However, there was no laxity on the part of the LGU since it immediately called for series of meetings with local officials when the information came out.

On August 15, 2008, there was an NDCC meeting attended by all Purok Presidents, the LGU and the military. One of the agenda was the peace and order situation of Kolambugan. The agenda also included information to the Purok officials about intelligence report that there were sightings of armed men in some areas in Kolambugan, but particular areas were not identified. During the meeting the military gave precautions to the civilians where to evacuate. They also gave their contact numbers and directed them to call Col. Ibrahim, the CO, whenever necessary. The military gave full assurance to reinforce and protect the civilians in case something happens. The information was not spread to people because events quickly happen one after another. The same day, Friday, there were also text messages that circulated informing those who were able to receive that there were sightings of armed men. Both the information given during the meeting and those from text messages were not given attention by the people.

A day before the attack, that was Sunday, August 17, 2008, at around 3:00-4:00 pm, it was notable that military troops moved out of the area. On the night of the same day, at around 9:00 pm, a

¹¹ Annex K - Documentation of interviews and FGDs conducted with the victims and local government officials in Kolambugan, Lanao del Norte.

Maranao approached CVO Joseph Ridao and the only police in the check point, a certain Omar, to give positive information that attack could not anymore be prevented. The MILFs are about to go down to Kolambugan but the two (CVO and police) were confused whether or not to believe the information. The informant told them to guard the market because it is the target of the attack. At 11 pm, armed men positioned at the market were sighted.

August 18, 2008

In Poblacion Kolambugan, at around 12:00 am, it was observed that there were only two (2) CVOs, two (2) policemen and one (1) Barangay Tanod, assigned at the checkpoint.

Starting around 3:30 am, simultaneous attacks were undertaken by the MILF in Barangays Pantar and Kulasihan, Kolambugan. Pantar is the route from Tangkal to Kolambugan and is located in the southern portion of the municipality while Kulasihan is the boundary of Kolambugan on the north to Maigo.

In Kulasihan, according to Barangay Captain Marlon Genobaten, at around 3:30 am, he received a text message informing him that the MILF is going to attack the area. At around 3:45 am, there was aloud firing followed by volume fires of different types of firearms which lasted for about 10 minutes. At 4:00 am, there was halt to the firing to give respect to the "bang." After the "sambayang," there was a loud "Allahu Akhbar!" which manifested a call to war. A PNP detachment located at the national highway was first attacked. Between 5:00 - 6:00 am, there was already an armed confrontation between the MILF, whose number was estimated to reach 100 persons, and the government forces, composed of 18 armies from the 32nd Brigade and 8 from the PNP. At 6:00 am, military reinforcement from Maigo came. The armed confrontation lasted until 8:00 in the morning. People were scampered anywhere and evacuated to the riverside. Some proceeded to Sigapud, to Ozamis, etc. The MILF withdrew taking with them the dead bodies of their companions upward to the mountains and believed to join forces of those who attacked Pantar and Poblacion. There were firearms and live ammunitions left by the group at the location where they positioned during the encounter. People added that when asked by the MILF where the "Christian" Barangay Captain was, the Maranao residents answered that the Brgy. Capt. has already left but he was made to wear "tutob" so that he could be identified as a Maranao. Furthermore, the MILF asked for gasoline but the Maranao residents refused to give them food and gasoline that prevented possible burning of houses of the Christian residents.

There are 156 families, mostly from Purok 2, affected by the attack. The houses of a police and that of his in-laws were ransacked, their food, radio and cell phones were taken. According to the evacuees, during the encounter, there were 3 MILF members killed on-the-spot while 1 military was wounded. No casualty among the civilians was reported. There were also 4 persons who just passed by the highway who were also killed by the MILF. According to the residents, the MILF stopped the victims' vehicle and fired at them.

Simultaneously, in Pantar, past 4:00 am when the MILF, under the Commander Bravo and believed to come from Tangkal, arrived at Purok 1. Residents were awakened by the heavy footsteps of the armed men. They started firing aimlessly and took hostages from Purok 1. Doors of houses were destroyed, all belongings (clothes, money, cell phones, etc.) were taken and residents were forced to go out of their houses. After that, houses were burned and properties were destroyed. The residents were first gathered in front of the house of Rissa Sechoco and then made to walk down to Poblacion. When they were about to go down from the hilly portion of the road, the MILF fired at all of them. Two (2) persons however survived.

It should be noted that there were 3 groups of MILF who came. The first 2 groups were good but the 3rd group was very cruel. Most of them wore bonnet masks. It was believed that the cruel group are members of the "Tonda Force" who joined and guided the MILF because the latter are not familiar with the place.

In Poblacion, at around 4:00 am, many vehicles were stranded because Kulasihan was attacked first. Around 4:30 am, there were roughly 300 to 400 MILF members who were in Pantar, had already reached the Poblacion, the number do not include those present in the hinterland. The first firing was simultaneous with the Muslim's "bang" at the mosque. They scattered themselves throughout the area. A CAFGU was killed and his house burned. The people were surprised because they did not expect that Kolambugan would be attacked by the MILF because it is the market of the hinterland municipalities like Tangkal. Although they were wearing masks, it was accordingly observed that the MILF forces were mostly young.

At 5:00 am, volume fires were heard for about 15 minutes. The MILF continued to other parts of Poblacion and burned the houses and schools there and fired their weapons. In one of the interviews in Kolambugan, the respondent disclosed that *"Nakita gyud namo ang pag-ambush nila ni Col. Benetiz . Apan nakasukol pa si Col. Benetiz uban sa duha (2) niya ka kauban ug napatay nila ang upat (4) ka sakop sa MILF nga naka-plastar sa may kakahoyan duol sa Forestry. Apan tungod sa kadaghan sa nibalos sa pagpabuto sa mga sakop sa MILF, napatay ra gihapon si Col. Benetiz ug usa niya ka kauban."* (We really saw them ambushed Col Benitez and his two (2) men at the woody area near the Forestry. But because of the huge number of the MILF, Col Benitez and one (1) of his men were killed.)

Hostage taking also started that time. Forty (40) persons were held in the house of Veneranda Uy. They were ordered to cook for the MILF and wash their clothes and shoes. The hostages were not able to call for help because they were ordered to put all their cell phones off. Between 5:00 - 7:00 am, there were calls for military reinforcement within the duration but they did not respond because accordingly there was no order for them. At around 7:00 am, there were seventy-two (72) persons from the Poblacion who were also held hostage. Two (2) PNP asked for assistance from Col. Ibrahim of 913rd battalion and Chief Roxas, the military did not reinforce, the first reason, there was no order, the second reason was that they could not engage in the area because there were hostages. At about 9:00 am, succeeding calls to the military were made but still no reinforcement was sent. Accordingly, during the heist, the military only stood by in Mukas. At around 11:00 am, the MILF withdrew from the area tracking their way to Tangkal and bringing along with them the 72 hostages, including children, who were tied and were forced to walk and help carry the looted properties/goods (cell phones, canned goods, etc.) placed in sacks. Intense hunger and thirst were felt by the victims while walking under the heat of the sun without taking any breakfast nor lunch. Not all MILF members have weapons. Many were bringing bolos - they were assigned to carry the loot to tug the animals (cows, carabaos and goats). One MILF member pronounced in Tagalog dialect, *"pasensya na kayo pero hindi namin kayo papatayin, ang gobyerno ang may kasalanan dahil hindi nila ibinigay ang hiling naming Bangsa Moro para sa Mindanao."* (We're very sorry, we will not kill you, it is the government's fault because they did not give what we are asking, that is, the Bangsamoro for Mindanao). Moreover, the respondents relayed that the MILF pronounced that they will only release the victims after having achieved an agreement with PGMA. If the Mindanao issue is not resolved, the war will go on. The hostages were then brought to Mayor Dante Darussalam's house in Tangkal at around 10:00 pm. They were entertained and served with food. At around 11:00 pm, they were released by the MILF while others thanked the hostages for accompanying them to the mountains.

Meanwhile, at the height of the attack, upon hearing volume of gunfires, the LGU was able to set up command centers and implemented precautionary measures since the place was not yet fully occupied by the MILF. At around 6:30-7:00, the LGU called the 32nd IB/PHQ. LGU of Kolambugan helped to evacuate the people. At around 7:30-8:00 am, the military troop was encountered by the some LGU personnel along the highway, this made them wonder where the military came from.

There was no actual encounter between the military and the MILF in Pantar and Poblacion particularly in Puroks 4 and 9 but more of "tulis" or robbery. Commander Macaslang is allegedly the leader of "Tonda Force" whose activities include robbery, theft and killing civilians.

There were sixteen (16) casualties involving 11 civilians, 2 children and 3 military personnel, and four (4) persons were wounded. A total of 72 persons were hostages and brought to Tangkal and were released on the midnight of the same day. Another forty (40) persons were held hostage inside the house of Veneranda Uy. More than 5,000 families evacuated. There was also a total of fourteen (14) houses, 3 school buildings, 12 establishments (grocery stores, water district and bakery), 1 patrol car and 1 Rural Transit Bus that were burned. Livestock, money, jewelries, food stuff and other properties were also looted.¹²

After August 18, 2008

On August 25, 2008, about 20 units of shotgun were issued by Sec. Puno and another 80 units was expected to be released. The firearms were turned over by the Mayor to the some barangays for the use of CVOs but all units were retrieved sometime in September because Col. Capuyan called and informed that distribution was a violation because there was no training conducted among the CVOs including orientation on the rules of its use. Firearms are now in the custody of the PNP.

The attack also led to the revival of vigilante groups. There were five (5) groups identified in Kolambugan. There were 1) Ilaga, 2) Shepherd, presence in the area of both is very clear, 3) Pulahan, 4) Bakal, and 5) Vigilante

At present, the community feels that situation in Kolambugan is not yet normalized. Some evacuees have not yet returned home for fear that MILF will attack again.

Dimarao and Pagayawan, Bacolod, Lanao del Norte

Barangay Dimarao has been populated with both Maranaos and Christian. Although there was no actual attack in the area, they were affected by the conflict. There was information from text message before August 18, that there would be possible MILF attack from Linamon to Maigo. More than half of the population evacuated. The Maranaos evacuated to their relatives in Marawi, SND and Iligan because of fear. Until now they have not yet returned.

Most Christians evacuated at the coastal area. Those Christians who did not evacuate are tenants of Muslims and instead prepared for the incident by holding prayer activities.

There were about 200 evacuees in Barangay Dimarao coming from neighboring areas of Maliwanag, Punod, Kauswagan, Munai, and Poona Piagapo.

During the celebration of Ramadhan, there were incidents of firearms forcibly taken from Barangay Tanods, one in townsite named Eddie Maura, and another .45 calibre pistol was from Eksan Apang whose house was searched by the MILFs.

According to the respondents, after the attack in Lapayan and Tacub, people feared because there was a group of military men who patrolled over the area accompanied by a person whose head was covered with a bonnet. This man pinpoints to the military who are members of MILF in the area. The people fear that the person might wrongly pinpoint the innocent civilians who are not really members of the MILF.

One Sultan expressed that he is in favor of military presence in their area but feared of possible cross fires. According to Barangay Chairwoman of Dimarao Uling Bulua-Ampaso, evacuees received food and non-food assistance from MSWD, RDRRAC, and MERN.

Opinion of the Mayor on the incident of MILF attack was related to the failure of the government to sign the MOA-AD. The Mayor expressed that he is in favor of Law Enforcement Operation.

¹² Annex L - Incident report of LGU Kolambugan

Pantao a Ragat, Lanao del Norte¹³

An FGD was conducted among Maranao women coming from Pantao Ragat who evacuated to Baloi, Lanao del Norte. According to these women, the Mayors of Poona Piagapo & Pantao Ragat advised them to evacuate from their place after hearing of a military operation. They only evacuated a week after the Lapayan incident when there were already military bomb shelling in Barangay Pualas-Uragot towards their area. The reason they heard of military assault was the presence of MILF in these areas. They were forced to leave bringing nothing with them. They already abandoned their farms which were destroyed by military amphibian, sikatuna and samba tanks and tora-tora. The rice and corn crops were about to be harvested. They lost their livestock and other properties inside their house. Their houses were destroyed and the materials were used by the military to build their camps and as firewoods. There were houses which were used by the military as their camp or clinic. Many of the houses were also burned to ashes.

Total damages to the properties of the respondents include burning and destruction of their houses, looting of household belongings, destruction to more than eight (8) has. corn crops, more than nine (9) has. ricefield, more than five (5) has. ginger farm, more than ten (10) chicken lost, destruction of a copra dryer estimated to cost P15,000.00 and tilapia fishpond with 300 fingerlings. The number does not include damages to the properties of other victims not available during the time of the interview.

The women respondents said until now they (militaries) haven't presented any evidence yet of the presence of MILF in their area. All the respondents expressed anger towards the military but not with Christian civilians. They believe that peace in their place can only be attained if the military would leave their place and they would be able to return to their respective homes and farms. Moreover, they appeal to the MILF to leave the community in peaceful situation.

Tambo, Munai, Lanao del Norte

According the residents being interviewed, Maranaos evacuated due to the presence of the military. The civilian Maranaos were forced to evacuate because they were afraid to be accused as MILFs. The houses in Barangay Panggao, Tamparan, Balintad and Dalama, all in Munai Municipality, were burned by the military. It was at these places that the armed encounter happened between the military and the MILF.

Children in the evacuation center in Tambo, Munai were already sick. There were also those who died because there was not treatment of diseases that spread in the evacuation center. There were also elderly people who died because of fear of the military attacks. Farmers had abandoned their farms.

There was MEDCAP Mission in Tambo conducted by the military and the US Troops. The evacuees wanted to return to their homes but they are so afraid of the military who committed atrocities against them. They said they will not return to their homes unless the military would be pulled out from their area.

Poona Piagapo, Lanao del Norte¹⁴

According to the participants of the FGD, it was the 32nd IB PA 1stID, under 104 Brigade Commander GX7 Captain Alonto Maamo, who committed atrocities to the community and civilian constituents of Poona Piagapo that included rampant looting/divestment and destruction of properties and farms,

¹³ Annex M - Documentation of interviews and FGDs with evacuees in Pantao a Ragat, Lanao del Norte.

¹⁴ Annex N - Documentation of interviews and FGDs with evacuees in Pantao a Ragat, Lanao del Norte.

burning, demolition and destruction of houses killing of civilians and illegal arrest and detention, and torture.

There were two (2) civilians who were killed during military operations Poona Piagapo in pursuit of the MILF, one of whom was a 15-year old minor.

Nine (9) innocent people, five (5) were minors, were arrested in Poblacion 1 Poona Piagapo, Lanao del Norte during the hot-pursuit operations of the 32nd IB PA of 1st Inf. Tabak Division, lead by Gx7 Captain Alonto Maamo, and detained and tortured in 104th Brigade, Ditucalan, Iligan City. The arrested persons were deprived of food for four days since their arrest on August 19, 2008 until August 22, 2008 and were subjected to regular interrogation and torture every three (3) hours. They were also forced to drink their urines. at Pobl.1, Poona Piagapo, Lanao del Norte.

Tangkal, Lanao del Norte

An interview with Camilo Batingolo, Administrative Officer of Tangkal, Lanao del Norte, Imam Pingno Otiin and other evacuees revealed that they had not heard about the attack in Kolambugan and they have not seen any MILF member roaming around their area. Accordingly to them, the MILF members who attacked Kolambugan had withdrawn in Tangkal but they did definitely come from the area.

Moreover, Mr. Batingolo and his companions said that there were no human rights violations committed by both the MILF and the AFP. There were no firing and harassment that happened in their area. There was no military operation in Tangkal in pursuit of the MILF. Evacuation took place because the residents were just afraid. It is also not true that there are wounded people in the area.

It was their Mayor who negotiated the release of the hostages from Kolambugan.

The attack resulted from the government's failure to sign the MOA. Tangkal is definitely peaceful. There are CVOs who were trained but there was no issuance of firearms.

Another interview was done with the DSWD personnel. There were a total of 116 families staying inside the evacuation center. More than 500 evacuees are home-based or adopted by the relatives. Relief-assistance for the evacuees by the DSWD is on-going. The evacuees, particularly children are afflicted with common diseases in the evacuation center such as coughs and colds. There were only limited medicines distributed to the evacuees.

The plan of the LGU is to let the evacuees return to their homes once the military has cleared the area. Two houses and some properties were destroyed but they did not know who were responsible.

Piagapo, Lanao del Sur¹⁵

On September 9, 2008, the military, under the command of 33 IB ug si Col. Pabayo, the Commanding Officer, arrived in Barangay Bansayan, Piagapo, Lanao del Sur. They took the microphone and 3 rolls floormat in the Masjid. They also destroyed the table and chair inside the Masjid. They cut the electrical wiring of 15 houses. About seventy (70) families evacuated and are still in the evacuation center at the time of interview.

On September 16, 2008, during the Ramadhan, the military came in Barangay Talao and Sitio Dimayon and burned and damaged twenty (20) houses. They camped at about 200 meters from

¹⁵ Annex O - Documentation of interviews and FGDs with evacuees in Piagapo, Lanao del Sur.

Barangay Talaoc and some of them stayed in the house of Barangay Officials of Dimayon, at the house of Ex-Mayor, and at the Madrasah for almost one month. Beside the Madrasah were the military's 105mm and 60 mm mortars and 0681 firearms.

At the remote portion of Sitio Dimayon, the military also set up their camp and the house of one civilian was used as their clinic. It was also on the walls of that house where the military wrote "MILF pisot - by Marines" and "Commander Bravo pisot!"

Aside the the houses burned and damaged, they also scattered on the ground one sack of rice, butchered one carabao (which was a partner of the owner in farming) and two goats, and consumed all the fishes in his fishpond, damaged one sewing machine and other household belongings such as clothes, kitchen wares and utensils. The military also damaged other infrastructures including the potable water system (plastic pipes were cut) project of STARCM. The residents were forced to evacuate and have not returned to their homes as of this time.

On September 20, 2008, a group of military entered into Barangay Tapureg, Piagapo to conduct military operation. They killed a civilian named Tarate Mimbala, 35 years old, resident of Bandy, Pantao a Ragat. They shoot his head and whole body many times and finally cut off his head.

The military also burned five (5) houses, damaged three (3) cooperative stores (damage was estimated to reach P100,000.00), a corn sheller worth P100,000.00, destroyed sixteen (16) sacks of rice which was left by a Kagawad and twenty (20) sacks of fertilizers.

The residents expressed their disappointment of the military and call for the pull-out of the military in their place because while the military men are still there, their livelihood is adversely affected.

On September 26, 2008, the last Friday of Ramadhan, at around 4:00-6:00 pm, an estimated 180 military men suddenly came in Palacat, Piagapo from Purok Kangkong and indiscriminately fired on the civilians while they were gathering food. The firing caused damages to the properties and houses. The civilians ran to different directions. They hit and killed Yasser Markakim, 14 years old, while he was gathering food, and dropped him down to the hole which was dug for toilet. They destroyed all the properties inside the houses and burned all big houses before they went down and proceed to Purok Kabiguan.

There was a total of 6 houses burned, a Masjid was also burned, one carabao and one horse were shot dead, and properties damaged were "Tubuta" rice thresher worth more than P20,000.00, 2 sacks of rice, 1 corn sheller. Total damage to poperties costs more than P160,000.00.

The evacuees have been staying in the evacuation area for more than two (2) months now. They just go back in Palacat to harvest food.

Rogongon, Iligan City¹⁶

Sometime in 2006, some Higaonons joined the MILF for a promise that the latter would give them 30,000 Ringgits. There were about thirty-one (31) of them who are non-Maranaos, including a 15-year old, joined a military training in Poona Piagapo in the same year. The rest were Maranaos including children, as young as 7 years old, who were also trained to become combatants. They only used wooden rifle during the training.

After that, the Higaonons forgot about the training and returned to the community as ordinary civilians and continued to perform their normal routine. These persons were working at the farm of Mr. Ora when, three days after the attack in Kolambugan and Kauswagan, someone identified as Alvin Cunto informed them that they have to report immediately to the army brigade to clear their

¹⁶ Annex P - Documentation of interviews and FGDs with evacuees in Rogongon, Iligan City and PNP Directors in Iligan City.

names because they are in the list of suspected MILFs. Twenty-three (23) persons were fetched by a government truck at Digkilaan. They did not even bring some clothes with them expecting that the process would only be completed in one or two days. But they were told that they would undergo a process before they will be released. Said process involved reorientation by the AFP and PNP, orientation by the DILG, debriefing, etc. The process was already completed but he wondered why the schedules of release were not materialized when in fact, there were no charges filed against them and they were already cleared by the RTC Judge in Iligan following a resolution passed by Iligan City Sangguniang Panlungsod. They were also called as defectors, not surrenderees. They stayed in the PNP compound for more than two months now.

When they were at the army brigade, Alvin suggested to them to surrender so that the government would provide them reward and livelihood.

At first the City government provided them both rice and viand (noodles and dried fish). Later, the supply was only rice that is why they are forced to do some chores inside the PNP compound to earn something for their viand. They sleep inside the room near the guardhouse on plywood but when it rains, they are forced to get up because the water comes inside the room that leaked from the ceiling and from the ground outside.

They were so shocked of what happened to them and so ashamed because the people and the media tagged them as criminals. They were just ordinary farmers. They have abandoned their farms, which are their primary source of living, and also abandoned their responsibilities to their families.

Alvin Cunto and six (6) others were walking towards the forest to act as the blocking force during the attack in Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte.

Meanwhile, at the community, a week after the August 18, 2008 attack, about 80 military men from the AFP were deployed in Poblacion Kalamalamahan, Rogongon. The military ordered the residents to evacuate immediately. If they refuse, the military would not be responsible for them.

Many families (the exact number has not been accounted) evacuated to Sitio Binasan, Rogongon and to adjacent areas in Misamis Oriental such as in Tumpagon, Kauyunan, Mahayahay and Limunda. The evacuees fear for possible retaliation of the MILF to the Higaonons in Rogongon due to the surrender of Alvin Cunto and 29 others who are Higaonons and residents of Rogongon.

V. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND EFFECTS OF MILITARIZATION TO THE COMMUNITY

- Establishment of military bases in schools and in civilian communities in Mamasapano, Maguindanao;
- Loss of means of livelihood, homes and lives, and destruction of properties in all areas affected;
- Displacement of thousands (Muslims and Christians) families and communities;
- Psycho-emotional trauma as manifested by trembling, fear of men in uniform, and low performance, inattentiveness and absent-mindedness among school children, etc. due to the MILF attack in Christian areas and ongoing mortar shelling, presence of landmines and indiscriminate firing by the AFP in Muslims areas ;
- Many children stopped their schooling both from Moro and Christian communities;
- Changes in the relationship between Christians and Muslims particularly in Kauswagan and Kolambagan, Lanao del Norte. Trust towards the Muslims is hard to regain;

- Epidemics, sickness, malnutrition, spread of contagious diseases and death due to lack of potable water, relief goods and medical assistance. Congestion and filthy situation of the evacuation centers also add up to the deplorable situation of the IDPs especially the children;
- Insecurity for another possible attack by the MILF and continuous military operations by the AFP;
- Revival of vigilante groups in Christian areas such as ILAGA;
- Moral damages to victims of mutilation and arrest and detention; and
- Closure of many business establishments particularly in Kolambugan, among others.

VI. INTERVENTIONS BY DIFFERENT SERVICE PROVIDERS

Lapayan, Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte:

- The military distributed food and P200.00 per person.
- Relief assistance from the LGU and NGO
- Trauma healing sessions were also conducted.
- The Red Cross *promised* to give materials to build a new house but it is over three months now, nothing has happened.
- There was also a promise for assistance to reconstruct the houses and financial assistance of P10,000.00 for the families of killed persons. P5,000.00 for the wounded persons, and all those families of killed persons and burned houses be given additional P4,000.00 per family.

Tacub, Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte:

- The DSWD distributed food items.
- The Red Cross *promised* to give us materials to build our new houses.

Kolambugan:

- Complaints were already filed for the three commanders, Macaslang, Mercury and another one who were responsible for the attack.
- Victims are temporarily housed at the Riverside Elementary School. Ms. Jennifer Lopez was assigned by the LGU to manage the evacuation center.
- Distribution of relief assistance by the LGU of Kolambugan, DSWD, Diocese, Evangelical Church, NGOs (LAFCCOD), La Salle, Red Cross. Last distribution was made by Holy Cross on October 12, 2008. There was a problem in the distribution; non-victims were able to receive the assistance while the real victims in Pantar and Poblacion were not able to receive. Evacuees were not prioritized. Accordingly, list of victims were validated by LAFCCOD. The distribution led to disorder.
- Kolambugan LGU conducted stress debriefing to the victims and their families.
- LGU also extended financial support to the family of those who were killed, food support to all victims, and provided for the evacuees' temporary shelter.
- Mayor Dante of Tangkal gave P100,000.00 financial assistance however, the amount was not addressed to the LGU but to the Vice Mayor of Kolambugan.

Tambo, Munai, LDN

- There was MEDCAP Mission in Tambo conducted by the military and the US Troops.

Piagapo

- Relief assistance was distributed twice by the UN-World Food Program but these are not enough for the needs of the evacuees.

Mamasapano, Maguindanao

- As of humanitarian response, Mamasapano had been assisted by the World Food Program, CFSI, Red Cross, Act for Peace, Save the Children, UNICEF and International Committee of the Red Cross since the start of the conflict in the municipality on September but lately some of these organizations had been advised not to enter Mamasapano because of the worsening conflict and unstable situation in the municipality; leaving the area more prone to danger and risks caused by the ongoing war.

Datu Piang, Maguindanao

- There were medical assistance provided by DOH-ARMM and medical missions conducted by various support groups
- Humanitarian assistance were also received from LGU and other support groups
- Various humanitarian agencies such as the the World Food Program, CFSI, Red Cross, Act for Peace, Save the Children, UNICEF and International Committee of the Red Cross, OXFAM and others.

VII. NEEDS / PERCEPTIONS / REACTIONS RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMUNITY

- Support to the evacuees while they have not yet returned to their farms where their means of livelihood are present.
- The MILF troops that attack some Barangays in Kolambugan came from Tangkal municipality and not from Lanao del Sur. Members of "Tonda Force" joined the MILF in the attack to serve as the latter's guide. Members of Tonda Force are scratched revolutionary forces of Tangkal because their activities are non-Islamic. According to a store-owner, Mercury even paid the bread he ate because he follows the Islamic laws.
- Some are in favor of arming the civilians while others are not;
- Divided reactions of the Christians towards the revival of vigilante groups;
- Disgust and frustration by the Christian communities for the inability of the military to respond to crisis situation. Should the military responded immediately to the Mayor's call, the extent of damage should not be as much as this. The military's negligence has a great contribution to violation of human rights;
- Christian communities prefer for the permanent deployment of military in the area, particularly in the hinterland, for their protection against the MILF, and in order that encounters will only happen in the hinterlands, and people will not be caught in the cross fires. Christian civilians also urge the MILF to stop committing human rights violations to the civilians;
- Muslim communities urge the government to stop militarization in their respective communities and to stop the rampant and continuing human rights violations committed by the military;
- Muslim communities also urge the government for the pull out of the military from their areas so that genuine peace be attained and that they would be able to return to their

homes and farms. Until now they (militaries) haven't presented any evidence yet of the presence of MILF in their area;

- Government should take a serious effort in preserving peace and order;
- Government should secure the means of livelihood of the people.
- Justice for the innocent civilians, both Christians and Maranaos!

VIII. ANNEXES

Annex A

MINDANAO PEOPLES' PEACE MOVEMENT (MPPM) and TASK FORCE CIVILIAN PROTECTION (TFCP), ALYANSA NG MGA MAMAMAYAN para sa KARAPATANG PANTAO (AMKP)

c/o MPPM Office: Sarip Auliya St., Block 3, Bagua 2, 9600 Cotabato City

Telephone No: +63 64 4211358

Email: lahrahr@yahoo.com, salam_inc@yahoo.com, mppm4peace@yahoo.com

Concept Paper:

Even before the abortive signing of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MoA-AD), there were already armed conflicts in North Cotabato when troops of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) made their presence felt to drumbeat the snail pace of the peace process. The conflict in Central Mindanao has risen to such proportions when the MOA signing was aborted last August 4, 2008 when the Supreme Court issued a Temporary Restraining Order. The conflict then spilled over to the Provinces in Lanao del Norte, Saranggani and now in Maguindanao Province which caused more displacement of civilian populations- especially the women, children and the elderly, disruption of community life especially the people's economic activities as well as the education of the children. According to the National Disaster Coordinating Council on its September 8, 2008 Report, the cumulative total affected number of persons in Mindanao is 88,243 families 423,772 individuals. Cases of death and wounding among civilian population, women, men and children as they were caught in the cross fire, and those who got sick and died in the evacuation centers are also increasing as the conflict continues.

Adding to the conflict situation is the policy adopted by the National Government to arm civilians in response to the violent attacks made by the MILF in Lanao del Norte and Saranggani Provinces. The national government through the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) justified this response stating that it is the Local Governments' request for arms so that their constituents can protect themselves against the enemies. This action of the National Government is breaching upon its duty to protect its citizens but instead exposing the latter to risks of attacks by other armed groups and the military.

Government operations against the MILF troops also went on despite calls for a ceasefire during the Holy Month of Ramadhan with the military still employing ground and air assaults which indiscriminately hit civilian communities as the case of a family of six (6) killed in Brgy. Butilen, Datu Piang, Maguindanao. Four (4) children, a pregnant woman and their father was killed in that incident as they together with their neighbors tried to flee their village for safety.

Even before the Ramadhan have fully ended, government troops have intensified their military operations in Maguindanao in pursuit of Commander Ameril "Ombra" Kato and Commander Bravo of the 105th and 102nd Base Commands of the MILF respectively. Accordingly, these two commanders are responsible for the attacks in North Cotabato and Lanao del Norte. As renewed armed fighting continues, violence against the civilian population are committed by both side, however, neither would like to take responsibility. Cases of human rights violations abound when the conflict started in North Cotabato and later on spilled over to Lanao del Norte, Saranggani and now in Maguindanao Province, such as killing of civilians, looting and destruction of their properties, food blockade and hamletting. The latter is especially experienced in the interior areas in Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur. However, reports of these incidents are very far and between and not accorded much response despite the victims' pleas for justice and reparation.

In the year 2000 when then President Joseph Estrada declared an "All Out War" against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), thousands of civilians were also displaced and damaged to properties

were immeasurable. In the said year, the response of several groups coming from basic sectors of the society, NGOs, CSOs, human rights and peace advocates was the call for an end to the war in Mindanao while addressing the basic socio-political issues that confronted the tri-people. It was also at this time when a broad multi-sectoral coalition was born, the Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM). Varied responses to the Mindanao Crisis were done those times through its member-organizations conducted like relief distribution and Fact-Finding Missions, investigating and documenting events, especially human rights violations.

The specter of war which ravaged Mindanao in the said year have again recurred in all its ghastly implications as there is still no signs of let-up in the current war in Mindanao. Again, civilians bear the brunt of the consequence of war as they again become "Collateral Damage". Because of this MPPM and Task Force Civilian Protection (TFCP) and the Alyansa ng mga Mamamayan para sa Karapatang Pantao with other human rights and peace formations have decided to conduct Fact Finding Missions in the Provinces of Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, North Cotabato and Saranggani to document and validate the reports and data initially gathered, and take proper actions regarding the results of the mission.

Objectives

The Fact-Finding Mission aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To verify the veracity of data and validate reports gathered regarding human rights violations committed by both parties;
2. To expose actual events and especially human rights violations committed by both parties through media conference;
3. To continuously monitor, document and expose unfolding events brought by this continuing armed conflict;
4. To file documented HRV cases to proper bodies; and
5. Lobby to the national government for the indemnification and reparation to the victims of HRVs.

Activities to be Conducted

1. Fact-finding mission in affected areas in the provinces of Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, North Cotabato and Saranggani
2. Press Conference before and after fact-finding mission
3. Meetings with AFP and MILF
4. Public forums participated by different stakeholders in Mindanao

Accountabilities

1. Each participating organization will shoulder its own transportation, food and accommodation during the whole duration of the fact finding mission.
2. All the participants of the mission would be assigned with a specific task/s. His/her output will be centralized to the Secretariat and a unified result will be generated out of the data gathered and submitted by the participants of the mission.

Proposed Itinerary

PROPOSED ITINERARY OF FFM	
Date	Activities
October 12, 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrival of delegates in Iligan City • Orientation/Briefing • Press Conference
October 13, 2008 Lanao del Norte TEAM 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Departure for Lanao del Norte areas • Actual interview with the affected communities in Kauswagan (Lapayan and Tacub), Bacolod (Pagayawan, Dimarao), and Munai • Meeting/Interview with the LGU of Kauswagan, Bacolod and Munai
October 13, 2008 Lanao del Norte TEAM 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual interview with the affected communities in Kolambogan (Kulasihan, Pantar, Poblacion) and Tangkal • Meeting/Interview with the LGU of Kolambogan and Tangkal • Meeting with the Provincial government
October 14, 2008 Lanao del Norte TEAM 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual interview with the affected communities in Poono Piagapo, and Matungao • Meeting/Interview with the LGU of Bacolod and Matungao • Meeting with 104th IB (area) • Meeting/Interview with Civil Societies in Lanao del Norte
October 14, 2008 Lanao del Sur Cotabato City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual interview with the communities in Lanao del Sur (areas to be identified by Lanao del Sur contacts. • Meeting with LGUs <p>AM- Briefing of FFM Team PM- PressCon</p>
October 15, 2008 TEAM A: Pikit, North Cotabato TEAM B: Datu Piang, Maguindanao	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual interview with the communities in North Cotabato (Pikit: Kolambug, Bualan, Dalengawen, and Takepan) and Maguindanao (Datu Piang) • Interview with the LGUS • Meeting with local Civil Societies • Meeting with MILF • Meeting with AFP officers in the area
October 16, 2008 TEAM A: Aleosan, North Cotabato TEAM B: Datu Saudi, Maguindanao	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual interview with the communities in North Cotabato (Aleosan: Tapodoc, Dunguan, Bagolibas, Pagangan, Dualing) and Maguindanao (Datu Saudi) • Interview with the LGUs in North Cotabato and Maguindanao • Meeting with AFP in the area • Meeting with MILF in the area
October 17, 2008 TEAM A: Midsayap, North	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual interview with the communities in North Cotabato (Midsayap: Baliki, Labas, Rangaban) and Maguindanao (Mamasapano)

Cotabato TEAM B: Mamasapano, Maguindanao	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with the LGUS in North Cotabato and Maguindanao • Meeting with AFP in the area
October 18, 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (AM) Press Conference in Cotabato City • Debriefing • (PM) Departure to Manila for Luzon delegates • Departure to Iligan for Lanao del Norte Delegates • Departure to Davao for Davao delegates

Annex C

Participating Organizations:

1. Alternative Center for Health and Development, Inc. (ACHDI)
2. Alyansa ng Kabataang Mindanao para sa Kapayapaan (AKMK)
3. Alyansa ng Mamayan para Karapatang Pantao (AMKP)
4. Baloi Muslim Christian Movement for Peace Inc. (BMCMPI)
5. Bangsamoro Development and Resource Center (BDRC)
6. BLGU Rosary Heights 5-Cotabato City
7. Citizen's Peace Watch/Stop the War Coalition
8. Civil Society Organization – Forum for Peace (CSO-FP)
9. Conservative Baptists of Davao
10. Episcopal Church- Social Ministry Unit
11. Franciscan Movement for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (FMJPIC)
12. KAAGAPAY OFW Resource Center
13. Kabnar Human Rights Advocates – Marawi City
14. Kagsabuwa Hu Kalinaw Daw Kalambuan (Kagsabuwa), Inc.
15. KAISA KA
16. Lanao Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (LAHRA), Inc.
17. Lanao Aquatic and Marine Fisheries Center for Community Development (LAFCCOD), Inc.
18. Lanao Fisheries for Advocacy Network (LFAN)
19. Lanao Media Practitioners (LAMP)
20. Lig-ong Hiniusang Kusog sa Kabus (LIHUK), Inc.
21. Lumad Development Center Inc. (LDCI)
22. Mamalo Descendants Organization (MDO)
23. Mindanao Peoples Peace Movement (MPPM)
24. Mindanao Tri-People Youth Center (MTPYC), Inc.
25. Mindanao Tri-People Women Forum (MTWF)
26. Mindanao Tri-People Women Resource Center (MTWRC), Inc.
27. Pigkawayan, Pikit, Alamada, Midsayap, Aleosan (PPALMA) Alliance
28. Paglingkawas, Inc.
29. Peacebuilders Community – Menonite Peacebuilding Team
30. Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), Inc.
31. Ranaw Disaster Response and Rehabilitation Assistance Center (RDRRAC), Inc.
32. Ranaw Women and Children Resource Center (RWCRC), Inc.
33. Research, Communication, Justice and Peace (RCJP)
34. SALIGAN
35. Southern Christian College (SCC)-CEREA
36. Sumpay Mindanao, Inc.
37. Sustainable Alternatives for the Advancement of Mindanao (SALAM), Inc.
38. Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP)

39. Teduray-Lambangian Youth and Students Association (TLYSA)
40. Tri-People Organization Against Disaster (TRIPOD) Foundation, Inc.
41. United Church of the Philippines – Iligan City (UCCP- Iligan)
42. Women and Children Therapy Center (WATCH), Inc.
43. Young Advocates for Peace and Solidarity (YAPS)

Annex D

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS (HRVs) CONFIRMED BY THE FACT-FINDING TEAM IN LANAOS PROVINCES

Initial reports of the on-going Fact Finding Mission (FFM) on Human Rights Violations (HRVs) during and after the various recent armed confrontations in Mindanao between the military and MILF armed forces unravel HRVs committed by both parties to the civilian population. In the towns of Lanao del Norte, cases of abduction, destruction of houses, private and government properties, looting, mutilation and murder committed by the MILF combatants are recorded. Victims of atrocities said that the MILF attackers were from the neighbouring provinces since they spoke in *Tagalog* instead of their local dialect. Also, the victims said that the attackers used local residents to act as their guide in entering and withdrawing from the villages. The victims further said that some of the attackers even ransacked food establishments along the highway before they withdrew at around 10:00 am to 11:00 am on August 18, 2008. The Military and the Police forces failed to protect the people. They did not respond during the attack as verified by the local residents despite the proximity of the 32nd Infantry Battalion in the barangays of Tacub and Lapayan in Kauswagan. According to the victims, upon arrival of the military assigned in the nearest detachment, they even pointed to the direction where the MILF forces were fleeing, but they were told by the military “*wala pang order*” (we have not received any order). Military reinforcements came in late.

In an interview with Major Benedicto Manquiquis, Civil Military Relations Officer of the 104th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, he said that it is the discretion of the ground commanders to respond since civilians are already being murdered. He said that they are already conducting interviews from the community to the allegations that their forces did not respond however the military would not initiate filing of charges without formal complaints from the victims. Major Manquiquis stood firm that the military immediately sent reinforcements but could not divulge the details since this is a matter of Military Secrecy and Tactics. He further said that the reinforcements were not allowed to use the highway for fear of being ambushed, instead the troops were told to take the mountains to conceal themselves from the MILF fighters. Major Manquiquis said that the Army Tank stationed in Poblacion Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte was not used to respond to the nearby attacked villages to protect the Municipal Hall, which according to him is the seat of government and for fear that the tank would be destroyed by the rocket propelled grenade (RPG) of the MILF. Cases of torture and illegal detention committed by the military in Lanao del Norte were also confirmed by the tortured and detained victims themselves. According to the interviewed victim, he and nine (9) others were forcibly taken by the Military to the headquarters, and forced to admit their involvement and support to the MILF as well as the identities and whereabouts of the MILF fighters. They were illegally detained for three (3) days, blind folded and beaten with sticks and deprived of food and forced to drink urine and dirty water from canal.

In the town of Piagapo, Lanao del Sur, cases of murder, destruction and burning of houses, farm equipment, Masjid, Madrasa School and looting of farm animals were confirmed to have been perpetrated by the Military. The residents also claimed that their villages were occupied and used as

camps of the military and that their food stocks such as rice grains, were either eaten, destroyed or burned. There was even a case of a 13 year old boy who was killed and was thrown in a toilet hole (unused septic tank). In various affected towns in Lanao del Norte and in Lanao del Sur, hundreds of residents are still displaced either in the evacuation centers or in the house of their relatives. These residents are forced to live somewhere else because their houses have been burned during the attack or their villages are still occupied by the military. Some of these villages have become ghost towns. In the evacuation centers, children are dying due to diseases.

Major Maniquis, dispelled the claim that there is an on-going Military Operations, saying that what they are conducting are Law Enforcement Operations. In the communities, residents leave their villages because the military are patrolling the areas with a civilian, wearing bonnet and large sunglasses, who is supposed to identify the "MILF" members in the areas.

*The on-going Fact Finding Mission (FFM) is conducted in order to verify the veracity of reports of HRVs and expose the same to the public through the media and to other appropriate agencies and institutions. The Mission is being spearheaded by the Mindanao Peoples Peace movement (MPPM), Task Force Civilian Protection, SALAM Inc., and the Alyansa ng mga Mamamayan para sa Karapatang Pantao (AKMP) and is participated in by 52 organizations from Mindanao and Manila. **The FFM covers the provinces of Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Maguindanao, Sharif Kabungsuwan and North Cotabato.** It started last October 13, 2008 and will end on October 18, 2008 with a press conference.*