

Date: March 8, 2019

ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES (AFP) VS. ABU SAYYAF GROUP (ASG) IN SULU

Issue No. 01

INCIDENT BACKGROUND

On January 27, 2019, two improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were consecutively detonated at the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Jolo, in the island province of Sulu. The explosions resulted in a reported total of 27 deceased and dozens more injured. As of the evening of said date, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) tagged a faction of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) known as “Ajang-Ajang” as the perpetrators of this attack.

Two days after the incident, President Rodrigo Duterte visited the site and ordered the military to launch an “all-out offensive” against the ASG and alleged Islamic State (IS)-linked elements operating in the Province of Sulu. The AFP and the Philippine National Police (PNP) also raised a nationwide “heightened alert,” with intensified checkpoint operations and strict implementation of the gun ban in connection with the upcoming national and local elections.

The AFP launched the operation on 29 January in the municipality of Patikul, Sulu – believed to be the stronghold of the ASG. Amid airstrikes and mortar shelling, civilians from the barangays of Anuling and Danag, and in the upper portion of Barangay Latih (all in Patikul) were displaced. Meanwhile, residents from Barangay Bungkaung, also in Patikul, pre-emptively evacuated with assistance from the AFP to ensure their safety.

The Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO) reported that as of 05 February, a total of 731 families (3,109 persons) have sought refuge in relatives’ homes and in evacuation centers within Patikul municipality. The Provincial Government and the Department of Social Welfare and Development Office (DSWD-ARMM) provided relief assistance to the affected families. IDPs, however, have expressed needs for additional food support, as well as non-food items such as plastic sheets, beddings and hygiene materials.

CURRENT SITUATION

The military offensive in Patikul municipality has already escalated and spread to the municipality of Tongkil. Reports from barangay officials and local volunteers reported that some 102 families (approximately 409 persons) in Tongkil have already fled to safer areas due to fear of being caught in the crossfire. Some 98 families (approx. 490 persons) were also reportedly trapped in the firefight, with no access to food or other basic needs. Another 69 families (352 persons) have temporarily taken refuge in Lower Latih, Patikul, and 55 families (165 persons) have constructed makeshift shelters in Barangay Bangkal, Patikul.

PROTECTION ISSUES AND RESPONSES

ISSUES	RESPONSES	WAYS FORWARD
Threat to life, safety and security		
Some families were reportedly trapped in Barangay Bakaan during the firefight between the AFP and the ASG. According to them, the AFP did not allow them to leave because they might be caught in the crossfire while fleeing.	Protection partners have referred the issue to the municipal local government unit (MLGU) for further validation.	Follow up and monitor the situation of the trapped civilians. Refer to the Regional Human Rights Commission (RHRC) for further verification.
IDPs experience restrictions on their freedom of movement when going outside the evacuation centers/displacement site into the town proper of Patikul municipality due to lack of proper identification. Military checkpoints are strictly implemented, and every person is asked to present government-issued identification cards. Other identity documents are not recognized.	IRDT conducted protection monitoring in some of the evacuation centers. The issue was referred to the MLGU, which initiated a dialogue with the military to allow more relief assistance for the displaced families. However, based on the latest updates from field monitoring, the AFP still refuses to grant this request.	Protection partners will continue monitoring the situation of the IDPs. The issue has also been referred to other protection actors who may be able to facilitate dialogue/negotiation with the AFP.
Women and girls expressed fear of potential risks of gender-based violence due to lack of electricity in one of the evacuation centers located in Lower Latih. In general, poor lighting also hampers the IDPs' movement and safety, especially at night.	Protection partners have referred this concern to the MLGU and barangay officials, with the recommendation to assign Barangay Police Action Teams (BPAT) in these areas to enhance security.	Continue monitoring the situation, and follow up on the action points referred to the duty-bearers.
Access to food aid and nutrition		
Food assistance is scarce, reportedly because the AFP is limiting the quantity of food supplies. According to information gathered by Protection partners, this is due to allegations that portions of the food supplies go to ASG members.	IRDT conducted protection monitoring in some of the evacuation centers to validate this information.	Protection actors to continue monitoring to verify the reported food blockade. Advocate with the MLGU to conduct a peaceful dialogue with the AFP to ensure a minimum standard of food intervention for the IDPs.
Persons with Specific Needs (PWSN), such as elderly people and pregnant women, face potential risks in the evacuation centers due to the poor conditions of the temporary dwellings/shanties. There are no targeted interventions to address the needs of PSWN, both from government and any humanitarian agencies.	Provincial/Municipal Local Government Units, IRDT, UNHCR, and Matawaksi Inc provided food/relief assistance, WASH facilities, and core relief (non-food) items to address some of the needs of the PWSN.	Continue to monitor the situation of the IDPs. Refer to other agencies such as UNFPA and UNICEF, to look into the situation and needs of women, children, and other PWSN in the evacuation centers.
102 IDP families staying at a warehouse (bodega) that serves as an evacuation	Referred to Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Officer	Continuous monitoring and coordination with the

center in Barangay Bakkaan have not yet surveyed and validated by the MSWDO. So far, the IDPs have not received any aid.	(PDRRMO) of Sulu and Municipal Social Welfare and Development Officer (MSWDO) of Patikul	relevant actors (P/MDRRMO and DSWD) to ensure that all IDPs are included in the provision of assistance.
Access to non-food items		
Majority of the IDPs left their belongings in their habitual residences. Some families in the evacuation centers are sharing cooking utensils with their relatives or neighbors.	IRDT/UNHCR, in coordination with the MLGU of Patikul, provided kitchen sets for 731 displaced families.	UNHCR and its partners will continue to monitor the situation of the IDPs inside and outside evacuation centers. Advocate with the MWSDO/MDRRMO to conduct monitoring in other displacement sites to ensure that no IDPs are left out in aid distributions/other support.
Camp coordination and camp management		
WASH facilities in the three evacuation centers are insufficient. In Lower Latih, only two units of latrines (constructed by a local civil society organization) are being shared by the IDPs. At the evacuation centers (ECs) in Anuling and Dan Puti, there are no latrines. These have triggered apprehensions that if displacement becomes protracted, some diseases may spread quickly within the ECs.		Coordinate and advocate with the duty-bearers and other WASH actors for possible support.
In Lower Latih, makeshift structures have been constructed by the IDPs on their own. These are in open spaces, without proper partitions and/or walling. Privacy is thus limited, and women and girls are particularly exposed to potential GBV risks. Some of the IDPs complained about the congested conditions, especially at night.	The issue was referred to the MSWDO and MDRRMO. P/MLGU provided plastic sheets to improve the makeshift dwellings. However, IDPs in Dan Puti EC were not included in the last distribution.	IRDT to request for additional plastic sheets to be distributed to the IDPs.
Access to shelter		
Since January 2019, the displaced families have no access to their houses in their places of origin. There are reports of looting of civilian properties by unknown perpetrators.	None.	UNHCR and its partners will continue to monitor the situation of the IDPs inside and outside the evacuation centers.
Access to health		
No serious illnesses have been reported in the evacuation sites, and IDP have access to the health center.	None.	Protection partners will continue to monitor the situation of the IDPs inside

However, mothers have expressed concern that most of the IDPs, especially children and youth, are directly sleeping on the soil. Local partners who conducted protection monitoring observed that some IDPs are only using tarpaulins to cover the soil.		and outside the evacuation centers. Specific cases of illness and/or other urgent concerns will be referred to Health actors and the relevant duty-bearer agencies.
Access to education		
Majority of the children have access to education. Most of the students/pupils were accommodated by Latih Elementary School, but three (3) students were forced to stop schooling as a result of their displacement.	None.	UNHCR to refer the issue to UNICEF for further validation, and advocacy with Education authorities as needed.
Access to livelihood		
Since January 2019, IDPs do not have access to their livelihood sources. They are afraid to visit even in the daytime because of fear that they might be caught by the military. Martial law is strictly implemented, and civilians are asked to present identity cards (only government-issued IDs are recognized).	Protection partners have conducted verification of the issue and referred it to the MLGU.	Continue to monitor the situation of the IDPs.
Housing, Land & Property (HLP) rights		
On February 14, seven (7) farm animals were killed, allegedly due to indiscriminate firing. The incident occurred near one of the evacuation centers.	Referred to the MLGU for documentation.	Referral to RHRC for further documentation/investigation

PERSONS OF CONCERN

No. of Fam	+/-	No. of Persons	+/-	Location (Origin)			Location (Current)			
				Province	Mun	Barangay	Province	Mun	Barangay	Exact Location
165		445		Sulu	Patikul	Latih	Sulu	Patikul	Bungkaung	Karayawan Village
125		494		Sulu	Patikul	Buhanginan	Sulu	Patikul	Danag	Home-based
3		15		Sulu	Patikul	Maligay	Sulu	Patikul	Latih	Home-based
23		79		Sulu	Patikul	Maligay	Sulu	Patikul	Latih	Lower Latih EC
56		280		Sulu	Patikul	Latih (Upper)	Sulu	Patikul	Latih	Lower Latih EC
301		1488		Sulu	Patikul	Bungkaung	Sulu	Patikul	Latih	Lower Latih Home-Based
10		57		Sulu	Patikul	Bungkaung	Sulu	Patikul	Latih	Lower Latih EC
48		251		Sulu	Patikul	Bungkaung	Sulu	Patikul	Latih	Lower Latih Home-Based
55		165		Sulu	Patikul	Buhanginan	Sulu	Patikul	Bangkaal	Dan Puti EC
102		409		Sulu	Tongkil	Bakkaan	Sulu	Tongkil	Bakkaan	Warehouse

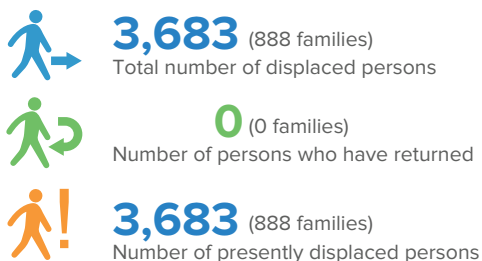
DURABLE SOLUTIONS (No returns yet)

No. of Fam	+/-	No. of Persons	+/-	Location (Displaced)			Location (Current)			Type (Please select one)		
				Province	Municipality	Barangay	Province	Municipality	Barangay	Return	Relocation	Local Integration

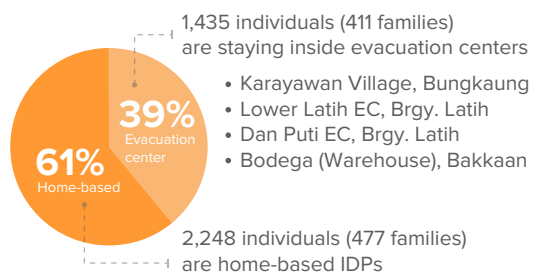
SOURCES:

Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO), Sulu
Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (MDRRMO), Patikul
Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO), Patikul
NONVIOLENT PEACEFORCE INC (NP)
MATAWKASI INC.
INTEGRATED RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT FOR TRI-PEOPLE (IRDT)

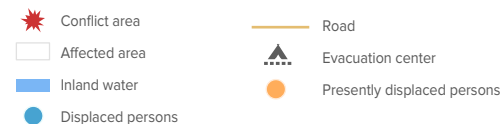
KEY FIGURES



DISPLACEMENT



LEGEND



LOCATION MAP

