



Residents of Wao in Lanao del Sur stage a rally to oppose the inclusion of their municipality from the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region last April 21, 2014. © Richel Umel/Sun.Star CDO

THEMATIC PROTECTION Bulletin

Wao Clan Feud Crisis
03 July 2015

Background Information

- Located at the southern edge of Lanao del Sur and in between Bukidnon and North Cotabato is the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) municipality of Wao. Without an all-weather road linking it to the provincial capital of Marawi, Wao is geographically more connected with Bukidnon than with Lanao del Sur. Wao was one of the identified resettlement areas in Mindanao in the early/mid 1950s. Based on the 2010 National Housing Authority census, the municipality is now dominated by Christian settlers (83%), with a Maranao Muslim population of 17% and an indigenous population of less than one per cent.
- In March 2014 just before the signing of the peace pact between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) or the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), a group of Christians led by a "people's organization" in Wao staged a rally to call for Wao to be excluded from the proposed Bangsamoro Autonomous Region. The group had complained that the meeting conducted in their town did not include all points of view and all

of the community was not invited to express their views in the planned consultative meeting so the outcome was not representative of the whole constituency of the municipality. The group further said that it is willing to meet with officials from the Bangsamoro Transition Commission for more consultations.

- Wao has had several incidents of conflict in 2015 that have caused fear and displacement of both the Christian and Moro communities. The most recent incident was when an unidentified man tried to steal a water buffalo being tended by a 15-year-old girl and a 13-year-old boy who were then killed. The victims' bodies were found with hack wounds and the girl was allegedly raped prior to the killing. In what seemed to be an act of retaliation in the early hours of the following morning of 25 April, an armed group with heavy weapons opened fire on a nearby Moro community that killed four and wounded seven people. These incidents have increased the division between the Christian and Moro communities which have been tense due to the ongoing talks on Wao's inclusion in the Bangsamoro entity.

IDP Protection Situation

The recent displacement in Wao was triggered by the attack that killed four and wounded seven persons in a Moro community in Sitio Magampong, Barangay Park Area. More than 400 families (approximately 1,800 persons) fled, making their way to an evacuation centre in Sitio Proper of Barangay Manila Group. Other IDPs went to their relatives in Kalilangan municipality in Bukidnon.

After the attack, members of the adjacent Christian community, fearing possible revenge from the Moro community, and on advice from the barangay captain, also fled from their homes.

These two incidents have been considered to cause or could potentially cause more retaliation from either group. But direct interviews with Christian and Moro representatives have confirmed that the families of the slain victims were not locked in any kind of revenge conflict.

A recent protection monitoring visit in the area found that the majority of the families displaced have returned except for a few Muslim families who according to returnees, have decided to relocate for the time being in Kalilangan municipality. The majority of the displaced from the Christian community have also returned however, some decided to stay with their relatives in Maramag.

Police and army detachments were set up in the Christian community, Sitio Camp 2; and a police post was established in the Muslim community, Sitio Magampong to monitor the situation and provide security to the returnees.



UNHCR interviewed representatives from both the Muslim and Christian communities in Wao. Halamia Macalawan recounted the day they were displaced because of the killings. © B. Escalante/UNHCR 2015

"We don't know about that BBL. There was no discussion or consultations made in barangay meetings."

-Halamia Macalawan, 67, Maranao resident

"There are those who oppose it (BBL) as they don't have enough information. I would respect whatever decision that would be beneficial for our community."

-Luzviminda Andu, 58, Christian resident

Assessment and Recommendation

The lack of Rule of Law will enable tensions in Wao to persist because of the limited capacity of the police to step in and provide security against heavily armed persons. With the lack of thorough police investigation and protection of witnesses, evidence to prosecute cannot be obtained. The rape and killings will be unresolved resulting in more potential violence as individuals and armed groups act on their own to redress criminal acts.

The gradual reduction of the Maranao/Moro access to land as a result of decades of continuous settlement and conflicts over land has resulted in forced displacement that continues and most likely will continue unless there is a peace agreement that is supported by the national authorities and negotiated with the local communities. At this time there are some IDP families that have moved to municipal centers to stay with relatives and some most likely will not return. After the recent displacement, there are Moro families who expressed they do not want return. Also, younger people from both Maranao and Christian communities are moving to obtain education and to find work away from Wao. Christians with more resources continue to purchase land from Maranao and other minority families.

Wao can be considered a microcosm of Mindanao where there is a continuous gradual reduction of the lands the Moro inhabit. Unless there is a locally negotiated and enforced agreement on land and boundaries of the new Bangsamoro region, a likely scenario is that MILF commanders will confront armed civilian groups and the AFP.

The new Bangsamoro leaders and the Government of the Philippines should take the Wao conflict situation seriously and specifically address it in the ongoing peace process. If not, there is a risk that armed groups, including the MILF and the AFP will be the ones who will determine if Wao is part of the Bangsamoro or not and as a result, there is the potential for more death and displacement.

DISCLAIMER

The Thematic Protection Bulletin aims to provide a starting point for information and analysis that can help protection agencies, policy makers and other stakeholders concerning instances of forced displacement or solutions (repatriation, resettlement, integration). The number of people displaced / affected may differ from the number in need of humanitarian assistance. To the extent possible, the terminology used in the Bulletin reflects the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and other sources of international law and practice. The information reported in the Thematic Protection Bulletin has been received from members of the Protection Cluster across Mindanao. Consequently, unreported cases of forced displacement and solutions are not reflected. Updates will be provided as and when more information is received from members. Although efforts are made to verify the data, the UNHCR Mindanao, Philippines takes no responsibility for the incompleteness or inaccuracy of the information. The information provided in this Thematic Protection Bulletin does not necessarily reflect the views of UNHCR or any individual member of the Protection Cluster.



UNHCR MINDANAO: WAO LANAO DEL SUR

LOCATION MAP

