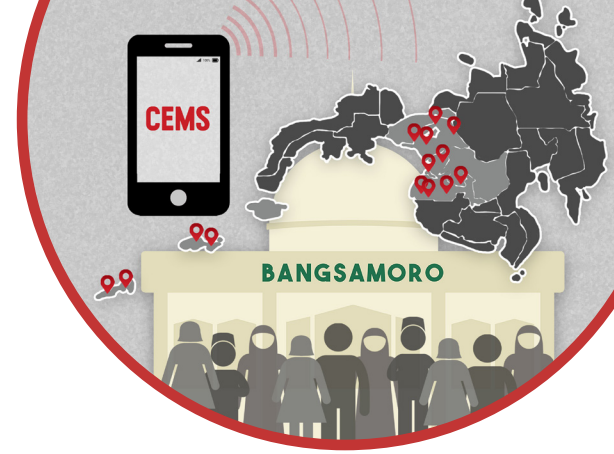


# CRITICAL EVENTS MONITORING SYSTEM BULLETIN

Period covered: June 2019  
Date of release: 31 July 2019



## No honeymoon period for Bangsamoro's newly elected leaders

Transitions are never easy, particularly if they affect the well-being of thousands of people. In the Bangsamoro, the month of June saw officials who won new terms after the previous month's election prepare to assume their posts and officials who lost prepare to vacate their offices, reluctantly or not. Meanwhile, those who won second or third terms set new priorities and consolidated loyalties among other local officials. Amid the comings and goings, the challenges plaguing the Bangsamoro became even more manifest, as if telling the election winners there will be no honeymoon.

Around 170 reports provided in June by Early Response Network (ERN) members based in Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao indicated a fragile peace and order situation, with more shootings and assassinations by riding-in-tandem teams.<sup>1</sup> Illegal drug buy-busts and confiscations were conducted as the state continued to pursue an anti-drug campaign. Cases of kidnapping or missing children panicked families, especially as they could mask recruitment by groups linked to ISIS. All the while, extremist groups have regrouped – and not even furtively – despite intense military pressure.

### More crimes

At least eight shooting incidents were monitored in June, half of which occurred in Cotabato City. In five of these incidents, the perpetrators were 'riding-in-tandem' or riding a motorcycle, with one driving and the other one acting as the gunman. Three of their victims were soldiers who succumbed to their wounds. Also killed was a tricycle driver.

Meanwhile, the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) led at least six illegal drug buy-busts during the month, of which at least five were conducted in Cotabato City and in Datu Odin Sinsuat town, located south of the city. Drugs worth thousands were confiscated. PDEA, the lead agency for the government's anti-drug campaign, has intensified its operations, mindful that the Duterte government has reached the halfway mark and seeks to declare all barangays drug-free by the end of its term.

Criminality and illegal drugs provide a volatile mix. Assassinations by riding-in-tandem teams have been linked to the illegal drug trade. In Cotabato City, riding-in-tandem and other crimes, drug-related and not, will test the effectiveness of the new police chief who

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<sup>1</sup> ERN members gather and act on the CEMS reports. They are autonomous individuals and members of groups with grassroots reach who monitor disputes and harness traditional, formal, and hybrid institutions and arrangements to defuse or resolve violent conflicts. Among them are women and youth leaders. International Alert Philippines established the Critical Events Monitoring System or CEMS to gather real-time reports on tensions and violent conflicts in communities in the Bangsamoro. Reports are transmitted through SMS, stored in a database, and processed for deployment of context-specific responses by key stakeholders on the ground.

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replaced someone judged to have failed at stopping or solving them. These will also be a challenge to the city's elected officials.

Marawi City confronted incidents of a sinister nature. Four women were allegedly kidnapped and one was able to escape and tell of her experience. Several children were also declared missing and later fortunately found. The news created panic among families and city residents, fearful their children were actually lured by armed groups.

### The 'black' group

Their fears were not unfounded. Two other young women who went missing were confirmed to have joined the Maute Group. That they disappeared just before a congregation of Islamic missionaries or *juhor* began on 20 June in Marawi City added to tensions as residents recalled how the *juhor* in May 2017, held a few days before the start of the war, allowed foreign fighters to join the Maute and allied groups that besieged the city. Talk also circulated of another Maute attack timed with the *juhor*.

What drives young people to join the Maute or other groups that adhere to ISIS, when they have wreaked much destruction in places such as Butig and Marawi, is a question that not only parents must grapple with but also communities and leaders in government and other sectors.

In June, there were sightings again of armed men in the contiguous towns of Lumbatan, Lumbaca-Unayan, and Marogong, as well as in Tubaran and Sultan Dumalondong in Lanao del Sur. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) confirmed that the 'black' – parlance for ISIS adherents – has been regrouping in Lanao. In Marawi, Maute presence has been confirmed. However,

extremists' defeats in Butig, Marawi and in other places in Lanao after the 2017 siege, and heavy military presence due to martial law implementation make another attack on the same scale as the 2017 war unlikely in the near term.

What the security sector, local government leaders, elders, and the MILF need to check is a convergence between extremist groups and clans feuding over politics, resources, or other issues. Research showed that membership in extremist groups grew because of the need to beef up clan firepower to fight other clans.<sup>2</sup> This widened the groups' power and reach, which allowed them to hire themselves to other warring clans as well as to politicians. These could happen again, with the 2019 election creating new feuds or providing a new trigger to existing clan conflicts.

Monitoring in June showed fighting between parties embroiled in election-related feuds, in areas where ISIS adherents have been monitored. In Lumbatan, Lanao del Sur, a former barangay chairman and his men attacked the homes of the family he blamed for the death of a sibling and his loss in the 2018 election. In Tubaran, Lanao del Sur, a barangay chairman exchanged gunfire with a former councilor. In Pagalungan, Maguindanao, bitter political rivals clashed anew. Pagalungan has been the site of clashes between the military and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, also linked to ISIS.

### Feuds between individuals

Other incidents involved individuals, which turned violent or nearly became violent. There were also incidents that involved heightened tensions that could potentially escalate to violence.

Of the latter sort was a Meranao family's plan to confront an official of the Department of

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<sup>2</sup> International Alert, *Religion not the only cause of Marawi war, report says*, <https://www.international-alert.org/news/religion-not-only-cause-marawi-war-report-says> (accessed 10 July 2019).

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Trade and Industry in Iligan City who was said to have coarsely treated a family member who wanted to avail herself of a *carenderia* (food stall) starter kit. The family was one of thousands displaced by the Marawi war. There were other war survivors who were agitated at their seeming shut-out from assistance distributed by Task Force Bangon Marawi, the lead government agency for Marawi's rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Some road accidents developed into conflicts or nearly turned violent when victims weren't seriously injured. Some of the victims engaged in fistfights when they could not be pacified. Others nearly came to blows while others threatened those deemed to have caused the accident. There were at least 19 road accidents in June, with half involving motorcycles.

No conflicts have resulted from the occasional heavy traffic on the highway connecting Iligan and Marawi cities so far, but it has been known to raise the tempers of motorists. The highway traverses Baloi in Lanao del Norte and Pantar and Saguiaran in Lanao del Sur. More vehicles, including big trucks, have been plying the highway, amid the assistance being channeled to Marawi City and other parts of Lanao del Sur and the

consequent boost to economic activities. Some occasions cause congestion such as big celebrations, tighter inspection at checkpoints, and lockdowns. On some days, traffic is slow-moving for no apparent reason, causing irritation or anxiety among motorists, who remember the exodus of vehicles from Marawi at the start of the war in 2017.

Some incidents benefited from conflict resolution, with persons in authority, such as elders and barangay officials, mediating between parties. In some road crashes, the aggrieved party was recompensed for the death or injury of a family member by the offending party. Hospitalization costs were also shouldered by the latter party. In some family feuds, blood money was paid to the family with a member who was killed. To make the settlement hold, the feuding parties were made to swear on the Qur'an.

Conflict mediation and settlement methods, often hybrid in nature, are essential in preventing feuds from escalating. Their application has also ended protracted conflicts such as family and clan disputes. Coupled with peacebuilding, they might work in addressing seemingly unsolvable challenges such as violent extremism. Understanding how it evolves will be key.

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*International Alert's Critical Events Monitoring System (CEMS) is an SMS-based reporting system that captures conflict incidents and tensions in communities. It is used by the Early Response Network (ERN), a group of men and women in various localities in the Bangsamoro, who share real-time information and work with local governments, key agencies, the security sector, and religious and traditional leaders in coordinating quick and context-specific responses to tensions, violent conflicts, disasters, and displacement, as they happen. Command posts are led by our local partners TASBIKka, Inc., ERN Lanao del Sur, MARADECA, Inc., and Lupah Sug Bangsamoro Women Association, Inc.*



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