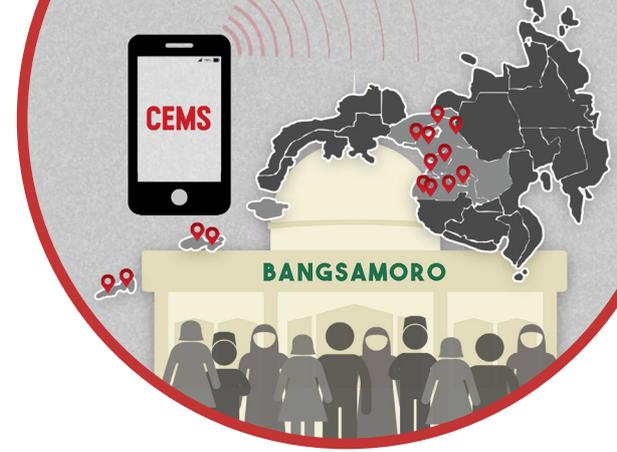


CRITICAL EVENTS MONITORING SYSTEM BULLETIN

24 June 2019



Heightened tensions and conflicts as dry season and campaign period set in

April saw temperatures soar as the weather warmed and political rivalries heat up as the campaign for local posts got underway. These formed the backdrop for tensions that simmered and, in several instances, boiled over to claim lives and destroy properties in the Bangsamoro and surrounding areas.

That month, a total of 93 reports were received by International Alert Philippines's Critical Events Monitoring System (CEMS), sent in by Early Response Network (ERN) members in Cotabato and Marawi cities, the rest of Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur, and parts of Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato.¹ These reports excluded reports on election-related incidents, which were covered by an earlier bulletin.²

Dry taps

The onset of the dry season was declared by the weather bureau on 22 March – earlier than in 2018 – but by then Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi had already suffered from drought while Lanao del Sur and Basilan had experienced severely dry conditions.³ Even hotter days were forecast for April.

In Cotabato City, taps ran dry while a temporary housing site in Brgy. Emie Punud

for families displaced by the 2017 Marawi siege clamored for water and reeled from smelly canals, which affected the health of residents, particularly children.

Amid the heat, fire incidents destroyed properties in Cotabato, Marawi and Iligan cities and in Lanao towns.

Gun and explosives use

While implementation of martial law in Mindanao has seen the military confiscate thousands of loose firearms, it has also driven up the price of Danao-made guns, which continued to sell well, particularly in Cotabato City. Guns emboldened carnappers and gunmen targeting certain individuals, notably, in Cotabato City.

Meanwhile, guns still in the hands of families and clans enabled revenge killings. In Makilala, North Cotabato, a barangay chairman from Cotabato City was shot due to an ongoing rido. In Lumbatan, Lanao del Sur, an alleged member of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and another individual, with whom he had an altercation, traded gunfire. The MILF member went into hiding after reportedly killing his adversary, afraid of retaliation by the dead man's family.

¹ International Alert Philippines set up the 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. Members of the ERN provide and also use the 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.

² That report can be read here: <http://conflictaalert.info/cems/cems-bulletin-12-may-2019/>

³ Divina Nova Joy dela Cruz, *The Manila Times*, *Pagasa declares start of hot, dry season*, <https://www.manilatimes.net/pagasa-declares-start-of-hot-dry-season/529740/> (accessed on 12 June 2019).

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Partners in business could worsen a misunderstanding with the use of guns. In Marantao, Lanao del Sur, partners in a sand and gravel business did not see eye to eye, and with their men, fired at each other.

Other weapons were used to intimidate or to harm. In Marawi City, explosives were used in at least two occasions; reports indicated no one was hurt or killed. In Cotabato City, however, a grenade blast killed two, apparently targets of a grudge.

Armed groups

Armed groups continued to be active. The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) clashed with the military within the SPMS Box in Maguindanao and in Midsayap across the border in North Cotabato. The group was also said to be actively recruiting members in Cotabato City.

Meanwhile, the New People's Army (NPA) clashed with government troops in Tagoloan town in Lanao del Sur. Reports indicated that three NPA members were wounded, while on the government's side, a soldier was killed while six others and several MILF members, who assisted the troops, were injured. Families displaced by the conflict sought refuge in four barangays in Kapai, the town west of Tagoloan.

In other areas of the province, alleged NPA members were spotted in the forests of Butig while armed men – their affiliation unclear – were seen in Lumbaca-Unayan. Despite their reduced numbers, Maute Group members were seen in Marogong.

Law enforcement

The government's ongoing campaign against illegal drugs resulted in arrests and killings.

Meanwhile, Omar Solitario Ali, former mayor of Marawi City, who had been linked to the

Maute Group that was held responsible for the 2017 siege, was arrested by the military. News reports later clarified he was merely "invited" for a short discussion.⁴ He was able to return to his home in Marawi and ran for city mayor in the May 2019 election but lost.

Another arrest bore semblance to the Mamasapano incident in 2015, which had lacked the benefit of coordination between the government and the MILF. The Philippine National Police-Regional Public Safety Battalion served a warrant of arrest to several individuals in Brgy. Ilian, Madamba, Lanao del Sur but did not communicate with the MILF camp nearby about its operation. A firefight ensued between the police and these individuals and their relatives in the MILF, who came to their defense. The fighting stopped after the MILF ordered its men to stand down. Several days after the firefight, the BARMM's Regional Human Rights Commission went to Brgy. Ilian to investigate the incident.

Precursor of violence

Other incidents on the surface may not appear to be a source of tensions. Among these are road accidents, of which nine were recorded in the Bangsamoro in April alone. Such accidents, involving mostly motorcycles, have become terribly common in city and municipal roads. If these are not immediately responded to or addressed appropriately, these could blow up into rido, as previous instances had demonstrated.

Development assistance may spark competition among beneficiaries or invite complaints from those who were excluded. They may be rejected outright. These should benefit from proper consultation with local and traditional leaders and be implemented with care.

The transition to Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) from

⁴ Divina Suson, *Philippine News Agency, Marawi ex-mayor not arrested but 'invited': AFP*, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1067270> (accessed 12 June 2019).

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the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao has generated excitement but also unease over job continuity and high expectations over new appointments. For instance, teachers in Lumbayanague, Lanao del Sur complained of late payment of salaries while some MILF members in Butig, Lanao del Sur were expecting to land work in the BARMM

government. How the transition will unfold, particularly with regard to staffing, will be critical to the quality of government services and to stability in the region. The basis of appointments – whether merit, family ties, or political connections – will be closely monitored.

This bulletin is based on the ERN reports below, which were collected in April 2019.

Business rivalry

- Partners in a sand and gravel business based in Marantao, Lanao del Sur had a misunderstanding. The two and their men exchanged gunfire.

Carnapping

- A carnapping incident in Cotabato City resulted in the loss of a motorcycle and the life of its owner, who was shot.

Development assistance

- Republic Cement Group and the Philippine Business for Social Progress launched a training program for Marawi residents.
- Enumerators of the United Nations Development Programme tried to hold a survey in Butig, Lanao del Sur but their prospective respondents were reportedly not welcoming. One allegedly fired a gun, scaring them.
- In Butig, Lanao del Sur, the first anniversary of a program on peace and order called 'Angat Ka Butig, Atin To' was celebrated. The program was spearheaded by the 49th Infantry Battalion (49IB) of the Philippine Army.

Drugs

- A 'top drug personality' in Lanao del Norte and alleged member of the Magandia and Mapandi Drug Group was arrested in Iligan City by a combined force of the Iligan City Police Office and Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA)-Region 10.
- One died while the primary drug suspect escaped a PDEA raid in Marawi City.

Family feud

- The chairman of a Cotabato City barangay was ambushed in Makilala, North Cotabato allegedly due to an ongoing rido.
- A misunderstanding between an alleged MILF member and an individual known as Red Man sparked a clan war in Lanao del Sur. Red Man and one of his cousins were killed. Red Man's family sought the MILF member, who went into hiding.

Family issues

- In Butig, Lanao del Sur, a couple eloped after the girl's parents turned down the young man's suit because he did not have enough dowry. The couple eventually married after negotiations and a dowry of P100,000 and a one-hectare piece of land.
- In Butig, Lanao del Sur, a baby died soon after birth. The mother was assisted by a 'hilot'.
- A man was found dead in a rice field in Lumbayanague, Lanao del Sur. He had been texting a woman and had asked to meet her. Unknown to him, the young woman's father had read his texts and, pretending to be his daughter, agreed to meet him. The meeting was set Thursday night; the man's body was found the next day.

Fire incidents

- Fire incidents were recorded in Cotabato City, Marawi City, Iligan City, Baloi town in Lanao del Norte, and Taraka town in Lanao del Sur.

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Gender issues

- A man wanted for rape in South Cotabato was arrested in Cotabato City.

Grudge

- Two persons were wounded in a grenade explosion in Cotabato City. The motive was believed to be a grudge against the two.

Illegal logging

- Illegal logging operations in Marantao, Lanao del Sur were raided by the provincial police.

Law enforcement

- A firefight erupted between the police and alleged MILF members they tried to arrest in Brgy. Ilian, Madamba, Lanao del Sur. The firefight involved the alleged MILF members' families who came to their defense. The police reportedly had failed to inform the MILF in a nearby camp about their operation. At least seven policemen were wounded while four MILF members were killed.
- In Cotabato City, members of the BARMM's Criminal Investigation and Detection Group arrested an MILF member for direct assault with murder, in relation to the Mamasapano incident in 2015 in which 44 members of the Special Action Force died.
- Former Marawi City mayor Omar Solitario Ali was arrested by the military during a campaign rally. But he and his family were later seen cleaning his house, which the military had used as a temporary camp during the Marawi war.

Martial law implementation

- A local government official was forced to sleep inside his vehicle at a military checkpoint in Tugaya, Lanao del Sur because of a curfew.
- Four military trucks were spotted on the Pantar highway going to Iligan City.

Physical assault

- A brawl broke out among three men, all relatives and neighbors in Maguing, Lanao del Sur.

Private sector services

- Marawi City residents complained of empty ATMs.

Public services

- A barangay collector of electricity bill payments in Butig, Lanao del Sur was accused of pocketing part of the payments. The mayor ordered him to turn over all monthly payments to the municipal collector to ensure the town made full and correct payments to the Lanao del Sur Electric Cooperative, Inc.
- A candidate for Marawi City vice mayor threw a fit after his relative was not accommodated at a public hospital. A clerk at the hospital lodged a complaint against him.
- Marawi City's 'Area 1' for families displaced by the war in 2017 has had no water for more than two months already.
- Area 1 also bore the brunt of smelly canals. Rashes among some of the children had been noted.
- A barangay in Cotabato City went without water for a week because of the dry season.

Rebellion

- The military and the NPA clashed in Tagoloan, Lanao del Sur. A soldier died while six others were injured. Several MILF members, who helped the military, were also injured. Among the NPA, three were reported injured. Displaced families sought refuge in four barangays in Kapai, Lanao del Sur.
- Men believed to be NPA members were said to be hiding in the forests of Butig, Lanao del Sur. The men, who could speak only Bisaya and Tagalog, had been monitored buying food in the town center, after which they went back to the forests.

Road accidents

- A motorcycle and a motorcab collided in Cotabato City, seriously injuring the motorcycle driver and passenger.
- Two cars collided in Marawi City, after which, the driver of the car that hit the other quickly ran away. A hunt for the driver was launched.
- Two motorcycles collided in Marawi, injuring one.
- Two trailers collided on the road going down to Iligan City from Marawi City. A car was caught in the collision.
- A motorcycle and a car collided in Marawi City. The motorcycle driver agreed to shoulder the cost of the car repairs, admitting the accident was his fault.

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Road accidents (con't)

- In Mulondo, Lanao del Sur, a motorcycle bearing the driver and his wife hit a tricycle as it tried to overtake other vehicles in its lane.
- Three were seriously injured in a collision involving two motorcycles in Marantao, Lanao del Sur.
- Two motorcycles that collided in Maguing, Lanao del Sur resulted in the injury of a minor.
- A road accident in Marantao, Lanao del Sur injured a child. The driver and the Maranao rescue team brought the child to the hospital for treatment.

Shooting

- Two shooting incidents were recorded in Cotabato City. In the first, a person was shot by two men in a motorcycle in a covered court in Brgy. San Roque. The second happened in Almonte Extension. Two were wounded while two others died. The suspects were aboard a pickup truck.

Snatching

- Snatchers onboard motorcycles victimized several in Cotabato City.
- A snatcher was nabbed in Cotabato City.

Threat

- In Marawi City, a group of high school students waited for another, whom they allegedly had planned to kill. The student called the Saksi radio group to ask for help. With the assistance of the barangay chairman, the student safely made it out of the school.

Transition to BARMM

- Five teachers in Lumbayanague, Lanao del Sur complained of late payment of salaries. They were told that government agencies in the BARMM were reorganized and interviews were held to pick the new heads. The teachers received their wages scheduled for March in April.
- In Butig, MILF members wanting to be employed under the BARMM government were advised by an MILF commander to wait as arrangements with the different agencies in the BARMM were ongoing.

Violent extremism

- BIFF recruitment was said to be ongoing in Cotabato City.
- The BIFF claimed responsibility for the fatal shooting of a soldier in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao.
- Fighting between the military and the BIFF in the SPMS Box in Maguindanao remained unrelenting.
- A clash between the military and the BIFF in Midsayap, North Cotabato lasted 30 minutes and resulted in the wounding of two soldiers and the killing of two BIFF members.
- Armed men were seen in Lumbaca-Unayan, Lanao del Sur on two separate days. It was not clear to which group they were affiliated.
- In Marogong, Lanao del Sur, members of the Maute Group were seen on two separate occasions.
- A Maute Group member who had surrendered wanted to go to another city to find work but he was disallowed by the commanding officer of the Philippine Army's 49IB, who allegedly required him to show himself at the 49IB every two days.

Weapons

- In Cotabato City, prices of Danao-made guns rose to P14,000-16,000 each from P10,000-11,000 because of martial law. Despite the price rise, they continued to sell well.
- A bomb was found in a barangay in Marawi City, particularly on the bank of Lake Lanao.
- Meanwhile, the sound of gunfire and a bomb explosion were heard in two different locations in Marawi City.

International Alert's Critical Events Monitoring System (CEMS) is an SMS-based reporting system that captures conflict incidents and tensions in communities that may or may not lead to the eruption of violence. It is used by its 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.

