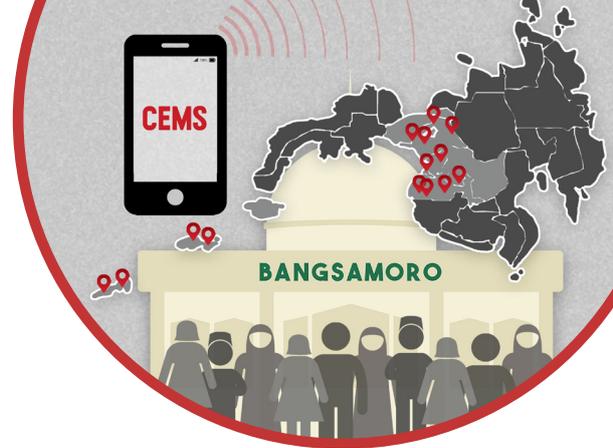


CRITICAL EVENTS MONITORING SYSTEM BULLETIN

Period covered: July & August 2019

Date of release: 10 October 2019



Bangsamoro confronts NPA, ISIS, and weather threats

The Bangsamoro confronted a growing insurgency problem, just as the rains, which provided relief from the heat, turned into a deluge that brought misery, particularly to families displaced by the 2017 Marawi war and still living in temporary shelters.

In the backdrop, winners of the May polls began their terms, eager to deliver on election promises, yet aware of the many challenges they face, including threats from the enemies they made in the past election.

This bulletin for July and August was pieced together using around 300 reports from Early Response Network (ERN) members based in Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao.¹ Many of the ERN members are disaster risk reduction officers at the municipal level who, as such, situated themselves among communities affected by the fighting and the rains to rescue or extend relief, as well as to provide accounts for the Critical Events Monitoring System (CEMS) designed for conflict analysis and quick response.

Military-NPA clashes

The military launched attacks against New People's Army (NPA) rebels its drones had sighted as having massed in the forest of Lumba-Bayabao, Lanao del Sur. Positioned

in the nearby town of Poona Bayabao, the military commenced shelling and combat operations on 26 July. Families in the Lumba-Bayabao uplands went down to the low areas and either sought safety with relatives or assistance from the local government. Some families returned to their homes by 30 July. The clashes reportedly drove the NPA deep into the Lumba-Bayabao forest.

Conflict Alert, International Alert Philippines's conflict monitoring system, has no record of NPA-related incidents in Lanao del Sur from 2011 to 2017. By 2018, there were three: the killing of an NPA leader in Tagoloan II, the seizure of sacks of rice that were part of the NPA's food cache in Tagoloan II, and the surrender of NPA organizers in the area between Tagoloan II and the adjacent town of Kapai. All these took place in November. In 2019, there is one so far: the clash between police and NPA rebels in Tagoloan II last February.

CEMS reports this year detailed clashes in Tagoloan, Lanao del Norte, which borders with Kapai, Lanao del Sur. There also have been sightings of men believed to be NPA members in the forest of Butig.

Increasing NPA presence in Lanao del Sur has coincided with the November 2017 decision of Pres. Rodrigo Duterte to terminate

¹ERN 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 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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peace negotiations with the Communist Party of the Philippines, its political wing, the National Democratic Front, and its armed wing, the NPA. This has elicited intense military and police operations against the NPA in the provinces in Mindanao's eastern corridor as well as provinces that border with Lanao del Sur, such as Lanao del Norte, Bukidnon and North Cotabato. NPA rebels have been driven to Lanao del Sur's thick forests, which extend from Tagoloan II in the north to Butig in the south, where they could regroup.

The military has declared there would be no letup in its operations against the NPA and groups allied with ISIS.² CEMS data showed that while it was fighting the NPA in Lanao del Sur in July, it was also attacking Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters' (BIFF) positions in the towns comprising the so-called SPMS Box near the Liguasan Marsh in Maguindanao and in Pikit in North Cotabato. The BIFF have affiliated themselves with ISIS. Operations were sustained until August. By that time, displaced individuals had reached around 8,000.

For its part, the Lanao del Sur provincial government formally declared the NPA "persona non grata" at a provincial peace and order council meeting in August.³ This serves as warning to the province's residents against providing support to the rebels.

Recruitment, whether to the NPA or ISIS, should be continuously monitored. Poverty has been known to be one of its major drivers. The promise of money is a potent lure to those whose survival is a daily battle. Socioeconomic programs can create resilience among those who are vulnerable to recruitment by either group.

Floods and disease

Heavy rains induced by the southwest monsoon, tropical storm Falcon, and typhoon Hanna inundated many parts of the Bangsamoro. Flashfloods and landslides were reported in Lanao del Sur, particularly the towns on its eastern side, which serve as catchment for water coming from surrounding areas with higher elevation. In Maguindanao, floodwater submerged municipalities near the Liguasan Marsh. Among the hardest hit was Datu Salibo, which serves as catchment for water coming from other towns. Some of its barangays, in fact, are flooded year-round. This time, however, all 17 of Datu Salibo's barangays were covered by water.

Rains and strong winds also lashed at temporary shelters and evacuation centers for families displaced by the 2017 Marawi war, adding to their inhospitable conditions. Floods caused traffic in Marawi's narrow streets, testing the patience of motorists who didn't want to risk getting stuck behind checkpoints during curfew hours.

In Marogong, a tornado destroyed houses, schools, a madrasah, a mosque, three other buildings, and the stage in the poblacion. Around 30 families were displaced while two students were injured and brought to a hospital in Malabang for treatment.

Municipal and provincial disaster risk reduction and management offices were galvanized to help or rescue affected residents.

The wet season, which officially began in mid-June, brought relief from the heat in the previous months but also too much water, and with it, diseases such as dengue. New cases were reported daily in the Bangsamoro, stressing health facilities such as the Amai

²Western Mindanao Command, *Troops, NPA clash amid intensified ops in Lanao*, <http://www.westmincom.com/troops-npa-clash-amid-intensified-ops-in-lanao/> (accessed 16 September 2019).

³<https://www.facebook.com/PhilippineSTAR/photos/the-provincial-peace-and-order-council-in-lanao-del-sur-in-a-meeting-today-decla/1431490263671317/> (accessed 18 September 2019).

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Pakpak Medical Center in Marawi, which serves the whole province of Lanao del Sur. Region 12, which covers North and South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and Sarangani, also reported thousands of dengue cases.

Climate change is inexorable and will affect the poor more than others. It is important that responders, whether disaster or health officials, are equipped with full and accurate risk data and have sufficient budgets and the right equipment to respond to calamities or emergencies. Government officials should plan for the long term and look at ways to build disaster resilience, including flood management and landslide mitigation. It is important that projects go through a process of community buy-in and conflict-proofing so they don't cause new or exacerbate existing conflicts in the communities where they'll be implemented.

Political transitions

The current set of local government officials will confront insurgency, terrorism, environmental and other challenges in the next three years, and will need to accommodate the transition to the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao under the helm of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Their terms of office began at noon of 30 June as provided by law.

Lanao del Sur held a mass oath taking for winners of the May polls. Some places long established as bailiwicks of powerful clans saw peaceful transitions to new leaders who had the daring and machinery to challenge these families. Marantao held its first turnover ceremony in a long while. It was the same in Malabang, after the new mayor found favor with the Court of Appeals, which said his transfer of registration to Malabang from Ganassi was in order. This had been challenged by his political opponents.

In Pagalungan, Maguindanao, the elected mayor, whose victory was questioned by an opponent, booked another win when the court junked the petition against him reportedly for infirmities.

In Datu Unsay, Maguindanao, however, the elected mayor and vice mayor – Fuentes Dukay and Wanay Dukay, respectively – unceremoniously resigned. Taking over their posts were Andal Ampatuan V and Janine Ampatuan Mamalapat. Datu Unsay town is named after Andal 'Unsay' Ampatuan Jr., father of Andal V and one of the principal suspects of the 2009 Mamasapano massacre that took the lives of 52 people. No reason was given for the resignations. These came though as trial of the 197 accused of participating in the massacre wrapped up. The Quezon City regional trial court that heard the case is expected to give its verdict in November.

Longstanding feuds

Politics creates bitter enemies, and in the Bangsamoro, results too often in rido. July and August saw new episodes of fighting stemming from longstanding family feuds due to politics and other causes.

In Baloi, Lanao del Norte, a relative of a Marawi government official was shot allegedly by a relative of a former official. The shooting was believed to be related to the 2016 election that both had contested.

A former barangay chairman and his men and the family he blamed for the death of a sibling and his loss in the 2018 barangay election exchanged gunfire while riding boats on Lake Lanao in the area between Lumbatan and Bayang towns. The Lumbatan mayor offered a half-a-million-peso reward to anyone who could capture the former chairman or provide information on his whereabouts. After this, the former barangay chairman reportedly sought refuge in the hinterlands of Madamba town.

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In Balabagan, a firefight between two families engaged in a rido lasted five hours, stopping only when town officials, the police, and the Marines intervened.

In Shariff Saydona Mustapha in Maguindanao, two farmers, members of the 118th Base Command of the MILF, were killed by 10 men using high-powered firearms. In Sultan sa Barongis, also in Maguindanao, a barangay chairman and an MILF commander, together with their men, had a shootout. One was killed on the side of barangay chairman and several wounded on the part of the MILF commander. Military, police, and local officials intervened to put a stop to the shooting. In the two cases, rido was cited as cause for the violence.

Crime and other incidents

July and August also saw new shooting, carjacking, and kidnapping incidents.

There were at least eight shooting incidents in July and at least 10 in August. Targets were ordinary people such as drivers or farmers, as well as government officials. Among the prominent cases was that of the Masiu police chief who was ambushed in Marawi. Two sisters, barangay chairwomen in Marawi, were also ambushed in the city. One died while the other survived.

There were eight carjacking and carnapping cases, all involving motorcycles.

The mayor of Ditsaan-Ramain was kidnapped in Marawi but released the next day – an incident allegedly related to issues within his family.

There were at least 14 road accidents in July and 15 in August, mostly involving motorcycles. Meanwhile, fire engulfed homes in Balindong, Balabagan, and Lumbayanague towns, and Iligan City.

The government continued to pursue an anti-drug campaign and embarked on road-clearing operations. The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, leading the crackdown on the illegal drug trade and use, conducted at least eight buy-busts in Cotabato City alone. In the municipalities of Lumbayanague and Sultan Dumalondong, members of the Citizen Armed Forces Geographical Unit, assisted by the military, exchanged gunfire with members of a drug syndicate. Members of the syndicate were believed to have taken refuge in other municipalities.

Local governments in the Bangsamoro began clearing roads of obstructions or illegal constructions, following a directive from the Department of Interior and Local Government that, in turn, implemented Pres. Duterte's order during his State of the Nation Address. This raised tensions and despair among those who were affected, especially as many local governments instead embarked on road widening and tore down privately-owned structures such as houses. Residents were afraid to complain because the initiative had stemmed from the President's order.

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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