



A Surge in Vertical Violence Shames the BARMM and Uncovers the Breakdown of the CAB Normalization Process

Statement on the ambush killing of PNP personnel on 28 March 2026 in Shariff Aguak

31 March 2026

A surge in ambush attacks and revenge killings targeting State security forces blows the whistle on a new round of vertical violence and its steep rise in the first quarter of the new year. **Worse, the causal root of violence not only uncovers the combined onslaught of violent extremism and horizontal revenge killings but also the near collapse of the post-conflict normalization process and the humiliation and shaming of its authors and advocates.**

The most recent tragedy occurred past 9:00 PM on 28 March in Brgy. Mother Poblacion, Shariff Aguak, when an ambush killed five members of the Philippine National Police (PNP) 2nd Provincial Mobile Force Company. Three more were wounded. The PNP officers were on their way back to their detachment following patrol and police visibility operations in the municipality. Local police have stated that there were at least 10 armed men behind the attack, and that weapons of the police officers were taken.

There are two narratives that are gaining ground to explain what happened.

The first narrative is shaped by local voices and perspectives. People from the communities where the incident occurred believe that the ambush is a continuation of the conflict string stemming from a violent political feud (rido) between two prominent groups in the area. The circumstances of the ambush indicate that it was not happenstance but well planned, and the ferocity shows that it was most likely a revenge killing rather than a chance encounter. On 29 March, the spokesperson of the military's 6th Infantry Division said that they were investigating members of a private armed group (PAG) operating within Shariff Aguak municipality as the likely perpetrators, without naming the family linked to the armed group.

A second narrative suggests that the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), a Maguindanao branch of the Dawlah Islamiyah (DI) extremist group was behind the attack. More recent media reports cited the PNP as saying that the attack was in retaliation for the successful series of operations that resulted in the arrest and seizure of high-powered firearms and ammunition by the security forces since October 2025.

The site of the attack is also located within the SPMS box, home to members of the extremist BIFF. Indeed, CCAA has documented the resurgence of DI recruitment and violence, mostly concentrated in the Lanao corridor, and the ambush could indicate a show of force by the DI in the Maguindanao area. **However, the government itself has stated that an investigation is still ongoing, underlining the need for caution as DI has often been used as a convenient cover for illicit activities and to lay the blame on everyone except those involved in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) implementation process.**

Nevertheless, one thing is at least certain. The incident, irrespective of its cause or the perpetrators, is a shameful stain on the Bangsamoro peace process and a stark reminder of the utter failures of the decommissioning and normalization aspects of the political settlement. CCAA's Critical Events Monitoring System (CEMS) has

already recorded an alarming series of thirteen (13) violent attacks against security forces and fifteen (15) violent incidents involving MILF-affiliated actors and other armed groups in the region in the first quarter of 2026 alone.

If this was indeed related to DI, it represents a repeat of the shaming tactics that helped fuel the mobilization of the youth to join their ranks during the war in Marawi, and for good reason. **Recent youth interviews conducted by CCAA noted the wide tensions and disenchantments of the Moro youth brought about by media reports of wanton corruption in the BARMM.**

It neither helps that the narratives of blatant corruption in the BARMM now coincides with investigations of massive flood control corruption rocking the central Philippine government itself. **It is fueling uncertainty and insecurity amongst the Moro youth, discrediting the actions of the BARMM and sowing doubt about the future of the CAB.**

The confirmation of the first Bangsamoro parliamentary elections in September 2026 provides renewed hope and the best remaining chance for reclaiming the promise of peace. All must unite to ensure that the forthcoming battle remains free and democratic and that the integrity, security, and safety of the upcoming parliamentary elections is not disrupted. ●



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CCAA manages the Critical Events Monitoring System (CEMS), an SMS-based reporting system that captures conflict incidents and tensions in communities that may lead to the eruption of violence. It is used by Early Response Network (ERN) in various localities in the Bangsamoro who share real-time information and work with key stakeholders in coordinating quick context-specific responses.