

NEWSLETTER: MINDANAO

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PAYING IT FORWARD A STEP AT A TIME

EDITORIAL



Mindanao is a melting pot of rich cultures and traditions and teeming with possibilities for growth. As naturally diverse and rich as it is, some areas in Mindanao have constantly been affected with armed conflicts between government security forces and various

armed groups. Other situations of violence, such as rido and land issues, remain challenges to the security of communities. In 2016, the ICRC has not observed a decline in the scale and consequences of armed clashes on the civilian population.

The vulnerability of civilians in these conflict-affected areas continue to rise as they are displaced from their homes, leaving behind their sources of livelihood and whatever material possessions they have. Oftentimes, displacement is prolonged or recurrent, with the affected families finding it difficult to rebuild their lives even after relative peace and reconciliation between parties to the conflict.

The efforts of the ICRC's Mindanao sub-delegation in Davao and the Cotabato, Zamboanga, and Butuan field offices are guided by our institutional mission: to protect and assist victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence, and to endeavour to prevent suffering by promoting the respect for international humanitarian law (IHL). If respected by the parties to

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Overcoming difficulties is something people with disabilities do every day. It takes great effort and dedication to adapt to their condition. Very often they have to learn all over again how to do basic activities such as standing or walking without aid. They also have to cope with the impact of their disability on their own confidence.

In 2005, then eight-year-old Saturnino Latonio Jr. or Bim-Bim was watching TV with his friends inside their friend's house in Maco, Compostela Valley when a loud bang went off. A rifle was accidentally fired by a man, hitting him on the left knee. He recalled, "My left knee just exploded and I was in pain. There was blood everywhere." Bystanders rushed the bloodied boy to the nearest hospital.

Doctors tried to save Bim-Bim's limb, but the severity of his injuries led to the amputation of his left leg. He recuperated in the hospital for a month. Bim-Bim's surgeon, upon learning that he was wounded by a weapon and that his family had financial challenges, referred him to the ICRC. After an assessment of his case, he was enrolled in the physical rehabilitation program of the ICRC in partnership with the Davao Jubilee Foundation (DJF). The Davao Jubilee Foundation is a long-time partner of the ICRC in the field of physical rehabilitation for weapon-wounded patients.

Bim-Bim was fitted with an artificial leg. He practiced standing up and walking with it with the help of DJF's therapists. He

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returned home after a month but continued practicing until he got used to his artificial leg. He pressed on despite the bullying of some people.

After two months, Bim-Bim's mobility—playing or doing some outdoor activities—improved. He got back on his feet to play with his friends, engaged in community activities, and, eventually, finished secondary school.

"I am very grateful to the ICRC and DJF. Had it not been for them, I would have lost hope and confidence. I wouldn't know what to do. I don't even know if I could work, earn a living, or support myself," he said.

Like other patients with prosthesis, Bim-Bim was required to visit DJF every two years to be refitted with a new artificial leg. This is because the prosthesis suffers from wear and tear of daily use, and to make sure that the prosthesis is well adjusted to the patient's limb.

In 2015, Bim-Bim was given a lightweight prosthesis using technology introduced by the ICRC to the DJF. Polypropylene technology—which is used in ICRC-supported rehabilitation facilities in Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar—is both inexpensive and of high quality, thus making rehabilitation services more affordable and accessible.

Last year, Bim-Bim, who was already 18 years old, received a call from DJF to check if he was interested to receive the socio-economic support for ICRC's supported amputees. Qualified beneficiaries of this program undergo a technical-vocational course for free and receive livelihood assistance upon completion of the course.

Without hesitation, Bim-Bim accepted the offer because the course would open up more opportunities for him. He was among the first batch of 10 weapon-wounded individuals who received this assistance.

He studied welding for one month at a local vocational school where he earned a National Certification level 02 from



Bim-Bim has since relearned to stand on his own feet and is now helping others.

the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda). Upon graduation, the ICRC provided him with a portable welding machine so he could start earning a living. "It so happened that around that time, DJF was looking for a young, dynamic, and qualified person to work as a prosthetic/orthotic lab assistant. Bim-Bim's capability and his recently earned diploma from Tesda was a good match. So we offered him a job which he accepted," said Cheryl Arellano, DJF's operations manager.

"Before, other people made prostheses and assistive devices for patients like us, but now I'm very happy that in my own little way, it is my turn to help others. I'm glad that I have a decent work now. I'm earning and able to provide for my



For nearly 10 years, the ICRC has been working with Davao Jubilee Foundation, a physical rehabilitation center catering to the Mindanao region. The ICRC has been helping enhance DJF's services through the renovation of its infrastructure and by providing clinical trainings for its staff. In 1997, the ICRC started referring its first weapon-wounded patients for rehabilitation to the DJF.

In 2016, more than 400 patients received services in the center, among them 59 patients including 52 weapon-wounded people who received financial support for their physical rehabilitation.

parents. I'm also helping other people have a better life," Bim-Bim shared.

Recently, the ICRC helped upgrade the DJF's facility by renovating and equipping its physiotherapy area to improve the access to physical rehabilitation care. Currently, a dormitory is being constructed for the patients' use.

"A disabled person needs more than an artificial leg; he or she needs a role in society to recover dignity and self-respect," said Davide Fasola, ICRC health delegate in Mindanao. "Our hope is that through the physical rehabilitation program, weapon-wounded people affected by armed conflict can reintegrate, socially and economically, into society."

HEALTH SUPPORT IN MINDANAO

To ensure that life-saving aid reaches weapon-wounded people in Mindanao, the ICRC regularly supports **7** hospitals in conflict-affected areas with medical materials, as well as ad-hoc donations to **85** hospitals, rural health units and first aid posts to cope with the influx of patients following clashes or other bouts of violence.

Hospitals that received regular support in 2016:

- Maguindanao Provincial Hospital
- Cotabato Provincial Hospital
- Zamboanga City Medical Center
- Agusan del Sur Provincial Hospital
- Lianga District Hospital in Surigao del Sur
- Marihatag District Hospital in Surigao del Sur
- Dr. Amado Diaz Provincial Foundation Hospital in Midsayap, North Cotabato (January to June 2016 only)

Thanks to this overall support, more than **900** weapon-wounded people were treated in ICRC-supported health facilities including **235** wounded people treated in first-aid posts and rural health units.

Meanwhile, more than **90** people wounded by weapons received financial support for their treatment during this period. First aid and basic life support trainings were also conducted for nearly **800** health workers from rural health units and barangay health stations in Sulu, Basilan, North Cotabato and Agusan del Sur, as well as around **500** community members.

These ongoing trainings with the Philippine Red Cross (PRC) help enhance the readiness of **18** municipalities to treat the sick and wounded during emergencies. The RHUs and health stations that participated in the training all received dressing sets.



Prolonged displacement in Surigao del Sur led the ICRC to assist 4,700 affected families with relief items and livelihood support.

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the conflict, IHL provides essential protection for the civilians whose lives are daily affected. For them, these conflicts stand in the way of their stability, prosperity, and development. Armed conflicts could likewise lead to uncertainty about the future, cause ruin, suffering or even death.

As an organization accountable to the communities it protects and assists, the ICRC continuously engages with the affected population, local leaders, government agencies, all weapon bearers, and other humanitarian organizations to deliver relevant humanitarian aid with our primary partner in the country, the Philippine Red Cross. Our analysis of the broad range of needs and the institution's resources led us to focus our support on these priority areas: Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Surigao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu and the Zamboanga peninsula.

More than ever, our presence and actions in Mindanao are confronted with volatile security situations, complex dynamics of influence, and diverse contexts. So for each new development, we need to carefully assess the situation, the responses of different stakeholders, and how we can fill the gaps with our experience and expertise. We must also have the foresight and act rapidly for the conflict-affected victims.

Our teams in Mindanao are encouraged and challenged in our approaches through direct action, dialogue and partnerships across the region. The ICRC's neutrality, impartiality, and independence in carrying out its humanitarian aid bring an added value as we constantly confront volatile security situations and complex dynamics.

The displaced communities time and again have exhibited their resilience to cope with difficult circumstances but never wavered in their efforts to rebuild their lives. With this encouraging outlook, we are committed to support them to get back on their feet again and ensure respect for their lives, dignity, and well-being.

Yann Fridez is the head of the ICRC sub-delegation for Mindanao. Prior to his posting in the Philippines, he has had missions in Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Palestine and Sudan.

HELPING PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

In 2016, a number of armed conflicts and violent situations sparked in different parts of Mindanao that forced thousands of families out of their normal lives. Together with the Philippine Red Cross (PRC), the ICRC provided food, household and hygiene items to around **17,700** families or roughly **90,000** conflict-affected and displaced individuals in Surigao del Sur, Agusan del Sur, Maguindanao, North Cotabato, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, and Haran compound, Davao City. This support augmented the aid provided by authorities and helped families to meet their basic needs. Meanwhile, water and sanitation facilities built by the ICRC in evacuation sites served more than **49,400** people.

While emergency aid saves lives and mitigates the worst effects of armed conflict, displaced people also need to be self-reliant upon their return home. Through independent assessments and consultations with the community, the ICRC provides livelihood support and technical trainings aimed at improving their capacity to earn. It also implements cash-for-work programs that benefit families and the community at large. In Maguindanao and in two transitory sites in Zamboanga, more than **3,000** people gained short-term income and improved communal facilities through the cash-for-work projects.

"We provide aid based on the most pressing needs and urgency to receive humanitarian relief without discrimination and in compliance with the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence," said Ahmed Nezar Tamine, deputy head of the ICRC's Mindanao sub-delegation.

ZAMBOANGA CITY, December

- 1,068 beneficiaries,
cash-for-work



BASILAN, July and December

- 24,550 beneficiaries,
food, household and hygiene items





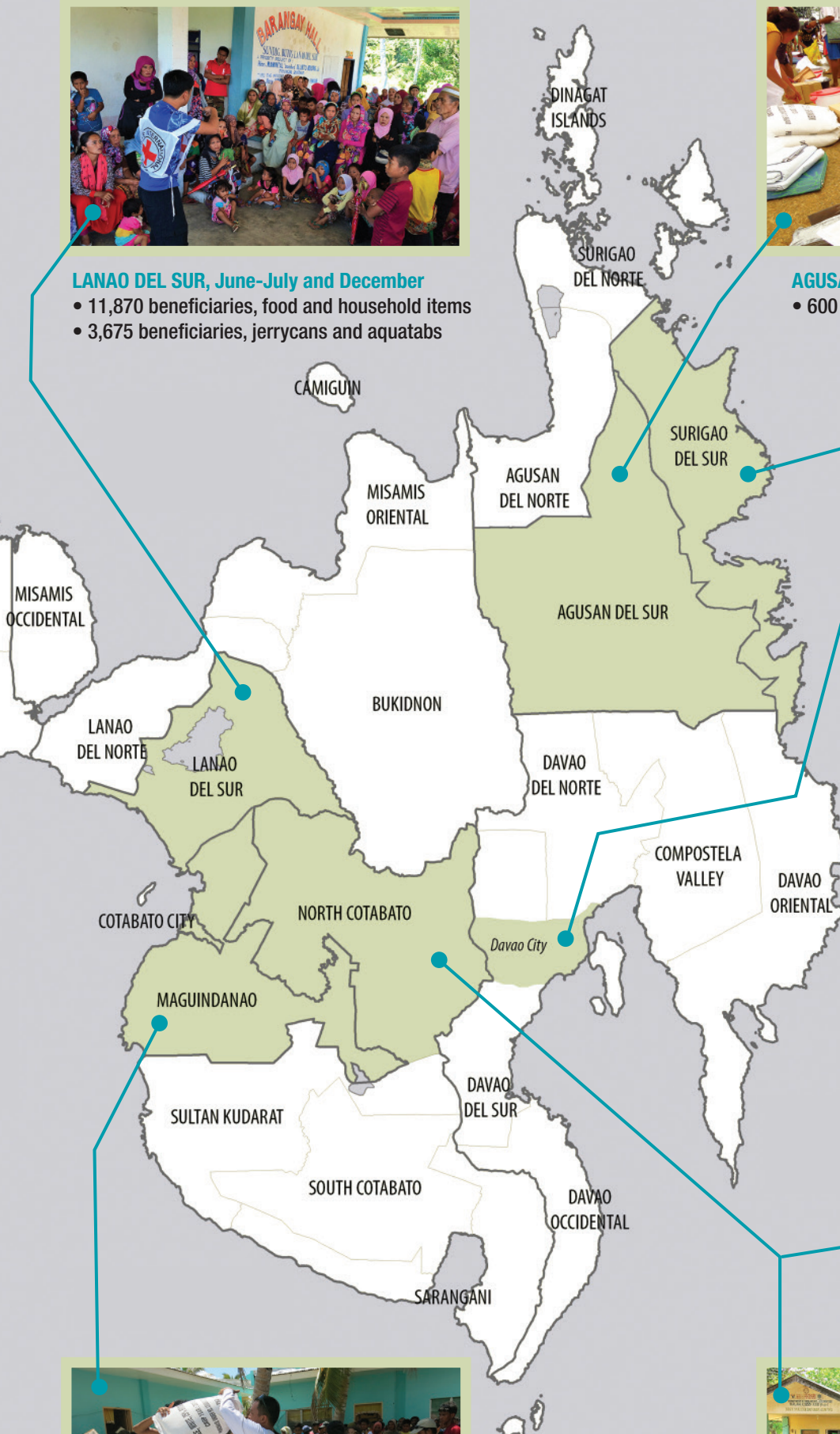
LANAO DEL SUR, June-July and December

- 11,870 beneficiaries, food and household items
- 3,675 beneficiaries, jerrycans and aquatabs



AGUSAN DEL SUR, August

- 600 beneficiaries, food and household items



SURIGAO DEL SUR

- 4,700 beneficiaries, food, household and hygiene items, seeds and farm tools (February, October and December)

Haran Compound, DAVAO CITY (February and July)

- 400 beneficiaries, household items

NORTH COTABATO, April

- 27,700 beneficiaries, food and household items



MAGUINDANAO

- 12,560 beneficiaries, food items (April)
- 2,000 beneficiaries, cash-for-work (September to October)





Marvin, now back in his village, carries home the food and hygiene items from the ICRC.

In early September 2016, after almost a year of staying in the sports complex and other host areas, the displaced communities received word that they could already return to their villages after a long negotiation between their representatives, concerned groups, and the authorities. Finally, Marvin and his tribe can now go home.

But the sight that greeted them doused their jubilation and excitement. Their homes were destroyed; grasses and weeds covered their farms, and not one of their livestock survived. A year of displacement took a toll on their shelters and livelihood.

“We all cried. Everything had changed. It was as if we returned to another place. The fighting left us no choice but to leave and when finally, we were able to return, nothing was left,” said Marvin, shaking his head.

To help those who were displaced for a year to recover, the ICRC provided each family with half-month food rations consisting of 25 kilograms of rice, 12 cans of sardines, 2 liters of oil, 1 liter of soy sauce, 1 kilogram of sugar, ½ kilogram of salt, and hygiene items. Vegetable seeds were also distributed so they could produce vegetables in their backyards for their own consumption. To support the families to rebuild their livelihood, the ICRC in December distributed various farm tools to each family.

“Our response is based on the urgent needs of conflict-affected communities. By distributing seeds and tools, we hope to support their efforts to rebuild their lives after their long displacement. Having their own farm tools will enable them to work on their fields again and provide for their families,” said Olav Sinsuat, head of the former ICRC office in Butuan, Agusan del Norte.

In places affected by armed conflicts around the world, 90 percent of the consequences and destruction are borne by civilians. They are displaced from their homes, lose their livelihood, get injured or killed. They constantly face uncertainty and danger.

The ICRC’s exclusive humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence. The relief assistance for the displaced communities in Surigao del Sur covers the essential needs of individuals, and their social and cultural norms given primary consideration.

“We were never part of the conflict and yet, we have suffered so much. We’re thankful that organizations like the ICRC was there to help us when we were at the oval. Now that we’ve returned, the assistance they provided is very timely and needed as all of us try to start again,” said Marvin as he prepared to carry back home the provided supplies.

THE ARDUOUS ROAD TO HOME

“It was around midnight when some armed men arrived in our village. We were roused from our sleep and all male residents were told to line up. We didn’t know what was going on, but we were all terrified. They were looking for some people, they said.”

Marvin (not his real name) vividly recounts the event that happened more than a year ago in Barangay Bolhoon in San Miguel, Surigao del Sur. The once tranquil lives of more than 25 families, most of them related to one another, were immediately shattered. The villagers packed up what little belongings they could and headed on foot to the town as soon as the sun rose. The decision to evacuate was unanimous lest they all live in fear.

Surigao del Sur is a province teeming with natural resources and verdant forests. Many indigenous tribes, among them the Manobos to which Marvin belongs to, called this home since the time of their ancestors. They lived idyllic lives and depended mostly on agriculture for their livelihood.

However, in September 2015, a series of violent incidents forced some 3,000 individuals from five municipalities in Surigao del Sur to flee their homes, most seeking refuge at the sports complex or “oval” in Tandag City, the provincial capital. All of them chose to leave their homes for their safety.

“The oval was wide; but since there were so many evacuees who arrived by truckloads, it became cramped. Our community leaders told us it’s best to stay together and go as far as possible from our villages,” he shared.

What they thought to be several days of refuge in Tandag turned into weeks then months as the situation in their village remained hazy. As in their culture, the tribal leaders conferred and decided to wait until it was safe to return.

While in displacement, Marvin’s children got sick one after the other due to the heat inside the tents. They were not used to it since the weather was cooler in the forest. Due to the influx of people, the latrines set up by the local government could not cater to all the internally displaced persons (IDP). The Philippine Red Cross (PRC)-Surigao del Sur Chapter delivered potable water and promoted proper hygiene practices among the evacuees. Additional toilets were built to address their sanitation needs.

The ICRC, with its primary partner the PRC, distributed one-month food supplies and hygiene items several days after the displacement to help affected families and to complement the aid given by the authorities and other organizations. This was followed by another round of assistance in February 2016.



Starting anew: After one year of displacement at the Tandag sports complex, residents of this village in Barangay Bolhoon are relieved to be back to their ancestral domain. Although scarred, they are resolved to rise above the circumstances.



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Deportees face an uncertain life after their return to the Philippines.

SEARCHING FOR A BETTER LIFE

A weekly sight at the Zamboanga port is the arrival of a boat from Sabah peninsula in east Malaysia. But unlike other sea vessels, onboard are about 200-600 Filipinos who are being sent home.

Many of them share the same stories: they are often undocumented workers or families who left their hometowns in Sulu archipelago or Zamboanga peninsula due to poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and security issues.

Their journey home is not an easy one. The deportees board a commercial boat for 22-24 hours. On top of the long travel, they face an uncertain life after their return to the Philippines.

To address the deportees' needs, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) set up the Processing Center for Displaced Persons (PCDP) in Zamboanga City in 2005 to facilitate the processing of deportees and refer them to government agencies for other concerns.

"We help the deportees to ensure that basic personal needs are covered, and regularly monitor the situation of the most vulnerable ones in order to offer our support to authorities in case of an identified need," said Rajema Villegas, ICRC protection field officer in Zamboanga City.

Since 2010, the ICRC has been helping thousands of deportees to complement the support from the authorities and the Philippine Red Cross (PRC). The ICRC regularly donates hygiene items through the PCDP in Zamboanga since many deportees bring only few belongings.

Usually, the deportees stay for an average of 2-3 days in the migrant processing center before going home through the Philippine government's support. To improve their

living conditions in this temporary shelter, the ICRC built and/or repaired the PCDP kitchen and laundry areas, and its drainage system in 2011.

"I was relieved when I arrived at the PCDP. We had sleeping quarters and the space inside the facility is comfortable. We have enough water for drinking and bathing. I am happy with the hygiene kits given to us," said a 43-year-old deportee and father of two.

"My daughter and I were arrested for illegally staying, but I was deported first. I'll wait for her so we can go home together. She does not know anyone here," he added.

In March 2013, the ICRC worked with the PRC to assist chapters in Tawi-Tawi, Sulu, and Basilan, and with the PCDP in Zamboanga as they responded to the influx of migrants. The ICRC provided the PRC with 6,500 hygiene kits as well as jerry cans, tarpaulins, and industrial fans for ventilation.

Thanks to the partnership, the PRC was able to provide enough food for more than 10,000 evacuees and distribute household items for 5,000 evacuees.

Since January 2016, all deportees were sent straight to the PCDP after the boat in Tawi-Tawi was damaged. Unfortunately last September, the remaining vessel used to transport the deportees capsized in the Zamboanga port, halting the arrival of deportees. This resulted to an increased number of detained Filipinos in Sabah awaiting deportation. Hence, a massive deportation is anticipated this year when the boats will likely be operational again.

The PCDP director said they are ready to receive an influx of deportees and may ask the government for additional support. The ICRC also stands ready to extend its assistance to the Filipino deportees.

NEWSBRIEFS

DIALOGUE ON IHL WITH ISLAMIC SCHOLARS AND LEADERS

In November 2016, the ICRC engaged in a dialogue with around 170 Islamic scholars, community leaders, and members of armed groups through seminars held in Zamboanga, Marawi, and Cotabato cities to shed light on the complementarity of Islamic law with international humanitarian law (IHL).

The seminars aimed at deepening the dialogue between Islamic institutions and the ICRC for the common purpose of preserving the life and dignity of victims of armed violence. The seminars highlighted the teachings of Islam similar to IHL that focus on the protection of civilian populations, civilian property as well as captured or wounded fighters.

CODE OF CONDUCT POCKET CARDS FOR MILF FIGHTERS



A discussion on the international and Islamic laws that apply to armed conflicts and the conduct of hostilities was held in October 2016 with commanders of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF), the armed wing of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

During this occasion, the ICRC also turned over 2,500 copies of pocket cards containing the BIAF's General Order No. 2 and its code of conduct for combatants, in Maguindanaoan version. The ICRC printed the pocket cards to support the BIAF in their adherence to international humanitarian law (IHL).

WHY DO WE HELP DETAINEES?

People deprived of liberty—regardless of the reasons behind their arrest and detention—should be treated humanely and have proper living conditions. All over the world, the ICRC helps ensure that they have access to basic necessities and communication with their families, for them to live in a dignified manner.

Get a glimpse of what the ICRC does behind bars:

PRIVATE TALK WITH DETAINEE



We discuss privately with detainees issues related to their treatment and living conditions, with the consent of the jail authorities who understand our work.

FAMILY VISIT PROGRAM



We help families, living far away and do not have the means, to visit their loved ones who are detained in relation to the conflict. This is done together with the Philippine Red Cross.

In Mindanao from January-December 2016, the ICRC has:

- Conducted **89** jail visits in **31** places of detention: **9** provincial jails, **18** BJMP jails, **1** prison and **3** PNP custodial units
- Financially supported family visits for **334** detainees from Mindanao
- Financially supported the medical treatment of **4** detainees and provided crutches to **1** detainee

BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS WITH JAIL AUTHORITIES



Serious issues concerning detainees or the jail facility will be discussed by the ICRC with the jail warden or with his or her superior, with the aim of resolution.

RED CROSS MESSAGE



Thanks to our access inside the jails and to our worldwide network, we are able to reconnect families through written messages that we personally deliver for them.

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