



ICRC

# CENTRAL MINDANAO UPDATE

MAY 2015



## THE UNCERTAINTY OF DISPLACEMENT

In central Mindanao, thousands of people have been living precariously due to recurrent fighting. Pockets of skirmishes erupt oftentimes as an inevitable consequence of civilian displacement.

The hostilities between armed groups in February resulted to around 4,000 families fleeing to safety in evacuation centers in Pagalungan, Maguindanao, and in Pikit, North Cotabato.

At the height of the fighting, affected civilians managed to bring only few belongings with them and limited supplies of food.

For over three weeks, 74-year-old Sadiya Makayaw stayed with her relatives in a cramped makeshift shelter in Barangay Gligli, in Pikit. She recalled that before the fighting began in early February, all her neighbors left at dawn when armed men were sighted near their village.

"We heard loud gun fires. We didn't have a choice but to leave," she said in Maguindanaoan, the local dialect.

Sadiya had been living alone in her home in Barangay Kabasalan, also in Pikit, after her husband and two children passed away more than a decade ago.

Grabbing what she could, Sadiya joined her neighbors to "bakwit" (or evacuate), unsure of when they would return. She was left with nothing – even the clothes she is wearing now are borrowed.

### PROVIDING LIFE-SAVING ASSISTANCE

In joint efforts with the Philippine Red Cross (PRC), the ICRC assisted 2,335 families in Pikit and 1,732 in Pagalungan who have been in evacuation centers for close to a month.

Displaced people were given food rations good for two weeks, hygiene items and tarpaulins. Potable water was also delivered daily from 27 February to 5 March to the two largest evacuation

camps in Pagalungan, in order to help safeguard the health and sanitation needs of the communities.

"Our support supplements the help being provided by the authorities. The violent situation and lack of security hamper these already vulnerable communities from going back to their homes. As such, they were forced to stay in evacuation centers for quite some time," explained Maria Carmen Echezarreta Inurritegui, ICRC head of office in Cotabato.

The majority of people living in the areas affected by conflict live in poverty, relying heavily on farming and fishing as their main sources of income. Due to the volatile situation and the presence of improvised explosive devices, evacuees couldn't go back to tend their farms. The difficulty thus rises each day for displaced families as they have to put food on the table to survive.

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*Evacuating may be a reality for those living in conflict-affected areas. Sadiya Makayaw, in her old age, says she is tired and would want to spend the rest of her life in peace.*



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Fortunately, Sadiya's family received assistance in Pikit. The support, however, is not enough to put her worries to rest, as she fears nothing will be left of her belongings when she finally returns to her village.

At the evacuation center, Sadiya heard stories of damaged houses. She hopes the small farm where she grows corn will be spared.

"I can no longer count how many times I have evacuated in the past. It is something I do not want to keep doing now that I'm old," shared Sadiya, with a weak smile on her wise face.

In March, a month-long armed fighting between government forces and armed groups occurred and caused further displacement in several areas of Maguindanao.

"The prolonged dry season is affecting the health of displaced families and reducing their incomes. Each day in these temporary sites is a major struggle for them, and the future remains unclear," said Pascal Mauchle, head of the ICRC delegation in the Philippines.

Remaining responsive to the needs of the displaced, the ICRC and the PRC currently provide clean water daily to around 24,000 people in 24 evacuation centers in Datu Salibo and Mamasapano. It is preparing to launch targeted food distributions in May.

## CLEAN WATER FOR VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES IN PIKIT

Residents in the village of Panicupan, Pikit, had to travel more than eight kilometers on unpaved roads to the town plaza to get potable water. Others relied on dug wells for other use but not for drinking, as water was unsafe for consumption.

One of the challenges of host communities receiving displaced people in conflict-affected areas is the lack of clean water, or the added strain in the already limited access to safe drinking water.

In Pikit, many of the 42 barangays, including Panicupan, are familiar to the distressing effects of protracted armed conflict, having experienced violent situations since the 1970s. Most recently, hostilities have again caused the displacement of more than 2,000 families from interior villages.

But today, the scenario is vastly different.

As part of its work to improve the situation of these vulnerable communities in central Mindanao, the ICRC created a 33-kilometer network to bring clean water to 15,000 residents in 11 barangays of Pikit – its largest ever community water project in the Philippines. The residents were actively involved as additional workers during the construction phase and to this day, they ensure the tapstands are functional.

In 2013, the project was completed and handed over to the Barangay Water and Sanitation Association (Bawasa) or elected members of the community who are responsible for managing the water system and ensuring its sustainability.

"To have a safe and steady source of clean water made a difference in our lives. Water from the hand pumps is not fit for drinking and caused some health problems before," explained Tani Kumpa Manden, Bawasa president in Panicupan.

Ten tapstands set up in strategic locations around the village serve the population equally, each serving at least 30-40 families. This was done so that families would have access to the taps within 250 meters from their residence. A total of 87 tapstands were built in the entire municipality.

"The Bawasa collects PHP 40 per household every month for operation and system maintenance. We understand that some can't afford to contribute the full amount, so we still accept whatever amount they can give. Everybody understands that we have to take care of our water system," Tani added.

A certain percentage of their monthly collection is forwarded to the municipal government to cover the operating costs.



*What was once a dream: The ICRC community water project provides around 15,000 people with steady access to clean, potable water.*

"We are assured that the water we get from the Bawasa is pure and clean. You cannot put a price tag on that. I sell ice using the same water and the quality is really good," shared Panicupan resident and tapstand leader Marietta Berman.

Since January, there was a noticeable decline in rainfall in the area that affected water pressure, similar to all water sources during dry months. However, the communities are assured that the water level at the source will increase come the rainy season.

"During dry seasons, water needs of the communities also increase, thus straining the source. One of the tasks of the Bawasa is to arrange a system so that everyone will have equal access," explained Marco Albertini, Water and Habitat Coordinator of ICRC in the Philippines.

Aside from Panicupan, 10 other barangays in Pikit benefited from the community water project. These villages regularly accommodate displaced populations and the importance of reliable water access cannot be overemphasized. Other Bawasas are currently strengthening their operations and management in collaboration with the municipal government to sustain the project. BAWASAs are essential in monitoring water consumption, finance, maintenance interventions and improvements, which in return will assure these conflict-affected communities of a stable water system in the future.

# HEALTH: LIFE-SAVING SUPPORT WITHOUT DISTINCTION

Civilians can unfortunately be the casualties of armed conflicts. Such is the case in some parts of Maguindanao and North Cotabato, where explosive devices and recurrent armed clashes pose danger to communities.

With the prevailing insecurity in these areas, the ICRC continues to deliver medical support to local health structures to treat people wounded by weapons or explosives. In the first quarter of this year, the ICRC enhanced its efforts to provide life-saving assistance with no distinction.

"All those who are wounded and sick – regardless of their religion, ethnic group, gender or political beliefs – should be respected and benefit from first aid and urgent medical treatment in the health facilities", says Beatriz Karottki, ICRC's Health Coordinator in the Philippines. "First aiders and health staff must also be allowed to perform safely their duties."

## REINFORCING LOCAL HEALTH CAPACITY

In areas experiencing frequent armed violence, it is important that hospitals and smaller health facilities are fully prepared to treat people wounded from gunfire or explosions.

The ICRC regularly supports three hospitals in the provinces of North Cotabato and Maguindanao by providing medical equipment, supplies and medicines needed, to stabilize and treat the weapon-wounded. These are the Cotabato Provincial Hospital (Amas/Kidapawan) and Dr. Amado Diaz Provincial Hospital (Midsayap), both in North Cotabato, and the Maguindanao Provincial Hospital, located in Shariff Aguak. In 2014, at least 76 weapon-wounded patients benefited from ICRC's support to the three hospitals.

During emergency situations, the ICRC also provides ad hoc support to other health facilities receiving conflict casualties.

Additionally, to strengthen the emergency preparedness and response capacity of the rural health units and local governments, the ICRC and the Philippine Red Cross (PRC), are conducting a series of First Aid & Basic Life Support trainings to the health staff working in 21 Rural Health Units and other emergency units in these two provinces.

## SUPPORTING THE WEAPON-WOUNDED

In special circumstances, the ICRC supports with material and/or financial support the medical treatments and/or transportation for people who have been wounded to the health facilities. Between January and March 2015, at least 27 weapon-wounded persons benefited from that ICRC medical support.

An example of this is the case of a 15-year-old child who was injured by a stray bullet from an armed clashes in January 2015 in Maguindanao. After being found unconscious due to the gunshot wounds, he was given first aid and was immediately brought to an ICRC-supported medical facility for further treatment. To this day, the ICRC continues to monitor his condition, as well as of several people in similar situations, to ensure continuity of care, essential for full recovery.

Unfortunately, some weapon injuries result in amputation, putting the affected individual's future at stake. To help those amputees regain their mobility and dignity, the ICRC provides prosthesis and rehabilitation, in collaboration with the Davao Jubilee Foundation (DJF).

For 15 years now, the ICRC has been referring weapon-wounded patients to this non-profit organization, which provides services for people with a physical disability. Continued support to the DJF allowed more than 56 patients to access specialized services in 2014.

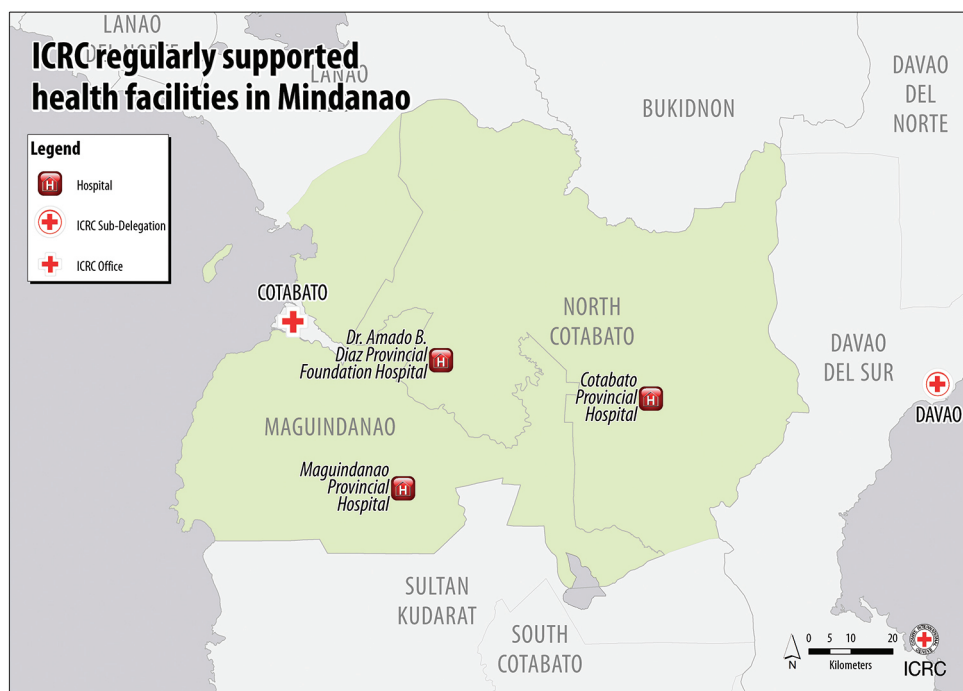
## HEALTH CARE SUPPORT IN CENTRAL MINDANAO

### ICRC-supported hospitals

- Cotabato Provincial Hospital (Amas/Kidapawan, North Cotabato)
- Dr. Amado Diaz Provincial Hospital (Midsayap, North Cotabato)
- Maguindanao Provincial Hospital (Shariff Aguak, Maguindanao)

In 2014, a total of **360** weapon-wounded persons benefited from ICRC support to five hospitals in Mindanao.

An additional **138** patients received complementary support.



*In 2014, 76 weapon-wounded persons benefited from ICRC's medical support in different ICRC-supported hospitals in North Cotabato and Maguindanao. For the first quarter of 2015, at least 27 patients have been supported.*

# LESSONS ON HUMANITY



A year ago, my classmates and I decided, out of the blue, to visit the Philippine Red Cross (PRC) Cotabato City chapter office to enlist ourselves as Red Cross Youth volunteers. At that time, all I knew about the PRC was their national blood services. I was initially worried that being a volunteer meant I had to donate blood regularly! I was interviewed and I said I just wanted to help other people.

We were informed about the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, its mandate and work in the Philippines. I learned that the mission of the PRC's Red Cross Youth program is to educate and empower youths in the spirit of the Red Cross through trainings and effective leadership. I got excited when we were told that there would be opportunities for us to take part in humanitarian or disaster-response activities.

In the three-day Leadership and Development Program training I attended, the fundamental principles of the Red Cross Movement were presented. I was struck by the principle of "Humanity", which aims to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. My parents experienced displacement in our hometown in Gen. Salipada K. Pendatun municipality in the 1970s. My mother told me how difficult it was to hide for many days in the marshes, being afraid for their lives and not having enough to eat. A strong desire was born in my heart to help conflict victims, especially after I met PRC Cotabato City chapter chair Bai Fatima Sinsuat. Despite her age – when most would be living a docile life – she is still actively involved with the Red Cross. What could be more inspiring for young people like me?

Last month, I received a text message from a fellow Red Cross Youth volunteer about an ICRC-PRC assistance for displaced families in North Cotabato and Maguindanao. I knew it was the moment I was waiting for to put into practice what the PRC had taught me. I immediately

signified my willingness to join the registration of displaced people and distribution of assistance. An ICRC staff member briefed us and emphasized that we have to work together for those who were displaced. Belonging to the same Movement, the PRC and the ICRC have a common goal: to reach those in need and to help and protect them.

I was an "all around" volunteer – I did crowd control, registration, carried relief boxes, and translated from Filipino to Maguindanaoan dialect for the messages to be better understood by the community. I'm not exactly the strongest or biggest among the volunteers, but there seemed to be a surge of energy inside of me. I guess that's what they meant by "humanity in action." To see the people in need – and how my work as a volunteer will help them while they are in the evacuation center – is inspiring. I will not forget how all of us, ICRC and PRC staff and volunteers, pitched in efforts to finish the task of distributing more than 4,000 food rations in one and half days! After the distribution was completed, the evacuees were not just mere statistics to us; each of them had unique stories and experiences.

After my first on-the-ground experience as a PRC volunteer, I can now say I have a deeper appreciation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and my fellow volunteers. It's definitely not easy, there is in fact a huge responsibility associated with it, but the satisfaction one feels offering service to those in need is incomparable.

Looking back, I can say that the Red Cross enriched me as a person, built my character and leadership skills. Most of all, it taught me humanity.

I might be done with school, as I'll be graduating this month, but with the Red Cross Movement, it's a lifetime commitment and learning opportunity.

*As told to the ICRC by Coby Zahabudin D. Lucas, 21, a Philippine Red Cross "Red Cross Youth" volunteer in Cotabato City. Hailing from GSK Pendatun municipality, Maguindanao, he graduated early this month with a degree in Public Administration from Cotabato City Polytechnic Colleges.*

## PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

In accordance with its international mandate, the ICRC reminds all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law (IHL), or the law of armed conflict, with particular emphasis on respect for the civilian population. It promotes IHL to a range of stakeholders, such as national authorities, military and police, the armed groups, judicial/legal actors, media and civil society. This dialogue is important to ensure awareness of and respect for this law that protects those who are not or no longer participating in hostilities, and restricts the means and methods of warfare.



*A lecture on IHL with the Philippine Army's 15th Infantry Battalion in Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte*



*A lecture on IHL with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in Camp Darapangan in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao*

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