



# Displaced Lanao villagers to get P53-M assistance



**CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY** – The Office of Civil Defense (OCD) in Northern Mindanao said that at least **P53.29 million** have already been extended to the internally displaced persons (IDP's) affected by the ongoing atrocities between government security forces and rogue Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebels in Lanao del Norte.

Northern Mindanao OCD Director Carmelito A. Lupo said the government is continuously supporting the IDP's needs since last August after wanted Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) leader Abdulrahman Macaapar, alias "Commander Bravo" staged a bloody attack in several towns in Lanao del Norte where several innocent civilians were killed and wounded, and burned several houses.

[DISPLACED/p.11]

**HYDROELECTRIC PLANT** --- Children walk along modular tubes where water from a river in Buldon, Shariff Kabunsuan flow down to a paddle wheel attached to a turbine generator now supplying electricity to more than a hundred houses in the area.[]

## MEDCo holds exhibit on Mindanao's peace and development achievements

**DAVAO CITY (PNA)** — The Mindanao Economic Development Council (MEDCo) has set up a peace and development exhibit at the SM City Davao Event Center in support of this year's Mindanao Week of Peace celebration.

MEDCo chair Undersecretary Virgilio L. Leyretana Jr. said that in the face of renewed conflicts that give Mindanao unfair negative image, there is a need to articulate the other "face" of the island-region.

"The exhibit is our humble attempt to highlight and protect Mindanao's gains in peace and development, and create a positive projection of Mindanao," Leyretana said.

[MEDCO/p.11]

## Bangsamoro state eyed under federacy

**BAGUIO CITY, Philippines** — Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. on Friday said the autonomous governments mandated by the 1987 Constitution for indigenous Filipinos of the Cordillera and Muslim Mindanao would not be touched by charter amendments seeking to create a federal government in the Philippines.

Pimentel said the existence of the autonomous governments, particularly the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, would repair the damage caused by a failed government attempt to sign a deal creating a Bangsamoro Juridical Entity with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

In August, a peace panel organized by President Macapagal-Arroyo and its counterpart in the MILF drafted a memorandum of agreement on ancestral

[BANGSAMORO/p.11]

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## MILF rebel surprised by raid charge

GENERAL SANTOS CITY, Philippines—Police authorities in Sarangani province recently filed charges against Alo Binago, a sub-commander of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, for leading the August 18 MILF attack on Maasim town wherein two civilians died and several houses were burned.

But Binago has been in jail since 2006 and could not have possibly led the attacks while behind bars, said his father, Ingkong Binago.

Rolando Ampuyas, warden of the Sultan Kudarat provincial jail, confirmed that the suspected MILF leader has been in their custody since July 31, 2006.

Binago was arrested the same month due to his alleged involvement in various crimes in Central Mindanao, including the kidnapping of a Korean national in 2002.

“We were surprised why he was implicated (in the Maasim raid) when in fact, he has been here for two years already,” Ampuyas said.

He said other inmates and jail guards could attest that Binago never left the jail since then.

Binago, who admitted to being a member of the MILF’s 105th Base Command under Ameril Ombra Kato, was amused when he learned that the police had charged him for the Maasim raid.

“Natatawa ako na nadamay ang pangalan ko dun sa gulo sa Maasim eh nandito ako sa loob ng kulungan [MILF/p.9]

## SC asked to reverse MILF land ruling

MANILA, Philippines — A Muslim group has asked the Supreme Court to reverse its ruling declaring as unconstitutional the memorandum of agreement on ancestral domain (MOA-AD).

In a 51-page motion for reconsideration, lawyer Nasser Marohomsalic and his group the Muslim Legal Assistance Foundations Inc. told the high court that it should uphold the validity of the agreement between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

They said that contrary to the apprehensions of several petitioners, the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE), which will be created through the MOA-AD, would not become a separate state but would remain part of the Philippines.

Petitioners said that the MOA-AD was their hope of achieving lasting peace in Mindanao.

Last October 14, the Supreme Court declared as unconstitutional the MOA-AD, which was supposed to be signed by the government and MILF last August in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Associate Justice Conchita Carpio-Morales, author of the ruling, and seven other justices agreed with the petitioners that the MOA was unconstitutional and that [SC/p.9]

## In Datu Piang, even schools “evacuate,” too

DATU PIANG, Maguindanao (MindaNews/25 October) – Elizabeth Sarabia, 48, has had to travel almost everyday this week from her home in Poblacion 2, Midsayap, North Cotabato to this town, spending a total of P140 a day, to teach 10 of her 55 students in Montay Elementary School, in a “borrowed” classroom at the Datu Gumbay Piang Central Elementary School here.

Two other elementary schools – in Barangays Dado and Duaminanga – are holding classes in Datu Gumbay, to ensure the children’s education continues — principal Usop Panegas says.

Together, four schools are sharing its 30 classrooms at daytime — from 7 a.m. to 12 noon and from 1 to 4 p.m. At nighttime, the rooms are occupied by some of the estimated 6,000 evacuees within the school grounds.

Sarabia, who has been teaching in Barangay Montay for 11 years now, used to rent a room or stay with friends here but with the influx of evacuees into the poblacion, “the worst” in the history of this predominantly Moro trading town and the largest municipality in Mindanao a century ago, all rooms have been taken.

[IN/p.8]

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## Pacts just 'cosmetics' – Malaysian prof

COTABATO CITY – A Malaysian Islamic university professor has called for unity among the people of Mindanao amid the ongoing fighting between government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) forces that seems to have widened the gap between Muslims and Christians.

“Let’s embrace each other as a human family,” Prof. Kamar Omiya Kamarosa of the International Islamic University in Malaysia said during a speech delivered at a forum for peace hosted by Muslim converts here.

Kamarosa said anything that “is wrong, brutal and violent against any community” should be condemned together by the other communities.

“If anything (wrong) happens to the Muslims, the Christians, Catholics and Protestants should voice out and condemn this; (In like manner) if the same happens to the Christians, the Muslims should likewise condemn it, for we are one family and all religions speak about co-existence,” she said.

Kamarosa also said that in the case of Mindanao, which has been affected by decades of conflict, what was needed was a common direction and not treaties, which she labeled as “cosmetics.”

“To me, all peace agreements and treaties are only cosmetics. It makes people feel as if we are moving forward, but the real change lies on the people. It is the responsibility of every individual to work for change,” she said.

Kamarosa said a signed peace agreement would not solve a problem like that in Mindanao.

“It is the people (Christians, Muslims and other inhabitants) working for harmony and co-existence that matters. Even if we have a signed document, but the people are not working to achieve the objective, nothing happens,” she said.

Kamarosa also urged Muslims to understand their religion better amid the global threat of terror blamed on the so-called extremists.

She said every Muslim should understand that jihad in the Qur’an pertains to a struggle or sacrifice to improve one’s condition and not a declaration of war or violence.

“Jihad has been misused and even personalized,” she said, adding that “jihad is a general term for everything that is a struggle towards good.”

Kamarosa said the actual word for war in the Qur’an is “quitar.”

“And the Book also reminded us that not every death is a jihad or the deceased is a (martyr). Only God knows if the person is a martyr,” Kamarosa said. (By Charlie Señase, Philippine Daily Inquirer)

## Respect rights, Amnesty tells AFP, rebs

MANILA, Philippines—Amnesty International Wednesday urged the Philippine military and Moro rebels to respect the rights of noncombatants, holding them responsible for deaths and destruction in Mindanao.

The London-based rights group said that since the current round of fighting broke out in August, it had documented hundreds of cases of human rights abuses in which almost 100 civilians were killed and hundreds of homes and farms destroyed.

Donna Guest, Amnesty deputy director in the Asia-Pacific region, said soldiers and guerrillas were behind the killings and burning of houses and farms, according to victims the group had interviewed.

“The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and local groups opposing the peace talks have used violence as a negotiating strategy and hundreds of thousands of people are paying the price,” Guest said in a statement.

Some of those interviewed at temporary shelters in late August and early September also blamed soldiers for some of the atrocities, said Aurora Parong, head of the local chapter of Amnesty.

“In most cases, the Philippine government failed to provide noncombatants adequate protection,” Parong told Reuters. “Some of the victims said the government has also done some abuses.”

In a 39-page fact-finding report, Amnesty urged both the government and MILF to abide by the protocols of the Geneva Convention in the conduct of war and to take action against rights abuses in the conflict areas.

It also recommended that the government indemnify victims of violations of international laws based on global standards, including compensation and rehabilitation of homes and farms.

The group also criticized the arming of civilians and warned against imposing food blockades and preventing aid agencies from delivering food, medicines and supplies to displaced people.

Nearly 300 people have been killed in more than two months of fighting in Mindanao.

Violence erupted in mid-August after the Supreme Court halted the signing of an agreement between the government and the MILF that would have expanded an existing Muslim autonomous region, giving it wider political, social and economic powers.

Amnesty said at the start of the fighting that 610,000 people fled their villages, citing data collected by the National Disaster Coordinating Council.

“Around 240,000 of them have subsequently gone back to their homes ... only to find their houses burned and their livestock stolen,” the report said.

## Legarda warns on peace, order in Mindanao

Senator Loren Legarda has cautioned the government on the worsening peace and order in Southern Philippines because of Muslim insurgency.

Legarda noted that while attention is focused on the on-going plenary session of the global forum on migration and development, lawless elements continue to carry out their criminal activities.

Legarda was reacting to reports that human traffickers were preying on children displaced by the Mindanao conflict which escalated following the Supreme Court's declaration of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation front (MILF) unconstitutional.

"The government cannot brush aside the unconscionable activities by these lawless elements who take advantage of the situation," Legarda said.

She explained that the government, while exerting effort to bolster the economy and spur growth, must not forget that criminals "strike anytime, anywhere" and that it should keep its police force aimed at the most vulnerable in the society.

The senator had also urged the government to quickly act on the peace initiative, so that the thousands of people displaced by the conflict would be able to return to their homes.

"We just could not imagine the trauma, the anxiety and the difficulty of being always on the run because of sudden fighting," she said.

Legarda said the human trafficking was reported by an independent monitor Visayan Forum Foundation, which claimed to have rescued 34 Filipino minors from the clutches of unscrupulous individuals who prey on them at the conflict zones in Mindanao.

"These things must be stopped," she said.

Legarda, chair of the Senate Committees on Social Justice and Economic Affairs, said the police must intensify its effort to apprehend the alleged human traffickers, and, if warranted, be sent in the bar of justice.

She also raised an almost the same concern the other day in which she cited the lamentable exploitation of children by syndicates.

The concern was raised by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which had been bothered by unconfirmed reports that children are being used by criminal syndicate in their activities.

UNICEF had also urged the Philippine government to punish the syndicate and not the children.

"We are now in a situation where our nation has to contend not only the possibility of a recession, but also of the criminals preying on innocent civilians," Legarda said.

## Fire hits military ammo depot; Yano orders probe

CAMP SIONGCO, Awang, Maguindanao – Armed Forces chief Gen. Alexander Yano yesterday gave the Army Support Command (ASCOM) 48 hours to investigate the cause of the fire that destroyed some P10 million worth of old ammunition in a storage facility at this military camp before dawn yesterday.

"While it appears that there was no sabotage or any hostile enemy action that caused this incident, we have to get to the bottom of this to determine its real cause," Yano told The STAR after inspecting the burnt facility along with key officials of ASCOM and the 6th Infantry Division.

The facility, one of 12 scattered in the compound here of the 12th Field Support Service Unit (12th FSSU), is tactically under the operational control of ASCOM.

"This early we can say that it was an accident because the burnt building where the old, unused ammunition was kept is only one of the 12 and is located at the center of all of the rest," Yano said.

"If there was sabotage or attack, definitely the saboteurs would destroy the building most accessible to them," he added.

Yano declined to comment when asked if there could be negligence on the part of the 12th FSSU, which has jurisdiction over the 30-hectare compound at this camp, the operations center of the 6th ID.

"We have to investigate first. I have formed an investigation team and they have 48 hours to wrap up their investigation," Yano said.

Maj. Randolph Cabangbang, spokesman of the military's Eastern Mindanao Command, also ruled out sabotage in the fire, saying in a report that it was apparently caused by a leaking 105mm howitzer round with white phosphorus charge, used to mark artillery targets.

"Definitely it was not sabotage. It could be faulty wiring or it came from the munitions. Faulty munitions are sensitive. Grenade levers may disengage due to rust and munitions' charges can ignite when exposed to extreme temperature," he said.

Cabangbang said no one was hurt in the fire and the subsequent explosion as the facility was situated on a hill surrounded by barricades. Its guard was positioned some 20 meters away, he added.

The fire lasted for more than an hour, he said.

Yano said the incident would not have any impact on the tactical stature of Army units in Central Mindanao which the 12th FSSU supplies with ammunition, vehicles, firearms and other war materiel, including 105 howitzer cannons and shells.

Yano downplayed as "insignificant" text messages circulating that the 6th ID has been weakened tactically by the loss of the old ammunition in yesterday's dawn fire.

"The ammunition destroyed by the fire was old, unused ammunition that was to be disposed off," he said. – **With James Mananghaya**

## Exploration bares oil, gas deposits off Tawi-Tawi

PANGLIMA SUGALA, Tawi-Tawi – A top government official said that an ongoing oil and gas exploration project in this island province showed positive results for an encouraging volume of mineral deposits.

Reports reaching Provincial Gov. Sadikul Sahali indicated that the area is a potent source of oil and gas, even as foreign and local oil drilling companies are pursuing for the mining project on mid-sea off the island municipalities of Mapun and Taganak.

Oil deposits estimated at 500 million barrels and some 1.5 trillion cubic feet of natural gas are potential mineral resources positively discovered by giant miners in the deep seas of this Southern province, the report said.

Governor Sahali expressed optimism that this positive development will transform this province into a highly industrialized area and will strengthen the economic situation of the local constituency here.

“I received reports from various sources that the ongoing oil exploration operations in Tawi-Tawi seas proved positive of oil and gas mines, however, I got no confirmation yet from mining concessionaires about it,” Governor Sahali said.

“This is a welcome development for the province. Our people are highly appreciative of this multi-million project. There has not been much resistance in view of the mining activity from the local residents as they are development-oriented people except on issues involving supposed participation of certain agencies that equally manifested support for the project,” he said.

“I’m very much hopeful that Filipinos will soon do away with problems of oil crisis and high oil prices that are pretty much a setback in the present economic condition in the country,” he said.

“I’m not privy on the process of how the oil drilling activity is being pursued. The most important thing is it is on going and it accordingly acquired encouraging results,” the governor said when asked on the status of the oil exploration there.

The Tawi-Tawi executive said the conduct of a public information campaign spearheaded by the provincial government as to the positive economic impact of this project facilitated its high acceptability among local residents, hence no hassles incurred that would disrupt the job.

It was gathered that the oil and gas mining operations are being operated by the Union of Oil of California, Malaysian firm, Sandakan Oil, Australian BHP Biliton, Exxon and some Filipino firms, that also consider the Sulu sea as mining sites.

It was also gathered that the exploration stage has been over which incurred positive results.

The foreign-led mining operation started with its seismic survey in 2007 and was undertaken by a private Australian firm in Mapun Sea in search for mineral deposits.

## ARMM water system project leads to reconciliation of warring siblings in Sulu

COTABATO CITY (Nov. 4, 2008) - The foreign-funded water system project built in Barangay Asin in Panglima Estino town in Sulu has led to the reconciliation of two warring siblings. The family feud stemmed from their political ambitions, which saw the two go separate ways. After seeing their respective followers work together in a “*bayanihan*” system in the construction of the project, the two agreed to unite as blood brothers.

Mayor Hadji Munib Estino of Panglima Estino town agreed to a peace covenant with his brother Hadji Kadil Estino who was his predecessor following negotiations brokered by Gov. Hadji Abdusakur Tan of Sulu and Vice Gov. Lady Anne Sahidullah in a solemn ceremony held in the Municipality of Patikul, Sulu.

Munib and Kadil are the sons of former Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) commander, Hadji Abbas “Maas Bawang” Estino, the legendary warrior of Sulu who was tagged as one of the members of the “*Magic 8*” that returned to the fold of the law and was personally received by the late President Ferdinand Marcos in Malacañang. The group of “*Magic 8*” was composed of eight tribal leaders of the province of Sulu who joined the MNLF in the 1970s. However, after several years of fighting the government, they later agreed to join forces with the military.

Col. Celestino Pereyra, commander of the 2nd Marine Brigade based in Jolo, Sulu witnessed the signing of the peace covenant between the two brothers since dozens of their followers loyal to them have been killed already because of this family feud.

The World Bank and Japan Bank on International Cooperation through the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Social Fund Project, which is being managed by ARMM Regional Gov. Datu Zaldy Uy Ampatuan with the assistance of lawyer Mustapha Sambolawan, is bankrolling the water system project.

Tausug residents that witnessed the two warring brothers embrace said it took the construction of the water system in a town that has no regular supply of potable water system to unite after politics separated the two since the 2004 elections.

The quarrel of the two brothers and their respective followers also caused an economic recession in their hometown, torn by factional division among sectors that took sides.

The Autonomous Region Social Fund Project has dozens of socio-economic projects in far-flung communities in the autonomous region, all involving local communities, mostly identified with either the MNLF or the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, according to Ampatuan.

In the end, the Autonomous Region Social Fund water project built by the followers that were loyal to either Munib or Kadil now benefits some 1,000 residents in four adjoining villages where people have once lived in fear and under tight security as a devastating consequence of the family feud between the two scions of an influential Tausug clan of Sulu.

— Julmunir I. Jannaral

## Ceasefire can't lead us to peace - Lanao governor

TUBOD, Lanao de Norte (MindaNews / December 5) – The governor of Lanao del Norte said he would not recommend keeping the ceasefire agreement with the Moro guerrillas as he warned that this would encourage civilians in his area to arm themselves.

Governor Khalid Dimaporo, who created a Peace Initiative Committee to hold forums and dialogues on peace down to the villages, told a peace forum here Friday that the killing of civilians during the bloody MILF attacks on three towns in the province in August this year left a scary mark among residents.

This was also the governor's position when he met with peace advocates that held a peace caravan for Duyog Mindanao. He was asked to recommend "to reclaim shattered peace".

"I was frank in telling them that I cannot agree with the mounting call for ceasefire. Ceasefire can't lead us to peace. Innocent civilians are massacred and I wanted justice for all of these victims," he said.

He said that "ceasefire means withdrawal of forces from their continued operation against wanted rebels. Their withdrawal will cause security vacuum and reactivation of local militia such as the Shepherds."

The Shepherds was the name adopted by a shadowy anti-Moro armed group in some Lanao villages who formed themselves after the MILF attacks. It was similar move taken by the former members of the Ilaga group when they reactivated the anti-Moro armed group of the 1970's.

"I'd rather that the Armed Forces of the Philippines be our security officers than civilians arming themselves against attack," Dimaporo said.

"We cannot have peace at the expense of justice. Lawless and criminals such as MILF commander Bravo should not be allowed to escape his commission of murder," the governor said.

"Peace is needed but we must look into every detail. Else, we are just prolonging the war. It is complex that's why we need to talk together," he added.

In announcing that he has created the Peace Initiative committee, Dimaporo urged all sectors "to have a singular direction on peace advocacy."

The peace forum gathered hundreds of participants from all municipalities of Lanao del Norte and was attended by Secretary Hermogenes Esperon Jr, the Presidential chief adviser on the peace process Rep. Abdullah Dimaporo, Col. Benito de Leon of 104th Infantry Brigade and representatives of the civil society organizations.

The forum presented the film "Ang Kababaihan ng barangay Pinantao" (The Women of barangay Pinantao), a video documentation on how women from the conflict areas of Kapatagan, Lanao del Sur,

[CEASEFIRE/p. 7]

## Evacuees refuse to return home

CAMP SIONGCO, Maguindanao (Oct.29) — Evacuees in Maguindanao and surrounding provinces are more reluctant now to return to their villages with the nearing completion of the tenure of the multi-national peacekeeping group monitoring the ceasefire between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

The term of the International Monitoring Team (IMT), which is composed of police and military officers from Malaysia, Libya and Brunei, and a rehabilitation expert from Japan, will end by Nov. 30 and only the government and the MILF, through a bilateral resolution, can prolong its stay to monitor the ceasefire in many flashpoint areas in the South.

Cotabato's auxiliary bishop, Monsignor Jose Colin Bagaforo, said there is an immediate need now for the government and the MILF to peacefully discuss on whether to extend the term of the IMT to prevent any backlash in efforts of various local and international peace advocacy organizations to restore normalcy in conflict-stricken areas.

Bagaforo said church workers involved in humanitarian works for thousands displaced by recent military-MILF hostilities in Mindanao are aware of the apprehensions of evacuees on the implications of any pull out of the IMT, at a time when the Armed Forces is pursuing some members of the front, such as the elusive Commanders Ameril Ombra Kato and Abdullah "Bravo" Macapaar.

"There is a very acute need now for both the government and the MILF to resolve the issue. The problem, however, is that the government already disbanded the GRP peace panel and the MILF has also said recently that it already has a plan to disband its peace panel too," said Bagaforo, who is active in various peace-building activities in Muslim areas.

Not one of at least 36 evacuees, in random surveys in evacuation sites in nearby Datu Odin Sinsuat, Shariff Kabunsuan and Guindulungan, Maguindanao, is willing to return to their villages without any extension of the tenure of the IMT.

The IMT has been helping enforce the ceasefire in many flashpoint areas in the South since 2003.

"We will never return to our village unless we hear that the term of the IMT has been extended," a mother of five, Bai Sarifa Monting, said in the Maguindanao vernacular.

Malaysian Col. Badrul Hisham Bin Mohammad, the IMT's chief-of-staff, was quoted yesterday by a local news cooperative, the [www.mindanews.com](http://www.mindanews.com), as saying that they will leave the country by December 1 if there is no mandate for them to stay and continue with their monitoring of the ceasefire.

Three IMT contingents, since 2003, have served a one-year tour of duty in Mindanao each, based on bilateral agreements by the GRP and MILF, concurred by the Malaysian government.

The July 1997 General Agreement on Cessation of

[EVACUEES/p. 7]

## MILF lawyer says military abuses a reason for saying no to DDR

MARAWI CITY (MindaNews/04 Nov) — Recent allegations of military abuses against Moro civilians in war-affected areas in Mindanao have given the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) more reason not to agree to the “disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration” (DDR) formula that government has set as prerequisite for the peace process to continue, the Front’s legal counsel said. Lawyer Blo Umpar Adiong, who is also president of a local human rights group named Kabnar, told a media forum organized by civil society organizations in Lanao del Sur that the MILF has “already been demobilized during the past six years” as a result of the ceasefire agreement they forged with the government.

The sad part of the MILF’s demobilization, Adiong said, is the alleged increase in the number of human rights violations against their people.

“What we have are mounting human rights violation cases against the Bangsamoro people—injustices against our people,” he said.

Among the alleged human rights violations reported are illegal arrests, torture, burning of houses of civilians, looting and harassment.

Datu Musa Diamla, who represented the provincial government of Lanao del Norte in the forum last Wednesday, reported that there were 28,437 evacuees in his province as of September 26. Excluded in the figure were 499 families in Malatag, 829 in Malugon and at least

600 in Kalanugas.

The figure could be more, Diamla said, adding many Maranao evacuees have opted to stay with their relatives. They pegged the number of evacuees at various evacuation centers at only five percent of the total number of displaced families.

He also reported that 19 houses were burned at an estimated damage of P3.3 million.

While saying the government has “worked hard to assist our displaced families,” he admitted that there is a humanitarian crisis in the area, citing lack of relief goods and medicines for the evacuees.

The Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process is currently conducting consultation meetings with civil society organizations in Mindanao to explain why the government is pushing for DDR.

But Dr. Safrulla Dipatuan, representative of the Bangsamoro Development Agency in Lanao del Sur, said government has no moral ascendancy to discuss DDR because “it could not even abide by and implement” the things agreed upon in the peace negotiation.

Dipatuan was referring to the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain the signing of which was aborted by a temporary restraining order issued by the Supreme Court and which was later declared unconstitutional.

“They can even dare violate or not honor the things they agreed with us now that the MILF is still armed, how much more if we have already laid down our arms,” Dipatuan asked.

While government is pushing for DDR, evacuees in North Cotabato, Maguindanao and the two provinces of Lanao are asking government to stop the war against the MILF.

The call was echoed during rallies in Cotabato City and at the evacuation center in Datu Piang, Maguindanao on Monday and Tuesday last week.

The protesters, shouting “no to war in Mindanao” and “yes to peace in Mindanao,” asked the United Nations to intervene in resolving the conflict in the South.

Aside from huge streamers, tricycles also displayed small pieces of paper that carried the anti-war call. (*Romy Elusfa/MindaNews contributor*)

## CEASEFIRE . . . from page 6

rise from sad situation as internally displaced communities.

In his speech, Esperon, who retired in June this year as Armed Forces Chief of Staff, said “the MILF must know that they can’t win in this war. On the other hand I cannot say that military is the solution of this problem but they are part to complete conflict resolution”.

“We will sustain our police enforcement coupled with dialogue. We must acknowledge that Mindanao problem can’t be solved in the battlefield.

The guests later signed the Peacemaker’s Pledge on a tarpaulin posted on the wall of the gymnasium inside the Civic Center where the forum was held. (*Violeta M. Gloria/MindaNews*)

## EVACUEES . . . from page 6

Hostilities between the GRP and MILF have been shattered by the outbreak of hostilities in North Cotabato, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Shariff Kabunsuan and parts of the South Cotabato-Sarangani-Gen. Santos (Socsargen) area following the aborted August 5 signing by both sides of the memorandum of agreement on ancestral domain (MOA-AD) in Malaysia.

The MOA-AD, already declared by the Supreme Court as “unconstitutional,” would have been the basis of the GRP and MILF for the setting up of a Muslim homeland in the South.

Bravo, an ethnic Maranaw, and Kato, a Maguindanaon, leaders of the MILF’s 102<sup>nd</sup> and 105<sup>th</sup> Base Commands, respectively, now each carry a P10 million reward on their heads for leading the bloody attacks that precipitated the government’s continuing hunt for them since August.

A Christian preacher, Reverend Troy Cordero, said there is still enough time for the MILF and the government to initiate “backdoor dialogues” to address the IMT issue to prevent worsening the apprehensions of people in areas affected by the hostilities between the groups of Kato and Bravo and the military units running after them.

“This is a very serious concern and there is a need for both the MILF and the government to focus each other’s attention on this, said Cordero, whose congregation is also involved in various community projects complementing the Mindanao peace process.[]

**IN . . .** from page 2

Like the rest of the teachers in the 11 public elementary and primary schools in this district, Sarabia went around the makeshift tents in the town's 28 evacuation centers and camps to look for her 55 Grade 5 students and found only 10 of them. "They got separated," she says of her students.

It was the first time Montay residents evacuated, adds Sarabia. The rest of her students may have evacuated by pumpboat to other areas like Cotabato City and Parang, Maguindanao.

Classes in Datu Piang and the other towns in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) are held Sundays to Thursdays and Sarabia was supposed to have left for Midsayap to be with her family on this Friday morning. But she and some 40 teachers, principals and supervisors gathered at the Datu Gumbay school to discuss how best to conduct education in emergency situations.

For a town (and yes, region) badly needing catch-up in terms of education on days of quiet, this year's war, "the worst" according to Labaya Bakal, District 1 supervisor of the Department of Education, has again taken its toll on the children.

"Pinaka-worst kasi lahat nagkaroon ng mass evacuations. Dati hindi ganyan" (This is the worst because all villages experienced mass evacuations. This was not so in the past), the 57-year old supervisor told MindaNews.

The mass exodus into the poblacion from at least 16 of 20 barangays in Datu Piang, from other villages in the neighboring towns of Midsayap and Aleosan in North Cotabato and Datu Saudi Uy Ampatuan in Maguindanao since the third week of August, led to the suspension of classes as evacuees sought refuge in the classrooms, school grounds and even the space underneath the wooden buildings.

Classes resumed only two weeks ago, says Panegas, principal of the Datu Gumbay school which had a student population of 1,056 and had 30 classrooms, only 19 of which were used, before the evacuations.

Construction of bunkhouses is going on in what used to be the children's playground fronting the school buildings.

Bailyn Roslin, 28, mother of three, and an evacuee from Barangay Duaminanga who stays in a makeshift tent nearby, says the wooden structure under construction is for evacuees, so that those occupying the classrooms need not "evacuate" to the school grounds or what remains of the grounds during class hours.

Municipal administrator Musib Uy Tan told MindaNews the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) is providing the town 42 bunkhouses of 32 units each. Ten of these bunkhouses will be in Datu Gumbay for the evacuees who are occupying the classrooms, he said.

Panegas, who has lived here since birth, says they have a lot of catching up to do because of the suspension of classes from the third week of August until the first week of October. The semestral break of the teachers will be cut, there will be no Christmas vacation and they will likely hold Saturday classes, too, he said.

"This is the only chance we can catch up," the 46-year old principal explains.

Like Bakal, Panegas says this is the "very, very first time that all barangays are really affected."

Akmad Guiamblang, 52, principal of the Duaminanga Elementary School, an evacuee here for around two months now, says that aside from the war, the school had to contend also with floodwaters. He said their books were destroyed, the monitoring device for antennae of the Knowledge Channel is gone, chairs were either destroyed or missing, and the microscope and the science kit are gone.

Bakal, who supervises four elementary and seven primary schools under her district, says it is the civilians who are suffering, who are taking the brunt of government's military operations against the three alleged rogue commanders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

"Ewan ko ba kung makita ba yung hinahanapan nila" (I don't know if those wanted persons can be found), she wondered aloud.

The afternoon before, she said, there was a strafing incident nearby. "Civilians are suffering," she said.

The children's schooling has been repeatedly hampered as she narrated that prior to the armed confrontations now between government and the MILF, there was rido (clan feuds) "MILF to MILF."

There has not been a year where classes have not been disrupted "but education must go on, even during evacuations," Bakal said.

School heads attended the week before a two-day seminar on Education in Emergencies.

"We will have to hold classes six days a week. No more sem break, No more Christmas break," she said. (Carolyn O. Arguillas/MindaNews)

**MILF . . . from page 2**

(It's funny that my name was dragged into the mess in Maasim when I've been here in jail)," he said.

Binago admitted though that there are many MILF members who share his surname, but said "I am the only Alo Binago."

Senior Superintendent Danilo Peralta, Sarangani police director, could not be reached for comment. The Philippine Daily Inquirer also sent him several text messages to inquire on how the filing of the charges against a jailed suspect happened but he did not reply.

The Inquirer also repeatedly tried but failed to reach Chief Superintendent Felizardo Serapio, Central Mindanao police chief.

In Pantukan, Compostela Valley, police authorities also blamed MILF rebels for Wednesday's killing of a policeman.

Compostela Valley is one of Mindanao provinces where the New People's Army is known to operate.

Police sources said only MILF rebels had the reason to kill Senior Police Officer 2 Rex Takasan.

The victim, a member of the Kalagan tribe, was earlier blamed by the MILF for the death of one of its commanders in neighboring Banay-banay in Davao Oriental, they said.

Inspector Werenfredo Regidor Jr., Pantukan police chief, said Takasan, 32, a member of the Southern Mindanao police's intelligence division based in Davao City, was emptying trash near the gate of his house around 8 p.m. when three gunmen opened fire at him using automatic rifles. (Aquiles Zonio)

**SC . . . from page 2**

it was important to decide on the issue despite government declaration that it would no longer be signed.

Seven justices had voted to dismiss the petition for being moot and academic.

Some of the petitioners are North Cotabato Governor Jesus Sacdalan and Vice-Governor Emmanuel Piñol; Zamboanga City Mayor Celso Lobregat, Representatives Isabelle Climaco, and Erico Basilio Fabian; former Senate President and Liberal Party National Chairman Franklin Drilon, United Opposition (UNO) spokesman Adel Tamano, and Senator Manuel Roxas.

Petitioners said that the MOA-AD would be tantamount to the creation of a separate state where several provinces in Mindanao would be included in an independent Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE) which would have the power to enter into treaties, have their own courts, and police courts, among others. (By Tetch Torres, INQUIRER.net)

**RESPECT . . . from page 3**

"The 370,000, who are still displaced, remain in internally displaced person sites or with relatives."

**Fresh evacuations**

The continuing clashes have triggered fresh evacuations, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

It said that in Maguindanao's town of Datu Piang alone, the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) had swelled to 55,000 from 35,000 in August when the current round of violence began.

If there is one good thing that has happened, said ICRC's Philippine delegation chief Jean-Daniel Tauxe, it is the effort of local residents to help those who had fled their homes.

"The solidarity of the local population is remarkable. Some families are playing host to as many as 20 displaced people, despite being very poor themselves," Tauxe told the Philippine Daily Inquirer Wednesday.

**ICRC stepping up relief**

The Geneva-headquartered ICRC said that as the number of IDPs continued to increase, it was stepping up its distribution of food and essential household items.

"This is obviously our top priority," said Isabelle Bucher, an ICRC economic-security coordinator.

Dr. Elizabeth Samama, Maguindanao health chief, said the Department of Health was working with NGOs to prevent the outbreak of diseases. She said that the health department was putting up a "tent hospital" in Datu Piang for the IDPs.

"The makeshift hospital, large enough to accommodate 30 patients, is undergoing construction and may be ready for use next week," Samama said.

She said an intensified feeding program was being conducted to address malnutrition among children.

**Deepening discrimination**

In Lanao del Norte, the National Interfaith Humanitarian Mission said many women and children in five municipalities of the province had shown signs of psychological trauma.

"Aside sa psycho-sociological intervention, of course the military operation should stop and let the evacuees return to their communities," said Maki Macaspac, a member of the mission.

"One of the significant findings is the deepening discrimination between Moro and Christian children. This is unlikely for children. They have become irrational because nobody could explain to them what is happening," Macaspac said. **With reports from Reuters, Agence France-Presse and Jeffrey Maitem, Charlie Señase, Edwin Fernandez and Grace Albasin, Inquirer Mindanao**

**BRITISH . . . from page 12**

Security, Intelligence and Resilience, met with MILF leaders last night and shared the lessons learned by the British government in the Northern Ireland peace process.

He emphasized the difficulties in finding a solution for peace but called on the government and the MILF to achieve “the prize at the end of this which is a peaceful, prosperous life for ordinary people and their families.”

“I think the greatest message that we can give is that there can be a solution. It’s difficult, it takes time and there are great disappointments along the way but the prize is worth going for,” Hannigan said.

Hannigan arrived in Manila last Monday for a two-day visit to meet with the Security Cluster of the Philippine Cabinet and leaders of the MILF to share the British experience in the Northern Ireland peace process.

“I’ve come to share some of the experiences of the Northern Ireland peace process which concluded in the last couple of years and went on for some 30, 40 years,” Hannigan said.

“I don’t come with solutions or come here to negotiate but hope to share some of the lessons we’ve learned, and I had a very useful meeting with the members of the (Philippine) government,” he said.

British Ambassador Peter Beckingham said Hannigan has extensive experience of negotiating peace in Northern Ireland.

“Of course there are many differences between the peace discussions in Northern Ireland and Mindanao, but if the parties in Mindanao can gain insight from Robert Hannigan’s work, then his visit will be valuable,” Beckingham said.

Hannigan is advising the British Prime Minister on security policy, intelligence matters, crisis coordination and civil contingency planning. He is also responsible for the coordination and funding of the UK intelligence agencies and the UK National Security Strategy.

Until 2007, Hannigan was the principal adviser to then British Prime Minister Tony Blair and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the peace process, including negotiations with the political parties and liaison with the Irish government.

According to Beckingham, the idea of a sharing of experiences was initially brought up when President Arroyo met with Blair in December 2007.

Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Secretary Hermogenes Esperon Jr. welcomed Hannigan.

“Dr. Hannigan’s visit is very timely as the Philippine government is shifting to a new paradigm in engaging various armed groups,” Esperon said.

**BADAWI . . . from page 12**

before the MOA was drafted. The high court agreed with them.

In the meeting, Dureza said Ms Arroyo briefed Badawi on the status of the peace talks, which were shelved after rogue MILF forces raided several North Cotabato and Lanao del Norte towns killing and wounding scores of civilians following the non-signing of the MOA.

“[The President] personally relayed to [Badawi] the status he knows already, about where we are in the peace process, the dialogues that we are conducting,” Dureza said.

“She assured everybody the continuation of the peace process was still a high priority,” he said.

Badawi in turn told the President he would continue to support the Philippine government’s efforts to end the decades-old Moro insurgency through peaceful means, Dureza said.

“The President thanked him for all the support in the peace process,” he added. (Christian V. Esguerra, a reprint from the Philippine Daily Inquirer, published October 26, 2008, THANKS TO THE INQUIRER)

President Arroyo suspended the peace talks with the MILF after Abdurahman Macapaar and Ameril Umbra Kato launched deadly attacks in Central Mindanao, leaving scores of civilians dead and burning down schools and homes last July.

More than 670,000 civilians have been affected, many of them still camped out in evacuation centers where sanitation and food remain perennial problems.

The two rebel commanders launched the attacks after the Supreme Court issued an injunction against a land deal that would have given the MILF control over a Muslim autonomous region.

The SC later declared the agreement unconstitutional.

The SC ruling also caused an impasse in the peace talks, with both sides unwilling to budge due to the ongoing military offensive against the MILF commanders.

Even as the military has intensified its manhunt for recalcitrant guerrillas, the ceasefire agreement with the MILF still holds in most parts of Mindanao.

MILF vice chairman Ghadzali Jaafar said the skirmishes between troops and MILF rebels occur only in Maguindanao, indicating that the rebel group still adheres to the five-year ceasefire agreement with the government.

As this developed, 12 MILF rebels were killed in renewed clashes with government troops in Datu Saudi Ampatuan, Maguindanao. – (By Pia Lee-Brago, Wednesday, November 5, 2008, with Edith Regalado, James Mananghaya, Roel Pareño, Evelyn Macairan)

**BANGSAMORO . . . from page 1**

domain creating the BJE.

The talks eventually collapsed after the Supreme Court stopped the scheduled signing of the memorandum of agreement in August. On October 14, the Supreme Court declared MOA-AD unconstitutional.

Pimentel presented the 63-page Joint Resolution No. 10, which outlines the creation of 11 Philippine federal states under an amended Constitution, before 500 north Luzon officials who attended a Charter change consultation here on Friday.

Baguio Representative Mauricio Domogan, a member of the House committee on constitutional amendments, organized the forum.

Pimentel said a Bangsamoro federal state would take the place of ARMM in a new bureaucracy to avoid antagonizing former Moro rebels.

But unlike previous political organizations designed for a Muslim community, the proposed Charter reforms would allow a Bangsamoro government to be administered by sharia (Islamic legal system).

Giving the region its own sharia-supervised state means the government is finally acknowledging the Muslim Filipino identity, he said.

The discussion pacified many of the Cordillera delegates, who are trying to revive Cordillera autonomy before legislators push for federalism, Domogan said.

The Cordillera drafted the country's first law creating an autonomous region but the bid failed to win support during a 1990 plebiscite. A second law was also not ratified in a plebiscite held in 1998.

Some of the delegates, who discussed Charter reforms with Pimentel, were worried that the constitutional amendments would make Cordillera autonomy obsolete.

ARMM remains the only active autonomous region in the country, Pimentel said, but it has its flaws.

"There is a critical element missing [from ARMM] to address the problems of the Moro people... Pinag-aralan ko ito nang mabuti (I studied this thoroughly). That problem is our lack of recognition of their cultural identity," he said.

"What is the basis of this identity? That element is the absence of the sharia... Without their laws, they could not truly say they are being allowed to live their lives as Muslims," Pimentel said.

Egyptian, Indonesian and Malaysian legislators have already assured the Philippines that sharia can still be bound to Philippine laws that forbid extreme punishment such as beheading and stoning, Pimentel said.

He said the government has been attacking the Muslim secessionist problem with war when all it needed to do was accept their religion. (By Vincent Cabreza, from the Philippine Daily Inquirer, October 26, 2008)

**DISPLACED . . . from page 1**

He said the government's help to the IDP's already reached the cumulative total of P53.29 million.

Of this amount, Lupo said that R36.24 million or 68-percent have been provided by the national government agencies, R11.78 million or 22-percent by the United Nations (UN) and private sector and P5.28 million or 10-percent by the local government units (LGU's).

He said the national government agencies and their cumulative amount of assistance extended to the IDP's of LDN are as follows: Dept. of National Defense (DND) thru the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC), P2.16 million for 1,900 sacks of rice and financial assistance to the dead and injured victims of the lawless MILF group.

From the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), P8.08 million for assorted family food packs and non-food items and Department of Health (DoH), P2 million for additional medicines and medical supplies.

Department of Education (DepEd), P9.7 million for the reconstruction of the Kolambugan Central School classrooms burned by the attacking MILF group and Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), P4.65 million for fund assistance to victims of the lawless MILF. (a reprint from the Manila Bulletin, written by Mike Crismundo, published October 26), 2008)

**MEDCO . . . from page 1**

He also said that there is much that Mindanao can boast of like its bountiful natural resources, its peace-loving people, and its rich cultural heritage.

MEDCo, through its newly convened Mindanao Peace and Development Communicators (MPDC), highlighted the islands' feat on peace and development.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) through its Mindanao Rural Development Program (MRDP) led by Roger C. Chio, program director, supported the event.

"By investing in development projects for the people of Mindanao, we are sowing the seeds for peace," Chio said.

He said MRDP is a development effort aimed particularly to alleviate poverty in the rural communities, with farming and the fishing sectors as main targets, along with environment conservation and governance reform.

It showcases the gains on development projects and its contribution to the communities' peace and order particularly in rural areas.

"We cannot separate peace from development. These two are indivisible," Chio said.

Other peace and development advocates and partners which supported the event include the Act for Peace Program, the Asian Development Bank, the ARMM Social Fund Project (ASFP), the Philippine-Australia Basic Education Assistance in Mindanao-Stage 2, Catholic Relief Services, Education Quality and Access for Learning and Livelihood Skills, the Growth with Equity in Mindanao Program, GTZ Mindanao office, Local Governance Support Program in ARMM, the United Nations Population Fund-Southern Philippines Office (UNFPA-SPO), and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process.



## British official urges RP gov't, MILF to revive peace talks

A top British security official yesterday urged the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to revive the peace talks and continue negotiations for a final peace agreement to end the conflict in Mindanao.

Robert Hannigan, security adviser to British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and head of the United Kingdom [BRITISH/p.10]

**RELIEF GOODS --- ARMM Gov. Datu Zalduy Ampatuan (left) instructs his subordinates on dispersal procedures for relief goods procured by his office for thousands of evacuees in Maguindanao, displaced by recent military-MILF hostilities.[]**

# 'Bakwits' learn to sew bags, bake bread

## Badawi: Multisectoral acceptance needed

BEIJING, China—Malaysia on Friday said negotiations to get the peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) moving again should be anchored on "multisectoral acceptance" by the stakeholders.

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi made the statement during a meeting with President Macapagal-Arroyo at the Kerry Center Hotel here on the sidelines of the 7th Asia Europe Meeting (Asem).

"Prime Minister Badawi agreed a dialogue must be held so that a multisectoral acceptance of any moving forward later on (in the peace talks) will be there," Press Secretary Jesus Dureza told reporters after the meeting.

A dialogue—or the lack of one—contributed to the collapse of negotiations to resume the peace talks after a memorandum of agreement on ancestral domain for the Bangsamoro people was not signed by the government.

The MOA would have created an autonomous Bangsamoro Juridical Entity.

Mindanao provincial and city leaders asked the Supreme Court to junk the agreement on constitutional grounds and because the people were not consulted

[BADAWI/p.10]

MAMASAPANO, Maguindanao (MindaNews/25 October) – While displaced villagers were busy queuing to get their half-sack rice ration in front of the town hall here last Thursday morning, behind the hall, inside the training rooms facing the sports oval here, displaced villagers were also busy, learning how to sew bags and bake bread.

Sessions on bag-making, baking, welding and small engine automotive repair have been going on here since last week.

The sessions range from two weeks to 45 days, said Mayor Datu Akmad Ampatuan, Sr.

"Kahit magulo, sulong tayo" (Despite the troubles, let's move on), he said.

Norton Tago, 14, of Barangay Tukanalipao, was sewing an envelop conference bag. He and his family evacuated to the poblacion here on September 8.

Learning a new skill, he said, helps keep him busy.

Arnel Montenegro is teaching bag-sewing for 10 days to his 30 students, most of them evacuees.

He said the final product the potential bag-makers will make will be a backpack.

The sessions are under the Technology-Based Community Skills Training) sponsored by USAID, Equals, Save the Children and the Technological Education and Skills Development Authority. (Carolyn O. Arguillas/MindaNews)