



# Survivors of Air Force bombing said no rebels in area



**WAR VICTIMS** --- Without any viand, displaced Moro children eat rice at a makeshift relief shelter in the town proper of Datu Piang, Maguindanao.[]

**DATU PIANG, Maguindanao, Philippines**—It was as if they were racing against each other, rowing their bancas across the Bugok River to get to the village of Butilen. And when they were about 500 meters from Butilen, the bombs fell.

When the aerial attack ended, six persons, including two children and a pregnant woman, were dead.

Ameen Abdullah, 40, a resident of Butilen, said residents of the village of Tee fled the moment they saw Air Force planes and helicopters hovering overhead on Monday morning.

Abdullah said there was no fighting between government troops and Moro Islamic Liberation Front rebels when the bombing happened.

He said as the planes and helicopters flew over at around 8 a.m., government soldiers arrived, prompting

[**SURVIVORS/p.11**]

## **Murad: “We will never re-negotiate MOA-AD:” Esperon: MOA-AD will be “major reference”**

**MAGUINDANAO (MindaNews/14 Sept)** – On Thursday, the day President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo told a lobby group from Mindanao that government will no longer sign the initialed Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the MILF’s highest official also restated its earlier stand that the MILF will “never renegotiate” it.

“As far as the MILF is concerned, the MOA-AD is a done deal. We will never renegotiate,” Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, chair of the MILF, said in an interview before he was filmed by Aljazeera in the jungles of Maguindanao

[**MURAD/p.10**]

## **Chief Justice calls for end to Mindanao fighting**

**CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY, Philippines** — Chief Justice Reynato Puno on Saturday joined calls for an end to the fighting between the military and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, saying civilians have been suffering.

“We see the gathering clouds of an all-out war here in Mindanao, where bullets have already terminated the lives of hundreds, where bombs have dislocated thousands of families,” Puno said as he led the National Day of Prayer and Reconciliation here.

Puno’s call for an end to the hostilities came days after Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Utama

[**CHIEF/p.10**]

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## Muslims still searching for homeland

MANILA, Philippines — It is mid-morning and the muezzin's call at Manila's Blue Mosque in suburban Maharlika echoes across the run-down tenement blocks as men slowly walk towards its sky blue onion-shaped dome.

Across the road, goats graze and women gather under trees, their heads covered by white or black scarves.

A placard taped to the mosque wall reads: "Peace for MindaNOW."

The latest attempt to bring peace to the southern island of Mindanao and give the minority Muslims a homeland has been officially scrapped after 11 years of negotiations between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Both sides have struggled for a settlement through peace negotiations punctuated by bouts of bloodshed which had displaced more than a million people and left more than 120,000 dead over the past 40 years.

Once the majority ethnic group in Mindanao, Muslims have been marginalized and are now a minority in their own land following massive Christian migration from the northern and central Philippines from the early 1900s.

Many of the displaced have drifted to Manila over the years, settling in small Muslim communities scattered around the city such as that at Maharlika.

Known locally as "Little Mindanao," it is home to an estimated 50,000 Muslims. Some were born here, others were children when their parents fled the fighting in Mindanao and some are recent arrivals.

"Without our own homeland we are nothing as a people," said Kamim Macmod, 38, who was two years old when his family fled Sultan Kudarat in Mindanao.

Casting his eyes around the faithful entering the mosque, he says: "Despite our clan differences we (Muslims) all share the same dream — to live in peace and on our own land."

Although the latest attempt for a settlement was endorsed by negotiators from both sides it drew widespread condemnation from Mindanao's Christians and politicians who saw it as unconstitutional and a sell-out of Philippine sovereignty.

The agreement has been dumped by the government and factions of the MILF have begun fighting, sending more than 500,000 civilians into refugee camps.

Nur-ashree Dawani, 37, married with three children is out of work but he gets by selling cigarettes and sweets on the streets for a relative.

"Muslims in this country are a bit like the Palestinians in Israel, lost in their own homeland," he said.

"The fight for a homeland has been going on for decades now and I would expect it will go on for decades more," he said.

Historically Muslims dominated the islands of the Sulu archipelago, western and central Mindanao and the island of Palawan well before the Spanish colonisers arrived in the mid-1500s.

Despite 350 years of Spanish occupation the Muslims were left alone where the local sultanates dominated Southeast Asia.

After occupying the Philippine islands following its war with Spain in 1898, the US fought a series of brutal wars with the Muslims to bring them into what was then the Philippine Commonwealth.

For most of the 20th century large scale emigration was encouraged, first by the US and the Filipinos themselves, urging Christians to populate Mindanao.

In less than 60 years the Muslims were pushed into being a minority people in what was once their own homeland, and now no one knows how many Muslims have drifted to Manila in the past four decades.

On one recent morning heavily armed police and SWAT teams keep a discreet distance from the mosque.

Maharlika was set up during the presidency of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos in the early 1970s to provide a refuge for the wave of refugees who fled Muslim Mindanao when students began agitating for a homeland.

After 40 years of false promises exhaustion and frustration are eroding the patience of many Muslims in the Philippines.

"Our quest for a homeland is like a voice from the wilderness. It has haunted the American colonisers and

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## Bomb dropped from the sky kills family fleeing from war

BUTELIN, Datu Piang, Maguindanao (MindaNews/09 September) -- Inside a small nipa hut, the bodies of the children and their pregnant mother – riddled with shrapnel allegedly from a bomb fired from an OV-10 Bronco bomber aircraft — were lined up on the floor, just about two feet above the waters that overflowed from a nearby river.

Still shocked, not one of the relatives who were all crying, could talk.

At the entrance of the hut's small door, Catholic priest Elino Isip of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, called on Fadza Salido, neighbor of the victims.

Fadza identified them as Aida Mandi, 23 and her children Baily, 10, Zukarudin, 7, Adtayan, 5, and Faida, 2. She said Daya Manunggal, the children's father, and another son named Khneg, both wounded, were still missing. Their bodies had not been recovered by neighbors who were also fleeing the war on their bancas.

Salido said the Manunggal family fled Barangay Te – their village-turned-war zone – for safer ground here on board a banca – but just as it was crossing the Bugok River, some 200 meters away from the landing area here, a bomb allegedly dropped from an OV-10 aircraft exploded near them.

It was 10:30 a.m. September 8.

The banca ride between the parallel barangays some 600 meters apart, is estimated to be around 10 minutes.

"A lot of people are dying here. There are still two whose bodies have yet to be recovered (apparently referring to the still missing father and son). Times like this, we don't know what to do," the teary-eyed Fr. Isip, parish priest of this predominantly Muslim town.

Panalon Uggad says both father and son are likely dead.

At the Municipal Health Center, medical personnel were attending to Abdullah Ibrahim, 24, who also sustained three shrapnel wounds from a bomb dropped by a plane he called "fighter plane." The residents said it was an OV-10 bomber.

The bombing was part of the Army's pursuit operations in search of Ameril Umbra Kato, commander of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front's (MILF) 105<sup>th</sup> Base Command who was blamed for the alleged attack against civilian communities in neighboring North Cotabato Province in early August.

Along the five-kilometer stretch of the highway from Butelin to the Poblacion here, hundreds of villagers walked to safer grounds here.

Social Welfare Officer Bai Ebos, who was with three other volunteers, said "it is very difficult for us to monitor

## OIC aid sought for evacuees

COTABATO CITY — The 57-nation Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) has been urged to provide assistance in the relief operations for thousands of mostly Muslim evacuees affected by the recent atrocities in Mindanao, especially in this fasting month of Ramadan where charity is highly recommended.

Hassan Dalimbang, director for the national capital region of the Office on Muslim Affairs (OMA), asked for help from the OIC after his office delivered on Sept. 14 relief packages donated by Philippine movie actor Robin "Abdu;aziz" Padilla for evacuees in three war-torn towns in Maguindanao and North Cotabato.

Dalimbang accompanied by Padilla's eldest daughter Zulaikha Queenie and Moro singer Khomeini Bansuan distributed 500 packages in Pikit, North Cotabato and 330 others in Talayaan, Guindulungan and Datu Saudi towns in Maguindanao.

Each package contained coffee, sugar, five kilos of rice, canned goods, milk and biscuits worth P300 which, he said, came in the form of Padilla's supplementary aid to "limited relief goods and services" reaching Moro evacuees in Mindanao.

"However meager, the contribution of the Padilla family should elicit support from well-to-do Muslim individuals and groups including the OIC, especially during this fasting month of Ramadan where charity or *pitra* is highly encouraged in Islam," Dalimbang pointed out.

The movie actor, who embraced Islam along with his family, is one of the donors coordinated under the Liwanag ng Kapayapaan Foundation program organized by the OMA-NCR office in the upsurge of evacuees caused by the recent fighting between Moro rebels and government forces in five Mindanao five provinces.

Initially, Dalimbang said, the foundation workers had visited 180 mosques all over the Metro Manila and solicited funds for the relief operations in Mindanao.

During Ramadan season, OIC-member countries led by Saudi Arabia send out tons of dates and other food assistance to poor areas across the globe. Such act of charity should cover the evacuees in Mindanao, Dalimbang said.

Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) defiant guerillas led by commanders Umbra Kato and Abdullah Macapaar attacked civilian villages in five provinces after the Supreme Court stopped the government from signing a deal on ancestral domain with the rebel group on Aug. 5 in Malasia. — Manila Bulletin, Sept. 18, 2008, ALI G. MACABALANG

## GMA to Mindanao peace advocates and bakwits: no more air strikes

DAVAO CITY (MindaNews/12 September) – There will be no more air strikes during Ramadhan, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo told a delegation of peace advocates and displaced villagers from conflict-affected areas in Mindanao.

Mary Ann Arnado, secretary-general of the Mindanao Peoples' Caucus, said President Arroyo gave the order during her two-and-a-half hour meeting with peace advocates and displaced villagers from conflict areas in Mindanao on September 11 in Malacanang, three days after a family of six was killed due to shrapnel wounds from a bomb from an aerial strike that exploded near their motorized banca.

Arnado said the President summoned Local Governments Secretary Ronaldo Puno, Health Secretary Francisco Duque, Armed Forces Chief of Staff Alejandro Yano and Philippine National Police chief Avelino Razon, to meet with the "Bakwit sa Siyudad II" delegation.

"She reaffirmed her order re no bombing, Secretary Puno said the distribution of shotguns has been deferred and she ordered her Cabinet to attend to the IDPs (internally displaced person or bakwits)," Arnado said. (MindaNews)

## Erap on peace negotiations: "Don't wait another 30 years"

ZAMBOANGA CITY - Former President Joseph Estrada said the government should take a position of strength and must not wait another 30 years to start negotiating peace with the separatist Muslim rebels.

Estrada expressed his concern for the people of southern Philippines who are displaced by the attacks of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) despite of the government's peace overtures.

The government has been dealing with the problem of the Muslim separatist for more than three decades and has sealed an accord with the mainstream Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which broke away from the MILF that is clamoring for a separate and independent state.

Estrada, who stayed for two days here for a private function and brief meeting with his local supporters, said Mindanao has not moved forward in developing its potential as the country's food basket because of the bombings and kidnappings.

## Army denies soldiers looted abandoned homes in Mindanao

MANILA, Philippines—Military officials on Friday disputed reports that soldiers looted homes and shops in a village in Maguindanao, claiming that the ones responsible were the "lawless groups" of the secessionist Moro Islamic Liberation Front that had occupied the village of Dapiawan, Datu Saudi town, before the soldiers arrived to liberate it from the rebels.

"There was an inaccuracy in the report and it might not have been able to present the whole picture," said Brigadier General Segovia, acting chief of the AFP command center.

Quoting field commanders in the area, Segovia said the media members who interviewed the residents of the village for the story about the alleged looting had also talked to the town mayor and other village residents who said government troops were not responsible.

But somehow, these interviews absolving the military of culpability were never aired or printed, Segovia said.

AFP spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Ernesto Torres Jr. said the military was checking the "veracity of the report."

"Our troops are constantly reminded of the rules of engagement and observance of human rights. Any AFP personnel found to have deviated from this will be investigated and prosecuted," he said.

Colonel Marlou Salazar, commander of the 601st Infantry Brigade in Maguindanao, is positive it was not his men who ransacked the village.

"We distributed 150 sacks of sinandomeng rice to our troops when this offensive began. They don't need to do that (looting). Who are the ones hungry when they first got there?" Salazar said, referring to the rebels.

He said soldiers know that if they commit any infractions, they would be dismissed.

Salazar noted that there had been three days of intense fighting in the village before government troops moved in to drive away the MILF rebels.

He said the villagers were then allowed to return, accompanied by the village watchmen, the police and the Cafgu. They saw the damage brought on by the heavy fighting, he said.

Salazar said accountability for any looting is always difficult to establish.

He said soldiers were used to being blamed for criminal acts because residents know that they can demand payment from the government and the military.

"Can they ask the MILF or their neighbors to pay up?" he said. (By Nikko Dizon, Philippine Daily Inquirer)

## Digos bomber charge

DIGOS CITY – The Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) filed Wednesday murder charges against 16 members of the Al-Khobar extortion group tagged as responsible for the Sept. 2 Metro Shuttle bus bombing inside the Digos City overland terminal.

Exactly 10 days after the incident, the Task Force Metro Shuttle 2 which was created to investigate the blast finished its probes on the bombing that killed six persons and injured 34 others.

Senior Supt. Cesario Darantinao, Davao del Sur police director said the task force has recommended the filing of multiple murders and multiple frustrated murder charges against the suspects based on the evidence collated from witnesses.

Darantinao identified those charged in court as Salahudin Hassan, Abdulmalik Sali alias Dindo, Tahir Abubakar alias Tasi, Junaira Baklid Mimbida alias Bari, Jo o Junai, Muhammad Nor Hassan, Genaid Guiama, Jun Ibarra, Jabide Abdul alis Bedz, Salamodin Hassan alias Din, Jordan Kamad alias Abas, Ali Nor alias Salir, Muhammad Nor alias Medz, Norhan Nor alias Datu, Kamad Makauyag alias Madz, Mucasid Delna alias Ustadz and certain alias Rex.

The task force also identified the leader of the group as Salahudin Hassan, alias Ustadz, Tulya, Orak, Salla and Basir, who was charged earlier with three others for the same charges in connection with the July 24 bus bombing, also in Digos City terminal.

CIDG said that the Al-Khobar group is based in Camp Daranganan, Datu Uddin Sinsuat, Maguindanao, the residence of Hassan and 15 others.

Supt. Joel Consulta, CIDG chief said Al-Khobar is a dreaded extortion group that victimizes bus owners. He said the group bombed the bus of the Metro Shuttle since the management failed to give in to the demand of the group.

Task Force Metro Shuttle said the group stayed and assembled the bomb used in the Sept. 2 bombing inside a Mosque.

However, the task force refused to give details on where in the city the Mosque is located.

Witnesses testified that a man in mid-30s, 5'4 in height, wearing rugged pants and t-shirt with fatigue backpack boarded the bus at Crossing Aplaya along the national highway here some two kilometers away from the overland terminal.

The suspected bomb courier was identified as Abdulmalik Sali alias Din based on the description given by witnesses. Sali has been charged in court for being involved in the July 24 bus bombing. ([www.mb.com.ph](http://www.mb.com.ph) – Sept. 13,2008)

## Japan not polling out from Mindanao peace initiative

COTABATO CITY — Japan remains keen on continuing its socio-economic and rehabilitation programs in war-torn areas of Mindanao despite the collapse of the peace talks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

“With or without the help of partner donor countries, the Japanese government would continue its ongoing projects in Mindanao,” Tomonoro Kikuchi, first secretary of the Japanese Embassy in the country, said in a brief meeting with reporters here Wednesday night.

Kikuchi is a senior reconstruction and development adviser of the Japanese Embassy.

Kikuchi said is to join the next batch of the Malaysian-led International Monitoring Team (IMT), which is helping oversee the ceasefire between the government and the MILF.

The IMT's tenure was to end August, but the GRP and MILF panels, along with the Malaysian government, agreed to extend its operation in Mindanao just shortly before the aborted signing last August 5 of the controversial memorandum of agreement on ancestral domain (MOA-AD).

The IMT is composed of police and military officers from Malaysia, Libya, Brunei, and a rehabilitation expert from Japan.

“Our government somehow felt frustrated with the collapse of the talks but we have to cling to that slim chance of hope for the talks to resume as the Philippine government earlier declared the scrapping of the negotiations following attacks launched by rogue MILF factions to civilian communities in North Cotabato and Lanao del Norte provinces,” Kikuchi said.

Renegade MILF forces pulled off bloody attacks in Lanao del Norte, North Cotabato and Maguindanao after the Supreme Court prevented the government's peace panel from signing the MOA-AD, as petitioned by local officials who have questioned the lack of transparency in the drafting of its provisions and are opposed to the inclusion of several barangays under their jurisdiction to the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity, which is to govern the areas to be covered by the agreement.

Kikuchi said the Japanese government supports the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) approach the government is to pursue in furthering its peace overture with the MILF.

The ARMM and surrounding Muslim areas outside of the region's coverage are known for having thousands of loose firearms both in the hands of civilians, political clans and secessionist guerilla forces.

Malaysian envoy to the Philippines Ambassador Dato

## Saudi king helps evacuees

COTABATO CITY (Sept.13) – Peace advocates are grateful to Saudi King Abdullah Bin Abdul Azis Al-Saud for his donation of almost \$200,000 worth of preserved dates for Muslim and Christian evacuees displaced by the continuing hostilities between the military and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

“We’re praying hard that Saudi Arabia, which a member of the Organization of Islamic Conference, can also help in the enforcement of the ceasefire between the government and the MILF,” said a Christian preacher, Reverend Troy Cordero.

Cordero said interventions by influential Muslim states, member-countries of the European Union, and the United States of America, can help defuse the tension in areas where soldiers and MILF forces have been killing each other in one encounter after another.

Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Gov. Datu Zaldy Ampatuan, chairman of the ARMM’s inter-agency regional peace and order council, said he will officially thank the Saudi King, on behalf of all sectors under his jurisdiction, for his donation of 5,000 boxes of preserve dates for thousands of evacuees in the south.

The Charge D’Affaires of the Saudi Embassy, Faisal Kahtani, told reporters in an emailed statement that the king’s donation will be channeled to the Department of Social Welfare and Development, The Philippine National Red Cross, and the Department of Agriculture, which is also providing displaced farmers with technical assistance and other provisions needed to improve their productivity.

Ustadz Farid Solaiman Adas, chief of the ARMM’s Madaris Educatio Bureau, said the donation from the Saudi royalty is a big help to Malacañang’s effort of providing evacuees much needed rations while in evacuation sites.

“We’re happy with such gesture by the King of Saudi Arabia,” Adas said.

## US has no plans to set up base in South

**ZAMBOANGA CITY — American soldiers have no plans to establish a base in Mindanao or in any part of the country, a military official said.**

United States forces in this city, in Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and in some parts in Mindanao performing humanitarian undertakings are deployed in these parts of the country amid a six-month tour-of-duty, even less, prior to their eventual return to their unit headquarters within Southeast Asia.

Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom) deputy military spokesman Capt. Rommel Miguel said US forces’ presence in the country is covered with an agreement with the Philippine government, hence it is the top political leadership in Manila that regulates their stay in the country.

This he said amid revived political issues questioning the stay of US forces in the country.

The Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTFP) comprising United states soldiers assigned in this city occupy a land area of a few hundred square meters within the Camp Navarro premises in Westmincom where the visiting service men are temporarily deployed and quartered in improvised facilities.

## Gov’t, UN, private sector extend P89-M aid for displaced persons

**Top 3 donors are DSWD, UN World Food Program, DoH**

ZAMBOANGA CITY — The Philippine government, the United Nations (UN) and private sector poured some P89,337,869.64 in emergency assistance for the displaced people in Central Mindanao, according to the National Disaster Coordinating Center (NDCC).

The figure on emergency assistance was tallied by NDCC as renewed fighting’s between government forces and Moro rebels in Central Mindanao continued.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development headed by Secretary Esperanza Cabral chipped in the biggest assistance amounting to P16,758,966.37 which was used to purchase food, clothing, blankets, mosquito nets and other necessities, the report said.

The UN World Food Program contributed P14,814,742, including 650,000 kilos or about 650 tons of rice for immediate assistance to 160,000 displaced families in Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur and North Cotabato.

The Department of Health under Secretary Francisco Duque released P11,464,265.14 for the purchase of assorted drugs and medicines for the thousands of residents that fell affected in the fighting between government troops and the rebels,

Education Secretary Jesli Lapuz released P10 million for the repair of damaged school buildings destroyed during the atrocities between government troops and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in various parts in Central Mindanao.

Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro, chair NDCC chairman, released P9,049,375 for the purchase of thousands of bags of rice and for the financial assistance to the families of victims who were killed in the crossfire in Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte.

The amount of P10,000 was given to each family for burial expenses of their loved ones. Those injured got P5,000 each.

The Department of Public Works and Highways under Secretary Hermogenes Ebdane Jr. released P7,281,000 for the construction of evacuation centers in Lanao del Norte, while the Department of Interior and Local Governments headed by Secretary Ronaldo Puno released P4,650,000 as fund assistance to victims of MILF atrocities.

Local government units also bought relief goods and medicines worth P9,449,631.80 for the evacuees. (Nonoy E. Lacson)

He said foreign soldiers deployed in nearby provinces are but minimal who, along with Filipino soldiers, perform humanitarian aid functions meant to cushion the impact of previous and on-going conflicts.

Amid persistent rumors that American soldiers have direct participation in combat operations, Westmincom chief Lt. General Nelson Allaga earlier said ground commanders do not allow their deployment to remote areas where fighting against terror elements happen.

They are limited to sharing with Filipino soldiers some intelligence inputs gathered and considered prior to any relevant operation aside from the conduct of the joint training exercises, he added. (Gertrude Sienes, Manila Bulletin, October 4, 2008)

**BOMB . . . from page 3**

and account for all the evacuees at this point as they are still moving.”

Ebos has 13,000 evacuees on her list, not counting the new batch.

Aside from hosting displaced villagers from the interior barangays of Datu Piang, the town is also hosting hundreds of evacuees from neighboring Midsayap, North Cotabato.

At the bridge located about a hundred meters from the hut where the bodies of the Manunggal family were awaiting cleaning up for burial, bancas docked, loaded with evacuating civilians who braved the rains and the raging river current, most of them children.

The Manunggals were buried, according to Islamic tradition, by dusk of September 8.

In a telephone interview at around 2 p.m., Lt. Col. Julieta Ando, spokesperson of the Army's 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division based in Camp Siongco, Awang, Datu Odin Sinsuat town in Shariff Kabunsuan, said he had “yet to receive reports from the field.”

Brenda Albarico, a Bantay Ceasefire volunteer from Midsayap, North Cotabato, who immediately responded to help ensure the safety of civilians, was furious at the soldiers after seeing the bodies of the Manunggal family

“If we earlier denounced the alleged atrocities of the MILF in Lanao del Sur, we are denouncing this killing of civilians in the strongest term. This is all the more deplorable because those who killed the civilians are supposed to be not lawless elements but are those we expect to protect the lives of the people,” Albarico said in Pilipino.

The incident, she said, had all the more “strengthened” her commitment to work for peace and “help poor civilians like me who are all victims of this war that we have long demanded for government and the MILF to stop.”

“We call upon Congress, the Commission on Human Rights and other peace and human rights organizations to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation on this sad incident. Above all, we want to see justice reign in this case,” Albarico said.

She expressed fears that the incident may “invite more people to join the Moro rebellion. Mawalang saysay ang lahat ng ating peace efforts pag ganito ang ginagawa ng ating gobyerno. Hindi ako takot na sabihin ito dahil ito ay katotohanan” (Our peace efforts will go to waste if government keeps on doing this. I am not afraid to say this because this is the truth).

Bai Ali Indayla, spokesperson of Kawagib, a Moro human rights organization, said they

condemn “the inhumane acts and indiscriminate aerial bombing by the Armed Forces of the Philippines.... The military should be held accountable for violating human rights and disrespecting the Muslim civilians who are fasting during this holy month of Ramadhan.” (Romy B. Elusfa/MindaNews contributor)

**JAPAN . . . from page 5**

Ahmad Rashidi Bin Hazizi has also assured that his government will continue to play a key role in the peace process between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) as long as Manila needs Kuala Lumpur's assistance.

“The Philippine government calls the shots. If they want us, we will continue to play the role of (facilitator),” Hazizi said in a statement.

Hazizi said Malaysia just wants its neighbors, like the Philippines, to achieve peace and prosperity which will pave the way for more interactions between the two friendly countries in terms of more economic activities, for example.

“As you know, Malaysia and the Philippines have good friendly relations. We came in (to the Mindanao peace process) seven years ago,” the ambassador said, only after the request in 2001 of President Arroyo to the then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad.

The Malaysian diplomat said when Arroyo made the request, his country also has some problems of its own, “but we are looking at the bigger picture...accelerate our relations.”

“When we went to play the role (of facilitator), there were a lot of financial constraints...a lot of energy needed, but we don't talk about money...relations between the Philippines and Malaysia is more important,” he said.

Hazizi said the “bigger picture” is Malaysia's friendly relations with the Philippines and his government's desire to see peace and prosperity achieve in the troubled southern Philippines. “A lot of things can be done if there is peace...a lot of interactions between the two countries,” he added, such as on investments and in the economy.

The ambassador spoke about his government's role in the decade-old Mindanao peace process amidst some Filipino officials and some media personalities' bashing of Malaysia after the memorandum of agreement on ancestral domain (MoA-AD) created a national controversy.

GRP and MILF peace panels led, respectively, by Secretary Rodolfo Garcia and Mohagher Iqbal were to sign the document that would grant through a referendum an expanded homeland called Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE) for Muslims. Christian politicians opposed the MoA-AD, prompting the Supreme Court to suspend the August 5 signing in Putrajaya, Malaysia.

The aborted signing attended by United States Ambassador Kristie Kenney, Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) special Ambassador Sayyed Kassem El-Masry and other foreign dignitaries triggered new clashes between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Moro rebels.

Hazizi said his government only came to play the role of facilitator after Arroyo's request. “We have our own problems. We are not going to enter into an area where we are not wanted,” he said. []

**GRP . . . from page 12**

anonymity, said Malaysia had spent at least RM10 million, about P136,158,000, each year for its IMT members in Mindanao.

When told of the amount, Eid Kabalu, MILF civil-military affairs chief, said with this kind of expenses, having a peace negotiation “is really no joke.”

“But consider also the untold gains once peace is achieved,” Kabalu said. “I believe every centavo is worth the expenses for achieving peace.”

Kabalu said this figure does not even include Malaysia’s expenses for the five-star hotel accommodation and food of the peace panels of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) since 2003.

He said GRP and MILF panels had already met 16 times in Malaysia for their Exploratory Talks and five executive meetings.

For the exploratory talks, each peace panel had 10 members each and three each for the executive sessions, he said. “Now, consider how much that cost in a five-star hotel?” he added.

Nor does the figure cover expenses for tons of documents needed in the peace talks, for transportation, etc., Kabalu said.

The MILF leader said it also excludes the unquantifiable time and energy harnessed to have the peace panels of both sides meet in a conducive atmosphere in Malaysia.

As members of the 60-man IMT, Libya, Brunei and Japan had also surely spent another fortune each to help achieve peace, he added.

Last week, former Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief of staff Hermogenes Esperon Jr., now President Arroyo’s senior peace process adviser, was quoted as saying in a news report that GRP may directly deal with the MILF already without passing through Malaysia.

In the present arrangement of the negotiation, all communications between GRP and MILF must pass through Malaysia, being the facilitator. The two sides cannot talk directly to each other.

Malaysia’s chief facilitator, Datuk Othman Bin Abdul Razak comes from the highest level, being from the Office of Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Esperon’s revelations said a lot, some observers

**EU . . . from page 12**

displaced or have lost their homes and livelihoods, and the civilian death toll has risen to 68 in the wake of a military offensive to arrest the recalcitrant MILF leaders.

The EU also expressed concern that government-armed civilian militias “may become embroiled in the violence” and heighten the danger of an outbreak of an armed religious conflict.

The EU reiterated its willingness to continue to assist communities in Mindanao, but said the “successful delivery of its development programs could be jeopardized if the violence continues.”

The government and the MILF were close to signing the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD), a preliminary agreement that would have allowed the rebel group self-rule over an expanded autonomous region in Central Mindanao.

The Supreme Court, however, stopped the government and the MILF from signing the MOA-AD, allowing the petition of local officials questioning the legality of the agreement.

Following the attacks by the MILF, the government disbanded the negotiating panel and indefinitely suspended the Malaysia-brokered talks.

In a letter to Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi last week, President Arroyo said the Philippine government would not resume the talks “with a gun pointed at our head,” and would press for the surrender of the rebel leaders accused of triggering the deadly rampage, according to Presidential Peace Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr.

Esperon said he personally delivered her letter to Badawi.

Esperon also discussed with Malaysian officials other ways to sustain the peace process in Mindanao.

He said the Malaysian government has agreed to continue as facilitator of the peace talks. —**Pia Lee-Brago, Jose Rodel Clapano, Sandy Araneta, Evelyn Macairan, AP**

said, GRP could be slowly making it known Malaysia’s role is no longer needed, they said.

Another source said GRP has been “shopping” around for other countries to join the IMT or even the facilitation of the floundering peace talks. (Edd K. Usman)

**MURAD** . . . from page 11

one-and-a-half hours away from Cotabato City.

But also on Thursday, Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Hermogenes Esperon relayed a four-point message to the MILF through the Malaysian facilitator, during his visit to the Prime Minister.

Esperon went to Malaysia on Thursday as President Arroyo's Special Envoy to Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, to hand over a personal letter "explaining the non-signing of the MOA-AD, and to discuss and explore ways of sustaining the peace process and other related issues in Mindanao."

Esperon met with Dato Othman Abdul Razak, the Prime Ministers' appointed GRP-MILF Talks Facilitator, "who was straightforward in asking what the GRP would like to be relayed to the MILF."

Esperon said: "One, the peace process continues. Two, calmer and cooler MILF leaders must take control while Umbra Kato and Bravo must be turned into the Philippine authorities. Three, the MOA-AD will become a major reference, if and when the talks resume. And four, Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) must be frontloaded in the agenda of future talks."

Disarmament, however, "is not a precondition to the resumption of talks," the press statement read.

Asked to comment on Esperon's message, MILF peace panel chair Mohagher Iqbal told MindaNews on September 13 that he "can't comment. We need official communication from Kuala Lumpur."

While both the government and the MILF declared they are not abandoning the peace process, the position of the President, which she reiterated in front of war victims who dialogued with her in Malacanang on Thursday, and the MILF's decision not to renegotiate MOA-AD, however, mean "the peace process has totally collapsed already," Rexall Kaalim, coordinator of the Bantay Ceasefire, said:

"What peace process are they talking about when their respective positions on MOA-AD are poles apart and apparently irreconcilable?" Kaalim asked.

"We have to start from where we stopped. Meaning, we have to start with the signing of the MOA-AD," stressed Murad as he explained that the government "has no reason" not to sign the controversial agreement that was supposed to be signed on August 5 had the Supreme Court not issued a Temporary Restraining Order for the government panel not to sign it.

Surrounded by around 200 heavily-armed MILF combatants in this jungle where there are no houses, Murad said that "the MOA-AD had been subjected to long and several scrutiny" in the past four years that the peace panels of both camps were discussing it.

"The government even hired experts to scrutinize the

**US** . . . from page 12

AD).

The limited autonomy pact between the Philippine government and the 12,000-strong rebel group under the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE) is aimed to end a 40-year-old conflict that has left more than 120,000 dead and tens of thousands displaced.

Tribal groups led by the lumads in the south, however, questioned the government's motive in pushing for the BJE to favor the MILF in establishing a region for self-rule and autonomy.

Dailey lauded the government's efforts for reconciliation with the MILF.

"I know it's been kind of up and down and there have been recent problems, but in the general scheme of things reconciliation is a sound strategy," he said.

"It is the right thing to reintegrate a political party or terrorist organization that is prepared to move to the center," he added.

Dailey, the US State Department's coordinator for counterterrorism, admitted the presence of American troops in Mindanao, saying they were training their Filipino counterparts in counterterrorism.

Dailey said the American troops are rotated regularly with strict orders to keep a low profile.

"They (Filipino officials) have asked, by virtue of the country's Constitution and its history, not to have a lot of Americans in the area in a very aggressive, overbearing presence and we have complied with this," he said.

Dailey also denied reports of Predator drone planes

[US/p.10]

provisions of the MOA-AD. That is why we could not understand why it is only now that they say there are some flaws with it when in fact it took the panels more than four years to discuss ancestral domain alone," he said.

Politicians led by North Cotabato Vice Governor Emmanuel Pinol, Mayor Celso Lobregat of Zamboanga City, Senator Mar Roxas II, former Senate President Franklin Drilon, among others, cited the lack of consultation as reason for their opposition to the MOA-AD.

But the MILF claimed it did several consultations among their ranks.

"As far as consultation is concerned, we have conducted so many of it. The first we had was the one attended by over a million people, plus several others," Murad said as he went on blaming the government for allegedly failing to consult local government units.

The government peace panel, though, claimed it did some 120 consultations with its constituents. (Romy B. Elusfa/MindaNews contributor)

**CHIEF . . . from page 1**

Dr. Rais Yatim warned that the violence could worsen unless the government and the MILF returned to the negotiating table.

Kuala Lumpur hosts the peace talks.

“What shocks our senses is the knowledge that there will be no victors but only losers in this war and the losers are all of us,” Puno said.

He acknowledged that the violence erupted after the negotiations hit a standstill.

“We saw rage running riot, we witnessed anger rule instead of reason, we heard the call for violence and not a few readily unsheathed the sword of violence. The question is whether Christians should resort to violence. Prof. Hengel says the answer is an emphatic ‘no,’” he said, quoting Prof. Martin Hengel, a popular Christian missionary.

Speaking to reporters in Davao City early this week, Yatim said the only way for violence to subside was for the two sides to return to the negotiating table.

The MILF has said it was willing to resume the negotiations but that there should be no preconditions.

Malacañang has announced that it would like to see the MILF demobilized and disarmed before any talks.

As the talks continued to hang in the balance, sporadic fighting erupted anew between government security forces and MILF rebels in Maguindanao.

Major Peter Edwin Navarro, spokesperson of the Army’s 601st Infantry Brigade, told the Inquirer that troops belonging to the 64th Infantry Battalion clashed with the group of MILF commander Ameril Ombra Kato in Upper Tatapan in Datu Piang town around 11:30 a.m. Saturday.

The site of the encounter was near the Dapiawan Elementary School, where a medical mission facilitated by the military and local health workers was being conducted.

No casualties were reported, he said.

On Friday, clashes also took place in Maguindanao and in Maasim, Sarangani, where three soldiers were wounded.

The MILF said one guerrilla was killed in the Sarangani clash.

In a press statement issued on Saturday, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) said Secretary Hermogenes Esperon Jr. has already told President Arroyo that he had accomplish his mission in Kuala Lumpur.

Esperon flew to Kuala Lumpur on Thursday to hand over a letter to Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, in which the government’s decision to trash the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) was explained.

In the statement, OPPAP said Badawi told Esperon

**US . . . from page 9**

being used to strike suspected terrorist hideouts in southern Philippines.

Dailey, on the other hand, described Philippine-US bilateral efforts to curb terrorism, particularly in Mindanao, as a “success story.”

Dailey said the Malaysian-based Southeast Asia Regional Center for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT) established in 2002 has been working effectively with the US in containing any regional terrorist threat.

He said the Sulawesi Sea and the Sulu archipelagic region were kind of ungoverned areas but the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia were mutually patrolling and monitoring the territory.

Various governments and foreign aid groups have also stepped up assistance to hundreds of thousands of civilians displaced by the fighting in southern Philippines.

The UN World Food Program had scaled up food assistance to more than 220,000 people in the region with the delivery of nearly 1,000 tons of rice – around one month’s ration.

Saudi King Abdullah Bin Abdul Azis Al-Saud, for his part, donated almost \$200,000 worth of preserved dates for Muslim and Christian evacuees in the region.

The charge d’affaires of the Saudi Embassy, Faisal Kahtani, said the King’s donation will be channeled to the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Philippine National Red Cross, and Department of Agriculture, which is also providing displaced farmers with technical assistance and other provisions needed to improve their productivity.

“We’re happy with such gesture by the King of Saudi Arabia,” said Ustadz Farid Solaiman Adas, chief of the Madaris Education Bureau of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. **(By Jose Katigbak /The STAR Washington Bureau –with Evelyn Macairan)**

that Malaysia remained hopeful the Philippines will eventually find the key to peace in Mindanao.

Esperon also reportedly told Yatim during a separate meeting in the Malaysian capital that the military operations “are target-specific and area-delimited, and are extremely important for the security of the people and the stability in the affected areas.”

Esperon also met with Dato Othman Abdul Razak, Malaysia’s facilitator for the GRP-MILF talks, and told him the government would like to see the peace process continue.

But the government would like “calmer and cooler MILF leaders (to) take control while Ombra Kato and Bravo must be turned over to the Philippine authorities.”

Esperon also said the government was amenable on the use of the MOA-AD as a major reference in the talks.

“However, disarmament is not a precondition to the resumption of talks,” the OPAPP news release said.

**Reports from Ma. Cecilia Rodriguez, Jeffrey Maitem, Rizalene Acac, Judy Quiros, and Aquiles Zonio, Inquirer Mindanao**

**LAWYER** . . . from page 1

residents to leave on small boats that could accommodate only six people.

The village of Tee is about a kilometer away by boat from Butilen.

Abdullah said at least 10 “fully-loaded” boats were already near Butilen when the bombs were dropped.

“One village official even informed soldiers to contact the pilots of the OV-10 not to drop bombs because those people approaching on board small boats were civilians from nearby Tee village and not rebels,” Abdullah told the Philippine Daily Inquirer, parent company of INQUIRER.net.

Emkamil Mantao, 18, also a resident of Butilen, said he saw two OV-10 Bronco bomber planes, two SF-260 planes and two helicopters flying over Datu Piang at around 8 a.m.

Two hours later, Mantao said, the air strikes started.

“There were no rebels in the area. Those were all helpless civilians. They were not used as human shields by the MILF either because there were no enemies at that time,” Mantao said.

Mantao said soldiers also fired mortars at the approaching boats.

But Colonel Marlou Salazar, commander of 601st Brigade supervising punitive action against MILF commanders Ameril Ombra Kato and Abdullah Macapaar, also known as Bravo, told the Inquirer that the incident was a legitimate encounter with MILF rebels. Kato and Bravo are facing multiple criminal charges for leading rebel attacks on civilian communities in North Cotabato and Lanao del Norte last month.

The government has doubled the reward for information leading to the capture of Kato and Bravo from P5 million each to P10 million. Another P5 million has been put up for the capture of another MILF commander, Aleem Sulayman Pangalian.

Salazar said there “were no civilians” in the area when the aerial attack happened.

“Three days before the attack, we have cleared the area. There were no civilians there,” Salazar said.

He added that the bodies of the civilians were recovered some four kilometers away from site of the supposed encounter.

“But we are doing our own investigation,” he said.

Sahara Badtungan, 45, also a resident of Butilen, said she also saw more than 20 houses set on fire by people she described as government troops in the nearby village of Sambulawan from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Monday.

“There were no people in the area except for the military. Why are they doing this? Soldiers ruined our lives,” she said.

“The people here are afraid. We are hoping one day all will be back to normal,” she added.

**MUSLIM** . . . from page 2

successive Philippine governments since our independence in 1946,” said Norhaya Macusang, a 26-year-old engineer and mother of one.

“Many Muslims here have not only escaped the fighting in Mindanao, they have also escaped the poverty it has created,” she said.

“But that is not to say everything is fine here in Manila. We suffer from widespread discrimination because we are Muslims. We have lost our dignity and self respect as a people,” she said.

“Yes, I could pack up and leave. But where does that leave my people?” she asked.

“The only way this situation will be sorted out is when we get our land back and Muslims are in control of their own destiny,” she said.

“It’s not a question of not being able to live side by side with Christians, we do,” she said. “It’s a question of political will on both sides.” (Agence France-Presse 09/16/2008)

But Salazar said there were no government troops in Barangay Sambulawan.

“That is not true, we do not have troops in the area,” Salazar said of the text messages and radio reports aired over Muslim radio programs in Cotabato City.

“Only the MILF is present in the area and it has the capability to traverse marsh area using their motorized bancas,” he said, adding that Sambulawan is 80 percent marshy and could be reached through motorboat from the town center.

He said the MILF rebels were the ones burning homes and looting houses in some areas to divert the attention of pursuing lawmen.

“They were doing it so the soldiers could be blamed once we reached the area left by the rebels,” Salazar said.

He urged any group to come forward if they have solid evidence that could prove the Army’s involvement in the burning of houses.

“This is the work of terrorists, including MILF, when they attacked villages in North Cotabato in July, now they are doing it in Maguindanao and then putting the blame on us,” he said.

But the MILF, on its website, claimed soldiers torched seven houses in Sambulawan on Tuesday.

The MILF said owners of houses in Barangay Sambulawan hit government soldiers for direct and indirect involvement in the arson.

It quoted a certain Makmod, owner of one of the torched houses, who claimed that houses were on fire “right before the eyes of the military.” It did not say the soldiers set the houses on fire.

“That is what I am saying, when the soldiers arrived in the scene of clashes, houses were already on fire,” Salazar said. (By Jeffrey Maitem, Edwin Fernandez, Mindanao Bureau, 09/11/2008 www.inquirer.net)

# US expert to gov't, MILF: Negotiate anew



**ROYAL DONATIONS** --- Local officials in Datu Piang, Maguindanao inspect preserve dates donated by the Saudi Arabian monarch for Muslim villagers displaced by military-MILF clashes in the area.[]

## GRP, MILF peace talks costly Malaysia spends P544 M for its IMT operations

Filipinos, government officials and some in the media, who have been bashing Malaysia, particularly after the aborted signing on August 5 of the memorandum of agreement on ancestral domain (MoA-AD), may not know that the cost of the Mindanao peace process is no joke, with the Muslim country having already spent 40 million Malaysian ringgit (RM), about 544,632,000 million, for its 40-member International Monitoring Team (IMT) alone.

Include the GRP's expenses for plane tickets and the amount it spent for helping in the accommodation and food of the 60-man IMT and the figure can be staggering.

A very reliable source who asked for  
[GRP/p.8]

**WASHINGTON** - The Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) should set aside their differences and go back to the negotiating table for a final peace agreement, US State Department counterterrorism expert Dell Dailey said.

Dailey warned violence would continue in southern Philippines until both sides settled their differences and signed a peace pact.

Dailey stressed it is "absolutely important" for the Philippine government and the MILF to pursue the peace process and work out a political solution to bring lasting peace and development to Mindanao.

Violence erupted after the MILF attacked several villages in Central Mindanao, killing scores of civilians and displacing thousands of residents last month.

The attacks came after the Philippine Supreme Court issued a temporary restraining order against signing the preliminary peace agreement, known as the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-

[US/p.9]

## EU urges RP, MILF to resume talks

The European Union (EU) urged the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to resume peace talks amid an escalation of fighting in Central Mindanao.

In a statement in Manila, the EU said it was deeply concerned by the growing number of civilian casualties and displaced people and "condemns the indiscriminate killing of civilians."

"The European Union believes strongly that the conflict in Mindanao can only be resolved through dialogue and calls upon all parties to show restraint and genuine respect for the rule of law," the EU said.

The EU urged the Philippine government and the MILF, "who both have invested heavily in the peace process, to agree to an early return to the negotiating table in order to seek a lasting solution to the conflict."

Violence erupted early last month when renegade MILF commanders raided villages, shooting or hacking to death scores of civilians after a preliminary peace accord was aborted.

More than half a million people have been  
[EU/p.8]