

MINDANAO UPDATES

For the Period January - February 2011



OVERALL SITUATION

The commencement of 2011 witnessed positive initial movement in the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GPH) - Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) peace process. After several months of delay in 2010, informal Panel talks were finally held in Malaysia on 13 January 2011. This was followed soon after by the formal resumption of peace negotiations during the 20th round of Exploratory Talks that took place on February 9-10, 2011 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

The forward movement on the negotiating table was complemented on the ground by continued adherence of both GPH and MILF forces to the ceasefire agreements and their respective declarations in 2009 of the suspension of offensive military operations/actions (SOMO/SOMA). Such conditions helped lend relative stability to the conflict-affected areas despite the noted resurgence of several *rido* (family/clan feuds) cases, as well as concerns over the creation of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) headed by former MILF 105th Ground Base Commander, Ustadz Ameril Umbra Kato, which caught the public's attention in the run-up to the February Exploratory Talks.

There is positive public reaction on the ground over the announcement of the next round of talks signifying renewed momentum on the peace negotiations, continuing conciliatory moves from the MILF leadership to reach out to Umbra Kato, and various efforts to address *rido*-related issues, particularly in Kabacan, North Cotabato, and in Buluan, Maguindanao. Additional stabilizing factors include the latest resolution issued by the MILF Central Committee to resolve *ridos* where some MILF members are involved, and the continuing stance of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to stay neutral on *rido* cases while remaining active in the protection of civilians and properties from said feuds.

There is built-up confidence on the ground over the renewal of the International Monitoring Team's (IMT) mandate during the last round of peace talks. The IMT structure is largely viewed as a key factor in the prevention of direct hostilities between the AFP and the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF).



The reactivation of the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) on 01 March 2011 is likewise viewed as a welcome development in light of several criminality issues, especially in the areas of Maguindanao, Lanao, the Zamboanga peninsula and Basilan. The AHJAG is tasked to coordinate, monitor and disseminate information between and among the AFP and Philippine National Police (PNP), and the MILF/ BIAF to effect the apprehension and arrest of suspected criminal elements within or near MILF affected communities/areas.

As part of the IMT Civilian Protection Component (IMT-CPC), Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) continues to perform its mandate of supporting the GPH-MILF ceasefire structures ensuring that civilian communities are constantly protected from the effects of armed conflict. Additionally, NP actively lends support to other CPC member organizations, and has organized community fora on the CPC mandate to establish grassroots participation especially in remote conflict-affected areas.

For close to three (3) years now, NP has been regularly monitoring the situation of internally displaced persons (IDP) in evacuation centers and other housed-based IDP communities, especially those situated in areas of Maguindanao, North Cotabato, Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur. NP personnel also provided physical protective accompaniment to families returning to their places of origin. To date, NP has supported various local and international organizations, including UN agencies and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in assessing the needs of displaced communities in affected areas.

Meanwhile, NP, along with its local partners, also initiated a series of “open space” dialogues on People’s Security at the community level to elicit local residents’ perspectives on the issue of human security and their understanding of the concept of “security” as it applies to their respective communities. So far, three dialogues have

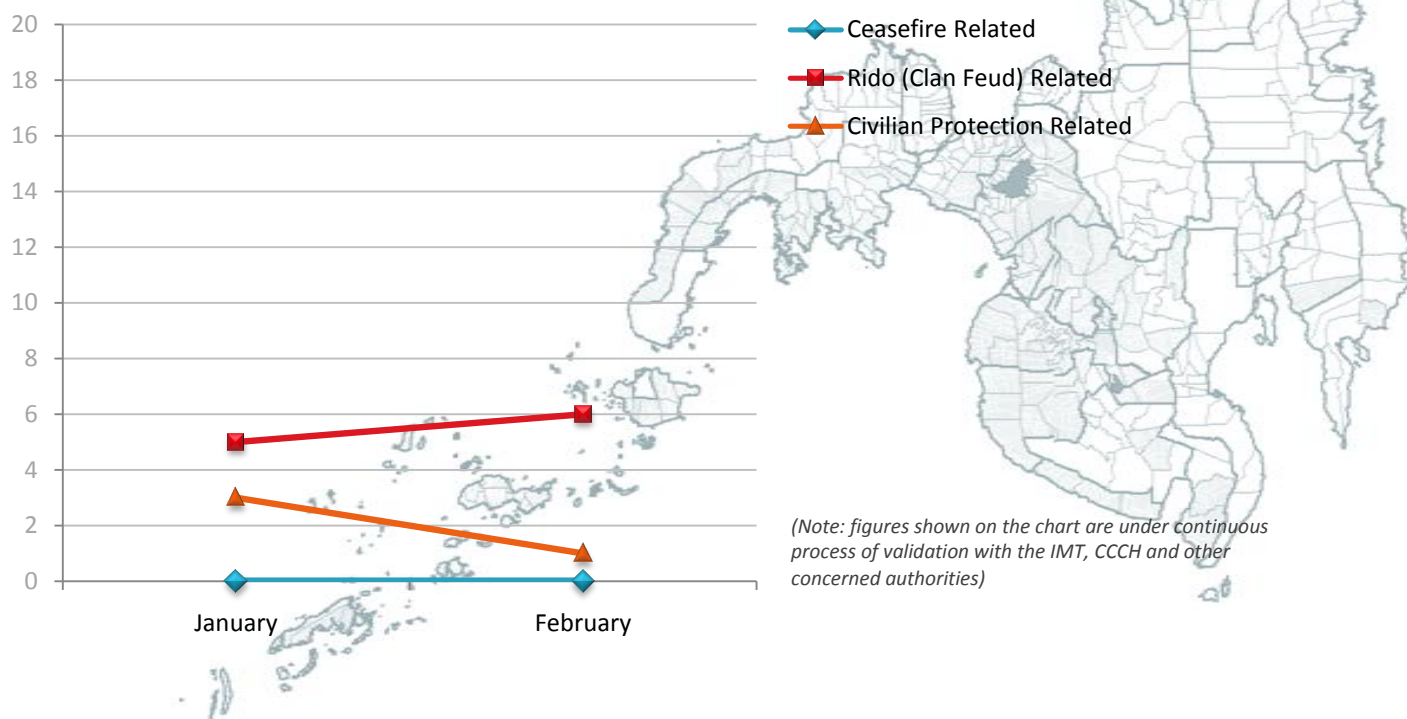
been convened at Datu Odin Sinsuat (Maguindanao), Marawi City (Lanao del Sur) and Iligan City (Lanao del Norte). Plans are underway to cover an additional five (5) areas during the first half of 2011.



NP GROUND MONITORING

Monitoring work was enhanced this year for the IMT with the deployment of Norwegian IMT representatives, Mr. Oddvar Midtkandal and Mr. Tor Fredrik Moe, in mid-January to help monitor the security aspect of the GPH-MILF peace process. In addition, European Union (EU) IMT representatives, Ms. Susan Robertson and Ms. Cynthia Petrich, were deployed on 25 January and 01 February, respectively, to assist in the observation of the humanitarian, rehabilitation and development aspects.

Information shared by the ceasefire committees and the IMT show that no incidents relating to the ceasefire and/or the SOMO/SOMA took place during the first two (2) months of the year. However, they noted the occurrence of several *rido* cases and other incidents linked to criminality, and they continue to monitor developments on these issues to make sure that such events do not complicate the implementation of the ceasefire agreements and SOMO/SOMA declarations.



According to NP records, the month of January posted five (5) incidents relating to *rido*. This includes one incident in Carmen (North Cotabato) that resulted in the death of a four (4)-year old boy and the wounding of another 12-year old. Both were IDPs. On the other hand, monitoring reports for the month of February revealed that the number of *rido*-related incidents slightly increased to six (6), with two (2) cases each observed in Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao and North Cotabato.

NP also observed three (3) possible civilian protection issues for January, the most notable of which pertains to injuries sustained by three (3) children in Guindulungan (Maguindanao) due to UXO (M79 grenade launcher ammunition). On the other hand, only one (1) civilian protection-related issue was noted in the subsequent month,

specifically concerning a reported temporary occupation of a mosque in Bgy. Dungguan, Aleosan (North Cotabato) by some AFP troops due to *rido*-related clashes in that area.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

The municipality of Guindulungan (Maguindanao) presents a potentially volatile area in view of the fact that Umbra Kato's forces are currently situated in the outskirts of the municipality. Meanwhile, AFP mechanized units have been stationed in nearby Datu Salbo and the provincial capital of Shariff Aguak. In addition, NP also observed several movements of AFP troops, as well as riverine military activities noted along the Rio Grande River.

Several activities relating to the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) have also been observed in Maguindanao during the last two (2) months, specifically with respect to the establishment of new MNLF encampments along the highway of Crossing Salbo to Datu Piang, although there are no direct indications that such developments are linked to the long-standing *rido* involving some local MNLF elements in Buluan (Maguindanao) and Kabacan.

A number of kidnapping incidents have also been observed, especially in the Lanao areas. Among these cases include the kidnapping of an American citizen in Baloi (Lanao del Norte) in mid-February, and the abduction of two (2) Mindanao State University (MSU) students on February 19 in Marawi City. In Maguindanao, a high-profile kidnapping incident took place on January 8 involving a Chinese kidnap victim who was abducted from a local hotel. Another kidnapping attempt occurred at the public market of Midsayap (North Cotabato) on February 21 involving a local Filipino-Chinese businessman.

Meanwhile, favorable conditions have been generally noted in other parts of conflict-affected areas in Mindanao.

LATEST SITUATIONER ON IDPs

Significant displacements were noted early this year due to a *rido* in Kabacan municipality involving elements of the MILF and MNLF engaged in a land dispute. At present, displaced residents have started returning to their areas. Still, some IDPs remain reluctant to return, fearing re-escalation of the conflict. To this end, NP, through its CPC monitors, provide regular updates to the IMT on the status of the IDPs.

Additionally, NP dialogues with local authorities and IDPs are ongoing to help assess their needs. In turn, these needs are further referred to concerned government authorities and UN agencies to mobilize assistance.

Another conflict that took place in Buluan municipality (Maguindanao) on February 13 between local MILF elements and Civilian Volunteer Organizations (CVOs) identified with Buluan Mayor, Ibrahim Mangudadatu, also resulted in the displacement of several residents in the area. At present, NP is closely monitoring the IDP situation and assessing their needs, in collaboration with the local government.



MISCELLANEOUS

NP is in the last phases of establishing a mobile team and CPC coordinating office in General Santos City to cover the areas of South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and Gen Santos City (or SOCSKSARGEN). The new area of operation consists of 34 municipalities, 3 cities and 908 barangays. They have a total population of 2,364,742.

Courtesy visits and initial meetings were held with local government officials, including General Santos City Mayor, Darlene Antonino-Custodio, and several communities and indigenous groups in the areas of Sarangani and General Santos City. During these engagements, all concerned welcomed NP's initiative and pledged their cooperation to the NP field team's future undertakings on civilian protection related matters.

The operationalization of the NP-CPC field team covering the SOCSKSARGEN area effectively widens the organization's reach in enhancing the protection of civilian communities in conflict-affected areas.

□ □ □

Eversince NP's participation in the CPC-IMT, it has initiated, among others, its own internal monitoring system to record issues relating to ceasefire, civilian protection, displacement and rido. This was undertaken to maximize the presence of NP ground staff currently assigned to the field. All information contained in this update reflects this initiative.

It is understood that authoritative data on the incidents - whether relating to ceasefire, civilian protection or rido - rests with the ceasefire committees and the IMT. However, the purpose of this update is to provide the reader an additional tool, on top of other instruments and indicators that may already be available, which can be utilized for a fuller appreciation of current conditions prevailing in conflict-affected areas in Mindanao.

For general inquiries or comments and suggestions about the contents and layout of our update, please email us through nphilippines@nonviolentpeaceforce.org or contact us through (+63 2) 828 45 98 and (+63 64) 421 19 77. We value your feedback.

For more information on the Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP), please visit our website at www.nvpf.org.



Nonviolent Peaceforce Philippines

Main Office
#003 Gen. Luna Street,
Rosary Heights IV, Cotabato City
Tel/Fax: (+63 64) 421 19 77

Makati Office
Unit 606 GC Corporate Plaza
150 Legaspi Street, Legaspi Village, Makati City
Tel /Fax: (+63 2) 828 45 98