



Highlights of the Report of the

NATIONAL INTERFAITH HUMANITARIAN MISSION 2

Background

Since the first mission on June 15 to 16, the Kalinaw Mindanao network never let up on its humanitarian outreach to the victims of Marawi conflict and martial law. It is for this reason that over the past month, it has been standing closely with the Marawi evacuees when they began getting more vocal about their questions as to why their homes are still being bombed. And why they are still being prevented from coming back.

By their estimates based on their knowledge of their city and the combatants, the government troops should, by now, have neutralized the ISIS-influenced Dawla Islamiyah. The government obviously is more superior in number and firepower. That the government is still bombing the city and demanding the surrender of the ISIS-inspired group more than two months later raises several questions. The announced extension of Martial Law on the premise that the Marawi conflict isn't over yet certainly did not sit well with the Marawi evacuees.

By now they are down to the pits of their patience and credulity. They also feel in their heart that the welcome mat extended to them by their relatives and neighboring cities is already wearing thin. So is their willingness to remain subsisting on relief in evacuation centers. Removed from their sources of livelihood, from their city known as the only Islamic City of the Philippines and center of trade in Lanao del Sur, they have become a mass of increasingly restive, defiant people.

Days before the formal opening of NIHM 2, the more advance and critical of the Marawi evacuees gathered to openly demand the end of military airstrikes in Marawi and the lifting of Martial Law declaration. They may not have spoken much against Martial Law when it was first announced on May 23. They thought at the time it was just meant to crush an extremist group that, according to word of mouth news, is beheading both the Muslims and Christians unwilling to embrace Islamic fundamentalism.

Most evacuees are saying, enough of that war, bombing and Martial Law. They want to return to their old homes now, to rebuild whatever is left and move on with their families reunited.

Standing in solidarity with Marawi

Like the first NIHM, the second NIHM featured the gathering near Marawi of hundreds of individuals from the Philippines and abroad who come from various organizations (61 orgs, offices or schools from six Philippine regions mostly in Mindanao).

During the four-day NIHM 2, the 288 participants and volunteers gathered as one during the orientational assembly on July 26, the opening program on July 27, and at the solidarity night on July 28. In between,



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they divided into groups for simultaneous activities with Marawi evacuees at different evacuation centers. They held psycho-social services with the evacuees grouped according to age range. They conducted medical missions; they distributed relief packs from church institutions that followed international standards. All in all, 1,162 families received food packs and non-food items from relief delivery operations; 600+ patients were served by the medical mission; and 526 women and children benefitted from counselling and psychosocial interventions. The beneficiaries come from seven various evacuation centers located in Iligan City (3 evacuation centers), Lanao del Norte (2) and Lanao del Sur (2). (See separate report of teams that led in conducting the medical mission, psycho-social activities, relief distribution.) Another team focused on documenting cases of human rights violations.

At the same time, a group composed of representatives from the interfaith mission also made a courtesy visit to Hon. Soraya Alonto-Adiong, the governor of Lanao del Sur, and exchanged notes on Martial Law and cases of rights violations with the IBP (Integrated Bar of the Philippines) chapter of Lanao del Sur. They also tried, but was barred by soldiers, to keep a scheduled meetup with Marawi Crisis Committee Head Zia Alonto at the provincial capitol in the Martial Law-locked down Marawi City.

The real face of martial law

The NIHM 2 continued documentation of the cases of human rights violations. Encouraged by the show of support from several groups, victims have started to surface and narrate

what had previously been kept for fear of military retaliation.

Karapatan was able to record at least three extra-judicial killings, five cases of torture, and two enforced disappearances. These are the heavy cases on top of the massive documentation of threat, harassment and intimidation in evacuation centers, and the previously recorded destruction of properties and aerial bombardment.

In several of the cases documented, suspicion was enough to put lives in danger.

Highlight cases include the arrest of Lala Arafat, a mechanic who had become the leader of one group of evacuees in Saguilaran, Lanao del Sur. Arafat worked as a sweeper under the ‘DOLE GO Negosyo kapatid for Marawi.’ On July 23, 2017, Arafat was asked by a man to fix a motorcycle. However, a few minutes later, he was reportedly arrested by the police, accusing him of fixing a motorcycle belonging to a Maute Group member. His wife since then had not heard of him other than through media reports citing his alleged membership of the ISIS. Unfortunately, his wife who could not even find enough food for their children at the evacuation center, has no capacity to look for him. When she, together with a lawyer, went to the police station to ask for a copy of the blotter against Arafat, they were merely told that they would not be provided with the blotter since it was ‘martial law.’

Another case is the killing of Ramos Malik, a 35-year-old male. Neighbors saw a footage of him, who at that time was wearing black, being apprehended by the military. Afterwards, his body was found on Banggolo bridge. Malik was mentally-disabled, but was helping his family financially by collecting scraps and selling them.

Of importance also is the arrest, detention, and torture of a 36-year old man and his two sons. They had sheltered in an evacuation center when military came to pick them up. The military forced them to admit that they were members of the ISIS, all the while dripping candle wax onto their hands, which were tightly handcuffed. This torture was carried on for a week until their names were cleared and were released.

Defiance: support for Tindeg Ranao

The cruelty of martial law especially directed against the Marawi evacuees who are doubly victimized in the situation has resulted to a collective movement among the survivors.

NIHM 1 showed that there was space for resistance. NIHM 2 provided further support in the Marawi evacuees' need to organize and collectively raise their issues and demands.

Close to the President's second State of the Nation Address (SONA) and what should have been the last day of Martial Law on July 22, the Marawi evacuees held their first rally in Iligan City. It shattered the silence attributed to the Maranao in the face of Martial Law. It also challenged the lies peddled in the media and in Congress by Martial Law architects that it is "different" from the Marcos era and has "no human rights violations." Evacuees were even able to hurdle the difficulties of leaving their camp and joining the protest activity during the actual day of Duterte's SONA.

The highlight in the opening of the second wave of NIHM had been its solidarity work in the public presentation of a Marawi crisis survivors' movement, Tindeg Ranao (Rise Up Ranao). The hundreds who assembled talked of the privation, pain, and enforced helplessness they often felt as evacuees. They called for an end to Martial Law and the military's arbitrary and destructive rule over Marawi.



Heightening repression

Controlling Marawi survivors' movements

In all these activities in Iligan City and Lanao del Sur, evacuees who wished to join the activities encountered various military suppressions. Just before President Duterte's Second SONA and the widely-circulated march of evacuees to "reclaim" Marawi City, evacuees were informed that IDs were not enough to allow them mobility. They were required to bring cedula with them. This requirement was difficult for them to meet due to limited supply of cedula, additional burden of paying to acquire one and the rigorous process of background checking by their host local government units.

Additionally, after the July 22 rally of Tindeg Ranao in Iligan City, evacuees who joined the event were listed by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), threatened by the military that they would not receive relief services anymore, and was told by camp leaders never come back to the evacuation center once they leave on the day of the rally.

This environment of suppression and intimidation was carried on during the activities of the NIHM 2.

Violation of the International code of conduct

International code of conduct governing relief missions say soldiers, the police or any armed party in a conflict shouldn't be near a relief distribution or operation. This is to ensure no one will hesitate to get their needed relief. But in all recognized evacuation centers reached by NIHM2, (Bgy. Sta. Elena in Iligan City; Kampong Madrasah in Pantar, Lanao del Sur; and,

Covered Court in Saguilaran, Lanao del Norte) soldiers are all over the place trying to establish their control.

At the covered court in Saguilaran, Lanao del Sur, military head Villarosa even joined the program during the relief distribution on July 28. Villarosa and his men were also seen motivating the evacuees to raise sheets of paper with calls supporting the presence of the military in the evacuation center. Other military personnel were going around, taking photos of the IDs of the NIHM delegates and the delegates themselves.

In Pantar, Lanao del Norte during a relief distribution on July 28, soldiers asked the staff of the DSWD why they allowed a program inciting people to criticize Martial Law and the government's actions.

Conclusion

The two National Interfaith Humanitarian Missions, especially the recently-concluded second wave, were able to open venues for the victims' demands. These were venues that even the poorest, and in social hierarchies normally voiceless, evacuees were able to access. This allowed the fleshing out cases of human rights violations under Martial Law beyond the common narrative of the effects of the aerial bombings.

Martial Law's basis is questionable on many fronts. On its supposed target and location, it had specifically said Marawi City and the target enemies they would finish in only three weeks. But two months later, it even expanded its scope, notwithstanding the baselessness of its declaration in the first place.

Survivors, who, at first thought that they would be able to express their grievances after sixty days of suffering under martial law, have seen the futility of keeping silent. And their stories do not only counter the declaration of the government that there are no Human Rights Violations. Their stories also show that there is already resistance.

Recommendations

1. Government and non-government units should continue providing humanitarian aid because of the difficulties of the survivors in finding livelihood alternatives while in the evacuation centers.
2. Government and non-government institutions should provide venues for human rights protection of victims, especially sanctuary programs for survivors or witnesses of violations.
3. We call for the investigation of cases of human rights violations based on reports. It has to be made clear that the judicial system has already been rendered useless under the present declaration of martial law.
4. We have to investigate further the actual face of martial law, which is targeting civilians because of the state's assumption that the rebels are among the evacuees.
5. Evacuees should push against a martial law-designed and profit-oriented rehabilitation Task Force Bangon Marawi, and insist on their right to be involved in its entire process from planning to implementation. The local government units should also be involved in the rehabilitation.



***The NIHM 2 is led by the Kalinaw Mindanao, and co-convened by the Sandugo, Sisters' Association in Mindanao, Moro-Christian People's Alliance, Balsa Mindanao, Suara Bangsamoro, Kalumaran, Kawagib Moro Human Rights Alliance, Barug Katungod Mindanao and the RMP-NMR.

Kalinaw Mindanao is an interfaith network that was formed after then-President Estrada declared an all-out war in Central Mindanao in 2000. It also responded to the crisis caused by the eruption of violence after the failure of the MOA-BJE under the Arroyo government in 2005.

Participating organizations to the NIHM 2 will be published in the full-blown Mission Report which will be released later

