

SPECIAL ISSUE: MARAWI, ONE YEAR AFTER

MAY 2018 | TENTH ISSUE

CHANGED

A BITTERSWEET HOMECOMING

The fighting has ended but people are in a different battle of mixed emotions: heartbreak from coming home to a place which is now just a pale shadow of what it used to be and hope of a renewed Marawi full of life vitality and lasting peace to be enjoyed by future generations.

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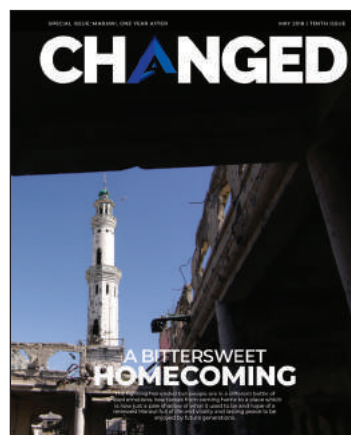
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Lessons from the Siege

PBSP employees
recount their
traumatic
experiences and
how they coped
and moved forward
to fulfill their mission
to help others



ABOUT THE COVER



The cover in this Marawi issue of the CHANGED Magazine features the minaret of the Dansalan mosque, one of few remaining structures which still stands amid the ruins in the ground zero or the main battle zone of the five-monthlong siege.

The magazine "CHANGED" features stories of inspiring people in social development whose lives were changed either through their involvement in projects undertaken by PBSP with its member-companies, partners, and donors, or through interventions in the communities we serve. The A in "CHANGED," is represented by the delta sign (Δ) which is also a mathematical symbol for change.

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CHANGED

MAY 2018 SPECIAL ISSUE

MARAWI, ONE YEAR AFTER

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

UPLIFTING LIVES TOGETHER IN MARAWI

By **Reynaldo Antonio D. Laguda**

Executive Director, Philippine Business for Social Progress



I was in a meeting with our partners from Washington on May 23, 2017 when I received a text message from one of our program officers handling the PBSP-Global Fund project. He informed me that armed men in black masks and toting guns occupied the Amai Pakpak Medical Center in Marawi. Our team of nurses handling Multi-Drug Resistant TB (MDR-TB) cases and stationed in the Satellite Treatment Center at the entrance of the hospital were trapped. This was our first knowledge of the Marawi siege.

Blind of substantial information, we took steps to ensure the safety of our employees who were stationed in Marawi and surrounding areas. We had more than 20 personnel deployed and implementing two projects on Tuberculosis Control and Reproductive Health funded by the Global Fund and Oxfam, respectively. When we accounted for our employees, we moved on to gathering information to determine where we could provide support.

SOS MARAWI

We touched base with local partners and contacts and based on what we gathered, PBSP decided to initiate a five-day campaign called "SOS Marawi," a blanket call for cash donations. This enabled us to rapidly raise money to immediately provide relief assistance. We were informed that there was space to provide assistance to home-based evacuees. PBSP provided what we called "buckets of love," which contained essential non-food items (blankets, utensils, cookware) to support home-based evacuees and relieve the pressure from hosts. June 14 was our first relief mission and we were able to raise more than PhP 6 million in 10 days.

#STAYSTRONGMARAWI

After the first mission, we were able to see the real situation on the ground. We talked to home-based evacuees, adults and children alike, and we heard first-hand their woes, frustrations, and the real needs. We also talked to volunteers like development workers and teachers alike who were (and some still are) *bakwits* themselves. Returning to home base, we drew up additional assistance with the evacuees in our minds and hearts. This prompted the creation of the #StayStrongMarawi campaign that contained different gifts that donors (companies and individuals alike) can choose to support. These were meant to be more than just relief goods. These were gifts to nourish the body and mind, and uplift the spirit.

A MORE RESPONSIVE FRAMEWORK TOWARDS REBUILDING

In the last 12 months since the siege, we were able to reach out to more than 55,000 individuals or over 11,000 families (home-based evacuees and evacuation center-based internally displaced persons or

IDPs). Donations in cash and in-kind worth more than PhP33 million flowed generously through our corporate and individual donors. Some children even donated their own savings as a genuine gesture of support. But much is still to be done. From our experience after several missions in Marawi City, PBSP developed a more responsive framework to guide the institutions, its member companies, partners and donors towards a more holistic collective response, supportive of the needs of IDPs and the local plans.

The PBSP framework aims to achieve four outcomes: (1) relief assistance provided and facilitated transition for the recovery of IDPs; (2) organized and engaged community members for improved settlement management; (3) revived economy that is conducive for enterprise; and (4) empowered children and youth for peace and development.

PBSP believes and supports the clamor of residents for rehabilitation plans to be based on the aspirations and values of the community. A more inclusive approach in planning will enable people to work together towards collective impact on Marawi's rehabilitation. A comprehensive plan that is anchored on multi-sectoral consultation and properly communicated to the general public will greatly enable private sector to respond better and more cohesively.

Together with our member companies, partners and donors, we re-affirm our commitment of unity with our Muslim brothers and sisters as they journey towards recovery that is participatory, inclusive, and culturally sensitive. It must be development that builds and promotes just and lasting peace. We are one in saying that Marawi will rise again.

STATE OF DONATIONS

AS OF MAY 21, 2018

First mission: June 14-16
Second mission: July 8-10
Third mission: Sept. 13-15
Fourth mission: Oct. 6-8
Fifth mission: Dec. 7, 11-12
Sixth mission: March 15, 2018

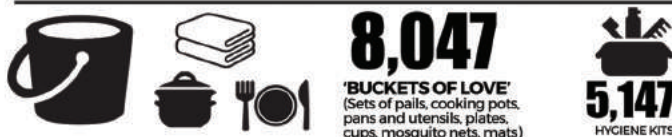
SITES
Marawi City
Balo-i, Lanao Del Norte
Saguiaran, Lanao Del Sur
Iligan City
Pantar, Lanao del Norte



Gifts that support basic needs



Gifts that help families help home-based evacuees



Gifts that uplift the spirit




* 4196 Teachers and 569 Volunteers received a set

Gifts that help evacuees in early recovery



**33M**
CASH & IN-KIND
DONATIONS RAISED

**55,395**
INDIVIDUALS
FROM 11,079 FAMILIES
(HOME-BASED &
EVACUATION
CENTER BASED IDPS)



112 INDIVIDUAL
DONORS



96 CORPORATE
DONORS

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CHANGED


MAY 2018 SPECIAL ISSUE

MARAWI, ONE YEAR AFTER

PERSPECTIVES

PERSPECTIVES

ON REBUILDING MARAWI



“The task of development is so great that no one sector can bring it about alone. The key is to establish partnerships among the major sectors of society.”

— former **PBSP Chairman**
Andres Soriano III

PBSP owes its accomplishments in Marawi, not only to our donors, but to partners, especially to our local partners who not only assist us in the implementation of our projects, but provide us with guidance to make initiatives more responsive and sensitive to the needs of those affected by the siege.

This section allows some of our local partners (both from the government and CSOs/NGOs) to share their thoughts, feelings and opinions on how the benefits of true rehabilitation will be most felt and appreciated. Let this serve as a platform for their voices to be heard and hopefully inform and educate our readers on the rebuilding efforts in Marawi, inspire more involvement and propel further discourse and dialogues.

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MAY 2018 SPECIAL ISSUE

MARAWI, ONE YEAR AFTER

PERSPECTIVES

TOGETHER, WE SHALL RISE

By **Hon. Majul Usman Gandamra**,
Mayor of Marawi City, Lanao del Sur



Marawi City was once at the tail-end of development. For several decades, it was left behind and even ranked at the bottom of some 145 cities in the country.

When I assumed office, I tried my best to improve governance, particularly in the delivery of basic services and collection of local taxes which is the lifeblood of the city. I am a believer

that for a place to be successful, you should not just rely on the national government but also do your share to make it one. In 2016, our revenue collection increased by 220% from 2.107 million to 6.734 million. I knew we had to do more to be able to educate our people in sharing the mission to help build our city.

While the city was slowly progressing, the Marawi siege happened. The extent of the devastation seemed to have put us back to where we started, but the difference now is that many assistance are coming to help us start anew.

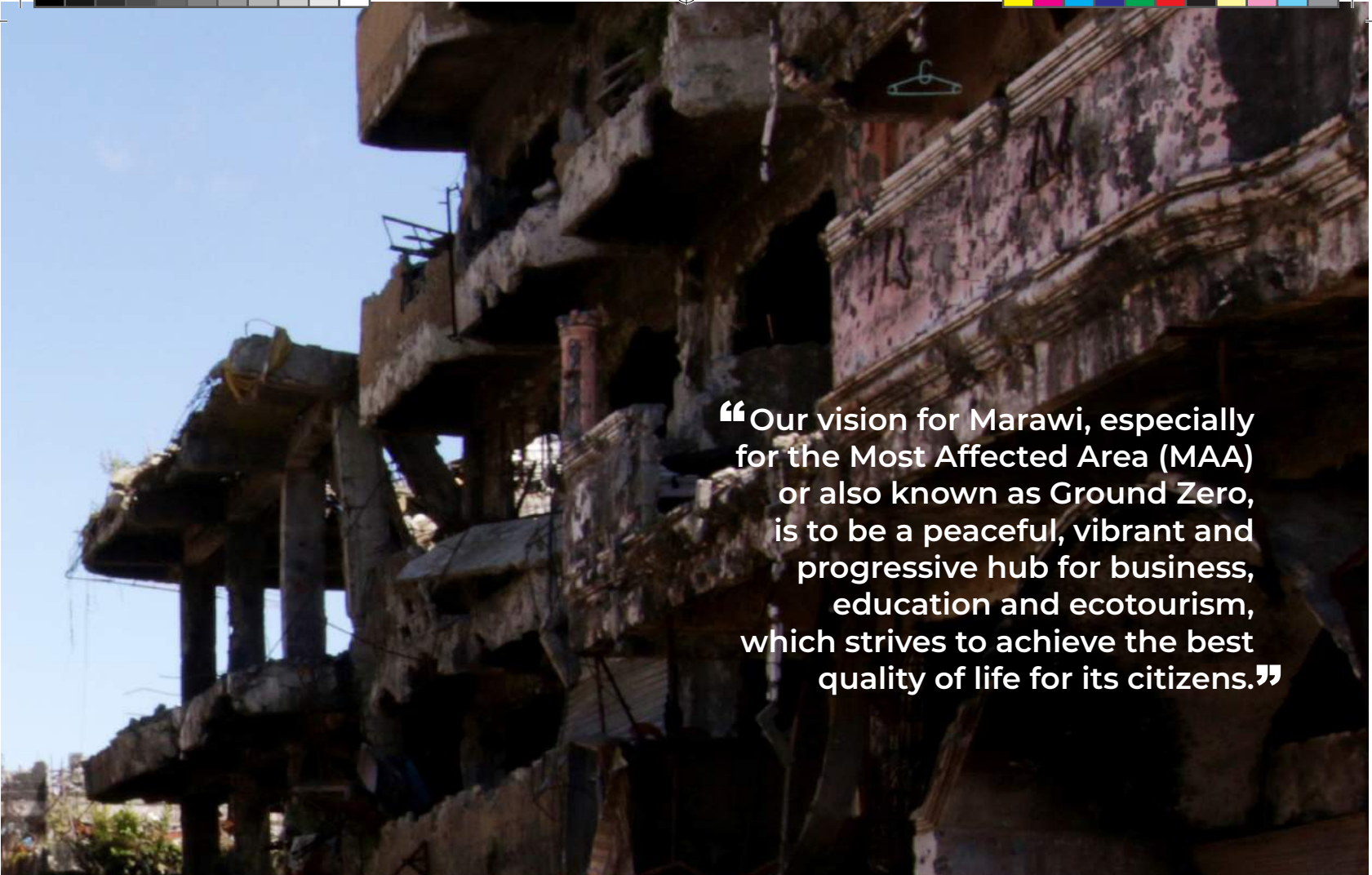
THE MASTER PLAN

Our vision for Marawi, especially the Most Affected Area (MAA) or also known as Ground Zero, is to be a peaceful, vibrant and progressive hub for business, education and ecotourism, which strives to achieve the best quality of life for its citizens." The goals are to build communities of highest standard of living with a culture of peace and welfare promotion, and to develop a thriving local economy capitalizing on its

potentials in business and ecotourism and on its role as an educational center in Mindanao. In order to do this, we need the support of the different agencies of the national government and the private sectors.

A comprehensive master plan was submitted to Task Force *Bangon Marawi* and was enhanced by the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA). This was the result of consultations made with different stakeholders in Marawi, including professional experts from Mindanao State University, traditional leaders, religious leaders, IDP leaders, business sector and other stakeholders.

The master plan which is still being finalized, will be the basis for the reconstruction and rebuilding of the MAA which is expected to start in June 2018. We are striving for it to be compliant to all laws, rules and regulations sans compromising customs and traditions of the Maranao people. There will be proper zoning for all infrastructures that will be built inside and it will be culturally and religiously sensitive. *Kailangan hindi*



“Our vision for Marawi, especially for the Most Affected Area (MAA) or also known as Ground Zero, is to be a peaceful, vibrant and progressive hub for business, education and ecotourism, which strives to achieve the best quality of life for its citizens.”

mawala ang aming identity (We should not lose our identity).

There are areas that will be preserved such as our mosques. We will rebuild these mosques on the same areas where they are located. We will construct buildings in accordance to our cultural norms and customs. Similarly, we welcome innovations that will conform to our Islamic beliefs. Part of the initial master plan is the construction of public structures like roads, government facilities, schools, a big public market and a convention center. The national government also plans to set up a battalion (extension) camp to help ensure the security of the city and the province as well as the safety of the people.

The people of Marawi can also look forward to bigger roads in the city with the construction of new roads and widening of existing roads networks such as the primary road, the highway spanning Quezon Avenue. In this expansion, only a certain width and length of the road will be taken and utilized from the private lands so as not to cause displacement or

encroachment of private properties.

In cases of public lands which were occupied by private individuals, negotiation shall be made for its utilization for public use with reasonable compensation to the occupants. Latter respects the ownership of the government of these lands. However, should these lands be utilized by the government in the course of the rehabilitation of Marawi City, proper compensation to the occupants shall be made. In addition, there will be no massive displacement of individuals from their properties since the government will be expanding the reclamation areas to be utilized in constructing government facilities. Properties in these areas which were occupied by private individuals may also be used by the government without disregarding the rights of the occupants for proper compensation.

Part of addressing this issue is a constant dialogue with our people and explaining to them the importance of making a sacrifice for Marawi, *ang pagbibigay ng konting sakripisyo*

para sa kabutihan ng Marawi. At the end of the day, we are talking about the welfare of the people of Marawi City. *Hindi dapat maging sagabal ang personal na interest ng isang grupo lang sa pagbangon ng Marawi.* We need to be united. Otherwise, we will be left alone. As Mayor, I do not want this to happen.

LESSONS FROM THE SIEGE

As we move on from the tragedy caused by the siege, we have to learn from past experiences and use these lessons in rebuilding our lives and our city. We should be socially responsible and must do our part to help the national and local governments bring peace and order in our city. We should be more involved and participative in the activities in our communities. If we feel and see threats in our respective areas, we should not be afraid to report this to the authorities.

Lastly, in dealing with differences, let us respect one another's opinions and find solutions that will bring welfare to the people of Marawi and will help Marawi rise again.

WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD MARAWI

By **Hon. Zia Alonto Adiong,**

Assemblyman in the Regional Assembly in the ARMM
and Head of the Marawi Crisis Management Committee



FIVE PRIORITY AREAS

There are two master plans: the one for the Most Affected Area (MAA or a.k.a. Ground Zero) and the other is the Short-term Comprehensive Recovery and Rehabilitation Program (RRP) for the entire city. The plans are anchored on five identified priority areas. The first is the reconstruction that involves the repair of damages, government infrastructures and even to some extent, houses and privately-owned buildings. Second is social services that includes medical services and peace and order. Third is business and livelihood. Fourth and fifth priority areas are education and shelter.

All of these priorities were identified after a three-month workshop that we conducted in Cagayan De Oro with residents, stakeholders including the Department of Education, and even home-based internally displaced persons (IDPs) and those still in evacuation centers. Through the workshop which was designed as a focus group discussion, we were able to identify their assessments, their needs and hopes, and even the areas that residents would want to rehabilitate. We expanded the coverage of the plan to include adjacent localities Butig and Piagapo which also incurred great damage caused by the previous

attacks by the same perceived enemy. Until now, they have IDPs who are still in evacuation centers and also need as much help.

The government also undertook its own post conflict needs assessment which also became part of the basis for the drafting of the Short Term Comprehensive Rehabilitation and Recovery Program. This and our plans from the workshop were submitted to Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM) and were used in the creation of the plans which are still being finalized today.

CHALLENGES IN RECONSTRUCTION

What makes the reconstruction challenging though is the clearing operations in the MAA with the danger of active, undetonated bombs still lying beneath the rubble. The government also has to deal with the management of the dead whose remains may still scattered underneath the destroyed buildings.

But while waiting for the reconstruction, there is the impact of the crisis that needs to be addressed. Before rebuilding and rehabilitation, we want to focus first on recovery – immediate emergency response – as there are quite a number of families who are still living in evacuation

The process of rebuilding Marawi is very complex because it is a human-induced calamity. Violent extremism is the cause of war. So it is not just about repairing damages in physical structures, but also about repairing relationships and communities.

Ultimately, this is about social healing. Everything in the master plan, therefore, should be directed towards conflict resolution. It should be a victim-centered plan and proposal.

centers. Their houses have been completely destroyed and they have not been fully integrated back because they have yet to be given temporary shelter.

The government has yet to finalize the identification of the area for permanent shelter which can accommodate all those people whose houses were destroyed in the MAA. The Task Force is planning to hold consultations with these families on whether they want to shoulder the cost of the demolition cost of their houses/properties or if they allow the government to expropriate the land for them and will just get a payment in return for claiming their land which will be used for roads expansion or other public infrastructures. Payment for this varies and may even take billions of pesos especially right now that the cost of land in Marawi has skyrocketed. There had been delays in identifying areas for permanent shelter because of this. The residents saw the opportunity to sell their lands in a much higher price. I think that's inhuman in a way. They should lower it down to fair market value.

Perhaps this is the reason why the government allowed the coming in of foreign developers because we don't have that much money to rebuild MAA. We will pay the Chinese developers in the coming years. The PhP50 billion is really not enough for the rebuilding because we have a continuing drama of families who have been dislocated from their job, from employment. We have students who have to enrol in schools in some other places. We have families whose businesses were lost and have to set up again in some other places. We also have the issue of difficulty in renting a space. During the siege, there were landlords who were not willing to rent out their space for IDPs and Maranaos.

ENSURING SECURITY VS. PERCEPTION OF MILITARIZATION

For the military facility, I think it's about time to embrace the idea of strengthening our partnership with the security sector because we are dealing here with a group that has no national liberation agenda. They don't ascribe to any rules of engagement. They are plain terrorists who kill not only Christians but even

us Muslims. So I think security visibility is also a deterrent to anybody who is planning to commit crimes against the community. That's the physical structure of having an outpost or headquarters to ensure the safety of the community. But you cannot blame some residents who are resisting it. Their impression is that they are being militarized, that they may be the next Palestine. I think it was just wrong timing because the military facility came first even before the shelters were distributed. Another issue in the military facility is its location which is very important to the residents. That was where the old city hall is located. Historically, that hill is well connected with our heritage. It carries the epic narrative of Bantugan, our local hero. These are the things that the government needs to understand. There are cultural dynamics that need to be respected and integrated in the plan so that it would be more acceptable to the people, and they can identify easily with it. We don't have any doubts or questions regarding intention. Everybody wants to rebuild Marawi city, government, private entities, NGOs, among others. It's how you send the message across. It's very vital in making sure that the people would really support the program or the plan that you are proposing.

ENGAGING THE RESIDENTS

That is why the issue of rebuilding is very personal to all of us, the residents, the Maranaos. Some individuals or even groups feel that they were not consulted or could not identify with the master plans because everything is at stake here. This is about our lives, our homes. We are talking about generations of people living in the area and then all of a sudden dislocated and displaced.

I don't see these opposing opinions as a detriment but as a chance to improve the planning. This is a continuing process. Before a masterplan is finalized, it is subject to the acceptability of the people. The rehabilitation will not be effective if people are not willing to accept your proposal. Physical reconstruction is just a mere catalyst to repair social relations. Even if you have Marawi City transformed into Makati or any urbanized area, if the people are not satisfied because their culture, religion

and identity are not respected and they don't easily recognize themselves in the plan, it won't hit the mark. This is because you are trying to repair the damaged areas and at the same time, trying to combat and counter violent extremism. So that's what makes the case of Marawi very unique.

I know we cannot win entirely the support of the people, that's impossible. But if you do your job and you'll be criticized anyway, then just do your job but handle it well. In the end, let the people be the judge. We need to encourage the people to speak out and then later on explain to them why the plan is being designed that way. It's more of like handling and managing communication lines so that you can also manage expectations from the people.

If there is an area where people are disconnected with the ones handling the rehabilitation, then you have a vacuum of the communication lines which may be used as a portal for somebody who is espousing a different, more sinister agenda. That person may even convince the people to join groups or be antagonistic against the government, now that's another problem. Development does not necessarily mean ending conflict. Sometimes it might cause further conflict.

So we need to have a good communication line between the stakeholders and the government. All I'm saying is that the government has the right and the mandate to rehabilitate the city. But we have to make sure that there is active participation from the residents and the victims. It's like transforming victims into peace advocates and development partners. We need to have a high level approach here.

We want to make Marawi City progressive. But we just don't see it with a skyline. We are not ambitious people. All we want is for the residents to be assured that they will be compensated greatly. We are satisfied with the assurance that the people will eventually be reintegrated into the city, their homes will be rebuilt, and there will be better government services. That would be enough for us.

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MARAWI, ONE YEAR AFTER

PERSPECTIVES

BUTIG IS NOT A HAVEN FOR ISIS-INSPIRED MAUTES

By **Hon. Atty. Dimnatang Pansar**,
Mayor of Butig, Lanao del Sur



I was not yet the Mayor of Butig when the Maute brothers launched their first attack in our town on February 20, 2015. About 15 to 20 Maute members ambushed the military troops stationed at Butig Municipal Hall.

The next attack happened two weeks after the May 2016 elections. I was already elected Mayor at that time but I have not yet assumed office since my term would start on June 30,

2016. To avoid the Mautes, I stayed in my residence and in our temporary Municipal Hall, together with some police and supporters. There were no soldiers at that time. They responded 18 hours after the incident.

After the operation, the soldiers were responsive but no military camp was set up yet in Butig. The final attack took place on the last week of November 2016. This was the most devastating war we had as hundreds of houses were destroyed, including government offices, mosques, school buildings and the public market.

Many residents in Butig believe that the Maute brothers were wrong in their purpose for their attacks which was supposedly jihad or holy war. Instead, it was for power and wealth. Their supporters were just misguided.

TAINTED IMAGE

The Maute attacks have affected our town's reputation. But we are trying to transform it into an opportunity.

What happened in Butig was neither the fault of residents nor the local government. It was the result of security lapses at the macro level of

governance. For decades, there was no military presence which was an advantage for the Mautes who took this chance to grow in numbers. Maybe, the Mautes were just too cunning to stage the attacks like what happened in Piagapo and Marawi City.

Before the Marawi siege, Butig was still in disarray and was struggling to bounce back. Many residents were still in evacuation centers, especially those whose homes were destroyed. As part of the rehabilitation, the government started to construct 14 classrooms in our town. Hopefully, they will also include the reconstruction of homes and other facilities like the public market.

RISING FROM THE RUBBLE

I am happy to say that Butig is now more safe and secure. Almost all residents affected by the war have returned home but many are still struggling to start anew. Our local government is doing its best efforts to help the people live a normal life. Improving Butig's economic standard of living can liberate and heal our people from the trauma of war.



A military camp was already set up in Butig to help maintain peace and order. But I think it would also be good to have a force multiplier such as the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit (CAFGU).

We also need help in providing basic services. Long-term development efforts are also needed to address the root cause of insurgency vis-à-vis terrorist elements. At present, the government has also started to construct a highway connecting Butig (Lanao del Sur) to Barira (Maguindanao).

OPPORTUNITIES AND POTENTIALS OF BUTIG

Butig has fertile lands and abundant source of water for irrigation. It has favorable weather and is typhoon-free throughout the year. It can be the rice basket of the province if given proper support. Aside from high value crops, coconut can grow well in Butig's sandy loam soil. We can even produce coco sugar and other related products.

There are two mountain ranges in Butig, Mount Makaturing and Mount Piapayungan, which is the last rainforest in Lanao del Sur. If remained

untouched, it can be a research area for flora and fauna. It can be a tourist destination. The mountain ranges also give way to Malaig River. Without security threat, there is a strong possibility that investors can develop the river into a hydro-electric power plant as a source of renewable energy.

With all these opportunities and potentials, the economy of Butig can grow, and local revenue generation can actually happen for the first time in the history of Butig.

As a first phase strategy (2016 to 2019), the local government of Butig aims to establish a strong presence of governance that can deliver basic social services on education and health, safety and security by isolating terrorist organizations, rice productivity and infrastructure through the construction of roads. For the second phase (2019 to 2022), Butig will be open to investors like agri-companies which can help develop idle lands to generate employment and revenue. Hopefully by 2022 to 2025, Butig will become an exporter of rice and high-value vegetables to nearby towns in the Lanao provinces and other cities in Mindanao.

“With the guidance of our Almighty Creator and with the help of other stakeholders, alongside people’s participation, Butig will become a peaceful and resilient community, as well as a model of good Maranao governance.”

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MARAWI, ONE YEAR AFTER

PERSPECTIVES

BEFORE MARAWI, THERE WAS THE PIAGAPO SIEGE

By **Hon. Engr. Ali Sumandar**,
Mayor of Piagapo, Lanao del Sur



Before the Marawi siege, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-inspired terrorist group waged war in Butig, the hometown of the Maute brothers, then went to Barangay Gacap in Piagapo – my homeland.

The armed conflict in Barangay Gacap lasted only for 72 hours because of the joint intelligence efforts of the local government unit and the civilians with the authorities which was hastily established following the outbreak of the siege.

Prior to war, as Local Chief Executive of our town, I have been in close coordination with the military camp in Marawi City and have strengthened our intelligence and safety measures to protect our people and the community. Part of our plans is to equip and utilize our able constituents to stop and prevent any security threats.

PLANTING SEEDS OF TERROR

The ISIS-inspired group's key person in my town was a local Imam who was a former commander of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and has proven to have relatives residing in Butig. The Imam went to Butig during the war in 2016 and made contact with the terrorist group. In December 2016, they established a camp at Barangay Gacap in Piagapo.

Upon learning the existence of the camp, I immediately called the attention of our traditional and religious leaders to help the local government check on the camp. Considering peace as everybody's concern, I made sure to involve all the stakeholders in addressing issues concerning peace and order.

As a result of the observation, it was discovered that the militants are using ideology designed to brainwash young brains who are their target for recruitment. The said ideology misleads people's faith in Islam with ISIS doctrine.

THE KEY TO FIGHTING TERRORISM

The presence of the camp in Barangay Gacap made it difficult for us to make them leave the area. As feared, war had erupted leaving massive damages on local agriculture and infrastructures, and prompting affected residents to flee for their lives. During these trying times, the local government unit of Piagapo through the offices of the Mayor, Disaster Risk Reduction and Management, and the local Social Welfare Development worked in close coordination to attend to the needs of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). We fully exercised our expertise and exhausted our resources in order to provide temporary shelters to IDPs.

Soon after the war, we started our recovery efforts to rebuild the lives of the affected residents and their communities. Although we were not



“Peace is everybody's concern. The government alone cannot secure peace without the help of our stakeholders.”

able to bring back what we have lost from the war, at least we have provided needed services to our constituents and helped them rise again from the tragedy caused by the conflict.

Despite losses to war, the local government unit has maintained the integrity and has increased its performance in public service. In fact, the LGU was awarded with the Seal of Good Local Governance and Seal of Child-friendly Local Governance, among others. These two most coveted awards in government are manifestation of our religious compliance to the requirements set by the Department of the Interior and Local Government. Through trying times, we rise up to ensure delivery of public service.

HELPING IDPs FROM MARAWI

May 23, 2017 at around 2:00 in the afternoon, another firefight erupted involving the same group against

the government troops. It was called the Marawi siege. The conflict lasted for five months. Although Piagapo has not yet recovered fully from the experience of Gacap siege, we opened our town to evacuees seeking refuge. We housed 5,000 to 6,000 persons or 600 to 700 families in our evacuation centers. As of this time, there are 11 families who are still in our evacuation centers because their homes in Marawi City were already destroyed.

THE WAY TO LASTING PEACE

Because of the recent wars, the government granted my request to put two military camps in Piagapo. The declaration of Martial Law has helped sustain peace and order in my town. As a public servant, it helped me secure critical areas, especially those areas that have armed groups. Lawless elements are now categorically controlled. The lesson of the current Martial Law remains engraved in every one's heart.

We also strengthened security measures in the area by putting in place contingency plans, coming up with hazard maps and identifying possible evacuation sites. We also conducted capacity-building sessions in barangays on Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM).

Like I said earlier, peace is everybody's concern. The government alone cannot secure peace without the help of other stakeholders.

With this in mind, I urged the public to engage in community activities and eventually be part of the nation-building process. It is also my hope that federalism will soon be implemented and the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) be enacted into law in order to solve local problems concerning development, prosperity, and peace and order. With federalism, everybody will be given a fair share of opportunities to alleviate the living conditions our fellow Filipinos deserve.

UNDERSTANDING THE MARAWI SIEGE AND ITS ROOTS

By **Drieza Lininding**,
Chairman, Moro Consensus Group



One of the reasons why the influence of radical groups is gaining ground in Mindanao is because people are being fed with too much information on the political processes that it makes them impatient and lose trust in the authorities.

Our group, the Moro Consensus Group was formed two to three months before the siege, to help educate the people on the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), federalism and to generate awareness on the history and identity of the Bangsamoro. This stemmed from our observation of young Maranaos who need to learn more about the history of the Bangsamoro, of the Maranaos.

These lessons on our history are not being taught in elementary schools because it is not in the centralized curriculum. We feel that we need to

educate the people to manage their expectations. In the BBL, for instance, you need to explain and correct their expectation that this law is already full of remedies and independence.

FIGHTING FOR INDEPENDENCE

The BBL is a bill that seeks to establish a proposed new autonomous political entity known as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, replacing the current Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The proposal is part of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, a peace agreement signed by the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in 2014. The BBL basically aims to expand the powers of the ARMM. This includes giving it a block grant of two percent from the total national budget of the country and the authority to decide on its usage.

The desire of the ARMM to have autonomy is based on its unique culture which is anchored on its religion. The Philippine government strongly values the separation of church and state but for us Muslims, there is no such thing. For us, Islam should be one with values and governance because all teachings about governance are taken from Islam. At the same time, the history of the Moro precedes the history of the Philippines. A Moro sultanage existed even before the coming of the Spaniards and other colonizers. We already have our own practice in terms

of governance and leadership that is very unique to us.

In 1935, our leaders led by Hadji Abdulhamid Bongabong of Unayan and 189 Maranao sent a letter of appeal to the US Congress about their wish to remain independent and not be made part of the Philippines. This is the Dansalan declaration which is an effort to push for the recognition of the 1924 Zamboanga declaration also sent to the US Congress by our leaders. This declaration seeks to have Mindanao declared independent Constitutional Sultanate which was known to the world as Moro Nation, in the event that US grants independence to the Philippine islands without provision for its retention under the American flag.

There was resistance from our leaders because they were never a part of the revolutions even during the time of Emilio Aguinaldo. They had their own struggle and battle in Mindanao. In fact, Mindanao, not Manila, used to be the seat of government during pre-colonial times. The first mayor of Manila was Rajah Sulayman, a Muslim. Manila and Rosario in Cavite are like the provinces of Mindanao. So the history forms a bigger part of the aspiration of the Bangsamoro.

SLOW PROGRESS OF THE BBL AND INJUSTICES

One of the causes of the ISIS-inspired Maute group is their frustration in



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the government. They think that the government of the Philippines should no longer be trusted. After years of dialogue and even coming up with a signed agreement, it still has not been implemented. This, along with injustices committed against the Muslims in previous years (from the colonial times, to the Marcos regime, all-out wars in Mindanao), pushes them to fight for independence instead and to rally people behind their cause.

The Mautes also no longer believes in what the BBL could bring. They are part of the radical Muslims who are twisting their knowledge of Islam to incorporate their own beliefs. Even the Muslims around the world are condemning them because of their personal resistance.

Pledging allegiance to the ISIS was more of a propaganda for them, they wanted to get attention and be recognized. If they won, they would have set up a caliphate or territory here. Their group believes in prophecies that they think will happen. One of these is the prophecy that when the end of the world is near, there is someone who would rule and their caliphate will return. We share in the Catholic's belief of the coming of Jesus Christ as a prophet but there is another personality, Imam Mahadi. According to prophecies, he will be one to liberate for example, Palestine. His followers are holding a black flag. That was where

they got the idea of the black flag and they made themselves believe that they are the soldiers of Islam who will liberate the world.

When Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was declared ISIS leader in Iraq, he called on all the Muslim people in the world to pledge allegiance to him. In Islam, where there is a legitimate leader installed, Muslims need to pledge allegiance. That is how important leadership is to us. But they exaggerate this and in reality, it all boils down to politics, rule of dominance of the world. In some Muslim countries though, Islam is just being used as an excuse but in reality, it is political. They end up fighting themselves. Syria is mad at Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia does not like Syria. They do not like Iran and Iraq. That's why the question is if they are for Islam, why do they cause chaos in other Muslim countries? Why do they fight and kill their fellow Muslims?

IN SEARCH OF THE TRUTH

As for the Marawi siege, we would like to know what really happened. The government gained prior information of the Mautes' planned attack which was even shown on TV news reports at that time. We would like to know if the government did something that could have prevented the attack.

We are being accused of letting the terrorists enter our city but we learned that days before the siege some of the

soldiers were transferred to a different location.

So the terrorists who were reported to be only a small group of 60 then according to military sources were able to pass through our crossings without any challenge. From that small group, they grew to a hundred and then eventually became 900, with the forced recruitment of civilians.

We all deserve to know the truth, for our people and even the soldiers who sacrificed their lives.

SOLUTION TO THE CONFLICTS

I think the first thing to do is to pass the BBL and see how it will change the present dynamics, and if it will work with the Philippine system. As long as this Bangsamoro aspiration is not addressed, I believe that these arguments will continue.

I also think that if we will be allowed to police our own people and guard our city from terrorists, there will be a bigger chance that there will be no bloodshed. It's not the money that they are fighting for here, but their death on their cross. That is what the ISIS-inspired groups are yearning for, to die for their cause. This makes them feel victors, while for us who didn't fight, we become cowards. We need to understand this kind of thinking. We cannot win this by violent means. Leave it to us to solve this. Let us be.

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REJECTION & DISCRIMINATION THE PLIGHT OF MARANAO IDPs

By **Zahria Muti Mapandi,**

Executive Director, Al Mujadillah Development Foundation



Following the infiltration of ISIS-affiliated Maute group in Marawi and the declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao a year ago, many of us Maranaos fled the city, unaware that the following months could be the worst in our lives. Instantly, thousands became internally displaced persons (IDPs), victims of a conflict we never wished to happen.

Apart from the trauma caused by the terrors of war, abrupt exile, destruction of property, or loss of family members, many of us faced prejudice while seeking places to stay in.

The first reports of discrimination that surfaced are from well-off families who first opted to stay in hotels in Iligan and Cagayan de Oro City thinking that the fighting would only last for a few days. Hotel owners initially refused to accommodate Maranaos for fear that they might be members of the Maute group.

In a way, their response was somehow understandable especially because these incidents happened during the first few days of the siege. Many hotels were being cautious after hearing rumors that some Maranaos welcomed the terrorists into the city. But I think accusations like these, however, are unfounded and to some extent, unfair. In fact, these have become a source of resentment among our people.

Considering that it was the Maranao business owners who first provided protection to their non-Muslim employees and refused to surrender them to the terrorists, being denied of shelter just because they are Muslims was a heavy blow to the Maranaos.

NO MUSLIMS ALLOWED

When it became apparent that their displacement would last longer, many

families started looking for houses they could rent because renting is a lot cheaper than checking in a hotel.

In my case, we've been staying at my husband's relatives and decided to move out because we didn't want to be a burden to them anymore, especially when we realized the siege could go on for months.

My sister-in-law searched for houses for rent on Facebook for us and found one that was big enough for my family but as soon as the homeowner found out we are Muslims, he said that the house was occupied already. A month later, I saw that same house on Facebook still open for occupancy.

A friend of mine who is a teacher had the same problem. Her co-teacher, a non-Muslim, offered to find a place for them. Easily, she found one and they immediately gave the down payment. However, when my friend and her family were about to move to that house, the landlord saw that she was not the teacher who initially negotiated with her. My friend and her family were denied entrance and their down payment was returned.



While we have been welcomed warmly into different cities, many of its residents seemed to be a bit hesitant. Even if we were willing to pay rent according to their regular rate, they would just offer us excuses. The worst reason we heard was that there was a barangay ordinance barring property owners to rent out living spaces to Maranao IDPs. If this is true, it is clearly a case of discrimination.

When the IDPs asked for copies of that said ordinance, they could not show any so we concluded that it was just one of their excuses. After all, no barangay would issue such ordinance since that kind of discriminatory policy is against the law. It's alarming how people would create such excuse in order to justify their rejection of Maranao IDPs.

Until now, no action has been made to address this issue.

HOME-BASED WOES

Maranaos have this concept of "maratabat" which can be translated to English as "self-pride." It includes the principle of protecting family honor and helping family members in need.

Putting this into practice, it would be dishonorable for a Maranao household to let members of their extended family to stay in evacuation centers while their own family sleep comfortably at home.

This explains why more IDPs stayed with their relatives in Iligan, Saguian, or Cagayan de Oro than in evacuation centers.

This resulted to crowding since many houses accommodated four to five families, which in turn exhausted the resources of some host families. We have to understand that relief goods were not enough to sustain such number of people so these host families shouldered the expenses and many of them were already financially challenged even before the siege.

Emotions escalated. Some home-based evacuees shared hearing hurtful words from their host relatives. Yes, it's more emotionally painful to feel unwanted or rejected by your own family, but we also have to understand that it was also stressful on the part of the host families. Besides, these reports are only isolated cases.

Those were desperate times. Sadly, these are all parts and parcel of internal displacement.

THE HEALING PROCESS

One year after the siege, many IDPs have already returned to their homes except those whose houses were destroyed by the airstrikes.

The issue of discrimination is a serious matter that has to be addressed. I think the first step we should take is to recognize that these problems stemmed from a much deeper issue of cultural intolerance.

If there is one thing we should take from this experience, it is learning to understand each other's cultures. We have to widen our understanding and celebrate our diversity and cultural differences. Let us abandon mutual distrust that has been plaguing us for hundreds of years and start having mutual respect. Only then can we start the process of healing those centuries-old wounds and move forward as brothers and sisters.

HEALING THE WOUNDS OF WAR

By **Samira Gutoc-Tomawis**,
Focal Person/Co-Convenor, Ranao Rescue Team



At the height of the Marawi siege, the Ranao Rescue Team was like the “Bureau of Funeral Parlors” because we were monitoring the dead. We assisted the transfer of dead bodies in checkpoints because the army was very strict about it. We were also monitoring the living so we could help and rescue them.

Majority of the evacuees are home-based because the Maranaos (as the most affected tribe) preferred to stay with relatives. They did not want to be documented or queue in line

during relief distribution. Home-based evacuation is a new phenomenon that can only be found during the Marawi siege.

With the help of other organizations and groups, we were able to reach out to home-based evacuees in underserved areas in Munai, Lanao del Norte, Barangay Hinaplanon in Iligan, and in Cagayan de Oro City. We acknowledge the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) and other partner organizations for the various kinds of assistance they provided and truckloads of relief goods.

ONE YEAR AFTER

A year has passed and many of the evacuees are thankful because they have already returned home. Just recently, we were allowed to visit our properties. Many of the properties were burned and vaults were lost. In my house, we lost our closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras, aircon units, men's clothes and registered guns. We did not know who took it.

In some areas, we could still smell the stench of dead bodies that have been recently found amid the rubble of bullet-riddled structures. Right now, we need intangible assistance. We

already feel ashamed of asking for relief goods since last year. For me, it is about giving us confidence. Evacuees, especially those from ground zero need confidence-building. It was traumatic for them to see their properties destroyed. There was a man who collapsed because he saw the watch of his father in a skeleton. They could also hear voices of children in places with no people. I think those are restless spirits who died unreasonably. One way of providing us confidence is by enabling young Maranaos to find their talents. It may be through singing or any talent that brings consciousness. There are so many people who can entertain the public. They can give not only happiness but also pride to Marawi evacuees. As rescuers, we saw that many evacuees need entertainment right now. They need to forget the sad memories brought by the siege.

As short-term solution, evacuees need cash assistance because they have no resources for 12 months. Evacuees who came from safe zones received Php5,000. Unfortunately, this is not enough because one sack of rice and a Gasul already cost Php2,000. According to the grievance desk, there are still thousands from the safe zones

STATE OF EVACUEES

77,170
families
353,921
individuals
from Marawi
City and other
neighboring
municipalities
were displaced
during the
siege



2,841
families in
evacuation
centers

65,653
home-based
evacuees
(Source: Task
Force Bangon
Marawi)

59,495
families
remain
displaced (as
of March 2018)

Over
1,000
missing persons,
100 of whom
are Muslims
(Source: Ranao
Rescue Team)

who did not receive cash assistance. As for evacuees from ground zero, all of them did not receive cash assistance, only some kind of livelihood training. Evacuees as volunteers also need to be acknowledged. They leave their hungry, fearful families under Martial Law to find food for the table for others and if there are remaining for themselves, as well.

We need to help young Maranaos to be open to diversity. They need to know how to combat hatred as conveyed in the message being propagated by the Maute group that only Muslims can be with Muslims. For now, the Maranao tribe is a closed culture. But the world is evolving and there are different kinds of people. Through talents, we can unite people. Bring in talents with universal messages like Filipino-American singer Allan Pineda Lindo (also known as apl.de.ap of the Black Eyed Peas) who was a poor kid but became successful. His life story as an artist is an inspiration to young Maranaos.

Rehabilitating is not just about buildings or building back from shattered realities. Every piece of broken glass is an emotion and memory that needs to be picked

up with tender loving care. Spiritual recovery is needed in bringing back normalcy and is as valuable as infrastructure. Such step requires recognition of MAA (Most Affected Area) as central to the label of Marawi being the Islamic capital of the country. It cannot be mere developer's vision but accommodating the rightful need to rebuild back one's residence as a way of therapy in waiting so long to get back. We also need cash assistance for getting us back, give us PHP5,000 and we can get back the vibrant spirit for which we, a trading community, is known for.

PLANS NEED TO BE IDP-CENTERED

We cannot undo the Marawi siege and the destruction it has left behind, both physically and emotionally. The only way to go is forward. The future is being molded at present. However, we feel that we as victims are not being fully consulted. This should be an opportunity for plans to be developed not for us, but by us, or at the very least, with us. It is our position that for rehabilitation plans to be responsive, said plans need to be IDP-centered for they know what they need and their capacity; they need to be sensitive to the culture and the Islamic faith which demands for the local people to craft

their own Marawi vision; that plans should have undergone an inclusive process where it ensures IDP, CSOs and local groups' participation in all aspects of the development of the plan; there should be mechanisms of transparency and accountability installed with a clear statement of the people's role in monitoring such; and that the plans should enable peace, requiring that the rehabilitation be facilitative of dialogue and conflict resolution and transformation.

You may visit Ranao Rescue Team's website samiragutoc.webs.com and Facebook page www.facebook.com/rebuild.marawi to access full articles, position papers, and presentations related to its rehabilitation and peace-building efforts.

(Editor's Note: Ranao Rescue Team is a stakeholder movement that was borne out of the siege. The movement is composed of almost 300 volunteers. The volunteers first brought their family and friends to safer grounds and then later sought out people trapped in the war zone and helped them evacuate.)

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A PHOTO ESSAY

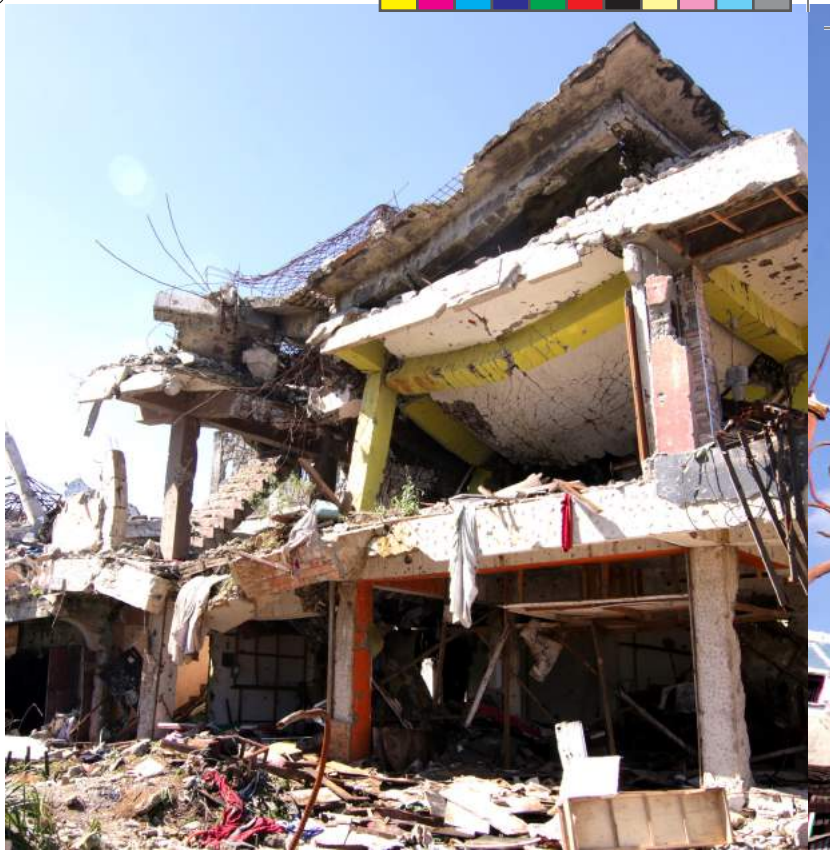
A BITTERSWEET HOMECOMING



On the last day of the Kambisita (Maranao word which means visiting), where Marawi City residents were allowed to visit their homes and other properties at the ground zero, PBSP was able to share this profound moment with them, and took images of the devastation left by months of conflict. We witnessed how the people were literally picking up the pieces and taking their first steps towards recovery.



Upon entering the besieged city, residents are greeted by the sight of homes and shops laying open. Store owners are dismayed to see what used to be the source of their livelihood empty and in disarray.



For those who knew the Marawi before the siege, this is far from the bustling city that was full of activity. In fact, the atmosphere is now more like a graveyard.



Due to the impact of explosions, this building fell and blocked access to a street.



People try to salvage anything they could from their properties or collect scrap metals they can sell to junk shops.



Scrap metals can be sold for Php 8 per kilogram. People use the money to buy food and other necessities while others use it to pay for the vehicles they rented just to see whether their houses are still standing. Since accidents could happen anytime, a military medical vehicle (center photo) was on standby during the Kambisita.





Many structures like this one along Quezon Avenue, a primary thoroughfare, are barely standing.



Owners mark their properties with their names and contact details so that they will be notified if ever their properties need to be bulldozed to give way to road widening.



Parts of the city are already cleared of unexploded bombs. Still, posters like this have been put up in several areas to warn visiting residents.



Although heavily bombarded, the minaret of the Dansalan Mosque remains standing - a perfect symbol of the Maranao people's resilient spirit.

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SEWING THE PIECES OF THEIR FUTURE

She ran as fast as she could amid the deafening gunfire. Raida Pandapatan took one last look at her house and saw her sewing machine, her livelihood, staring coldly at her. It was a difficult situation but she had no choice. The window for escape could be gone at any moment.



“If not for these sewing machines, we won’t have a livelihood. That’s why we are very grateful for the gifts that you have given us because we can now get back to sewing.”

“Men wearing black uniforms carrying long firearms were surrounding us. They were at every street corner. We were very afraid of the terrorists. They would greet you ‘Assalamu alaikum,’ if you do not know how to respond, they would not let you through. That’s why we made our Christian companions wear hijabs and we did the talking. That night of May 23, 2017, my family left Marawi for the town of Ragaini where we have relatives. I did not know that it would last that long. If I knew, I would have carried my sewing machine,” she said.

After two months in Ragaini, Pandapatan took the perilous journey around the lake to Iligan City. Her organization, the Technology and Livelihood Development Center (TLDC), put up a satellite office there and was in need of personnel. She wanted to help.

As a skilled sewer, she was tasked to train evacuees on dressmaking. These people are among the 100 evacuees who would eventually receive sewing machines under the Stay Strong Marawi initiative of Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), in partnership with its member company Brother International Philippines Corporation (BIPC).

She said, “Although I am deeply saddened by what happened to us,

I am still grateful that I was able to help other people because many of them really had nothing.”

Among the people she had trained are Zenaida Alonto and Normala Mantar whom just like her, left their sewing machines after fleeing from the conflict.

“I used to have a machine of my own but I left it at home. When we returned home recently, it was gone,” Mantar said.

“My house was in the ground zero. I also had a stall at the market where I used to sell cellphone accessories and where I kept my sewing machine. When I went back, all of my merchandises were gone along with my sewing machine,” Alonto added.

BOUNCING BACK

After their training, Alonto and Mantar received their new Brother sewing machines from BIPC. Other PBSP member-company donors include The Net Group and PLDT, Inc. BIPC President Glenn Hocson said, “We provided the home sewing machines to enable them to use different materials. This will help them with their livelihood to generate income. The JA1450NT is a compact, lightweight and easy-to-use sewing machine that has the features to help people create projects as beginners.

We wanted to help and show our support in the recovery of Marawi and its residents by providing them with livelihood resources that can support them on a long-term basis.”

With their new sewing machines, Alonto and Mantar are now accepting sewing jobs like garment repair and madrasa uniform making. The two are very grateful for the equipment they received that will help them bounce back from the siege.

“If not for these sewing machines, we won’t have a livelihood. That’s why we are very grateful for the gifts that you have given us because we can now get back to sewing,” Alonto said.

Thanks to the collective action of groups like TLDC, PBSP and its member-companies, many Maranaos who lost almost everything they owned were given the chance to start anew and rebuild their lives.

Hocson said, “We are glad to have a great partnership such as what we have with PBSP, as their connections, services, and cause, help companies like us to share and give back to the community. As part of the Global Brother Group, we are tasked to take care of our community and be a good corporate citizen in areas where we operate, and through PBSP, we are able to also carry out this mission.”

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STAYING STRONG TOGETHER

For the past school year, 12-year-old Relanie Mohammadali (left) and 13-year-old Anna Farina Tabao (right) have shared this temporary learning space (TLS) in Saguwaran with their teacher Tanjirea Mascara (center). Amid all the hardships they have been through, the pupils remained strong and are now ready to enter Grade 7.



BOMBS CANNOT STOP THEM FROM LEARNING

Months of airstrikes may have reduced Marawi's schools to rubble but it did not erode the children's hunger for knowledge. While the conflict had been so traumatic to many, if not to all, the students' determination to learn and finish school motivated them to continue their studies amid their dire situation.

After the siege, temporary learning spaces (TLSs) were put up. These tent classrooms were very helpful but learning conditions were far from ideal. Still, it did not hinder both teachers and students to finish the school year.

A TEACHER'S COMMITMENT

Teacher Tanjirea Mascara could still remember how the frequent airstrikes disrupted her class at the TLS in Saguwaran Central Elementary School.

Their tent classroom is only a few kilometers away from the main battle area, that was why the atmosphere would turn tense every time the city was being bombed. Most of her pupils have homes there and every explosion could mean houses destroyed: reminders of better days gone forever.

"Whenever we would hear the military planes passing over us, we would know it's time. I would stop in mid lecture and the whole class would freeze in silence. Moments later, we would hear the explosions as they drop the bombs off down the city. They were so loud! We could even feel the shock waves. After the last bomb explode, I would resume the class as if nothing happened," she recalled.

DEALING WITH THE CHALLENGE

Mascara is the first teacher from Marawi who volunteered to teach at the TLS. She used to teach at the Amai Pakpak Central Elementary School until the siege forced her to relocate to the nearby Saguwaran town.

She shared, "I felt miserable seeing that my pupils had to endure this. When it's sunny, it would be hot and humid inside and when it rains, water would enter through the tent's seams and make our floor muddy. In spite of these, my pupils kept their perseverance. Seeing them in that kind of situation was too much for me. I would go out of the tent just to cry. I do not want them to see me crying because I do not want them to be discouraged. I want them to see that I was being strong amid everything."

To help her project a more dignified appearance in front of her pupils, she would use the make-up kit given to teachers like her by Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP).

One day, a rumor that the ISIS-inspired terrorists have broken into Saguwaran spread like wildfire. Panicked parents rushed to the school to pick up their children. Mascara herself and her husband decided to leave for Manila to ensure the safety of their six kids.

She settled to start a new life in Metro Manila away from the conflict. She began the process of transferring to a school in Metro Manila to teach, but deep inside, something felt wrong.

Unable to hold back her tears, she said, "My mind was set that I will never return but one night I had a dream. My pupils were calling for me, 'Teacher Tanji, please come back.' The following morning, I told my husband to buy me a plane ticket. He asked me why and I said that my pupils need me. If I have to transfer, not this year. I talked to my fellow teacher over the phone and I could hear my pupils in the background. I have to come back. My pupils and I have to survive this together. As a teacher, my commitment is to my pupils."

A SECOND MOM

Mascara went back to Marawi by herself with the support of her family, driven by her own maternal instincts to help her "children" in distress.

"I saw how persistent my pupils are with their studies in spite of their situation. That kept me from giving up. Even when it rained and the floor turned to mud, they would still come. That was how determined they were to finish Grade 6."

Just recently, her 82 pupils finished Grade 6 and 35 of them were able to pass scholarship exams for high school. Mascara could not be more proud.

"My dream is that they all finish their studies. I call them 'my ever special pupils.' In fact, I kept their master list. I laminated it so that a few years from now, when I see college graduation

congratulatory tarpaulins in the streets, I will check their names and I would know if they were able to graduate. I wish that they become successful in life," she said.

THE BRAVE KIDS OF MARAWI

At their tender age, Teacher Mascara's pupils Relanie Mohammadali and Anna Farina Tabao have already endured what most Filipino kids have not: being caught in an armed conflict.

Tabao, 13 year-old, was at home with her family when the fighting erupted. She hid with her siblings in their bedroom, screaming in fear.

"I want to say to other kids that they are very fortunate that they were not able to experience what we have been through. When we were told to evacuate, I was really frightened and nervous that a stray bullet might hit us," she said.

Just like her, 12-year-old Mohammadali and his family evacuated during the panic that followed the fighting.

Sadly, his eldest brother who just graduated from college was shot to death after being suspected of being a terrorist.

"We evacuated to Saguwaran. My brother went back to our house to get rice because Ramadan was approaching. On his way back, he was shot and killed. They thought he was an ISIS fighter. I could not sleep for days. I cried a lot," the boy said.

BACK TO SCHOOL

Despite everything, the two children went on with their studies when the school year started. The fear that the fighting might reach them was constant considering that the airstrikes were only a few kilometers away from the TLS, but the pupils chose to be brave. Their problem was, their school materials were destroyed along with their houses.

Mohammadali said, “We left my school uniforms, books, and other things behind because we thought the fighting would not last for more than a few days. They were destroyed or burnt.”

Thankfully, various groups like PBSP provided them with much-needed supplies. The two T-shirts included in the student kits which also consists of a bag, an umbrella and hygiene products, were particularly helpful since most of the pupils were only able to salvage the clothes they were wearing they day they evacuated from Marawi.

CHASING DREAMS

Mohammadali and Tabao are among Teacher Mascara’s pupils who recently graduated from Grade 6 after spending one whole school year studying inside a tent classroom.

Tabao said she wants to become a doctor when she grows up.

“I want to help people,” she said.

One year after the siege, Mohammadali still lives at the evacuation center because their house was completely destroyed. But he is a strong boy and remains positive and hopeful.

The siege has taken so much from him but still, there are things it was not able to get from him: his smile and dreams.

“My dream is to become a lawyer one day so that I’ll be able to uphold justice. I want to prove that my brother was innocent. I also dream that Marawi City will return to what it once was,” he said



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MUSLIMS & CHRISTIANS SAVE EACH OTHER

A '*masjid*' servant and entrepreneur goes beyond religion to help people in need during the Marawi siege

At the height of the Marawi siege, entrepreneur Taib Bongcao helped evacuate four Christians working at his friend's hardware store. They did not want to leave the Christians because they feared that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria- (ISIS) inspired group might hostage them.



TAIB BONGCAO has lost his house and livelihood during the Marawi siege but he chooses to rise again and grab every opportunity to provide a better future for his family.

"I told my friend that we needed to dress up the Christians in Muslim clothes. From my knowledge as a *masjid* (mosque) servant, we provided them with *taqiyah* (Muslim cap for men) and *hijab* (Muslim veil for women). There were 18 of us, including the Christians who rode a dumptruck. When we reached the highway, some of the terrorists inspected us. As protocol, we greeted them Assalamu alaikum (Peace be upon you) so they would know we were Muslims. They asked if we had Christians and we replied that there were none, but in reality they were in the middle of us. As final inspection, they instructed us to recite *takbir*, an Arabic phrase. We responded *Allahu akbar* (Allah is the greatest). We told the Christians to also recite it but in a lower voice," recalled Bongcao.

Fortunately, the terrorists did not check the passengers one by one because they were already positioned beside the wall in preparation for the incoming military assault. From there, Bongcao was able to pass the highway.

PROVING THEIR INNOCENCE

The Christians whom Bongcao saved from the ISIS-inspired group also saved them from the military when it was the latter's time to interrogate them.

"While we were approaching a military checkpoint, soldiers were signalling us to stop. One of the soldiers told us in an angry tone that we needed to step down. They were assuming that we were members of the terrorists group because of our Muslim attire. The soldiers interpreted the white flag we were carrying to mean that we were surrendering. I said it was a sign to show that we were civilians. My friend told me that he would be the one who would talk to the soldiers because I seemed to be heating up the conversation. I told my friend that I was just scared because the soldiers might shoot us," revealed Bongcao.

His friend told the soldiers that they could ask the Christian employees about the truth. When the soldiers investigated them, the Christians told the soldiers that they were working in a hardware store in Marawi City.

"While the Christians were being investigated, we (the Muslims) were on hands-up position. The soldiers instructed us to strip our clothes so they could see if we had body wounds from war. They also smelled us if we had traces of gun powder. Then, one soldier was calling someone over the phone. They compared our faces to those in the list of suspected persons. After a series of investigations, we finally got out and reunited with my family who were waiting outside the war zone," he added.

Bongcao's wife and 11 children could not help but cry when they saw him as they were happy to see him get out of the war zone alive.

THE STRUGGLES OF A HOME-BASED EVACUEE

Bongcao's family sought refuge at a friend's house in Ditsaan-Ramain, Lanao del Sur. They buried a relative there who died of heart attack due to stress during the first day of the siege.

"A week after the siege, we first sought shelter at my friend's house but we stayed at a room below because we could not fit inside the main house. Only the children were allowed to go in to avoid mosquito bites. Due to my family's condition, another friend offered our family a shelter in his ricemill dryer at Buadiposo-Buntong. Initially, we didn't have enough supplies and only used sardine cans as container for drinking water. But later my friend's relatives let us borrow their kitchen utensils," he said.

Even with a friend's help, life for the Bongcao family was still difficult. The distribution of relief goods was very

seldom. Due to this, he had to work in the rice mill to earn a small income to buy food and other needs for his family.

STARTING ANEW

Bongcao learned about a scheduled distribution of non-food items spearheaded by Philippine Business for Social Progress through the Maranao People's Development Center (MARADECA). Called "Buckets of Love," the relief packages consisted of hygiene kits, kitchen utensils and sleeping supplies which were what Bongcao's family needed at that time.

"We were thankful and happy because MARADECA and PBSP reached us. The items were a big help. The mosquito nets provided us protection from insect-bite diseases. From nothing, we now own something. We do not need to borrow things anymore," he said.

Soon after, Bongcao earned enough money that enabled him to transfer his family to another temporary residence in Marantao where they are staying with 30 other individuals as home-based evacuees. While their situation is still difficult, things have started to work out for the better in his family.

"Though we are still living in another friend's house, I was able to find a construction job near the Marantao public market. Some of my children are now working to support our family. My son is working in Bukidnon while my daughter is a salesperson in a store in Iligan City," he said.

Bongcao's resilience and drive to further improve their family's situation is as strong as ever. He continues to look for work and grabs all opportunities that can help him provide a better future for his family, and hopefully a permanent home where they can start all over again.

Tenth Issue

CHANGED

MAY 2018 SPECIAL ISSUE

MARAWI, ONE YEAR AFTER

PATIENTS INTERRUPTED FIGHTING ON TWO FRONTS

On the seventh issue of CHANGED Magazine, we featured the story of PBSP nurse Saddam Hussein Ali Derico who was at the Satellite Treatment Center in Amai Pakpak Medical Center (APMC) the day when the ISIS-inspired Maute Group attacked it, eventually leading to the Battle of Marawi.

The incident resulted to the closure of the treatment center which was providing medical care to Tuberculosis (TB) patients, especially to those who have the multi-drug-resistant strain of the disease or MDR-TB.



THE MARAWI SIEGE has been a race with death for Tuberculosis patients Camalia Esmail (left) and Jamerah Acraman (right), but their determination to be cured and live motivated them to never lose hope.



One year after the siege, we went back to check on Derico and talk to two of their patients who were lost to treatment but managed to get back before it was too late.

A RACE WITH DEATH

During the first week of the Marawi siege, MDR-TB patients Camalia Esmail and Jamerah Acraman were fighting their own two-front battles.

"At that time, I was thinking about death. If I would not die from a bullet, Tuberculosis (TB) would kill me. I thought that this could be the end," Esmail said.

Acraman herself was still in the hospital after a surgery when the terrorists took the building, killing one police officer. They had to leave the city soon or the terrorists could take them hostage and kill them.

"Everyone at the hospital were terrified. My husband and my brother who were with me were crying. We managed to get out. I was on a wheelchair and I still had a drain tube stuck to my lungs," she said.

With the hospital taken and the chaos escalating, continuing their treatment seemed impossible. Since both have MDR-TB, they knew that the interruption to their medication puts them in serious danger.

Time was running out. Without regular intake of medicines, their condition could deteriorate within weeks or worse, in just a matter of days.

Acraman said, "I was afraid that I will die because I could not access anti-TB drugs."

THE CRITICAL DAYS

After escaping danger himself, Nurse Derico immediately went on to the task of finding all the missing patients. However, communication

was difficult and most roads are impassable. It was almost hopeless.

Apart from the risk that patients could die from the disease, there is also the threat that the TB bacteria would turn active again and start infecting other people. He had to find out where the patients were as soon as possible to prevent the problem from getting worse.

Derico said, "I kept on texting them but phone signal was a challenge. Finally, I made contact with Camalia and Jamerah. I instructed them to go to either Iligan City or Malabang, whichever is closest to where they evacuated. I told them MDR-TB drugs are provided there."

Esmail and Acraman are among the fortunate few. Of the 42 MDR-TB patients, only 11 were found and were able to continue treatment in time. Some already lost their battle against the disease while others remain missing to this day.

Many of these lost patients have become indirect casualties of the conflict: victims of unfavorable circumstances that barred them from receiving the life-saving medicines that they were getting for free.

Derico lamented, "It's painful for me because I have already formed a bond with my patients, then you'll find out from their relatives that they are already dead. It's heavy to bear."

He's still thankful that he was able to find some of the patients. After all, 11 lives are still 11 lives and 11 families that did not lose a loved one.

PURPOSE FOR FIGHTING BACK

Amid the double whammy that befell them, family was the reason Esmail and Acraman never gave up all hope. "I was thinking of my family. I want to be able to help around the house

again so that my family will no longer be burdened with me. I want my sickness to be gone. By that, I will be able to help my family again," Acraman said.

Esmail on the other hand, admitted that there came a point during the first few months of her treatment when she lost all faith that she will ever get cured. Yet, her desire to stay with her family motivated her to go on. She did not let the Marawi siege put all her sacrifices to waste.

She recalled, "There was a time that I've already given up with the treatment because the side effects were so hard for me to bear that I wasn't able to walk. I said that I would just stop taking medicines and accept death. It happened during the close of the school year. My child told me to go to school to put a ribbon on him because he got a recognition. I told him, 'How can I go? I am going to die. I cannot walk anymore.' I saw how sad he was because I would not be there so I told myself that I have to get better. I'm going to take my medicines rain or shine so that next year, I'll be able to be with him."

And get better she did. Last December, Esmail was cured after almost two years of treatment. With renewed strength, she was able to walk her son up the stage recently during his school's recognition day.

"He got an award. They gave him a medal for attending the Peace Camp, and I was the one who put it on him," she said gleaming.

Indeed, positive stories still come even from the most miserable disasters. Thanks to the dedication and selflessness of PBSP nurses, Esmail, Acraman and the other surviving patients were given a second chance in life.



UPLIFTING LIVES TOGETHER

IMAGES OF A YEAR OF GENEROSITY





IN MARAWI CITY

AND SOLIDARITY



WITH THE SUPPORT of its member-companies, donors and partners, PBSP was able to respond immediately during the first few weeks of the siege, distributing relief goods, hygiene kits, cosmetics, student kits, kitchen utensils, and other kinds of in-kind donations to home-based evacuees. These gifts that nourish the mind and body, and uplift the spirit aimed to help the victims stay strong amid difficult times.

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MARAWI, ONE YEAR AFTER

LEADING THE SUICIDE SQUAD

A local DRRM officer from Lanao del Sur and his team of volunteers risk their lives to save civilians during the siege

It has been a year after the Marawi siege but Saripada “Tong” Pacasum Jr. would still get nightmares of his harrowing experience in rescuing some 2,000 civilians and recovering over 200 cadavers.

Everything was still fresh in his mind: the death-defying search and rescue missions in the middle of the night; his narrow brush with death when they were being ambushed on a bridge trying to rescue a judge; the non-stop phone calls and messages of hostages and people stranded in

their homes; and the devastating look of a pregnant mother’s corpse and her child. They had bullet holes on their heads.

On top of all these, Pacasum could vividly recall one conversation with a victim that continues to haunt him to this day.

“A resident who was trapped in her home in the Ground Zero (or most affected area) had been coordinating with me for one week already. I couldn’t get her yet because she was in an area surrounded by terrorists.

But I assured her that we would come as soon as it was safe to get in. One night, she called and told me the terrorists were already inside her house. I told her to go up to the second floor and hide. She said, ‘Sir, I’m going up already.’ After that, I didn’t hear from her anymore. That was so painful for us. We blamed ourselves for the lives we couldn’t save,” recounted Pacasum.

BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

Many of these foiled rescue attempts were what further pushed him and his lean team of volunteers to continue



rescuing people even without training, equipment and despite the huge possibility of dying on the job.

As a local Disaster Risk Reduction Management Officer of the provincial government of Lanao del Sur, Pacasum's tasks are merely to conduct rescue missions in natural disaster such as earthquakes, fires, typhoons, and floods. He and his team are also into mitigation, conducting education sessions to help communities prevent and handle such disasters. They were never prepared to respond to man-made disasters but during the siege and the war in Butig held a month before, they had to go beyond the call of duty.

"On the first day of the siege, I was in the office at the Provincial Capitol. We were only four or five in our team and we had to secure the capitol as we believed the terrorists were targeting to take over the government offices. But at that time, there was already a barrage of phone calls of persons asking for help. I was also worried of my family who were in different areas in the city. I didn't know who to save first. I didn't know what to do. The military were engaged in combat in Basak Malutlut and their reinforcement came in several days after," he recalled.

Pacasum stayed in the capitol and continued to secure it until night came and they saw the ISIS-inspired Maute group already on the tower, a few meters away from the capitol.

"I really thought I was going to die that time. There were also many non-Muslim workers with us and we heard that they were all going to kill them, and eventually us. But then came a troop of 20 SAF who came to us by accident. They were finding a place to hide. They helped us secure the place," he said.

Pacasum's first rescue mission came that night, too. Some 42 teachers hostaged in a building near the

Mapandi bridge were asking for help after being caught in the crossfire between the soldiers and the terrorists. He had no vehicle so he borrowed from those who were willing to lend and set out for the mission with his cousins who just couldn't allow him to go by himself.

He said: "Going in there was like committing suicide. I could die there but despite the fear and the thought of my wife and two kids, humanity swept over me. Who else would be brave enough to help them if I didn't? What if I or my family were in their place and no one would want to help?"

Without any training and arms to protect them, they pushed through with the mission and saved the teachers who were already walking on the bridge. The teachers immediately got inside the cars they borrowed. In the Mazda 3 he was driving, Pacasum was able to accommodate 10 teachers! He thought the wheels would explode with such weight but good thing it didn't and they were able to bring them to the Capitol safely.

"The feeling of being able to help and



SARIPADA PACASUM'S love for life and deep passion for helping people pushed him to go beyond his duty during the Marawi siege.



rescue people, especially those on the verge of dying, is so surreal, you just couldn't describe the kind of fulfillment you get," Pacasum revealed.

A FORMIDABLE TEAM

Their group of rescuers was later formed by Miko Adiong, the grandson of Lanao del Sur Governor Bedjoria Soraya Alonto-Adiong. He looked for people to help Pacasum's team. Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) Governor Mujiv Hataman also sent the ARMM-Humanitarian Emergency Action and Response Team (ARMM-HEART) from Cotabato to partner with them. From five, the team of volunteers increased to a diverse group of 33 composed of students, farmers, and unemployed people.

Driven by their compassion for the victims and determination to save as much people as they could, they went from mission after mission, without food or even uniforms to protect them. They only wore helmets, a white band and held a white flag to show that they were unarmed civilians, and part of the rescue team. It was at that time that they called their team "Suicide

Squad" because their dangerous missions literally felt like they were succumbing to their death.

Eventually, their rescue missions were backed up by the military so the work became easier. But not all missions were happy endings.

"We've also had unsuccessful rescue attempts where they ended up getting killed. We were even the ones who retrieved their cadavers. We also didn't have training and the proper equipment for the management of the dead. I, myself used to be afraid of the dead but at that time, I had no choice but to retrieve the bodies. We were even the ones who put them inside bags. I saw all kinds of deformities such as a face eaten by a dog, and a body with internal organs exposed," Pacasum said.

ARMED WITH A DEEPER PURPOSE

The volunteers remained with Pacasum's team until now and share in his mission to make humanitarian activities a regular part of their work. His office also began conducting training and education sessions on emergency response that includes basic rescue and first-aid, community resilience,

"Life goes on. There's no use dwelling on what you lost, the only way is to move on. We will definitely go back to rebuild our house in Marawi. I don't consider moving to another place because Marawi was where I was born. If I leave, it is like we have allowed to be defeated by the terrorists."



and even topics not covered by their mandate – solid waste management, and the dangers of radicalism.

“I really make it a point to insert lectures on these topics to warn them not to believe these false ideologies because nothing good will happen, just like the Marawi siege,” said Pacasum whose office now attracts a lot of interns eager to work with the team.

Through their experiences, the team also strengthened their camaraderie and volunteerism while seeing their worth and purpose in life – as life-savers.

As for Pacasum and his siblings who were also victims of the siege, they have no more ancestral house and business to get back to. The house and their commercial building in the Ground Zero were among those reduced to ruins. They have one property left, a land outside Marawi, but they offered to lend it to the government to house evacuees in temporary shelters.

Pacasum is now residing in his office at the Capitol while his mother and siblings are staying with in-laws in Iligan. Fortunately, his wife and kids

are living in Manila so they were kept safe all throughout the siege.

Amid these losses, Pacasum never had any regrets in doing what he did. In fact, he would even do it again if he needs to.

“Life goes on. There’s no use dwelling on what you lost, the only way is to move on. We will definitely go back to rebuild our house in Marawi. I don’t consider moving to another place because Marawi was where I was born. If I leave, it is like we have allowed to be defeated by the terrorists,” he pointed out.

The experience has taught Pacasum to be more responsible and to do more beyond his duty to ensure that the siege will never happen again. This is by spearheading education trainings and sessions that will contribute to a better Marawi.

“I’m already 40, and the normal life span in my generation could only be until 50 or 60. I want to be able to do something to solve the problems here in our city, our country so that my children will not suffer the same problems anymore,” Pacasum said.

THE SUICIDE SQUAD engaged in all kinds of rescue missions during the siege, including putting out the fire in structures and houses and retrieving bodies. (Photos courtesy of the Lanao del Sur Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office)

“I want to be able to do something to solve the problems here in our city, our country, so that my children will not suffer the same problems anymore.”



LESSONS FROM THE SIEGE

PBSP employees recount their traumatic experiences and how they coped and moved forward to fulfill their mission to help others

What started out to be an ordinary work day for PBSP employees, Sarah Panotolan, Aliah Mandoc, and Normalah Taher turned out to be the beginning of five months of terror and tragedy in their city of Marawi.

Everything was all set that day of May 23, 2017 for the Phase 2 of the Improving Availability of Reproductive Health Services in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Philippines (ARCHES) project being implemented

by PBSP in partnership with the Philippine Legislators' Committee on Population and Development. The three community organizers were gearing towards the fulfillment of their duties in their respective areas in Buadiposo-Buntong, Bo. Salam, and Bo. Datu Saber but the siege changed the course of their mission – from being health workers to humanitarian champions.

One year after the Marawi siege, these employees recall how the horrifying

incidents destroyed their city, the tragedy that changed their lives and that of their fellow Mindanaoans and how these experiences and stories of resilience further strengthened their passion in helping others.

Q: Where were you when the siege erupted on May 23?

Normalah: My team just finished a site visit in Ganassi and headed to Basak Malutlut to eat. While eating, we heard gun fires but we ignored



LIFE GOES ON for PBSP employees (from left) Normalah Taher, Aliah Mandoc and Sarah Panotolan who have become stronger women after the siege.

it, thinking that it was the usual *rido* (clan war) between families. When I got home at Amai Pakpak, I could still hear gunfires. When the gunshots grew closer and louder, my brother and I rushed to the ground floor of our house and we ducked to protect our heads. We stayed at home with my other siblings even when the gun fires and explosions got worse, unaware that the ISIS-inspired Maute group had already invaded Amai Pakpak. When the shooting stopped, I checked Facebook, and found out that it was the Maute-ISIS who attacked our place. It was more terrifying when we learned that they would knock at every house in the area to recruit men, including boys. If you fail to recite Arabic phrases when they ask you to, you are suspected of being non-Muslim, so they will kill you.

My sister was trembling in fear as we planned our escape. Our brothers slept on the stairs so whenever someone knocks they could alert us to climb up to the upper floor, sneak out the window and run to the next house to escape. Martial Law was then declared, our neighbors already left and some stayed to guard their homes. I grew furious when my mama who was in Ganassi with my father, called up and told us not to leave the house and our belongings. I told her it was no longer safe to stay here.

At dawn, we ran to the house nearest to the highway and waited for the rescue to come but no one came. We received a text message saying that the last vehicle to pick up other evacuees already left at 10 a.m. because the terrorists were going to bomb the area. We went back to the house to get our motorcycle. All three of us girls rode the bike and my brothers walked. Fortunately, a neighbor's car crossed and they let us in. So my brothers were able to use the bike.

The usual 30-minute travel to Iligan from Marawi became 11 hours. From there, we went to seek refuge at my brother's house in Cagayan. There

were two other IDP families in his house but everyone seemed to have packed a few clothes good for only three days and nothing else. It was already Ramadan when our mother came to see us after one month.

Aliah: On that day, my husband and I went to Iligan to buy some materials for our office. Then I received a call from my sister at 2 p.m. telling me not to go home yet because there was trouble at the Mindanao State University. At first, I thought it was just the usual encounter between the MILF and the community in Balindong or common clash between two families, so I was not worried at all. But my sister called again and pleaded for me not to go home. She seemed terrified. She was trapped in the BIR building with her friends. They couldn't leave as there were several gun shots fired already. It was around 3 to 4 p.m. when she called again and said it was getting worse. It got me concerned because common clashes do not usually take longer hours to be resolved and gun fires are not that dreadful.

My husband and I were torn on whether we should go home or not. Our kids were at home with my parents and they were safe. So we decided to go home instead. As soon as we got home at 4 p.m., I received several calls and messages from colleagues checking our situation. I also texted Normalah and we planned on picking her and her brothers up after rescuing our sister. We were able to rescue my sister the following day at the capitol where they were brought by the owner of the restaurant. But Normalah was not there anymore. We decided to stay at our house because it was safer compared to the town proper.

After two days, electricity was cut and there was a blackout. If power doesn't get restored in two days, we would lose water and it will be very difficult for us especially because we have babies in the family who greatly depend on water. My family decided to go to our house in Cagayan. But my father opted to stay. He believed that

he was safer at home and he said that as long as he had his maintenance medicines, he would be fine. Some of our neighbors stayed to guard their house because they thought that the terrorists will not breach the gates of MSU. Since my father is sick and old, my husband and I opted to stay to take care of him. My kids left with my mother and my sister-in-law.

Fortunately, electricity was restored in the afternoon. Our team remained in contact with everyone to check each other's condition and if anyone needed help. Back then, it was the start of Ramadan, so every day after the morning prayer, we would go up the rooftop and watch how the terrorists destroyed our city. It was like watching a real-life war movie with bombs being dropped everywhere, soldiers marching, and fighter planes circling around Marawi. We've memorized their routine, we counted every bomb that was dropped and even the number of seconds it took to explode. We knew when the gun fires would stop and when it would resume. It was the saddest sight to behold – seeing houses and structures burning. Sometimes, we would get so scared that a bullet might hit us.

Sarah: I was in the area to coordinate an event for ARCHES when the siege broke out. Residents were given three hours to pack their things and evacuate Marawi. We decided to rescue my half-sister and her mother who got trapped in Barangay Tukas, in ground zero. While traveling via speed boat around the lake, they almost got hit by bullets, but fortunately, we got them home safely.

During the siege, we ran out of food. Almost all the stores were closed so we didn't know where to get supplies. Martial Law was already declared when my husband and I left to look for food in other barangays. There were military checkpoints everywhere and when it was our turn to pass, we were stopped by the soldiers. My husband forgot to bring any ID or license and the soldiers almost didn't let us pass. But we managed to convince



them to allow us to pass because we desperately needed to buy food. Unfortunately, only a few stores were open and they no longer had supplies left. We headed home with nothing. So we decided to evacuate and left my two brothers who stayed behind to watch over our house.

There were 20 of us cramped in a van going to General Santos City. Throughout the 15-hour journey, I could not help but cry because of our difficult situation inside the van. Our clothes were soaked with vomit because my kids threw up a couple of times. We couldn't even breathe. We trembled in fear every time we stopped at checkpoints. It was already 2 a.m. when my brother arrived to pick us up. We were held for a few hours in the sports complex for questioning and as part of the security protocols. But the kind soldiers gave us some food and water, and then eventually allowed us to go.

Q: How are you now? Have you recovered from the trauma?

Normalah: Almost, but it's still haunting me. Gun fires still scare me. We never really talked about it because our mother gets too emotional every time she recalls what happened and the things she lost. Most of them were gifts from her grandmother, that's why she treasures them a lot.

Q: What urged you to go back to work?

Sarah: Since my family is already safe and my kids have recovered from the trauma I decided to go back to Iligan. I just felt I needed to go back, I have to do my part. For more than a month, I didn't see my kids. My three-year-old child even got sick. After two months, my family went back to our house in Laguindingan. Even if I had to commute for 11 hours from Laguindingan to Iligan, I still come home every two weeks to see my kids. That was my routine for one year. Now, my 11-hour trip was cut down to two hours because Marawi is stable now.

Normalah: After two weeks, I went back to work. Our team started to

pack relief goods coming from PBSP and partner organizations.

Q: Have you all gone back to your homes already? How about your office in Sugud?

Aliah: A few weeks after the siege, the team finally started to conduct meetings. They held it at hotels and used their own money to pay for the function rooms. Back then, it was hard to find an office space to rent. A couple of owners even refused to accept them but later on they found one. I was able to join the team in Cagayan after a month, and we did relief operations.

Now, we are back home. We can't use our office in Sugud yet because the roads are still not accessible. Transportation is still a problem, and there is a curfew at 6 p.m. It's not practical because we won't finish anything if we work there.

Normalah: Right now, we're doing okay but only the four of us siblings stay in our house. Our parents seldom visit. My brothers and sisters stay in Cagayan, Iligan, and some went to the province. We got separated.

Q: How were you changed by this experience?

Normalah: I am stronger now, the siege made me stronger. I feel blessed because I have my family and I was there to help them when they needed me. Sometimes, we get too attached to work that we almost forget that we were also "bakwits" (evacuees). But it feels good to be able to help others.

Aliah: Everything seems fine now. The siege made me a lot stronger. Now, we are more alert, more cautious about what's happening around us, and we pay attention to information that we get from our neighbors. It was all a first-time experience to see horrifying gun fights, bombs, and explosions, and first time to be away from my family. We choose not to talk about it at home, it makes us cry.

I am very much thankful to God for keeping my family safe.

The siege has taught us a lesson, it made us work together. There were noble stories that show how Muslims and Christians help each other during those trying times. You can hear stories of Muslims teaching Christians to speak Islamic language and made them wear *kumbong* (Muslim cap for men or veil for women) to spare them from getting killed or be held hostage because the ISIS kills everyone they suspect to be non-Muslims. Christians, on the other hand, help their Maranao friends in military checkpoints. They show proofs and convince the soldiers that their Maranao friends are not members of the ISIS. This goes to show that Maranaos are good people, too and that there are better stories to tell than the horrors of the siege.

Q: Do you somehow feel that you survived because you still have a mission to pursue?

Aliah: Yes, I believe that it was all part of God's plan and He set the right timing for everything. When the siege happened, He allowed me to go home and take care of my family, He kept us safe. Then, when the team planned to do the relief operations, He sent me there to join them. Everything seemed to fall into place, in His will. He made us see that there's still a bright side after that horrific experience. I feel so lucky to have survived the siege and now, I plan to do more, and I will do better to help others.

Sarah: My family is doing well now and we're trying to move on. I still get too emotional sometimes but I need to be strong for my children. We cannot just live our lives in fear. What's important now is that we should be 100 percent prepared all the time and be wary of what's happening around us.

Q: What lessons have you learned from these experiences?

Sarah: Now, we became more organized in the house, we learned to be prepared. I learned to save money, and to invest on things that we might need in the future so whenever there's an emergency, we have some cash to use.





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Learn how you can support PBSP's rehabilitation efforts in Marawi. Call Kathleen Almonte, PBSP Senior Program Officer for DRRM at 0917.822.5284 or email kbalmonte@pbsp.org.ph

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