

## **Delivered during the MindaNews Media Forum**

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I thank MindaNews for holding this media forum today and everyone for joining us.

If you've been following local developments in the region regarding the rehabilitation of Marawi, you'll know that we recently jumpstarted the Bangsamoro Marawi Rehabilitation Program or BARMM-MRP with the signing of Memorandum Circular No. 003 by the Chief Minister last October 20, and that we recently convened its Program Steering Committee, or PSC. The PSC, which is the policy-making and oversight body of the Bangsamoro Marawi Rehab Program, is tasked, among others, with evaluating and approving project proposals from our Ministries—something which we have already begun doing, starting with a slate of three projects from the Ministry of Social Services and Development.

To give us a better sense of where the BARMM-MRP is coming from, and what direction it will be headed, it is important to discuss the Report of the Special Committee on Marawi, which we will be tackling today.

I don't think what happened to Marawi on May 23 three years ago needs repeating. We know that even after the city was declared liberated, the suffering of the Mëranaws still continued. By the time we were crafting our report, sometime in June, and even up to now, thousands remain displaced. Three years since the siege, we are still only seeing the beginnings of rehabilitation. To add to all these, the difficulties faced by displaced Mëranaws are compounded by COVID-19. In September, Lanao del Sur and Marawi City even had to revert to Modified ECQ because of the spike in cases.

That was the context in which we submitted our report.

To give a brief background, the Special Committee on Marawi or SCM was created after many different MPs filed resolutions to look into the status of rehab—knowing the experiences of those displaced and affected by the siege, and in keeping with the mandate of the BTA to supplement National Government efforts thereon.

The SCM, where I serve as vice chair, was created in September last year, and was tasked to look into the status of Marawi recovery, reconstruction, and rehab efforts. We knew that our work in the BARMM, per the Bangsamoro Organic Law itself, is only complementary and supplementary to the efforts of the TFBM. And we recognized that in order to be effective in this, we need complete and accurate information.

So in the span of several months—interrupted only by COVID-related restrictions on mobility and public gatherings—we held public hearings and consultations, we did our research, we pored over documents, we talked to experts, we went on field visits. The result was our report, which summarized all of the national, local, regional, and non-governmental interventions initiated in the aftermath of the Marawi siege; articulated the sentiments and crucial concerns raised by the internally displaced; and outlined our recommendations, as a Committee, to the Bangsamoro Government as well as other government instrumentalities, to address them.

The report is a long document; it's over a hundred pages, and we won't be able to cover it comprehensively—even when we presented it to the Parliament last August 27, that was our

disclaimer. I think it's best if we limit our discussion to the key highlights, then we can address any questions regarding other sections of the report after.

Also, as we emphasized in the Parliament, this report does not cover all that needs to be said and all that has been done in relation to Marawi. I don't know how many pages we'll need to cover that, considering the multitude and gravity of the issues faced by our people, and considering that even more issues continue to emerge today. This report contains only what was presented and submitted to us, and what was the result of the collective wisdom of the SCM.

So, let's discuss first the key issues raised during our interactions with those affected and displaced by the siege — issues involving land, property rights, and shelters, which include concerns regarding property ownership, the military reservation, clearing and demolition, taxes, housing, and temporary shelters; core necessities, which include utilities, livelihood, education, and health; public works; and other issues, which cover data issues, questions with regard to inclusion, scope, and priority, transparency, transitional justice, inquiries on the handling of the war, and security.

## **Issues**

### **Land, Property Rights, and Shelters**

One of the most crucial cluster of issues we encountered are concerns over land, property, rights, and shelters. I'm sure you know this—land has been a complicated issue for the Marawi residents even before the siege. Aside from competing ownerships, we have overlapping claims, encroachment, and reliance on traditional institutions of property ownership and possession. This has been pointed as one of the causes of delay in the rehabilitation efforts.

This problem cannot be discussed without mentioning the concerns raised regarding clearing and demolition. Some of those who consented to demolition were worried to see that the contractors left no visible markers or physical boundaries on their land. They wanted to do this themselves, but the way *Kambisita* was designed (i.e. the period within which IDPs from the most affected area (MAA) were allowed to briefly visit their properties but no repair, construction, or fencing was permitted), prevented them from doing so. Now all they are holding on to is the assurance of the local government that the exact boundaries will be followed since these are in the registered titles. But that's a problem because that would only work if you are a homeowner with a registered title and with no overlapping claims.

In relation to this, there also appears to be a problem with respect the proceeds of the sale of the debris from the MAA. They said the proceeds were consolidated into a Trust Fund and will go to the homeowners—but at the time this issue was brought to the attention of the Committee, no guidelines on the distribution has been released.

Our people are also very concerned about the construction of the Camp Ranao military reservation, as well as what they were told is only an “outpost” in Kapantaran, which is in the Most Affected Area. There are fears that more residents will be displaced in the future, and that even a supposed “outpost” may stir resentment and disturb the long-term stability of the city.

Real property tax is a problem. Despite some concessions, some of the IDPs are still unable to pay. Rehabilitation has barely started, they are still unable to return and profit from their lands, and yet they are being asked to pay taxes for these. This becomes even more relevant as the current program for allowing the residents of some sectors of the MAA to return to and repair their houses (or *Kathagombalay*) is contingent on the acquisition of a building permit, one of the requirements for which is the updated payment of real property taxes. Still, we're aware that this is a difficult balancing act for the Marawi LGU given the need to raise the revenues required of them by law and accommodate the realities of IDPs.

Social housing and private residential housing also pose problems for our IDPs. Many of those we talked to have serious concerns regarding the permanent shelters, which are for the most part located far from the city center. This is a usual problem in large-scale housing, but there are questions whether their moving to shelters will end up costing more, since their livelihood and place of employment is in Marawi's center, and schooling might be more expensive because of higher transportation costs. Based on our discussions, it is also unclear who will be allowed to avail of the permanent shelters, how they can finance these, and whether availing of a permanent shelter means they will have to give up their properties in the MAA. These are important questions especially since the TFBM declared prioritization in the availment for those whose properties are located in reclaimed areas and where government infrastructure will be built. Additional information on what sort of housing assistance IDPs can expect, and what the plan is now for private housing and structures, is more than welcome.

And finally, under this cluster, temporary shelters also have their share of problems. IDPs are grateful for this assistance, but their experience is that the temporary housing units are too small for the average Mëranaw family. We hear of the need to sleep in shifts, or outside the unit, or even asking neighbors and relatives to allow other members to sleep in their homes especially during inclement weathers. The cramped spaces have also forced the Mëranaws to disregard their religious and cultural norms, piercing through their sense of *maratabat* and self-esteem as a society.

### **Other Core Necessities**

Lacking in the shelters, and now also in the sectors in the MAA where residents are allowed to return gradually, are the core necessities for comfortable—or even just dignified—living. They talk of inadequacy of water supply. There is a problem with solid waste management. Electricity is an issue. Livelihood assistance and health services were also raised.

#### Utilities

There is a severe shortage of water—potable or otherwise—in the temporary shelters, and the situation in the MAA is likewise dire. This has contributed to sanitation and hygiene problems in the shelters, especially with the inadequacy of sanitation and waste management systems. Imagine, then, the impact of COVID in such a setting—IDPs don't even have enough water for what the authorities require of basic health protocols. Electrification has also not been completed in some temporary shelters. And it's not just the daily lives of our IDPs that are suffering. Their livelihood, education, and health are in peril too.

Just to add that when we personally went around the shelters last month, the IDPs mentioned that at least during this rainy season, rainwater is available to them to supplement what they get from the water systems installed or supplies rationed in their areas. But this is obviously

not the case during dry season. Moreover, one of the shelters in Boganga which houses more than 1000 families, has recently made its mark in social media about its suffering from landslides during heavy rains.

### Livelihood

Three national agencies are involved in providing livelihood assistance to IDPs, along with the regional government, LGUs, and different NGOs. Despite this, not all are reached by interventions of this kind and some IDPs decry the fairness of the process of selection. Some received assistance from all three agencies, while some received from only one, and others still received none at all. This inequity in the livelihood support is causing tensions within our communities.

Many IDPs also received similar livelihood starter kits to produce or market similar products. This assistance is much-needed, but the local market has been saturated, again causing tensions and prolonging economic recovery even further. The strategy may be to provide as many micro- to small-scale livelihood interventions to as many IDPs as possible, but the problem is we are ignoring the role of former big-time traders, or those who can help make our local economy recover faster.

There have also been complaints about overpricing, skill-intervention mismatch, and the quality of the equipment distributed.

### Education

While the Department of Education has understandably focused on the 20 public schools destroyed or affected by the siege, not much assistance has been given to the many private schools, *madaris*, and other educational institutions in the MAA so that they have a chance at repairs or reconstruction and, therefore, resumption of operations.

### Health

IDPs also reported problems with health services. Similar to education, distance is a big constraint in access. Regular medical missions are not enough for the IDPs, and they are calling for medical clinics in every site, along with affordable medicines. Given the problems with the water supply, inadequate hygiene and sanitation systems, lack of health services, cramped living conditions, and the COVID outbreak, what we have here is a perfect storm waiting to happen.

### **Other Issues**

These are the issues that affect the daily realities of the IDPs—but there are concerns that permeate the entire situation that we cannot ignore.

### Completeness of the List of Beneficiaries

Data is a big problem in the Marawi rehabilitation. Both the *Kathanor* and DAFAC systems are good attempts at databasing, but they are incomplete—and this is not denied by the authorities that implemented them. The problem is that these lists are the bases for the inclusion

in the intervention of the national government agencies. Exclusion in the list spells exclusion in the aid that is due every IDP.

Data on land possession and ownership is also problematic. Strict adherence to formal documentation like land titles, tax declarations, deeds of sale or other forms of transfer is not reflective of the reality of the complexity of the property arrangements within the Mëranaw society. This has caused anxiety or even tension to those who have been in possession of their lands for generations, prior to being displaced by the siege, but whose claims are not evidenced by documents recognized by authorities.

### *Inclusion, Scope, Priority*

From what we have seen, there also appears to be questions regarding the inclusion, scope, and prioritization for those affected by the Marawi Siege. There is the sentiment that non-Mëranaw hostages who survived or those who are affiliated with the ones who perished in the 2017 siege received more urgent assistance from the government compared to the IDPs.

### *Transparency*

Transparency is another critical issue. IDPs are not provided the clarity that they demand as to the assistance that they are entitled to, the processes, timelines, and targets when it comes to rehabilitation, and the policies that relate to their return to their properties in the MAA including whether, for some of them, its impossibility is a foregone conclusion. So much more can be done to inform and update the IDPs, especially to dispel perceptions of mismanagement and suspicions of corruption.

### *Inclusive Participation*

Related to the call for transparency is the clamor for inclusive participation. For instance, the *mujahideen* should be recognized as important partners not just in rehab efforts, but in long-term development and stability of the city.

Still, an even bigger problem that was revealed to us in our public hearings is that wide acceptance of the Bangon Marawi plan seems to be absent—indicative, perhaps, of this lack of ownership by the IDPs is the feeling that inclusive participation even from the stage of its conception is unsatisfactory.

### *Transitional Justice and the Handling of the War*

IDPs also highlighted the importance of transitional justice in the case of Marawi so that the allegations of looting, vandalism, and trespassing over private properties during the height of the siege – are not simply forgotten.

Many of those affected also have lingering questions regarding the handling of the war. Our people want to clarify what factors led to the siege – beyond the victim-blaming that has pervaded the earlier discourses, investigate violations committed by both sides, and have a full accounting of the dead and the missing.

### *Emerging Security Issues*

All of these compounding problems lead to a Marawi that is exposed and vulnerable to emerging security issues. IDPs have reported renewed recruitment, which is likely driven by frustration over the pace of rehabilitation.

There has also been a reported spike in illegal drug transactions. While never an excuse, perhaps the lack of adequate socio-economic opportunities have forced some to resort to selling drugs.

## **Recommendations**

Given all these, we outlined corresponding recommendations divided into immediate-term actions, immediate-to-medium term actions, medium-to-long-term actions, and recommendations for matters outside the Bangsamoro Government's mandate.

Immediate recommendations include setting up an office or board for the BTA-led rehab efforts, which has been addressed by the creation of the PSC. We also recommend addressing data gaps through a centralized, up-to-date, and comprehensive database of household profiles, the assistance they received, and property ownership. We also need to improve IDP access to assistance and ensure food security.

Under immediate-to-medium-term actions, we need to hasten the construction and improve WASH facilities. We need to hasten electricity access. We need to prioritize livelihood and business. The delivery of services should also be synchronized.

We also need to ensure that education and health services continue. Finally, we have to assist those who were displaced in identifying the boundaries of their properties.

Under medium-to-long-term actions, we recommended that we support permanent housing development.

Meanwhile, for entities outside BARMM, we raised the call for transparency—especially through frequent updates on plans and developments, better consultation mechanisms, and the establishment of an independent auditing and accountability mechanism. We also again urge Congress to pass the Compensation Law. The national government should also address emerging security concerns. We also urge them to allow the exercise of property rights in the MAA—for instance, by allowing IDPs to clean, clear, and fence their properties without having to secure prior permission, especially if they have proof of ownership. Finally, we recommended that we raise the matter of monitoring the rehab to the Intergovernmental Relations Body between the National and the Bangsamoro Governments.

After this lengthy process—and this lengthy report—I think it's clear: the current process and pace of rehabilitation leaves so much to be desired. From what we have heard, it's not meeting the expectations—much less the needs—of those who were displaced and affected. So much more needs to be done to ensure rehab is inclusive, genuine, and comprehensive. But the good news is, there's also so much the Bangsamoro Government can do to make sure this happens. One of these is through the well-grounded and evidence-based insights we offer the National Government through the SCM Report.

As I mentioned earlier, at least on the part of the Bangsamoro Government, work is already underway on the recommendations in this report. We are optimistic with how the Bangsamoro's work on Marawi rehab is unfolding, but this is going to be a long process. And moving forward, this work on rehab will need your help. Aside from disseminating critical information on rehab initiatives, we will also need you to ensure, through your reportage, that we will remain faithful to our aspirations in making the SCM Report and the findings and recommendations that emerged from it. And perhaps more importantly, we will need help in amplifying the voices of those who were displaced and affected, and who continue to suffer today—in the hope that in doing so, we push the process forward and move more quickly, more efficiently, towards the dream we all share—for our sisters and brothers to have the chance to rebuild their lives in Marawi stronger, more prosperous, and more peaceful.

Thank you.

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