

Delivered during the Hearing of the Senate Special Committee on Marawi Rehabilitation
on September 21, 2021

Assalamu alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh.

We thank the Senate Special Committee on Marawi Rehabilitation for this invitation. As a Member of the Bangsamoro Parliament and as head of the BARMM's interventions for the besieged city – the BARMM Marawi Rehabilitation Program – allow me to stress the great interest and commitment of the Bangsamoro Government in seeing a whole-of-government and people-centered approach to the rehabilitation of our beloved City and its people – a people whose resilience and patience have been tested for more than four (4) years now.

We will not be able to tackle all of the crucial details provided in our 134-page report. We will be happy to provide the Senate Special Committee with a copy of this report which discusses:

1. *issues on land, property rights, and shelters*, which include concerns over property ownership such as overlapping claims, encroachment, and reliance on traditional institutions of property ownership and possession.

This is exacerbated by the clearing and demolition of properties which in some noteworthy instances were done without the consent of the owners. This means that the only clear proof of demarcation of property lines has been obliterated, making contestation on lands once the IDPs are allowed to return almost certain.

There is likewise great concern over the assertion of military reservations whose boundaries are unclear even to those who have lived in the areas for years. A look at the various government issuances on the lands in Marawi City also serve to confound as they seem to cover the same or overlapping areas, causing residents to fear that they will again be displaced in the future.

Payment of real property tax becomes a problem as some IDPs, despite some concessions, are still unable to pay. This becomes even more material in light of the requirement of a building permit prior to allowing residents to return to and rebuild their homes, which permit in turn requires payment of this tax. We can imagine that IDPs who have lived in states way below ideal would be unable to shell out extra resources for daily subsistence, and much less for payment of taxes.

The location of permanent housing which for the most part is far from the city center also poses concerns for the IDPs. Of late, the pronouncement that those who used to possess, occupy, and reside in lands in certain barangays within the reclaimed areas of the MAA will not be allowed to return is a huge concern for which no clear response has been heard from authorities.

In sum, a general feeling that the most stringent enforcement of existing laws is being applied in the most affected areas of Marawi City and is being used to justify the IDPs' continued displacement, prevails and should not be ignored.

And finally, the situation in temporary shelters – whose sizes are too small for the average Mranao family, where sufficiency of water supply is always a problem, and where concerns

over payment for electricity consumption is developing – were likewise raised during the hearings of the SCM.

2. *issues on core necessities*, which include the need for access to livelihood, education, and health services; and,
3. *Other issues*, covering completeness of the list of IDPs in the *Kathanor* list of the TFBM; transparency or access to information of IDPs over the state of the rehabilitation, a realistic timeline for their return given the pace of the construction inside MAA, and what services and aids are and should be available to them; and inclusive participation in the plans for the City.

The IDPs also highlighted the importance of transitional justice in the case of Marawi so that allegations of looting, vandalism, and trespassing over private properties during the height of the siege are not simply forgotten. Many also question the handling of the war, seek to clarify what factors led to the siege – beyond the victim-blaming, ask for investigation of violations committed by both sides of the conflict, and call for a full accounting of the dead and the missing.

Again, our report in the Bangsamoro’s SCM and Parliament is lengthy even in the discussion of our recommendations. But allow me to highlight two things that our IDPs have been crying for and for which we feel that this august body will have considerable influence over.

First, our people want to return. This process of exacting transparency in the rehabilitation of our city is one we stand by as this ensures that institutions move more efficiently so that conditions for our IDPs return to their homeland are set in motion. But allow me as well to point out that even as we do our best to meet our deadlines on our public works within the MAA, exercise of property rights by their rightful owners – i.e., allowing the IDPs to clean, clear, and fence their properties without having to secure prior permission, especially if they hold incontrovertible proof of ownership – should be allowed. This not only speeds up the process of reconstruction of the private properties within Ground Zero – structures for which our government initiatives made no plans for – it also initiates the process of healing for our traumatized community.

And second and more relevantly to the Upper House, we reiterate our call for the passage of the Compensation Law in relation to the Marawi Siege. The Bangsamoro Parliament has earlier passed a resolution calling on the national Congress to immediately pass this key measure. We cannot assign financial value to the losses our people suffered but recognizing those losses and making sincere efforts at reparations is an important step towards healing and normalization.

Again, we thank the Senate Special Committee for this opportunity. And to your esteemed honors’ gargantuan task of doing right by our people, we say God speed.

Thank you very much.

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