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Philippines

Emergency in Mindanao (Philippines): the humanitarian crisis is spreading - A progress report on the situation and the solidarity campaign

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South of the Philippine Archipelago, the island of Mindanao is undergoing a state of critical humanitarian crisis with multiple causes: the combined consequences of typhoon Temblin/Vinta, the Marawi war and jihadist movements, the generalization of the conflict between the governmental army and the Communist Party of the Philippines, the systematic (often illegal) drain over the region's resources by mining and forestry lobbies, the military operations by forces linked to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the martial law regime imposed since May 2017 and extended for the whole year 2018 ...

We received two calls for solidarity after the passage on December 23 of Typhoon Temblin/Vinta [1], then a third alerting on the consequences of armed conflict. [2] We supported them and then, on January 7, we launched our own international call for financial solidarity taking into account all the causes of the state of humanitarian crisis and all its victims [3]. This campaign extends the one we conducted in 2017 to support families who had to flee in emergency, last May, the city of Marawi because of the violent fighting between the army and jihadist groups.

Since December, we have transferred to the Philippines a total of 10300 including 3300 via Mihands coalition and a total of 7000 via Tripod Association [4].

Mihands [5] and Tripod thank the donors. In this first period, these funds have largely contributed to the development of the initial activities without which it is impossible to intervene effectively: distributions of aid in the most easily accessible areas, but also coordination meetings, surveys and collecting information, lobbying government agencies, solidarity campaigns in the Philippines itself (donations in kind or money), etc. Gradually, activities will move on to a next stage, with communities self-organizing so that they can regain control of their present and their future, when this is not already the case.

The militant networks we support are engaged in humanitarian aid and victim protection over a vast territory in northern and central Mindanao. All their forces are mobilized to face a state of crisis of exceptional magnitude. They do not have yet the possibility to make an overall assessment of the situation and their action. However, we have received a number of information that we summarize here.

They intervene in particular in the provinces Lanao (North and South), the Zamboanga Peninsula, Maguindano, North Cotabao, Sultan Kudarat.

The response to typhoon Temblin/Vinta and displaced populations

It is still too early to assess the material and human consequences of the typhoon, because the state of the roads does not allow access to many localities. Municipalities lack adequate equipment to clear them (trees ...) and repair them (crevasses ...) - to operate in the hinterland, these machines must be light, small. In one given area, the damage can be very different if there has been, or not, a landslide. Destruction concerns in particular infrastructure, agricultural land and aquaculture, housing, equipment and services (water, electricity ...), goods, etc.

In the province of Lanao de Norte [6], at the end of December, emergency aid was provided to villages of peasants and fishermen (food, clothing, hygiene products ...) via local social movements (DKMP and LAFCCOD), then a

medical needs assessment was conducted. A medical team intervened for three days with 14 volunteers in the municipality of Lala with their health partner, NADA Philippines (in an informal evacuation site and in one locality). As usual, it had to convince survivors of the typhoon of the effectiveness of alternative treatments (acupuncture, etc.) and of how the community itself could appropriate them in the future. The results of this mission are considered very positive on various levels: physical illnesses, psychological traumas and depressive states ... Five volunteers undertook to animate on the spot an Alternative Medical Center of Mihands to follow up.

Mihands is being asked to send medical missions elsewhere to Lanao del Sur to an evacuation center and to Mindanao State University in the city of Marawi.

Mihands coordinates its activities with local authorities and relevant agencies to include them in the overall balance sheet of humanitarian activities. The type of disaster caused by the typhoon is quite unusual in Lanao (massive floods in the hinterland, sudden floods of rivers ...) and local government units such as field associations must learn to respond effectively.

Military conflicts and mountain communities

The multiplication of military conflicts particularly affects lumads - tribes or ethnolinguistic groups [7]. Armed forces of all kinds regularly occupy their territories to seek refuge, to operate from the heights of several neighbouring provinces, to open their access to economic lobbies ... The imposition of martial law only worsens the situation of Indigenous Peoples [8]. The government accuses them of serving as a support base for the guerrillas of the CPP-New People's Army and Duterte has been threatening to bombard their schools retaliatory [9]. In fact, the lumads have their own internal governance [10], displayed or secret, and aim above all to protect their communities from abuses, preserve their ancestral domains, avoid being driven off their lands and forests at the risk of finding themselves poor among the urban poor (which means their cultural death). If their territories have become war zones, it is not their fault [11]. They suffer from a long history of colonialism, exclusion, marginalization and dispossession. As a general rule, they only defend their rights.

On December 24, 2017, the BIFF attacked with mortars lumads' communities in the province of Maguindanao [12]. The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) is a more or less autonomous faction of the MILF - the MILF is currently negotiating with the government an agreement on the creation of a Moro administrative entity. The BIFF wanted to position itself in the area of Mt Firis [13] during a violent clash with the army.

On 9 January, Mihands and Tripod assessed the situation in the affected Maguindanao-Cotabato area and called for solidarity. 61 lumads' houses were burned, at least 7 people were killed and contact was made with 203 displaced families (but it has not yet been possible to reach the majority of the affected localities). The investigation work was going on. The mountain communities concerned are Teduray, Lambagnians and Manobo Arumanon; there are also Muslim Moros and Christians among the displaced people.

In the provinces of Cotabato (North and South), the lumads are threatened by fighting between the CPP, government forces, paramilitary groups of large companies. An IPVoice Council member was killed in Arakan. IPVoice (The Voice of Indigenous Peoples [14].) organized a ritual in which 21 hill tribes participated and want to engage, at the beginning of February, a dialogue with the army and the CPP-NDF-NPA.

It is hoped that at least some areas will be protected from multiple armed conflicts that contribute to fuelling the humanitarian crisis (forced displacement of people, destruction of their property and resources ...), but the fate of families who have fled fighting in the Moslem City of Marawi shows that the stigmata of war do not disappear

naturally. The battle of Marawi lasted 5 months (May-October 2017), but most of them have not yet been able to return to live in Marawi - and they are now suffering the effects of typhoon Temblin/Vinta.

Support the activity of activist networks

Responding to the humanitarian crisis is conceivable only in the long term. It demands a constant struggle for lasting peace, such as the one pursued by the Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM [15]) and thus effective coordination between organizations working on a range of terrain: response to more or less natural disasters, defending the rights of communities and affected populations, protection from military conflicts, commitment to rehabilitation and reconstruction beyond the emergency aid, support for victims' self-organization and respect for their decisions

The operational network linking dozens of grassroot associations makes it possible to combine efforts, exchange know-how, create bridges between movements, cover a vast region, and help each other to maintain the action over the long term. ESSF therefore supports these networks (in this case Mihands), rather than just financing very specific projects (which, of course, can also be very useful). In Mindanao, these associations operate under harsh and dangerous conditions. We wish to salute here the quality of their commitment.

Pierre Rousset
ESSF

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We will keep you informed through our website of the state of the permanent solidarity fund and how it is utilized.

PS:

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[1] ESSF ["Typhoon Vinta/Tembin – New Disaster in Mindanao \(Philippines\): An urgent call for financial solidarity"](#) and ["Mindanao \(Philippines\): Keep Supporting Typhoon Vinta / Tembin Survivors - MIHANDs. An update from the ground"](#).

[2] ESSF ["Mindanao \(Philippines\) – Urgent Appeal for Humanitarian Assistance for the Families Affected of Armed Conflict in Maguindanao"](#).

[3] ESSF ["Philippines: Critical humanitarian situation in Mindanao - Urgent appeal for financial aid"](#).

[4] This total includes a transfer of â,- 2000 which will be made on January 23.

[5] <https://www.facebook.com/MiHANDs/>

[6] See ESSF ["Mindanao \(Philippines\): Keep Supporting Typhoon Vinta / Tembin Survivors - MIHANDs. An update from the ground"](#). Photos can be found at the bottom of the page.

[7] ESSF ["Mindanao \(Philippines\): Series of killings of indigenous leaders and attacks against indigenous peoples villages"](#).

[8] ESSF ["Mindanao \(Philippines\): No to Martial Law – Protect of Human Rights and Collective Rights of the People!"](#).

[9] ESSF ["Mindanao \(Philippines\): Paramilitary groups attack indigenous people"](#).

[10] In the case of the Teduray, see ESSF ["Nature of the Timuay Justice and Governance in Central Mindanao, Philippines"](#).

[11] ESSF ["Mindanao \(Philippines\): Indigenous Peoples – Erumenen Timuay to warring parties: Do not bring your wars in our lands"](#).

[12] ESSF ["Mindanao \(Philippines\): Indigenous Peoples – Erumenen Timuay to warring parties: Do not bring your wars in our lands"](#).

[13] ESSF ["Mindanao \(Philippines\): Mt Firis revisited by hostilities – Its history and value to the Teduray and Lambangian tribes"](#).

[14] ESSF ["Mindanao \(Philippines\) – Sounding the Gong: The IPVoice in the Peace Processes"](#).

[15] <http://www.tripeople.org>