

Marawi: A City of Ruins Waiting to Be Reborn

Marawi is the oldest Muslim city in the Philippines. With its historical monuments and buildings, Marawi is a venerable place by the Muslims of Mindanao as the Mecca of Philippines. The city also was the only recognized "Islamic City of Philippines". Marawi having a high number of madrasas was famous for being an educational center for Muslims.

Marawi city experienced very devastating process after a group called Maute captured the city in May 2017. Maute group was supported by Abu Sayyaf who affiliated itself with ISIS. The Philippine army started its operations as of May 23 and declared a state of emergency in whole Mindanao. Clashes between governmental forces and Maute members took place during 5 months. During the operations, more than 400,000 people were evacuated from the city and around. According to the official data, 987 group members were killed in the operations along with 47 civilians and 165 security and police force members. Almost the whole city was destroyed. The scene in Marawi was no different than in Syria.

Almost after a year of this event, as of the beginning of April, 50,000 families have been allowed to return to their completely destroyed city in order to take their belongings if they are still there. Almost 11,000 families are waiting for the process to return their home. The government opens the city to the residents district by district. The process of rehabilitation of the districts will take place after residents of the city salvage their belongings.

According to information given by military, 80 percent of the city has been cleared from unexploded mines and other explosive materials. The remaining area of 20 percent is still dangerous for the residents because of the unfinished clearing process.

While the city had experienced total devastation, after a year rehabilitation of Marawi is on the agenda of Philippines government and the residents of the city. There are critical and controversial issues about rehabilitation process. One of them is the possibility of the involvement of Chinese Construction Consortiums in the rehabilitation.

A civil group called Ranaw Multi-Sectoral Movement appealed Duterte to stop the plan which focuses on the economic zone and the military camp buildings in Marawi City. They also stated that Task Force Bangon Marawi which is a government inter-agency task force group to organize rehabilitation, reconstruction of Marawi, has not applied the ideas of the Marawi people in the process of planning the rehabilitation. According to their statement "The people of the lake, who resisted foreign invasions throughout history, insist their right to lead the rebuilding efforts in their homeland and not just by any urban planner, investor, or architect".

Duterte suspended rehabilitation proposals after formation of "Swiss Challenge" which allows private groups to propose their plans. But uncertainty still goes on.

Besides the negative feeling about Chinese Construction Companies' involvement, two of the Chinese firms were blacklisted by the World Bank after their corruption in the projects in the Philippines in previous years. Therefore, they have been banned from involvement in the projects which are financed by the World Bank.

Another point which created anxiety among the residents is about land ownership. Many of the Marawi residents do not have official document of their household. Therefore, the fear of government seizure of the lands for public infrastructures is rising since they still are living as IDPs. While the government of Philippines formed "the Land Dispute Arbitration Committee" to investigate problems that may arise by the *Land Titling Programme*, there is also an agenda on widening the area of the military camp in the city.

According to the sources, the cost of Marawi siege was 210 million USD while the rehabilitation of the city costs around 1 billion USD.

The first stage of the rehabilitation of Marawi is total clearing areas from the debris and it will take six

months according to the government offices. After cleaning, most likely the rebuilding the city from the zero level will take place until 2021. But people also fear the process takes longer than estimates because of Zamboanga event. After the events in 2013 in Zamboanga, some IDPs are still not able to return to their homes and this increases the fear among Marawi people living with their relatives or in the camps.

Focusing more on widening the military camp and economic zones and other fears can trigger the tension in the city and make especially youth to join extreme groups, according to an analysis. Civil society organizations in Marawi advice the government to involve affected people in the decision-making process in the reconstruction of the city. While the IDPs still depend on aid, civic groups argue that this can extend the problem in terms of youth who can fell in the hands of the terror groups which offer them financial aid. Therefore, the NGOs advice the government that it should support them financially to recover their home and shops in the ruined city rather than keeping IDPs in the camps. This also can speed up the process of rehabilitation with the support of the people.