



INDIGENOUS NAVIGATOR

Data by and for Indigenous Peoples



Policy Brief **5**

Conflict and Human Rights Violations in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)

Written by Prof. Raymundo Rovillos, Ph.D., National Lead, Indigenous Navigator Philippines (2023-2025)

Introduction

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) is an autonomous region located in southern Philippines. It replaced the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), when its basic law, the Bangsamoro Organic Law, was ratified after a two-legally binding plebiscite in Western Mindanao on January 21 and February 6, 2019.



BARMM retained the five provinces that were already part of ARMM, namely Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao, located in mainland Mindanao, and the island provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi which are collectively known as BASULTA.

The Bangsamoro Organic Law and the BARMM are results of decades of armed resistance movement against the Philippine State as a response to the “marginalization and oppression they suffered from the Philippine State.” (Tan, 1989; 1993). Those resistances were led by Muslims/Moros: the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

On December 11, 2024, BARMM Chief Minister Ahod B. Ebrahim, approved into law the Bangsamoro Autonomy Act No. 64, entitled “An Act to recognize, develop and protect the Indigenous Peoples and their rights in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, strengthening the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs, appropriating funds therefor and for other purposes.” It is worth noting that the Bangsamoro Autonomy Act. No. 64 does not mention the IPRA as its guiding framework. However, it categorically states that it shall “Adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as part of its regional policy framework in the protection and recognition of the rights of all indigenous and native inhabitants in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region.” The Act promises to recognize, promote, protect, and preserve the rights of Indigenous Peoples, such as, but not limited to, their rights to their ancestral land and ancestral domain.

The peoples of BARMM are categorized by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) 2020 Census of Population as: Non-Indigenous, Non-Muslim Indigenous Peoples, and Muslim Indigenous Peoples or Muslim Tribes.

During the conduct of the Indigenous Navigator-Philippines’ team field work in Mindanao, we heard stories from IPs about issues on land-grabbing, issuance of Certificate of Land Ownership (CLOAs) and even mining grants on their ancestral land/domain that they have already applied a title for. We (the IN-Philippines) probed further on this sensitive issue by gathering sworn statements and documentation (e.g. written testimonies) from victims and/ relatives of victims of these mentioned crimes or human rights violations.

This policy brief (number 5) is a sequel to policy brief number 4 which also featured the IPs in Mindanao. Our aim here is to show empirical evidence that would support the anecdotal stories that we have been hearing from the communities.

Methodology

This policy brief is based on the community and national surveys that the IN-Philippines conducted from November 2023 to February 2025. To corroborate the IPs’ narratives on the ground, the IN-Philippines gathered well-documented cases of killings/murder, harassment/intimidation and land grabbing, victimizing Non-Muslim Indigenous Peoples (NMIPs) in the BARMM (sources: Climate Conflict Action Asia through Conflict Alert and Critical Events and Monitoring System and the Timuay Justice and Governance). This paper also benefited from the World Bank (2024) study: No Data, No Story. Thus, a mix of primary and secondary sources, as well as quantitative and qualitative data was very helpful in putting together this paper.

Data and Analysis

This section consists of two sub-sections: the first subsection tackles the relationship between ancestral domains and conflicts, while the second subsection zooms in on the dynamics of IP rights and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

A. Ancestral land/domain and conflicts

The World Bank report (2024) entitled “No Data, No Story” made a correlation between ancestral domains and conflict. There are different findings, on account of demographic composition of the people living in ancestral domains and the status of ancestral domain titling. On one hand, the study found that:

Barangays with higher shares of IPs are associated with less conflict, including land-related conflicts.



These findings hold when expanding the scope of the analysis to include resource-related conflict and when looking at conflicts of undetermined cause. These findings do not contradict the widely documented evidence that IPs are disproportionately affected by conflict in many countries. Notably, when focusing only on land conflict and comparing barangays with no IP presence to those with any IP presence (low or high), conflict incidence increases. But when focusing exclusively on barangays with IP presence (comparing low to high), a relationship is observed between higher IP presence and lower levels of conflict. In other words, these findings suggest that there is a non-linear and nuanced link between conflict and IP presence. (Underscoring ours).

However, the scenario above is not true in all IP-dominated barangays. The WB analysis also shows “CADT processing delays can increase violence”:



Only 31 percent of all violent incidents take place inside CADT areas, yet CADTs have a higher likelihood of land-related conflict. This positive correlation with land conflict appears to be entirely driven by CADTs that experience land titling processing delays: compared to areas outside CADTs, approved-but-not-yet-registered CADTs are associated with more land-related conflict and less non-land-related conflict, while registered CADTs are associated with less conflict across both land- and non-land-related conflict.

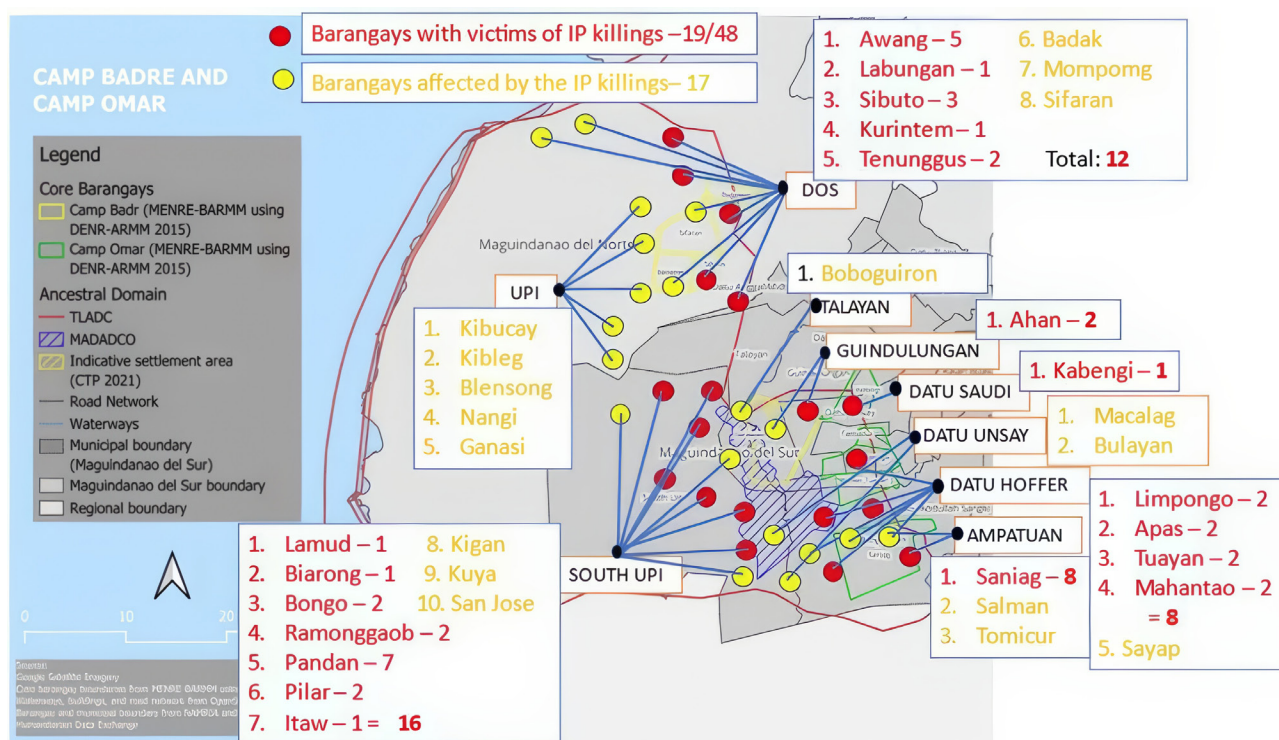
These findings suggest that CADTs can reduce conflict in general, but the delays in registration of CADTs can increase land-related violence. “The administrative delays that produce approved-but-not-yet-registered CADTs are, in turn, the result of lengthy and bureaucratic processes that are not backed up by sufficient resources and institutional capacity.”

The latter finding of the WB study is supported/validated by the Indigenous Navigator-Philippines' data on the situation of Non-Muslim Indigenous Peoples in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

B. Conflicts and Human Rights Violations in BARMM

The IN-Philippines gathered well-documented cases of killings/murder, harassment/intimidation and land grabbing, victimizing Non-Muslim Indigenous Peoples (NMIPs) in the BARMM (sources: Climate Conflict Action Asia through Conflict Alert and Critical Events and Monitoring System and the Timuay Justice and Governance).

According to these reports, a total of 84 NMIPs have been killed from 2014 to 2024 in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and adjacent provinces. This total number includes 12 IP leaders, 7 youth and 8 women. Majority of these violence against NMIPs are recorded in South Upi, Datu Odin Sinsuat and Upi. See map below:



Source: TJG, 2025.

On January 15, 2025, in statement at the ICC/IP Committee Meeting on House Resolutions 2005 and 2069, a representative of Timuay Justice and Governance (TJG) said that “NMIP killings within the ancestral domain are committed within or adjacent to the two major MILF Camps Omar and Bader, and near the delineated area of Ministry of Indigenous Peoples Affairs (MIPA).” (This is also cited by Buan in Rappler, 2025).

Most incidents of NMIP killings remain unresolved. “Only 9 out of 23 cases were found in the records of the Police Regional Office of BARMM. While we are still coordinating with other municipalities and provinces on the other 14 cases,” said former PRO-BAR Regional Director Eden Ugale during the Congress committee hearing in September 2021. According to the data of Conflict Alert, “land conflict incidents have become deadlier especially in 2023.” It adds that: “Fifty- eight percent (58%) of the incidents happened in Maguindanao (Conflict Alert Triennial Report: Appeasing Violence, Conjuring Peace). Families of victims opt not to file cases because they are afraid of death threats, they do not have resources, and/or they have lost hope in the legal justice system. Investigations do not push through as well if the perpetrators are unidentified.

According to the TJG report, land conflict has been cited as the probable cause of the killing in 19 cases. Killings are perpetrated by various groups:



Factions of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Moro National Liberation Front, and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters have, time and again, trained their men and weapons against each other in their claim to swathes of land. These armed groups — as well as Maguindanaon families — have also besieged the Teduray-Lambangian IPs that claim thousands of hectares of land as their ancestral domain (TJG, et al triennial report for 2021 to 2023).

Unfortunately, only a few of the incidents are covered by the PNP report (only 27 out of 69 between 2014 to 2023); the media (20 out of 84) and the Conflict Alert DataBase (31 out of 69 from 2014 to 2023).

Some IP leaders have expressed apprehensions over the non-recognition of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 as a framework (or even as a reference, at the very least) for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Act No. 64.

Conclusion

Our findings resonate with the analysis of WB, that land-related conflicts increase when the titling of ancestral lands/domains is delayed, or worse, negated and not recognized. This is indeed true in the case of the NMIPs in BARMM, particularly among the Tedurays and Menuvos/Manobos there. It is indeed alarming and paradoxical that even IP right advocates who work within the BARMM’s MIPA have been killed apparently due to their stance on IP rights. As tribal leader Leticio Datuwata passionately told the lawmakers on January 30, 2025: “We are displaced by war, and killed by peace.” He also said that “we IPs have always had a voice, but we are not listened to.”

Recommendations

We forward the following recommendations to the Philippine State and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM):

- Conduct an investigation on all the reported killings and other forms of human rights violations in the BARMM;
- Prosecute and punish the perpetrators of the crimes;
- Provide more security and protection to the civilian population in BARMM, including the IPs;
- Uphold and protect the land-rights of Indigenous Peoples, especially those who have already fully-documented their proof of ownership and titled their ancestral lands/domains; and
- Judiciously implement the Bangsamoro Autonomous Act No. 64, particularly in relation to the recognition, promotion and protection of the IPs rights to their ancestral land and domain and to strengthen their Indigenous Political Structures (IPS).

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