

IDPs confined to barracks in Aceh

by Lukman Age

The opening up of Aceh to the international community in the aftermath of the tsunami offered a glimmer of hope to the Acehnese. However, as rehabilitation and reconstruction plans start to be implemented, hopes for peace and development are being dashed by government insensitivity to local needs.

Before the disaster, many Acehnese had been living in difficult conditions due to the counter-insurgency campaign waged by the Indonesian military against the separatist Free Aceh Movement (GAM). Hopes for a return to normality and a chance to build sustainable livelihoods have been dashed by the government's *relokasi pengungsi* (refugee relocation) programme. This top-down scheme is moving IDPs out of emergency camps to temporary barracks rather than focusing on rehabilitation and construction of permanent housing as requested by those displaced by the tsunami.

Supposedly built to conform to international standards, the 30-metre long wooden barracks are equipped with electricity and water supplies. Each barrack contains a dozen family rooms of 10m² in addition to a communal kitchen, two bathrooms and a hall for assembly, study and worship. The government plans to transfer 140,000 IDPs from emergency camps and to provide each IDP with a monthly grant of 90,000 rupiah (\$9). People living in the barracks are likely to be totally dependent on government handouts with no means of making a living and no work other than possible participation in food-for-work schemes

Many IDPs are forced to accept relocation as they lack resources to rent or rebuild on their own. They have not been helped by the fact that international humanitarian organisations have appeared to lend support to *relokasi pengungsi*. The Indonesian government, the UN and a number of NGOs joined forces in a rapid assessment of such relocation sites and the government's National Coordinating Agency for Natural Disaster and Refugees Relief (Bakor-nas) and the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

(OCHA) have jointly coordinated the Joint Relocation Centre Liaison Unit.¹

Critics argue that the Aceh relocation shows many of the same elements as the transmigration programmes of the 1980s and the forcible relocation of villagers following declaration of martial law in Aceh in May 2003. Human Rights Watch has drawn attention to the Indonesian military's record of housing Acehnese displaced by the conflict in camps where at times their freedom of movement has been restricted and where serious human rights violations have taken place.² The Minister of Social Welfare has acknowledged that barracks sites have been selected after receiving military approval. It is not known how much freedom of movement will be permitted in and out of the barracks. Though they will not be surrounded by barbed wire, there will be security patrols to prevent contact with GAM.

Uncertain futures for barracks residents

No proper attempt has been made to assess the psychological impact of forcing people to live in barracks for possibly as long as two years. Living together in big groups is uncommon in Aceh. People prefer to live in smaller groups clustered around a *meunasah* (small mosque) at the centre of a community. In rural areas the *meunasah* provides a key marker of belonging and community, a focal point for prayers, meetings or simply hanging out with friends. Many villages in Aceh indicate the importance of the *meunasah* in their name: Meunasah Jiem, Meunasah Tuha, Meunasah Blang. Membership of a particular *meunasah* entails a responsibility to care for one another and guard against external threats. Living in barracks with strangers will present a major challenge to many

rural Acehnese. Barracks do not offer privacy and are likely to result in stress, arguments and increased risk of sexual harassment.

Tsunami survivors worry that relocation away from their villages may lead to them losing their land. Many have lost legal certificates, and boundaries demarcating fields have in many cases been washed away by the tsunami. Villagers fear that others will occupy and seize their land unless they are able to make frequent visits.

Corruption is deeply embedded in Indonesia. IDPs worry that promises to provide food and other material assistance will not be honoured in the long term. There are reports that, instead of receiving the promised RP 150,000 per month, IDPs are being forced to accept goods, supposedly of equal value. Barracks contractors have not been selected by an open tendering process and it is reported that some have fraudulently received funds for non-existent barracks. The anti-corruption NGO, Peace for Aceh Without Corruption (*Aceh Damai Tanpa Korupsi* - ADTK), has demonstrated that several completed barracks are smaller than planned and that they fail to meet Sphere minimum standards.

Relocation into barracks will delay the process of social recovery if IDP communities come to expect continuous assistance in their capacity as victims, rather than survivors, of the tsunami. This is unfortunate as it runs contrary to the wishes of many Acehnese to be involved directly and actively in redeveloping Aceh after the disaster. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has worked with USAID on a major survey to assess attitudes to the relief and reconstruction process.³ Its main finding is that the priorities of almost all those affected by the tsunami are to return home, resume their jobs and re-establish their communities. Displaying an acute awareness of the potential for land tenure/property disputes, IDPs said they would agree to permanent relocation if they were assured of legal ownership of the occupied land and house. The majority of the IDPs

have indicated a strong preference to be relocated, either temporarily or permanently, to areas close to their home villages. They expressed a strong desire not to live in barracks. Acehnese are renowned for their self-reliance and a significant proportion of respondents said they wanted to receive construction materials such as wood and cement. They overwhelmingly asked for livelihoods support and only 4% of those interviewed said that they had received any assistance to help them re-start earning a living.

Families are bitterly opposed to the relocation plans

Families who have traditionally depended on fishing are bitterly opposed to the relocation plans and have refused to leave their villages. At public meetings fishermen's representatives have been joined by others in declaring their refusal to leave their land under any circumstances. Their defiance is unprecedented in a society which has hitherto meekly accepted official instructions. How-

ever, it will not be easy to continue resistance given the strength of the military and the government's determination to provide no assistance to those who refuse to evacuate their villages.

Government policy is top down and target-driven and allows no space for participation. Those in charge of the relocation programme must:

- locate barracks as close as possible to villages of origin and within range of likely employment opportunities
- introduce greater transparency into the process of barracks construction and management
- accept that the desire of IDPs to return to villages of origin as soon as possible is legitimate
- recognise that under the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement displaced persons can only be relocated with their full and informed consent
- do more to ensure the cohesiveness of established social units
- publicise and adhere to a schedule to restore basic services and

infrastructure and to facilitate return

- support comprehensive livelihood assistance activities which take into account changes in family structure caused by the tsunami
- provide public information and education which address people's concerns about a future natural disaster: resettled communities should be involved in developing locally-specific contingency plans for disaster preparedness and management.

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1. www.humanitarianinfo.org/sumatra/assessments/doc/GoL_UN-joint_assessment_report_on_relocation_sites.doc
2. <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/02/07/indone10134.htm>
3. www.iom.int/tsunami/documents/indonesia_needs_assessment.pdf

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