

# Going home or going away from home? The dilemma of Madurese IDPs

by Sherly Saragih Turnip

*Conflicts in several areas in Indonesia have displaced large numbers of people.*

**B**y the end of 2002 it was estimated that some 1.42 million had been displaced and were living scattered around the Indonesian archipelago. Women and children comprise 70% of IDPs. Almost all of them have been through a long period of forced migration before arriving at safer locations.

Sampit is the major city in the Sambas region of central Kalimantan province on the island of Borneo. The indigenous population are Dayaks. While some Dayaks are Muslim, the majority retain their traditional religion. Living alongside them are the descendants of people who migrated to Kalimantan from the distant island of Madura at the time of the Japanese invasion in 1942. Madurese came to work as labourers but the second and third generation have achieved success as traders and were comfortable living in the multi-ethnic society of Sambas. Having been born in Sambas, most Madurese regarded themselves as locals. This is not the case with the Melayunese, Muslim immigrants from the island of Sumatra.

Conflict in Sampit erupted in February 2001 and rapidly spread throughout Sambas, claiming the lives of people from all three ethnic groups. Madurese IDPs and their families have been traumatised by threats and violence from the Dayak population. Many have moved outside Sambas to other towns in Kalimantan. Some have chosen to leave the island and have been encouraged to do so by the provision of government transport to take them to the 'home' island of Madura. While resettlement in Madura seemed to be a sensible solution and the IDPs were initially welcomed, serious problems have arisen.

Although there has been considerable publicity about the plight of Madurese IDPs little attention has been paid to mental health issues and to overcom-

ing the traumas and mistrust which impede hopes for reconciliation and mutual respect among different ethnic groups.

My research, seven months after their flight, sought to identify the sense of ethnic identity of Madurese IDPs who fled from Sambas after the riots. All of the subjects were born in Sampit, attended school with Dayaks and Melayunese and speak a distinctive dialect of the Madurese language. Despite the fact that many fellow Madurese had lost their lives, they still retained a sense of belonging to Sambas and to Kalimantan. Many hope they can return home, as they belong to nowhere else. Those who have lost relatives are more likely to be resigned to living in Madura.

Many IDPs suffer from feelings of helplessness, depression, irritability, sleep disorders, alcoholism, addiction to gambling and post-traumatic stress disorder. From being respected traders in Sampit, they have become anonymous. As one man told me:

"Now I'm not very respected anymore. People just see me as one of many IDPs and they do not know who I used to be." Children are less disciplined and less respectful of authority at home and in school.

Indonesia's unstable and resource-starved government faces great difficulties in addressing the massive problem of internal displacement and is dependent on NGO assistance programmes. Policy makers need to challenge the idea behind the Madurese 'resettlement' – that IDPs should be relocated to islands of 'origin' where returnees share an ethnic identity which will necessarily facilitate their integration with residents. We need to remember that the processes of identity formation and the manner in which values which give meaning to life are very complex.

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