

Post-tsunami protection concerns in Aceh

by Marion Couldrey and Tim Morris

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement clearly state that those forced to flee natural disasters are to be regarded as IDPs. However, some agencies in post-tsunami Aceh have been reluctant to use the term and to address protection issues.

In recent years the Bahasa Indonesia translation of the Guiding Principles has been widely circulated among government officials and conflict-affected communities. The Norwegian Refugee Council's Global IDP Project, the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) have worked with Indonesian government agencies and civil society organisations in locations across the Indonesian archipelago to disseminate the Guiding Principles.¹

It is therefore surprising that, in the aftermath of the tsunami, representatives attending coordination meetings convened by OCHA in Banda Aceh often referred to the 'homeless' or 'people who lost their homes because of the tsunami' instead of using the IDP label.

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) soon recognised that the tsunami had happened in a highly politicised context. Due to the conflict between the Indonesian government and the GAM separatist movement, the province of Aceh had been closed to the international community. The arrival of international agencies was only made possible by a mandate to respond to tsunami-related humanitarian needs. Indonesia's history of internal displacement was something that most of the international community and the local authorities did not recognise as having any relation to the humanitarian operation.

NRC is part of the Consortium for Assistance and Recovery toward Development in Indonesia (CARDI), a coalition of the Danish Refugee Council, the Norwegian Refugee Council, the International Rescue Committee and Stichting Vluchteling. NRC-CARDI shares the widespread

concern about the consequences of ignoring IDP status and the dangers of discriminating between the needs of Acehnese displaced by the conflict and those affected by the tsunami. NRC concluded that there is a need for more knowledge about protection of IDPs after the tsunami, including their legal rights and the obligations of various parties to enforce them. Humanitarian actors, including the internally displaced themselves, require an arena in which to discuss issues related to protection of IDPs during displacement and upon return, reintegration, relocation or resettlement.

NRC and the Global IDP Project started to plan two workshops on the Guiding Principles, one in Banda Aceh and one in Meulaboh on the west coast of Sumatra. The idea was welcomed by most of the national and international community as timely and appropriate. NRC wanted people relevant to the reconstruction of the province to participate as the official state of emergency in Aceh came to an end in March. The time-consuming task of identifying and inviting participants, finding co-presenters and tailoring training materials to the context of

Aceh began. A participants list was prepared which included a mix of national and provincial authorities, UN, donors, INGOs and NGOs from civil society as well as IDP leaders. The Indonesian Ministry of Social Welfare showed positive interest in the workshops and agreed to make presentations, and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs agreed to assist in the collection of data and its disaggregation by gender, age and location.

Unfortunately, NRC learned that they were not permitted to hold the workshops due to a new regulation obliging all foreign humanitarian assistance providers to organise activities in conjunction with a government institution. There is therefore an opening to hold the workshops at a later stage, together with a relevant government institution and in accordance with present laws and regulations. Hopefully this will be an arena for discussing important issues. It is important that the international community work with the local authorities to find durable solutions in the protection and assistance of IDPs in Aceh.

The FMR Editors are grateful for input from Astrid Sofie Arne, former NRC Project Manager, Protection, in Banda Aceh. Email: astrid.arne@freewave.cc

1. www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/IdpProjectDb/idpSurvey.nsf/wViewCountries/

A makeshift school in IDP camp in Banda Aceh.

