

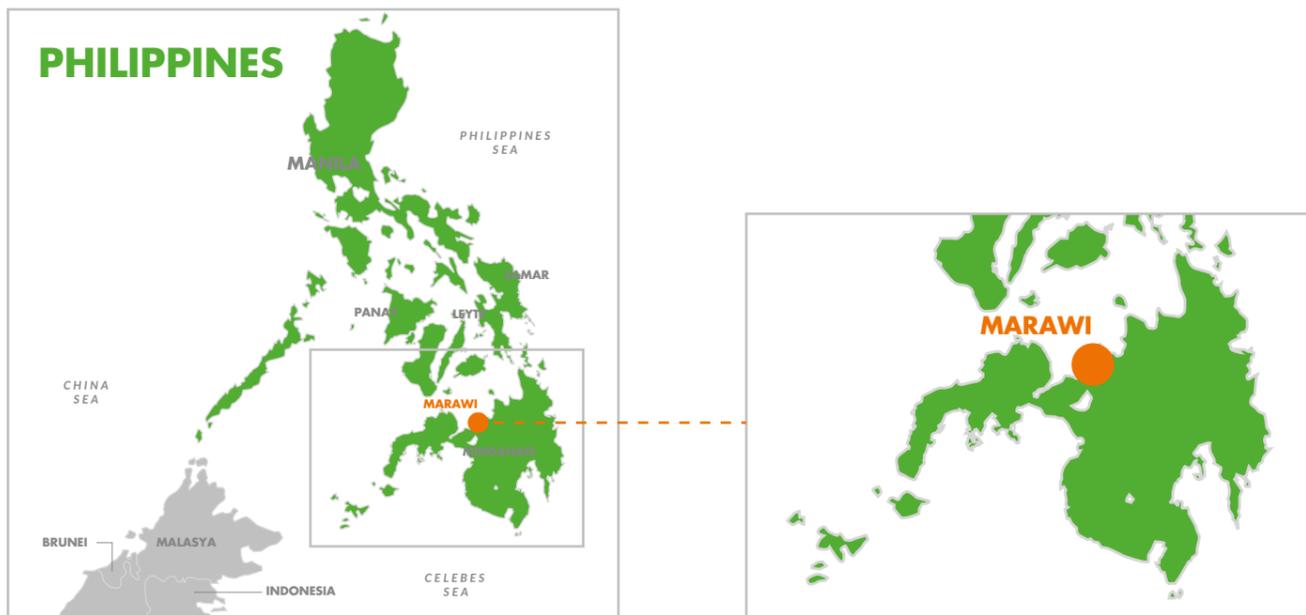
# VOICES OF MARAWI

5 MONTHS UNDER SIEGE IN THE PHILIPPINES





# ONE YEAR SINCE THE START OF THE CONFLICT IN MARAWI



## HUMANITARIAN IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT

More than 350,000 people fled Marawi and were forced to seek refuge in neighbouring cities. This displacement has led to increased levels of food insecurity and malnutrition, especially among the vulnerable population. Thousands of families depend on aid, however, many municipalities east of Lake Lanao are in areas that are hard to access and need more assistance.

In December, the arrival of Tropical Storm Vinta caused flooding and landslides, damaging homes, temporary shelters and farmland. It affected almost 175,000 people, many of them already extremely vulnerable. Our humanitarian response focused on meeting the needs of internally displaced people from the conflict, the host communities and those living in temporary evacuation centres.

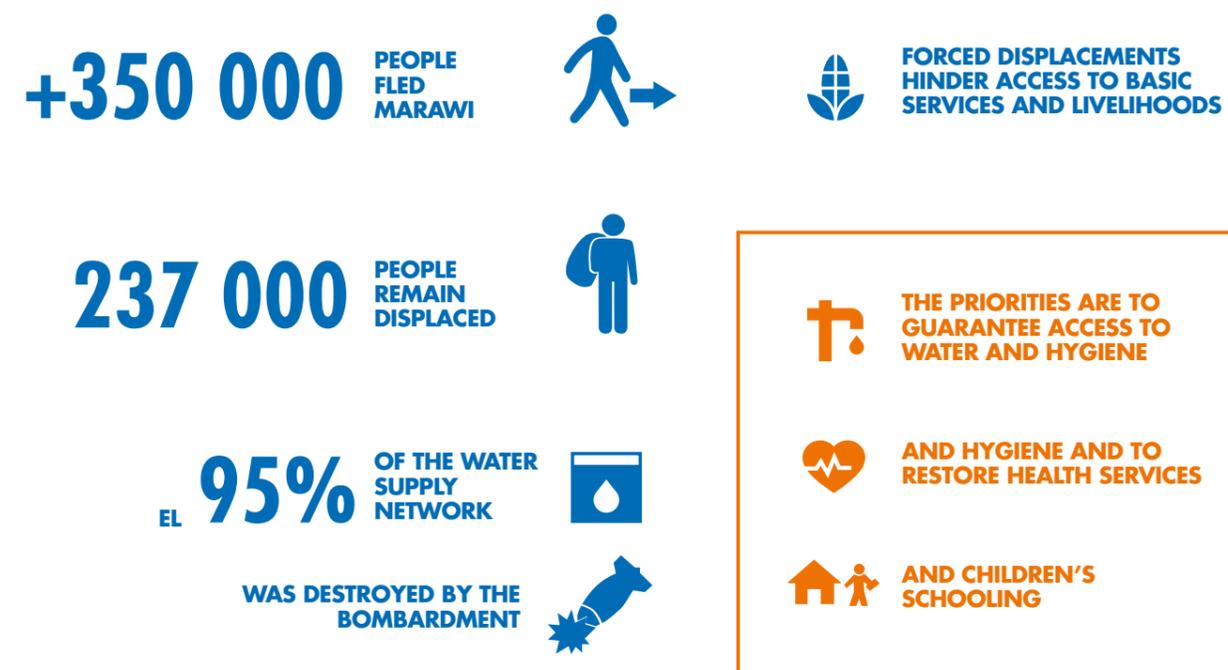
Since the end of last year, many families have started going back to Marawi despite the fact that the security risks and the restoration of basic services continue to be a challenge. However, 237,000 people remain displaced and tens of thousands of families from ground zero have nowhere to go back to.

## 5 MONTHS UNDER SIEGE OF MARAWI CITY

23 May 2017 saw the start of one of the longest sieges in recent years. Not in Syria, but in the southern Philippines. The battle of Marawi, on the island of Mindanao, started when the Philippine Army tried to capture Isnilon Hapilon, the head of a militant group that pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. The Maute group then joined forces with the militant group, making the battle even longer and deadlier.

In total, five months of fighting and air strikes turned Marawi into a ghost town, with a landscape very similar to destroyed Aleppo, but broadcast much less. The city's "liberation" was officially announced on 23 October 2017, but more than 237,000 people that lived at ground zero are still displaced. They no longer have a home to return to.

The conflict has also devastated the city's infrastructure, including schools and hospitals. In addition, 95% of the water supply network was destroyed by the bombardment. Marawi, which was the trading and commercial hub of the Lake Lanao region, has been turned into a city in ruins.





# MARAWI: WOMEN UNDER SIEGE

4 STORIES OF WOMEN THAT SURVIVED A CONFLICT WHICH DEVASTATED THE BIGGEST MUSLIM-MAJORITY CITY IN THE PHILIPPINES.

Photo: © Lys Arango  
by Action Against Hunger.



## JAWADA PACALUNDO, 12 YEARS OLD

« We flee with our nanny, who is Christian, hidden among the suitcases. »

Jawada lived at ground zero in Marawi. She hasn't been able to go home because there's nothing left of what she had. She now lives in the Bakwit Village camp in Matunggao.

« As we were fleeing from Marawi, some ISIS members stopped us at a checkpoint. We wound down the windows of the car and after saying good morning they assured us that we could return in three days. We were all cramped and scared to death. Our nanny, who is Christian, was hidden among the suitcases. We had heard that members of the Islamic State were killing Christians.

As soon as we left she went to her family's village and has not returned since. We call her regularly to find out how she is doing. She always says that she is well, that she misses us, but that her mother will not let her come back with us because she fears for her life. It breaks my heart. We have not even been able to pay her her last salary.

The arrival of ISIS changed everything: first they set fire to the Dansalan School, where several of my cousins were studying. Then they killed several Christians and cut off their heads. I saw the heads on the ground. I also saw strewn legs and arms. The teachers at the school who were murdered were killed by mutilation. I do not know why they did that to them. These people were innocent; they had not done anything wrong.

Here in Matunggao everything is different. I no longer go to school because I am not able to concentrate. I fail the subjects that I used to get top grades for. So instead I keep myself busy doing chores. For example, every day I go to fetch water with buckets and I help my grandmother cook and wash clothes. Actually, I am still adapting ... Before we had employees who were responsible for household chores. Everything was easier, but I know I have to accept that this is my new life.

I don't think we can go back to Marawi because we have nothing left: no house, no school, no shop. But have not lost hope altogether. I dream every day about going back and playing with my friends. I do not know if they are still alive or dead, but I dream of seeing them again. »



Photo: © Lys Arango by Action Against Hunger.



was happening outside. That's what he did. HE watched the members of ISIS from the window. One day they started shooting at the front of the house when they realized that someone was inside.

My children went to the capitol and asked the rescue workers to help their father. We had posted his picture on Facebook and asked anyone who saw him, to please let us know. A member of ISIS recognised him and called us. He told us that my husband was still alive and that they could help him out of the city. We accepted and my daughter reminded them that her father was alone at home and had reduced mobility.

So on the agreed day, at 7 in the morning, they went to pick him up by car. On the journey, they passed by the market and the city jail, but before along the way the car was shot down by the military. So, they got out and started running towards a nearby mosque. They hid for a few hours until the firing ceased. Then, when it was safe to leave, they returned to the car and left him in Lilod.

My husband crossed the bridge very slowly because his legs were not responding well. He arrived at Saduc, where he was met by the rescue team and the soldiers. When we were reunited, I burst with joy, even though I noticed that he had lost a lot of weight. But that happiness was short-lived; he was soon hospitalised after suffering a stroke. He spent three days in the Intensive Care Unit and then five more in another ward. He was prescribed some medication to prevent another stroke and to maintain his blood sugar levels, but didn't have money to buy it.

We now live in Bakwit Village, Matunggao, with other residents from ground zero of Marawi. Before we had a big house, a bakery and a fast food store. Now we live in a container. It is difficult to adapt to this life, especially because we do not know when we can return to our home. »

## ALIYAH PACALUNDO, 67 YEARS OLD

« Before we had a big house, a bakery and a fast food store. Now we live in a container. »

Aliyah lived at ground zero in Marawi. She hasn't been able to go home because there's nothing left of what she had. She now lives in the Bakwit Village camp in Matunggao.

« Around 12 o'clock we heard the sound of a bomb near Mindanao State University. We locked ourselves in the house and from the window we saw the Dansalan school burn. The next morning our son came to look for us, we tried to resist, but he informed us that if we did not leave we would be caught in the crossfire. However, my husband had no way of convincing him. He did not want to leave our house. He did not want to leave Marawi.

We said goodbye in tears. My son's car was old but we managed to fit six adults and four children in it. We went to Saguwaran and during Ramadan we could not stop thinking about my husband. After five days we were desperate, so we tried to return to rescue him, but the roads leading to the centre of the city were closed.

My husband, Ansari, was under siege for 16 days. He survived based on rice with salt and 2 gallons of water that we had stored. And for light at night, he used candles.

He was alone. He would hide during the day and from time to time would look out the window to see what





## JOHAIRAH MACAOMBAO, 27 YEARS OLD

« There is no market in Marawi to sell our products. »

Johairah escaped from Marawi when the siege began. She managed to go home a few months ago, although nothing is the same anymore.

« Bombs do not choose whom to fall on, civilians or enemies. That's why we decided to leave. We walked along the secondary roads because the battle had already intensified on the main roads. Bombs were falling everywhere: one hit the mosque and two of my nephews were hit.

When we finally arrived at my parents' house in Pantar we felt safe. However, we had difficulties in obtaining the emergency items distributed by government agencies and NGOs to those displaced by the conflict and who took refuge in the evacuation centres. We only received rice. Nothing more. Those 8 months were very hard.

The war ended in October and on 19 January, we were allowed to return to our house, but upon arrival we saw it had been totally ransacked. In addition we had lost our livelihood. Before the war we worked in agriculture, but there is no market in Marawi to sell our products. If we go to the city of Iligan, we spend more on transportation than we would receive from selling the goods. So, it is harder and harder to survive without income. My children ask for food, they cry constantly because they are hungry, but we have nothing to give them.

Now they are always sick, like all the other children in the neighbourhood. First, it was my son Rahim, who kept crying and had red spots on his skin. He just cried and slept. He slept too much and that also worried me. Sometimes I would wake him up just to see if he was still alive and then the crying would start again. He cried and cried. I tried to breastfeed him but he didn't want to. I did not understand what was wrong. My mother advised me to take him to the hospital, but we didn't have any money. How were we going to pay the bills? Or the medicine prescribed by the doctor?

One day we went to Bliss, near Medina. An Action Against Hunger team was doing a medical check-up on children under the age of five, so I took mine to see them. There we met Jonathan, who took the measurements of my three youngest children and after a week he phoned us to arrange a home visit.

She told me that the twins were suffering from acute malnutrition and my daughter, from moderate malnutrition. But how could they not be sick if our only food for months had been boiled rice? They gave us some sachets of peanut paste (Plumpy Nut) and told us how we should take it. So from that day onwards, I began to feed them with these sachets and by the time the Action Against Hunger staff came back after a week they found that the twins were gaining weight and were much more active. I was so happy to see my children recovering ... Now it's my daughter Sarah who is undergoing treatment.

Hopefully we can go back to our previous life when we earned enough to keep the family healthy. Hopefully we can return to agriculture. Hopefully life comes back to Marawi. Hopefully we can eat again. »





**Arma escaped from Marawi when the siege began. She managed to go home a few months ago, although nothing is the same anymore.**

« Living in a landfill was never easy, but relying on it to live was never as difficult as it is now. My husband and I moved in 2001 fleeing a clan fight where we ran the risk of being killed. We had six children and we worked in the collection of recyclable materials from the garbage that came from Marawi.

But when the siege began, we resisted for a month until several members of ISIS arrived and hid here. Shots were heard at all hours. We did not want to be killed so we left our house and walked to a safe place. In Baloi, they hosted us in an evacuation centre for several months until we were allowed to return.

Now we have no food left, not even rice. Some days we do not earn a single peso because Marawi no longer generates garbage and therefore the recycling business is practically finished. My little daughter, Alimira, has been very sick, about to die. First she had measles and then she got thinner until her eyes lost their brightness. Older people said it was because of the pollution caused by the bombs. But I think it's also because of the garbage and water that we drink, which is contaminated. If you add to this the lack of food, I think the result is obvious.

We did not have money to take her admitted to hospital, so I thought my little girl would die, like I've seen other babies die here. But Action Against Hunger took her to the hospital and saved her. Now we receive some therapeutic sachets for her, as well as food and hygiene items. We are very grateful, although we do not know how long this help will last. And most importantly: then what? »



**ARMA DULON, 45 YEARS OLD**

« The siege has cut even the wastes we used to live of. »



Action Against Hunger has been working in the Philippines since 2000 with a team of more than 80 people. In Marawi, we are providing water and basic sanitation, as well as nutritional and psychosocial support, for the communities returning and the families still displaced. We are also supporting the activation of alternative livelihoods for the families returning.



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Action Against Hunger is a global humanitarian organisation that takes decisive action against the causes and effects of hunger. We save the lives of malnourished children. We ensure everyone can access clean water, food, training and healthcare. We enable entire communities to be free from hunger.