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## School repairs go full swing in Mindanao

The Department of Education (DepEd) has started to rebuild schoolhouses damaged in conflict-torn areas in Lanao del Norte and Cotabato in the hope of bringing teachers and students back to their classrooms.

Education Secretary Jesli Lapus today instructed the Department of Education's Physical Facilities and Schools Engineering Division (PFSED) to prioritize schools that have suffered the most damages in war-ravaged Mindanao, even as he observed that classes in most areas had started to normalize. "All schools in Lanao del Norte are now undergoing repair and rehabilitation," Lapus noted.

Based on damage assessment report conducted by DepEd officials in the region, Lapus disclosed that some 3,753 students were affected as the number of damaged classrooms reached 28. DepEd estimates the cost of damage at over P17 million.

"As tension has started to ease up, classes have now resumed in all districts of Lanao del Norte except in Kolambugan, Pantao Ragat Central School, Poona Piagapo and Munai district," Lapus said.

DepEd has released an initial P10 million from its school building program for immediate repair and rehabilitation work. It is likewise coordinating with the Armed Forces of the Philippines Engineering Brigade for reconstruction work in high risk areas that cannot be reached by the PFSED.

Meanwhile, DepEd has joined other government agencies in the delivery of basic services for residents caught in the middle of the conflict and are now housed in evacuation centers.

The department has dispatched teams of health personnel minister to conduct de-worming and health examinations, as well as treats common ailments. These teams have also been giving tips to prevent the outbreak of diarrhea. With support from the local government unit, DepEd has likewise spearheaded feeding programs for school children, including demonstrations on how to prepare malunggay powder, an extract from an indigenous plant.

The DepEd is also conducting stress debriefings for teachers and students who were severely affected by the armed conflict. Books and instructional materials are currently being distributed to reinforce these psychological interventions.

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PRESS RELEASE