

## Some IDPs are falsifying data to get payments

Contributed by Gil Silva  
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Some of the people who have received government payments to move out of refugee camps and back to their homes have lied to get the money, according to village officials familiar with their circumstances.

The government says it has no statistics yet on how many camp residents may have cheated, but insists that anybody found to be cheating will be prosecuted.

Refugees and relief officials agree that the job of relocating thousands of families out of the city's sprawling camps is demanding and complex. Families receive government payments based on how badly damaged their homes were during the crisis of 2006.

According to figures provided by the United Nations, in Dili about 1,500 families have been relocated as of mid-June, or about 11 percent of the 13,000 families registered with the government.

So far, about \$4 million has been spent on the resettlement program, according to the information office at the Ministry of Social Solidarity. The total budget for the program is \$15 million. The process is expected to take the rest of the year to complete.

Two of those who have received settlements are Vicente da Silva and Bernardino de Cristo. Both were residents of Beto in the village of Naroman, and both fled during the 2006 crisis to the Dominican House in Beto Berat in the village of Anin-Fuik.

Both confirm that they have received payments for damages to their property, and both deny any wrong-doing.

"I registered two houses (because) my two houses were destroyed during the crisis, and I have received payment in amount of \$7,500," Vicente da Silva told CJITL. He said \$4,500 was for a house dating from the Indonesian period that was totally destroyed, and \$3,000 for a newer house he lives in.

A reporter for CJITL visited the village to observe the condition of da Silva's houses. The newer house is almost completed, while the Indonesian house remains in ruins.

But Mateus Freitas Tavares, the chief of Naroman Village, lives next door to da Silva and disputes his story. He told CJITL, "Only one of Vicente's houses was destroyed. The Indonesian house was destroyed but his private house, that he was building before the crisis, remains the same. His private house was not finished." A police officer from the village, who asked not to be identified, agrees with the chief.

"Vicente's Indonesian house was totally destroyed but not his new house. The new house had no windows or roof before the crisis, and no one touched it. His house was unfinished, not destroyed," said the officer.

Asked about the allegations of fraud, da Silva dismissed them, saying his accusers are simply jealous that he has received the payments.

In a somewhat different case, fellow villager Bernardino de Cristo confirmed that he had received a payment of \$500. "I have indeed received the money. My windows were broken and I have replaced them," he said.

His neighbors said they don't see why he got a payment at all, as the damage to his house was not very great and his relationship with villagers and local youths is good.

"I don't understand how the process works, because Bernardino's house remains undestroyed but he still received money from the government," said the leader of a neighboring village, who did not want his name used.

"I am not satisfied, because if your house is destroyed, you (deserve) the money. But his house is still whole and he received money. It's as if we are pulling the government's leg," the leader said.

Naroman village chief Tavares said that Bernardino has never had a problem in his neighborhood, so he doesn't

understand why he became a refugee in the first place.

“During the crisis Bernardino was free to walk around,” said Tavares. Since then, “every day he goes to work as a sand collector in the river and sometimes he sleeps at his house, sometimes in the tent (at the refugee camp). His relationship with the youth around here is also good.”

Leopoldinho da Silva, coordinator of the Jardim camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs), told CJITL in April that the process of data collection by teams from the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MSS) Team was ineffective because it didn’t involve camp coordinators and other camp residents, so it provided opportunities for unscrupulous people to falsify data.

Amandio Amaral Freitas, the National Director of Social Assistance, said that it is true that sometimes teams didn’t involve community leaders, because when they were doing the job, the leaders couldn’t be located. Other refugees reported other problems with the system. Florindo Jose Da Costa, who was living as a refugee at the National Hospital camp when he was interviewed in early May, said that he had received all the money he expected after his interview with the ministry.

But, he said, he still hasn’t been able to return home.

Da Costa says he was forced to move to transition housing in the Becora market because when he returned to his home in Becora Station, the neighbors refused to accept him.

Similar problems have been reported in the October 12 village in Taci-Tolu. When the families of brothers Antonio and Marcelino Soares tried to return from the Jardim Kolmera refugee camp to their previous homes in that village, they were stoned.

Village chief Joao Francisco Soares Dias said that was due to a misunderstanding, and that the incident occurred because the ministry did not do its job properly.

“It is the ministry’s fault that intends to reintegrate them here, because they didn’t have any consideration for me as the chief of the village. We knew that people from this village would return but we didn’t know the proper date, what day they will be here, and that’s why this happened,” said Dias at his residence in Taci-Tolu.

He said that during the crisis, other people had moved into the Soares’s abandoned homes, and they were surprised when the owners returned without warning.

But, as a local authority, he said he made efforts to resolve the problem and was successful. He said that the two families will soon be able to return home.

Dias also said he tried to normalize the situation in his village by insisting on the presence of security personnel in the area. And based on a reporter’s observation, the police have established a security post in the area.

Freitas, the director of Social Assistance, said in mid-June that the government does not yet have data on the extent of fraud involving IDP payouts. He said he is aware that some people face difficulties on returning to their neighborhoods, but said the government continues to work on mediating each dispute, and provides transitional shelter until the disputes can be resolved.

As for the people who are living in abandoned housing who will have to leave if the refugees are to return home, Freitas said the government does not have a blanket policy on what to do about them, but is trying to solve problems on a case-by-case basis.

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