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At least 150 people, most of them children, were forced to flee a remote village in Agusan del Sur province in Mindanao Tuesday as a battle between government troops and communist guerrillas intensified.

*Indigenous people in Mindanao flee fighting
between government soldiers and communist rebels*

The shooting started when government troops stumbled upon New People's Army rebels in the village of New Visayas on Monday. The soldiers were in the area for a meeting with villagers as part of the government's anti-insurgency campaign.

The villagers were told to flee Tuesday when government troops ordered airstrikes against the rebels.

"The fighting yesterday lasted from eight in the morning until around noon. The military sent in helicopters and attack planes in the afternoon and dropped around eight bombs," said Ricardo Caduplana, one of the fleeing villagers.

"The children were very scared. They didn't stop crying," he said.

The displaced families have sought temporary shelter at the nearby village of Pulang Lupa.

"We didn't bring anything. We fled after hearing the first burst of gunfire," said Ailyn Quilaton who

left with her two young children.

“I hope it all ends soon,” she added.

The military said the residents had to leave the village in order for the soldiers to pursue the rebels.

“We have not received reports of civilian casualties or damage to property. But we have [internally displaced persons],” said army spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Danilo Benavides.

He admitted that displacement of people “is something unavoidable in times of clashes because civilians really get scared.”

“Right now, we are taking care of them,” Lt Col Benavides said.

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