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Govt ready to relocate 2,600 families from Merapi's slopes

The Yogyakarta administration says it will soon permanently relocate 2,600 families from villages on the slopes of Mount Merapi that have been deemed unsafe. Yogyakarta Governor Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X said the administration has prepared six relocation sites for the displaced families, who were currently living in evacuation centers.

“In principle the six locations can be turned into permanent residences,” Hamengkubuwono said on Monday.

Hamengkubuwono added the relocation would be done after the Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry released its new map of Mt. Merapi's hazard zones and land use recommendations for the volcano's slopes next week.

“Officially we have not yet received the new map and the recommendations. We have only received an informal report during our coordination meeting,” Hamengkubuwono said.

Official recommendations were needed to prepare for post-eruption rehabilitation and reconstruction programs and to ready new spatial planning and policies for other regions, he added. The Governor said that the people would only be relocated with their approval.

“We will discuss this after all the displaced families move to their temporary homes. This way they will be able to think clearly about their future in the areas around Merapi,” Hamengkubuwono said.

Construction of the temporary homes has been scheduled to finish this month. Workers at some sites have been seen clearing fields as part of the preparations to build the houses.

The Volcanic Technology Development and Research Center's (BPPTK) office in Yogyakarta previously said that eight villages on the slopes of Mt. Merapi that were home to the displaced families were no longer safe for human habitation.

The villages were most likely to be directly hit by pyroclastic flows and volcanic effluvia when the volcano erupts again, according to the BPPTK. Mt. Merapi's last series of eruptions in October and November last year killed almost 400 people and displaced nearly half a million more in Yogyakarta and Central Java provinces.

The eight villages deemed unsafe were all in Cangkringan district, Sleman regency, Yogyakarta, where the 2,600 families resided before the eruption. The villages — Kinahrejo, Ngrangkah and Pangukrejo in Umbulharjo subdistrict; Petung, Kaliadem, Jambu and Kopeng in Kepuharjo subdistrict; and Kalitengah Lor in Glagaharjo subdistrict — have been completely devastated by pyroclastic flows and submerged by thick layers of ash after the eruptions.

In some areas piles of volcanic material dozens of meters high can still be seen, continuing to threaten the region with volcanic mudflows following heavy downpours. On the relocation plan, most residents said that had no objections.

“It's up to the government. For sure, my family and I no longer have the guts to live here,” Kimin, a resident of Petung village, said. Sugeng, whose village Kaliadem was completely covered by thick layers of volcanic materials, expressed a similar sentiment.

“What we are asking for is for us to still be allowed to cultivate our lands and cut grass in the area after being relocated so the wheel of economy here will keep rotating,” Sugeng said.