

Statement

Philippines - On Yolanda's Aftermath: They destroy, We suffer

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Capitalism is destroying the planet. Now we suffer.

The horror of devastations unleashed by monster-typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) upon eastern and central Philippine regions is unspeakable. As of writing, estimates on number of casualties and actual damages stay tentative since many areas remain isolated and communications, power, road and port systems are down.

Initial estimate made by the provincial government of Leyte and the regional police put the death toll to at least 10,000 as 70 to 80 percent of houses and structures along the typhoon's path were destroyed. In Tacloban City alone, city officials told the media that the death toll 'could go up' to 10,000 as people died en masse from surging tidal waves. As of the moment, we have yet to account for some of our party members, including the leader of the city's federation of tricycle drivers and operators. Another member, a newly-elected village official in another town of Southern Leyte, is still without contact. We just keep on hoping that they have survived the wrath of Haiyan. There is also little information on Eastern Samar towns where Haiyan made its first land fall from the Pacific.

Massive loss of lives and destruction is indeed beyond words to describe. The death toll is surely to climb up when actual rescue and retrieval operations reach the isolated areas. National and international aid are coming in but there will be definitely a catastrophic scarcity on most of essential needs such as food, water, power, housing and medicines as the national and local governments were caught unprepared to deal with the colossal impact of Haiyan. And we still have four or five more typhoons coming within this year, according to official weather forecasts.

The poor suffers the most

It is the poor, the army of low-income, unemployed and underemployed people, who suffer the most in every disaster. It is because they lack the means to protect themselves during calamities and the ability to survive and recover thereafter. Most of the poor, both in rural and urban areas, live in hazard zones (slums, riverbanks, creeks, coastlines, mountain slopes) which are prone to both

natural and man-made disasters. Their houses are made of light materials just enough to cover them from sunshine and rains and not for surging floods, landslides, or tidal waves. Moreover, the country's biggest employer, the agriculture sector, is also first to suffer from the impact of both La Niña (floods) and El Niño (long drought) which are now the common phenomenon due to climate change, endangering further the country's food security and employment opportunities.

Regrettably the poor don't even know why nature is so unkind to people, most especially to them. They have not been informed that today's wrath of nature is more man-made rather than which they usually consider as natural phenomenon. They have yet to understand that it was capitalism that exploited and destroyed this planet beyond its limits, creating in effect a destructive fusion of economic, social and climate crisis.

Philippines getting nature's wrath

The Philippines has the highest stake and the strongest case to bring before the on-going United Nation's Climate talks in Warsaw, Poland. Previous climate talks produced nothing as the process is dominated by developed countries which are known for committing something yet doing nothing. The timing is indeed 'tragically ironic', one writer has pointed out. The 19th Conference of Parties (COP) in Poland opened right after the Philippines was hit by the Earth's strongest typhoon in recent history, leaving thousands of dead from more than four million people who suffered from what scientists consider as a monster storm.

We welcome all international aid and solidarity work coming from Northern countries. This is the least they could do - put their one cent to climate emergencies such as the Philippines. But we demand more. We want climate justice. Capitalist countries must be held accountable for climate crisis. They must be forced to pay the climate debt they owe to poor nations.

Capitalist countries, we emphasize, were responsible for climate crisis. They emit more carbon to the atmosphere many times over what the poor countries do. It is the greenhouse gases emitted from capitalist industries which drove global temperature to rise to new levels. This causes climactic reactions like warmer and rising sea levels and which eventually lead to the formation of monster typhoons as in the case of Haiyan.

For over a century, capitalists profited from nature by monetizing it rather than in protecting its rich natural resource. And it is the poor people and poor nations who suffer the most from the climate crisis created by rich nations. The Philippines is among the topmost vulnerable countries. In fact we have suffered enough from devastating typhoons such as Frank (Fengshen, 2008), Ondoy (Ketsana, 2009), Sendong (Washi, 2011), Pablo (Bopha, 2012), and now Yolanda (Haiyan, 2013). The worst may yet to come.

State of corruption and free market

What makes the crisis more devastating is that Haiyan struck the Philippines when Filipinos are still reeling from recent earthquake that killed hundreds of people. The monster storm also came when Filipinos are fighting massive corruption scandals involving huge amount of public service funds. Corruption in the Philippines reduces the ability of both the national and local governments to respond to climate emergencies of this magnitude as billions of public funds are lost to official scams.

But more than that, the ruling class' full embrace of free market ideology since the 80's made poor people more vulnerable to present realities. They therefore are equally responsible and must be held accountable for the peoples' miserable condition. Neoliberalism made government rely completely on the private sector in creating employment. Public services such as water and power were privatized. Prices of goods and services were deregulated. These resulted to massive unemployment and underemployment (close to 30%). Social infrastructure and services are in poor state. Poverty incidence remains at 28 per cent while hunger incidence affects 19 per cent of the population.

Just imagine this number of poor people living in one of the country's poorest regions facing the wrath of super-typhoons. The post-Haiyan images would speak more of their miserable situation. They really are in dire need of immediate aid and rehabilitation. Many have already resorted to confiscations of available supplies in several stores and malls. We consider those as justified actions and much better if collectively organized to isolate criminal elements and individual push for survival. Where the government fails, the people should collectively rise up.

We therefore warn the government to avoid using force against our helpless people. The people need food, water and homes to stay, not a police force to quell their spirit to survive. In the first place, a government that fails to eradicate high level corruption has no justifiable reason to use force in supressing the peoples' desperate struggle for life.

P.S.

* <http://partidongmanggagawa2001.blogspot.fr/2013/11/statement-on-yolandas-aftermath-they.html>