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Philippines

The Philippines hit by Rai, a devastating super-typhoon

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The center of the Philippine archipelago was hit on 16 December by a super typhoon whose effects are particularly devastating. The Mihands solidarity network, partner of the ESSF association, immediately mobilized to bring emergency aid to some of the most affected provinces.

The Philippines are classified among the countries most exposed to climate change. The archipelago is notably swept away each year by about twenty violent tropical storms, of varying intensity, which sometimes give rise to stronger typhoons. They regularly destroy crops, housing and infrastructure in already poor regions. They are one of the main causes of humanitarian disasters, along with earthquakes and tsunamis or the current health crisis, as well as the displacement of people due to military operations in Mindanao.

It is important to understand what typhoons are and what the super typhoon Rai (named Odette in the Philippines) tells us about climate change and the aggravation of cyclonic or other extreme phenomena.

A typhoon (cyclone or hurricane [\[1\]](#)) produces strong winds and torrential rains, a formidable combination when it grows in size. At the beginning, it is usually only a tropical storm, more or less violent, but it can quickly turn into a proper typhoon. This is what happened during the night of 15 to 16 December 2021, when Rai, with a radius of action of about 400 kilometers, approached the Philippine archipelago and suddenly increased in intensity, reaching category 5/5 on the Saffir-Simpson scale [\[2\]](#), producing winds of 185 to 230 km/h. Ninth typhoon to have crossed the archipelago this year, it was only the second of this category.

Crossing the archipelago from east to west, it "landed" nine times on an island in the Philippines, decreasing continuously in intensity (down to category 2), but causing nevertheless extreme damage before reaching the open sea in the China Sea, where it underwent a new phase of rapid intensification to reach again category 5, sweeping over Vietnamese islands, while remaining quite far from the mainland. It exhausted itself as it moved northeastward, facing the dry winds of the Asian winter monsoon. Typhoon Rai was the 22nd cyclonic event and 9th typhoon of the year 2021 in the northwest Pacific.

What does Super Typhoon Rai tell us?

Rai testifies to the ongoing climate disruption. Let's leave, on this subject, the word to Meteo France [\[3\]](#) who noted the following peculiarities or anomalies about it:

"- It is a very late category 5 typhoon: it is the first category 5 typhoon in December since the super typhoon Nock-ten in 2016, passed in the Philippines at Christmas.

– Category 5 in the China Sea: it is very rare to reach this stage in the South China Sea (sea located between the Philippines, Vietnam, China and Indonesia). This is the third phenomenon in the modern era to reach this stage in the sub-basin, after Pamela in 1954 and Rammasun in 2014.

– Rai had a (false!) twin in the southern hemisphere... Indeed, the cyclone Ruby, which circulated around New Caledonia the [\[previous\]](#) week, was born at the same time as Rai. Both phenomena were born and strengthened on

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both sides of the equator at the same time, during an active phase of the Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO): this is an anomaly of strong convection (and therefore heavy rainfall) along the equator propagating from the western Indian Ocean to the Pacific. When it arrived east of New Guinea, it allowed the formation of convection zones conducive to the formation of cyclones. The cyclonic vortex on each side of the equator was also boosted by the passage at the same time of an equatorial Rossby wave, which circulates from east to west in the opposite direction to the MJO. (...).
"

In the Philippines, the cyclone season was basically over long ago: it is, in the archipelago, typically centered on a period of time from mid-August to mid-September, with the rainy season is running from June to October. The American NGO Center for Disaster Philanthropy noted that with its "arrival in mid-December (...) we can see that the 2021 season will have lasted all year in the areas bordering the Pacific" [\[4\]](#)

Before moving away via the Sulu Sea, Rai/Odette swept through the Visayas and the north/northeastern part of Mindanao: Bohol, the province of Cebu or Negros Occidental, Palawan, the municipality of Cagayan de Oro, Agusan del Sur, Surigao. Most of the victims lived in the province of Bohol, located in the Central Visayas, where residents consider it one of the most destructive cyclones in recent history. The devastation is reminiscent of that caused in 2013 by super typhoon Haiyan (called Yolanda in the Philippines), which would be a category 6, if it existed, without having its exceptional scale. However, where it remained stationary for a time, it caused particularly intense and deep damage.

According to recent estimations, in 11 regions, some 7.7 million people were affected by the super typhoon, which caused more than 400 deaths. More than a thousand people were injured and 78 are missing, half a million people have been displaced. According to the Philippine National Disaster Risk Reduction and Control Council (NDRRMC), some ten thousand villages were in the path of the typhoon, in more than 2,200 *barangays*, the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines; 1.2 million houses were destroyed.

A natural disaster of this magnitude means that entire areas are cut off, with communication routes impassable. That people are deprived of drinking water, food, shelter, access to health care..., that babies are deprived of milk other than breast milk. That one can die of diarrhea due to dehydration. That the infrastructure, the houses and buildings, schools and health centers, can be razed. In these conditions, when not supported by wealthy families living in other areas, the local population sinks into a deeper degree of poverty and destitution than ever before and may never recover.

Three weeks after Typhoon Rai struck southern and central islands of the Philippines, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) warned of a "mounting health crisis" in typhoon-hit areas as it scaled up its disaster response [\[5\]](#)

To make things worse in times of pandemics, in the refugee camps, where there is forced promiscuity, it is impossible to respect the basic protection measures (physical distancing, hand washing, etc.), while the Omicron variant has started to spread in the archipelago. Vaccination operations have been suspended by the authorities in the areas affected by the cyclone. The Philippines is one of the countries most severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in Southeast Asia.

The mobilization of the MiHands network

The MiHands network [\[6\]](#), based in Mindanao, includes some fifty associations, each specializing in a particular field of intervention (agriculture, small-scale production to ensure a stable income, health, peace processes, pediatrics,

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psychological support, etc.) or operating in a given region. This network is collectively mobilized in case of humanitarian emergency (climate disaster, armed conflicts...) to act together, combining their know-how. It is currently particularly involved in vaccination campaigns (against Covid, but not only).

Immediately after the passage of Typhoon Rai, the network mobilized to take stock of the situation in affected areas. For four days, electricity and cellular communications were cut off. On December 20, a small team was able to travel to Surigao, in northern Mindanao, and to the Caraga region in the northeast. The team initially came to assess the situation, but due to the extent of the devastation, they rush to prepare food and water shipments for disaster survivors without further delay.

The emergency action continued with, in addition to food aid, warm clothes, blankets, face masks, and other goods of daily use (hygiene kits...). It is now also planning in the long term, to initiate socio-economic rehabilitation, in the face of the loss of crops, the destruction of homes ..., as in the region of Caraga. Volunteers from Iligan, who were themselves victims of typhoon Sendong in 2011, are participating in the relief efforts.

The Mihands network, together with other movements, has launched an appeal for solidarity in the Philippines. The ESSF association is relaying this appeal on an international level and three thousand euros were already sent urgently at the beginning of January.

The solidarity networks must unfortunately act in a situation of insecurity linked to the multiple military conflicts in Mindanao, heightened by the economic crisis and the electoral campaign for the May 2022 elections, but also to a blind repressive policy of the Duterte regime. At least 21 journalists were killed in Mindanao in 2021. Security agents intimidate trade unionists and political opponents. The military and police have raided the offices of moderate unions such as the TUCP and SENTRO. The aim is to create a general climate of fear while the perpetrators of state crimes are assured of the impunity promised by the presidency.

Pierre Rousset

To send donations

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You can stay regularly informed via the [ESSF website](#) regarding the use of the solidarity fund.

Source [ESSF](#).

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[1] Hurricanes and typhoons are the same weather phenomenon: tropical cyclones (generic term). In the North Atlantic, central North Pacific, and eastern North Pacific, the term *hurricane* is used. The same type of disturbance in the Northwest Pacific is called a *typhoon*. Meanwhile, in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean, the generic term tropical cyclone is used.

[2] Established according to the strength of the winds

[3] Analysis posted on its site on December 20, 2020

[4] Quoted by Bruno Philip, "Aux Philippines, la violence du typhon Rai", *Le Monde* dated December 23, 2021.

[5] Agence France-Presse, 8 January 2022.

[6] Multi-Stakeholders Initiatives for Humanitarian Action against Disasters.