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Philippines

The storm Washi hits the Philippines: more than a thousand dead - an appeal for solidarity

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According to provisional numbers, the tropical storm Washi caused over a thousand deaths in the Philippines, mostly on the northern coast of the island of Mindanao. We appeal to your solidarity and ask for financial aid to the victims of this new catastrophe, in response to the call made by Ranaw Disaster Response and Rehabilitation Action Center, Inc (RDRRAC).

During the night of 16-17 December, the Philippine archipelago was hit by the tropical storm Washi (local codename: Sendong). According to official figures released on 21 December, there are already 1002 deaths. Hundreds more remain missing. The damage is considerable: roads are destroyed, infrastructure damaged, houses swept away...

Several hundreds of thousands people are without shelter and have been displaced. The evacuation centres are overcrowded. When people return home, it is first of all to look for loved ones that have been killed and to bury them... There is a shortage of drinkable water and the floods have spread pollution. There is a real risk epidemics might break out.

Two port cities situated on the northern coast of the large island of Mindanao were hit especially hard: Cagayan de Oro and Iligan. While the storm created large waves, enormous amounts of water rained down on the mountain-slopes.

According to meteorologists, this was the worse storm to hit this region since November 1958, more than half a century ago. It has also been one of the most lethal storms to hit the country. , In 2008, official statistics say that the storm Fengshen killed 938 people in the centre of the archipelago. In 1991, floods caused by the typhoon Thelma caused the death of 5000 people in Omoc City on the island of Leyte.

Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF) has been cooperating for several years with an activist network in Mindanao that brings together different NGO's, associations and popular movements. Among those is Ranaw Disaster Response and Rehabilitation Action Center, Inc. (RDRRAC). This network is especially strongly implanted and active in Iligan and immediately mobilized to organize emergency aid. At first communication was impossible, and it remains difficult, because of the damage to electricity networks and internet connections. We have to rely on information passed on by our contacts. On 20 December we received the following information:

'As far as I can remember, this was the first time towns like Iligan and Cagayan de Oro were hit like this by a tropical storm. This made the situation worse because when the warning was given that a particularly strong storm was coming, people didn't appreciate the gravity of the danger and didn't take serious precautions. Even more, the disaster came when the tide was high and during the night, shortly after midnight, when most of the people were sleeping. One of our members only managed to save her life because her dog woke up when the water entered the house where she was staying alone!'

'Torrents of rain fell down on the surrounding mountains. Parts of the slopes are covered with pineapple plantations, with little vegetation on the ground. On other parts there is little vegetation left because of deforestation. There was nothing to stop and absorb the large volumes of water which poured into the town, causing terrible damages.'

'The disaster hit more than half of the neighborhoods and villages of the city of Iligan. The villages on the river banks have been completely swept away. At least a third of the population has been directly affected: over a hundred thousand people. In many cases, entire families drowned and were swept into the sea. There is nobody left to report

them as missing.'

'Regarding members of my organization, two houses were completely destroyed by the floods and a dozen families lost all or part of their belongings, but at least no members have been killed. The same goes for about a hundred of activists of movements in which we take part, movements of urban poor, workers, drivers of jeepneys [a kind of public transportation] and peasants.'

'Our activist networks in the neighboring provinces immediately mobilized to bring aid. I was outside of Iligan and had difficulty entering the town because of the damage to roads and bridges. When I got there, the air stank with the smell of rotting corpses of animals and humans. Many of the killed were children or elderly people. Locating and identifying the bodies is going to be very difficult. There is not enough room in the morgues for all the remains.'

'We usually intervene in natural or human made catastrophes (military conflicts...). But this time, we ourselves were directly hit, our offices were hit, families of our members were affected. This was an unprecedented situation for us and it took us some time to get organized, we learned from the experience. But precisely because our organizations come from the affected areas and because they bring together - in this island torn by so-called communitarian conflicts - Christians, Muslims and members of the indigenous peoples living in Iligan, we can act efficiently and we have set to work. But we also need all possible assistance.'

It is important to respond to the appeal of RDRRAC, including by using Pay Pal. If necessary, it is also possible to address checks in euros to ESSF which will transfer the money.

Directly to RDRRAC

Donations (including using Pay Pal) can be made through this site: _ <http://rdrac.wordpress.com/donate>

Through ESSF

If you make a donation to ESSF, don't forget to specify it is for the Philippines.

Cheques in euros only can be sent to ESSF at:

ESSF
2, rue Richard-Lenoir
93100 Montreuil
France

Bank :

Crédit lyonnais
Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)
10 boulevard Chanzy
93100 Montreuil
France
ESSF, account n° 445757C

International account data:

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12
BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP

Name of the account holder: ESSF