United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

As delivered

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Press Remarks on the Philippines
Manila, 27 February 2014

Thank you very much and good morning everyone.

I am back in the Philippines. This is my third visit. I had the opportunity yesterday to return to parts of Eastern Visayas region that were devastated by Typhoon Haiyan and see for myself the progress that has been made since my visits in November.

Tacloban today is almost unrecognizable from the city I saw in November. Streets that were piled high with debris – making it very difficult for us to move – are now jammed with traffic. Numerous small businesses have also reopened. Children are back in schools that reopened at the start of the year. Women and men continue to make every effort to rebuild their lives. Fishermen from the coast in San José who had lost everything in the typhoon were hard at work rebuilding boats and elsewhere residents were hard at work at a wood processing plant turning downed coconut trees into market stalls. The early signs of recovery were visible everywhere.

I also went back to Guiuan, in Eastern Samar province. As you know, it was the first town hit by the typhoon as it came ashore on 8 November. Again, signs of the devastation are still evident but so too are heartening signs of progress. Markets are up and running. People are rebuilding. Debris clearance continues. And, again, I was able to see it for myself. Fishing is, of course, core to people’s livelihoods. In Guiuan, fishermen, with the support of NGOs, are looking at how to maintain their livelihoods while keeping their families a safe distance from the shoreline.

We always talk of the resilience of the people in the Philippines and I think I mentioned this when I was last here. They are very much leading the way in terms of recovery efforts and it is inspiring. But even as I saw progress, I saw how much remains to be done. Millions of people still require urgent assistance to rebuild their lives and livelihoods, and ensure that the gains that we have made thus far are not rolled back. Many in communities that were devastated are only now at the beginning of the difficult process of recovery.

In the coming nine months, the United Nations and our humanitarian partners here in the Philippines are prioritizing shelter and livelihoods programming, while continuing to provide the most vulnerable people with life-saving assistance and protection services.
We proved that we could make rapid progress in providing emergency shelter and assistance for people to rebuild their homes, but the outstanding needs for temporary shelter and permanent homes are enormous. The evacuation of people from tents and other shelters that collapsed when two storms passed through the affected area earlier this year underlines the urgency of finding long-term and durable solutions for affected families.

Livelihood needs are also huge. A million farmers in the [Eastern Visayas] region were affected when more than 33 million coconut trees were damaged or destroyed by the typhoon. Another 10 million trees were damaged and destroyed elsewhere in the affected areas. Once planted, however, coconut trees take 6 to 8 years to become fully productive. So again we need to look at how to support those communities in the meantime. Nearly two-thirds of fishing communities lost their productive assets, with 10,000 mainly small-scale fishing boats lost or destroyed and 20,000 damaged.

The Philippines authorities, including national and local government, UN agencies and non-governmental organizations, both national and international, and the Filipino people are to be commended for the pace of progress more than 100 days after the super typhoon struck. Once the bottlenecks and other obstacles were overcome in the first week of the response, the scale-up in delivery saved many lives and staved off what could have degenerated into a much worse humanitarian crisis. And our response as a UN was made more effective by the fact that this is a country, Government and people used to dealing with disasters so many structures were already in place.

In support of the Government-led response, the UN and partners provided food, medicine, water and sanitation and hygiene assistance. We distributed tents and tarpaulins so that more than 500,000 families would have some form of a roof over their heads and implemented emergency employment programmes that helped people get back on their feet and pumped money into local economies. We ensured that vulnerable people had access to protection services and farmers were able to go back to their fields in time to plant. During the emergency phase of the response, we helped to clear debris form 900 kilometres of roads in the affected areas and 400 kilometres of channels.

The Government, the UN and NGO partners must now continue to work together to do more so that the most vulnerable people are included in the recovery.

This morning, I met with representatives of the Philippines Government who reaffirmed their commitment to continuing to assisting the communities affected by Typhoon Haiyan through the Government’s multi-year Recovery Assistance Yolanda plan. The UN and humanitarian partners’ Strategic Response Plan for Typhoon Haiyan supports the first two phases of the Government’s plan – humanitarian relief and early recovery in the first twelve months.

Donors have very generously contributed towards the emergency relief phase of the Response Plan and the $788 million appeal is now 46 per cent funded. And I will continue to press donors for more resources for that plan.

We will also continue to forge stronger partnerships with the private sector, which looks for ways to support communities across the Philippines.
In the meantime, there are risks which we need to avoid. Major disease outbreaks were avoided in the first 100 days of the response, but more than 50 cases of dengue fever were confirmed in Eastern Visayas region this year. We need to continue assisting health authorities to ensure mitigation of outbreaks.

We will also continue to support survivors who mourn the loss of so many friends and loved ones. We are supporting the authorities to help survivors deal with the trauma of loss and ensure that the affected regions build back safer so that the next massive storm does not bring the terrible levels of devastation that we saw with Haiyan.

Thank you very much and I am very happy to take a few questions.