



ECOSOC Special Meeting

Response to Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) in the Philippines

16 December 2013, 10:00 – 13:00

INFORMAL SUMMARY

The Economic and Social Council convened a Special Meeting on “Response to Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) in the Philippines” on 16 December as a step to follow-up on the resolution on strengthening of ECOSOC (A/RES/68/1). The Meeting, organized by UN-DESA in collaboration with OCHA and UNISDR, drew attention to the international community’s response to Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) and explored ways to enhance coordination in response, rehabilitation, recovery and reconstruction/development efforts in its aftermath.

The meeting attracted high-level participation from Member States. The opening included an official welcome by His Excellency Ambassador Néstor Osorio, President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and Mr. Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) delivered by Mr. Navid Hanif, Director, Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination, (UNDESA). In a keynote address, H.E. Mr. Jose Rene D. Almendras, Cabinet Secretary of the Philippines, illustrated the destruction caused by Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) and provided an overview of the Government’s response. The UN system was represented by Ms. Valerie Amos (OCHA), Ms. Margareta Wahlström (UNISDR), Ms. Luiza Carvalho (UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator) and Mr. Nicholas Rosellini (UNDP). The Council also had an opportunity to interact with a representative of the civil society (Mr. Harold Brooks, Senior Vice President of International Operations, American Red Cross) and the private sector (Ms. Annie Garcia, President of SM Malls, the Philippines) on the response to the typhoon. Quite a number of delegations participated at the Ambassadorial level during the interactive dialogue.

Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) --a category 5 typhoon-- killed more than 6,000 people and displaced over four million people. Nearly one hundred thousand people were still in evacuation centres; the rest – 3.8 million –staying with friends and relatives. Total public and private property damages were estimated to be US\$ 586.4 million, and agricultural damages amounted to US\$1.8 billion, with 600,000 hectares of damaged farmland.

Both the Government of the Philippines and OCHA were praised for working closely with the international community to coordinate support and to avoid

duplication of efforts. UN Agencies, international NGOs and national civil society organizations have been working with Government line ministries following the cluster system, adopted by the Government and embedded in its legal system, to bring together relevant line ministries and entities for specific sectors, such as shelter, water and sanitation, health. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Principals, under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, activated a system-wide emergency at the highest level on 12 November, which helped prioritize the provision of additional staff, funds and other resources. Many countries, including Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Guyana, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Turkey and the United States, provided various forms of assistance and funding for the relief efforts in the Philippines.¹

The Strategic Response Plan (SRP) of humanitarian partners, which calls for US\$788 million, covering 12 months from the date of the disaster, has been designed to complement the Government's Reconstruction Assistance to Yolanda (Haiyan) (RAY) Plan for "building back better" --a 4-year plan to be launched on 18 December and foreseen to reach \$8.3 billion. In terms of thematic focus, the RAY focuses largely on resettlement, infrastructure, livelihoods and social development whereas the SRP provides continued emergency assistance and supports early recovery efforts, including food assistance and food production; provision of temporary shelter; restoration of livelihoods and emergency employment; enabling access to basic water, sanitation, hygiene and health services; and re-establishing community services, including access to education and protection services. The Government of the Philippines intends to conduct a Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA), commencing in January 2014, and the UN system expressed its readiness to support that process.

As of 16 December, more than 4.1 million people received food assistance, and over 162,000 households received help with emergency shelter including tarpaulins, tents, shelter repair kits, tools, cash and construction materials. Over 180 foreign and national medical teams brought emergency health aid and nearly 260 mobile clinics were functioning. Eight agencies established 75 Child Friendly Spaces across the affected regions, reaching more than 37,000 children.

Only 42 per cent of the SRP had been funded -- with the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia being the top donors. Private sector companies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been actively involved in co-designing and planning the delivery of cash transfer mechanisms in this response. Incentives for the private sector, such as tax credits or insurance packages, could help speed up the economic recovery.

The efforts of the Philippines to build national resilience, despite its complicated geography, frequent typhoons and high levels of poverty, were recognized. In general, while preparedness, early warning systems and legislative frameworks have improved in many countries, more work needed to be done, in particular

¹ For the latest on funding and other forms of support, please visit <http://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=emerg-emergencyDetails&appealID=1043>
<http://www.gov.ph/faith/>

addressing the underlying issues, such as governance, planning and land use, poverty and lack of protection of ecosystems, and applying the lessons learned from the past. Early warning systems, together with simplified scientific language, were critical in saving people's lives. Other issues raised included the role of local leadership, the use of technology in relief, recovery and reconstruction efforts, and civilian capacity gaps. The need to underscore the importance of social inclusion and equity in implementing recovery programmes was also emphasized.

The reconstruction phase was considered to be the most difficult. Consultation with local communities and local authorities was imperative for the sustainability of reconstruction efforts. The principles of "building back better" and of strengthening the ability of communities to cope with more frequent and possibly comparable disasters needed to be applied. One key message was that humanitarian efforts should be linked to long-term development agenda.

Expectations are high with regard to the 2014 International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in Samoa, the 2014 Climate Summit in New York, the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015 in Japan and the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, which many view as key opportunities for addressing issues related to natural disasters.

The Economic and Social Council will convene a follow-up meeting to assess lessons learned in 2014.