

Testimony by
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before the
House Foreign Affairs Committee
**Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International
Organizations**
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On behalf of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), I would like to thank the Subcommittee for this opportunity to testify on the United States' Post-Typhoon Response in the Philippines.

Catholic Relief Services is the official humanitarian organization of the Catholic community in the United States. It operates in nearly 100 countries, without regard to race, creed, or nationality, to address food security, agriculture, HIV and AIDS treatment, health, education, civil society capacity building, emergency relief, and peace building. CRS has an active emergency response program, providing humanitarian relief after recent floods, earthquake, and typhoons. CRS also prepares communities to reduce to their risk to natural disasters.

Catholic Relief Services' program in the Philippines is our oldest continuously operating country program. Prompted by the mass destruction and loss of life in the Philippines during World War II, CRS first launched relief efforts in that country in 1945. Today, CRS focuses on agro-enterprise and peace building programs around the country, and had most recently responded to the earthquake in the Bohol province in October 2013. Due to our ongoing presence in the Philippines and our extensive partner network, we were able to prepare teams that were ready to respond to Haiyan and its aftermath.

As you know, super-typhoon Haiyan made its first landfall in eastern Samar Island in the early morning hours of November 8th with wind speeds of 195 mph, making it the strongest storm in history at the time of landfall. An estimated 13.2 million Filipinos have been affected by the catastrophic storm that claimed thousands of lives and leveled homes, towns and entire cities, and 3.4 million who lived directly in the typhoon's path are now internally displaced.

As we respond to immediate shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene needs, CRS has already reached more than 16,000 households. CRS appeals for continued support for early and long term recovery activities that will ensure households' ability to quickly recover, have a safe and durable home, access to basic services and re-establish livelihood opportunities. We will use the lessons learned from Haiti and previous disaster response efforts to ensure that local institutions and knowledge are drawn upon to help create sustainable solutions for recovery. Lastly, we will continue to help Filipinos and Philippine institutions build their resiliency so that communities, households, and individuals can be better prepared for events like Haiyan in the future.

Preparation: Before the storm hit, CRS prepared by allocating funding from our emergency reserves and pre-positioning stocks of supplies for shelter needs. We readied staff to

perform assessments, coordinating with our local partners, including Caritas Philippines, the Diocese of Borongon and Archdiocese of Palo. CRS staff arrived one day after the storm passed, and began assessing needs, despite travel being extremely slow due to roads clogged with debris.

Needs: Our assessment found that people's most urgent needs included shelter, water, hygiene and sanitation, and food. As we meet these needs, large amounts of debris still keep families from returning to their homes, and pose public health threats if not addressed soon.

Response: CRS continues to respond in partnership with the local Catholic Church to meet the needs of 500,000 people in the most devastated areas in and around Palo, Ormoc and Eastern Samar. We have committed over \$23 million for this urgent response, with \$15.5 million collected from private funding of foundations and private donors. We are coordinating our response with the UN clusters and US Government, and much of work is funded with the generous support of the US Government, especially the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

Currently, our programs focus on the immediate needs for shelter, water, and sanitation. We are working with limited access to the places in most need, but have chartered planes and are using waterways to get to the most vulnerable communities. Many were living exposed to the elements, facing rain for days after the typhoon. Therefore we provided emergency shelter kits including durable, long-lasting tarps which can withstand various weather conditions and nails to fasten to an A-frame, which can be made from salvaged materials or coconut lumber. This design was created with community input, and has been adopted by the entire UN shelter cluster responding to the emergency.

To meet immediate water needs, we are distributing water purification tablets as part of hygiene and sanitation kits, which is essential to protect against sickness and disease. CRS has also installed water bladders in affected communities with little or no water supply, where we prioritize proximity to vulnerable groups—including women, children, elderly, and persons with disabilities. Water for these tanks is trucked in and treated for purification as needed.

We are also helping supply people with their everyday needs, such as soap, blankets, and cooking supplies. While local markets are closed, these supplies are available from markets in cities untouched by the typhoon. CRS is evaluating providing cash to families so they can buy their own supplies, which can both revive local markets and provide essential items to those in need.

Lastly, we are working with communities to clear debris to prevent a further public health disaster, such as widespread diarrhea or water borne diseases such as leptospirosis. CRS is providing "Cash for Work" support to 15,000 people to clean their neighborhoods, reducing the risk of disease, while providing income to those who have lost their jobs due to the storm.

Focus on the most vulnerable, women and girls: The immediate time after a disaster often puts women and girls especially at risk of exploitation and sexual or gender based violence. We include elements of protection in all of our post-typhoon work. In Palo and Tanuan, we are reducing the need to create camps by helping families remove debris and construct or repair their

houses. This "sheltering on site" helps to keep families within their neighborhoods, rather than making women and girls more vulnerable in camp settings. We are also segregating latrines that we build to ensure that women and girls are not waiting until dark for open defecation, which can increase their risk of victimization. We included flashlights in the household kits we are distributing, and have located our water tanks in public areas to minimize risks to women and girls. We also continually consult women and girls to ensure provisions are adequately made for their privacy and needs, soliciting their feedback on the usefulness of all activities towards the realities they face.

The road forward: As we meet immediate needs, we are already preparing to move into the "recovery" phase, to help those affected families start to rebuild their lives. We are focusing on rebuilding homes, ensuring continued water and sanitation needs are met, and helping to rebuild livelihoods. All of these activities will be done with an eye on building resilience, so that households and communities are better prepared to face future crisis. CRS is also working directly with the local governments, including the Department of Social Welfare and Development to engage strategically on shelter reconstruction, and attend coordination meetings that are chaired by the provincial governments. CRS also continues to work with local partners such as the Church, to ensure that they can better respond in the future.

One of the lessons we learned from Haiti was that we needed to "build back better" to ensure that people do not remain vulnerable to similar future disasters. CRS is preparing to help restore permanent shelter to families, providing them with the resources and technical assistance necessary to build safe and durable houses, while using local knowledge of safe sites for building, and incorporating disaster risk reduction components to the program. We are also building semi-permanent latrines using cash and voucher mechanisms, which have proven to be more efficient, while also incorporating sanitation messages. These low cost interventions have shown high impact.

More than one-third of the Philippines' labor force depends on agriculture for their livelihoods, and coconut production was a major income source in Leyte and Samar, where over 50% of the crop was destroyed in the most affected areas. Coconuts require a minimum of five years to harvest, therefore farmers will need to diversify their livelihoods to meet their immediate needs. Over the longer-term, farmers will need assistance to restore their main coconut crop, which will require restoring assets such as seeds, fertilizer and tools, as well as technical support along the value chain and linkages to the private sector. In order to protect against future disasters, we will focus on disaster risk reduction activities to help build resilience against recurring weather events in the future, such as training communities to prepare for disasters and creating early warning systems for evacuation.

Recommendations: We commend the US Government for its good work in the Philippines, including the military's rapid assistance with logistics and OFDA's immediate commitment and willingness to support the response. As we move into the stages of recovery and rebuilding, we would encourage the US Government to lead the establishment of a donor forum to raise the necessary resources to help the Philippines rebuild, while promoting coordination between humanitarian and development funding streams. We would also continue

to encourage the US Government's ongoing robust response, which depends on critical funding for poverty focused international assistance.

Second we urge the US Government to work with local and international civil society, and local and national government, to take the long view, providing the necessary support and funding to help those in the Philippines truly rebuild. CRS itself has committed \$40 million to support rebuilding Philippines over the next three to five years, working alongside the affected populations which have shown an impressive energy for self-recovery and rebuilding. We would encourage the USG to develop and fund a long-term recovery program. This would include dedicated funds for *disaster risk reduction* since the Philippines continually ranks as one of the most disaster prone countries in the world. Without proper protection, development gains will be lost by disasters, ultimately leaving the country poorer. Funding for disaster risk reduction should be focused and dedicated, rather than drawing from funds for other aspects of the recovery.

Lastly, the long term strategy must not only rebuild houses and livelihoods, but also build resilience in individuals, households and communities in an integral way so that their vulnerability to these extreme weather situations will be reduced and their ability to bounce back, improved. The USAID mission should provide leadership in the strategic objective to build resilience, reducing the need and cost of humanitarian assistance in the future. This requires broadening our scope to strengthen systems and structures, which takes time, money and most importantly, political will.

While the devastation of Haiyan has been compared to the earthquake in Haiti, we have much to build on in terms of strong Filipino government structures, a functioning and vibrant civil society, the connections of its diaspora, and the support of the American and International community. We encourage the US Government to plan for long-term investments for a full recovery, and the appropriate resources dedicated to this effort. We encourage the continued support and leadership of the US government, and look forward to continued partnership in helping the Philippines rebuild together.