



World Vision

Building a better world for children

**Testimony by
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December 3, 2013**

**Before the
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and
International Organizations
House Committee on Foreign Affairs**

Regarding the United States' Post-Typhoon Response in the Philippines

INTRODUCTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this hearing and for inviting World Vision to testify. For years you have worked tirelessly on behalf of vulnerable people around the world, especially children. You have led important legislation aimed at protecting children in the United States and around the world, prioritizing initiatives designed to strengthen child protection systems. An essential element has been recognizing that children caught up in emergencies are significantly less vulnerable when responses strive to rebuild the informal and formal systems meant to protect children and their families. Congressional oversight can help strengthen the efforts of the U.S. Government and humanitarian community and Congressional engagement. This hearing offers a timely opportunity to examine how efforts to date address the needs and aspirations of the disaster-affected families in the post-typhoon context.

My name is Chris Palusky. I am the Senior Director of Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs for World Vision U.S. and I have been responding to humanitarian emergencies in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Europe for more than 15 years. World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organization serving millions of children and families in nearly 100 countries. Our 45,000 employees are dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities to tackle the root causes of poverty and injustice. This work includes emergency relief and preparedness for people impacted by natural disasters and armed conflict; long-term economic development; prevention and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children; mobilizing children, youth, and local communities to hold their governments accountable; and advocating for effective systems and laws that can provide a safety net and protection for vulnerable populations.

World Vision has more than one million private donors, in every state and Congressional district. We partner with over 16,000 churches in the United States, as well as corporations and foundations. This disaster has highlighted the vital role of private resources in disaster response. The American public has generously funded almost all of the World Vision U.S. response to Typhoon Haiyan, including \$6.3 million from individuals and \$1.6 million from companies like Eli Lilly, JP Morgan Chase, the NBA, Pfizer, Proctor & Gamble, Royal Caribbean, and TripAdvisor. Cargo space donated by Boeing and Philippine Airlines enabled us to send 40,000 pounds of relief supplies. We are part of the federation of World Vision International, which last year implemented more than \$2 billion in programming aimed at helping children and communities. This included responding to 87 major disasters and humanitarian emergencies worldwide, reaching 10.3 million people impacted by these crises. The \$8.3 million World Vision U.S. has raised is part of the \$23 million the World Vision partnership has so far raised globally for this disaster.

World Vision has been working in the Philippines for more than 55 years. Of our 593 local staff, 138 of them are solely responding to the typhoon. Additionally, 40 members of the World Vision global partnership have been deployed to assist with response efforts, including staff from World Vision U.S. Prior to the typhoon, World Vision had programs in eight of the affected provinces. We are now undertaking emergency response activities in Aklan, Antique, Iloilo, Capiz, Cebu, Bohol, Leyte, and Western Samar provinces. We have also established a medium-term operational hub in Cebu.

In this emergency, we have prioritized providing shelter, food, clean water, non-food items (such as cooking sets, mosquito nets, blankets, plastic mats, can openers), opportunities to earn income, health services and goods like medicines, and child protection. We have so far reached 62,900 people impacted by the typhoon. We plan to reach 400,000 people, the equivalent of 80,000 families, our largest emergency response ever in the Philippines.

Other witnesses have described the current, overall humanitarian situation. Because World Vision is a child-focused organization, today I will focus on the particular needs and vulnerabilities of children. I will also provide context for World Vision's recommendations on how the U.S. Government can ensure lessons learned from recent, comparable disasters like Haiti are operationalized in the context of this disaster. These recommendations can also help frame ongoing Congressional oversight and engagement. We recommend that the U.S. Government:

- **Implements throughout the response its requirements that protection needs and concerns, focusing on the “safety, dignity, and rights” of people impacted by a disaster, must be fully integrated into U.S. Government-funded disaster assistance.** Integrating will ensure the most vulnerable people – like children, women and girls, the elderly, and people with disabilities – are protected, their needs are met, and they have access to appropriate services and essential information. Integrating protection at all phases, rather than retroactively, will be more effective and less difficult and costly. The protection requirements were developed collaboratively with NGOs following the Haiti earthquake, an excellent example of U.S. Government-NGO partnership.
- **Ensures the Government of the Philippines, NGO partners, the United Nations, and other key entities, engage and collaborate with people impacted by the disaster from the start to the finish of the response, especially to identify their assistance and protection needs and ensure they are met.** Meaningful participation of affected people is essential to the success of programs and can help prevent unanticipated harm. For participation to be meaningful, all groups, including the most vulnerable, are consulted and engaged, as appropriate. All groups also must be engaged at all stages of the response, including assessments, design, and implementation and monitoring.
- **Puts children, and their best interests, at the center of the U.S. response, including by supporting initiatives to:**
 - Urgently scale up and implement a comprehensive registration program of children, coupled with family tracing and reunification efforts when children are separated and/or unaccompanied children are found.
 - Monitor alternative care arrangements for separated and/or unaccompanied children to ensure they are in safe and emotionally nourishing environments. Children should only be placed in homes that have been properly screened and meet international child protection standards associated with alternative care arrangements.
 - Restore schools, because schooling is critical for enable children to return to a life of relative normality. The U.S. Government can help the Philippine government, and other donors, prioritize the clearing of rubble from collapsed schools. We call for the humane relocation of people currently living in school buildings and yards, according to international standards on relocation of disaster-affected people, especially regarding informed consent. Caution may be needed when planning to establish temporary schools near spontaneous or informal settlements, as these arrangements could inadvertently entrench communities in areas unsuitable for long-term habitation.
 - Increase training in minimum standards of child protection for national police and other security personnel. There may also be a need to increase the number of dedicated child protection officers present in Tacloban and other key areas of the response.
- **Prioritizes the needs, including protection needs, of women and girls, by supporting initiatives to:**
 - Develop a comprehensive plan to improve security for women and girls, with the cooperation of national police and other security structures, especially in evacuation centers where poor lighting and crowding may increase incidents of sexual and other forms of violence where women and girls are especially at-risk.

- Create opportunities for women, especially women-headed households, to earn a living. This will require addressing childcare needs so that women can more fully participate. Engaging child protection initiatives will be critical, so that older children, especially girls, are not inadvertently removed from schooling and other initiatives.
- **Commits to immediate and short-term relief that lasts as long as is necessary, happens concurrently with recovery activities, and is fully funded.**
- **Monitors and pushes for needs-based access to aid, services, and economic opportunities, and against the corruption and cronyism that is often a risk, regardless of where in the world a disaster occurs.**

World Vision looks at this massive disaster through the lens of lessons learned from the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and 2010 earthquake in Haiti. We and others in the humanitarian community pledged to apply these lessons when we next responded to a major disaster, like Typhoon Haiyan. The principal finding flagged in the post-disaster reports was that meaningfully engaging and collaborating with disaster-affected people, from the very beginning of the response, is vital to ensure their protection and assistance needs are adequately addressed. An equally important conclusion was the imperative to provide timely information to impacted people about services. In the Philippines, World Vision has implemented these findings by ensuring that a community accountability manager works closely with a protection specialist. We also review information, complaints, and feedback mechanisms, to ensure they are functioning and to identify where these systems may need strengthening.

HEALTH, WATER AND SANITATION

As emergency food, water, and medical supplies continue to make their way to the survivors of Typhoon Haiyan, we are concerned that these communities may now face the threat of an outbreak of deadly infectious diseases.

Infectious diseases often create a second wave of disaster after a natural disaster – something we saw in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake response. Lack of shelter and continued bad weather can lead to widespread acute respiratory infections, which the Philippine’s Department of Health officials say are becoming the biggest public health threat since the typhoon. Medical authorities also worry about leptospirosis, a water-borne parasitic disease endemic in the Philippines, and diseases that thrive in tropical, unsanitary environments like cholera, typhoid fever, dengue fever, dysentery and other infections that spread easily through crowded evacuation centers and shelters. Diarrhea outbreaks are a concern as well because of the typhoon’s impact on access to clean water and proper sanitation and hygiene. Many of these diseases disproportionately impact, and can even be deadly for, children under five who are often more vulnerable due to malnutrition, stage of development, and other factors.

The collapse in sanitation, shortages of fresh water, and inability of emergency health teams to respond quickly because of typhoon damage and other extraordinary challenges, exacerbate any disease outbreak when it occurs. While the response to Typhoon Haiyan is appropriately focused on meeting the basic needs of survivors, transitioning to a properly phased and effective recovery stage will be important. Elements of this include: rebuilding the health infrastructure of community and provincial providers; ensuring equitable access to a safe water supply and sanitation; and reducing crowding in evacuation centers and shelters through alternative and more durable ‘shelter in place’ solutions. Collectively, these measures are critical to protecting against and responding to potential outbreaks of deadly diseases. In an effort to integrate child protection assistance across sectors such as health, water, and sanitation, we teach children in the Child Friendly Spaces basic hygiene and nutrition.

CHILD PROTECTION

We have learned through our many decades of involvement with relief efforts like this that one of our first priorities must be providing a safe place for children. So World Vision has set up Child Friendly Spaces in two of the most heavily damaged areas, Cebu and Estencia. A Child Friendly Space is a structured, safe place where communities create nurturing environments in which children – particularly separated or unaccompanied children – can access psychosocial support, structured and unstructured play and leisure, learning, educational activities, key health and hygiene messages, and skills to address their distress and risk. In the Philippines, this includes education to prevent any form of abuse or exploitation, including human trafficking, that children could face in the aftermath of the storm. Child Friendly Spaces are developed to strengthen the resilience and coping mechanisms of children and to contribute to a restored sense of normality, continuity, and inclusion. They simultaneously mobilize community resources and support around child wellbeing and empower parents and primary caregivers to provide for their children. This reduces risks of secondary separation, child trafficking, child labor, sexual exploitation, and other child protection concerns. Where we have Spaces, we plan to do rapid tracing of and follow-up with unaccompanied and separated children software UNICEF has developed.

We currently have seven Child Friendly Spaces in typhoon-hit areas serving 1,800 vulnerable children and we are working hard to scale up to 40 of these Spaces and reach 18,400 at-risk children with them.

Child Friendly Spaces complement school activities where formal schools exist and can be the basis to start formal schools where formal schools are absent. For example, tents for the Spaces are being used as classrooms in locations where classroom blocks are completely destroyed. Notably, the majority of schools have at least lost their roofs and the materials inside them have been damaged beyond repair. As part of the education-focused element of our response, we will provide direct support to schools, like school kits and learning materials. We are combining Child Friendly Spaces with our catch-up program, which is a tutorial program to help struggling learners, so that we can reach as many children as we can in areas where schools are close. Getting children back to school as soon as possible is one of the most important means to protect children from abuse, exploitation, and neglect, and minimize the disruption to their education.

There is a strong relationship between the exploitation of children and lack of opportunities for adults to earn sufficient income. Prior to the typhoon, NGOs including World Vision, and multi-lateral institutions like the UN and International Labor Organization had already identified the affected provinces in the Philippines as having over three million children engaged in child labor (including farm work, fishing, scavenging, and even sexual exploitation). Because of the typhoon, sources of income for over 5.6 million men and women in nine regions have been destroyed, lost, or disrupted. Moreover, most schools are destroyed and/or closed and the need for basic services is at a critical point. **It is urgent to engage and work with vulnerable children and families now to ensure that their desperation does not lead to the exploitation of children in exchange for money, food, or medicine.** One indicator that World Vision will monitor is the proliferation of online, explicit images of children from the Philippines. Prior to the typhoon, INTERPOL, the Department of Homeland Security's child exploitation unit, and the Virtual Global Taskforce (a coalition of law enforcement agencies from around the world), identified the Philippines as a hub for explicit images and videos (mostly in the form of Skype chats) of children. As communities return online, we have asked law enforcement bodies that track these images to see if

there are a number of new images of concern from the Philippines. If we see such an increase, it will show we are not reaching the most vulnerable and that children are at risk of exploitation. Already there are troubling signs showing the dangers of moving too quickly from an emergency phase to a recovery phase. Just last week, Filipino authorities arrested two men in Tacloban for human trafficking as the men tried to take a 16 year old girl onto a flight to Manila. The incident reminds us all that it is imperative to meet basic needs, and commit to protecting children, particularly during this critical period. Since it will take time to rebuild livelihood, it is imperative that every vulnerable person, especially children, have a safe place to go in the meantime where their needs can be met.

As the recovery continues, the international community must prioritize strengthening existing formal and informal child protection mechanisms at the community and local government levels. This includes reactivating and supporting local child protection councils, especially to address the needs of children separated from parents. It is encouraging that the Filipino government is taking the risk to children seriously. After years of U.S.-led pressure and assistance to take on the issue of child sex and labor trafficking, we are seeing the Filipino national police and Department of Social Welfare and Development focusing so much more on preventing child exploitation. Department of Social Welfare and Development staff who were monitoring buses, planes, and all other forms of transportation leaving the city of Tacloban, identified the two men arrested last week for child trafficking. These kinds of systems are crucial in this current phase and should be developed in tandem with other vital services. Referrals systems are being established and World Vision will be part of an inter-agency system so that we are best able to refer children and other vulnerable people to specialized agencies as-needed.

Addressing primary health care and restoring child protection systems should not be seen as mutually exclusive, either-or choices when funding decisions are made. The wellbeing of children cannot be ensured if sanitation is poor, clean water supplies are inadequate, and diseases threaten the lives of children. Families faced with such dire circumstances are pushed to move from crowded shelters and thus risk homelessness or breaking up the family unit, with older children sent off to other parts of the country to work. This is one of many reasons World Vision has been distributing shelter kits (including tents, tarps, rope) to meet immediate need and plans to do permanent shelter reconstruction and rehabilitation at the recovery stage. Where families remain in damaged houses, material support like toolkits and repair materials, local procurement and salvaged materials will be prioritized to maximize local economic benefit. If and when families are relocated from evacuation centers and other temporary shelters, it is essential that relocation be voluntary and consistent with Filipino law and international laws and standards.

Examples from our response of accountability, consultation, and integration of protection, include:

- Ensuring all our distributions are in safe locations and during the safest time of the day for travel. We also monitor our distribution sites and access routes for safety and do post-distribution assessments to identify and address any protection concerns. All of our distribution staff have been trained on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and signed the related child protection policy, to ensure we maximize protection.
- Identifying and prioritizing groups that are most vulnerable to the effects of disasters.
- Consulting with children, community leaders, and women on safety issues and the selection of volunteers.
- Using existing community watch groups we helped set up in areas we were working pre-disaster to update us on the people and schools we had been serving and help with distributions.

- Conducting rapid needs assessments within three days after the disaster and including questions about whether people had received sufficient information about aid initiatives and available services. We also asked about how they preferred to receive information, to ensure we communicate with communities based on their preferred and trusted sources (our initial assessment suggest that communities prefer to receive information via community and local government leaders, and so we have prioritized working closely with these leaders). From our first distributions, we established mechanisms to provide information. These included banners in local language with pictures and using megaphones to ensure people had the information they needed. Complaint and feedback mechanisms have been in place at each distribution sites. These include help desks, a focal point, and phone numbers to text/call.
- Ensuring our Humanitarian Accountability Team is working with sector, operational, and zonal staff to ensure that all our programming includes providing information and having complaint mechanisms. Assessment data from our operational area reflect that. So, we will certainly be working closely with these groups to communicate with our beneficiaries.
- Adjusting our information sharing and feedback mechanisms as the response goes on to ensure that especially vulnerable groups, like people with disabilities, have access to information, and that there is strong accountability, engagement, collaboration, and communication, with affected people.

NEED PHASED AND CALIBRATED TRANSITION FROM EMERGENCY TO RECOVERY

World Vision supports efforts to bring typhoon-affected families in the Philippines back to self-sufficiency, with a phased and carefully calibrated restoration of livelihoods. We also call for critical primary health care systems to be rebuilt and schooling to resume: both contribute to the well-being and protection of children. However, pivoting too soon from the emergency phase to early recovery could adversely impact the most vulnerable people, including separated and/or unaccompanied children, children under the age of five, women who are either pregnant or lactating, the elderly, and people with disabilities. The Haiti earthquake response reminded us that ongoing, targeted emergency assistance is critical for the immediate to short-term and should continue until markets are restored and families have widespread, consistent access to cash (when there are cash-for-work initiatives and too few people have access to them, there can be inflation and cost increases). Haiti also showed relief should happen concurrently with recovery efforts aimed at returning people to fullness of life. For recovery to be successful and sustainable, disaster-affected communities must actively participate in identifying and determining the priorities, scope, and scale of it.

CONCLUSION

When we learn from experiences like previous disasters, we can leave the lessons in reports or make them real. We know what works: implementing protection throughout the duration and aspects of a response rather than retroactively, authentically engaging and involving communities, prioritizing children, women, and girls, getting the relationship between relief and recovery right, establishing excellent systems of information-sharing and feedback, ensuring a needs-based approach, and being vigilant against corruption. With knowing comes the responsibility of doing.

Mr. Chairman, as you saw, the Filipino people are remarkably resilient. They are prepared to shoulder whatever is needed to rebuild their communities and their lives. The need is tremendous but we can give hope to the 13.2 million people who were impacted by Typhoon Haiyan, more than five million of whom are children. America and the Philippines are rightfully proud of the longtime friendship between our countries. May our response be worthy of this friendship.