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## **“The U.S. Post-Typhoon Response in the Philippines: Health and Human Rights Issues”**

*Excerpts of Remarks by Chairman Chris Smith  
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and Int’l Orgs.  
2172 Rayburn HOB  
December 3, 2013*

Nearly one month ago, the deadliest typhoon ever to hit South East Asia devastated portions of the Philippines, including the islands of Leyte, Samar and Cebu. With sustained winds of 155 miles per hour, Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda reached as high as 270 miles per hour at one brief point. The storm surge reached a maximum height of 40 feet. It is the deadliest Philippine typhoon on record, killing more than 5,600 people. Another 1,759 are listed as missing. Approximately 26,000 were injured. Yolanda is also the strongest storm ever recorded at landfall, and unofficially the fourth strongest typhoon ever recorded in terms of wind speed. Philippines Foreign Secretary Alberto Del Rosario told us the storm was “three and a half times the size of Katrina.”

Last week, I led a congressional delegation to the Philippines to witness the devastation unleashed by Typhoon Haiyan—known locally as Typhoon Yolanda—and to gain a better understanding of the unmet needs going forward.

Joined by my distinguished colleagues Trent Franks and Al Green—and staff director Greg Simpkins and counsel Piero Tozzi—we were unanimous in our deep respect and abiding gratitude for the accomplishments of the U.S. military, USAID leaders, and NGOs on the ground including Catholic Relief Services—who alone has committed over \$20 million to assist victims. For their part, the Philippine military was also playing a vital role along with the remnants of local governing bodies.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm—right up until arrival—highly motivated U.S. service members brought desperately needed supplies, including food, water, medicine, and housing materials by the planeload to the ruins of Tacloban, with homeless, destitute victims—over 19,000 and counting—hitching flights back to Manila for safety and shelter.

As was the case after the 2004 tsunami, the United States deployed an aircraft carrier—this time the USS George Washington—and other major military assets to provide assistance. Smart, rapid response combined with unique airlift capability has made all the difference in the world.

In the Philippines, I had the privilege of meeting Col. Eric Mellinger, Chief of Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Expeditionary Force. I nominated Eric to the Academy in 1982—and it was clear watching him in action that he has earned extraordinary respect. His leadership—and that of Generals Kennedy and Wissler—ensured that a desperate, shell-shocked population of victims got immediate, tangible help. Every Marine we saw, including three from New Jersey—Lance Cpl. Anthony Pellegrini, Lance Cpl. James Soccodato, and Lance Cpl. Michael Nappa—was working around the clock to protect victims. “Sleep—what’s that?” one Marine told me with a smile. “We’re saving lives.”

Al Dwyer, Principal Regional Advisor for East Asia and the Pacific at the USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Relief said “when the U.S. hit the ground things got moving...this was a model response...we saved lives here—I know that for a fact.” The cooperation and teamwork of the military and disaster assistance leaders from USAID, including Jeremy Konyndyk—Director of the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance—who traveled with us, the NGO community, and Philippine officials was a textbook example of how disaster assistance ought to be done. But of course the relief efforts are far from over. The emergency phase has matriculated into recovery.

With Donal Reilly from Catholic Relief Services, our delegation visited a sanitation kit distribution at a local parish church, and received a briefing from Mayor Remedios Petilla of Palo—whose daughter Jessica Petilla is a medical doctor in New Jersey—and met with numerous survivors who told us heartbreaking stories yet radiated a calm and inner peace. One man told us how his father drowned only a few feet from where we stood and how he had stoically carried many waterlogged dead bodies to a mass grave. He said he nearly collapsed emotionally however when he carried the lifeless body of a three year-old girl. He said he just broke down, overwhelmed, and felt he could continue no more. Yet amazingly, a few hours later, there he was—determined to rebuild and overcome and full of faith in God.

That resiliency was best summed up by Archbishop Jose Palma of Cebu who said “the Typhoon was the strongest in the world...but our faith in the Lord is even stronger...no calamity or natural devastation can quench the fire of our hope. The Filipino soul is stronger than Yolanda.”

Enroute from Tacloban to Manila aboard a C130 commanded by Major Jason Kauffman, our plane was diverted to seek the whereabouts and rescue of a helicopter that crashed into Manila Bay. After a flawless, just above the deck, systematic search for survivors in the water—kind of like looking for a needle in a haystack—the pilot spotted two individuals, opened the back end of the C130, and kicked out a yellow life raft to two lifejacketless swimmers. With night darkness fast approaching, it was clear that their lives had been saved. Aboard was the crew’s superior officer, Colonel John Peck, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Expeditionary Brigade Chief of Staff, along with copilot Captain Kim and Crewmasters MSgt. Holdaway, Sgt. Weins, Cpl. Oliver, and LCpl Lopez.

Back in Manila, we had productive meetings with both the Health Minister Enrique Ona and Secretary of Foreign Affairs Albert del Rosario. Matt Bohn, Resident Country Director of the Millennium Challenge Corporation told us that roads that had been constructed pursuant to a \$435 million 5-year MCC grant had been only minimally damaged but had provided—after debris removal—an additional artery for humanitarian aid.

We also met with a plethora of NGOs and UN agencies. Our interest was not only in seeing how effective our emergency aid coordination has been throughout it all, but going forward where our assistance ought to be directed in the medium- and long-term. We felt that two areas deserved special attention: preventing or addressing potential epidemics and minimizing human trafficking.

It normally takes two to three weeks for a marked increase in disease prevalence after a natural disaster such as the typhoon, but international health experts on the scene told us that dengue fever already was endemic in the storm-ravaged areas and could increase four- to five-fold in the coming weeks. In addition to dengue fever, cholera, hepatitis A, typhoid fever, leptospirosis, shigelosis, pneumonia and other diseases can proliferate in a post-storm environment. There are vaccines for cholera, hepatitis A and typhoid fever (as well as some other diseases likely to spread post-storm), but there are no such vaccines for dengue fever, leptospirosis or shigelosis.

Efforts to address potential epidemics are complicated by several factors. First, the Philippines is undergoing a rainy season that will not only increase breeding grounds for mosquitoes and other disease-bearing pests, but also will hamper relief efforts. Furthermore, the many residents without shelter or with inadequate shelter will be more susceptible to the elements. Second, the lack of electricity means no cold chain for medicines that must be refrigerated to remain usable. Third, many roads remain uncleared or badly damaged, making transportation for health workers or patients more difficult. Fourth, many Filipino health workers have either left the affected areas or died in the storm, and the continued presence of foreign health workers will depend on ongoing donor funding and the health needs demanded by subsequent crises elsewhere.

Internationally-funded protection efforts currently focus on family reunification, personal identification and creation of safe spaces for women and children. USAID grantees are establishing women-friendly and child-friendly spaces in strategic locations to address the needs of women and adolescent girls, as well as male children. The lack of electricity and insecure housing raises their risk of falling prey to abusers, especially at night.

However, while there is acknowledgement of the increased risk of human trafficking in the wake of the storm, the lack of reports of increased trafficking may be a good thing—or could mean that this issue is not yet a sufficient focus of protection efforts. This is despite the fact that the Philippines had a problem with human trafficking even before the latest typhoon. The Philippines was raised from Tier 2 Watch List to Tier 2 in the current human trafficking report by the Department of State. Nevertheless, that report states that trafficking of men, women and children remains a significant problem, but child sex trafficking is a special danger, with children being forced to perform sex acts on the internet. Clearly, there needs to be more involvement of trafficking in persons experts on recovery planning teams.

Also important will be providing shelter for the 1.2 million families whose homes have been damaged or destroyed. Schools have been so widely destroyed on Leyte that officials told us the school year may be over now – months before it normally would have ended in March. Livelihoods have been severely affected as the coconut industry – the leading agricultural producer – has been decimated, and it will take 5-7 years to replace the trees lost in this storm.

The Philippines is a major American ally and trading partner. There are an estimated 350,000 Americans living in the Philippines, and 4 million Filipinos living in the United States. We have an important stake in seeing that our friends and neighbors in the Philippines can recover from this devastating storm.