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Philippines

After Haiyan: The ineptness of those who govern and the urgency of solidarity

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The super-typhoon Haiyan has just devastated the Visayas, at the centre of the Philippine archipelago as the 19th international climate conference opens in Warsaw. Last year, another deadly cyclone struck the Philippines as the said conference was held in Doha. The governmental delegates saluted the memory of the victims, before concluding that it was urgent to do nothing. This year we can bet on it doing the same. It's rush hour for shale gas. The energy lobbies dictate their law. Thus for the European Roundtable of Industrialists, "competitiveness" should be considered as being "as important" as "the objectives of CO2 reduction". Nothing should challenge their profits and their power.

It would be impossible to "prove" that this or that cyclone would have taken place without global warming. Perhaps, but that isn't the point [1]. Haiyan is the most powerful typhoon having touched land ever recorded in the world, The unlucky Philippine archipelago suffered at full force the violence of exceptional meteorological phenomena formed in the Pacific Ocean. The list of deadly typhoons gets ever longer: Frank (Fengshen, 2008), Ondoy (Ketsana, 2009), Sendong (Washi, 2011), Pablo (Bopha, 2012) and now Yolanda (Haiyan, 2013). The worst is perhaps yet to come: cyclones are getting more numerous, and their trajectories are changing.

The "message" of Haiyan is clear: this is what climate chaos means for the peoples of the world – in particular for the poorest sectors who often live in the riskiest areas, threatened with floods, mudslides, rising sea waters. In these times of emergency, corruption as well as the destruction of the public services in the name of neoliberal dogma and private interest have contributed to rendering the state impotent.

Negligence on the part of the international community of the wealthy, criminal negligence also on the part of the Philippine presidency. The disaster was foreseen, but nothing was done to evacuate the inhabitants of the most exposed areas. Solidly protected stocks of supplies and medical equipment were not constituted. Emergency centres were not set up in advance when the authorities knew the risks incurred and when communications were still easy. The Philippine elites seemed to completely ignore disaster prevention policy - certainly the rich can withdraw from the threatened areas but the poor lacked any means to do so. As to the local authorities, they were left to themselves to face the situation with very little means.

Television coverage, together with the reports of journalists or "cyclone hunters" who were on the spot have allowed us to take the measure of the disaster. The coastal town of Tacloban (220,000 inhabitants) was literally razed and it is feared that there alone up to ten thousand could be dead. The hospitals are devastated, the staff no longer have medicines. The survivors roam the ruins to find water, food, clothing, something to build a shelter with, while President Benigno Aquino denounces "looting" and vows to "re-establish order": army tanks arrive more quickly than the undistributed food aid! Rather than point the finger to criminalise the victims, Aquino would be better to draw the consequences of his incapacity to protect the people and prevent disaster.

Tacloban is not the only area struck by disaster. Haiyan passed over numerous islands of the Visayas, in addition to Samar and Leyte which the media have mentioned: 41 provinces were more or less seriously affected by the typhoon. Communications are still very difficult. It is today impossible to estimate the number of victims and the scale of destruction. The United Nations have warned that so far as the final balance sheet is concerned, it is necessary to "expect the worst".

Impossible not to be angry in the face of such a disaster; however now is the time for solidarity. International aid is being set up; so much the better. As indispensable as that is, experience also shows its limits, indeed its perverse

effects as the dramatic situation in Haiti continues to remind us.

Aid should be conceived as restoring a real decision making power to the affected populations. The victims should not be treated as helpless persons awaiting charity! Self-organisation of the people should be facilitated so they can defend their interests at a time of great weakness and dependency, as well as great disarray. If not, the most deprived could become victims several times over: of the natural disaster, of unequalitarian distribution of aid, and then of an unequalitarian reconstruction to the benefit of the wealthy.

Emergency aid (water, food, medicines and so on), rehabilitation and reconstruction should also be linked – aid should not be reduced to a short operation, but should continue long term.

It is in this spirit, in this perspective, that the association “Europe solidaire sans frontières” has launched an appeal for financial solidarity, to help our Philippine partners to aid the victims notably where the bulk of international aid will not go.

To send donations

Cheques

Cheques in euros only and payable in France made out to ESSF should be sent to:

ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

France

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10 boulevard Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

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National bank references (RIB):

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https://www.paypal.com/uk/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_flow&SESSION=JnPvhpDV07dKx6vTDm7hxvfqXr3zFRtL8R8rluNgjkpai6xiL9mEqP-wUj4&dispatch=5885d80a13c0db1f8e263663d3faee8def8934b92a630e40b7fef61ab7e9fe63].

We will keep you regularly informed via our site of the situation and the use of the solidarity fund.

[1] Although scientists do link the magnitude of Haiyan and climate warming. See on ESSF (article 30311), <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article30311>.