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Philippines

Solidarity aid arrives in Ormoc

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The financial campaign

We have made a new transfer of **1,500 euros** on Friday November 29, 2013.

As of now, we have then sent **a total of 11,000 euros** to support the action of Mi-HANDs.

For reasons of efficacy, we are concentrating our financial aid in favour of the campaign initiated by our partners in Mindanao – Tripod and RDRRAC – now led by the new coalition Mi-HANDs.

However, we have responded (very modestly) to two other appeals:

300 euros have been sent to a fund for the reconstruction of the houses of members of the tricycle trade union of Tacloban (on the island of Leyte).

200 euros have been sent to aid the installation of refugee families in Manila.

Donations have come from:

Europe: Germany, Belgium, Spain, France, Britain, Italy, Holland, the Basque Country, Switzerland

Asia-Pacific: Australia, Hong Kong

The Americas: Canada, USA, Québec

International networks

If we are missing anything tell us. At the end of the campaign, we will make a balance sheet in figures of the origins of donations.

From Iligan (Mindanao) to Ormoc (Leyte)

Our Philippine partners have initially had to decide where solidarity action would be carried out in the Visayas; to define needs; inform and mobilise in Mindanao; collect funds; buy supplies and resolve a good number of logistical problems.

The decision was also taken to increase the number of households Mi-HANDs was responsible for, from 850 to 1050 [1]. In Ormoc (Leyte), the choice was initially focused on a single community which was Muslim, but it turned out that their neighbors, Christian (like the great majority of inhabitants of the centre and north of the archipelago), were in just as much need. There was a great risk of stirring up a feeling of injustice leading to tensions. One of the

objectives of Mi-HANDs being on the contrary to favour inter-community solidarity [2], it was important to make an extra effort to integrate 200 families more into the aid programme.

Nearly 1200 batches of aid – one per household – were packed in Iligan (Mindanao) including food, washing necessities, maintenance products, toys for children and on, before being loaded on two lorries. Teams of volunteers who went to Leyte, in the Visayas, also brought their own food, medical equipment, radio and Internet equipment, and generators (there is no longer any electricity in the areas affected).

To prepare everything and load the trucks the associations involved in Mi-HANDs sent to Iligan activists from various provinces: Pagadian, Lanao del Norte, Cotabato, Maguindanao and so on. A cooking team specially constituted for the occasion was particularly appreciated by the volunteers! A whole network of organisations was mobilised.

Once the convoy left, it took 32 hours by ferry and roads for the aid to reach the town of Ormoc on November 29, at 2.28 am to be exact.

The situation in the villages in Ormoc

It's now 21 days since typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda struck and Mi-HANDs hesitates to speak still of "emergency aid". But for many beneficiaries, that is what it is, because this aid in goods and services is the first that has arrived from the outside since that terrible day of November 8.

An Indonesian institution has offered 250,000 pesos to repair a mosque in a Muslim community in the village (the "barangay", abbreviated as "Brgy" or "Bgy", is the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines and could be a village, a neighbourhood or a district. Municipalities and towns are made up of several barangays) of Tambaliling in the Ormoc conurbation. A local councillor ("*barangay kagawad*") had distributed three kilos of rice, two boxes of sardines and that is all. An inhabitant said that they were told by government officials and the Department of Social Welfare and Development that relief goods are still under repacking in government offices.

Here, 80% of habitations have been destroyed by the super-typhoon. None of the affected families have yet been able to rebuild their houses, in the absence of the necessary materials and carpentry tools. Each has had to build temporary refuges with the rubbles that pile up everywhere. Also their means of existence (fruit trees and so on) have been destroyed.

The same is true of Sitio Baugo (Curva barangay), still in the Ormoc conurbation and the second place where Mi-HANDs has begun distributions. Here again the inhabitants said it was the first external aid that had reached them. Can the absence of the big humanitarian organisations be explained by the fact that this is a village somewhat buried in the hills, difficult to access? The truck bringing aid could not get through and it was necessary to hire motorcycles to bring the equipment while the teams of volunteers climbed on foot.

The distribution of aid was significantly delayed by heavy rain. Hence only 31 households in the Tambaliling barangay and 98 in Sitio Baugo received their family batches of basic needs goods. The sessions of psycho-social aid (aimed at children in particular) had to be cancelled and medical aid has remained limited. Thus the Mi-HANDs teams will have to return to complete the work, while also having to visit other sites.

A new stage is now emerging: the reconstitution of a context of family (reconstruction of houses) and collective life to restore hope and a reason to live for inhabitants after the trauma of the typhoon.

Basic principles of humanitarian aid

The Internet site for Mi-HANDs is now operational [3] and publishes daily news from Leyte (most of the information above comes from there). The first texts put on line also include the initial call as well as a summary of the basic principles and operational rules of humanitarian intervention [4].

This summary is important. The fight against climatic disaster is waged at multiple levels. A level which is very classically political because on the one hand the dominant order is often at the origin of humanitarian disasters [5] and, on the other, it always remains significant in the area of prevention and aid [6]. For example, in this case, the violence of the typhoons increases with the rising temperature of the tropical oceans and *“inside each new born violent storm thus is the DNA of the fossil fuel industry and capitalism”* [7], to paraphrase a recent article by Alexandre Costa while the victims of Haiyan/Yolanda pay an unbearable price for the neglect of the elites and the Philippine regime.

That is why we advocate a “people to people” solidarity, from social movements to social movements, independent of the powers that be. According to our (limited) resources and needs, we give priority to aid to popular sectors or the most deprived communities and often where the aid of the big organisations does not go. This also is a fundamental political choice.

However, once we commit ourselves to aiding the affected populations, we enter a terrain of intervention which has humanitarian rules which we must be the first to respect. Take three examples.

â€¢ **Non-discrimination.** Where our partners intervene, aid is provided without discrimination to all households, according to need. No question of asking who they voted for, of separate treatment, or offering aid under conditions. It is the dominant elites (and some others) who break with this golden rule by using aid to reinforce their political “clientele” and social grip.

â€¢ **Protection of victims.** The people affected have lived through a deeply traumatising experience and are in a situation of great material and psychological weakness. They must be helped to get back on their feet and not asked to relive unceasingly the apocalypse of November 8 – they should not be “harassed” to “witness” but given time to recover their own destiny and make their own choices.

â€¢ **Listening.** It should not be forgotten that even with the best intentions in the world blunders are possible. What happened in Ormoc offers an interesting illustration of this. As already stressed, the member associations of Mi-HANDs are determined to strengthen popular inter-community solidarities in an island where social conflict often takes the form of inter-religious violence. Seen from Mindanao, their aid programme in the Visayas responds to this concern by including a Muslim community in an essentially Christian region; but seen from Ormoc, it is different, the aid being only originally intended for a village populated by Muslims. It was preferable to include a neighbouring village inhabited by Christians, so they could have a common experience of solidarity. The permanent adjustment of aid programmes demands a great ability to listen.

These basic principles of humanitarian action bring together some very diverse movements of varied specialisations. This allows them to act together, or at least in a convergent fashion, and to strengthen the efficacy of aid. They have their own political approach, because they express respect for victims – a respect without which the very notion of self emancipation would lose any meaning.

This principle of respect combines in the documents from Mi-HANDS with two other basic principles:

A politics of rights – Often victims live “without rights” while awaiting charity: accepting aid thus involves carrying a debt of recognition – “*utang na loob*” in Tagalog – a very significant social relationship in the Philippines which underpins clientelism and patronage in politics. For the member associations of Mi-HANDs on the contrary, receiving aid is a right and does not involve any abandonment of freedom. Thus, after typhoon Sendong hit Mindanao in 2011, RDRRAC published a document aimed at the people affected stating that “*even in times of disaster, know that your basic human rights are non-negotiable*” [8].

Actors in their own protection – Affected Individuals and populations are recognised as actors in their own protection, who should defend their rights throughout the process going from emergency aid to reconstruction. This is a fundamental line of divide with aid policies controlled by the élites (who have no desire to see an independent capacity of mobilization appear from below), as well as with these NGOs which substitute themselves for the social movement, giving priority to their own construction to impose themselves as necessary intermediaries on the “humanitarian market”.

A considerable experience has been accumulated in the Philippines concerning intervention in times of humanitarian disaster. A campaign of solidarity can and must be the opportunity to learn in area too long neglected by the European social movement.

The urgency remains however in continuing financial aid. The second funds transfer made by ESSF (2,000 euros) arrived in Iligan just in time for the teams leaving for Ormoc to take enough liquid cash with them. The third (3,500 euros) has – like the first (4,000 euros) – allowed the purchase of supplies and equipment, as well as the hire of trucks this time. The fourth (1,500 euros) is on the way... while the fifth is awaited.

Pierre Rousset

To send donations

Cheques

cheques to ESSF in euros only, payable in France, to be sent to:

ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

France

Bank Account:

Crédit lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)

10 boulevard Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

ESSF, account number 445757C

International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP

Account holder : ESSF

Through PayPal

You can send money through Paypal: see the PayPal button on the upper left side of ESSF home page [English version of Paypal form is on the English Home page].

https://www.paypal.com/fr/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_flow&SESSION=HYicOYx_ee-jYpZ4KT0Lb30CFQ_allhQDaCsf2UhDzHgORSJCLJk_DiCgy&dispatch=5885d80a13c0db1f8e263663d3faee8def8934b92a630e40b7fef61ab7e9fe63

We will keep you informed through our website of the state of the permanent solidarity fund and how it is utilized.

[1] A household often have around 5 members, which would mean more than 5 thousands persons (estimation to be checked).

[2] Most of the Muslim population of the Philippines lives in Mindanao and the associations members of Mi-HANDs work to reinforce people's solidarity between the three "people" of the island: the moros (muslims), lumads (hill tribes) and descendants of the christian "settlers" coming from the north and center of the archipelago.

[3] <http://www.mihands.org/>

[4] <http://www.mihands.org/main/index.php/articles>

[5] But not always: an earthquake does not necessarily a human origin!

[6] See on ESSF (article 1830), my 2006 report, <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article1830>

[7] See on ESSF (article 30379), <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article30379>.

[8] See on ESSF (article 23864), <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article23864>. This lists 28 basic human rights related to situations of humanitarian disasters.