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THE PHILIPPINES: YET ANOTHER TRAGEDY DUE TO ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Another tropical storm, even stronger than those which have recently claimed the lives of at least 400 people in the Philippines, is approaching the east coast of the island nation and could potentially result in more death and destruction. The Philippines is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world. Philippine communities are threatened by all kinds of natural hazards including volcanoes, earthquakes, typhoons, floods and landslides.

The disastrous impact of these hazards in the Philippines is largely due to the high level of risk faced by its inhabitants. Increasing urbanization, lack of land management and planning as well as logging practices make the Philippine people all the more vulnerable to floods and mudslides.

Following the Pinatubo volcanic eruption of 1991, Philippine communities have learned some lessons in reducing their risk and vulnerability to natural hazards, but still have a long way to go.

“It is essential that the humanitarian community gives higher priority to investing in prevention rather than just in response. The Philippines is more prepared than other countries such as Haiti which suffered terrible losses during the recent hurricane season. Its national capacity to reduce risk and vulnerability to natural hazards still requires further strengthening and support,” says Salvano Briceño, Director of the UN secretariat in Geneva that focuses on disaster reduction.

“We hope that the upcoming World Conference on Disaster Reduction this January in Kobe, Japan, will encourage serious actions by governments, international and regional organizations on reducing the impact of disasters. The series of disasters that we have recently witnessed should serve as a wake-up call for all decision makers to act now. They need to pay more attention to disasters and in particular, invest in their prevention. I have been repeating the same message since I have been with the secretariat and I have seen many improvements, but we are now facing new threats due to extreme weather conditions which call for a fresh approach to disaster risk management.”

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