

# Supertyphoon ‘Rolly’ a warning of worsening climate

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 05:01 AM November 12, 2020

Supertyphoon “Rolly” (international name Goni), the world’s strongest typhoon this 2020, devastated the Philippines just a few years after “Yolanda,” the world’s worst typhoon, shook us with 6,000 dead and toppled everything in its path. “Rolly” could have been more destructive if not for the government’s risk reduction interventions.

It would cost billions to rehabilitate the affected communities, especially in Catanduanes and Albay. We pray for and bury the dead, and sympathize with the bereaved. Usually they are the poor people who have to endure the insecurity of living in danger zones, in houses that can hardly protect them from the elements—courtesy of unjust social structures in a country teeming with natural resources that are amassed by local elites and foreigners.

We do appreciate the government’s risk reduction programs, but we have to go to the root of supertyphoons. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned in 2015 at the Paris Conference of the Parties (COP) about the consequences of global warming that spawns supertyphoons.

In 2018, they again warned us that we barely have 12 years left to contain the carbon emissions that cause global warming. We are reaching the tipping point. Christiana Figueres of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change demonstrates the problem by folding a piece of bond paper: By 2030, she said, we have to halve our present-day carbon emission; by 2014 it has to be one-fourth; and by 2050 it has to be one-eighth—if we want our healthy climate back.

In 2015 at the Paris COP, countries around the world promised to reduce their gas emissions. President Duterte also reminded the world about this, but he should walk the talk in his own country.

The announcement by the Department of Energy that it would no longer accept applications for coal-fired power plants is not enough, because it has not stopped more coal-fired power plants from spewing carbon. The administration does not realize that its decision would lead to more supertyphoons.

One of the more urgent issues concerning the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Duterte administration is how they neglected the complaints by communities of quarrying along the slopes of Mayon Volcano. The quarrying has been blamed for the landslides that buried people and houses during Supertyphoon “Rolly.”

A similar situation is in the making in Kaliwa Dam, with some 100,000 residents downstream put in grave danger. The two-inch-thick environmental impact study of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System on the proposed Chinese-funded Kaliwa Dam was used by the DENR to hastily issue an environmental compliance certificate despite the objections from scientists that the study was peppered with “contradictions, outright lies and dubious science.

“The DENR simply stonewalled instead of responding to the objections. Was it because the department was caught unprepared to answer the scientific objections, or was it because it was more intent on pleasing the authorities beholden to China instead of looking after the welfare of the 100,000 endangered poor people?

“Rolly” has howled to us that we are now in a climate emergency situation. As young environmentalist Greta Thunberg said: “Our house is on fire.”

Without waiting for others to move, the renewed commitment of 110 million Filipinos for a new direction can trigger change. If we are wise, we prepare accordingly, as Jesus tells us today. Nothing is impossible with love for God and the poor!

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