

## **DÓCHAS**

### ***The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations***

#### **MEDIA BRIEFING**

19 November 2013

### **Philippines Typhoon: How Irish aid agencies respond**

The scale of the devastation caused by the Philippines Typhoon has meant that the relief operation faced by Irish aid agencies will be a substantial one, says umbrella group Dóchas.

“Now that aid is starting to get through to the people of Philippines, it’s vital to ensure the aid reaches those who need it most. Aid targeting and distribution is a highly specialised job, and we are calling on the Irish public to support Ireland’s humanitarian agencies in their efforts to reach the poorest and most vulnerable people” said Hans Zomer, Director of Dóchas, the umbrella group of development NGOs in Ireland.

#### **1. Addressing emergency needs**

With the ‘search and rescue’ phase of the relief operation now coming to an end, humanitarian agencies’ attention is focused on meeting emergency needs, such as health care, food, water and shelter, while also providing for the protection of vulnerable people, amidst challenges of failing infrastructure and communications.

“Given the scale and urgency of the needs – with almost 13 million people affected and over 4 million people displaced – the task facing the Philippines Government and aid agencies is daunting. As aid workers are reaching out into the communities, access to basics such as shelter, sanitation, water, food and medicines remains limited, and the dangers of disease and exploitation of vulnerable people are rising”, said Jim Clarken, Chairperson of Dóchas.

#### **2. Coordinating the aid effort**

The number of agencies arriving in Philippines now to help the victims and survivors means that coordination of efforts is vital. The UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is assisting the government of the Philippines in ensuring delivery of effective relief to affected people. The job of coordinating aid is not only aimed at securing humanitarian access and maximising the efficiency of the response, but also to ensure that the aid reaches those who need it most, meets people’s real needs, and sets them up to recover from the disaster.

Government, the UN organisations, military forces and international aid agencies all work to alleviate the situation. Each responds based on their role and experience, but also on internationally agreed rules, standards of quality and close collaboration with others.

“The international community has agreed core principles of humanitarian aid: independence, neutrality and impartiality. It is absolutely crucial, therefore, that aid is

not based on donor priorities, but on the needs of the people for whom it is intended” said Hans Zomer.

### **3. Ensuring aid reaches those most in need**

In relief operations, speed is important. But effectiveness is even more important. However quickly the international community reacts, it is always local people who are the first to aid the victims of disaster. And local people have the knowledge and know-how that can make the difference between aid that works and aid that is wasted.

“The scale of a relief operation such as the one now under way in Philippines is truly enormous. The last time the world saw an operation on this scale was in 2010, in response to the Haiti Earthquake. At the time, a lot of new organisations sprang up, and a lot of mistakes were made. It is vital that all aid initiatives put the victims’ needs at the heart of their response. Only by listening to the survivors can we decide where the priorities should be”, stated Hans Zomer of Dóchas.

### **4. How people in Ireland can help**

People in Ireland have a very strong track record in aiding the victims of disasters. The enormous scale of the destruction and suffering in the Philippines has already prompted an outpouring of generosity across Ireland. Irish NGOs, who work together through the Dóchas network, suggest that the best way for the Irish public to support the international aid effort in this instance is to contribute financially.

A dedicated website, <http://www.HowYouCanHelp.ie>, which is hosted by the 51 members of Dóchas, provides information as to how people can best help in case of a humanitarian emergency. A list of organisations working on the Philippines Typhoon response is also available on the website.

Some agencies may need volunteer help here in Ireland - volunteers with skills such as accounting, fund-raising and logistics. Few agencies envisage sending untrained volunteers to the Philippines, as volunteering needs to be part of a coordinated response plan, drawing on aid workers with emergency relief experience. The current security and logistics situation makes volunteering in the Philippines itself unfeasible and undesirable.

### **5. The scale of the challenge**

#### **Latest available figures**

- Philippines government estimate of overall death toll: ± 4,000
- No. of people displaced: ± 4 million
- No. of people affected in some way: ± 13 million
- Total no. of houses damaged or destroyed: ± 1 million
- No of people in need of food aid: ± 2 million

#### **Main immediate priorities for emergency aid**

- Emergency shelter, water, medication and sanitation
- Health services (surgical capacity, mobile medical teams)
- Food and nutrition

- Water and sanitation
- Protection of women and children, and emergency education services
- Logistics (storage, transport, fuel), telecommunications

### **Main challenges for international assistance**

- Scale of people displaced and damage to housing and infrastructure
- Damaged transport and logistics pipeline
- Limited communication networks
- Limited power supply
- Fuel shortages

## **6. Funding**

The scale of the relief operation being mounted in the Philippines means that funding is required. The United Nations have appealed for a total of \$301 million (€223 million) to be made available.

“The emergency phase will cost money, and after that the reconstruction of communities in the Philippines is going to be enormously expensive. Rather than simply rebuild, we must ensure that the reconstruction is based on a model that will reduce risks for the future. It is vital that the reconstruction, too, is adequately funded, and this may require bold and innovative steps,” said Hans Zomer.

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### **Notes for the Editor**

- Dóchas is the association of Irish Non-Governmental Development Organisations. It provides a forum for consultation and cooperation between its 51 member organisations, and helps them to speak with a single voice on development issues. For more information, visit: <http://www.dochas.ie>
- For more details of how professional emergency aid organisations work together, see <http://www.howyoucanhelp.ie>
- See also the Dóchas briefing paper on NGO cooperation: [http://www.dochas.ie/Shared/Files/2/Development\\_ngos\\_working\\_together\\_for\\_great\\_impact.pdf](http://www.dochas.ie/Shared/Files/2/Development_ngos_working_together_for_great_impact.pdf)
- Latest figures and information on the Philippines Typhoon can be found at: <http://www.unocha.org/crisis/typhoonhaiyan>

