

# At least 10,000 dead in Philippine typhoon

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Super Typhoon Haiyan, known in the Philippines by the local name Yolanda, has wreaked unprecedented death and devastation across the islands of the central Philippines. Over 10,000 people are estimated to have been killed in the city of Tacloban on the island of Leyte.

Large portions of the country remain without power or communications. Whole sections of the coasts on the islands of Samar, Leyte, Panay, Cebu, and some interior parts of Bohol remain completely isolated, and the death toll is expected to rise precipitously.

Over one million people have been evacuated, and hundreds of thousands have lost their homes. They have no access to drinkable water, food, medical supplies, or the means of disposing of waste. Tens of thousands have no shelter at all.

Corpses litter the streets of Tacloban. The city administrator of Tacloban told the press, “The dead are on the streets, they are in their houses, they are under the debris, they are everywhere.” The disposal of the dead bodies is itself becoming an emergency.

The military has deployed teams to collect the dead bodies, but they are insufficient for the task. A military driver told the press: “There are 6 trucks going around the city picking up the dead, but it’s not enough.”

Tacloban was home to 250,000 people, on the northeastern coast of Leyte, just across the San Juanico strait from Samar. Video footage and photographs show plywood, corrugated tin, and tarpaulin are strewn everywhere. The debris of tens of thousands of homes of the working poor of Tacloban lie at the foot of the hotels, malls, and the pristine towering pillars of City Hall, all of which still stand.

With wind speeds of 195 miles per hour and gusts of up to 235 miles per hour, Haiyan was the strongest storm to make landfall in recorded history. Sandy Torotoro, a 44-year-old resident of Tacloban, who provides for himself, his wife and eight year old

daughter, by transporting passengers around the vicinity of the airport in a bicycle with a sidecar, described the storm surge.

“The water was as high as a coconut tree,” he said. “I was swept away by the rampaging water with logs, trees and our house, which was ripped off from its mooring ... When we were being swept by the water, many people were floating and raising their hands and yelling for help. But what could we do? We also needed to be helped.”

Most of the reports thus far have focused on the devastation of Tacloban, but one must assume that such destruction was wreaked on many towns in the area. No contact has been made with extensive sections of the remaining coast. It is likely that numerous fishing villages have simply been washed off the shore. Each village has hundreds of occupants, living in stilt bamboo homes, with slat floors and *nipa* leaf roofs, all earning their living from the sea.

Robert S. Ziegler of the International Rice Research Institute was quoted in the *New York Times*, “The coastal areas can be quite vulnerable—in many cases, you have fishing communities right up to the shoreline, and they can be wiped out ... The disturbing reports are the lack of reports, and the areas that are cut off could be quite severely hit.”

The preparations for the typhoon by the Philippine government have proven utterly inadequate. As the largest storm in recorded history was hours away from the coast of Samar, Philippine President Benigno Aquino addressed the nation in a televised address and advised those in the path of the storm to evacuate.

Given that the government provided neither transportation nor shelters away from the coastline, those in the path of the storm had no place to evacuate to. What are termed “evacuation centers” by the Philippine government are nothing but local churches, schools, municipal auditoriums, or cockfighting arenas.

One million people are now in these “evacuation centers” across the central Philippines. Thousands sleep on *banig* mats in the squat Baroque naves of local churches, tens of thousands on the painted cement of the local basketball court. There is a thin layer of water on the ground and no way to dispose of waste. Some try to cook on makeshift *hurno*, a small clay oven, using whatever fuel they can find.

While the typhoon involved massive forces of nature, the social catastrophe that it wrought was almost entirely preventable, and is the result of grotesque social inequality. The homes of the rich remain secure, having safely weathered the winds and water. At least ten thousand are dead, not because of a storm, but because they were compelled to eke out an existence on fringes of society.

US Secretary of State John Kerry issued a press statement saying, “Having so recently had my own visit to the Philippines prevented by another powerful storm, I know that these horrific acts of nature are a burden that you have wrestled with and courageously surmounted before. Your spirit is strong.”

In fact, Washington has committed to giving only \$100,000 to aid the victims of the typhoon. This is barely enough to be considered an insult. At least 10,000 people are dead, entire cities and towns are devastated, a humanitarian crisis of malnutrition and possible starvation threatens to engulf a million people, and Washington has committed to give only one-fourteenth the cost of a single Tomahawk cruise missile.

As nightfall approached on the evening of November 10, tens of thousands scrambled to find shelter and supplies. Many resorted to taking food, water and medical supplies from the abandoned, but still standing grocery stores and from the Gaisano Mall.

Business owners and members of the city council—all of whom somehow survived—denounced this as “looting.” Philippine Red Cross chair and long-time politician Richard Gordon denounced those taking food as “mobsters,” saying the police should “arrest them.”

President Aquino, who traveled with his entourage to view the devastation, met with the capitalists and local politicians on Sunday morning. Under the leadership of Alfred Romualdez, the mayor of Tacloban and nephew of Imelda Marcos, they called upon Aquino to declare martial law.

Aquino immediately deployed 300 soldiers and police to the city to “restore order.” A column of armored vehicles arrived Sunday night, to “show the government’s resolve and to stop the looting,” Aquino told the press. The government has as yet distributed no food, but the armed might of the state has been deployed to protect capitalist property.

Aquino pledged he would declare martial law if the city council drafted a statement that there was “anarchy” in Tacloban. The negotiations between the nephew of Imelda Marcos and son of Corazon Aquino over the best method of declaring martial law to crack down on the hungry and devastated masses aptly encapsulates the character of Philippine capitalist politics.

The rice fields of Leyte and Samar, which were just about to be harvested, are destroyed. The conditions for widespread and protracted mass hunger are everywhere.

The five-star hotels of Iloilo and Cebu are fully booked because, according to *Business World*, the country’s leading business daily, “the rich opted to wait out the typhoon in comfort.”

Haiyan made landfall at approximately 3 a.m. local time today as a weakened storm in Vietnam, having moved westwards across the South China Sea, with sustained winds of 75 mph. Coastal flooding was reported in Quang Ninh and Haiphong provinces, and a 170-foot TV tower was reported toppled in Uong Bi. Reports indicated there were 12 dead overall in Vietnam.



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