



# TYPHOON ONDOY ACTION ALERT (2)

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## 200 FEARED DEAD

### **WHY THE FLOOD?**

The volume of rain itself plus clogged waterways, too much garbage, deforestation, the release of water from bursting dams, poor crisis management and planning, insufficient training for rescue, poor communication and coordination for help and rescue, corruption and misuse of resources – all these made last Saturday's flood also a catastrophe in governance.

On Saturday, 26 September, Typhoon Ketsana (Ondoy in the Philippines) dumped more rain than Manila had seen in more than 40 years. More than 430,000 people were affected by the storm, including some 115,000 persons who were brought to approximately 200 schools, churches and other evacuation shelters. Authorities say that soldiers, police and volunteers have been able to rescue more than 7,900 persons. The government has declared a "state of calamity" in metropolitan Manila and 25 storm-hit provinces.

As of noon Monday, 28 September, the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) placed the death toll at 100 and the number of people affected at nearly half a million pending reports from local government units. Fifty-six were killed in Region IV-A or the Calabarzon/Southern Tagalog; 36 died in Region III (Central Luzon); seven in the National Capital Region and one in the Cordillera Administrative Region. More casualties are being reported such that 200 are feared dead.

The Philippines is right in the pathway of the world's No. 1 typhoon generator. Ketsana, with winds of 85 kph and gusts of up to 100 kph, hit land early Saturday. The Philippines has been ravaged by stronger winds, but it was the rain that caused death and destruction this time. In just 12 hours, 42.4 centimeters of rain fell, exceeding the 39.2-centimeter average for the entire month of September. Rainfall also broke the previous record of 33.4 centimeters for a 24-hour period set in June 1967. In Metropolitan Manila, the most rain was recorded in Quezon City at 45.5 centimeters for 24 hours, much more than Katrina's 25 centimeters for 24 hours in the US

in 2005. Two more typhoons are currently brewing east of the archipelago. "People drowned in their own houses," Bulacan Gov. Joselito Mendoza was quoted as saying.

The Angat and Ipo Dams were opened, and they were only closed at 12pm, Sunday. The Pasig River, which drains 13 major river tributaries in addition to Manila's vanishing network of esteros (narrow canals) and creeks is clogged. As a result, a virtual lake has been formed in the low-lying provinces of Rizal and Laguna as well as in Manila, north and south of the Pasig.

Parts of Cainta have not been reached by authorities because of the scope of the calamity and impassable roads. A breakdown in communication has prevented relief teams from immediately reaching those in need. Electric power was shut down in many areas in the province at the height of the storm.

Frustrated residents from all social classes have criticized ineffective government response. "Only the barangay captains (those still alive) are doing their jobs," says a woman from San Juan. "My brother, Ramon, of Addition Hills, San Juan, just trashed three of his barangay vehicles and his personal car getting help to people. Mayor JV sent rubber boats but still my brother spent the whole day SWIMMING to take about 10-12 people off roofs, old ladies, little children. Now, I cannot contact him and I hope he is fine. (Last I heard, some of the other kapitans do not know how to swim, so he's been doing it.) Haaay..."

Many communities experienced their first deluge. In Sto. Domingo, waters were four feet deep. Along Araneta Avenue, Amoranto and Banawe Streets, flood waters rose to as high as 25 feet. Here a 24-year-old man with mild autism died after saving some children. His aunt remembers him and the one joke he had learned: "Anong langgam ang hindi makaakyat sa puno? (What kind of ant cannot climb a tree?... patay na langgam (A dead one). His was a life of pure simplicity and seemingly, pure joy."

The tales of death and survival are alternately sprinkled with gratitude and anger. A man who escaped with his life, having gathered his family for prayer, asks, "God has already dispensed mercy. Will we do our part?" He is angry about why despite the proximity of the headquarters of the National Disaster Coordinating Council and Armed Forces of the Philippines, many trapped residents in Quezon City could not be rescued. Despite the large budgetary allocation to the military, there was a deficit of rescue vehicles. In recent years, the Arroyo government has been accused of entering into a questionable telecoms deal and squandering millions of pesos on Presidential dinners abroad; likewise, the sources of millions of pesos in campaign contributions and personal assets of public officials are unaccounted for. He asks: "How do you explain this to kids trapped on their rooftop for nearly 24 hours—soaking wet, hungry, crying for their mothers and going insane with fear." (SLB)

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The UCCP building at 877 EDSA has been opened as an evacuation center. Delivery of relief aid is being organized in coordination with the affected jurisdictions and conferences, have themselves been affected by the typhoon, some of their homes still submerged in water.