

**19 August 2014**

**Report on a visit to Tacloban and Palo, areas devastated by Typhoon Haiyan / Yolanda**



Today, we visited Tacloban and Palo in the Leyte Province, areas that were devastated nine months ago by Typhoon Haiyan, known here in the Philippines as Typhoon Yolanda. The actual death toll remains unclear, but it is claimed to be at least 10,000 from Tacloban City alone. Many people are still missing; they were likely carried out to sea by the initial tsunami-like storm surge that was the unexpected element of this “super typhoon” that hit on November 8, 2013.

Huge freight vessels were tossed onto the land and are still sitting there, now occupied by families displaced by the typhoon.

Canadian Catholics, through the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, have contributed significantly to the initial relief effort in collaboration with Caritas Filipinas – Development and Peace is the Canadian member of the international Caritas network. Help has included providing material support like food and shelter, but also helping the affected residents plan their future in the aftermath of this catastrophic event which has destroyed families and left so many displaced.



Because the Philippine government has designated a 40-metre “no-build zone” along the water in all the affected areas, people who formerly lived in this area, and who depend on fishing for their livelihood, have to be relocated. In order to prevent their being relocated too far from the sea, Development and Peace, along with the Archdiocese of Palo, is attempting to secure land close to the water and to help the people create a community there that will be truly resilient to future events like the one that destroyed their homes.

Many are still living in tents which can become incredibly hot during the day.

The people remain very grateful for the help they have received, particularly from the Holy Spirit Sisters, who donated 125 new fishing boats, complete with nets and gear.



We celebrated an outdoor Mass by the sea today with the community, praying in a special way for those who lost their lives. It was very moving to speak afterward with those who were affected and hear their stories. One group of young women explained in a word what they believe kept them alive: “faith”.

**Dr. Patrick Fletcher**  
**Senior Advisor for Theology and Social Doctrine**  
**Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops**