

PRESS RELEASE

# **Philippines after Haiyan : Workers in Region 8 demand employment, people's participation in Yolanda rehabilitation and reconstruction plan**

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Declaring they won't beg and live on relief and aid forever, several associations of workers in the informal sector in Region 8 today launched a campaign demanding employment, social protection and people's participation as bedrocks of Yolanda rehabilitation and reconstruction plan to address not just the immediate but also the long term needs of Pepe and Pilar.

The campaign came days after the government announced the US\$8.17-billion or P361-B plan under the so-called Reconstruction Assistance on Yolanda (RAY) which will be completed in four years or by 2017.

Held in Tacloban City, the campaign launch was spearheaded by tricycle and trisikad drivers and operators (TODA's) in Tacloban, Hilongos and Baybay, in coordination with the labor group Partido ng Manggagawa (PM).

After attending a twelve noon mass at the Sto. Nino Church, TODA members held a motorcade around Tacloban City with posters bearing the call, "Make jobs a priority in Yolanda rehab", wrapped around their trikes. A gathering and small salu-salo followed the motorcade at the Church's Social Hall where family members and other Yolanda survivors gathered to hear the groups' manifesto and affirm their commitment to the collective struggle of rebuilding their lives and their communities.

In a joint Manifesto signed by the Tacloban Federation of MCH Drivers and Operators Associations, Inc. (TAFEMDO), the Hilongos-based Trisikad Operators and Drivers Organization (TODO), and Partido ng Manggagawa-Region 8, the groups explained that prior to the onslaught of Yolanda (Haiyan), they already were living poor, miserable lives since transporting people around the city through motorized and non-motorized cabs for hire was their only source of income.

The Rebolustonyong Alyansang Makabansa (RAM) in Leyte also signed the manifesto in solidarity with the workers.

"Because income is irregular in this nature of work, we earn less than what we need. This condition likewise explains why many of us, together with other poor people, live in urban poor communities where we face recurrent and extreme vulnerabilities from both man-made and natural calamities. In other words, we are poor, defenceless and were unprepared to face the strongest typhoon in history," read the manifesto.

**Jobs as priority**

According to Judy Torres, regional coordinator of Partido ng Manggagawa, this was the main reason why they were urging the government and donor agencies to make jobs a priority in Yolanda rehabilitation and reconstruction plans.

“We want jobs because it is a guarantee to a person’s long-term security and a life of dignity,” said Torres, adding that while everybody was devastated it is the poor that suffered most.

“We want to rebuild our lives. We want to rebuild our communities. Hence, in the rehabilitation and rebuilding process, we do not want to just revert back to where we were before Yolanda. We want a new community - a better community,” added the manifesto.

Torres, who also chairs TAFEMDO, added that aside from providing employment, “the State must also provide victims of Yolanda a broad range of social protection to enable them to live a more secure life in the face of the ‘new normal’ and the worsening climate crisis.”

The workers’ groups also called on the government, both national and local, to put their act together in formulating a new type of rehabilitation and rebuilding plan, saying people at this point in time are not interested in squabbles and personal plans among politicians.

“What you owe us is immediate, climate-resilient, inclusive, and empowering rehabilitation and rebuilding program,” said the groups, stressing further that in the rebuilding process, direct participation by the people is far more important than private consultants and contractors.

### **International responsibility**

The groups likewise urged donor countries and international aid agencies that once the relief and life-saving stage is over, “we enjoin you to help us build a new model community out of the ruins of Yolanda.”

They further stated : “While we clearly understand that it was Nature’s wrath that made our lives more miserable now, we are also aware that today’s extreme weather systems are the awful outcome of climate change caused by unrestrained economic activities of industrial countries. Thus, we believe that more than the humanitarian aspect, developed countries have the historical, moral, and social responsibility to come to our aid.”

### **Specific demands**

The TODA groups in Tacloban have come up with specific demands addressed to concerned government agencies, international donors, as well as the Church and civic groups. These include :

- Jobs for displaced TODA members and for unemployed Taclobanons.
- Moratorium on payment of fees, specifically the renewal of business permits for FY 2014.
- Financial assistance for motor/cab repairs or for acquisition of new units.
- Fuel subsidy for registered TODA members.
- Mandatory SSS and Philhealth coverage for TODA members through national government or local government sponsorship programs.
- In-city relocation and climate-resilient socialized housing program for informal settlers.
- Participation in the rehabilitation and rebuilding process.

Except for some specific items, the same set of demands will be pursued by workers associations in Hilongos and Baybay.

The groups said they are making this appeal not as mere victims of Yolanda but as Filipino citizens who are entitled to the broadest social protection possible from the State.

“Finally, we believe that everything is possible as long as everyone considers the task of rehabilitation and rebuilding a collective mission and the dream for a new community rising out of Yolanda ruins a common vision,” concluded the manifesto.

**Partido ng Manggagawa** (Labor Party) - Philippines

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