

## **Statement of Ms. Cristina C. Cocadiz**

Cristina C. Cocadiz, 34 years old, currently residing at Ridgewood, New York City.

*(The Statement of Ms. Cristina C. Cocadiz was taken through Skype call on 27 August 2018 by Atty. Hasminah D. Paudac, together with Ms. Desiree Llanos Dee and Mr. Mohamad Rayyan M. Domado.)*

**Q1: Can you please give us a brief information about yourself?**

A1: My name is Cristina Conanan Cocadiz. I was born and raised in the United States, although my roots are from the Philippines. My dad is from Calauag, Quezon Province, and my mother is from Aklan. I am currently working at The Door, a youth social services agency, as the Training Coordinator for Roundabout Theatre Company's Theatrical Workforce Development Program.

**Q2: How often do you visit Philippines?**

A2: The first time I visited Philippines was when I was a toddler, but I don't remember that trip. The first trip home I remember was when I was thirteen (13) years of age. The reason why we were there was because my mother wanted us to visit and meet her dying father, my *lolo*. I went there last 2010 and 2012 for vacation to visit my parents' hometown. The recent visit was in 2014 when I volunteered with Gabriela New York relief operations to help the survivors of Typhoon Haiyan in Tacloban City.

**Q3: You seem involved in socio-civic activities. Have you personally encountered any typhoon, hurricane, or any extreme weather-related calamity here in the United States?**

A3: Yes, Hurricane Sandy. Even before that, a year before Hurricane Sandy, Hurricane Irene also hit New York. I had never expected to see a hurricane in New York City. That was the first time I have heard that the government shut down the subway. I was scared and nervous that time. I did not go to work because I had no way to get there. I remember that it was a major event because it was rare for something like that to happen. There were really long lines in the grocery store. However, for that incident, there was much less damage than was expected. In Detroit, I have not experienced hurricanes, only tornados.

**Q4: Can you walk us through the day hurricane Sandy hit New York on 29 October 2012?**

A4: I was living in Red Hook, New York, at that time. I moved there September 2012, but I have been working over a year in a restaurant nearby before moving in there. Red Hook is an isolated peninsula in southwestern Brooklyn. It is surrounded by water on three sides.

The day before hurricane Sandy hit, I was working in a restaurant four blocks from my apartment as a server. I first heard from customers that there will be a hurricane and there were reports that the subways will be shut down. I felt I didn't have any other place to go, so I just stayed. Also, I was living with one person who owns a cat which, at that time, I had to look after.

On the day hurricane Sandy hit our place, I was in my apartment, despite the notice to evacuate. I could not leave the apartment because I had to work and take care of my roommate's cat. I took the risk because I could not afford to leave work before transportation stopped running. So, evacuating was not an option.

I charged my phone and I just waited inside my room. It was just me and one person in the building as everyone else evacuated. There were two apartments and one storefront in my building. In another apartment, there was a family, but the husband decided to stay as he was manning the storefront. I was staying on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, I felt safe at least since I was quite elevated.

It was raining the day before and all throughout the day. My bedroom is on the third floor of my building on the corner of Van Brunt Street and Visitation Place. There are two windows where I can see the outline of lower Manhattan and the water as far as the Statue of Liberty. I was sitting near the windows to see what is happening outside.

**Q5: What did you see?**

A5: When it was flooding, I thought it would come from the southern end of Van Brunt Street, but I was surprised when it came from the other direction. The water was coming from the east and west side, and at some point all sides. It got really dark. I also saw cars trying to drive in the flash floods that rose very quickly. Cars were stuck on the streets and people have to get out their cars and leave their cars there. Around 9pm, I saw a bright green flash over the Manhattan skyline, which I found out later was the ConEd substation transformer explosion that caused the blackout south of 34th Street. Directly across the street from my window, I also saw the electricity wires and transformers spark, then, blow out. So, the power went out and everything went dark. The Manhattan skyline was dark, the street lights were out and my apartment had no power. The only lights were the headlights from the cars stuck in the flooded street.

**Q6: What did you next, if any?**

A6: I texted my family telling them I was okay. My parents were living in the south of Detroit and one sister in Michigan. I was not able to contact my other sister in London. I also was texting all day with my friend Candice Sering, a fellow Gabriela member and my co-worker who also lived in the neighborhood to make sure we were both safe. I

remained alert and watched outside the window. I could see Manhattan so dark. I also remembered it was full moon. I was nervous to go to sleep, but in the morning, the water had finally receded. You can still see the extent of the flood as there were watermarks on the buildings and outlines of cars in oil left on the street.

**Q7: How long was the actual storm or hurricane Sandy?**

A7: To be honest, I unconsciously forgot because it was traumatic. It felt like the duration of the eye of the storm that passed New York was five hours, but not so sure about it. But since the morning, it had been very stormy, windy, and rainy. You really can feel that the eye of the storm will be hitting later.

**Q8: Were there previous warnings as regards the magnitude of hurricane Sandy?**

A8: I was not updated of any warnings because I had no smart phone and television at that time. I missed the warnings because I was busy doing back-to-back shifts as a server. I only heard the news from the customers and co-workers who were talking about the warnings of hurricane Sandy and the reports that subways were shutting down, thus, everyone was preparing.

**Q9: What happened to you the day after hurricane Sandy?**

A9: I was not able to work. The restaurant I worked in was flooded and the power was out everywhere in the neighborhood. The basement where we store food was flooded. We were just lucky that the flood did not go in the actual sitting area of the restaurant. Our restaurant was not operating for three (3) days, but others were closed for six (6) months because their damages were severe.

The day after hurricane Sandy, we opened the restaurant by candlelight just to offer drinks and a space for neighbors to gather. I did not consider it as working because we just offered services in order for the people to share stories of what happened.

**Q10: How did your experience with hurricane Sandy affect you, if any?**

A10: It was traumatizing. It was really traumatic when I saw people throwing out all of their possessions and how severe the damages were to homes and businesses. But I had to stay in the neighborhood to work. My co-workers could not report for work so I had to fill in for them. It also felt like it was a way to be helpful to my community, by providing a safe space at the restaurant, listening to their stories during the recovery.

In my part of Red Hook, we didn't have power for two (2) weeks or so. The street lights were out and it was hard to walk around. Everyone had a flashlight at all times so you could see when walking around. It was also difficult for me to communicate with my loved ones because there was no power and no internet connection. I used

other people's phones to communicate to them. Also, there were no accessible stores in the neighborhood because they were all flooded during hurricane Sandy. The only establishments that were open for service were a bakery nearby and the restaurant that I used to work at.

The following days, there were sump pumps everywhere. It was loud and noisy because of all the motors running all day to pump out flooded apartments and basements. Everyday, sanitation workers would come multiple times a day to take away piles of personal belongings destroyed by flooding. I couldn't stay in the apartment for two (2) weeks because there was no power and no gas. I could not even heat water on the stove and it was getting colder. There was also a snow storm a few days after hurricane Sandy. After a few nights in my cold apartment, I stayed with my friend, Candice Sering. I thought it was also better for me to stay in Candice's place because I really needed company. It was quite difficult for everyone that time to be alone.

**Q11: How else were you affected by hurricane Sandy?**

A11: On a personal note, there was trauma from the incident. It was the first time in my life when I felt deprived of basic necessities, such as heat and water. There was this sense of displacement, and loss of community. At times, there was hopelessness from the difficulties of communication because internet, phones, and usual services were not working. It felt like we were left alone in our neighborhood and we had to rely on each other for basic needs like shelter and hot water. No one was going to help us. We had to rely on each other as neighbors and community members.

Also, at the beginning, there was a sense of powerlessness from not being able to help out fellow Filipinos in the community who suffered impacts of hurricane Sandy. Because of my affiliation with Gabriela, there was clear community work and contribution that I could do as soon as I got back up. And that made me quite hopeful despite what happened.

**Q12: Did you undergo any psychosocial intervention?**

A12: No.

**Q13: Why was that?**

A13: I could not afford it at the time.

**Q14: You mentioned about losing that sense of "powerlessness." Can you elaborate on that?**

A14: It did not feel like I had a choice to evacuate. Even if I had somewhere to go, I did not want to leave my community, knowing that there were others who also were staying. So when the storm surge happened, the destruction from the flooding and trauma experienced by the survivors like myself made me feel powerless and helpless. There were some volunteers and forums held by the city about relief, but it really felt

like we were alone to figure out how to survive post-storm in many ways. It was only once my neighbors and I began to check in on each other and help each other that I felt the power of community.

**Q15: You mentioned that you were active in socio-civic activities, especially in extreme weather-related occurrences like typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. Were you able to participate in trainings, seminars, or talks involving causes of extreme weather-related events?**

A15: In 2014, I traveled to the Philippines with GABRIELA. There I participated in a Women's International Solidarity Mission (WISM) in Tacloban one year after Typhoon Haiyan. We met and integrated with women and fisherfolk who, like me, did not have a choice to evacuate their homes and leave their source of livelihood before the storm. Shortly after the typhoon, their fishing communities near the water were designated as "No Build Zones." Government officials stated that the land near the water was unsafe, however, later we learned that the no build zones were slated for resort and hotel development. In a way, this reminded me of how after hurricane Sandy, developers and real estate agents appeared in Red Hook and many new unaffordable apartment buildings were built. In Tacloban, I learned that the typhoon survivors received the most support and assistance from fellow survivors and people's organizations like Peoplesurge. I also traveled to Mindanao where we spoke with indigenous communities who had been forcibly displaced and whose leaders were even killed due to military and paramilitary occupation of their tribal schools and ancestral land for transnational mining interests. These lumad communities often experienced devastating landslides caused by the deforestation and land stripping by fossil fuel companies.

**Q16: Have you heard about climate change and what causes it? If yes, what do you know about it?**

A16: Yes, I have heard about climate change. Climate change is not a naturally occurring phenomenon, but a condition created and intensified by our dependency on fossil fuels. Not only does the plundering of land result in deforestation and environmental destruction, but it also results in persecution of the peasants, farmers, and indigenous people who depend on their land as their source of livelihood. Also, superstorms caused by climate change are much more dangerous in places where natural barriers against storms have removed due to deforestation.

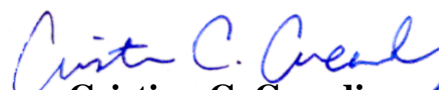
**Q17: Do you think climate change has something to do with hurricane Sandy? If yes, what is your message to the fossil fuel companies who were said to be the big contributor of climate change?**

A17: Yes, climate change clearly has changed weather patterns and increased the intensity and frequency of superstorms like hurricane Sandy and typhoon Haiyan all over the world. Devastating natural disasters are the new norm of weather cycles. I experienced a brief

taste of how destructive and traumatizing surviving a hurricane can be. I want the fossil fuel companies to know that the poorest Filipinos, peasants, farmers fisherfolk, lumad, bear the brunt of natural disasters in the Philippines caused by climate change. The result of climate change is unnecessary loss of life, homes, livelihood, community and access to people's most basic needs. As it stands, corporate profits are prioritized over people's welfare and human rights. Transnational fossil fuel companies and the governments who allow them to plunder land in the Philippines and all over the world must acknowledge their part in climate change and take a stand with the people most affected by holding themselves accountable.

**Q18: Are you ready and willing to swear this Statement under oath before the Philippine Commission on Human Rights, if required to do so?**

A18: Yes.

  
**Cristina C. Cocadiz**  
19 September 2018