

Statement of Ms. Marielle Trixie J. Bacason

Marielle Trixie J. Bacason, 27 years old, Filipino, and a research nurse from Putney London, United Kingdom.

(The Statement of Ms. Marielle Trixie J. Bacason was taken through Skype call on 21 October 2018 by Atty. Hasminah D. Paudac, together with Ms. Desiree Llanos Dee.)

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

A1: I am Marielle Trixie J. Bacason. I am a super typhoon Yolanda (“Haiyan”) survivor. I was born and raised in Tacloban City and lived there until I moved here in London in July 2016. I have three (3) siblings; one elder brother who was in Dubai, one elder sister who was working in Manila, and one little nine (9)-year old brother who stays with me and my mother. My mother works in a real estate business and my father works abroad. My parents broke up when I was still in primary school. Before super typhoon Haiyan, I lived with my mom who was a strong authoritative power in our family, my little brother, my seventy-five (75)-year old grandmother, and two house helpers.

Q2: Can you describe the community you grew up in?

A2: I lived in a fifty (50)-year old bungalow in Tacloban and grew up in a small community. Our place never experienced severe flooding since it was not a flood zone or coastal area. Generally, you can say that our place was a nice and peaceful neighborhood.

Q3: Can you share what happened the day before super typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) struck Tacloban?

A3: At that time, we did not know what a storm surge was. I knew that Haiyan was the super typhoon that was meant to go to China, and people of China were so happy that it changed course and was directly hitting Tacloban instead. A few days before Haiyan, I vaguely saw in my Facebook news feed that there was a forthcoming strong typhoon which will cause water to rise... about five (5) meters high. I did not believe that and paid little attention. I thought it was just exaggerated. In our community, there was no evacuation plan, no real warning of what will happen.

But we decided to move out just in case since our house was old and, also, it was 50%-part concrete and 50%-part wood. We also heard that there was going to be a power cut, and my little brother plays his gadgets a lot and cannot really sleep without airconditioning. Our dad sent us some money for us to stay in a hotel downtown. Initially, my grandmother did not want to go with us, as she did not mind the power cut in our old bungalow house. It was then when I scared her with the random post I saw on Facebook; I told her that the water levels would rise and she is going to drown and die if she would stayed behind. We

were able to convince her and we left the house. Only our house helpers were left to man the area.

My family and relatives were able to stay in a hotel downtown— all of us in three (3) rooms – two (2) on the second floor and one (1) on the third floor. During that time, I was working as a nurse trainee in a government hospital. I just asked my family to pack me one (1) set of clothes knowing that the situation will not be that worse.

After my shift from work, I went straight to the hotel. The night before the typhoon, it was super quiet. As they say, “calm before the storm.” I was on the phone talking with my dad and he reminded me to charge my cellphone as there might be no electricity for days.

Q4: Can you walk us through the day super typhoon Haiyan hit your place on 08 November 2013?

A4: It was 6:00 in the morning of November 8 and we heard the strongest wind. It was the loudest I have ever heard. There were big windows in the hotel and we were afraid as we felt that any minute the glass windows will shatter. My grandmother and other relatives were praying the rosary. Everyone was praying hard.

My brother and my mom went to another room with less windows so they can feel a little bit secured from flying broken glasses. From the place where we were standing, we saw the whole first floor of the hotel submerged in water. All of the ground floor was just water.

When the strong rains and winds subsided, my aunt and uncle went out to check the vicinity. They were the first ones who went out and the rest of us were left in the hotel because we have our little cousins and grandmother to look after. My aunt and uncle saw the extent of the damage. You could not distinguish the roads, and dead bodies of people and animals are everywhere.

My aunt and uncle walked to their house, which was roughly thirty (30) minutes by car. Their house was damaged, but still livable. They got their motor bike, which was still working at that time, and they used that to go to the hotel and tell us what happened.

Q5: What did you feel at that time?

A5: I already knew the extent of the typhoon since we saw, heard, and felt the strongest rains and winds. My mom was just in denial at that time. She would not believe and even asked us to get a tricycle so that she could check our house. At that time, no tricycle or public vehicles were operating because everything was in disarray.

Q6: What happened next?

A6: The following day, using my uncle’s motor bike, they went to check our house and our relatives’ houses. We were worried at that time

because our helpers stayed behind and we thought they died. Luckily, our helpers managed to swim to the tall building behind our house and walked to their hometown on the next island.

When we got to see our house, it was a total mess. Some of our neighbors who did not evacuate and stayed in their houses perished. At least twenty (20) died in our small community.

Q7: What else did you witness during that time?

A7: There was no signal, no radio. Everything was dark. There were rumors that prisoners were able to escape, went to houses to get food and other stuff, and attacked families. The same goes with the rebels, who were up in the mountains before Haiyan, and began looting and attacking people.

We saw people with massive push carts containing groceries they stole in shopping stores and groceries. People started looting. We did not do it because we had some food and we managed to stock up on canned goods and some food. We were adding water to our rice to extend our food for some more meals. But days passed and we no longer have clean water in the hotel. We decided to leave because we could not stay there anymore in that situation.

We walked for hours to get to our house and salvage whatever we could. When we reached our place, my mom was totally a different person— not a strong woman who I used to know. I saw her breakdown after seeing the house she built for years to have crumbled. Everything was covered by mud. After that, she refused to go back and did not want to see our house, even the community.

Q8: Where did you stay?

A8: We moved to the house of a relative which was not badly hit. We all walked to get there. It would normally be half an hour by car, but we walked for two (2) hours. It was not easy because along the way, you see everything— dead people all over the place, dead animals, and debris. My little brother and cousins were able to see them and we just told them to look away.

Q9: How was your stay in your relative's house?

A9: When we were in my relative's house, it also felt unsafe. Big warehouses nearby were forcibly opened and people were looting all the goods they could get from there and from everywhere. There were news of people getting raped and killed since it was dark and there was no electricity at that time. You could hear gun shots and broken glasses. There were also rumors that a person who was carrying a sack of rice was stabbed by another person to get that sack of rice from him. This happened two (2) to three (3) days after the typhoon. Everyone was so desperate and on survival mode.

It was also difficult not living in your own house and having no house help. I have to do all things by myself. I also realized that when you lose everything, people will treat you differently.

Q10: Why did you say that?

A10: Back then, people were nice to us since my dad was working abroad and my mom was generous with money. We were treated differently because we have nothing left. What was actually left from me was self-respect. The experience ignited a certain fire in me that I have to do something. It was disheartening to see my mom in very low disposition and not even fighting for us. This is very unusual since my mom would not allow anyone to hurt us. That was when I realized that I have to do something.

Q11: What did you do?

A11: I did not have a choice, but to man up. I went back to our old house to see if I could still save some of our clothes, some documents, or anything we could still use.

Three (3) days after the typhoon, signal or reception went back. For the first time we were able to tell to people outside what happened to us. I talked to my sister and she was just crying. Before the typhoon, I was a normal 22-year old who would talk or meet with some boys. But after the typhoon, I never thought about myself and just wanted to be with my family. I lost what a normal younger person would be like doing and was forced to mature quickly.

My sister wanted us to leave Tacloban because it will never be the same again. When she said that, we went to the airport to book a flight since no one could book online. We have to make few trips to the airport because the queue was long. We have to go back the following day.

My family was worried every time we went to the airport, as something might happen. We were driving a motor bike, plying narrow passages and inches close to hundreds of dead bodies, along with debris.

When we reached the airport, we saw desperate people who wanted to leave Tacloban. The earliest flight we could get was at least one (1) week after.

Q12: How did you feel at that time?

A12: We felt not safe every day. We were always worried about our safety, especially during the night. We just wanted to leave Tacloban. At

that time, the most valuable people in our community were the “*tambays*”¹ who roam the area to check if everyone is safe and secure.

Q13: Were you able to move out of Tacloban?

A13: We managed to get in touch with a distant uncle from the Philippine Navy. We were allowed to board a military vessel twenty-four (24) hours before it was officially opened to the public.

At that time, we felt a little secured and we thought we were on a safer place. There were 5,000 more Taclobanons who went aboard the vessel. While on board, we saw trees uprooted and dead bodies everywhere. It reminded me of the scene in the movie *Hunger Games*. We swore not to set foot in Tacloban again.

Then, we flew to Cebu and were received by families and friends. Help was overflowing at that time.

Q14: How long did you stay in Cebu?

A14: Just few months, as we went back to Tacloban in January. My little brother had to continue schooling. At that time, we stayed with our aunt because we could not rebuild our house anymore. It was not the same community. Many have died.

Q15: How was the experience moving back?

A15: It was so difficult. It was so hard to not have your own place. We tried to save a little to rent out a small room which we could call our home.

At that time, my mom was no longer active in her real estate job, as no one would invest in real properties in Tacloban. It was my first time to see her as a real stay-at-home mom, where she would manually do our laundry and other household chores. I had no choice, but to work for the family. I had to work as a school nurse at the school of my little brother so that I could look after him. At that time, I only earned PhP 250.00 a day (just over three [3] pounds) or PhP1,300.00 per week (less than twenty [20] pounds).

To augment my earnings, I worked as a part-time server at my friend’s burger joint. I used the extra income as my drinking money, as an attempt to normalize my social life. There, I met people who were working for foreign non-profit organizations (NGOs). I was able to build a network and was fortunate to find a new job as research assistant and community coordinator.

As a research assistant and community coordinator for an NGO, I did community interviews and I felt like a stranger in my own community

¹ Usually unemployed males loitering or hanging out either on a drinking spree or just chatting with each other outside their homes until wee hours of the morning

after learning a lot from the people I talked with. It was during this work that I found myself useful.

Q16: How did you end up working in London?

A16: Even if I enjoyed what I was doing in Tacloban, the funding for the NGO I was working with was low. It was not a secure job for me. So, I decided to move out of Tacloban and go here in London.

In 2016, there was a mass hiring of nurses from the Philippines to go to United Kingdom. Being a nurse is actually not something I wanted to do. It was what my mom wanted it. But at that point, I realized what is there to lose if we already lost everything? I knew in my heart that I enjoyed community work, but it was not sustainable.

Q17: How did your experience with super typhoon Haiyan affected you, if any?

A17: I was traumatized, but I had to cover it up. I felt I had to repress it. I pretended to be strong for my family since my mom was not. I had to stand up for them. I had to suspend my youth as a 22-year old because I have to help my family. My social life was never the same even if I tried to act normal.

It was also traumatic to see dead bodies everywhere. When I was in Cebu and I saw a homeless person lying on the street, it made me jump out of fright. It reminded me of Tacloban when I saw dead bodies.

We did not undergo any psychosocial briefing. My little brother had to stop from schooling for three (3) months. My mom was not able to work. Before Haiyan, we were living a relatively comfortable life where my mom could earn around PhP100,000.00 or more in a month or two and we could afford house helpers. After Haiyan, we had to make do of what I was earning, which was around PhP5,000.00 to PhP6,000.00 as school nurse.

Also, even our relationship with some of our relatives turned sour. For a year, I never spoke with some of my relatives. I started talking with them only because of my aging grandmother who did not want any feud in the family.

Q18: How else were you affected by your super typhoon Haiyan experience?

A18: Growing up, I thought the strongest typhoon was signal number 3. In my lifetime, I was able to experience signal number 5. Now, I do not know anymore what is in store for us.

Every time I hear typhoons, I remember my experience. Even if I am away, I get in touch with my family to check on them. I get worried

all the time. It is a shame that it took thousands of lives before people started acting on this.

Also, it ignited the drive in me to be better because of how people treated us when we lost everything. I told myself I do not want this to happen again. I became more ambitious, wanting a brighter future for my family. Also, with the opportunity of talking with the communities when I was working in an NGO, there was a renewed appreciation for my place. My love for Tacloban grew even more.

Q19: Have you heard about climate change and what causes it? If yes, what do you know about it?

A19: To be honest, my knowledge on climate change is not that elaborate—only enough to know that irresponsible industrialization produces harmful gases that destroy the ozone layer. In effect, the temperature regulating system of our planet is altered. Glaciers are melting. Atmospheric imbalance is growing; hence, producing stronger typhoons.

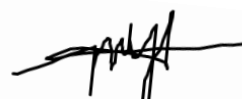
Q20: Do you think climate change has something to do with the occurrence of super typhoon Haiyan? If yes, what is your message to the fossil fuel companies who were said to be the big contributor of climate change?

A20: Definitely. Like I said, growing up, the strongest typhoon signal I knew was signal number 3. Then super typhoon Haiyan happened in 2013. Another super typhoon this year happened simultaneously with the hurricane in the US.

All I ask of these big companies is to allow our children, grandchildren, and the future generations to be able to enjoy an unspoiled planet. I just ask that they consider the long-term effects of their actions. The cheapest and most convenient ways are not always the best for humanity.

Q21: Are you ready and willing to swear this Statement under oath before the Philippine Commission on Human Rights, if required to do so?

A21: Yes.



Marielle Trixie J. Bacason
22 October 2018