Devastating Philippine Cyclone Sends Message to Climate Talks Negotiators

DOHA, Qatar, 7 December (Tebtebba Indigenous Information Service) – An unusually devastating Philippine cyclone has sent an urgent message to those lobbying for a strong global policy to address the impacts of climate change.

“As we are speaking here, thousands of people are reeling from the strongest typhoon ever to hit the Philippines,” said Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, executive director of Tebtebba, a Philippine-based indigenous institution promoting indigenous peoples’ rights. “This current situation is obviously an impact of our changing climate, which is caused largely by green house gas emissions by the richest nations of the world.”
As co-chair of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) working group on REDD Plus (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries), Tauli-Corpuz has been in this Qatari capital for the two-week UN climate change talks, which began last November 26.

She was referring to typhoon Bopha (local name Pablo), which, as of 7 December, claimed over 400 lives, and forced thousands to flee their homes to escape from flash floods and mudslides. News reports from Manila say hundreds missing remain unaccounted after the typhoon packing maximum sustained winds of 250 kilometers per kilometer landed last December 3.

The island of Mindanao in southern Philippines previously did not experience such strong typhoons in recent decades. The country would experience an average of 20 typhoons a year, but this would usually happen in Luzon in northern Philippines. Mindanao, say residents, was “typhoon-free” in past decades.

With these current climatic changes, Tauli-Corpuz is joining her fellow indigenous representatives and thousands of other civil society and indigenous representatives here in lamenting the evidently “lack of political will and commitment” by developed-country Parties to commit to ambitious emission cuts.

As the Conference of Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) ends on December 7, Tauli-Corpuz shares the concerns of...
others that the talks would end without any legally binding targets for developed countries or Annex 1 countries under the Kyoto Protocol.

Meanwhile, the damaging effects of climate change are already being felt. The rise of the average global temperature is 0.8 degrees Celsius (compared to the pre-industrial period). Climate scientists say the world is on a road to a 4 degree rise or more by the end of this century, the consequences of which, they warn, are catastrophic.

On “REDDiness”

Tauli-Corpuz and other indigenous peoples here in Doha are also concerned about the lack of progress in the negotiations on the 2nd Commitment Period of the Kyoto Protocol, mitigation commitments of developed countries (like the USA) outside of the Kyoto Protocol, shared vision, adaptation, REDD Plus, technology development and transfer, finance and capacity-building (under the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action).

They are also concerned about what happened to the REDD Plus under SBSTA. Indigenous peoples were expecting that decisions should be made on how reporting on safeguards were being addressed and respected.

“Under the system of information on safeguards, a national forest monitoring system and measurement of forest reference emission levels should be done as the baselines to measure how much emissions from forests have been reduced,” she said. But decisions on this have been pushed next year, she added.

She also bewailed the lack of agreement on finance from which scaled up finances for climate change mitigation and adaptation would be based.

“I came here with some expectations, which are not realized,” also said Stanley Kimaren, executive director of Indigenous Livelihoods Enhancement Partners (ILEPA), an indigenous organization working closely with pastoralist communities in Kenya.

He has been following closely the discussions on REDD Plus, which included systems of monitoring, information and safeguards.

In implementing REDD Plus, safeguards, said Kimaren, are critical. “Ensuring that safeguards are put in place is the only string we will hang on, especially when the (REDD Plus) mechanism will add some market-based system,” he told a press conference last December 4.

Instituting safeguards can protect indigenous peoples, who, Kimaren said, are strongly and intimately connected to their forests and environment.

“But what did we get in engaging in the discussion? We have a decision that has been bracketed (or practically put in the backburner),” he lamented.

Kimaren is also one of indigenous peoples’ representatives, who have been pushing for recognition of the non-carbon benefits of REDD Plus. “Forests are not just about carbon,” he said. “Forests are also about indigenous peoples’ spirituality, cosmo-vision, social culture, and production (such as
Kimaren called for the strengthening of community-based monitoring systems. He said indigenous and local communities are very much capable of monitoring REDD Plus projects and programs because they have “a nuanced understanding” of their communities.

He said indigenous peoples may need some capacity-building in the use of technological and technical devices such as GPS (Global Positioning System) in measuring carbon. Indigenous peoples can integrate traditional or indigenous with scientific knowledge in monitoring projects, he said.

But indigenous peoples may have to brace for the reluctance of some REDD Plus countries to be monitored, said Tauli-Corpuz. “For us, there has to be a strong monitoring system. We need to monitor how they (governments) are implementing the safeguards we have agreed upon in Cancun,” she said. “We also have to monitor if they are going to respect the rights of indigenous peoples and provide and submit policy reports on how they are implementing these.”

On funds without money

Dennis Mairena, executive director of the Centro para la Autonomía y Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas or CADPI, an indigenous organization promoting indigenous peoples’ rights in Nicaragua, is deeply concerned that those emitting greater greenhouse gases are practically turning their backs on their historical debt. The responsibility to pay for the cost of mitigation and adaptation these heavy emitters caused, that is.

While lamenting the lack of commitment of funds for the Green Climate Fund (GCF), Mairena also scored the lack of full and effective participation of indigenous peoples even as observers in the GCF Board.

He pointed that two observers of the Board are allotted to civil society organizations, from which indigenous peoples’ representatives can come. Indigenous peoples are demanding that they have separate representation from civil society and that they be furnished documents before the Board meetings.

Even with lack of money for the GCF, Mairena stressed on the need for systems of monitoring, information and safeguards for projects funded through the GCF.

Tauli-Corpuz provided information that Section X of the GCF Governing Instrument of GCF is on Safeguards and Section XI is on Accountability.

Section X states that the GCF should have safeguard policies, which are consistent with existing internationally accepted environmental and social standards. “We interpret this to mean the rights of indigenous peoples enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples will be respected and environmental standards that have been agreed upon under environmental conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UNFCCC should be adhered to,” she said.

She also cited Section XI, which calls for redress or grievance mechanisms if ever there are problems with proj-
projects or programs funded through the GCF. She urged the Board to establish this grievance mechanism as well.

“Most important of all is ensuring indigenous peoples’ direct access to the GCF, and not only for governments,” she said. “We are thus calling on the Board to establish a small grants facility that will allow indigenous peoples’ better access to these climate funds.”

She hopes that the Board considers these proposals when its members meet in Berlin in March 2013.

“When they (Board members) meet next year, I hope they will be able to elaborate on this Governing Instrument, which is going to matter a lot for indigenous peoples, especially if they are affected by projects funded by the GCF,” Tauli-Corpuz added.

She likewise underscored an underlying basic principle, which must guide governments in implementing climate change-related projects or programs.

“We call on governments to respect the human rights approach as this ensures that we, indigenous peoples, are not disadvantaged both by the impacts of climate change as well as by the proposed solutions that are put on the table to address climate change impacts,” she said.