

TESTIMONY OF MARINEL UBALDO

I'm Marinel Ubaldo, a 24-year old young professional who is trying to live a normal life after surviving from the wrath of super typhoon Haiyan. I'm currently working as the Advocacy Officer for Ecological Justice and Youth Engagement for Living Laudato Si' Philippines, an interfaith movement initiated by Catholic lay people calling on Philippine financial institutions to divest from coal-related operations and other environmentally harmful activities, and as the Philippine Country Coordinator for COY16 in Glasgow. I grew up in Matarinao, Salcedo, Eastern Samar, with fond memories of a happy childhood playing on a white sand near the shore on a coast facing the Pacific Ocean. I grew up not worrying about food, since we are living on the coast with abundant produce. My father is a fisherman. He did not need to sail far to catch fish. The ocean has always provided for us.

Growing up near the Pacific Ocean, I have been used to typhoons -- it's nothing new to me. Our house has always endured every storm and we seldom need to evacuate. Not until super typhoon Haiyan happened.

The night before Haiyan struck, we had no more electricity. Together with my whole family, we were already at the evacuation center which was 10 metres away from our house. I brought an encyclopedia with me so I can just read until the storm passes. My bag was only filled with my phone, charger, notebook and pen. I didn't bring any clothes because I thought we could go home immediately when the storm subsided. It has always been that way. Never did it cross my mind that we will have nothing left of our house, but only $\frac{1}{4}$ of its flooring and about 3 of its columns. We did not really know what storm surge meant until we experienced it ourselves.

Around 3 o'clock in the morning on November 8, 2013, everyone was panicking as the winds became more intense. We wanted to evacuate again because there might be a tsunami. I saw a woman carrying her child who almost had her head cut-off because of the *GI sheets* blown away by the strong winds. I couldn't fully describe what was happening at that moment. There were plenty of families with their children in tow, rushing to seek refuge in our evacuation center because the evacuation center they were in got destroyed. The roof, windows, and doors of the building we were in also got destroyed. Many of us got injured because of the broken glass windows and flying debris, and 11 people died in our village.

I went back to our house even though the winds were still strong, as I wanted to see if we still had a home to go back to. Although it was still dangerous for me to go back, I wanted to save the box that has a sentimental value to me. This box was very special to me because it was filled with my personal things- my literary works, the certificates and medals I earned in school. For me, that box symbolizes who I am, my achievements, my self-worth. Nothing was left of our home. And losing that box felt like losing my identity, my dreams, my significance as a person.

Three days after Haiyan, we were left in isolation. We had nothing to eat but cassava. We had no food, water, electricity, and secured shelter. We had no change of clothes so we were all wet and cold. I was confused and devastated by the reality I was facing. I was only 16 and was about to graduate high school at that time, and I wasn't even sure if I could graduate, let alone continue my college education. I lost my books, my uniform. How can I continue studying when my parents cannot afford to send me to school anymore because we lost our livelihood?

For 3 months I was not able to go to school because it got destroyed. March 2014 came and we needed to fast track all lessons so we could graduate by April 2014. After Haiyan happened, it seemed like my future even became more uncertain because my parents did not earn enough to send me to college. Luckily, I was

able to get a scholarship for my college education, and was able to work by facilitating training on climate change adaptation and mitigation.

I had no choice but to do it so I could sustain my needs, especially because our fishing livelihood stopped for months because my father's boat was broken, and there were no fish to catch. We couldn't bear the thought of eating fish that may have fed on the dead bodies of our neighbors, and people we know. My father had to sail to other places just to go fishing but he would end up with little to nothing. There was a huge depletion of fish catch after Haiyan and it made surviving even more difficult.

It even came to a point when my mom couldn't handle it anymore, so she left us for good.

And thus we were faced with another dilemma. I was already in my 1st year of college in Tacloban at that time when my father told me the news. As time passed, my father suffered from depression, he barely ate and slept. He couldn't bear to go fishing anymore, and he became suicidal. Being far away from home knowing that your family is in that painful situation made things worse, but I had to remain strong.

I first learned about Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction in October 2012. At the age of 15, I became a child facilitator and I had the opportunity to visit remote communities and schools to educate people about the causes and effects of Climate Change, and the measures necessary to adapt and mitigate its effects.

Seven years later, my nerves still get the best of me whenever I hear the crash of the ocean waves. I get anxious and restless when it rains because I fear that another Haiyan will happen again. It took me three years before I was able to go into the ocean again. It's sad because the ocean was our childhood friend, I grew up with it. It has always provided everything we need. But now, whenever we look at the ocean, there's always fear because we can never forget how it took everything away from us.

Super Typhoon Haiyan was the strongest typhoon ever recorded. If climate change continues, the Philippines will be experiencing more and stronger typhoons. Super Typhoons will become a normal phenomenon, and it would mean that my children will live their lives fighting, and surviving super typhoons.

These experiences motivated me to do more. Sharing has been the key to healing for me. Because I realized Climate Change is not just an issue of adaptation and mitigation but also an issue of human rights. This is the start when I started lobbying with the government, delivering talks around the US, Europe, and Asia.

Last 2015, we submitted, along with other grassroots organizations like the fisherman, farmers, IPs and others, a landmark petition to the Commission of Human Rights of the Philippines to investigate 47 carbon majors for their contributions to human rights violations linked to climate impact. And, in 2018 I have served as a community witness during the public hearing in New York, and September last year I was one of those who did a lone protest in front of the Shell Company in Bonifacio Global City calling them to face the people. Finally, after 4 years of battling with the carbon majors, we have won and the result of the first in the world Climate Justice petition is a basis for future actions. Now, there is already a legal document that declares that these highest carbon emitting companies are responsible for fueling climate change, and for the human rights violations linked to climate impacts. We are nearing the justice that we deserve. We want the carbon majors to acknowledge their responsibility for what they have done to us, to my community and other vulnerable

communities around the world. But these companies didn't show up in any of the hearings conducted. They did not have the decency to hear the stories of people who have suffered because of their business practices.

My international engagements gave me an opportunity to be exposed to different environments allowing me to experience working and networking with people from diverse backgrounds, and understanding different ways and approaches that organizations do to help young people become a catalyst of change in their communities. My global campaign with Amnesty International on Write for Rights gathered almost 600,000 support worldwide, through organizations like Plan International, Greenpeace, Amnesty, and Living Laudato Si' Philippines. I was able to represent the voices of the youth and the marginalized at COPs and COYs. And, for this year, I am set to attend the Pre-COP YouthInClimate Driving Action in Milan Italy, and the COY16 in Glasgow.

Also, together with my 3 friends, we have founded the Youth Leaders Environmental Action Federation that is a youth-led organization based in Eastern Visayas. The organization partners with different youth organizations in communities and schools. We give mentorship and training to other youth organizations on where and how to start with their advocacy, projects and programs. We are the first organization who organized the Climate Youth Strike in Eastern Visayas. We also have submitted a petition to the City of Tacloban to ban single use plastics, and we have lobbied with the city council with a policy on the banning of single-use plastic. Those are just some of the things that we have achieved so far, and we are continuing.

Our government in the Philippines has long been deaf to the outcry of their people. In COP25 in Madrid, no one from our government has brought the voices of the Filipino people to the negotiation table. In 2019, the Philippines is the 3rd most deadliest country to be an environmental advocate, according to Global Witness.

Friends from the US who are here today, you are leaders, you are known experts in your respective fields, you are being looked up to by so many people, but behind those achievements, you are fathers, mothers, grandfather/mothers, aunts/uncles, sisters/brothers to the younger generation. When you go home, you go home to the kisses of your children. I dare you to look them in the eye, and tell them you are burning their future in front of your own eyes. You should not be the one asking me what the US could do to help us. You should know the answer to that. Stop funding business as usual. Stop loaning developing countries large amounts of money for "climate projects" that are impossible to be settled. You need to take accountability for the suffering of vulnerable people from countries that are not contributing that much to global carbon emission like the Philippines. Stop the "fake it until you make it" tactic, we are in an emergency not in a show. You are superheroes to your children, and you should be one for the Earth.

I saw the hopelessness the typhoon had caused – the struggle of my community and my family, the loss and destruction. I have seen death. I realized we should not just accept being vulnerable throughout our lives; we should not accept being only victims. We have the power and we have to do something. I do not want my family and community to suffer again.

More and more young people are fighting to reclaim our rights to our future. There should be no such thing as a youth climate activist, yet here I am and there are thousands of others like me who have led a life of activism not by choice but by necessity.

No amount of climate denial, or apathy can resurrect our loved ones. But I hope to awaken the minds of those most responsible for climate change, of those who have the greatest capacity to act and change the current system for the protection of vulnerable communities everywhere.

I'm here in front of you, not just as a climate statistic you see in the news, but I'm here as a human being – hoping to remind you that we need to value lives again.

In his encyclical, *Laudato Si – the Care on Our Common Home* – paragraph 49, Pope Francis said, “We have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”

My story is only one of many, and I'm here to speak on behalf of the vulnerable and the marginalized communities - may our voices be heard.

Thank you!

END