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Philippines

Hello. I am Kristine Marie Sabate, a climate activist from Davao City, Philippines. I started my activism in April 2019. Although I do not participate in weekly strikes (as protesting in my country is very stigmatized, and you are automatically tagged as a communist or a rebel), I strike on major events, participate in round-table discussions on local youth environmental summits with environmental organizations within the Sustainable Davao Movement, and create online discussions through sharing environmental and climate emergency articles.

I am a child of Typhoons Ondoy and Yolanda (Haiyan). Being a climate activist and requesting climate action, in a country where we barely create carbon emissions yet are receiving the blow of the impact of fossil fuels, is very challenging. I want to share my experience during Typhoon Haiyan and how it created a story about my challenges as a climate activist in the Philippines.

So, let me start it off with... It was a cold dawn. No blanket was enough to provide comfort for my shivers; but the smell of early-morning Barako and toasted rice, and the monotonous murmuring of current national news, kept me warm. Most of the lights were out in the dining room, yet one remained. The news murmured some more. It caught my full attention. It was a man, in front of the green screen of a weather forecast. Unlike any other time in his segment, his tone was different. He told us to pack as many essentials as we could. 'This time,' he said, 'the typhoon is unlike any other before.' As I watched, sceptical of the message, thinking it would be one of the regular typhoons we experienced, I

remembered reading the ticker tape: it was 7 November 2013 – the literal calm before the storm.

I knew something disastrous was going to happen. I just did not know to what extent. As the day of the typhoon came, the storm was indeed unlike anything before. The winds were more than I could imagine. What once was a hill covered with coconuts now became a bald, brown field. The winds threw the houses, made out of nipa and coconut lumber, to the sky, with no remorse. Roofs made out of aluminium were not enough to keep everyone dry. They flew to the sky as well. My house now became a soggy, wet shelter. Everything was drenched, even the ceilings. The wind's restlessness remained for hours. We were wet; we were tired.

Later on, the skies had already calmed. The typhoon was over. As we got out of our shelters, our emotions were all simultaneously provoked. We saw the trees in the garden all collapsed, every single one but the papaya plant; the houses in the neighbourhood were all missing their roofs; and the 7 a.m. sun had wreaked its radiance, as if it was already noon. The heat was unbearable. The damage in my village and my region was too much – so much that money was not even valuable any more at that moment, there was no food available, transportation was impossible to access, and electricity was not available for the next three to four months. Six thousand people from Tacloban, a city two hours away from where I live, died in that typhoon. It is said that the death toll was so high that some are still unidentified to this day.

Four years after the disaster, I moved to the city, and became one of the lucky ones who was able to escape the regular typhoons in the province, and to have a better and more stable lifestyle. I was able to forget the tragedy and carry on with my everyday life, as if it had never occurred in the first place.

I never knew I was privileged until now. I only just came to realize that not everyone was as fortunate as I was. While my family and I were able to receive enough to eat during Typhoon Haiyan, some of our neighbours, and other people from the affected region, were starving, injured and mourning. While we were able to contact our friends from other places and reassure them of our survival, others were devastated by the loss of loved ones and hard-earned properties.

That experience made me realize that I was taught that resilience was what we should embody the most. And that everything has a reason. I was told not to question the phenomena around me, beyond what was and is socially acceptable. I was expected not to be involved in politics, or even question current policies. After some years, I learned to cope with the trauma and not question the disaster at all. It was something that was all a memory, a natural disaster caused by the laws of nature and nature alone.

Our population is scattered over an archipelago of 7,641 islands, and we have many ways of talking, greeting, eating; yet we still have something in common – resilience. You would think at first, ‘Yes, we do need resilience.’ Resilience gives one hope for tomorrow. It gives the reassurance that something better will come. It gives light in times when one does not have the strength to pull through hardships; but not every kind of resilience is the same.

In this case, the Filipinos, during disasters, are too resilient. So much so, that we tend to look on a situation too positively and disregard the case for justice and accountability. But who can blame us? When systems fail, we have nothing and no one to rely on but ourselves. When no media coverage of the accountability of the fossil fuel industry, animal agriculture and other factors is shown to the people, you would not blame us for believing that no one is at fault. We will tend to believe that there is no urgency.

In my society, environmental issues and policies still belong to the ‘preservation of Mother Earth’ - it must be more than that. This little blue planet will carry on and exist for millions of years to come. The Earth is not in need of rescue; we are. We have to think of making the world a better place as more than hype and trendy marketing. That is something I want to help change. I want to make the conversation less of a taboo by educating (not humiliating) people uninformed about the climate crisis. I want to fill in the gap of climate education, and make information more accessible to people who are more drawn to TikTok, Instagram, K-dramas and video games. Who knows, maybe in a week or two, climate urgency is something we will talk with our parents about at the dinner table, or during a day at the park; maybe a cup of tea will create the next climate revolution.