

UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF VISITS FLOOD-RAVAGED ILLIGAN AND CAGAYAN DE ORO

(Mindanao, 3 January 2012): The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator (UN HC) for the Philippines Jacqui Badcock is impressed by the humanitarian response that has been mobilized to help thousands of people left homeless by flash floods caused by Tropical Storm Sendong.

“As tragic as this disaster is, I am heartened by the impressive response provided by local authorities, government agencies and volunteers who have been working non-stop for more than a fortnight,” said Ms Badcock adding “So much has already been done in such a short period of time despite the overwhelming needs.”

The tropical storm sent torrents of water, mud and logs cascading through villages and two major cities on 17 December, destroying more than 13,000 houses and displacing some 430,000 people. The death toll stands at 1,257 and many remain missing. More than 37,000 people remain in 54 evacuation centers in Illigan and Cagayan de Oro.

“People affected in remote villages and the families in the evacuation centers are the main priorities and I am very pleased to hear that the authorities are looking for the best possible sites to build new accommodation for these people and are keeping them well informed and part of the decision-making process. This is an ideal outcome,” she Ms Badcock.

During her two-day mission Ms Badcock visited ‘ground zero’ in Illigan and Cagayan de Oro, as well as Mandulog, a remote community outside Illigan city where 545 families live. The village was badly affected and is only recently accessible. It has lost its school and more than 250 homes were washed away and another 300 left damaged.

Ms Badcock also visited the Macasandig evacuation centre in Cagayan de Oro where more than 335 families are living in cramped conditions under a covered basketball court. Outside there are teams of workers constructing temporary accommodation, showers and toilet blocks, with funds provided by the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

In the center she met a woman with five children who was sleeping when the flood water came. “My husband told me to climb up a coconut tree with the children but the water was so strong it pushed the tree over. We held on for our lives and were swept out to sea.” Not all of her family survived.

“I’m pleased that the international community could support the Government’s efforts during this time. The UN and NGO partners have really stepped up to provide as much support and expertise during this difficult time.

“The day after the floods hit, our national staff were on the ground organizing a rapid needs assessment, and mobilizing resources and assistance,” she said.

During her visits with the mayors of both cities, as well as the Regional Director of the Office of Civil Defense and Dept. of Social Welfare and Development she pledged the continued support of the international community and offered information management expertise from the UN to help process and analyze data to help the authorities coordinate its response.

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