



SAMIN
SISTER'S ASSOCIATION IN MINDANAO

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Sisters and SAMIN friends and benefactors,

Fresh from the Balsa Mindanao relief mission to Leyte, my heart is heavy with various emotions. The images on television are powerful, but nothing could have prepared us to witness firsthand the death and destruction left behind by our country's latest calamity. Yet it is in the spirit of the survivors of Typhoon Yolanda that I am writing to you today.

Riding through Tacloban and the surrounding cities we saw people struggling to regain their footing after the catastrophe. Men and women clearing debris from the streets, the building of small shelters from the remnants of houses destroyed, vendors beginning to sell soft drinks and vegetables again. The spirit of the people is damaged but the resilience of the people is thriving.

Our caravan of roughly 300 missionaries, including 26 SAMIN sisters from 12 congregations, arrived in Tacloban around 10pm in the evening of November 24. As we pulled up to the Benedictine school where we were to stay for the next two nights, St. Scholastica's College, we spotted two body bags lying in the street just a few feet away from the entrance. This literal image of death prepared our hearts and minds for the reality and necessity of our mission.

We awoke before sunrise the next morning to head to our designated relief areas. SAMIN sisters lead the psycho-social activities for the men women and children, and even the religious sisters affected by Yolanda. The people are victims; our hearts went out especially to the children. Their homes destroyed, family members killed. Yet by the smiles on their faces during the activities you

wouldn't have been able to tell. One sister left the area at the end of the day with tears in her eyes clutching a small biscuit that one young child insisted that she have. It is this spirit, visible in that child who continually reassures that our work is relevant and needed given the immensity of the number of communities affected by Typhoon Haiyan.

Things got emotional in the community of San Joaquin where we held a liturgy honoring the deceased members of the town. We stood at the foot of a mass grave, and watched victims digging graves and burying their dead.

This was by no means a comfortable trip, emotionally or physically. We were told before arriving not to expect to be able to take a bath. We sisters were hosted in a small room that sustained less damage than some of the others. We slept on the floor for our three nights in Tacloban. As we all know, working for the people who truly need our help is not always easy. But responding to the needs of the people is part of who we are, and what we have been called to do by our loving God.

Relief efforts in humanitarian crisis such as this are critical, but what is it that will distinguish us from the hundreds of other organizations offering relief services? Our commitment to continued advocacy is what sets us apart. SAMIN in conjunction with partner organization Balsa Mindanao stands firm in our stance of educating our people on the importance of care for our environment. We as human beings have been given responsibility over all other living things. We must and we will continue to educate our people of the dangers that enhance the probability of disasters such as Yolanda as well as the oppressive practices that keep the cycle of poverty intact.

SAMIN sisters choose to join the association because SAMIN gives them the opportunity to live out their faith radically. The type of radicalism that is imperative of the gospel, following directly in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, the prophet, the voice of the voiceless, and the challenger of the status quo in His time. He, being a God of love and compassion challenged the immoral rules and laws that were anti-people. SAMIN strives to do the same through our work. We provide our members the opportunity to grow personally, relationally, and

prophetically in living their religious vocation with our fundamental option in journeying with, and serving the Anawim of Yahweh.

While our first wave relief mission was a success, there is more work to be done. We can offer more to our brothers and sisters in the Visayas who lost everything, and we will. **We continue our appeal for resources, goods and/or cash, which will be used for our second wave relief mission tentatively scheduled for mid-December.**

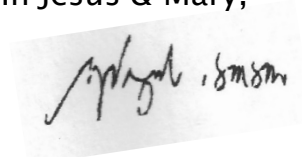
We would of course be remiss to not formally thank those who contributed to our first relief mission. Daghan Salamat to Father Ed OSB from Digos, The Hilton Fund for Sisters, Sr. Juana Navel CSC & community, Notre Dame of Kidapawan College c/o Sr. Alecs Dumaboc OND, Mr. Remus Morandante, the Benedictine sisters of Tacloban, and our anonymous donors. The success of this mission would not have been possible without your help and dedication to the people of the Visayas. We also thank you personally for accompanying us with your prayers and continued support and interest in our advocacies.

We women religious have power and influence. Let us use it. This is the grand challenge for us as religious congregations in this day and age. This is the call we hear echoed by our beloved Pope Francis. We therefore continue to invite you to join, contact or donate to SAMIN as we plan to travel back to the Visayas.

Here in Mindanao, let us remember the spirit of that giving child especially now as we have commenced the first Sunday of Advent season. Let us embody the spirit of the survivors, and their spirit of resiliency. Let it propel our reflections on the real meaning of Christmas and impel us to continue our work for our people and for God.

A blessed and meaningful Advent journey to you all.

In Jesus & Mary,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Raphael Samson", is written on a small, light-colored rectangular piece of paper.

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Sisters' Association in Mindanao (SAMIN) Sisters



Psycho-Social Intervention





Relief Distribution



Medical Mission



Liturgy at the Mass Grave



