

Headline: A People's Pilgrimage for climate justice

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The climate movement is gaining momentum and no less than Pope Francis has written an encyclical that tackles the social injustice of climate change.

It is a movement that is uniting communities across the Pacific and in the Philippines who have experienced the tragedy of extreme, violent weather fueled by climate change. I was in the South Pacific island-nation of Vanuatu the other week to launch the People's Pilgrimage, a global network of faith-based, environmental and civil society groups who, over the next six months, will make a journey, including a historic 1,500-kilometer walk beginning in Rome and culminating in Paris, where the United Nations Climate Change Conference takes place in December.

As in the Philippines where I come from, communities in Vanuatu are exposed to the vagaries of climate disruption. In March, the island-nation was pummeled by Cyclone "Pam," one of the strongest storms to ever hit the South Pacific. Almost 90 percent of the buildings in Port Vila, Vanuatu's capital, were totally destroyed. Winds reached strengths similar to those brought in November 2013 by Supertyphoon "Yolanda" (Haiyan), which devastated Central Philippines and remains the strongest storm to ever make landfall in modern recorded history.

Vanuatu President Baldwin Lonsdale has spoken about the impacts of Cyclone Pam and the resilience of his people. But these are not ordinary tragedies, nor are they accidents.

What started as a gathering of people from other Pacific islands such as Kiribati, Tuvalu and Solomon Islands on board the Greenpeace ship, the Rainbow Warrior, has now become an alliance demanding climate justice. Much of the harm that many vulnerable communities face are actually consequences of a chain of actions that have collectively altered the face of the planet, leading to climate disruption.

Every superstorm will have the fingerprints of climate change. And climate change will have the unequivocal and more unmistakable fingerprints of an incredibly small number of entities, including investor-owned fossil-fuel companies that have benefited from the use and exploitation of the global commons. Recent research shows that 90 carbon major entities are responsible for an estimated 65 percent of all anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions between 1751 and 2013.

As ocean temperatures continue to rise, storms like Yolanda/Haiyan can get even stronger and more common. A recent study found that the intensity of hurricanes in the northwestern Pacific Ocean can increase by 14 percent—nearly equivalent to an increase of one category on the hurricane intensity scale—by the end of the century.

What is also becoming clear is that the most severe impacts are being experienced by those who have contributed the least to the causes of climate disruption and have benefited the least from the burning of fossil fuels. Many would argue that the world's nations need to continue depending on fossil fuels to emancipate all people from poverty. But the failure of this paradigm to address inclusive and sustainable development sits at the heart of climate injustice.

We need to turn this around and hold to account those responsible. I am filled with hope that justice will be delivered, because not only are we uniting diverse communities across the Pacific and in the

Philippines, but I and many other Filipinos are also signing up to what may be the first climate legal action brought before a national human rights institution. In this act of defiance, Philippine civil society groups, along with Greenpeace Southeast Asia, are mounting a petition that will pave the way to holding the big polluters accountable and preventing further climate harm.

The major carbon polluters are aware of the harm that they are causing the planet, and yet they continue to extract and sell fossil fuels. But we are emboldened by Pope Francis' encyclical and carry its urgency with us as we undertake the People's Pilgrimage for climate justice.

Naderev "Yeb" Saño is a Filipino environmentalist and climate activist and formerly with the Philippine Climate Change Commission where he served as chief climate negotiator. He is also spiritual ambassador for Our Voices, a multifaith climate network.

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