

Headline: Climate envoy's epic walk ends in ground zero

Byline: Philippine Daily Inquirer

Published Date: 04:45 AM November 08, 2014

Section: globalnation

Word Count: 3647

Content:

MANILA, Philippines—He began his walk more than a month ago in Manila. It ends today when he tramps into Tacloban City, ground zero of the strongest typhoon ever to hit land—an epic march he believes will help spur action against global warming.

"It's been a wonderful journey. Physically, the walk is starting to take a toll on my leg ... but everyone is in high spirits and so am I," Philippine climate change envoy Naderev Saño told Agence France-Presse on Friday on reaching his final rest-stop in the typhoon-damaged town of Basey, Samar province.

Sano ends his 1,000-kilometer trek today in Tacloban City that was among the worst hit when Supertyphoon "Yolanda" (international name: Haiyan) crashed in off the Pacific Ocean exactly one year ago.

Sano and 12 other walkers have traveled an average of 25 kilometers a day since leaving the capital Manila.

Philippine climate change envoy Naderev Saño. INQUIRER FILE PHOTO

Show of solidarity

Sano, the Philippine representative to the United Nations' climate change negotiations, made world headlines last year when he fasted during the annual summit in Poland to protest the lack of meaningful progress on global warming.

The trek to Tacloban is another call to action, and he has garnered the support of global environment activist heavyweights, such as Greenpeace, Oxfam and Climate Action Network, as well as strong social media support.

No illusions

The walk is also a show of solidarity for the millions of survivors of Yolanda, many of whom are enduring brutal poverty and living in areas that leave them dangerously exposed to the next big storm.

"We are under no illusions that the walk will change anything [in the climate change fight] overnight, but it is raising awareness," Sano said.

A more tangible outcome of the journey was the overwhelming support of the local communities that the walkers have passed through, according to Sano.

"At the least, every person whom we have encountered we can safely say we have converted on climate change action and they will become local environmental heroes in their own communities," he said.

“Many of them promised to us they would continue the fight by organizing with their own communities to protect their natural resources.”

40 towns

Sano said every local government in the 40 towns they stopped in along the way had also signed commitments to take their own action on climate change, including developing strategies to cope with stronger storms.

Sano said the band of walkers had swelled to as many as 3,000 people at different stages of the trek, as schoolchildren and supporters in towns joined for a few hours or a day.

The original group that started in Manila stayed each night in tents or in local community centers, such as gymnasiums or schools, and they would approach each town banging drums or playing other musical instruments.

Tears in the end

Sano, 40, said he had lost a lot of weight and had a shin splint that left him in severe pain during the final stages of the walk, but he was otherwise in good health.

Sano described the best part of the journey as the walk into Basey, which was the first town in his journey that had been badly damaged during Yolanda.

“I was personally anticipating a solemn atmosphere but what we got was a rousing welcome ... I got teary-eyed, many walkers got teary-eyed,” he said. AFP

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