

**ONE MONTH ON, THOUSANDS OF SENDONG SURVIVORS CONTINUE TO NEED ASSISTANCE**

(Mindanao, Bangkok, New York: 17 January 2012): Hundreds of thousands of people in northern Mindanao, in particular those located in remote and suburban areas which, continue to need vital humanitarian assistance, shelter in particular, one month after flash floods and landslides swept through villages and two major cities.

Tropical Storm Washi, known locally as Sendong, lashed the Philippine island and neighbouring areas from 16 to 18 December last year, bringing torrential rains which triggered the disaster. More than 50,000 houses were damaged and livelihoods of some 1.1 million people were affected. About 26,000 survivors remain in largely overcrowded evacuation centres in Cagayan de Oro and Iligan and another 200,000 people are seeking refuge in makeshift shelters and with host families in their areas of origin.

“We will not lessen our efforts until we are absolutely certain that assistance has reached all those in need,” said the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for the Philippines Jacqui Badcock adding “Our priority now is to ensure that aid continues to reach those outside of evacuation centres, including people in remote and suburban areas, many of whom are also affected by on-going armed conflicts.”

Hours after the disaster hit, the Government and the humanitarian community launched a joint, large-scale relief operation and have since been providing life-saving assistance to some 430,000 people, including emergency shelter, food, water and sanitation, protection, medical and psycho-social care and other relief goods. The agreed plan of intervention is based on the multi-cluster initial rapid assessment completed in the first 72 hours.

Although significant progress has been made to date; much more remains to be accomplished in the months to come, including addressing the specific needs of women, children and other vulnerable groups. One particular challenge is to ensure that adequate temporary and long-term shelter solutions are provided to all the displaced and become a basis for rebuilding of sustainable livelihoods and bringing lives back to normalcy.

“We cannot just re-establish these communities, we must also make them more resilient and prepared to avoid unnecessary loss of life in the future,” said Ms. Badcock noting that “nothing can be accomplished without involving the displaced throughout this process and empowering them to contribute to it and make informed, voluntary decisions regarding the future of their families.”

Construction work in several temporary relocation sites established on land made available by the authorities is on-going, with 350 families having already moved in to one such site in Cagayan de Oro. Permanent relocation sites for all those who lost their homes and those who cannot return to their areas of origin (declared by the Government as ‘no build’ zones) are due to open in July 2012. The exact numbers of people to be provided with shelter or shelter-repair assistance remain unconfirmed. Tenure security and land occupancy conditions are the key challenges to be addressed urgently by the authorities.

Joint multi-cluster rapid (needs) assessments began today, aimed at identifying gaps and informing the revision of the existing response plan, taking into account the evolution of the situation and needs. The Flash Appeal, launched by the Humanitarian Country Team on 22 December, remains 26 per cent funded with US\$ 7.4 million received so far, including a \$3-million disbursement from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

*For further information, please call:*

*Leszek Barczak, OCHA Philippines, [barczakl@un.org](mailto:barczakl@un.org), cell: +63(0)927 580 3273*

*Kirsten Mildren, OCHA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, [mildren@un.org](mailto:mildren@un.org), cell +66 819 151 276*

*OCHA press releases are available at [www.unocha.org](http://www.unocha.org) & [www.reliefweb.int](http://www.reliefweb.int) More information available at <http://ph.one.un.org/response>*