Emergency Directors: Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines
Analysis of the Classification of the Emergency

Overview
Typhoon Haiyan made landfall in the Philippines in Eastern Samar province on 8 November at 4.40am local time with winds reaching up to 315kph. It travelled through the Visayas, bringing destruction and death to nine regions of the Philippines.

Under the IASC Transformative Agenda, the IASC Principals have agreed that major humanitarian crises triggered by natural disasters or conflict which require system-wide mobilization (so-called ‘Level 3/L3’ emergencies) are to be subject to a Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation (‘L3 activation’), to ensure a more effective response to the humanitarian needs of affected people. The activation of an L3 emergency takes into full account the host Government’s leadership of the response. The L3 activation is a time-bound measure intended only to allow humanitarian organizations to make available, as a matter of top priority, the leadership capacities, funds, supplies and personnel required to support the Government’s response. While a system-wide L3 designation does not commit individual agencies to internally classify the crisis as an L3; it does obligate them to meet system-wide L3 obligations.

The designation of an L3 emergency is to be issued by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), in consultation with the IASC Principals, and on the basis of an analysis of 5 criteria: scale, complexity, urgency, capacity, and reputational risk. The Emergency Directors met on 10 November 2013 to assess the situation against these criteria. Following is a summary of their analysis. The Emergency Directors agreed to recommend the activation of an L3 system-wide emergency response, pending confirmation that the Government would be receptive to such a declaration, and once proper consultations had been undertaken with national authorities.

Analysis

1. SCALE: VERY HIGH / CATASTROPHIC
Typhoon Haiyan is one of the strongest storms ever to make landfall. At least 9.5 million people have been affected by the typhoon in 9 regions across a large geographic area including multiple islands. While the official death toll remains just over 100, the latest media reports indicate that more than 10,000 people have been killed. There are reports of people being buried in mass graves. Hospitals are full and many health centres are closed or have been looted. More than 618,000 people are displaced with around 435,700 sheltering inside nearly 1,500 evacuation centres and nearly 182,500 living with host families. Tacloban City, the capital of the worst-affected province, Leyte, has no food, water or electricity. Communications are down and access to affected areas is limited due to damaged and flooded roads, debris and fallen trees. There are still several areas from which no information has been received and the number of people affected and dead is expected to continue to rise.
2. **URGENCY: VERY HIGH**

Although the full scale of this disaster will only become clear in the coming days, the displacement and lack of access to food and clean water already reported require the immediate mobilisation of a large-scale response. There is an urgent need to provide temporary shelter for those displaced and to get food, essential non-food items and clean water to people in the worst-affected areas. There is also an urgent need for debris clearing and restoration of electricity and communications. There is also need for emergency health. The threat of continued morbidity and mortality exists due to untreated injuries, dehydration, significant environmental impact (lack of water, electricity, food), lack of health supplies, and speed and scale of population displacement. The thousands of deaths due to injury indicate that up to 5 times as many people will have survived the event with injuries that will require treatment. There is a risk of disease outbreak due to poor sanitary conditions and the destruction of health infrastructure. Delaying the response or responding inadequately could result in loss of life.

3. **COMPLEXITY: HIGH**

There are significant logistical challenges to the response, with many airports and seaports damaged and closed to commercial traffic, and travel by road impeded by debris and destruction. Telecommunications are still disrupted in Leyte and Eastern Samar.

Security is also an issue. Various armed individuals and groups are roaming the streets looting or protecting their property. Although IASC actors are not currently a target of the violence, if aid is not delivered swiftly, humanitarian workers may become the focus of local anger. There are already reports of humanitarian convoys being attacked and looted, including a Philippines Red Cross convoy in Tacloban.

As the scale of the disaster becomes known, an increasing number of countries are offering bilateral assistance, including military assets. This will add to the complexity of the operation. Strong civil-military coordination will be essential in the coming days to maximize the response and avoid duplication of efforts.

Another tropical storm is expected to impact the same area over the coming few days.

4. **CAPACITY: MEDIUM, DUE TO THE RESPONSE TO MULTIPLE EMERGENCIES**

The Philippines has good national capacity to respond to emergencies of this kind and has a strong working relationship with the international community. International organizations also have strong presence on the ground.

However, in-country response capacity is stretched due to the simultaneous response to multiple emergencies, including the recent fighting and displacement in Zamboanga in September 2013 and the Bohol earthquake of 15 October 2013.

The Government has expressed shock at the magnitude of this disaster. The Government officially accepted international assistance on 9 November, requesting all possible support from the UN and its partners, particularly with regard to logistics. Some ministries, including the Department of Health, have requested extensive international assistance, including the deployment of field hospitals and foreign medical teams.

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) is supporting the response through twelve clusters: Health, Logistics, Emergency Telecommunications, WASH, Nutrition, Education, Protection, Emergency Shelter, Camp
Coordination/Camp Management, Early Recovery, Livelihoods and Food Security and Agriculture.

The HCT and Philippines Red Cross are planning to establish at least four field hubs for the response. Given the scale of the disaster, further UNDAC team members and agency staff, including Global Cluster Leads and L3-capable cluster coordinators, are already being deployed and are expected to land in the coming days to bolster the response. An ASEAN Emergency Rapid Assessment Team has also deployed.

5. **REPUTATIONAL RISK: HIGH**

This large-scale and very visible disaster has captured media headlines around the world, particularly given the visual parallels to the devastation wrought by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

Although the Government is leading the response, reputational risk is high for the international community given the profile of the crisis and the Government’s high expectations for international support.

This crisis is the first large-scale sudden-onset natural disaster to strike since the IASC Transformative Agenda was adopted and strong scrutiny of the IASC response can therefore be expected.