Signs of Climate Change Spur Mercy to Push for Mitigation and Adaptation

Reports of probable signs of climate change throughout the Institute were on my mind when a couple of dozen sisters, associates, co-workers, students, volunteers and friends participated in the Forward on Climate rally in Washington, D.C., in February 2013.

Most of the more than 35,000 people gathered on the National Mall to urge President Obama to take action on climate change were probably thinking about the drought that reduced harvest yields in some parts of the United States last year and the devastation of Hurricane Sandy along the northeastern coast. Scientists have said both examples could be indications of a changing climate.

I remembered heart-wrenching pleas from sisters in the Philippines after Typhoon Pablo in December, 2012, left more than 1,000 people dead and destroyed whole communities and agricultural land. The sisters said villagers had been caught by surprise since their island of Mindanao is not usually in the path of such storms. A government climate change commission has linked such extreme weather events to a “rapidly changing climate” and is preparing disaster reduction and climate change adaptation plans. The sisters blame deforestation and the erosion of mountains for mining purposes for contributing to the threat.

“Now I am feeling heavy because we sisters and many cause-oriented Filipinos have been working hard to do advocacy work and because our adversaries are over-powering giants,” Sister Mary Socorro Largo (NyPPaW) wrote in an email message. “We feel so helpless and hopeless many times but we do not stop our advocacy. Please pray for us in these island countries because we are targets of killer calamities and for the conversion of those who are only after the gold and gain without regard to the poor people who are usually the victims.”

In Argentina, Sister Ana Maria Siufi (CCASA/Argentina) warns about melting glaciers that are worrying downstream populations that depend on the ice fields for a steady summer water supply for drinking and agriculture.

In Chuuk, a collection of islands in the Pacific, Sister Cabrini Taitano (NyPPaW) reports that the rising ocean level is noticeably diminishing the size of some islands. Salt water is infiltrating people’s taro patches and causing this source of staple food to diminish, therefore increasing reliance on imported rice. On one island west of the Chuuk Lagoon, most of the people have relocated to Guam, Hawaii and mainland U.S.

In Guam, Sister Trinie Pangelinan (NyPPaW) has observed a change in the traditional wet and dry seasons. “Guam’s ‘rainy season’ was usually in the summer, and the dry season was always from November-March,” she wrote in January. “Now, it’s unpredictable. We had the rainy season since March of last year, and it’s still raining much of the time.”

These stories provide all the more reason for Mercy to push for climate change mitigation and adaptation wherever we can. Please consider becoming an Earth advocate. Sign up online at capwiz.com/sistersofmercy/m/m/signup to receive information and opportunities to contact your legislators.

—Marianne Comfort
(Institute Justice Team)