

To the National Government: A Call for Urgent Action, Transparency, and Accountability on the Oil Spill in the Verde Island Passage and Adjacent Waters

We decry the disruption caused by the oil spill from MT Princess Empress to the lives and livelihood of coastal communities and the health of critical marine biodiversity - as the fuel tanker sank in waters belonging to the Verde Island Passage, the most biodiverse marine habitat in the world that is undeniably a national ecological treasure for the Philippines.

According to the data gathered by [Karagatan Patrol](#), the oil spill has already reached almost a million hectares (984,238) of municipal waters covering the 10 coastal towns of Oriental Mindoro, two in Palawan and one in Antique. Based on the data as of March 17, 2023, this tragic incident has reached the waters of Bansud, Bongabong, Bulalacao, Calapan, Gloria, Mansalay, Naujan, Pinamalayan, Pola and Roxas in Oriental Mindoro; Caluya in Antique; and Agutaya and Taytay in Palawan.

We welcome the hearing conducted by the Senate Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Climate Change over half a month since this tragic situation began, and we are looking forward to the resumption of the investigation as soon as possible. We are concerned that we have yet to see decisive leadership on the necessary steps among concerned national government agencies.

The March 14 hearing, presided by Chairperson Cynthia Villar, exposed glaring negligence in ensuring seaworthiness of the tanker's shipping activities by companies involved and maritime agencies alike in the lead up to the spill; insufficient coordination among all involved agencies in the wake of the oil spill; a lingering lack of clarity as to how impacted peoples would receive reparation and support for their safety, livelihood, and food security in the long-term; and a deafening silence on any decisive and punitive actions that will be taken against all liable actors.

Despite these, a next hearing has yet to be called for by Congress. **We thus demand an urgent continuation of the investigation into the cause and accountabilities of companies behind the oil spill and measures being taken by responsible government agencies.** These must lead to the realization of the following:

1. **Immediately contain and remove the oil spill, with full transparency on the status of containment and removal towards affected communities and the Filipino public, and streamlined leadership in overall disaster risk reduction and management efforts.**

2. **Urgently and sustainably address the impacts** of the oil spill to the food supply, livelihood, health, economic welfare, and environment of **affected communities**, and **ensure reparation** for damages they incurred.
3. **Ensure that companies at fault** for the oil spill - particularly the owner of the tanker, **RDC Reield Marines Services, Inc.**, and of the fuel it contains to be transported by the reported charterer, **San Miguel Corporation Shipping and Lighterage's subsidiary SL Harbor Bulk Terminal Corporation** - are **fully held accountable** and **immediately called to issue a cash bond that can already cover costs for containment, mechanical removal of the oil, damages to communities, and commitments for long-term rehabilitation for affected communities and ecosystems.**
4. **Pursue a whole-of-nation approach in determining and implementing solutions** to the oil spill and its impacts to marine and coastal biodiversity and affected communities, which would entail effective leadership and transparent action from government, particularly in prevention of further damage, followed by sustained rehabilitation, and the **meaningful participation of communities, civil society, and other key stakeholders.**
5. **Implement long-term solutions to protect critical marine and coastal biodiversity and prevent more instances of oil spills** in the future, including policy and legal reforms such as imposing strict liability to charterers in instances of pollutions under the Oil Pollution Compensation Act and integrating the Verde Island Passage into the Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System.
6. **Mobilize concerned agencies** to begin thinking and planning seriously about a **just transition away from fossil fuel dependence**, as the industry's unabated and unchallenged business operations continue to threaten and destroy lives and the environment, a glaring example of which is the ongoing oil spill crisis.

The pollution of our waters and destruction of critical marine habitats due to the oil spill are clear violations of the people's constitutional right to make a living and to a clean, healthy, and balanced ecology, and those responsible must be held accountable for their actions, omissions, and negligence, most especially the shipowners and their charterer, who until now have deliberately withheld information and have refused to take responsibility.

We urge the government to take swift and decisive action to ensure that the right to a clean, healthy, and balanced ecology is upheld and protected for the benefit of present and future generations of Filipinos.

Signed:

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Greenpeace Philippines
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Caritas Philippines
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WWF - Philippines
Living Laudato Si' Philippines
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Earth Island Institute Philippines
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Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission- Conference of Major Superiors in the
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Oxfam Pilipinas
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Saint Augustine Major Seminary
Angat Kalikasan Pilipinas (AKaP)
Lasallian Institute For the Environment - De La Salle Philippines
Conference of Major Superior in the Philippines
Caritas Occidental Mindoro

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