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POSITION PAPER

An appeal for the Immediate Withdrawal of DPWH Department Order No. 73, Series of 2014 for Strengthening Inter-Agency Coordination to Promote Efficient and Effective Delivery of Public Service in Tacloban City and Nationwide

Addressed to:

1. Secretary, Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH)
2. Secretary, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)
3. Secretary, Department of Tourism (DOT)
4. Secretary, Department of Transportation (DOTr)
5. Secretary, Department of Energy (DOE)
6. Secretary, Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG)
7. Administrator, Office of Civil Defense (OCD)

I. Introduction

PH Haiyan Advocacy, Inc. is an organization composed of Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) survivors who have adopted the vision of making Tacloban City a **model of climate resilience in the Philippines**. Since its founding, it has actively pursued community-driven environmental restoration and climate adaptation projects.

In 2017–2018, PH Haiyan Advocacy successfully implemented a **46-hectare mangrove enhancement project** along the coastline of Tacloban City in partnership with the DENR. At present, it is organizing local communities for its **Adopt-a-Tree Project along the Tacloban Bypass Road**. This project is designed not only to restore ecological balance but also to enhance tourism by showcasing the panoramic San Juanico Strait.

However, during its 2nd inter-agency coordination meeting last **19 August 2025**, its implementation has been disrupted by an existing **DPWH Department Order No. 73, Series of 2014** (“Prohibited Uses within the Right-of-Way of National Roads”), which prohibits tree planting and the installation of utility posts within ROWs, sourced from the DPWH Region VIII ROW Division.

The said Order supersedes previous issuances (DO No. 29 s. 2012, DO No. 15 s. 2000, DO No. 38 s. 2006, and DO No. 52 s. 2003). While the intent of ensuring safety and mobility is recognized, the Order was apparently issued without sufficient inter-agency consultation and has had the unintended effect of undermining greening programs, disrupting ongoing community initiatives, and creating conflicts with the mandates of DENR, DOE, DOT, DOTr, DILG, and OCD.

This Position Paper is respectfully submitted to call attention to the urgent need for a unified, inter-agency approach to addressing infrastructure, tourism, environmental

restoration, and energy-related concerns. While this appeal was initially raised in the context of Tacloban City, we now emphasize that these issues reflect a **nationwide concern** that requires policy intervention, enforcement, and consistent standards throughout the Philippines.

II. Observations and Concerns

1. On DPWH Infrastructure Projects

- Infrastructure projects must be aligned with DENR's environmental protection mandate. This requires strict integration of mangrove conservation, watershed rehabilitation, and biodiversity protection, particularly in sensitive coastal and riverine areas.
- Recent DPWH directives and designs for the Tacloban Bypass Road also did not include **access roads for private lot owners adjacent to the edge of the ROW pavement**. This has raised legitimate concerns from affected communities. Without adequate provisions for access, residents and landowners face restrictions that may hinder their mobility, economic opportunities, and property rights.
- DPWH should strengthen its **ROW Divisions in every region** and implement **annual audits** to ensure accountability and efficiency in ROW acquisition, enabling timely and successful completion of road infrastructure projects.

2. DENR Mandate on Tree Planting and Greening Programs

- DENR is mandated to implement the National Greening Program (NGP) focused on planting 1.5 billion trees across 1.5 million hectares and promote biodiversity conservation. **Restricting tree planting in all ROWs without due coordination undermines national greening and urban forestry efforts.**

3. On DOT and Tourism Development

- The Tacloban Bypass Road and related infrastructure offer opportunities to boost local tourism, particularly with its scenic views of the San Juanico Strait. DOT's involvement is essential to promote the area as a **sustainable tourism site**, while ensuring that infrastructure and environmental protection efforts are complementary. It presents a unique tourism opportunity with panoramic views of the San Juanico Strait and surrounding seascapes. Tourism-sensitive planning requires inter-agency coordination to transform ROW spaces into eco-tourism corridors.

4. On DOTr and Transport Systems

- Road networks and transport terminals must be harmonized to improve public mobility. Close DOTr-DPWH coordination will ensure that transport connectivity benefits all sectors, including marginalized communities.
- Vehicle growth projections and traffic demands determine the scale and timing of road infrastructure expansion. Tree planting and roadside utilities must also be harmonized with DOTr's long-term planning.

5. On DOE and Energy Access

- Strengthening electrical posts and other utility structures against hazards—especially in disaster-prone areas like Tacloban—is within DOE’s mandate. Blanket restrictions on utility posts in ROWs disregard technical solutions that could make such infrastructure resilient to calamities like Yolanda.
- Road infrastructure should also support future integration of energy facilities (street lighting, renewable energy-powered utilities, charging stations for e-vehicles), which DOE can guide in line with national energy transition policies.

6. On DILG’s Supervisory Role over LGUs

- The DILG must exercise its general supervision over LGUs to ensure close coordination with the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and other agencies in the planning and implementation of road infrastructure projects. This entails directing LGUs to safeguard road access for lot owners, support right-of-way (ROW) clearing, and facilitate community consultations to prevent displacement and conflict.
- DILG should also require LGUs to coordinate with **water and electricity distributors** so that utility development plans are harmonized with road projects, preventing duplication, unnecessary costs, and service disruptions. Likewise, LGUs must ensure the proper **installation and maintenance of drainage systems** to protect road investments, reduce flooding risks, and strengthen disaster resilience. Moreover, since barangay and city governments serve as the **frontline in greening programs and disaster preparedness**, DILG’s active engagement is essential to guarantee that ROW enforcement and infrastructure development complement—rather than undermine—local climate resilience and sustainable development initiatives.

7. On OCD and Disaster Resilience

- Both natural and man-made hazards must be anticipated. Integrating greening projects, disaster-resilient utilities, and safe roadways strengthens overall community preparedness.
- All infrastructure and development projects in Tacloban must be **disaster- and climate-resilient**. OCD, as the implementing arm of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), should ensure that risk assessments and resilience measures are integrated into DPWH and LGU project planning and execution.

In addition:

1. Road Infrastructure Standards and Maintenance

National roads are the lifelines of commerce, tourism, and community connectivity. They must ensure **safety and comfort for all travelers**, particularly in rural and tourist-rich areas. Roads must be adequately maintained with:

- A. Properly **painted centerlines and pavement edge lanes**.
- B. Adequate and strategically placed **road signages**, especially on curves and dangerous sections
- C. Regular inspection and repair schedules to prevent deterioration.

2. **Tourism-Oriented Road Amenities**

The Department of Tourism (DOT) and the Department of Transportation (DOTr) must be strongly represented in road infrastructure planning and inspections to ensure that roads and their amenities, including **world-class standard public toilets**, contribute to a **positive and safe tourist experience**.

3. **Environmental Protection and NGP Implementation**

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) should actively enforce the **National Greening Program (NGP)** along national highways, ensuring tree-planting and sustainable landscaping for ecological balance and climate resilience.

4. **Road Lighting and Safety**

The Department of Energy (DOE) and the National Electrification Administration (NEA) should prioritize **well-lit national roads**, especially in accident-prone and remote areas, as part of the country's road safety framework.

5. **Uniform National Standards**

Infrastructure development must follow a **consistent national standard** so that travelers can experience safe, comfortable, and well-maintained roads, regardless of location. Such standards should be a **source of pride for Filipinos** and a showcase for international visitors.

III. Appeal

In light of the foregoing, PH Haiyan Advocacy, Inc. respectfully appeals to the concerned Secretaries and the OCD Administrator to:

1. **Immediately withdraw DPWH Department Order No. 73, Series of 2014** ("Prohibited Uses within the Right-of-Way of National Roads"), as its blanket restrictions have created unintended conflicts with the mandates of DENR, DOE, DOT, DOTr, DILG, and OCD, and have disrupted ongoing community-based greening and climate resilience initiatives in Tacloban City.
2. **Conduct a Joint Inter-Agency Review** of ROW policies and guidelines to ensure alignment with the mandates of DENR, DOE, DOTr, DOT, OCD, and DILG.
3. **Strengthen inter-agency coordination** in the planning and implementation of infrastructure and environmental projects in Tacloban City.

4. **Allow guided and conditional tree planting** within ROWs, especially along scenic routes like the Tacloban Bypass, provided that appropriate species selection, spacing, and engineering safeguards are observed.
5. **Develop a Unified Framework for ROW Management** that balances:
 - a. Road safety and mobility (DPWH, DOTr),
 - b. Environmental sustainability (DENR),
 - c. Energy resilience (DOE),
 - d. Tourism development (DOT),
 - e. Disaster preparedness (OCD), and
 - f. Local governance participation (DILG, LGUs).
6. **Ensure inclusive project designs**, particularly access roads for affected lot owners, to uphold property rights and social justice.
7. **Adopt climate resilience as a guiding principle**, consistent with the lessons of Typhoon Yolanda and the urgent need to safeguard vulnerable communities.
8. **Integrate environmental protection and climate resilience measures** in all development undertakings, consistent with national climate goals.
9. **Promote Tacloban's tourism potential** by aligning infrastructure projects with sustainable tourism development.
10. **Empower LGUs through DILG oversight** to perform their duties effectively while avoiding gaps in coordination with national agencies.
11. **Mainstream disaster risk reduction and resilience standards** through OCD's active monitoring and guidance.

III. RECOMMENDATION

We strongly recommend the creation of a **Multi-Agency National Task Force** composed of **DPWH, DOT, DOTr, and DENR**, with active participation from DOE/NEA and DILG, to:

- Conduct **ocular inspections** of national roads from the northernmost to southernmost parts of the country.
- Develop and enforce **uniform standards** for roads, amenities, lighting, and landscaping.
- Propose a **national infrastructure improvement roadmap** aligned with tourism promotion, environmental sustainability, and energy efficiency.

IV. CONCLUSION

The state of our national road network reflects not just government competence but also **national pride**. With unified inter-agency coordination, we can create safer, greener, and more traveler-friendly roads that foster local development, boost tourism, and provide a standard of service every Filipino deserves.

We respectfully urge your offices to **act with urgency** and support this vision of a **world-class, safe, and sustainable national road network**.

IV. Closing

As survivors of Typhoon Yolanda, we know firsthand the cost of fragmented planning and lack of coordination. Tacloban and the entire Region VIII have the opportunity to rise as a **national model of climate resilience**—but this can only happen if national agencies work together instead of in silos.

We therefore urge the concerned Secretaries and Administrators to **harmonize the implementation of the new DPWH Department Order** with the broader mandates of environmental protection, energy security, tourism promotion, disaster resilience, and local development.

PH Haiyan Advocacy, Inc. believes that when each agency's mandate is **strengthened rather than suppressed**, public service becomes more efficient, communities more empowered, and resilience truly achievable. As survivors of Yolanda, we remain committed to working with government to transform Tacloban into a beacon of **climate resilience, environmental restoration, and sustainable development**.

In unity and shared responsibility, we can ensure that policies do not suppress mandates, but instead **enhance the efficient and effective delivery of services** to our people.

Respectfully submitted,

PETRONILO "PETE" L. ILAGAN
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