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US fears climate talks will focus on compensation for extreme weather

Officials fear the devastating impact of Typhoon Haiyan will overshadow core issue of climate change prevention

Stephen Leahy in Warsaw

The Guardian, Wednesday 13 November 2013 07.22 EST



Typhoon Haiyan battered Tacloban city in Philippines, killing thousands and displacing many more. Photograph: Erik de Castro/Reuters

US officials fear that international [climate change](#) talks will become focused on payouts for damage caused by extreme weather events exacerbated by global warming, such as the category 5 [Typhoon Haiyan](#) that hit the [Philippines](#) last week killing thousands of people and causing what is expected to be billions of pounds of damage.

An official US briefing document obtained by the Guardian reveals that the country is worried the UN negotiations, currently under way in Warsaw, will "focus increasingly on blame and liability" and poor nations will be "seeking redress for climate damages from sea level rise, droughts, powerful storms and other adverse impacts".

At last year's climate talks in Doha, the US fought off calls from African nations, the Pacific Islands and less developed nations for a "loss and damage mechanism" to channel finance to help nations cope with losses resulting from climate change, such as reduced crop production due to higher temperatures.

The member nations of the G77+China, which includes most African and some Latin American countries, cannot leave Warsaw without agreement on a loss and damage mechanism, said G77 lead negotiator Juan Hoffmaister.

"We can't only rely on ad-hoc humanitarian aid given the reality that major climate-related disasters are becoming the new normal," Hoffmaister said.

This issue is also a priority for other nations including India, small island states and the least developed countries.

While there is no precise definition of what loss and damages includes, Hoffmaister said climate impacts include the growing issue of climate refugees, people who are forced to move because their homelands can no longer support them.

"If loss and damage isn't addressed in Warsaw then it sends a signal to the world that some countries do not take climate change seriously," he said.

Trigg Talley, the US senior negotiator at Warsaw, acknowledged this week that some developing countries are experiencing costly damages and losses but said the US has "technical and political issues" with any loss and damage mechanism.

The US briefing document indicates that the Obama administration believes a focus on loss and damage will be "counterproductive from the standpoint of public support" for the UN climate talks.

The Philippines is facing an increasing number of fierce typhoons, said Alicia Ilaga, a member of that country's delegation. Damages are averaging \$200m (£125m) per storm, and the country has experienced 22 typhoons per year over the past decade, Ilaga said. Haiyan, the most powerful tropical cyclone to ever make landfall, was the 24th typhoon this year.

"Climate change impacts are beyond our capacity to cope. I can't imagine how we're going to survive," Ilaga said.



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