DISASTER BULLETIN ALERT

PRESIDENT DECLARES STATE OF CALAMITY

In a televised address to the nation, President Benigno Aquino III declared a state of calamity in light of the worsening situation due to the impact of the Tropical Storm Yolanda and the rising death toll on account of those yet unreported from other areas. The president declared the provinces of Samar, Leyte, Cebu, Iloilo, Aklan, Capiz and Palawan as calamity areas.

The presidential address is in line with government efforts to hasten the delivery of rescue and relief missions to those affected by the disaster and to prevent the situation from leading into a full blown humanitarian crisis. Also, the government promised to ensure mechanisms to impose a so-called price freeze and restrict the hoarding of basic commodities so as not to further aggravate the situation.

There has been a breakdown of law and order in the days following Tropical Storm Yolanda (Haiyan) which barreled its way into Tacloban and in many areas in Leyte, Samar, Bohol and Panay. Looting became rampant as survivors carted food items, among other things, from malls and grocery stores to stave off their hunger.

The national government has to step in behalf of local authorities who were unable to discharge their function due to the ensuing chaos in the aftermath of Yolanda. Hundreds of military and police forces from other regions were deployed to bring peace and order to the bedlam that is Tacloban city.

In other developments, UCCP has started to survey the damage brought by Yolanda to its local churches, constituencies and partner communities in identified disaster areas in Leyte, including Tacloban. As of this writing, the island of Samar is still incommunicado, with the San Juanico Bridge linking it with Leyte still impassable.

“Tacloban is like a no man’s land”, laments Bishop Dulce Pia-Rose of the UCCP East Visayas Jurisdictional Area, a few days after she led a team of UCCP disaster responders that arrived in the city. “My heart sank upon seeing the dead bodies lying in the streets and were beginning to decompose and the despair painted on the faces of hungry survivors that we met.”

“UCCP has its share of the brunt from Yolanda. Many of our churches in Samar and Leyte were destroyed, including the big local church in Tacloban”, said Rev. Levlou Amora, UCCP coordinator for East Visayas. “Everything is in shambles, so we decided to operate our disaster response center in Maasin city”, he added.

Bethany Hospital, a medical institution owned and operated by the UCCP, is in the state of total damage and has stopped its operation as many of its medical equipments and facilities were destroyed. Even its pharmacy was looted. The offices of the Bishop and the conference (NELBICON) were totally washed out.

“We are now determining our service areas and the extent of the needs of our relief beneficiaries. UCCP relief operations will commence as soon as duly constituted authorities bring in the semblance of system and order in many areas especially in Tacloban city,” said Rev. Amora. “As much as we would like to distribute relief packs to disaster survivors, we also would not like to risk getting mobbed.”

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