

Written by Bobby M. Reyes

Friday, 15 January 2010 15:14 - Last Updated Friday, 15 January 2010 15:37

Just after the Katrina Tragedy hit New Orleans and its suburbs in Louisiana in 2005, I sent a letter to Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (PGMA). I coursed the correspondence through channel – via diplomatic pouch at the Philippine Consulate General in Los Angeles

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California
, as routed to the Philippine Embassy in Washington

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In my September 2005 “love letter” to PGMA, I said that land-based hospitals and other healthcare facilities in New Orleans were devastated by the Hurricane Katrina. I mentioned likewise the Dec. 26, 2004, earthquake that struck Aceh, Indonesia, which spawned a tsunami that devastated not only Indonesia but also Thailand and other neighboring countries. All land-based medical facilities were destroyed or damaged substantially to render them useless in helping the disaster victims.

I said there was a need to operate hospital ships like the USS Mercy or the USS Comfort. I told Mrs. Arroyo that according to my sources, the United States Navy has some 10 other hospital ships being mothballed. I argued that the Philippines is one of the few countries in the world that can operate any or all of the said 10 American hospital ships, as the country has produced and continues to graduate tens of thousands of medical professionals. The second argument was

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that there was no problem in providing trained crew members to operate the vessels, as there are hundreds of thousands of professional Filipino Merchant-Marine officers and retired Philippine-Navy personnel.

Editor's Note: To read other "love letters" sent by Bobby Reyes to PGMA, please click on the following links:

[Love Letters Sent to President Gloria M. Arroyo](#)

[Another Love Letter to President Arroyo \(Part II\)](#)

[Why Philippine Presidents Refuse to Answer Love Letters that Discuss the I2D2 Option](#)

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My contact then at the George W. Bush's White House said that the Philippine government must endorse my proposal of operating the hospital ships and assigning them in areas that usually suffered periodic natural calamities or prone to huge catastrophic events like earthquakes, hurricanes and typhoons. My contact said that probably a friendly foreign government like that of the Philippines might be given the right to operate the mothballed American hospital ships – on the right negotiations. I mentioned where the proposed Filipino-operated hospital ships can be “parked” as a floating medical facility and storage depot for disaster-relief items: Southern Philippines-Indonesia, Indian Ocean (Diego Garcia), the Caribbean, California-Baja California (Mexico), Gulf Ports-Mexico, the Arabian Gulf, an African location and a South-American port.

Funding for the operations of the hospital ships was also discussed in my letter. I said that with the proper leadership, the more-than eight-million Overseas-Filipino workers (OFW) and Overseas Filipinos in more-than 120 countries (at that time and counting) could become ambassadors of goodwill and help raise the needed operational funds from the respective government of the countries where they are working, other third countries and multilateral agencies such as the United Nations. I mentioned also the feasibility of tapping the private sectors in the United States, the Philippines and other interested countries.

Finally a Reply from the Office of the President

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On Oct. 26, 2005, this writer was thrilled when he received from Ms. Maria Lourdes P. Varona, the Correspondence Secretary in the Office of PGMA, in JPG format a letter of acknowledgment about the proposal. Actually, Ms. Varona sent a copy of an official reply dated Oct. 7, 2005

, from Undersecretary Maria Margarita M. Galon of the Philippine Department of Health about the proposed operation of hospital ships. I replied to Ms. Varona and Undersecretary Galon that our Southern California-based coalition would wait for further instructions and that we were willing to serve in any capacity the proposed project. That was the last time we heard from Ms. Varona, Undersecretary Galon or from the

PCG

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Los Angeles

and/or the Philippine Embassy in
Washington

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On Feb 20, 2008 (less than three years and four months later), the proposed hospital ship assigned to Southern Philippines and Indonesia would have played a big role after a magnitude 7.5 earthquake hit Aceh, Indonesia, again.

Had PGMA acted on the proposal, the first of several hospitals ships could have been operational within one year or at the latest by December 2006. Other hospital ships could have been added at the rate of one vessel per year

Gloria Arroyo Misses a Golden Opportunity to Create a World-class Legacy of Leadership in Disaster Relief

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When the magnitude 7.0 earthquake hit Haiti last Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2010, the proposed operations could have been equipped with at least four hospital ships. And that could have validated more the Filipino-led humanitarian project and the leadership and vision of PGMA.

Yes, Gloria Arroyo missed a golden opportunity to create a world-class legacy of leadership in the field of medicine and disaster relief, among other accolades. And when the two typhoons hit Metro Manila in September 2009, then her administration could have been well prepared to cope with the natural calamities.

All that the lame duck of a President is leaving on June 30, 2010, is a legacy of being the most-corrupt Filipino Chief Executive, if not being remembered in the dustbin of Philippine history as the most-infamous of all moral midgets.

Perhaps, the successor of PGMA may want to revive the 2005 project of operating a fleet of hospital ships. # # #

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