

Written by Bobby M. Reyes

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By Bobby M. Reyes of Sorsogon-Bacon (Sor-Bac) City, Philippines, and West Covina, CA.

The Overseas Filipinos must “reinvent” the sending of relief supplies or donations and disaster relief itself. Once again, after a major natural calamity in the wake of Typhoon Frank, many Overseas-Filipino organizations are gathering relief supplies and/or raising funds to send either to the National Disaster Coordinating Council (as coursed through Philippine diplomatic posts), the Philippine National Red Cross or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Ayala Foundation, the Gawad Kalinga and other private entities. But it seems that there is no coordinated system of response, no synchronized way of handling the relief funds and/or supplies. The response of the Philippine national government itself is so slow, as Sen. Nene Pimentel has complained. In fact, Senator Pimentel traces the “slow response of the ‘Imperial Manila’ to calamities traced to flawed system of government.”

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Q. Pimentel, Jr. (PDP-Laban) said the very-slow delivery of relief goods and other forms of emergency assistance from the national government to the typhoon-ravaged communities vividly illustrates the flaws in the existing unitary system of government wherein local government units heavily depend on the “Imperial Manila” for the release of much-needed funds and aid.

The happening of a natural disaster in the Philippines becomes a bigger calamity by the lack of preparation by, and foresight of, the Philippine government. Even Philippine television newscasts predict the coming of a typhoon at least five days in advance but the homeland’s civil and military authorities do not implement even the forced relocation of people who are living in harm’s way such as in areas that are prone to flooding. No government agency prepares for the setting up of well-supplied emergency centers that can house typhoon refugees. Other government agencies do not force domestic shipping companies to order their vessels to stop voyages and seek cover in waters that are not in the forecasted path of the

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typhoon. Fishermen are not warned to stay ashore and not take their fishing boats out to sea.

In an earlier editorial about Typhoon Frank, we said that the Philippine President “must blame herself for not providing the right leadership in changing a corrupt system that is responsible for the routine comedy of errors that plagues the country.” To read again the editorial, please click on this link [Editorial: President Arroyo Must Go Back Home ASAP and Attend to Pressing Problems](#)

Senator Pimentel said this intolerable situation during severe calamities bolsters the argument for adopting a federal system where the authority to release funds to aid disaster victims can be exercised by the component federal states instead of being monopolized by the national government.

The national government is not impotent to deal with preparations to mitigate the effects of a typhoon and marshal resources to provide relief after the storm has passed. The national government spends tens of billions of pesos for pork barrel, foreign trips of high-government officials from all the three branches of the government and lining up the pockets of corrupt bureaucrats. The Office of the President even hands out millions of pesos in cash as dole outs to visiting provincial governors and members of the Philippine Congress – instead of using the funds to bolster the Presidential Calamity Fund.

It has become the mentality, if not the habit, of Philippine-government agencies and their officials to rely on foreign donors and financial assistance from the Overseas Filipinos every time there is a natural calamity in the country – instead of husbanding ample government funds to prepare for contingencies. More often than not, it does not even acknowledge with thanks the donations in cash and kind by the Overseas-Filipino communities. There is also the lack of accountability and transparency in the handling of the calamity funds.

It is high time for Overseas Filipinos to stop throwing good money after bad, to use a cliché. The sending of cash and other relief supplies under the present system of addressing the effects of calamities in the Philippines does not address the issue of solving permanently the needs of the calamity victims. We suggest that the Filipino government officials use wisely the pork in its budget. We suggest that Overseas-Filipino donors pool their resources and go for projects that would address the long-term solutions such as helping the victims resume their livelihood, so that – using the oft-quoted adage – they can catch the fish, instead of providing them with a fish for a day or plant crops, instead of providing them with staples for a week.

Editorial: Overseas Filipinos Must “Reinvent” the Sending of Relief Supplies and/or Donations - Mabuhay

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There are other steps that the Overseas Filipinos can do with their relief funds, as will be explained in another article in the “Unsolicited Advice” column of this editor.

The Overseas Filipinos must force the Philippine government to undertake fundamental structural reforms. One such reform is the adoption of the federal system, as advocated by Senator Pimentel and his allies in the Senate, House of Representatives and local-government entities.

“That is one distinct advantage of the federal system. The federal state would have the necessary power to meet contingencies. All the agencies responsible for assisting disaster victims would be found within the federal state. They might still need assistance from the national government, but the primary responsibility for rendering emergency relief assistance would be placed on the shoulders of the federal state,” he said.

In the wake of the widespread havoc and destruction wrought by killer Typhoon Frank, local officials and displaced residents in disaster areas complained that the National Disaster Coordinating Council, Department of Social Welfare and Development and other Manila-based state agencies were too slow in responding to their call for emergency assistance.

The most vociferous in hurling this criticism were the local chief executives and congressmen from Iloilo, Aklan, Antique and other provinces in Western Visayas which were hardest hit by the typhoon. Iloilo Governor Neil Tupas and the mayors of the cities and towns of the affected provinces even denounced the small quantities of food packages and other emergency relief items that were sent by NDCC a few days after the typhoon.

Majority of the members of the Senate have introduced Joint Resolution 10 calling for the

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conversion of Congress into a Constituent Assembly to amend the 1987 Constitution and lay the groundwork for the federalization of the country.

In initiating the filing of the resolution, Senator Pimentel said the misuse and misallocation of public funds and economic wealth of the nation can be attributed to the over-centralized system of government.

“Hardly anything that is of far-reaching developmental importance moves in this country without the central government having a fundamental say over it. Hence, the over-centralization of government powers in the central government has stymied the economic development of the nation,” Mr. Pimentel said.

As recommended by Resolution 10, the taxes and other revenues collected by the national government shall be apportioned in the following manner: 20 percent shall go to the federal government and 80 percent to the federal states.

In contrast, under the present unitary system, 60 percent of internal revenue tax collection goes to the national government and 40 percent to local-government units. # # #

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