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OF THE PHILIPPINES)
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SENATE
P. S. R. No. 324

RECEIVED BY

Introduced by Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago

RESOLUTION

DIRECTING THE PROPER SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY,
IN AID OF LEGISLATION, TO ESTABLISH PROTOCOLS AND STANDARDS
FOR DISASTER RELIEF OPERATIONS BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS
IN COOPERATION WITH NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS,
IN LIGHT OF NEWS REPORTS THAT THE RELIEF OPERATIONS FOR VICTIMS
OF THE OCTOBER 2013 VISAYAS EARTHQUAKE HAVE BEEN HAMPERED
BY ALLEGED POLITICKING BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS
AND POLITICAL ASPIRANTS

WHEREAS, the Constitution, Article 2, Section 23 provides: "The State shall encourage non-governmental, community-based, or sectoral organizations that promote the welfare of the nation";

WHEREAS, the Constitution, Article 2, Section 25 provides: "The State shall ensure the autonomy of local governments";

WHEREAS, various news agencies have reported on the 7.2-magnitude earthquake that hit Bohol, Cebu, and parts of Mindanao and southern Luzon last 15 October 2013, killing at least 180 people, leaving at least 580 people injured, displacing 676,000 families or almost 3.5 million individuals, causing centuries-old churches and modern buildings to crumble, disrupting power and phone services, and causing an estimated P867 million in infrastructure damage;

WHEREAS, the 23 October 2013 issue of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* reported that Mayor Leoncio Evasco Jr. of Maribojoc, Bohol told volunteers of the Philippine Red Cross (PRC) to stop their operations in his municipality, and insisted that the municipality should handle the distribution of relief goods from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to earthquake survivors, in line with the municipality's centralized distribution system;

WHEREAS, the report said that Evasco was slighted when PRC volunteers allegedly demanded a list of beneficiaries for the relief goods, and said that the PRC's distribution was conditional;

WHEREAS, it was reported that Evasco imposed the centralized system of distribution to ensure that all 27 villages would receive relief, and told the barangay officials to set aside politics at this time and focus on bringing help to the villages;

WHEREAS, Evasco said that the local disaster council and the barangay captains had agreed that all relief be coursed through the municipal government, which would identify the victims who would receive the items; the municipal government also converted the public market into a repacking center where each barangay has a representative, from whom the village chiefs would then pick up the relief for their constituents, to be monitored by chapel leaders;

WHEREAS, it was reported that Evasco confronted PRC chair Richard Gordon when he went to the municipality, and alleged that Gordon was using the organization to promote his own political agenda;

WHEREAS, PRC Secretary General Gwen Pang reportedly confirmed that the organization was there since the day after the earthquake to assess the situation in the area, and to identify who would be given the goods since their priority were those who were really in dire need;

WHEREAS, Pang also confirmed that Evasco told them that he wanted the PRC to endorse the goods to the municipality and let the municipal government distribute the goods;

WHEREAS, Pang said that the organization could not endorse relief goods to politicians and that the organization was following strict criteria in selecting beneficiaries because it did not have enough for all residents;

WHEREAS, Pang said that the PRC's system in relief distribution is globally accepted and promotes accountability to the organization's donors;

WHEREAS, Pang alleged that Evasco insisted that barangay captains could just receive the relief from the PRC and sign on behalf of the affected families;

WHEREAS, the *Inquirer's* sources said that, because of the meddling politicians, a so-called "ambush relief operation" was adopted by NGOs in which their volunteers went around the province and gave the goods directly to the families;

WHEREAS, the *Inquirer's* sources were concerned that local politicians such as barangay councilors might exploit the relief operations for the October 2013 barangay election campaign by claiming credit for NGO relief work;

WHEREAS, the *Inquirer's* sources alleged that the barangay chair of Aliswag stopped volunteers from distributing the goods in the evacuation center on 21 October 2013, claiming that any donation should be coursed through the municipal government as per instructions from Evasco;

WHEREAS, it was reported that, according to sources, that the relief distributions was highly politicized, as some residents were said to be hesitant to accept the relief from politicians because they might call their attention if they wouldn't vote for them in the elections;

WHEREAS, according to the news report, Randy Camoras, the chair of the Sangguniang Kabataan in Barangay Candavid, alleged that barangay captain Julio Barace prioritized his allies in the distribution of relief;

WHEREAS, the *Inquirer's* sources said that people wanted to help through the NGOs but did not trust officials of local government units (LGUs);

WHEREAS, the *Inquirer's* sources said that they feared the nongovernment organization's relief packs—intended for a family of six and good for five days—would be given by the barangay officials in smaller quantities to reach more families;

WHEREAS, the *Inquirer's* sources also said that providing packed goods for a day was useless because the survivors would need another round the next day;

WHEREAS, according to the news article, President Aquino ordered national government agencies in-charge of relief operations in the Visayas to implement an efficient

system of distributing relief stocks, as many survivors were reportedly receiving too little aid from the government a week after the earthquake;

WHEREAS, Malacañang officials reportedly urged local officials to adopt a very proactive and a very positive outlook and minimize the issues that obstruct instead of help the victims;

WHEREAS, Congress should come up with legislation that bridges the efforts of LGUs and NGOs in disaster relief operations; ensures efficient, fair, accountable, and transparent distribution of aid; and prevents those who take advantage of the plight of their countrymen in the wake of natural disasters to advance their personal and political agendas;

WHEREFORE, be it resolved by the Philippine Senate to conduct and inquiry, in aid of legislation, to establish protocols and standards for disaster relief operations by local government units in cooperation with nongovernmental organizations, in light of news reports that the relief operations for the victims of the October 2013 Visayas earthquake have been hampered by alleged politicking by local government officials and political aspirants.

Adopted,

Miriam Defensor Santiago
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