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**During the SRI LANKA NAVY 60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**  
**08 December 2010**

**NAVAL AND MARITIME SYMPOSIUM**  
***“COLLECTIVE RESPONSE FOR MARITIME DISASTERS AND SAR”***

**I. Introduction**

Good afternoon, in behalf of Admiral Cortez and the entire Philippine Navy, I wish to express my profound gratitude to our host, Vice Admiral TSA Samarasinghe, the Chief of the Sri Lankan Navy, for the great opportunity to address this distinguish forum, and further to extend to the Sri Lankan Navy our warmest felicitations on the celebration of its 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Given the task at hand allow me to share the Philippine perspective on Collective Response for Maritime Disasters and Search and Rescue.

Disasters are natural or man-made events that deprive our people of life, health, sustenance and property, and often have depleted our country's capacity to respond. These disasters can arise from natural hazards such as earthquakes, epidemics, typhoons, droughts and floods or from any number of man-made threats like food or water shortages, environmental and technological disasters, acute economic distress, civil unrest, armed conflict and terrorism.

Man-made and natural disasters generated worldwide economic losses of 222 billion dollars in 2010, more than three times last year's figure, as estimated by the world's biggest reinsurer Swiss Re. This year's major catastrophes claimed 260,000 lives. Given this data, it is undeniable that the occurrence of disasters has become an important factor adversely affecting our economic development and social stability. Countries throughout the world have thus rallied concerned governments and non-government agencies to formulate plans in order to prevent emergencies, mitigate their destructive effects and ensure the provision of assistance to those in need.

It has been standard practice of states around the world to use the capabilities of their armed forces, navies in particular, to address emergencies caused by natural disasters. Both the Philippines and Sri Lanka's incidents are replete with these experiences. During the Asian Tsunami relief operations, the navies of various countries like the US, Japan, France, United Kingdom, Singapore and Malaysia mobilized to

provide relief to countries that were affected by the tsunami. In one of the worst natural disasters in the Philippines, that of the Guinsaugon, disaster, where one whole village was buried under a massive landslide in the central island of Leyte, navies of the US and Indonesia provided support to Philippine disaster response forces. These instances of international cooperation for disaster response operations, point to the fact that rapid response capabilities inherent in armed forces can be utilized for operations in support of civil governments.

## **II. Disaster Relief Operations: Philippine Perspective**

Having a geography that is prone to both natural and man-made disasters, the Philippines has a vast experience and developed a system that has been refined through the years in addressing disasters.

The Philippine disaster risk reduction and management system is institutionalized through the recent enactment of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act. This law provides for the legal foundation for national, regional, and local inter-agency coordination in reducing the risks of disasters, mitigating its effects, responding adequately when it occurs, and rehabilitating communities affected by such. Thus, the law is a departure from the previous notion of disaster response as a reactionary activity. In the present Philippine viewpoint, disasters must be addressed both by proactive and reactive responses.

It is our view that disasters involve four different interdependent systems, namely prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response, and rehabilitation and recovery. Disaster prevention and mitigation is the core competency of our Department of Science and Technology. This involves the development of early warning systems and upgrading of our weather forecasting capabilities, geological studies, and land use development plans.

On the other hand, preparedness is within the purview of our Department of Interior and Local Government. This aspect of disaster management involves the enhancement of knowledge and capacities of local governments, the professionalizing of response and recovery organizations, and the active involvement of communities and

individuals to effectively anticipate, respond to, and recover from, the impacts of disastrous events. It aims to build the capacities needed to efficiently manage all types of emergencies and achieve orderly transitions from response to sustained recovery.

Perhaps, the aspect of disaster management where defense forces in general, and navies in particular, has the most role is on disaster response. Put simply, disaster response is the provision of emergency services and public assistance during or immediately after a disaster, in order to save lives, reduce health impacts, ensure public safety, and meet the basic subsistence needs of the people affected. Disaster response is predominantly focused, and this has to be emphasized, on immediate and short-term needs. In the Philippines, disaster response is the primary purview of the Department of Social Welfare and Development while the Armed Forces of the Philippines has Disaster Response and Relief Operations as one of its Mission Areas.

Post-disaster activities primarily involves the application of measures that ensure the ability of affected communities to return to their normal functioning levels by rebuilding livelihood and damaged infrastructures, and by increasing the communities' organizational capacity. This aspect of disaster management is called the Rehabilitation Activities and is under the mandate of our National Economic Development Authority.

Given this disaster management framework, our National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, chaired by the Secretary of National Defense, is the highest governing body to coordinate disaster management activities. He is supported by four Vice-Chairs each focusing on the four core activities of disaster management. The work of the council is presently done by clusters organized along the same lines of disaster management.

To support the NDRRMC, the AFP, with the Philippine Navy as one of its major services, has organized the AFP Disaster Response Task Group with the mission of assisting the NDRRMC and the regional and local DRRMC in responding to disasters. Most of the times, military units are employed in our system as the first responders.

Aside from this national disaster management organization, the Philippines maintains cooperative arrangements for disaster response and relief operations. As a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Philippines is a party to the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response which seeks to develop a regional response to disasters through the establishment of standby arrangements. On the bilateral level, the management of disasters is one of the core areas being discussed by the RP-US Security Engagement Board. To further highlight the importance that our country places on disaster response operations, the Philippines hosted the first ever ASEAN Regional Forum Voluntary Demonstration of Response last 04-09 May 2009. Through this first ever field exercise, the ARF-VDR hopes to move the ARF from a forum for dialogue into one that facilitates and provides concrete, tangible contributions to regional security such as disaster relief.

### **III. Case Studies: Philippine Experiences**

Allow me now to illustrate to you how this collective system of disaster management actually works through our experiences with some of the recent the natural disasters to have hit our country.

In 2009, within a matter of just ten days, two typhoons wreaked havoc to northern Philippines. I was at that time, the Commander of Naval Forces Northern Luzon. First, it was Typhoon Ondoy (Ketsana) on September 26, 2009. Its heavy rainfall drowned Metro Manila in just under six hours. Floods rose at an unusually fast rate, taking only thirty minutes to reach six feet deep. It sent many Filipinos to their rooftops for refuge, where they remained for at least twenty hours, before rescue came their way. The floods which slowly receded destroyed many properties. Homes and means of livelihood were left beyond repair or recovery. Those rescued were given temporary shelter in evacuation centers.

A week later, with little respite, Typhoon Pepeng , with winds reaching almost to the level of a super typhoon, threatened to cause further destruction as it headed for northern Philippines. Although it spared Metro Manila this time, the residents of the northern provinces like Cagayan and Ilocos Norte were not as lucky. The fierce winds uprooted many trees and likewise destroyed major infrastructures and means of

livelihood. As if it were not enough, Typhoon Pepeng lingered still for several days and causing massive floods and landslides in the provinces of La Union, Benguet and Pangasinan. Millions of Filipinos were ill-affected by these twin natural calamities that left billions of pesos of damage to crops and properties, as well as claimed hundreds of lives.

As the then Commander of Naval Forces Northern Luzon, I organized all available naval units under my operational control to prepare for the expected destruction of Typhoon Pepeng while at the same time managing the devastating effect of Typhoon Ondoy. Part of our contingency planning was to place Liaison Officers at the Office of Civil Defense Region 1 and the Provincial Disaster Coordinating Councils. We alerted all our units, including our reservists. The repositioning of response units was undertaken while other units were placed on constant standby to respond to requests for assistance by the civilian government agencies. When the typhoon suddenly changed course, our units were able to respond immediately, as they were deployed in advance in areas that were affected. All in all, my unit was able to rescue 942 persons and distributed relief goods that benefitted 2,664 families. However, the sheer size of the areas devastated stretched the limits of our capabilities.

In another situation, the Philippines rely mainly on its inter-island ferry system as its main mode of transportation between its various islands. Two significant incidents occurred that once again necessitated the utilization of PN capabilities to respond to man-made disasters. The first incident was the sinking of MV Princess of the Stars which capsized off the island of Romblon at the height of a typhoon. The PN dispatched several vessels for the search and rescue operations and deployed its SEALs to assist in the recovery efforts. On a different case, another passenger ferry, the Superferry 9 capsized off the coast of Zamboanga. The PN assets were the first units on the scene and rescued hundreds of passengers. Newly acquired Multi-Purpose Attack Crafts played a major role in the rescue operations being the first to respond.

#### **IV. Lessons Learned**

These natural and man-made disasters provided significant lessons learned, which necessitates the need for preparedness and the enhancement of inter-agency operations in your own countries. Foremost of the lessons learned in these disasters is that the

extent and gravity of a disaster may well go beyond the capability of any one agency or any one country to address. As we all are reeling from the effects of global warming, and expect more natural calamities with increasing strength, it will be worthwhile for countries to invest on developing systems that will institutionalize inter and multi-agency cooperations and coordination. We in the Philippines have an inter-agency and multi-sectoral organization in existence for decades, yet it may be found wanting when disasters of great magnitude strikes. Therefore, preparedness and mitigation efforts remain as the most efficient way to disaster management.

Another important lesson learned is the need to maintain a robust strategic sealift, and heavy helicopter airlift capability complemented by rapid response units. In an archipelagic and maritime nation such as ours, the sea provides the most effective medium to deliver relief aid when airports and roads are damaged during a disaster. Therefore, navies in a developing maritime country must maintain ships that can operate in higher levels of sea states to ensure that it can deliver response and aid in times of calamities.

Prepositioning logistics and response kits must be made at the earliest available time. Our experience shows that it is more cost-effective and efficient to maintain stocks of relief goods and deploy response units way before a disaster strikes. Through strategic prepositioning of supplies and forces, help and aid can be delivered in an efficient manner even with damaged infrastructures.

Disaster response operations are essentially joint interagency operations. Therefore, preparedness is enhanced through the conduct of joint training exercises among regular units, reserve forces, civilian agencies, and relief organizations.

Military units may be effective first responders, but we must always remain aware of the principle that disaster management is civilian-led and that role of the military is to ably support the activity.

Finally, international cooperation during disasters is becoming the norm rather than the exception. The Philippines has been the recipient of generous support from the international community after the devastation of Typhoons Pepeng and Ondoy. Cooperation must be maintained even during the post-disaster stage. Areas of capacity building must be identified that could be the subject of international cooperation.

Just last October another strong typhoon struck the Philippines. Typhoon Juan attained super typhoon strength, by far the strongest typhoon to have visited our country in decades. In response to this natural disaster, the PN organized Task Group Amianan as our main disaster response effort in the isolated battered province of Isabela that could only be accessed through the sea. Allow me to show you a brief video of the PN disaster response.

The background music you just heard is an original composition of a Filipino rock band River Maya...with the theme in English that says "Anything is possible".

## **V. Conclusion**

In conclusion, disasters are unavoidable fact in human existence. While mitigation and preparedness lessens the effects of natural and man-made disasters, there will be a constant need for rapid response capabilities for disaster response with which military units, especially navies, will play a central role. Thus, capabilities and capacities for disaster response will continue to be of essence in the future development of our respective navies.

Thank you and Mabuhay!