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Statement of DSWD Secretary Esperanza Cabral

23 OCTOBER 2009 – The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) manages the National Relief Operations Center (NROC) which is the facility for processing and storage of relief goods that are purchased by the Department or donated to us by generous individuals both here and abroad. The relief goods are released to our Regional Offices or directly to evacuation centers or to the local government units as they are needed and requested by these entities. They are delivered in trucks, many of which were lent to us by private companies or by military vehicles. Some of the goods are shipped by air from nearby Villamor Airbase.

When typhoons Ondoy and Pepeng hit the country, we received and are continuing to receive donations. Our warehouses are indeed full, inspite of the fact that we have distributed 500,000 food packs and 200,000 clothing packs as well as thousands of sacks of rice, blankets, beddings, and items of personal hygiene in the past almost 4 weeks. That is the reason why when asked if we still have enough goods, my constant reply is yes, so far we do, thanks to the many kind-hearted individuals and organizations as well as countries who responded and are still responding to the plight of the typhoon victims.

There are no rotting relief goods in our warehouses as we do not keep perishables there and the relief goods that are there, save for the donated old clothes are quite new since they have been either recently purchased by us or have been just donated.

Our goods are repacked by volunteers who are there because they want to help. But they are volunteers and report when they have time to help us. Sometimes there are two hundred of them and sometimes there are only a dozen. However many or few they are, we appreciate their presence and their assistance. Weekdays are usually quiet but on Saturdays and Sundays, the students, along with others who work Monday to Friday, including our own employees, are there.

Our staff at the warehouse work round the clock even now, making sure that the requests for relief goods are met in a timely manner. They work hard, they work quietly and they work humbly and I feel bad that they have been subjected to public vilification that they do not deserve.

I do not recall having talked to an Editor of Philippine News. I do remember my secretary telling me that someone was on the phone asking why there were no volunteers working at the warehouse. My reply was we do not own the time of the volunteers.

I wish that I could have prevented the deaths from typhoons but in fact, they have nothing to do with the relief goods that we are in charge of. Most of the deaths were from drowning or injuries sustained during the typhoon. Some died of illnesses. We are not in charge of rescue nor are we in charge of health and to the best of my knowledge, none of the deaths was due to absence of or delay in the delivery of relief goods.

We would like to assure all of you that the relief goods will reach the intended beneficiaries as they become necessary and will be used only to assist them. However, the relief goods don't all go out at the same time and an empty warehouse is not proof that the goods were used properly just as a full warehouse is not evidence that the goods are being hoarded. If you visit our website www.dswd.gov.ph you will find updates on our activities related to typhoons Ondoy and Pepeng. It includes an updated list of donations received and goods released from the DSWD warehouse.

There are many aspects of disaster response. They include recovery and rehabilitation and in both instances, goods and other resources are still needed. In the initial reaction to a calamity, people will want to help and as we saw recently, they came in droves, offering their time, their talent and their resources. We want them to know how much we appreciate them for what they have done and what they are still doing. But further down the road, when the initial flush of generosity gives way to donor fatigue, there will remain only a few hardy NGOs and volunteers and the workers of the DSWD and other government agencies to continue the job of helping the disaster victims back on their feet. Judicious use of resources at the outset is imperative lest we face the situation of even greater want after a period of relative plenty. We at the DSWD wish to assure you that your trust in us is not misplaced. Thank you.



Caption: Employees of the United Parcel Service, Inc. (UPS) share their time to do volunteer work – sorting out and repacking relief goods for typhoon victims at the DSWD – National Resource Operations Center (NROC) in Pasay City.