

## Flooding and its Aftermath

Growing up in the Philippines, I have quite a few memories of having waded on flooded streets and even witnessed our home being invaded by floodwater up to a few inches deep. Since the rainy season in the Philippines expectedly brings huge amounts of rainfall every year, one would think that the Filipinos have become accustomed to and have learned to adapt to this recurring weather episode.

Aside from the brief terror from the occasional loud thunderstorms and flashes of lightning during these seasonal rain showers, my personal memories of Philippine floods consist more of watching children happily wading in pools of water and shrieking in delight while splashing water against each other. In a country where clean water is a scarce commodity and swimming pools and bathtubs are luxuries reserved for the lucky few, I witnessed how innocent street children found great delight in reveling amidst this temporary natural abundance. Adults on the other hand, thanked the rains for the cool respite they provide after a long hot and dry summer. Rain water was even stored and used by those who do not have steady water flow to augment their supply.

The recent havoc wreaked by typhoons Ondoy and Pepeng (internationally known as Ketsana and Parma) therefore came as a big shock to many. However, there are those, including environmental activists, who have long forewarned that this type of disaster is inevitable if we are not going to take serious efforts at preserving our mother nature and actively participate in reversing its quick deterioration.

The sight of entire buildings and houses submerged in water and vehicles and other movables floating aimlessly and dangerously amidst human beings struggling to get to dry land, was totally heartbreaking. It was reported that the first typhoon, Ondoy, dumped one month's worth of rain in a few hours, causing the worst flooding in four decades, leaving hundreds dead and thousands trapped in miserable conditions. The next typhoon, Pepeng, caused even greater damage in the countryside, destroying crops, causing landslides and killing even more people and leaving scores homeless and traumatized.

Thanks to advances in information technology, these vivid images and extensive reports of the resulting devastation were quickly broadcast worldwide and tugged at the heartstrings not only of foreign governments and international aid agencies, but also of our Filipino *kababayans* who are scattered in all corners of the globe. Donations of money and relief goods poured in and people quickly did whatever needed to be done to alleviate the sufferings of those who were seriously affected by these calamities. It was truly a heartwarming sight to behold this generous *bayanihan* spirit and the Filipinos' willingness to help others in times of need.

However, more needs to be done as thousands if not millions are still reeling from the aftermath of the typhoons, on top of the endemic issues of poverty, unemployment, poor healthcare system, environmental degradation, corruption, etc. that have long plagued the nation.

As a result of this latest tragedy, it won't be surprising that an even greater exodus of Filipinos to other countries will occur in the coming months and years. The Canadian government, in response to the typhoons, has issued a special directive aimed at providing special immigration measures for direct victims of the typhoons and their families. When I first read this announcement, the first thought that came to mind was the possibility of unscrupulous individuals and agencies taking advantage of the situation in that they could pretend to be directly affected when they are not, which may eventually prejudice those who are genuinely affected and in need of reuniting with their families in Canada.

May I appeal therefore to those concerned to please act responsibly and conscientiously so that this rare opportunity of fast-tracking Canadian immigration applications will truly benefit its intended recipients. The last thing we want is to blow the opportunity for those who are truly deserving simply because of a few bad eggs who tainted the process for everyone else.

Meanwhile, there are news reports that the floods may not subside until December 2009 or even in early 2010. Even in areas where the flooding may have dried up, problems of how to rebuild their lives and livelihood, prevent illnesses, recover from the trauma, still exist. For those directly affected, the road to recovery will be long and difficult. Let us not only help them through actual donations of material goods, but also by resisting the temptation of taking advantage of the situation, for any personal or political gain.

Let us heed the lessons learned from this calamity, foremost of which is the extreme importance of environmental awareness and protection. I once had a conversation with someone who insisted that a politician with a green platform will never succeed because the voters care more about economic policies that would put more money in their pockets. Clearly, it's about time that this line of thinking change. After all, of what use would "a good economy" be, once we have all been wiped out by preventable natural disasters?

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