

RP ranks 12th among 200 countries most at risk from disasters

by CHRISTINA MENDEZ
Philstar.com

MANILA—The Philippines ranks no. 12 among 200 countries most at risk from tropical cyclones, floods, earthquakes and landslides, United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) senior regional coordinator Jerry Velasquez disclosed yesterday.

"The Philippines is among the disaster-prone countries in the world most vulnerable to cyclones, storms and climactic events," said Velasquez, citing a recently released UNISDR Mortality Risk Index (MRI) that rated the Philippines "very high" in terms of average number of citizens at risk from natural calamities.

At the Senate committee on climate change onsite hearing in Nangka, Marikina last Tuesday, Velasquez also cited a study fund-

ed by Canada and Sweden conducted last January which found that of the ten ASEAN countries, the Philippines is a "hot spot" for cyclones, landslides, floods and droughts.

"In fact, according to this study's multiple climate hazard index, the Philippines received a rank of 0.6 to 1.0, the highest among all countries in the ASEAN," Velasquez said.

The same study listed the most vulnerable provinces or districts in Southeast Asia wherein the National Capital Region (NCR) ranked seventh among all cities in the ASEAN, with Cordillera in 27th spot and Central Luzon 30th.

The UN report also revealed that while a single event cannot be attributed to climate change, extreme weather conditions like tropical storm "Ondoy" and typhoon "Pepeng" are consistent with the trend that the Inter-

governmental Panel on Climate Change identified in its 4th Assessment Report.

Velasquez agreed that the latest weather disturbances in the country meant that climate change was already in our midst, citing the historic data of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) that the mean annual temperature in the country from 1951 to 2006 increased by 0.6 degrees centigrade with the minimum annual rising by 0.89 degrees centigrade over the same period.

From 1964 to 2004, Pagasa reported that there has been a decrease of 500 million cubic meters of cumulative annual water inflow in Angat Dam and from 1948 to 1994, sea level rose by 40 cm in Manila and by 20 cm in Davao and Legazpi.

The Senate committee led by

Sen. Loren Legarda conducted the hearing Tuesday afternoon at the Balabag Settlement area, Barangay Nangka, one of the barangays in the city most affected by Ondoy.

Legarda stressed at the hearing that the people must learn from the lessons of Ondoy and Pepeng as she urged everybody to do their part in helping maintain a balanced environment.

Legarda said the factors that heighten disasters are poor urban governance, ecosystems decline and the vulnerability of the sources of livelihood in rural areas.

"It's a vicious cycle of poverty and disaster vulnerability. The deadly trio of haphazard urban development, ecosystems decline and unstable livelihood—individually and in combination—drives disaster risk and provokes catastrophe, especially in poor communities," she said.

UN on RP disasters...

PAGE A6 ◀

that country was able to get its legislation adopted way back 2007, while the Philippines is yet to pass its own bill in Congress," he said.

Deadly trio

Velasquez cited a UNISDR global assessment report on disaster risk reduction, which noted that Japan had 22.5 million people exposed to typhoons annually, compared to just 16 million people in the Philippines.

"However, the estimated annual death toll from cyclones in the Philippines is almost 17 times greater than that of Japan," he said.

He said the study found that the "deadly trio" that worsen natural disasters were "poor urban government, unstable rural livelihood, and ecosystem decline."

"So it's not God who is doing it. It's man who is at fault," Velasquez said.

Velasquez said that one study showed that the Philippines had a "medium adaptive capacity" to climate change, "together with Indonesia and just above Cambodia and Laos."

Metro Manila vulnerable

Velasquez said a January 2009 study funded by Canada and Sweden found that among ASEAN countries, "the Philippines is a hot spot for cyclones, landslides, floods and droughts."

"In fact, according to this study's 'multiple climate hazard index,' the Philippines received a rank of 0.6 to 1.0, the highest among all

countries in the ASEAN," Velasquez said.

"The same study listed the most vulnerable provinces or districts

in Southeast Asia, and found that the National Capital region ranks 7th among all cities in the ASEAN, with the Cordilleras 27th and Central Luzon 30th," he said.

Velasquez urged the Philippines to improve its disaster-coping ca-

pability.

"A single event cannot be attributed to climate change because the climate system is in constant state of flux and has always exhibited natural fluctuations and extreme conditions," Velasquez said.



A policeman walks past tombs in North Cemetery in Manila yesterday. The National Capital Region Police Office has deployed at least 2,000 police officers to secure cemeteries all over Metro Manila for All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day on Nov. 1 and 2. Philstar photo Edd Gumban

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