

Ondoy death toll climbs to 280

by JOCELYN UY
Inquirer.net

MANILA - The death toll from Storm Ondoy rose to 280 on Thursday and the number of people crammed in more over 700 temporary shelters ballooned to more than 680,000 as government agencies scrambled to prepare for a new typhoon roaring toward Northern Luzon.

Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro Jr., head of the National

Disaster Coordinating Council, spent the whole day Thursday moving around provinces to deliver warnings and inform local officials of urgent steps to take when Typhoon Pepeng is expected to slam ashore somewhere in northern Luzon over the weekend.

"We will go around the provinces to brief local disaster coordinating councils of what to expect and what to do once the typhoon strikes us because we need to be ready as early as

now," said Teodoro in an early morning briefing Thursday.

NDCC Executive Officer Glenn Rabonza said weather experts expect the new typhoon to hit Isabela by Saturday and its vast cloud band to bring heavy rains to Central Luzon and Metro Manila, where some districts remain submerged in floodwaters dumped by Ondoy last week.

"We must prepare for the typhoon and the most critical is on Saturday and Sunday," Rabonza told reporters in an interview at Camp Aguinaldo.

Teodoro and other government officials met with all local civil defense coordinators across Metro Manila before he flew to La Union, Cagayan and Pampanga.

In the meeting, Teodoro stressed the need for local government units to identify temporary shelters and resort to pre-emptive evacuation of residents in vulnerable areas to avoid further casualties.

Extended relief operations were also raised as part of the preparations for Typhoon Pepeng.

The latest NDCC report said 280 people were killed, 5 injured and 42 missing since Ondoy dumped torrential rains on the capital and surrounding provinces on Saturday.

People in the 726 evacuation centers - 363 in Metro Manila, 48 in Region III, 313 in Region

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US undaunted by Jolo attack

by SHEILA CRISOSTOMO
Philstar.com

MANILA - The death of two American soldiers and a Filipino Marine in Sulu last Tuesday will not break the resolve of the US government to help the Philippines in its time of need, US Ambassador Kristie Kenney said on September 30.

"What happened to the Filipino and US soldiers is completely devastating. They were supposed to build a school in a community in Jolo that needed education facilities. They lost their lives helping others and we are deeply touched. We are thankful to all Filipinos who send their sympathy and words of advice," Kenney told reporters during a visit to an evacuation center in Tatalon, Quezon City.

Kenney said a contingent of US troops would be arriving in the country to assist in the on-going relief and rehabilitation operations in Metro Manila.

The US troops based in Okinawa, Japan are arriving with heavy equipment, medicine and other necessities for distribution to the hundreds of thousands displaced by floodwaters and flashfloods caused by storm "Ondoy" last Saturday.

Kenney said the planned joint military exercise between US and Filipino forces would instead be transformed into an aid operation for survivors of the deadly weekend disaster.

"We are working with the Philippine armed forces to redirect a

long-planned exercise," Kenney told reporters.

"There will be medical teams, equipment to help clear debris, bulldozers, forklifts, and we will have some heavy-lift helicopters so we can help start cleaning up Manila so people can move on with their lives," she said.

Kenney, along with some American soldiers and United States Agency for International Development personnel, joined Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC) volunteers led by chairman Sen. Richard Gordon in conducting cleanup operations in the school and giving relief goods to the evacuees.

Kenney said their focus right now is to help the people.

"There are Filipinos in need right now and we are not going to let them down."

Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) spokesman Lt. Col. Romeo Brawner said five heavy trucks, five Humvees, one bulldozer, two forklifts and 30 US medical personnel had already arrived in the country to help in flood relief.

Kenney added the American contingent would bring other relief goods, including \$4-million worth of medical supplies.

The ambassador did not specify how many US troops would arrive in the country.

"We will have medical teams of 30 to 40... How many will be needed to operate the trucks and forklifts, I don't have that number," she said.

Brawner said US troops are expected to be deployed in calamity-stricken areas around Metro Manila.

He said around 3,000 Ameri-

can troops from Okinawa and the US Pacific Command in Hawaii are scheduled to arrive on October 1 to participate in relief assistance projects.

Two teams of medical personnel would be initially sent to various parts of Metro Manila to attend to the medical needs of the evacuees and the number of US soldiers would increase later on, Brawner said.

The US government also committed six Chinook transport helicopters to facilitate the distribution of relief goods to the worst affected areas.

The US military earlier sent 17 Navy SEALs with rubber boats in the rescue operations at the height of the storm.

Brawner said the US troops will be heavily involved with the distribution of relief goods using trucks and helicopters, while the heavy equipment would be used for clearing roads and clogged waterways.

Kenney led the advance party on September 30, joined by a small contingent of US soldiers who came from Sulu to help in flood relief efforts.

The American troops came from the same unit of the two soldiers were killed by a roadside bomb in Sulu last Tuesday.

Asked if the US would ask for more security for its military personnel, Kenney said they do not intend to do so.

"I'm not doing anything about that. We work through them (the AFP) and will let them determine the next step because they are in charge," Kenney said.

IED attack

President Arroyo, on the other

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Roach: We're at 40...

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someone like Porter around because it serves as a "wake-up call" for Pacquiao, who should always "keep his up because this kid (Porter) can punch."

Roach said it's all part of the process, and Pacquiao should be in much better shape as the camp goes on. They intend to stay up here in Baguio for five weeks, shift to Los Angeles starting on Oct. 24, and head to Las Vegas a week before the fight.

"When he gets sharp and get's his timing he'll do a lot better and that's how he'll do in the fight. We have a schedule and we're getting sparring part-

ners that fight very much like his opponent. Still, I'm happy with where we're at right now," said Roach.

Before coming over a more than a week ago, Roach felt they would need 12 rounds to beat Cotto, but a couple of days ago he said they're going to knock him out, more or less in way they stopped Oscar dela Hoya and Ricky Hatton.

"I thought we're gonna win by decision but the way this camp is going I think we can knock him out in the early rounds. It's all gonna be about Manny's speed and power and that we've got plenty of," said Roach. ■

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