

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

More US troops arrive for relief operations

by JAIME LAUDE
Philstar.com

MANILA – The United States government is sending more troops to assist in the ongoing humanitarian operations in areas devastated by storm Ondoy in Metro Manila and nearby provinces.

The US government immediately deployed 100 of its troops to assist their local counterparts in rescue and relief operations for hundreds of thousands of residents directly affected by the calamity, following the government's call for foreign assistance amid devastation wrought by Ondoy.

Armed Forces of the Philippines-Public Information Office (AFP-PIO) chief Lt. Col. Romeo Brawner Jr. said the additional troops comprise military doctors and medical personnel.

"They are mostly military doctors and medical personnel," Brawner said.

Last Sunday, another US contingent from the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force based in Okinawa, Japan also flew in to assist in the government's overall massive relief and rehabilitation operations.

"The US Marine contingent from Okinawa arrived last Sunday to augment their

colleagues who are already here," Capt. Enrico Gil Iletto, deputy military spokesman said.

Iletto maintained that US troops have been coordinating closely with the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC), the agency in charge of directing all humanitarian activities on the ground.

On October 5, two US warships arrived at the Manila's South Harbor with undetermined number of personnel and equipment onboard reportedly for deployment in Metro Manila and nearby flood-stricken areas in Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog.

The AFP confirmed the arrival of the two US warships but clarified that the two vessels were only here for a quarantine anchorage.

Navy spokesman Lt. Col. Edgard Arevalo said that the vessel and its personnel would participate in the forthcoming RP-US joint military exercises dubbed as "Phiblex (Philippine Bilateral Exercises)."

Earlier, the US Embassy announced that, as agreed, the conduct of Phiblex later this month would be advanced to assist residents affected by the flooding in Metro Manila and nearby provinces and also help in the massive rehabilitation operations in

areas ravaged by Ondoy.

But Arevalo said he would still have to check into the report that US troops and their equipment aboard the two warships would also join their colleagues in the ongoing massive relief and rehabilitation of flood-stricken areas in Metro Manila.

Earlier, Brawner said that US troops now deployed in the metropolis are part of the US contingent which will participate in the Phiblex.

Brawner said the joint RP-US military exercises, done yearly and including water and air drills, will push through as scheduled.

He said assisting the flood victims is just a "humanitarian aspect of the Phiblex."

Last week, the group conducted medical operations as well as relief distribution to the affected residents at Barangay Nangka Elementary School in Marikina City, one of the worst hit area in last week's widespread flooding caused by Ondoy.

UN issues flash appeal for RP

The United Nations has issued a flash appeal that called on the international community to pledge emergency assistance to the Philippines.

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Villar wary about an extended state of calamity

NACIONALISTA Party President Senator Manny Villar said that after rescue and relief, a greater task of rebuilding is needed to help typhoon victims to truly recover from the tragedy. However, he said, this does not merit too drastic actions and sweeping calls from the government.

"Regarding Malacañang's plan to extend its declaration of a state of calamity for a year or longer, this has to be evaluated further. Some areas are also recovering faster than the others. There has to be a balance and a consensus. At this early, business groups are already wary about the idea, they should be consulted to see how it will affect them," said Villar.

The Makati Business Club, the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Employers Confederation of the Philippines, the Federation of Philippine Industries among other business groups have

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