

PRESS RELEASE**Secretary Briones calls on gov't, public to shift approach to disaster risk reduction, management**

PASIG CITY, January 9, 2019 – Following the onslaught of tropical depression “Usman,” Department of Education (DepEd) Secretary Leonor Magtolis Briones underscored that it is high time for the government and the public to transform the country’s approach to the reduction and management of disaster risks in the face of a continuously changing climate.

“In previous years, DepEd schools were damaged by strong winds brought about by tropical cyclones [and] we have been busy preparing for the perfect storm. In Metro Manila, we are bracing for the perfect earthquake. We better prepare for the perfect flood,” Briones stated.

Presenting the emerging challenges in disaster risk reduction and mitigation before fellow members of the Cabinet during a situation briefing last January 4 in Pili, Camarines Sur, the Education chief remarked that although “Usman” was technically described as a tropical depression, its resulting floods and landslides left extensive damage to school buildings and facilities in affected areas.

Repair and replacement of damaged facilities due to “Usman,” typhoon “Ompong,” and typhoon “Rosita” are estimated to use up DepEd’s entire P2-billion Quick Response Fund (QRF) for 2019. She further emphasized that such damage demands enormous budget for slope protection, higher elevation, or transfer of building sites. However, DepEd has funds for site titling but none for site acquisition.

As floods and landslides happen with greater frequency and inflict severe damage to property, facilities, and equipment even without strong winds as measured by warning system, the Secretary also called on the Cabinet to consider the policy implication of this irreversible trend and make the necessary recommendations to the President.

“We have seen this in Guinsaugon [Southern Leyte], Biliran, Leyte, Quezon, Los Baños [Laguna], Cagayan de Oro, and Iligan, as well as in Lanao del Norte,” she noted.

The Secretary further proposed the review of protocols for government action before, during, and after natural disasters – case in point is the public mindset of relying on typhoon signals as basis for assessing potential danger to life and property, which needs to be corrected through sustained public communication and education. She also highlighted the need to revisit the progress on the proposed creation of a separate department on natural disaster.

“The financial, organizational, and administrative requirements for dealing with natural disasters cannot be managed by the government alone. All sectors of society have to be mobilized and activated to help ensure the safety of lives and the continuity of education,” the Secretary concluded.

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