

COA hits poor use of donated funds for 'Yolanda,' Marawi victims

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The Commission on Audit (COA) has called out the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) for its slow and poor use of funds, defeating the donors' intention of helping Filipino victims of disasters.

Five years after Supertyphoon "Yolanda" (international name: Haiyan) devastated Eastern Visayas, the OCD had yet to spend P40.98 million of P135.39 million, or 30.3 percent, in donations it had received to aid the victims of the strongest storm to hit land, the COA said in its 2018 annual audit report for the disaster agency.

The OCD also received P36.92 million in donations for residents of Marawi who were displaced by the fighting for control of the city between government forces and terrorists in 2017, but it had spent only P10,000 a year after the siege, the COA said.

Only one family helped

It said the OCD used the amount to help the family of a resident who was killed in the fighting.

The OCD is the implementation arm of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) and is overseen by the Department of National Defense.

While the unused Yolanda funds was recorded at P40.98 million, the actual amount was P46.67 million because of foreign exchange gains, the COA said.

The state audit agency did not recommend ways of using the funds, though.

Yolanda was one of the strongest typhoons in recorded history.

It slammed into Eastern Visayas on Nov. 3, 2013, with winds of up to 230 kilometers per hour, devastating the provinces of Leyte and Samar and wreaking havoc on other provinces as it swept across central Philippines on its way out to the South China Sea.

According to a 2014 NDRRMC report, Yolanda left more than 6,300 people dead, 28,860 injured and 1,060 missing.

It said the monster storm disrupted the lives of more than 3.4 million people in eastern and central Philippines.

Purpose not fully served

In the siege of Marawi, the COA said the OCD did not properly use local and foreign donations intended for residents displaced by the fighting between US-backed government forces and terrorists who had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State jihadi group in Iraq and Syria.

“The poor [use] of the donated funds defeated the purpose of donation and that the good intention of the donors for human consideration was not fully served,” the COA said.

The NDRRMC authorized the OCD to give the family of a slain resident P10,000 and injured residents P5,000 each in financial assistance provided they could submit documentary requirements, including a police report of the incident, death certificate, certification from the barangay captain, some proof of filial relationship with the victim, and endorsement for payment of

claims from the local disaster council chief.

The COA found the requirements “very burdensome” for the families of residents killed and those injured in the fighting.

It said the requirements and the one-year limit after the siege set for claims could be the reasons for the poor use of the Marawi funds.

Of the P36.92 million in local and foreign donations that poured in after the siege, the COA said more than half, or P25.57 million, came from India.

Thailand donated P5 million and the provincial government of Bulacan province gave P4 million, the COA said.

The COA also pointed out that the Yolanda and Marawi funds were purely local and foreign donations. The local donations did not include funds from the national government.—PATRICIA DENISE M. CHIU



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