

Headline: PH Red Cross at 75: Set for more challenges amid climate change

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MANILA, Philippines — The Philippine Red Cross (PRC) marked its 75th founding anniversary on Saturday, dedicating the milestone to donors and volunteers while renewing its commitment to emergency response and humanitarian work amid the rising frequency of disasters due to climate change.

From only 13 chapters in 1947, the PRC has grown to 102 chapters nationwide. Under the current chairmanship of former Sen. Richard Gordon, it has expanded its volunteer base — with over 1.5 million registered members — and strengthened its logistics capabilities, making it the largest humanitarian organization in the Philippines.

Its network of volunteers has been crucial in responding to emergencies, as they are often the first to arrive on the scene to provide initial assistance, the organization said in a statement on Saturday.

“Over the years, the PRC has evolved from its primary role as a blood collection agency to a full-service humanitarian organization. It has expanded its services to provide aid in all kinds of disasters, including typhoons, earthquakes, armed conflicts and disease outbreaks. The organization has built thousands of homes for those affected by disasters and has developed an extensive network of trained emergency medical services personnel,” it added.

Investing heavily in rolling assets, it now operates a fleet of 178 ambulances, food trucks, rescue trucks, firetrucks, Humvees, amphibians, rescue boats, wing vans, water tankers with water bladders, and payloaders for clearing debris.

One major asset, the humanitarian ship MV Amazing Grace, enables the volunteers to easily reach various islands for rescue efforts and relief operations.

The establishment of a 24/7 state-of-the-art PRC Operations Center—first set up at Manila's Port Area in 2008 and relocated to Mandaluyong City in 2015 — allowed for faster, more targeted coordination with and among the different chapters.

PRC's timely programs for the most vulnerable remain the most effective incentive for local and international donors to continue building partnerships with the organization. In March, for example, business conglomerates and both houses of Congress chose PRC to assist in their donation drives for the victims of the magnitude 7.8 earthquake in Turkey and Syria.

All these have made the PRC one of the best Red Cross societies in the world, according to its secretary general, Dr. Gwendolyn Pang.

“April 15 is a day of celebration, the day we express our appreciation to our donors and volunteers who embodied the values and mission of the PRC in the last 75 years,” said Gordon, who has been in PRC’s helm since 2004. “As we venture into the next 75 years of humanitarian work, the Philippine Red Cross is prepared for stronger and more frequent disasters as climate change rears its ugly head.”

Aside from the main anniversary program held at Shangri-La The Fort Manila, the various PRC chapters conducted simultaneous activities on Saturday.

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These included medical missions, first-aid demonstrations and lectures, blood donation drives, free circumcisions, cleanup and tree-planting activities, a fundraising concert and fun run, and solidarity walks, among others.