

‘Flood summit’ pushed for ‘comprehensive’ disaster response



By Divina Nova Joy Dela Cruz
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A lawmaker at the House of Representatives called on the government to conduct a “flood summit” to discuss a “comprehensive” disaster response program to prevent a repeat of the situation where communities in Marikina City, Cagayan, and Isabela were submerged by the floods spawned by typhoon “Ulysses”.

Quezon City 2nd District Rep. Precious Hipolito Castelo noted that the country had been visited by destructive typhoons in the past with the same extensive damage and flooding in low-lying areas, including parts of her district.

“We have not learned our lesson from Ondoy and past destructive typhoons that visited the country. There must be a comprehensive, holistic and well coordinated effort to avert flooding,” she said.

“Eleven years after, we faced the same problem. Many of those flooded by Ondoy swear that Ulysses was even worse. What have we done during those 11 years? What measures have we taken to prevent similar flooding?” she added.

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Castelo stressed the need to prepare a comprehensive plan for similar calamities in the future, noting the “catastrophic” impact of typhoons “Rolly” and “Ulysses” amid the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic.

“We cannot afford disasters like that. The economy and our people will suffer further, “ she said.

To come up with a comprehensive plan, Castelo proposed a flood summit to include the Office of Civil Defense, Department of Interior and Local Government, National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, Departments of National Defense, Science and Technology, Public Works and Highways, Environment and Natural Resources, Metro Manila Development Authority, and the Office of the President.

“Local government officials should be involved in a comprehensive flooding and disaster response program because they are the implementers and foot soldiers on the ground,” she said.

Castelo suggested exploring flood prevention measures implemented by some European countries that have successfully contained flooding. She said some of the concerned agencies may have sent personnel to these countries to study their programs and the flood containment structures they have built.

“We can even ask them to lend us some of their engineers and experts. We have to solve this problem once and for all, or at least lessen flooding in the future,” she said.

Castelo also called on the government to create a plan for the calibrated release of water in dams during typhoons that may have contributed to massive flooding.

“The matter is apparently left to the operators of the dams and the power plants in them who want to protect their facilities at the cost of losing lives and property of people in low-lying areas like many communities in Quezon City,” she said.

She suggested creating a single agency of experts that would include meteorologists, engineers, geologists, and hydrologists, that would determine and decide on water releases.

“I can appreciate that a dam has to be protected and saved from possible damage, or worse, from collapsing, but we also have to weigh the cost to lives and property,” she said.

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