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PRESS BRIEFING OF MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ
WITH DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
SECRETARY RENATO SOLIDUM JR
December 12, 2023 [11:17 A.M. – 11:34 A.M.]

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Magandang umaga, Malacañang Press Corps, at welcome sa ating press briefing ngayong araw, December 12.

During the sectoral meeting led by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. this morning, DOST-PAGASA and the Office of Civil Defense gave updates on the impacts of El Niño which are felt now and is expected to extend to the second quarter of 2024. The President ordered the coordination of all the plans to mitigate the effects of El Niño on water, agriculture, energy, health, security, education and other effects into an Updated National Action Plan on El Niño.

Joining us now is Science and Technology Secretary Renato Solidum Jr. Good morning, Secretary.

DOST SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: Good morning.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Go ahead with our briefing. Thank you.

DOST SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: Thank you.

DOST-PAGASA issued last December 6, 2023 El Niño Advisory No. 6 which states that a strong El Niño is present in the tropical pacific and this has further intensified, nearing its peak in the coming months as the sea surface temperature anomalies have reached more than 1.5 degrees centigrade. Aside from that, majority of global climate model suggests that El Niño likely persists until the second quarter of 2024.

Now, the effects of El Niño are currently felt and they have been experienced in some areas in the country and this is characterized by the reduction of rainfall up to 80% which led to dry conditions or dry spells. Dry spells are episodes where there is 21 to 80 percent reduction of rainfall compared to the average normal months' data. Below normal also would be the number of tropical cyclones in the previous months and this has contributed to the persistence of dry conditions in some areas.

Now, based on recent conditions, moderate to severe drought conditions are likely from February to May 2024. And by end of May, there would be 77% of the provinces of the country will have potential for drought – that would be around 65 provinces; and 7% potential for dry spell or around six provinces. And because of this, we need to further intensify our efforts to make sure that we are ready for this especially on the various fields that were already mentioned like health, water, agriculture, sanitation and of course, peace and order; and we also need to involve everyone in this effort.

Thank you.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you, Secretary Solidum. Any questions? Sam Medenilla of Business Mirror.

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESS MIRROR: For Sir Solidum. Tatanong lang po namin sana kung ano po iyong laman noong National Action Plan at saka kung ano po iyong mga possible intervention na niri-recommend ng DOST to address iyong possible drought at saka impact po ng El Niño sa power po?

DOST SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: Okay. Ang National Action Plan maraming laman iyan and this is actually being prepared early on when PAGASA mentioned the possibility of El Niño. And this... the sectors that—the plans are subdivided into five sectors: Water security to ensure sufficient water supply; food security to make sure that there is stable supply of key food commodities, income losses are minimized and access to affordable food would be expanded; on the energy security, power interruptions should be minimized; for health, outbreak of diseases and other illnesses would be managed and minimized; and for public safety, fire incidents due to El Niño especially for the dry grassy or forested areas would be reduced; and there will be safe, peaceful and orderly communities that would be maintained all over the country. So, those are the five major plans and the details would be done by the different concerned departments.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Ivan Mayrina, GMA-7...

VAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Comparing this year's El Niño to the previous ones that we've experienced, Secretary, gaano ho ka-severe ito or is it less severe than that ones we've experienced?

DOST SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: Strong ang indication ng El Niño so, we have to prepare. And if I recall – may I ask the... Jess, is it similar to the '97/'98 episode? Comparable to '97/'98.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: And that was the worst we have experienced?

DOST SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: Yes. So, we need to plan ahead and we should make it fast as the evaluation change from the previous one to a strong El Niño.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Are we looking at extreme temperatures especially during the summer? Are we in for the hottest summer in recent memory?

DOST SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: Yeah. The temperature that is a forecast during Amihan times 'no will be from 9.4 degrees to 14.8 and the maximum temperature in Northern Luzon around April or May can be up to 41 degrees centigrade and that would be the actual temperature. But if you add on the heat index, usually plus 5 to 15 degrees – magkaiba kasi iyong heat index, importante iyon sa katawan ng tao; in Metro Manila, maybe around 38.3; and in lowland Luzon up to 39.9; and Mindanao by April, around 39.5.

I think it's comparable... right, isn't it? Anna Liza, is that the maximum? Hindi naman, 'di ba? Comparable lang?

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Any other questions? Nestor Corrales.

NESTOR CORRALES/PDI: I'm sorry. You earlier mentioned that 77% of the country is predicted to experience a dry spell.

DOST SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: No, drought.

NESTOR CORRALES/PDI: Drought. May we know what provinces will be heavily hit by El Niño?

DOST SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: We'll provide you with the list.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Maybe we can show the map again because it's pretty much Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

DOST SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: Yeah, just show the map...

Now, on the right side will be the May. So ang tingnan ninyo diyan, iyong drought would be red, so North Luzon is dry spell, northern extreme Luzon; then some parts of Mindanao will be yellow or dry condition. So, essentially, all the rest of the country would be from dry condition to drought. So, mostly drought.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Tuesday Niu, DZBB.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Good morning, Secretary. Sabi ninyo, sir, we have to prepare fast. How will we do that, sir? At ano iyong pinakamabilis na paraan na gagawin natin?

SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: Ang utos ni President would be to categorize actions into short and medium. Iyong short ay kaagad-agad, iyong madali, we have to be realistic. So marami naman talagang nakaplano at ginagawa na, we just have to make sure that the coverage would also expand according to the forecast. And, of course, the one important thing is to enhance the communication effort, and this will be handled by the Office of the President so that we can have a massive information campaign on what we need to do, what the government is doing and what our kababayan should also be doing for their counterpart.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Eden Santos.

EDEN SANTOS/NET25: Secretary, good morning po. Doon naman po ako sa lindol, Sec. Tanong ko lang po kung sa taong ito ba ay nag-exceed tayo doon sa dami ng mga naranasang lindol ng bansa? At mostly bakit po sa Mindanao ang tama po ng mga lindol?

SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: If you count the aftershocks, yes. Pero there are sometimes, years where we have major earthquake events, and major earthquake events would trigger a lot of aftershocks. So by counting ay talagang susobra iyan kasi for example, sa magnitude 7.4 earthquake event ay mahigit tatlong libo na iyon, baka umabot pa iyon sa 4,000.

But the important thing though is the consequence of the events. And if you look at past events, these events in Mindanao have not really caused significant casualty. Important thing though is we need to make sure that people understand that all the rest of the country, except Palawan Island, is transected by active faults and also bordered by what we call trenches.

And the reason why we have several in Mindanao is because in Mindanao, we have at least three to four trenches compared to Visayas and Luzon. And some of these trenches like the Philippine Trench, between Samar Island and Surigao Provinces, have not really moved for a long time kaya nandoon iyong mga gaps na may mga earthquakes na nangyayari.

Now, on the Sarangani event noong November 17, part ito ng Cotabato Trench which is also very active in generating major earthquake events. So kaya nagkakataon na iyong ibang lugar would

have stored so much energy that need to be released kaya minsan may mga major earthquakes tayo.

EDEN SANTOS/NET25: Follow-up lang po. Iyong sa “The Big One” po dito sa Metro Manila, kasi iyong 7.4 sa ibang lugar ay malakas na po iyon. Sa Metro Manila, iyong ini-expect po nating lakas ay 7.2, tama po ba iyon?

SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: If the scenario that we look at is the West Valley Fault. So based on the length of the fault, we can expect that it can generate a magnitude 7.2. And since it is already on land and we are staying on land, the intensity of shaking that we will feel would be much stronger – intensity 8. Compare to the 7.4 magnitude in Surigao, energy-wise is much stronger but since the epicenter was offshore, what was felt in land was not that strong – intensity 7 lang.

And there is a big difference between intensity 8 and 7. Intensity 8 is when you cannot stand and shaking will be kind of long, close to one minute depending on the foundation. Itong 7, mga ano lang iyan—you can stand but less damage.

EDEN SANTOS/NET25: Can we safely say po, Secretary, na at this point in time ay mas handa na po tayo doon sa The Big One compared from ten years before?

SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: Definitely, when you were still covering me, we were both—sorry. And definitely, yes, I agree with you – *Iyong katabi mo, kasama mo, kasama rin iyan* – and essentially, yes, definitely, but we need to make sure that the information campaign is continued. As younger ... we have more youth now than before that they also need to know.

What is important though is we need to continue strengthening the houses that we have constructed years before. Iyong mga bago conforms to the building code but we need to strengthen our building preparedness, and that is where the solution would lie on the potential number of casualty – kailangang patibayin para kumaunti pa ang maapektuhan.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay, thank you. Alvin Baltazar.

ALVIN BALTAZAR/PBS: Secretary, good morning po. Secretary, going back doon sa El Niño. Ano ba iyong worst case scenario noong 1997 El Niño na sinisikap nating maiwasan ngayong paparating na El Niño sa 2024?

SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: May effect sa agriculture iyon eh kaya nga we need to make sure that water and the energy and agriculture are not that affected because that was really an issue that was very instrumental in making sure that we really need to prepare for this kind of event.

And as you know, pagdating sa mga ganiyan, we have to make sure na kapag food ang maapektuhan, dapat ample ang supply kasi baka makaapekto rin sa mga pricing ‘di ba. So that is the critical thing, we need to have food stocks and making sure that enough water and energy are available. So distribution is also a very crucial thing.

ALVIN BALTAZAR/PBS: Secretary, follow-up lang po. In terms of budget, magkano ba iyong budget allocation natin para dito sa El Niño?

SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: I don’t have the number. But there were proposals for increased budget as requested by different agencies. Agencies have their own fund ‘no. You can fund many of the activities based on the regular fund. When the effect happens and more assistance needed to be provided, then iyong quick response or other additional fund needs to be provided. Iyong mga

infrastructure like sa irrigation, sa mga dams, improvement of water facilities also need to be looked into.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Just to reiterate what the Secretary said, in the meeting today, the various agencies' secretaries were all present with the President. Let me just read who was there: DND Secretary, DA, DOH, DTI, DSWD, DENR, DILG, DOST, DBM, DOE, DICT, NEDA, OCD, MWSS, NIA (National Irrigation) and NWRB. So it is a whole of government, and we need the whole of society to also be aware and to prepare for this.

Any more? No more questions?

SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: Wala nang tanong? We need your help here in informing our kababayan and also educating them on what needs to be done.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: In fact, the President had also mentioned ...this is not the first time he mentioned it. Earlier, I think quarter two, he already said, we should have a conservation mentality – huwag mag-aksaya. As early as now ay huwag tayong mag-aksaya ng tubig, ng ilaw! Anyway, mahal 'di ba, so let's all do our part in conserving energy and water.

SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: Yeah, definitely, that's very correct.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Are we done? Anything else, Secretary?

SEC. SOLIDUM JR.: Well, maraming salamat sa inyo. And this kind of preparation has been done before. We need more concerted effort though with the strong El Niño forecast.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you. On that note, this concludes our press briefing this morning. Maraming salamat, Malacañang Press Corps. And maraming salamat, Secretary Solidum. Thank you.

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