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**COURTESY CALL ON PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR. BY UNITED STATES SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
LLOYD JAMES AUSTIN III**

[Held at the President's Hall, Malacañan Palace in Manila | 18 November 2024]

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Good afternoon, and of course, welcome once again to our often visitor and good friend, Secretary Austin, back to the Philippines.

I am very happy that despite the less-than-ideal weather that you have managed to come and visit as there are many items that need to be discussed concerning the different – concerning the different issues that are facing both our countries', especially on the economic front, and certainly, of course, the military front.

And I note that with the signing of the agreement on General Security of Military Information Agreement, which is certainly an important step for the continued interoperability of our two militaries.

I would like to point out and remind everyone how important the EDCA sites have become in all our HADR attempts in this last few... We have been hit with – we now refer to it as the KLMNOP series of typhoons. Six typhoons in about less than four weeks.

I – we were able to do a better job than we would have done otherwise because of the HADR sites – ah the EDCA sites, which we conducted a great, many of our HADR missions and to the benefit of those who have been isolated. And...

They served as staging areas, actually for... Well, before when we know that the storm is coming, we prepositioned as much as many assets, material as we can as close as possible, so as not to damage the actual resources that we have. And the EDCA sites have become the staging area because right after the storm, many areas can only be reached by helicopter. And many roads closed because of landslides. And therefore, even the main capital of provinces can only be reached by aircraft.

So, we have used to a great extent the EDCA sites. I just like to remind everyone on the wisdom behind that and how it has become so extremely useful in the face of these effects of climate change.

But once again, Secretary Austin, thank you very much for making your way here, as I said, despite the weather and welcome once again to Manila.

SECRETARY AUSTIN: Mr. President, thank you for meeting with us. I know your time is very, very valuable, especially now. I know we're meeting at a time of need.

At the outset, let me offer our condolences and thoughts and prayers to all those who have been disadvantaged by these six significant storms that have taken place in a very short period of time.

Mr. President, I have authorized US troops to help Philippine forces provide lifesaving aid to the Filipino people. And the US has also secured another million dollars in urgent humanitarian aid, and that will enhance the work of USAID and the World Food Programme. And that's in addition to the nearly 100,000 pounds of supplies that we delivered after Typhoon Julian.

So, our work together with the past, especially the past four years has enabled our alliance to grow stronger and better, Mr. President.

And you mentioned the EDCA sites, it was your vision a while back that these sites could be used to do exactly what you have described: prepositioning supplies and food and other critical elements in times of urgent need, and it would enable us to serve the Filipino people much faster and much more efficiently. And that your vision has come true. And so, we're glad we've played a part in that.

Mr. President, I look forward to discussing this morning how we may be of additional assistance at this time of critical need.

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Well, actually we are assessing the damage and the needs from Pepito, which is the last one.

I think we have determined that there are certain areas that were hit – Catanduanes basically and Polillo – that were hit very badly. But the rest of the country – because the storm crossed Central Luzon and the

rest of the country – we were expecting floods here in the city, and it didn't quite materialize. And so, we are very grateful for that. But nonetheless, the response to the previous typhoons...

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