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**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR.**  
**AT THE 24<sup>TH</sup> GAWAD KALASAG NATIONAL AWARDING CEREMONY**

[Delivered at the Philippine International Convention Center in Pasay City | 13 December 2024]

Thank you very much to our National Defense Secretary, Secretary Gilbert Teodoro, for his kind introduction. *[Please take your seats.]*

The Office of the Civil Defense (OCD) officer-in-charge Assistant Secretary Bernardo Rafaelito Alejandro; of course, our constant host, Pasay Cito Mayor Imelda Calixto-Rubiano; the officials and employees of the Office of Civil Defense; the awardees of the 24<sup>th</sup> Gawad Kalasag National Awards; my fellow workers in government; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

The bravery, the resilience, the ingenuity, and compassion of the Filipinos always prevail, especially in times of crises. We are proud of these qualities, though sometimes borne out of harsh necessity.

We already know that the Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. The Philippines has frequently been visited by typhoons, exacerbated now by climate change, and is situated in the Pacific Ring of Fire – as evidenced now by what we are experiencing with the Kanlaon eruption – and we are known therefore for volcanic and seismic activities.

During the first half of the year, the first crisis that we faced was El Niño, where we had six months -- there was no rain that came down to the Philippines from November last year, extending into the second even the third quarter of this year.

Now, we have the typhoons that have come with the anticipation of La Niña.

Now, the eruption and continuing unrest of Kanlaon has covered its neighboring places with ash fall.

And all of these compel us to establish a culture of preparedness and institutionalize disaster risk reduction and management practices across all sectors.

Today, we honor and give recognition to individuals, LGUs, academic institutions, medical facilities, individuals and other organizations who have demonstrated the unwavering commitment towards achieving resilience.

Thank you and congratulations to all of you – they are our awardees for today. *[applause]*

This 24<sup>th</sup> Gawad KALASAG Seal and Special Awards for Excellence in Disaster Risk Reduction and Management and Humanitarian Assistance highlights that building resilience is not the task of one single entity, but a collective effort that needs a whole-of-government, in fact, a whole-of-society approach.

The recipients of these awards have gone above and beyond to ensure the safety and well-being of their respective communities.

*Tunay pong ipinapakita ninyo ang pagmamahal at pakikipag-kapwa. At sa gitna ng mga hamon sa buhay, pinili ninyong maglingkod sa inyong komunidad para sa ating mga kababayan.*

Courageous, compassionate, and determined—our selfless volunteers faced strong currents to rescue those in need; you are the innovators who pioneered new technologies for disaster preparedness, organizations that championed people participation for a more [transformative] DRRM strategies, and decision-making that is ensured that every plan is done properly and is executed efficiently.

*Kasama sa bibigyan natin ng parangal ngayon, ang dalawang matatapang na estudyante na sina Ginoong John Niño Suarez at Emer Jhune Donaire.*

*Sa Lawis Marine Sanctuary Park sa Poro, Cebu noong Marso ng nakaraang taon, ipinamalas nila ang tapang nang sagipin nila ang isang kababayang nalulunod sa gitna na malakas na alon.*

*Bagama't pareho silang may kasanayan na sa basic life support, wala pa silang sapat na training sa water rescue noong panahon na iyon.*

*Kaya naman tunay na kapuri-puri ang pinakita nilang tapang at karapat-dapat na tawagin sila bilang bayani. [applause]*

*Kinikilala rin natin ang hindi matatawarang kontribusyon ni Ginoong Rafael "Paeng" Valencia sa pagsulong ng mga makabagong patakaran at paggamit ng mga modernong teknolohiya sa pagpapabuti ng DRRM practice.*

*Kabilang na rito ang paglikha [at] pagtatag ng 911 On Call Incorporated; ang Pailaw at Pabahay Program na layong tumulong sa pagkumpuni ng mga bahay na nasa mga pinakaliblib at mahihirap na mga lugar; at ang pagsagawa ng mobile vaccination para sa mga malalayong barangay.*

*Ang kaniyang serbisyo ay nagsisilbing patunay na kapag pinagsama ang pagka-malikhain at malasakit sa kapwa, nagbubunga ito ng makabuluhang pagbabago para sa ikabubuti nating lahat.*

*Dahil dito, kaisa ko ang sambayanang Pilipino sa pagsasaludo at pagkikilala sa inyong mahahalagang kontribusyon at tagumpay. Maraming salamat sa inyong sakripisyo, sa inyong pagsusumikap, at sa inyong dedikasyon.*

In line with our collective commitment to building more disaster-resilient communities, I recently signed the *Ligtas Pinoy Centers Act*. This mandates the establishment of designated evacuation centers in every city and municipality nationwide, providing temporary but secured shelter to displaced Filipinos during calamities and disasters.

The increasing frequency and intensity of hazardous events have provided us with insights that have shaped our approach and have saved many lives. Many of those lessons we learned from you.

It has become imperative that our DRRM system undergoes continuous improvement to address evolving circumstances. It includes our individual obligation to follow proactive, vigilant, and adaptable strategies for our own and our communities' safety.

I once again call on the NDRRMC and all other concerned agencies and the LGUs – our always our first responders – to continue working together to develop innovative solutions that are science-based, that are sustainable, and are future-ready, and establish clear guidelines for more effective disaster-response.

Let us be guided by the “Build Back Better” strategy in recovery, rehabilitation, and in reconstruction. It is about coming together as a community, lifting one another, emerging stronger than before.

In the spirit of this holiday season, let us remember our fellow Filipinos in need, especially those who are still now affected by recent calamities. Let us always extend a helping hand and always include them in our thoughts and in our prayers.

As long as we are united to help uplift each other, I am very certain and knowing the Filipino culture and the Filipino spirit, I know that we can turn challenges into opportunities, pave the way for safer, stronger, and more secure *Bagong Pilipinas*.

For our part in government, we are consolidating and putting together all of the new technologies, all of the best practices. It is unfortunate that we have become – the Philippines has become the example of how to handle these calamities and these disasters. It is unfortunate because we have had to learn those hard lessons through bitter experience.

But nevertheless, that has served us well, especially now that we face a new normal. It is a phrase that we have been hearing since Yolanda. But it is a fact that this is the new normal and therefore we need to think ahead of it.

Whereas before, dati ang ating – pagka may parating na bagyo, inaantay na lang natin. Sabi natin, padaanin muna natin ‘yung bagyo, padaanin muna natin ‘yung putok ng bulkan, padaanin muna natin ‘yung lindol bago natin puntahan ang mga nasalanta.

Ngayon, hangga’t maaari – lindol mahirap naman ma-predict ‘yan. Pero ‘yung putok ng bulkan, ‘yung bagyo nakikita na rin natin, inuunahan na natin. At ‘yan talaga sa palagay ko ang pinakamahalaga na pagbabago sa ating approach dito sa pag – sa disaster relief, disaster rehabilitation. Dahil at ay... ‘Pag inantay pa natin na magkakaproblema ay ‘yun na nga doon tayo nagkakaroon ng malaking casualty.

Ang napakalaking bagay kagaya ng ating laging ginagawa, unang-una, ay ‘yung evacuation para lahat ng mga nasa lugar na delikado ay hindi na – mailagay sa lugar na ligtas. Tapos ang ating mga sistema ng komunikasyon – sa mga NGOs, sa mga LGU, at saka sa national government ay pinapatibay natin.

Pangatlo, ‘yung ating mga evacuation centers, pinapatibay pa natin. Nagtatayo tayo ng mga bago. Iba na po ang design na ginagamit natin dahil palakas nga nang palakas. Pangkaraniwan na lang ‘yung 230 kilometers, pangkaraniwan na lang ‘yung mga gustiness of 350 kilometers.

Kaya ‘yung mga dati nating evacuation center ay kailangan pagandahin pa, patibayin pa para hindi tayo magkakaproblema doon sa mga nilikas na ating mga kababayan.

Iyan po ay natutunan namin sa inyong karanasan. These are examples that we have picked up from the best practices in the different areas: from the LGUs, from the NGOs, from the private sector who have always been our full partners in this effort.

So once again, congratulations to all the awardees!

*Maraming salamat. Mabuhay kayong lahat! Maraming salamat sa serbisyo ninyo!*

*Mabuhay ang Bagong Pilipinas! [applause]*

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