

Manila Standard TODAY

Where did the Yolanda relief and aid go?

By Emil Jurado

May. 07, 2014

Reacting to reports on the plan of the lawyer-fiancee of Hollywood actor George Clooney to elevate to the United Nations the plight of former President and now Pampanga Rep. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who has been charged with non-bailable offense, presidential spokesman Sonny Coloma, with a straight face, said GMA could hire the best and brightest lawyer if she wanted to since the human rights of the former President had not been violated.

Oh yeah? Gloria's rights have not been violated? What do you think happened when Justice Secretary Leila de Lima and immigration officials barred the former President from taking a flight out of the country for treatment abroad because of her debilitating bone ailment in violation of her right to travel, simply because Malacañang was fearful of her not returning! Santa Banana, that was a clear violation of human rights!

Even now, in connection with Gloria's plunder case on the alleged diversion of P366 million in Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office intelligence funds, while members of the former PCSO board have been granted bail, Gloria is still under hospital arrest as the Sandiganbayan has refused to grant her bail. And my gulay, the role of Gloria in that plunder case was simply ministerial.

Clooney's girlfriend, Amal Alamuddin, who represented Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, broached the plan to represent the former President after being apprised of the legal facts about Arroyo's case.

I know that presidential spokesmen often lie in defense of the President, but for Coloma to say with a straight face that the human rights of Gloria have not been violated is not only a lie but an insult to our intelligence.

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Days on end after super-typhoon Yolanda devastated the city of Tacloban, we saw on television so much aid and relief being brought from international institutions and foreign governments, not counting relief from local sources and the Philippine Red Cross on the ground. But that was over six months ago.

The question now is: Where have all those aid and relief gone since Yolanda's survivors in the city of Tacloban have not been fully rehabilitated? With so much relief and aid going to Tacloban as we saw on television, the city would have been fully rehabilitated. But, no. There are still hundreds of families living in tents, thousands more in makeshift shelters, hundreds more in schools have been turned into evacuation centers. The commitment given by Social Welfare Secretary Dinky Soliman to provide shelter kits worth P10,000 to each family whose homes have been partially damaged, and 30,000 for those totally damaged, never came. And electricity has not been restored to all the homes.

Santa Banana, it's not only the typhoon that hit Tacloban but the national government's criminal neglect and utter incompetence. That's why I agreed with Tacloban City Mayor Alfredo Romualdez when he said the perceptions on relief and aid for the city are far off from what's happening on the ground.

Thus, we ask again: Whatever happened to all those aid and relief that poured into Tacloban days after Yolanda laid waste to the city? This is something that has to be explained and answered by the national government, especially Soliman since she is in charge of aid and relief.

As for rehabilitation, six months after the disaster and calamity we still have to hear what "Rehabilitation Czar" Ping Lacson is doing. Does he have any master plan? When will reconstruction and rehabilitation begin, if at all? And most importantly, what kind of reconstruction and rehabilitation can people expect, if at all?

I ask these questions since from Day One, when President Aquino appointed Lacson rehabilitation czar, I doubted the capability of the former senator to do the job that requires not only an engineer and architect but a master planner, of which Lacson is neither of the three.

It would seem that the Aquino administration is incapable of reconstruction and rehabilitation. Santa Banana, when the administration cannot even reconstruct and rehabilitate the city of Tacloban after all those aid and relief, what can we expect it to do in the many areas needing reconstruction and rehabilitation?

If there's any legacy that President Aquino can leave the country after he steps down two years from now, it's criminal neglect and utter incompetence in coming up with the relief and aid needed by the survivors of a calamity.

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While admitting that only the Senate can compel her to release the Naples list of senators involved in the P10-billion pork-barrel scam, Justice Secretary Leila de Lima stands pat on her refusal to make public the list, which former Senator Ping Lacson said could constitute a quorum among senators.

The problem, however, is that Senator TG Guingona, chairman of the Yellow Ribbon Committee (I prefer to call it that), appears reluctant to convene the committee to make De Lima publicly

disclose the contents of the Napoles list. This leads me to conclude that Guingona is in cahoots with De Lima and Malacañang not to make that list public to end all speculation.

My gulay, the question is: Why is Guingona reluctant to convene the Senate Yellow Ribbon Committee? This adds to the perceptions that Malacañang is really all out to sanitize the list because some administration senators are in it.

But what's wrong with that Napoles list being made public when the administration was so quick in also making public the alleged involvement of three opposition senators linked to the pork barrel scam? I see no other reason why De Lima is so hesitant and even defiant in not making public the list other than to sanitize it. And by her continued defiance of the clamor for public disclosure of that list, the more people will believe that Malacañang is really all out to protect the administration senators.

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I have been getting a lot of complaints from friends and others coming from abroad after a short vacation passing through the Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 1. The complaints range from lack of enough air-conditioning in the wake of the humidity and the sweltering heat outside the building, dirty toilets, delayed recovery of luggage and inadequate counters for immigration purposes.

I don't know what NAIA Manager Jesus Angel Honrado is doing about all the problems at NAIA 1 when they are not at all new. It seems Honrado is incapable of making NAIA I more bearable in the wake of the numerous complaints from foreigners and locals alike that, indeed, its one of the worst airports in the world.

Yes, Terminal 1 is under renovation and reconstruction with no less than P1.8 billion earmarked for it. Just how soon will that come, nobody knows, but the problem is now. When will Honrado ever wake up to realize that he's incapable of managing an airport? Perhaps it's time the President made Honrado resign and make NAIA Terminal 1 at least bearable for the meantime.

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Read this and weep: The Philippines ranked 67th among 89 countries listed as most "miserable" in 2013, according to a US-based think tank which cited unemployment as the main reason for that misery.

The "misery index" was compiled by the Cato Institute of Washington, ranking 89 countries based on the sum of the unemployment rate minus the percentage rate in real Gross Domestic Product per country. Data was sourced from the Economic Intelligence Unit of the International Monetary Fund, a calculation of Professor Steve Hanke at the John Hopkins University in Baltimore. Unemployment was considered as the major contributing factor to a country's misery, the study revealed.

While the Japanese were the least miserable country in the list, the 10 most miserable were Venezuela (79.4 misery index), Serbia (44.8), Argentina (43.1) Jamaica (42.3), Egypt (38.1), Spain (37.6), South Africa (37.4), Brazil (37.3) and Greece (36.4). The Philippines had a misery index of 11.7.

The study showed that the Philippine unemployment rate grew 7.5 percent in January this year compared to 7.2 percent in 2013 despite the country's strong economic performance. This shows that something is wrong somewhere. If President Aquino cannot learn from it, I don't know who can.