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Inset photo: President Marcos and the First Lady listen to reports during their recent trip to the earthquake-damaged areas.

Be self-reliant in times of crisis

President Ferdinand E. Marcos has called on every Filipino to "now demonstrate, as they are demonstrating, concern and sympathy" for our countrymen who suffered great damage in the earthquake that hit our southern backyard last August 16. At the same time, he reiterated the policy guideline that should be followed when disasters strike: we should depend first on ourselves, on our own resources, in the rehabilitation of the damaged areas. The ethic of self-reliance, in fact, has been followed by the National Disaster Control Council, the government agency in charge of coordinating government relief, rescue and rehabilitation efforts in times of disasters.

"Let us not look as if we are beggars," the President has cautioned. In the past, the gut reaction of administrations had been to first look on outside help. This unconscious policy of dependence had only hindered the rise of a strong national will to immediately work together first to alleviate the suffering of our people who were affected by the disaster. The effect was that the people became more and more dependent on outside help, rather than on their own resources and initiative.

The President pointed to the Chinese experience during the recent earthquake that heavily damaged some of their most populous areas. The Chinese did not request for outside assistance, they buckled down to work. The spirit of self-reliance has been the major plank of the national leadership since the pro-

clamation of the authoritarian rule in 1972. This spirit pervades the organization of the barangays, the sangguniang bayans. Power, but at the same time, responsibilities, to the people.

Our geography makes us prone to natural disasters like typhoons and earthquakes. Our archipelago has the highest incidence of typhoons in the world. We also lie in the earthquake belt of the Pacific. This is why we should now institutionalize automatic responses to natural calamities. As President Marcos has pointed out: "The Filipino has always endured the hardship of a hostile environment. He has continually sought survival against typhoons, floods, earthquakes, fires and other calamities. Furthermore, the technological advances of the modern world, have ushered in more lethal weaponry not to mention environmental pollution, huge aerial and marine disasters, and fish holocausts." Thus, the President has created the Office of Civil Defenses in the Department of National Defense.

But the creation of agencies is not enough. There must be more support from, and participation by, the people. Perhaps, a good gauge of the renaissance of the *bayanihan* spirit of our people is the quick reaction of local government organizations—particularly the barangays—in alleviating the sufferings of the people affected by the earthquake.

The President himself, together with the First Lady, Mrs. Imelda Romualdez Marcos, made an on-the-spot inspection trip of the damaged areas. He told the people there that: "Our visit here is for the purpose of clearly demonstrating to you the concern and affection of the rest of the Filipinos for their Muslim brothers. Your Christian brothers grieved over your suffering and stand ready to help." The First Lady, in her capacity as governor of Metropolitan Manila, distributed a total of about P500,000 as housing aid to the most seriously damaged areas.

The aftermath of the earthquake disaster showed the great capability of the government to mobilize resources and people to aid those who have suffered. It also showed resurgence of the cooperative spirit among Filipinos. But there is still much we can do. Natural calamities will be part of our lives. Institutions not only in form of agencies or organizations, but more so of the spirit, should be built and nourished. The government managers should be the first to observe the ethic of self-reliance which should guide the building up of these institutions. Right now, they should prepare for the eventuality of another disaster. Instructions must be given to their men on what to do to prepare for the calamities, and what they should do in the aftermath of a disaster. Earthquake, typhoon and fire drills should now be conducted. Briefings on the nature of calamities should also be held. □

Inside track



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