

Dear friends and relatives,

I came back from Iriga (January 4, 2007) and here's some news and observations of the damage done by Super Typhoon Reming (International Code Name: Dorian) which hit Iriga on November 30, 2006.

1. It's like the US springtime in Iriga. The trees' leaves were just starting to come out. Mt Iriga and the city surroundings were bare looking (bright or like yellowish green rather than the usual luscious deep green color)
2. All of the public schools I saw in several barangays were all damaged (some severely) by Reming and two other typhoons prior to that (all within 3-month time span). The kids who don't have classrooms went to school in open spaces when it's not raining. To put it in perspective: Iriga Public Schools have about 2,000 plus kids who are third graders that I know of (multiply that by 6 (1-6 graders) and my guess is that there are 12,000 plus students (kids) affected by Reming. The kids who share their books (1 book per 3 students) have their books left at school...I can just surmise that most books are now gone.
3. A lot of the Indigenous (Agta) people who normally live in the mountains are now in the lowlands begging for food and clothing. (I saw many of them, everyday, in the downtown area)
4. People were still lining up for relief goods (at churches, schools, private residences)
5. Relief from the Philippine government in terms of food and shelter is nowhere close to adequate (keep in mind the province of Albay, the Gov't's No. 1 priority was hardest hit by the typhoon). One big reason why outside help is needed. (Note: As far as I know the Mayor is doing her best and I'm sure she'd welcome any help)
6. Almost 100% of coconuts, bananas, and fruit bearing trees were damaged. In general, food prices have risen by at least 20%.
Examples:
 - a) Talong from 5-7 pesos per kilo to 12-40 pesos.
 - b) Tilapia from 50-70 pesos per kilo to 60-90 pesos
 - c) Noyog from 5-7 pesos to 12-15 pesos and expected even to go higher
 - d) Sinapot 4-5 peso, now 7 pesos (did not find one in Iriga only in Anayan)
 - e) Non-local bananas from 15 pesos a kilo to 45 pesos a kilo
7. Because of rough seas you'll seldom see salt water fish in the market.
8. Electricity and other lines of communications were only available in the towns' commercial/main Hwy areas and brownouts were pretty common.
 - a) Most power lines were still down
 - b) Telephones: not all were in-service yet for both BayanTel and Iriga Tel
 - c) Cell Phones: all functional
 - d) Cable: Same as telephone
 - e) Web access: I found only one internet servicing place near UNEP (Obviously..only works if there's electricity)
9. Not so good news:

- a) It will be at least three years before we will see adequate coconuts in Iriga (barring zero typhoon for the next three years..which I doubt)
- b) Many local fruits like bananas and papayas will be out for awhile.
- c) Per The City Planners' Office information, about 25% of the houses in Iriga city were TOTALLY destroyed. The top 4 barangays with the most houses totally destroyed were the following:

- 1) Nino Jesus - 59%
- 2) San Vicente Norte - 59%
- 3) Antipolo - 56%
- 4) Salvacion - 54%

Please visit: www.iriga.net for a complete account of the damages done by the typhoon for each Barangay and some photos of the typhoon's damaging effects (provided by the City Planners Office.) which include the Gawad Kalinga houses.

10. Here are the City's priorities as I see it (not in the order of importance)
- 1. Food
 - 2. Clothing
 - 3. Shelter
 - 4. Medicines

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- 1. If you are regularly sending financial support to your relatives you may want to increase it as food prices have gone up.
- 2. FOOD: Contact Mosignor Jonie Aguirre: email: sapiriga@yahoo.com . He's a champion and has been steadfast in distributing rice, sardines, noodles, sugar, etc., to the needy.
- 3. CLOTHING: The group: Couples for Christ works with the church in distributing clothing to the needy. Likewise the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) also needs clothing for the Agtas. You can send your used clothing via Balikbayan Boxes to
 - a) Couples for Christ
c/o Atty Sergio Ramos Jr
San Nicholas
Iriga City
Philippines
 - b) National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP)Region V Office
San Roque St
Iriga City Philippines

- 4. SHELTER: Again note that about 25% of the houses in Iriga were totally destroyed.

The following estimate was given to me by the NCIP office.

For a core shelter (which I think is a very small shelter):

- 500 Pcs of Nipa 2,500 pesos
- Coco Lumber for frames, purlins 3,000 pesos
- Bamboos for walls and flooring 2,000 pesos
- 5 kilos of assorted common wire nails 250 pesos
- Wooded posts 1,000 pesos
- Plastic Rattan wires 250 pesos
- Labor 1,000 pesos

Total: 10,000 pesos (approximately \$210)

a) NCIP needs 280 Core Shelters for the Agtas' homeless tribal families in Iriga. I have a copy of NCIP's plan and will be glad to send you a copy if you're interested.

Point of Contact:
National Commission on Indigenous People Region V
San Roque
Iriga City Philippines

b) Go Direct: Iriga's Barangay Point Of Contacts (E-mail me and I'll give you their names and cell phone numbers)

5. MEDICINES

a) Contact Msgr Aguirre: email: sapiriga@yahoo.com

b) You can also provide medicines to:

- 1) The City Health Clinic located in San Nicholas near the Casureco Bldg
- 2) Puericulture Maternity Center at the City Proper

THE HOW TO HELP PROCESS

1. The balikbayan boxes for used clothing is straight forward: Boxed 'em and shipped 'em to the address above.
2. Do not mail checks.
3. It's best if you know of somebody who is already in Iriga or going home to contact the organizations above and provide them, ideally, items in kind or if not possible then the money in pesos. If you hand them a check in dollars it will not clear the bank until after 45 days.
4. You may also contact your Regional Iriga Organizations/Associations/Groups or the United Iriguenos Inc (c/o Dr Margallo, his e-mail: drchichi1.midco.net) and inquire of its activities in support of Iriga's needs.

Help if you can. If you have any questions please feel free to e-mail or call me at 571-265-5786.

My Service to God.

Larry Lee