

6th June 2016

**Open Letter
to
His Excellency
President Benigno Simeon C. Aquino III**

Dear Mr. President,

As you prepare to hand over the presidency to the new dispensation and return to private life, may we request you please for this one last service to some of the survivors of Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan in Jaro, Leyte.

The Citizens' Disaster Response Center Foundation, Inc. (CDRC), a 32-year old NGO advocating community based disaster management has an ongoing project to construct 303 typhoon resistant houses in Barangays San Roque, Buenavista and Macanip in Jaro, Leyte through the assistance of Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH) of Germany. This is already phase 2 of CDRCs shelter project, where phase 1 involved the construction of 297 houses in 6 barangays of Jaro. These houses were already turned over to the beneficiaries in November 2015.

For Phase 1 of the project, we requested for an exemption from taxes and duties, under Presidential Memorandum Order (PMO) No. 36, for the shipment of pinewood used to construct the houses in 2014. The exemption was processed through the one-stop-shop (OTS) set up by the government for donations to Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan survivors. The processing took only one day. So for Phase 2 of the project, we also requested for exemption from taxes and duties just like the exemption granted in 2014 for the pinewood used in Phase 1. However, this time there is no OTS anymore and so we had to process the exemption through the different government departments and agencies concerned.

For Phase 2 of the project, DKH sent 3 shipments of pinewood to the Port of Cebu en route to Ormoc City then Jaro, Leyte: 1st shipment arrived on Dec. 9, 2015, 2nd shipment arrived on February 3, 2016 and the 3rd shipment arrived on May 18, 2016. We started processing the request for exemption from taxes and duties for the 1st shipment through the DSWD on Dec. 14, 2015. We updated our request to include exemption for the 2nd and 3rd shipments while waiting for the processing.

From the DSWD, our request was endorsed to the Presidential Management Staff (PMS) which forwarded their recommendation to the Office of the Executive Secretary (OES) on February 12, 2016 which was given an official Barcode: **ES 1600229**. In April the OES referred our request/documents to the OCD. So USec. Alexander Pama met with CDRC representatives and concerned officers of DSWD on April 19 to explain that donated materials/equipment for recovery and rehabilitation are not DSWD concerns but OCD's/NDRRMC's. Thus, the request for exemption under PMO No. 36 has to be endorsed by the OCD/DND/ NDRRMC. Still, the project implementation has to be monitored and evaluated and this will be done by DSWD. Thus the project still needs DSWD endorsement.

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Assist. Sec. Cabrera of DSWD attended the April 19 meeting and assured us of DSWD's support. The officials of the two departments agreed that official communication between them will be done immediately to expedite the process. Support for waiving storage fees was also mentioned by DSWD representatives since the shipments are all for the shelter project for Typhoon Yolanda survivors and the 2 shipments are already accumulating storage fees at the Port of Cebu. While waiting for the tax exemption we have likewise requested for waiver of storage fees from the Cebu Ports Authority. And since at that time (April 19) we have a third shipment that is yet to arrive, we requested that endorsement for tax exemption for this be included also. They have somehow agreed to this, in principle. We just have to provide the necessary documents (bill of lading, etc.).

As of now, June 6th, it is almost 6 months, Mr. President, since we first requested for tax and duties exemption. Meanwhile the houses being constructed are awaiting completion. Rainy days have officially started and Typhoon Yolanda survivor beneficiaries of the project still have no permanent homes to protect them.

It is our fervent hope and prayer that with your help the exemption from taxes and duties of the shipment of pinewood for the shelter project be granted and the storage fees be waived as well so that these can be released immediately. We (CDRC), our donors (DKH) and their benefactors have patiently waited for action on our request even at the expense of our beneficiaries' welfare. The Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan survivors who are in dire need of shelter have waited long enough. Please grant the exemption and help build their houses.

Citizens' Disaster Response Foundation, Inc. (CDRC)

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Shelter Project Phase 1: part of 297 finished houses turned over to beneficiaries on November 2015



Shelter Project Phase 2: Part of 303 unfinished houses (waiting for shipment of pinewood)

