



Interview with Ambassador of the Philippines in Japan



The Japan Self-Defense Forces personnel engaged in medical activities in Cebu responding to Typhoon Haiyan (Ministry of Defense)



Q: What is your impression about Japan?

A: Beautiful country. I don't think I could be happier in any other countries other than Japan. It is a fantastic experience for me and my wife. I feel very fortunate that my government assigned me to Japan. I love your country.

Q: How long have you been in Japan?

A: Three years and ten months and I have also experienced the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami.

Q: The Philippines was damaged by the recent typhoon too, wasn't it? We share the same feelings about disasters.

A: Unfortunately we were affected by super typhoon Haiyan a year ago. This Saturday will be one year since the super Typhoon "Haiyan" hit my country. Japan is one of the biggest donor countries. Japan gave us not only finan-

cial assistance, but also sent us members of the SDF (Self-Defense Force) and provided us medicines, doctors, and equipments.

Manuel M. Lopez, Ambassador to Japan

<Interview>

Q: What are some characteristics of Japan's ODA for the Philippines? Compared with other countries, what kind of features do you think Japan's ODA includes?

A: I believe that in general Japan's ODA for ASEAN countries has been really helping improve poverty alleviation and infrastructure such as roads, bridges, airports, and school houses. What makes Japan's ODA in the Philippines a little more special is because it helps the peace process in southern Philippines. As you know, in the southern Philippines, we have had some conflicts between the Muslim minority and the Philippine government for a long time. Japan as the

catalyst has supported the peace process by inviting the peace panels for the Muslim group and the Philippine government officials led by the Philippine president Benigno Aquino III. We will finally have peace in Mindanao, the area which contains rich natural resources, while it is one of the poorest regions in the Philippines. We expect a lasting peace environment. That area can now be developed and progressive. In fact Japanese businessmen can now invest in agribusiness in that area and perhaps also in mining. Mindanao has plenty of rich minerals. Thus I believe what makes the ODA of Japan unique, is peace in the region. Of course another feature is poverty alleviation. A lot of ODA that you have given us has been helping the poor people.

Q: Has the poverty problem in the Philippines improved?

A: There were many poor people who subsisted on maybe one meal a day before, but now many of them eat at least two meals a day, some even three meals a day. That is such a great improvement. Many of them used to live in the squatter colonies on public land. They had nowhere else to go. Now many of them have been relocated to places where a small piece of land that the government provided them is now home for their families. Without a doubt it has been a very big assistance.

Q: How about the education?



Terminal building of Iloilo airport constructed by Yen loans
(Japan International Cooperation Agency)

A: Poverty alleviation also helped to improve the education of school children, but I would like to emphasize that providing food, clothing and home for the homeless is very important. But definitely education has been a very big contribution of Japan's ODA.

Q: How does Japan's ODA influences on the current Philippines economy?

A: As you know probably, the Philippines economy is the strongest in Asia outside of China. We have the highest GDP in recent years because in addition to Japan's ODA, we receive direct foreign investments, particularly Japanese companies. They have invested in factories, shops and plants in the Philippines. It has created employment and enhanced the quality of life of Filipinos. It has helped many companies in the Philippines so that we have been able to improve roads and build more bridges and airports, especially in the provincial area. We now have international airlines that fly direct to our provinces.

Q: What are the tangible aspects of Japan's ODA?

A: Tangible aspects of Japan's ODA are new airports, better roads, and infrastructure for our agricultural products. In the past, it used to be very difficult to transport

products from farm to market, but after building better roads, it became easier and



Vocational training facility built by Grant Assistance for Grass-Roots Human Security Projects in Maguindanao, Mindano (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan)

much faster to transport products from the farms. The products are now sold with cheaper prices compared to before because of the improved delivery system. We have also improved our weather forecasting systems. It rains a lot in the Philippines and we have typhoons regularly that cause floods. However, thanks to the efforts of JICA, the problems of floods are gradually corrected.

Q: Could you please tell us your frank opinion on Japan's ODA?

A: My frank opinion is that I do not think the Philippines will be where we are today without Japan's ODA. Japan has helped us in many areas particularly the peace process. It is very important because lasting peace is what we could not achieve a long time. Due to the support of Japan, fighting has stopped. People now live in peace. That is very important for residents in the southern Philippines. There will be many factories and companies that will be set up so the quality of life of the people will be further improved. The Philippine economy couldn't be where it is today without Japan's ODA because you had helped us in building infrastructure such as roads, bridges, airports, and more ODA projects also prompted Japanese companies to come into the Philippine market.

Q: What would you expect about Japan's ODA and the Japan-Philippines relation in the future?

A: It is my sincerest hope that Japan will continue on supporting my country with ODA projects. ODA funds are very important for us so I hope this will continue for a very long time. And as far as I see, the Japan-Philippines relation is probably at its finest right now. We have seen many times Japan has conducted assistance every time we have a calamity. The Filipinos believe that the Japanese government and Japanese people are very generous and the relationship of the two countries is very strong. (End)