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**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR. AT THE CEREMONIAL SIGNING
OF THE *LIGTAS PINOY* CENTERS ACT AND THE STUDENT LOAN PAYMENT
MORATORIUM DURING DISASTERS AND EMERGENCIES ACT**

[Delivered at the Ceremonial Hall, Malacañan Palace in Manila | 06 December 2024]

Thank you very much. *[Please take your seats.]*

Senate President Chiz Escudero and the honorable members of the Senate; House Speaker Martin Romualdez and the members of the – also honorable members of the House of Representatives; and the members of the Cabinet who are with us here this morning; the officials and stakeholders from various universities and colleges; my fellow workers in government; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

Last October, our country had the distinct honor of hosting the 2024 Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction.

Together with our partners and neighbors in the region, we came to the resounding conclusion that, as climate challenges intensify, so should our efforts.

The signing of the *Ligtas Pinoy* Centers Act and the Student Loan Payment Moratorium During Disasters and Emergencies Act today reflects our steadfast commitment to protecting the rights and providing relief to families and students affected by calamities.

The *Ligtas Pinoy* Centers Act mandates the establishment in every city and municipality nationwide of evacuation centers that are fully equipped to provide temporary but secured accommodations for our disaster-stricken citizens.

We do not wish for the frequent usage of such facilities and can only pray that we have fewer calamities. But nonetheless, we need to ensure that the evacuation centers sufficiently respond to the needs of our people affected by calamities and other such emergencies.

Investing in these climate-resilient facilities must be the norm; for we are not only protecting the people's lives, but also capacitating our local government units to respond, to reduce, and to manage the risks of disasters.

Through this, we are also integrating into the very consciousness of every Filipino that preparedness is as vital as responsiveness. Whenever disaster strikes, we can and will respond.

Noong Sabado dinalaw ko ang mga evacuation center ng ilang mga nasalanta ng sunog sa Tondo. Alam niyo po, naantig ako sa nakita ko dahil sa kabila ng pinagdadaan nila, nakangiti pa rin sila at ang init pa rin ng salubong na ibinigay sa atin.

Dito ninyo makikita ang pagiging matibay ng mga Pilipino. Kahit nasa gitna ng matinding pagsubok, nagagawan pa rin ng paraan upang sumaya. Tibay ng loob at tatag ng pananampalataya sa Maykapal, 'yan ang kanilang tangan.

Evacuation centers like these should also be as strong as their faith and as resilient as the people's resolve. These serve as safe havens for those who share the same struggle and find comfort amongst one another.

In my many visits to temporary shelters, I saw the plights of evacuees and it's a very serious matter.

Adding to that predicament is that, traditionally, public schools are being used as by default evacuation centers, and that has been the case since we ever – since we started using evacuation centers.

I understand the appeal of the DepEd to refrain from using school grounds and classrooms as evacuation centers for prolonged periods of time.

Schools are supposed to be sanctuaries for learning, creativity, and growth; they should not also bear the burden of being makeshift shelters.

With the enactment of this law, we heed that appeal and commit to only using our schools for the promotion of our students' welfare and development of the education system.

The enactment of the Student Loan Payment Moratorium During Disasters and Emergencies Act is in line with the harmonization of our efforts to make education accessible to all our students.

This law provides urgent financial relief by deferring student loan collections during and after disasters without penalty or interest.

The benevolence of this law allows the disaster-affected students and their families to have a breathing space as they recuperate and rebuild their lives.

It is our hope that this law will help lessen the financial burden off our students' shoulders as they continue their schooling.

Let me express my appreciation to our legislators who rallied behind the creation of these much-needed laws—a testament to your commitment of giving paramount prioritization to people's needs.

To properly implement these pieces of legislation, I call on the Department of Public Works and Highways to ensure the timely construction of these evacuation centers in priority LGUs, in adherence to the required minimum standards, including the National Building Code, and with consideration to the unique needs of each LGU.

Furthermore, we have redesigned the evacuation centers because the weather that we have been experiencing has become more and more extreme. And we have -- our evacuation centers rated to survive a very – 130 kilometers per hour winds. Whereas, we have seen in the past few weeks that these are way below the strength of the storms that we have been experiencing.

And that is why the standards that we are going to be building to will be much higher and to make sure that those who have been taken to evacuation centers do not then become victims when the evacuation center fails in the face of such strong weather.

So, to the CHED and to TESDA, extend all forms of necessary and reasonable assistance to our students. Ensure that the financial hardship of our disadvantaged students will not hinder them from completing their education.

To all LGUs, especially those located in calamity-prone areas, I urge you to keep your constituents informed with your disaster-resilience strategies and plans.

Let us together accelerate our efforts and offer more innovative solutions that aim to offer refuge and provide ease to our fellow Filipinos, especially in times of such crisis.

Let these new laws lead us to become a truly disaster-responsive *Bagong Pilipinas*—one that reflects the innate strength and resilience of the Filipino people.

Maraming, maraming salamat po.

Mabuhay ang Bagong Pilipinas!

Magandang umaga sa inyong lahat. *[applause]*

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