

Sen. Christopher 'Bong' Go, Health Secretary Francisco Duque and Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte lead the unveiling of a marker for the country's 49th Malasakit Center at the Philippine Heart Center in Quezon City yesterday.

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Also in photo are DSWD Assistant Secretary Glenda Relova, PHC executive director Dr. Joel Abanilla, Presidential Assistant for the Visayas Michael Dino and Quezon City Rep. **Jesus 'Bong' Suntay.**

In a step toward making quality healthcare more accessible and affordable for all Filipinos, the Malasakit Center at the Philippine Heart Center in Quezon City is now open to serve indigent and poor patients in need of medical assistance from the government.

Sen. Christopher "Bong" Go, chair of the Senate committee on health and demography, attended the launch of the country's 49th Malasakit Center yesterday, marking the second time that a center was established in a specialty hospital in the city after the first was opened at the nearby Lung Center of the Philippines in January.

"Pera niyo po ito. Ibinabalik lang sa inyo sa pamamagitan ng mabilis, maayos at maaasahang serbisyong medikal para sa lahat ng Pilipino," Go said, stressing this was the people's money just being returned to them in the form of quick and reliable medical service.

In his message, the senator recounted how the Malasakit Center program was conceived to improve the access of Filipinos to quick government healthcare services.

"The Malasakit Center was just once a dream. When President Duterte and I were still in Davao City, we saw how difficult it was for our fellow Filipinos, especially when they need hospitalization," said Go.

He recalled how then mayor Duterte told him "look for a way" to help all the sick falling in long lines to get succor, which led to the concept of Malasakit Center.

Go found an opportunity to put this into reality when he became presidential special assistant, and soon enough the first Malasakit Center opened with Duterte's blessings.

He expressed his appreciation at how far the program has come since its conception. In an interview after the launching ceremony, Go said that he seeks to institutionalize and set criteria for the establishment of Malasakit Centers to ensure that these centers are properly staffed so that concerned agencies are represented and are functioning properly to help every Filipino in need.

"This is the 49th Malasakit Center all over the country. This will go on as I have filed a bill to institutionalize and set a criteria what can be placed in Malasakit Centers so no government agency will be lacking," said Go.

"As long as you're Filipino, you can ask for help here. We have social worker to assess what help is needed," he added.

The senator sponsored the committee report for the Malasakit Center Act of 2019 which has already hurdled the interpellation period. Go said that he hopes the measure will be passed into law the soonest possible time given the support for the measure expressed by fellow lawmakers.

The Malasakit Center is a one-stop shop where patients only need to sign a single form to avail themselves of government medical assistance. Go clarified that the centers will serve as an office that hosts concerned government agencies that provide medical and financial assistance, such as the Department of Health, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office and Phil-Health.

Meanwhile, as to whether or not there is a humanitarian crisis in Mindanao due to the recent earthquakes that hit the region, Go said that he is not convinced and urged government critics instead to help in aiding earthquake victims.

With the country prone to natural disasters due to its location, Go stressed the urgent need for the creation of an executive department to centralize government efforts in times of disasters and calamities to bolster their effectiveness and efficiency.