

## Lawmakers push for strong houses, evacuation centers

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While Quezon City Rep. **Alfred Vargas** on Monday called for the immediate construction of permanent evacuation centers across the country following the devastation caused by typhoon "Odette," Albay Rep. Joey Salceda also pushed for building disaster-resilient houses.

Vargas said the onslaught of "Odette" underscored the need for the immediate passage of the bill mandating the establishment of permanent evacuation centers nationwide.

"The loss of lives and property in the Visayas and Mindanao should be seen as a wake-up call for us in Congress to be proactive in our legislation," Vargas said, urging the Senate to immediately pass the proposed law.

"Climate change is a reality we can no longer deny or ignore, and like the rest of the world, governments are taking measures to protect the vulnerable sectors from its worst effects. It's about time we step up to the challenge," he added.

Vargas is the principal author of House Bill 8990 or An Act Establishing Evacuation Centers in Every City and Municipality — which had been approved unanimously by the House of Representatives.

He also averred that setting up evacuations centers that are climate-resilient, located in safe zones, and equipped with needed amenities "offers a long-term solution to the crisis conditions in communities severely affected by increasingly powerful typhoons."

Among other provisions in the measure, it proposed the construction and maintenance of evacuation centers in all cities and municipalities, with the Department of Environment and National Resources that is tasked with identifying the sites based on specific provisions and standards in the bill.

Salceda, meanwhile, suggested that permanent rehousing and relocation must be included in the government's infrastructure plan. He is pushing for the creation of the Department of Disaster Resilience.

He pointed out that considering that the Philippines is frequently hit by typhoons, it's time for the government to shift from temporary evacuation to permanent housing.

It would be better, he explained, if the government resorts to building disaster-resilient homes than forcing residents to evacuate from time to time. He noted that "Odette" also exposed that even evacuation facilities were not resilient.

"The way forward is to make sure that the houses themselves are safe so that we don't have to frequently resort to evacuation. It is an experience that can be lowering of one's dignity, especially forced evacuation. Human dignity calls for safe, disaster-resilience housing that people can depend on for shelter against hazards," Salceda argued.

"Rehabilitation must therefore involve building roads, support infrastructure such as schools and healthcare facilities, and new housing in areas that are safer from natural and geohazards," he added.

The economist-lawmaker asserted that "mass rehoming" is "achievable," citing Albay's success in implementing the Guinobatan-Camalig-DaragaLegazpi Platform when he was the province's governor from 2007 to 2016.