

21 October 2009

## Main Committee

### ASIA PACIFIC NATURAL DISASTERS

**Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (11:13 AM)** —I rise to take note of some of the natural disasters that have hit some of our closest neighbours in the Asia-Pacific region over the past month. I would first like to thank the Prime Minister for bringing the parliament's attention to the impact of these disasters on literally millions of people across the region.

Since the end of September we have seen major calamities strike Samoa, Tonga, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, with thousands dead and millions more left to rebuild their lives in the aftermath. It has been a difficult time for all the communities affected in those countries and equally traumatic for those people who are now residents and citizens of Australia but who have had to watch these disasters unfold from afar—uncertain of the fate of their loved ones caught up in the strife. Each of these natural disasters—the earthquakes and tsunamis in Samoa and Tonga, the earthquake in Indonesia and the typhoons that struck the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos—have exacted a devastating toll on human life and property.

It is crucial that Australia continues to demonstrate leadership and uphold its leadership responsibilities in the region by providing the support and assistance needed to help these communities overcome the effects of these disasters. Without diminishing the seriousness of each one of these calamities I would like to take this opportunity to speak in particular about the events in Tonga and Samoa, and the typhoons Ketsana and Palma which struck the Philippines within a week of each other.

I have quite a sizeable population in my electorate who come from the Pacific Islands. In fact, just days after these disasters struck Tonga and Samoa, I had the opportunity to visit the Oxley Park Public School, in my electorate, for their South Pacific Expo. This was a tremendous example of some of the outstanding talents of the young people within my electorate. Oxley Park Public School is an outstanding local school under the leadership of its Principal, Mrs Karen Maraga. The school had on display a presentation that was put together by a number of the students but, in particular, a number of students from Pacific island communities. It was hard not to be moved by the singing of 'I am, you are, we are Australians' by what was a very multicultural group of students. I know that many of the students and some of the families who gathered to participate on that occasion had been affected by these disasters in Samoa and Tonga. I wish to acknowledge those families and the impact that these disasters have had.

I would also like to turn my attention to the situation affecting our good friends in the Philippines. As members would know, on 26 September, at the beginning of the fortnight of disasters in the Asia-Pacific region, Typhoon Ketsana smashed into the Philippines, hitting major population centres in the Luzon region, including the capital, Manila. Typhoons, intense storms with gusts and rain for hours on end, have been responsible for ripping off roofs, overturning cars and causing landslides and flash flooding. Ketsana dumped an entire month of monsoon season rain, almost 600

millimetres, on the Luzon region in just six hours. That is almost the equivalent of the entire year's average rainfall in my electorate of Lindsay. The consequences of this downpour created the worst flooding in more than 40 years in Manila. Hundreds of people were stranded on rooftops and walls, scrambling to make it to high ground before the water engulfed their homes. It is estimated that three million homes were affected across Manila and the wider Luzon region.

In the immediate aftermath, Ketsana took the lives of more than 100 people and, as the days rolled on, that toll climbed substantially as communities counted the loss of those washed away in floodwaters or landslides and missing loved ones who just did not return. As the people of the Philippines reeled from the savage impact of Ketsana, which later moved on to wreak havoc and destruction on Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, another typhoon rolled in eight days after the first. Typhoon Parma struck the northern Philippines with another ferocious day of rain and winds that caused more widespread flooding and soaked an already storm weary Manila for a second time. Dozens of houses were buried in mud and rock as hillsides gave way under the weight of floodwaters, and many more hundreds of people lost their lives.

According to the latest reports from the Philippines National Disaster Coordinating Council, a total of 8.4 million people were affected by typhoons Ketsana and Parma and more than 850 people died. This is a massive loss of life, on a scale even larger than our own Victorian bushfires, one of Australia's worst recent natural disasters, which claimed more than 170 lives. While there is now a massive relief effort underway, those same communities are bracing for a third typhoon as we speak—that is, Typhoon Lupit. Its gusts reach more than 200 kilometres per hour and it is poised to make landfall tomorrow, but its outer rings of wind and rain are already lashing the northern region of Luzon. The Philippines authorities, the United Nations and the Red Cross are all making preparations for this next onslaught, preparing people for evacuation and readying food and water supplies. I know that the thoughts and prayers of everyone in this parliament are with the people of the Philippines as they not only try to get back on their feet but prepare to fend off another threat of nature.

In the areas where there is still calm the biggest threat comes from disease. As water becomes stagnant, malaria, dengue fever and diarrhoea start to spread, and already more than 100 people have died from leptospirosis. The Rudd government through AusAID has provided \$3 million in food aid, clothes, sanitation services, health care and other basic items that will help thousands of people survive the coming days and weeks. I would like to acknowledge the swift responses of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance in committing Australia to the relief effort.

I would also like to take this opportunity to make special mention of the Western Sydney Filipino-Australian community who are organising a charity concert on Sunday, 1 November at Bowman Hall in Blacktown. A group of entertainers has donated their time and talents to help stage a concert to raise funds for the relief effort in the Philippines and this is being supported by all the major Western Sydney Filipino-Australian groups. In particular I acknowledge those groups within my local community that have given voice to the situation faced by those in the Philippines and I take this opportunity to express my personal condolences to those residents within my community who have been affected through the impacts of these devastating typhoons on their family members back in the Philippines.

This last month has demonstrated how vulnerable we all are to the ferocity of nature. But it has been a testament to the cooperation among countries in the Asia-Pacific region that governments, NGOs and grassroots community organisations have all rushed to lend a hand to those affected. To the people of Samoa, Tonga, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, you have all faced a horrible month of tragedy and disaster, but you are constantly in our thoughts and I know that we are all offering our strength and support in this time of great need.