

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 16, 2013

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary
United States Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Chuck Hagel
Secretary
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable Rajiv Shah
Administrator
United States Agency for International
Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Secretaries Kerry and Hagel and Administrator Shah:

As the people of the Philippines endure and try to recover from one of the worst disasters in their history, we extend our sincerest condolences to all those impacted by Super Typhoon Haiyan and firmly stand by the partnership and the friendship between our two nations. We are grateful for and proud of the swift and generous American military and civilian response to the search and rescue and relief and recovery operations, including the use of our military assets and the nearly \$50 million in humanitarian funding the United States government has already provided. In the continued recovery and reconstruction efforts, we write to urge your attention to the specialized protection of women and girls in the wake of this calamity.

The United Nations estimates that more than 13 million people have been affected, with 4.4 million displaced from their homes. Sadly, one of the terrible realities of post-disaster situations is that violence against women and children rises dramatically in their aftermath. The UN reports that an estimated 49,000 Filipina women between 15 and 49 are at high risk for sexual violence, though we know sexual and gender-based violence is not limited to women of those ages and is also perpetrated against boys. In some Philippine villages, the men sent the women and children to shelters while they stayed behind to protect their homes – whereupon many of these men perished in the typhoon onslaught.

To exacerbate the situation, internally displaced persons camps too often do not consider women's safety when setting up housing, sanitation, water, and energy supplies. Shelters lack locks to secure them against intruders. Women seeking medical or food assistance can be pressured to exchange sex for these services. Women and girls risk rape when they use the same latrines as men or go to find fuel wood. We have witnessed this phenomenon again and again. In the wake of calamities such as the Indian Ocean tsunami; the Pakistan earthquake; and the Haiti

earthquake, and the subsequent breakdown of societal norms that accompanied them, we saw all too clearly the vulnerability of women and children. In these cases, relief efforts meant to help did not adequately protect women and children from harm. We must not let this happen to the women and children of the Philippines.

We applaud the steps the Administration has already taken to improve U.S. humanitarian operations to protect women and children, such as the creation of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and the United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally. We were especially pleased to see the Department of State's recent announcement of the *Safe from the Start* initiative, and are confident that the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development will use this and other tools at their disposal so that US government supported relief operations incorporate best practices in preventing violence and addressing it if it occurs.

In particular, we know that the following basic actions can save women and children from further trauma:

- Consult with women and men of all ages to determine their needs, priorities and capacities and then reflect these in program design;
- Ensure that the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance's new guidelines for proposals are adhered to in response to typhoon Haiyan;
- Fully fund gender-based violence prevention and response activities and provide the additional expertise necessary, particularly on the Disaster Assistance Response Team; and,
- Make certain that the programs the US funds reflect the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's gender guidelines.

As the United States government continues to work closely with the Philippines government and the international community, we urge you to ensure the added protection of women and children of the Philippines. In the wake of the calamity, we have witnessed the resilient, inspiring, and enduring Filipino spirit in each of our districts, across our nation, and around the world. We are proud of the generous American spirit that supports our global neighbors, and want to ensure it is reflected in our relief and recovery efforts.

Sincerely,


MICHAEL M. HONDA
Member of Congress


JANICE HAHN
Member of Congress



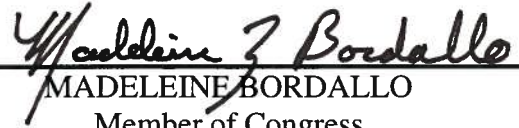
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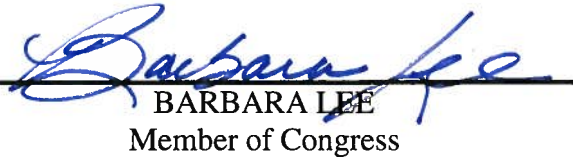
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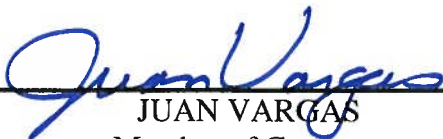
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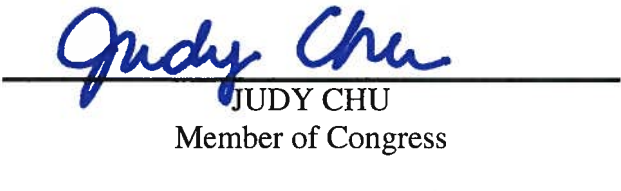
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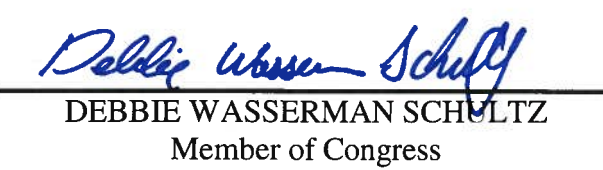
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