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President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo today ordered the National Insurance Commission (NIC) to facilitate the immediate payment of all insurance claims of victims of typhoons Ondoy and Pepeng that recently hit the country and destroyed lives and properties.

The Chief Executive held a private meeting with NIC Commissioner Eduardo Malinis and Justice Secretary Agnes Devanadera this morning at the Study Room in Malacañang to ensure that typhoon victims can claim what is due them from their respective insurance companies.

The President likewise directed Devanadera to create a taskforce that will assist the victims in whatever legal problems they might encounter arising from such claims.

In a press briefing, Malinis said that NIC had already talked to insurance companies last week to expedite the processing of claims.

According to Malinis, the insurance companies gave assurances that they will cooperate with the government for the speedy settlement of claims.

The NIC Commissioner noted that based on the estimates of the Philippine Insurers and Reinsurers Association (PIRA), formerly Philippine Insurance Rating Association, there are about P11 billion worth of property claims that they are expecting from the victims of typhoons Ondoy and Pepeng and another P1 billion from motor vehicles.

Under the existing Insurance Code, Malinis said that insurance companies have 30 days, to pay the claimants upon the submission of proof of loss. After the 30-day period, the company is liable to pay interest for the delay. According to Devanadera a delay could also lead to criminal liabilities as violations of insurance law.

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The claimants have two options in filing their claims. First, they can file their claims with the company, copy furnished the NIC; and second, they can directly file the claims to the NIC and the government will forward them to their respective insurance companies. On both cases the government can monitor and follow up the claims of the victims.

Malinis clarified that proof of loss needed in the filing of claims include a police report certifying that there is indeed flooding in the area and that their property was affected. The claimant can also bring photos of their damaged properties.

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde, who presided the press briefing, said that there is an estimated 8,000 vehicles that are affected, but this is increasing with the recent flooding wrought by typhoon Pepeng in Northern Luzon.

Meanwhile, Devanadera said that while there is a taskforce under DOJ to assist the victims, she advised the claimants to go to their respective insurance companies and to the NIC first to file their claims before seeking their help.

She explained that DOJ's role is in the filing criminal charges against erring insurance companies who will not settle those claims within the 30-day period set by law, adding that her agency's mandate is not to receive, process and settle claims and payments.

Devanadera likewise urged the insurance companies to fast track the payments of insurance claims of the victims and give them what is really due them to prevent any legal problems with the taskforce.

"These victims have suffered a lot, let us help them," she pleaded.

Malinis and Devanadera pointed out that as of press time there were no complaints yet against these insurance companies. The President's order, they said, is a pre-emptive measure to help the victims resume their normal lives.

Remonde also said that Trade and Industry Secretary Peter Favila is now attending to the complaints against towing and repair services particularly those charging the victims at double and triple rates. (PND)