

PBBM's heart is in the right place – DSWD Sec. Rex Gatchalian

Department of Social Welfare and Development Secretary Rex Gatchalian on Friday (June 30) gave a very high mark on the first year in office of President R. Marcos Jr. as he described his government as having a big heart for the poor, marginalized and vulnerable sectors.

“Early on, I can say that President Marcos’ heart is in the right place since his main concern is the livelihood and well-being of the poor, marginalized and vulnerable sectors of society. And this has been his guide during the first year of his presidency,” said Secretary Gatchalian, who was Valenzuela City 1st District congressman during the first seven months of the Marcos presidency.

The DSWD chief recalled listening to PBBM’s first SONA last year, he already knew that the President has a big heart for the poor and the vulnerable sectors, most especially farmers.

In his first Sona, President Marcos asked Congress to pass a law that will condone the loans of Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARB), which cover unpaid amortization and interest. “The condonation of the existing agrarian reform loan will cover the amount of P58.125 billion benefiting around 654,000 agrarian reform beneficiaries and involving a total of 1.18 million hectares of awarded lands.”

And for the poor and needy Filipinos who look to the national government for help and assistance, President Marcos issued a simple marching order for the Department of Social Welfare and Development – a swift response to victims of natural disasters such as typhoons, floods and earthquakes.

“Utos ko sa DSWD ang mabilis na pagtugon sa pangangailangan ng

mga biktima ng kalamidad at ibat ibang krisis,” the President said. This would mean the pre-positioning of relief goods in DSWD’s field offices and local government units (LGUs) such as family food packs as well as non-food essentials that include flashlights, first aid kits and medicines for typhoon and flood-related ailments.

Secretary Gatchalian had no idea that after seven months of being congressman, he will be asked by the President to head the DSWD with the goal of reducing poverty incidence by single digits using the whole-of-government approach.

“The President’s marching order is for the DSWD to use the entire machinery of government to achieve the goal of poverty incidence reduction by single digit,” Secretary Gatchalian said.

Heeding the President’s directive to simplify and bring government aid closer to the people, the DSWD under Secretary Gatchalian’s watch established satellite offices in Bulacan, Antipolo and in the Northern, Southern and Eastern Metro Manila.

The President also reiterated in his first SONA on the need for DSWD to review the list of beneficiaries under the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program or the 4Ps, which is continuously being implemented by the DSWD with thousands of families expected to graduate from 4Ps this year.

The President also said in his first SONA that supplemental feeding program for children enrolled under the Child Development Centers and Supervised Neighborhood Play will be continued under the Marcos administration and will be further expanded in 2023.

“Hindi rin natin nakakalimutan ang mga solo parent at mga nanay na nahiwalay sa kanilang mga mister dahil sa karahasan. Pagtitibayin natin ang programa sa Violence Against Women and Their Children, kabilang na ang counselling para sa mga

biktima, katuwang ang mga LGU,” the President said, again showing his big heart for the vulnerable sectors.

“The President’s heart was also in the right place when he greenlighted the WALANG GUTOM 2027: Food Provision through Strategic Transfer and Alternative Measures Program (Food STAMP Program), which aims to decrease incidence of involuntary hunger experienced by low-income households and make them productive citizens of the country,” Secretary Gatchalian pointed out.

One year in his presidency, the DSWD chief said, President Marcos is on the right track in his economic agenda, which is geared at making sure that the poor and vulnerable sectors are protected from the impact of high prices.

It helped that PBBM’s economic team is led by tried-and-tested technocrats like Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno and Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan, Secretary Gatchalian said.

“Job generation was also a highlight of the first year of the Marcos administration as can be seen from the decline of unemployment rate from 5.2 percent in July 2022 to 4.5 percent in April 2023 based on official data from the Philippine Statistics Authority,” Secretary Gatchalian said.

The DSWD chief also lauded the President’s program to build 1 million houses every year through the Pambansang Pabahay Para sa Pilipino Housing (4PH) Project.

“This is no longer a campaign promise but a concrete program of the Marcos administration to provide decent housing to low-income Filipinos whose long-cherished dream of having their own home can now be realized,” Secretary Gatchalian said.

The DSWD chief also cited the World Bank (WB) report that the Philippines, under the administration of PBBM, is on track to become an upper-middle income status country by 2025.

“One year after President Marcos assumed office, I can say that the State of the Nation is Healthy and Strong,” Secretary Gatchalian said.#