Financial Assistance

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Did The Relief Efforts Help The People of Saipan?

As the residents of Saipan all know, Typhoon Soudelor rocked the island with its devastating power leaving people without homes, electricity, and/or water. The important question is, did people get the help they needed to sustain their lives? The people of Saipan knew that their homes had been torn apart, whether it was just part of their roof flying away to their whole house getting ripped out of the ground. Some people were also left with little food because of damages to their refrigerator or the power outage. So in the upcoming days, weeks, months, how were people going to survive on what little supplies and shelter they had?

FEMA, Red Cross, the military, and many others were all coming from around the world to help our crippled island in our time of need. These groups/organizations came with what seemed like an abundance of food, water, and manpower to help sustain our daily lives. All those willing and able to help were here to see that we could get Saipan up and running again. FEMA assessed damages to homes, buildings, everything that they could see. The military personnel came to help clear roads, move trees and debris, and put up power poles. It seemed like the people of Saipan were in great hands and would be able to get everything needed to rebuild, reconstruct, and survive.

The people of Saipan began processing their paperwork needed for the assistance with FEMA or even NAP food stamp, but would later find out that their requests were being denied or people weren’t qualifying, such as, Non-US citizens or people with higher salary. Why? Are US citizens the only one living on Saipan? Are US citizens the only ones that got damages their homes and personal belongings? And although people had higher salaries, what if the damages

and necessities of their household couldn’t be met by their paycheck, would they be left homeless and/or starving?

I, John Pineda, asked a few people around the area of San Roque to see if they were able to get any help/compensation for their homes because many homes and buildings in that area were heavily damaged. I asked about 10 fellow employees and about 10 more residents that all lived in San Roque about what FEMA did for them or told them when they applied for the assistance. All of them did not get any help whatsoever, 15 of them were because they were Non-US citizens, and the other 5 were because their salaries were high. Upon looking at some of their homes, it was damaged beyond belief, houses were literally gone or without roofs or walls. The residents would not be able to pay for these damages on their own. How were they going to survive?

FEMA was given millions of dollars to help the survivors of Typhoon Soudelor, but the funds weren’t being used as such. A big portion of Saipan’s community is made of non-US citizens whose personal belongings were just as damaged as US citizens, why couldn’t they get the help they desperately needed? In a press conference with one of FEMA’s employees stated that “Those who are not qualified due to their citizenship may be eligible for non-exempt assistance such as voluntary agencies, local government programs.” The question I, John Pineda, raise is why would citizenship even be a factor in this scenario? These people are all residents of one island and all felt the strength and heartbreak of Soudelor, why would their citizenship be an eligibility requirement? Also for some who did get funds were asked send money back. It is an unjust act on FEMA’s part because they were the ones that the residents were relying on most to help them and now they can’t even get it.

FEMA, NAP food stamps, and other agencies were here to help and support the local community in this time of need. These agencies were given the funds most likely capable to help rebuild the island in its entirety, but many of the people on Saipan were misled to think that help was on their way, which leads me, John Pineda, to say that from my experience in through Soudelor and the hardships it brought, I had it easier than what I saw, what I had to find out from other survivors. Neighbors, family members, and friends were left to really struggle through this predicament, and it wasn’t only for a day or two, these fellow residents had to struggle through weeks and months of surviving. From what I, John Pineda, interviewed, asked, and found out from others was that this process was unfair to the people of Saipan, of all those who needed help, no one should have been left out. I do plan on finding out further details to these claims by talking to FEMA representatives still on island and other agencies who were denying help to the people of Saipan.

REFERENCES

Chan, Dennis. (September 02, 2015) Non-US citizens claim they’ve been denied FEMA aid

(August 24, 2015) Kilili says hundreds who need help are being denied disaster food stamps; not true says Torres