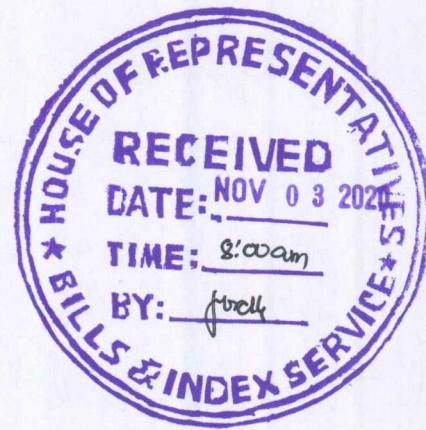


Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives
Quezon City, Metro Manila

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session
House Bill No. **7940**



**INTRODUCED BY
REP. ALFRED VARGAS**

**AN ACT
ENHANCING CITIZENS' ACCESS TO INFORMATION DURING DISASTERS
BY MANDATING GOVERNMENT ISSUANCES TO BE WRITTEN IN PLAIN
LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATED TO THE LOCAL LANGUAGE OR
DIALECTS IF NECESSARY, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

On November 8, 2013, Super Typhoon Yolanda (international name "Haiyan") made landfall in the Philippines and laid waste to the Visayas group of islands, home to 17 million people. The typhoon's rage affected more than 14 million people across 44 provinces, displacing 4.1 million people, killing more than 6,000 people and leaving around 1,800 missing. It is one of the most damaging natural disasters in the history of the country with 1.1 million houses destroyed and 5.9 million workers disrupted of their livelihood.¹ Families were torn apart and the Filipino people mourned such great losses.

Technically speaking, Yolanda brought not only strong winds and heavy rain, but also a wall of seawater that crashed inland, leaving barely any structure standing in its path. Meteorologists refer to this phenomenon as a "storm surge" and has warned the public the moment it appeared on their radar. However, a large portion of the affected population did not expect tsunami-like waves crashing on their homes during the height of the storms. Everyone was caught off guard despite early warnings from the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA). Experts have assessed that this unfortunate event

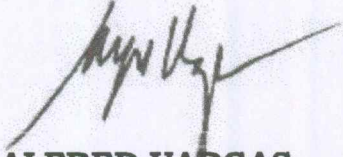
¹ World Vision. 2013. "2013 Typhoon Haiyan: Facts, FAQs, and how to help"
<https://www.worldvision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/2013-typhoon-haiyan-fact>

was a possible result of the lack of understanding of the public on certain technical terms on natural disasters.²

While the world continues to experience unexpected environmental changes, disaster risk reduction and preparedness should be made an utmost priority. The Philippines, as a country located in the Pacific Ring of Fire, has made significant efforts in disaster mitigation and resilience. However, the experience with Super Typhoon Yolanda has taught us that the general public must be included in our nation's plan and be properly informed on matters relating to disaster risk reduction and preparedness.

This bill seeks to require all government agencies and local government units to translate to Filipino and any other appropriate regional language or dialect all announcements, advisories, press releases, issuances, and any other information relevant to a local or national disaster or emergency. At the heart of this legislation is the vision of good governance to make information available and accessible, particularly, to make such public notices easily understandable by the general public. The jargons used on scientific and technical terms on natural occurrences must be broken down to a more understandable medium and must be disseminated as extensively as possible through all available means in order for the government to better save lives.

In view of the foregoing, the approval of this bill is earnestly sought.



ALFRED VARGAS

² Devex. 2013. "Storm surge: Lost in translation and interpretation".
<https://www.devex.com/news/storm-surge-lost-in-translation-and-interpretation-82311>

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AN ACT

**ENHANCING CITIZENS' ACCESS TO INFORMATION DURING DISASTERS BY
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AND TRANSLATED TO THE LOCAL LANGUAGE OR DIALECTS IF NECESSARY,
AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in
Congress assembled:*

SECTION 1. Short Title. – This Act shall be known as "Plain Language
During Disasters Act".

SECTION 2. Declaration of Policy. – The right of the people to information
on matters of public concern is recognized in our Constitution. Indeed,
communication and information occupy a vital role in nation-building. In
times of disaster and other emergencies, and to render meaningful and
effective the right of the people to information, it shall be ensured that
announcements, advisories, and similar public communications are
accessible in terms of the language or dialect used.

SECTION 3. Definition of Terms. – For purposes of this Act, these terms
are defined as follows:

- (a) **"Dialect"** refers to the form of a language that is used in a particular
part or region of a country or a particular group of people;
- (b) **"Disaster"** - a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or
a society involving widespread human, material, economic or
environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the
affected community or society to cope using its own resources.
Disasters are often described as a result of the combination of: the
exposure to a hazard; the conditions of vulnerability that are present;
and insufficient capacity or measures to reduce or cope with the

potential negative consequences, Disaster impacts may include loss of life, injury, disease and other negative effects on human, physical, mental and social well-being, together with damage to property, destruction of assets, loss of services, Social and economic disruption and environmental degradation;

- (c) "**Emergency**" - unforeseen or sudden occurrence, especially danger, demanding immediate action;
- (d) "**Government agencies**" refers to all government departments, bureaus, divisions, attached agencies, and government owned-and controlled corporations;
- (e) "**Plain Language**" refers to writing and preparations thereof that are clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience or constituents;
- (f) "**State of Calamity**"- a condition involving mass casualty and/or major damages to property, disruption of means of livelihoods, roads and normal way of life of people in the affected areas as a result of the occurrence of natural or human induced hazard;

SECTION 4. Scope of Application. – This Act shall cover disasters and other kinds of emergencies which are (1) national in scope, as declared through a State of Calamity or State of National Emergency by the President of the Philippines, and (2) provincial, city or municipal in scope, as declared through a State of Calamity or Emergency by the appropriate local government unit.

SECTION 5. Plain Language During Disasters. – In relation to disasters and other emergencies covered by Section 4 of this Act, it shall be mandatory for all government agencies and local government units to convert in plain language or an easily understandable form and translate to Filipino and any other appropriate regional language/s or dialect/s all their announcements, advisories, press releases, issuances and any other information relevant to such disaster or emergency, including but not limited to:

- a) Typhoon warnings, signals and other advisories by the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA);
- b) Volcano, earthquake, tsunami and landslide advisories and bulletins by the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS);
- c) Announcements, bulletins and other advisories of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) and the Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Councils (LDRRMCs);

- d) Information on epidemics, outbreaks and public health emergencies of the Department of Health (DOH); and
- e) Information on the Social Amelioration Program, emergency assistance and other social protection measures of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

SECTION 6. *Translation to Filipino and Other Local Languages or Dialect.* – The translation of the information covered by this Act shall be to Filipino and other regional language/s or dialect/s, as deemed necessary by the government agency and local government unit concerned considering the geographical location of the affected communities and the intended recipients of the information. The translated information shall be disseminated as widely as possible through all available media and communication channels.

SECTION 7. *Role of the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino.* – The Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF) shall render the necessary technical assistance and expertise to the government agencies and local government units and monitor their compliance to the duties mandated by this Act.

SECTION 8. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within sixty (60) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF) in consultation with the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO), PAGASA, PHIVOLCS, NDRRMC, and other relevant government agencies and stakeholders, shall issue the necessary rules and regulations to implement the provisions of this Act.

SECTION 9. *Compliance.* – All relevant government agencies are mandated to report and publish in their respective websites or publications a report on their agency's compliance with the requirements of this Act.

SECTION 10. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, presidential decrees, executive orders, proclamations, rules and regulations, or any part thereof, which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SECTION 11. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part of this Act, or the application thereof to any person or circumstance, is held unconstitutional or invalid, the remainder of this Act shall not be affected thereby.

SECTION 12. *Effectivity Clause.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days from its publication in the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,