

28 February 2010 - The Philippine Embassy in Chile reported to the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) today that Filipinos in Chile are safe after the country was hit by an 8.8-magnitude earthquake at 3:45 am (local time) yesterday.

Philippine Ambassador to Chile Consuelo Puyat-Reyes said that no Filipino has been hurt, except for an ankle injury sustained by a husband of a Philippine embassy personnel after a wooden plank fell from a cabinet in their bedroom.

"There are 75 Filipinos in Chile, mostly priests, nuns, engineers, businessmen and spouses of Chilean nationals. There are no Filipinos workers deployed in the country," she said. There are seven officers and staff members in the embassy, including the ambassador.

Ambassador Puyat-Reyes said that the country is still feeling some aftershocks. There is little flooding due to the tsunami. Electricity, water and communications facilities are still down in the capital city of Santiago, where the Embassy is located.

Yesterday afternoon, the DFA was able to contact by phone Minister Narciso Castaneda, who initially reported that the members of the embassy staff are in safe condition.

The main quake in Chile lasted about 15 seconds causing much damage to interiors of apartments and toppling household fixtures and other items. Smaller aftershocks were immediately felt hours after the main tremor hit.

Emergency services from the Chilean government have gone into full gear to attend to those affected and to restore basic services.

Quake also felt in Argentina

Meanwhile, the Philippine Embassy in Argentina also reported that the quake in Chile was also felt in Buenos Aires and in other Argentinean provinces, especially those along the long borders with Chile.

According to Philippine Ambassador to Argentina Rey Carandang, no victims or damage to structures have so far been reported, despite the strong aftershocks which continue to be felt.

"The only recorded Filipinos in the provinces near the Chilean border are in Mendoza, notably four Society of the Divine Word priests and a Filipina married to an Argentinean national. We have spoken to Fr. Rupert Solis who assured us that he and his companions are alright. He was particularly appreciative of our phone call. The Filipina married to an Argentinean is on holidays in the Philippines with her husband and children, according to her in-laws," he said.

Ambassador Carandang added that the Embassy advised the Filipino community through its coordinator and email network to take the necessary precautions and communicate with the Embassy should further emergency situation arises.

Most of the Filipinos in Argentina are concentrated in the capital city of Buenos Aires.

Filipinos in Hawaii also made precautions

Also earlier, the Philippine Consulate General in Honolulu, Hawaii, reported to the DFA that Consul General Leoncio Cardenas coordinated with state authorities and the leaders of the Filipino community in Hawaii in ensuring that community members there evacuated to high grounds in anticipation of the arrival of tsunami waves triggered by the Chile quakes.

According to Consul Paul Cortez, a number of Consulate personnel and their families evacuated to the consulate premises which are further inland and on a high elevation.

Hawaii state officials later rescinded the advisory after the tsunami waves turned out to be not immediately threatening to lives and properties. END