



From left to right: AIA Regional Chief Executive Officer Gordon Watson, DepEd Undersecretary Mario Deriquito, BPI-Philam Chief Executive Officer and President Ariel Cantos, and Philam Foundation President Max Ventura

## Classrooms of hope

**Y**ear in and year out, the Philippines falls victim to natural disasters. By the time storms leave, communities are left behind destroyed, affecting the lives of many—especially children. Not only do their homes get ruined but their schools get devastated as well. In order to help the children return back to a state of normalcy, Philam Foundation heeded the call of the Department of Education to rebuild classrooms in disaster affected communities.

After Typhoon Juan and Sendong devastated the country in 2011, Philam Foundation committed to build sixty-five classrooms within five years. The first eight Philam Paaralan classrooms were built in Isabela, and six more in Cagayan de Oro and Iligan City.

Philam Foundation President Max Ventura called the project timely, as back during Philam Life's 65th year, the Foundation decided to focus on empowering the Filipino children through healthy education as their primary thrust.

"Building in the aftermath of Typhoon Sendong, Pablo and Yolanda, or Typhoon Haiyan as it was internationally called, only highlighted what Philam Paaralan is all about: giving children a healthy education and building communities," said Ventura.

With more than enough time before their deadline, Philam Foundation has already gone above and beyond the original commitment, successfully constructing 85 classrooms in the past

three years.

Each Philam Paaralan is typhoon-resilient, and built with complete facilities: desks, tiled flooring, blackboards, electric fans, and lighting fixtures. As part of their vision to give each child a healthy education, each classroom is also fitted with Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) stations, to promote a healthy and clean lifestyle.

"We could not have accomplished this feat without our many project partners, the Department of Education, as well as the local governments where we built our classrooms," said Ventura. "Thanks to these gracious organizations and people, we were able to not only build classrooms, but also hope," he concluded.

According to Ventura, Philam Paaralan is more than the sum of its parts, more than the funds raised, and more than the number of classrooms built. "It is about the lives it has touched, the communities it has revived, and the children it has nurtured," he said.

Even after achieving remarkable results, they have yet to show signs of slowing down. Philam Foundation commits that their 100th classroom will be completed by July of 2016. Considering that each classroom is able to hold about fifty students, a total of 5,000 children will immediately benefit from this project. Since future generations will also utilize the structures, the number of lives touched by these buildings becomes multiplied tenfold.