

Interior and Local Government Secretary Mar Roxas declared here yesterday that the Zamboanga siege in September 2013 did not bring out the worst in the people, instead it brought out the best in the Zamboangueños and the best in the Filipinos.

Speaking at yesterday's Celebration of Victory and Peace, commemorating the day when government forces emerged victorious from a 20-day fierce gunbattle with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) rebels a year ago, Sec. Roxas said Zamboanga responded, repulsed, recovered and is now rebuilding a better city.

He described the celebration as a bitter-sweet event. "Bitter, because we just offered followers in memoriam of 34 people (20 soldiers, 5 policemen and 14 civilians) who risked their lives for Zamboanga. Bitter, because the future of Zamboanga was in just one day put to danger."

On the contrary, he said, there was sweetness in what happened "because we saw that the war did not bring out the worst in the Zamboangueños, but it brought out the best in them.

He said during the siege the Zamboangueños had shown their strength, courage, bravery and most of all their trust in each other. "The Zamboangueños were united behind one flag, one nation and one Zamboanga."

According to him, the police who first responded to the MNLF attackers will always be remembered, so do the brave men and women of the Zamboanga Red Cross and the ordinary civilians who continue to believe that Zamboanga is worth fighting for.

"These were the lessons we saw in Zamboanga, and today we are here to remember, to reflect and to recommit ourselves to the idea of what Zamboanga means to each and every one of us," Roxas said, adding that today, a year after the siege, he sees a Zamboanga with a beehive of activity, of hope, and of looking forward into the future.

The DILG chief and taunted to be President Aquino's successor said that after the siege he

sees a Zamboanga that does not forget the lessons it learned from the siege. “The lesson is not mistrust, not anger and not breaking apart. The lesson is that the siege brought out the best in the Zamboangueños.”

For his part, Sec. Gazmin said his visit to Zamboanga was to render honor to the fallen soldiers, police and civilians, and to thank the civilian populace, the business, government and private institutions that helped government forces liberate Zamboanga from the MNLF rebels a year ago yesterday.

Meanwhile, Roxas told a news conference that the delays in the reconstruction phase are attributed to various factors, among which is the laying out of an urban planning but he pointed out the substantial accomplishments of the government in the city’s recovery and reconstruction phase.

Proof of that, he said, the number of people displaced by the siege has dropped to 11,369 from 118,819 from 14 affected barangays.

Roxas cited another problem slowing down the reconstruction efforts is the purchase or acquisition of private lands for temporary shelters as negotiations have to be made with landowners.— Vic Larato