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Focus on water issues, UN exec urges media

By Cynthia D. Balana
Philippine Daily Inquirer

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FUKUOKA, Japan—A top United Nations regional official in Asia and the Pacific has called on both traditional and social media to give more focus and space to water-related issues that have dramatic consequences for humanity.

Chris Radford, acting director of the United Nations Human Settlements Program Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (UN Habitat), urged media to try and influence policy and cause positive action in communities to address issues such as water security, water crisis, sanitation and flooding.

Radford said there was a logical partnership between UN Habitat and the media in exploring ways to drive communities to action.

"How do we work together so that the community should be much more in partnership with the government?" Radford said at the end of the four-day 7th Asian City Journalists Conference (ACJC) and Environmental Technology Experts Group Meeting here.

Radford noted there was much media emphasis on disaster but less on people and communities that actually survive it and move on.

The four-day conference brought together UN Habitat country managers and executives, environmental technology experts, journalists, members of nongovernment organizations, governments and the academe to discuss the issues of water and sustainable development.

A number of environmental technologies were introduced—from water conservation technology to water purifying blocks; heat insulating paint, irrigation water wheels and sewage treatment bacteria, to rainwater harvesting and small-scale desalination technologies practiced by local governments and private sector companies.

Also discussed was sustainable urban development planning.

Butuan City Mayor Ferdinand Amante was among the experts invited from the Philippine government sector. Other experts were from Sri Lanka, Mongolia, Burma (Myanmar), Bangladesh, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Pacific Islands, who shared their experiences in addressing issues related to water and sustainable urban development.

In the Philippines, recurring water-related problems include increasing water bills, supply shortages, leaking pipes, unclean water and flooding. Water pilferage and lack of infrastructure were also identified as threats to water security in the country.

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