



The EU Integrated Approach to Food Safety

The EU follows an integrated approach to food safety, with the objective of assuring a high level of food safety, animal health, animal welfare and plant health within the European Union through coherent farm-to-fork measures, through effective monitoring and oversight, and ensuring at the same time the effective functioning of the internal market. It should be stressed that the general principles on which the rules on food imports are based are no more restrictive than the health rules applied to the EU Member States.

EU citizens have legitimate high expectations regarding the safety and quality of their food, especially in light of the food scares experienced in the nineties (e.g., salmonella in eggs, E. coli in meat, dioxins in food and feed, BSE, etc.). These incidents put safety on top of the EU food policies agenda, which led to a restructuring of EU food legislation.

To meet these expectations, the EU implements the principle of quality management

and process-oriented controls throughout the food chain, from farm to fork. Spot checks on the end product alone would not provide the same level of safety, quality and transparency to the consumer.

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Consumers (DG SANCO) works to ensure that Europe's food supply is the safest in the world and that the same standards of food safety apply to all products regardless of origin.

In its application of food safety rules, the EU tries to be proportionate in its response to food safety problems. A good example would be the coordinated approach by the European Commission services that set into motion various technical assistance initiatives to help the Philippines competent authority address the deficiencies noted by an inspection mission of the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) back in 2004 (instead of adopting safeguard measures against Philippine fishery and aquaculture exports to the EU). Technical assistance is continually ongoing to help address the remaining deficiencies in this sector.

Another good example is the outbreak of high pathogenic avian flu in Thailand. The Commission, in full conformity with the relevant international code of the OIE, imposed a ban on imports. However, EU excluded imports of certain cooked poultry meat products

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More RP Fishery Operators Enter the EU Market

By ERIC M. LOPEZ, Communications and Visibility Officer, TRTA

More and more fishery business operators are now able to export their products to the European Union.

After a series of delisting, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) has noted the steady increase of fishery business operators (FBOs) getting Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) recognition to export their products to the EU market, Dennis Tiotangco, Head of the BFAR Fish Inspection Unit (FIU) said.

In 2008, additional 16 Philippine-registered fishing vessels passed the rigid inspection of HACCP conducted by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources-FIU (FIU) and for which EU recognizes pursuant to EC Regulations 852/2004 and 853/2004. To-date, there are 36 fishing vessels that BFAR-FIU has accredited.

The HACCP system is a preventive system and a management tool of reducing risks from potential physical, biological, and chemical hazards to ensure food safety. It is used to identify these hazards

to establish the necessary steps known as critical control points (CCPs) to eliminate or reduce occurrence of these hazards.

The HACCP system is the bedrock of the EU Feed and Food Law (EC Regulation 178/2002) and finds strong reiteration in its application across the food supply chain in EC Regulation 852/2004: *Hygiene of Foodstuffs* and EC Regulation 853/2004: *Laying Down Specific Hygiene Rules for Food of Animal Origin*.

In the same year, Tiotangco disclosed there were five additional processing and service-provider plants that passed the HACCP recognition process and more are due for approval this year.

The increase in number of approved FBO establishments carries with it certain positive implications on major economic fronts: more workers getting employed, more industries in the energy and service sectors actively being tapped, and increase in export revenues.

The fishing vessels that were recently approved have tonnage capacities from 500 to 1200, Tiotangco said.

They are actively supplying the EU-approved fish processing

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Delegation of the European Commission to the Philippines



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RP joins seminar on SPS for ASEAN countries in Brussels

By **Lara G. Vivas**, *Senior Science Research Specialist*
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A seminar on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Issues for ASEAN Countries was organized by the EC in collaboration with the Emerging Markets Group, Development Solutions Inc. and the Central Science Laboratories.

The SPS seminar was held at the Albert Borschette Center in Brussels from 25 to 27 of November 2008.

Representatives from nine (9) ASEAN countries, namely Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam participated in the exercise.

The Philippines was fortunate to able to join and send five (5) participants from the regulatory agencies of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

The Philippine delegation was headed by Atty. Jane Bacayo, Executive Director of the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS). The other members of the delegation were Dr. Florence Silvano from the Quarantine Service of the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), Mr. Ramon Millori from the Plant Quarantine Division of the DA-Regional Field Unit XI (DA RFU XI), Mr. Dennis Tiotangco, Head of the HACCP Inspection Team of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), and Ms. Lara G. Vivas of the Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Product Standards (BAFPS).

The seminar was geared to provide participants with a good understanding of the EU's SPS import requirements; facilitate discussions leading to mutual understanding and practical insights; and provide advice on any particular issues for ASEAN members regarding the application of the EU SPS measures.

In achieving the objectives of the seminar, various presentations on relevant EU directives, standards and regulations were expounded, focusing on risk assessment, border inspection post protocols, animal health control systems, EU residue monitoring plans for animal products, aquatic products and plant products.

A similar discussion was also undertaken regarding the procedures for the EU Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (EU RASFF). Also, the step by step control mechanisms being implemented by EU for its imports from ASEAN countries were outlined.

At the end of the sessions and presentations, plenary for the questions were carried out. In here, country specific concerns, particularly actual EU-ASEAN country trade issues were clarified and given recommendations. Likewise, an online demonstration on the website assisting traders and other agencies exporting to the EU was conducted. Again, country specific issues were clarified and given recommendations by the representatives from the EU DG SANCO and DG Trade.

Overall, the exercise was very helpful in understanding the procedures and protocols being followed by the EU and also by third countries that have trade with EU countries. In line with this, it is recommended that similar exercises and seminars be conducted in order to provide good understanding of the EU's SPS import requirements and facilitate discussions leading to mutual understanding and practical insights in exporting to the EU.

In addition, the seminar not only provided technical discussion and exchange of ideas among the EU and the ASEAN countries but also cultural enrichment particularly for the ASEAN delegates.

Editor's Note

The year 2009 started on a positive light for the Delegation of the European Commission to the Philippines as one of its project grantees called Catchwise a consortium of NGOs, civil society organizations, local government units based in Visayas region, won the first ever Communication Award in the European Commission in Brussels.

We hope that the award will inspire other organizations involved in the fight against illegal trafficking of women and children.

This issue of EU News is focused on sanitary and phytosanitary issues to inform our partners and stakeholders of the current programmes to hasten trade and investment between EU and the region including the Philippines.

The EU News thanks all partners who contributed to this issue.

Theme for next quarter is health sector reform programme. Deadline for contributions for next quarter's issue is on 29 May 2009. Articles may be submitted to DELEGATION-PHILIPPINES@ec.europa.eu

THELMA A. GECOLEA

New Faces



BENEDIKT MADL joined the Delegation as programme manager for trade with responsibilities for the Trade Related Technical Assistance Programme as well as SPS/TBT and customs matters. Prior to this posting he worked in the Directorate General for Trade on EU-China trade relations. In this function he was responsible among others for setting up the EU-China High Level Economic and Trade Mechanism at vice-presidential level and pursuing trade in services and investment questions. Before joining the European Commission as a National expert he was Deputy Head of the Lower Austrian EU office in Brussels.

Benedikt has an educational background in economics, political science and Chinese studies. He wrote his Ph.D on China's brain-drain to Europe.

In his past time Benedikt enjoys skiing, mountain climbing and playing with his 3 month old daughter.



NAYIA BARMALIOU joined the Delegation as a Junior Expert, assuming the post of Political and Human Rights Officer in February 2009. Before joining the EC, Nayia was an Attorney-at-Law in Greece, focusing primarily in civil law cases, and working pro bono for immigrants and asylum seekers. Her first experience of the European Institutions' working environment was in 2006 when she was a trainee at EC's DG EuropeAid Cooperation Office, and then at the European Parliament's Human Rights Unit where she worked as a fellow in 2008. Nayia studied Law at the Democritus University of Thrace, Greece and at Aarhus University, Denmark, and then did her Master's in Human Rights and Democratization at the European Inter-University Centre, Italy as well as at the Maastricht Law School, the Netherlands. Her educational background further includes certificates in International Relations and International Law from Panteion University, Greece and Tulane University, USA, respectively.

from this ban because it is accepted that cooking destroys the virus. This distinction allowed the EU market to remain open to 40% of Thai exports, the most high value added component of their trade (in contrast with virtually all other countries which imposed a total ban on all poultry products).

It should be noted that the EU food safety measures are also soundly based on science and respect international obligations. All proposed measures with a potential trade impact are notified to the WTO, to allow EUs trading partners to comment on their compatibility with the relevant international norms.

The EU is the world's biggest importer and exporter of foodstuffs – the EU, for example, is increasingly dependent on imports of fishery and aquaculture products to meet its needs. In 2007 alone, the EU imported .16 billion worth of fishery products, accounting for 60% of total fish

consumption.

The EU recognizes the fact that it is impossible to check all products at the border or at the place of destination, and it therefore relies on food operators and competent authorities to undertake controls to ensure food safety. The competent authorities in the countries in which foodstuffs are produced are therefore responsible for carrying out inspections and certifying that the health rules on production and the health safety standards laid down in Community legislation are correctly applied and checked.

While the Commission recognises the competence of designated competent authorities in its trading partners to ensure that EU regulations are complied, the Commission also acknowledges that EU rules are not easy to understand. Thus, the Commission implements various technical assistance programmes to help third countries understand better the EU rules and implement the legislation properly.

In the area of food safety, there are various ongoing and completed projects, particularly regarding fishery and aquaculture products, that have benefited the Philippines. Apart from the bilateral programme "Trade related Technical Assistance (TRTA)", which just started its second phase, there are annual training programmes initiated by Directorates General Trade, and Health and Consumers targeting Philippine agencies involved in food safety issues under the Departments of Agriculture and Health (primarily the Bureau of Food and Drugs).

In this newsletter, we have tried to feature the recent technical assistance initiatives to help strengthen the capacity of the concerned Philippine organizations implement food safety measures. We hope that by encouraging and helping the Philippines comply with EU food safety standards, the Philippine Government will be in a better position to protect its consumers and expand exports to other developed countries.

The RASFF

The rapid alert system for food and feed (RASFF) is a concrete and visible result of a successful European integrated approach to ensure food safety. The quick exchange of information in cases of consignments entailing food safety risks among food and feed competent authorities ensures coherent and simultaneous actions by all Member States.

According to Health Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou, "Europe's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed plays an important role in our efforts to ensure a high level of food safety for EU citizens. It allows us to prevent food safety crises, and identify problems at an early stage, thereby minimising potential health threats. Awareness about the RASFF is rising, it is becoming stronger and more effective as time goes by, and serves as a model to other countries looking for ways to improve the levels of consumer protection."

The Commission is keen on promoting the RASFF system as a model for other regions of the world. Concrete steps in that direction have been taken, such as developing a web interface enabling third countries to monitor notifications which concern them.

Important tool

The RASFF is a tool enabling the quick and effective exchange of information between EU Member States and the Commission when risks to human health are detected in the food and feed chain. All Members of the RASFF (EU-27, European Commission, European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) as well as Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland) have a round-the-clock service to ensure that urgent notifications are sent, received and responded to in the shortest time possible. Thanks to RASFF, many food safety risks have been averted before they could harm consumers.

Legal basis for the RASFF

Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down the general principles and requirements of food law, establishing the European Food Safety Authority and laying down the procedures in matters of food safety

Article 50

1. A rapid alert system for the notification of a direct or indirect risk to human health deriving from food or feed is hereby established as a network. It shall involve the Member States, the Commission and the Authority. The Member States, the Commission and the Authority shall each designate a contact point, which shall be a member of the network. The Commission shall be responsible for managing the network.

2. Where a member of the network has any information relating to the existence of a serious direct or indirect risk to human health deriving from food or feed this information shall be immediately notified to the Commission under the rapid alert system. The Commission shall transmit this information immediately to the members of the network.

The Authority may supplement the notification with any scientific or technical information, which will facilitate rapid, appropriate risk management action by the Member States.

3. Without prejudice to other Community legislation, the Member States shall immediately notify the Commission under the rapid alert system of:

a) any measure they adopt which is aimed at restricting the placing on the market or forcing the withdrawal from the market or the recall of food or feed in order to protect human health and requiring rapid action;

b) any recommendation or agreement with professional operators which is aimed, on a voluntary or obligatory basis at preventing, limiting, or imposing specific conditions on the placing on the market or the eventual use of food or feed on account of a serious to human health requiring rapid action;

c) any rejection related to a direct or indirect risk to human health of a batch container or cargo of food or feed by a competent authority at a border post within the European Union.

The notification shall be accompanied by a detailed explanation of the reasons for the action taken by the competent authorities of the Member State in which the notification was issued. It shall be followed in good time, by supplementary information in particular where the measures on which the notification is based are modified withdrawn.

The Commission shall immediately transmit to members of the network the notification and supplementary information received under the first and second subparagraphs.

Where a batch container or cargo is rejected by a competent authority at a border post within the European Union, the Commission shall immediately notify all the border posts within the European Union as well as the third country of origin.

4. Where a food or feed which has been the subject of a notification under the rapid alert system has been dispatched to a third country, the Commission shall provide the latter with the appropriate information.

5. The Member States shall immediately inform the Commission of the action implemented or measures taken following receipt of the notifications and supplementary information transmitted under the rapid alert system. The Commission shall immediately transmit this information to the members of the network.

6. Participation in the rapid alert system may be opened up to applicant countries third countries or international organizations on the basis of agreements between the Community and those countries or international organizations in accordance with the procedures defined in those agreements. The latter shall be based on reciprocity and shall include confidentiality measures equivalent to those applicable in the Community.

Making food safer

A rapid alert system for food has been operating within the European Commission since 1979.

The RASFF was put in place to provide food and feed control authorities with an effective tool to exchange information about measures taken responding to serious risks detected in relation to

food or feed. This exchange of information helps Member States to act more rapidly and in a coordinated manner in response to a health threat caused by food or feed. Its effectiveness is ensured by keeping its structure simple: it consists essentially of clearly identified contact points in the Commission and at national level in member countries, exchanging information in a clear and structured way.

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The Pilot ARASFF Project: A Personal Account

by Amor G. Diaz, NCP-Philippines, Pilot ARASFF Project, BFAR

Background

The formation of the Pilot ASEAN Rapid Alert System for Feed and Food (ARASFF) Project in the ASEAN region was spearheaded by Thailand, in cooperation with other ASEAN countries and with a strong support from the EC Delegation to Thailand beginning mid-2005. The project officially commenced in 2006, with an initial 1 year life on its first phase. It has been recently extended, and is now operating on its second phase life. In August 2008, the ARASFF project was already officially recognized & endorsed by the ASEAN at the latest Special SOM- 29th Meeting AMAF held in Chiangmai, Thailand. Currently, the pilot project has six network members, namely: Thailand (project host/ administrator), Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar. The rest of the ASEAN countries are currently observers in the ARASFF system by their choice.

ARASFF Principle and Mechanism

The ARASFF was modeled from the EU-RASFF, with similar objective as in providing a system that allows the rapid exchange of information between and among the network members in the ASEAN community to better manage food & feed safety controls at both border and market levels. By mechanism, the network member who discovers the problem will notify the ARASFF Administrator (Thailand), and in turn, will notify all network members via the system. The concerned exporting country will also be directly informed by the notifying country for its appropriate action to ensure food safety and public health.

ASEAN Network Efforts

Since 2006, series of National Contact Point (NCP) meetings and related trainings/workshops had been jointly organized and funded by the Thai government and EC – Directorate General for Health and Consumers (DG SANCO through the National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity & Food Standards (ACFS) and EC Delegation to Thailand, respectively), in view of the continuous development and improvement of the ARASFF system. These activities were undertaken to ensure that ARASFF will complement and easily adapt to the national food control system of the ASEAN network, as well as the non-network members. These technical trainings/workshops on RASFF were organized under the framework of the "Better Training for Safer Food" programme of DG SANCO. To-date, the continuous effort on the further improvement of ARASFF's user guide manual (draft), application system (Ver. 4.0), and laying down the working policy & procedures were some of the major outputs from these several meetings & trainings conducted under the guidance of both EU and ARASFF project technical experts.

Benefits, Gaps & Constraints: A Personal Perspective

In terms of adopting the ARASFF system in the country today, there are benefits, gaps and constraints that can be possibly encountered in the process of integration and the eventual implementation of the system.

At personal level, I would like to share my thoughts on this matter based on my experience and knowledge on ARASFF. In terms of benefits, ARASFF or RASFF in general, can definitely improve and provide

a much faster and efficient way of exchanging information between or among concerned Competent Authorities (CAs) at the national and ASEAN-network levels, through web-based technology. It is an effective system tool that allows active interaction and feedback mechanism to take place instantly, in order to safeguard public health & product safety. As such, RASFF can further enhance and (indirectly) strengthen the country's existing official control system at the border and market levels by employing a precautionary approach in disseminating information (i.e., notification) to concerned parties.

However, the lack of specific legal basis for enforcement and well-defined working policy/procedures for implementation at national level is a major gap/constraint in adopting ARASFF/RASFF, especially if this system will potentially have (direct or indirect) economic implication on the domestic & export trade activities of the implementing country.

In terms of constraints, the lack of or inadequate infrastructure facility & manpower, funding support, national program for adopting the system, trained personnel, political will (commitment) of the relevant implementing CAs, overlapping/conflicting jurisdictional mandates of involved CAs and the lack of coordination among them could be the significant factors to consider. It is therefore vital for each network (including non-network) member to make an objective evaluation first of their existing infrastructure facility, manpower capacity and available resources; review or create legal basis for national RASFF enforcement; and come up with well-defined implementing guidelines to ensure that it will run smoothly and will serve its purpose to uphold the interest of the implementing country from the standpoint of food safety & economic welfare.

The RASFF...from page 3

RASFF and the Philippines: In the case of the Philippines, the Commission notifies the concerned authorities when a product exported to the EU has been the subject of a notification, so corrective measures may be taken and the problem does not happen again. In the same vein, when the Commission receives information that a product notified in the RASFF is imported into or distributed to the Philippines (regardless whether this is originating in the EU or outside the EU),

the Commission also informs the relevant authorities so they can take appropriate actions. RASFF has therefore helped the country make its food safer both through its exports and imports.

Promoting food safety worldwide

The Commission has helped interested countries outside the EU develop a national system to improve consumer protection. Training seminars were organised in 2007 under the initiative "Bet-

ter Training for Safer Food". The Commission has also financially supported a pilot ASEAN Rapid Alert System for Food, set up between Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia, Philippines and Myanmar. The ultimate goal of the Commission's overall efforts in this field will be to join all of these national and regional systems in a global network of food safety alert systems.

For more information, see: http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/food/rapidalert/index_en.htm

Philippine Participants to the EU Training/ Workshop on Food labelling legislation and standards. (From left to right) Guinevere Pastrana, Rosemarie Juano, Elane Malalay and Gloria Peña

Workshop on the EU Food Labelling Legislation and Traceability held in Bangkok, Thailand



The Training/Workshop involved participation of representatives from competent authorities in thirteen (13) countries of South East Asia (Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos PDR, Malaysia, Maldives, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Hongkong and Macau) who are directly involved in the design of regional/national legislations and standards on food labeling matters and in the enforcement of their application, in particular in relation with foodstuffs exported to the European Union (EU) market.

It covered technical issues such as general food labelling, nutrition labelling, specific food labelling (genetically modified organisms, geographic indications, halal, etc.) and related certification and traceability systems.

The theme "Better Training for Safer Food" is a European Commission – Health and Consumers Directorate General initiative aimed at organizing a community (EU) training strategy in the areas of food law, feed law, animal health and animal welfare rules, as well as plant health rules.

The objectives of the programme are to:

- ensure and maintain a high level of consumer protection and of animal health, animal welfare and plant health;
- promote a harmonized approach to the operation of community and national control systems;
- create an equal level playing field for all food businesses;
- enhance trade of safe food; and
- ensure fair trade with third countries and in particular developing countries.

Topics discussed were Food labelling, Traceability, Geographic Indications, Organic Labelling, GMO Labelling, Nutrition and Health Claims, Concepts of Nutrition Profiles in Relation to the EU Legislation, EU Legislation on Food Fortification and Food Supplements, Overview of Legislation on Nutrition

Labelling in Thailand and other ASEAN Countries, and "Traffic Light" Labels.

The workshop was comprehensive, informative and valuable. It is very much applicable to Philippine Situation and timely since at present our organization has draft Administrative Orders on Food Labelling, and Nutrition and Health Claims. Some provisions in EU legislations may be incorporated in our draft. However, there were topics which we found are not yet applicable to the present Philippine set up, such as "traffic light" systems, GMO, Geographical Indications, and Organic Labelling, since we are still in the process of formulating our own basic guidelines. However, these can be included probably after we have formulated our own basic guidelines on food labelling. Nonetheless, we found these topics are valuable tools especially where the harmonization of our standards with the international communities concerned.

With our attendance, we became knowledgeable on various EU legislations specifically on food labelling requirements of which our country maybe able to meet, adopting some provisions in EU legislation for the export of Philippine products to the European countries. Thus, our attitude became positively inclined to adopting some provisions in their legislation. However, the organizers hope to achieve a multiplier effect, wherein the information and knowledge gained from the workshop will eventually be shared and utilized by the competent authorities as well as private sector operators.

Accordingly, this training is a series of ten (10) regional training workshops with different topics, hopefully, when the group from the different countries meet again there will be positive news to share in terms of applicability.

• By Guinevere Pastrana, Rosemarie Juano, Elane Malalay and Gloria Peña, Beureau of Food and Drugs.

a special sanitary and phytosanitary issue

Participants to the EU Training/ Workshop on Food labelling legislation and standards held in Bangkok, Thailand, 11-13 March 2008.



establishments and canneries in the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Japan and Thailand.

On the other hand, the plants that recently passed the HACCP examination are into packing fresh deboned *bangus* or milkfish (*Chanos chanos*) or functioning as service-providers like having their cold storage facilities available for use for a fee or providing ice to other plants.

Tiotangco cited the FBOs have profited immensely from the training on HACCP and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) that TRTA has provided them. He said that these establishments benefited from the TRTA training on GMP-HACCP.

There was a total of 243 FBOs trained in HACCP for free as TRTA concluded its operations in October 2008.

The training took into account risks that can potentially breach food safety across every step of processing food—and it extended further to include pre-processing and post-processing stages such as qualifying raw materials and packing of finished products, respectively.

A significant feature of the training included a one-on-one “clinical” diagnosis of an FBO’s plant operation by the TRTA expert on sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) on the actual problems affecting the viability of complying with GMP and HACCP.

The interaction between the FBO and the expert provided an in-depth understanding of how a food safety problem could be addressed within the context of real and specific processing operation. This approach in capacity-building provided immediate and useful translation of concept-based learning into action-ori-

ented understanding in ensuring food safety in the context of actual operational setup.

Tiotangco observed that the FBOs who have undergone TRTA training have come up with adequate HACCP plans and were, thus, competent in seeing through the implementation of their food safety commitments. The FBOs were also able to effectively manage their identified CCPs or in simple terms, manage their risks from being realized. For example, at the early processing stage, a risk borne by histamine could be potentially high if receiving the raw materials is done only with visual inspection without the required post-harvest documentation such as origin, date, time, size, temperature and volume of harvest to form part in assessing the quality and safety of the raw materials.

Tiotangco, however, differentiated TRTA-trained FBOs from those that have trained in GMP-HACCP.

He said, TRTA-trained FBOs dutifully attended to their HACCP tasks and have become more thorough in the conduct of quality and safety profiling of raw materials rather than engaging in visual inspection right away.

In fact, Tiotangco noted that the FBOs have become more articulate regarding their planned management steps over their unique CCPs. Therefore, the co-operation of the BFAR inspection team and the FBOs reinforces the commitment of the latter in ensuring food safety standards are compliant to HACCP on a long-term sustainable basis.

The pivotal role of TRTA begins when the HACCP system works within the operational setup of the FBOs, but this does not mean that ensuring food safety is delimited to the HACCP system nor is it an exclusive responsibility of an FBO. The complementation between the FBO and regulatory agency falls under the overarching control measures embedded in SPS as regards food trading.

Under the second phase of TRTA, Tiotangco cited that the fishery inspection system will be further strengthened by integrating traceability with the SPS control measures. Traceability will provide critical information on production account from the origin of the raw materials to handling of finished products.

He identified that a training course on risk based sampling for sample verification for the BFAR inspectors is scheduled under the TRTA 2. This training is important because it will provide BFAR with better management control to assist FBOs in ensuring that safety standards are maintained and in fastracking traceability. Traceability in this measure is founded on a firmer basis as it integrates a regime of scientific and statistical methodologies to identify deviating variables on food safety limits.

The BFAR has about 50 inspectors with notable concentration in General Santos City, Zamboanga City, and the National Capital Region.

BFAR

As the inspection system of BFAR grows in complexity and widens its scope, Tiotangco said that through TRTA 2, it will start laying the groundwork for ISO 17020. Although this undertaking cuts a long-term scale before BFAR-FIU becomes ISO17020-certified, EU’s recognition of BFAR as competent authority for over five years provides solid institutional experience for the unit to competently manifest the readiness of its capacity for the ISO certification on a relatively shorter processing period.

BFAR, among the food-oriented regulatory agencies of the Philippine Department of Agriculture, stands as the only EU-recognised competent authority as of today.

In trading terms, its health certification and HACCP certification on Philippine fishery and aquaculture product exports are directly recognised by the European Commission.

ISO 17020 deals on the examination of materials, products, installation, plant processes, works procedures or services and determines their conformity with regulations, standards, and regulations and the subsequent official reporting of the examination results (to concerned parties such as the FBOs and supervisory authorities), according to the International Organisation for Standardization.

The International Organisation for Standardization (ISO) cites that ISO 17020 was drawn from EN 45005 which was crafted by the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) and the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (CENELEC). The ISO Committee on Conformity Assessment subsequently adopted the ISO 17020 to meet a perceived market need for an international consensus-based normative document on requirements for inspection bodies.

Having an ISO 17020 certification is BFAR-FIU’s long-term goal. Being eventually certified as such will accord BFAR-FIU a market confidence that will be useful not only to facilitate domestic trade but also FBOs of ASEAN member-states needing certification to export their fishery products. In the end this certification will aid in strengthening the convergence of its markets into a unified entity robustly trading with EU and the rest of the world.

Tiotangco takes into account the many steps yet to be undertaken before reaching that stage but is hopeful for the prospects for the Philippine fishery and aquaculture industries.





BFAR hosts the EU Fishery and Aquaculture Standards Workshop

The Philippines, through the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) of the Department of Agriculture (DA), hosted the EU Fishery and Aquaculture Standards last 2008 in collaboration with the City Government of General Santos. BFAR particularly the Regional Office in General Santos had worked closely with all the City officials and representatives including the concerned police and military personnel to ensure the success of this training. Apart from the local coordination within the City, BFAR also had to coordinate the preparatory work with the representatives from the EC Delegation and the European contractor, AETs.

General Santos proved to be an excellent choice for the venue of this seminar, not only because it is the tuna capital of the Philippines, but also because the different categories of operators in the fishery food chain are represented in this dynamic city. A total of 7 Philippine establishments offered their premises for the site visits covered in this training. The site visits were intended to provide practical applications of the various requirements to ensure food safety.

The various concerns of relevant Philippine stakeholders were discussed as well as those of the other participating countries, namely: Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Pakistan, Salomon Islands, Sri-Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. Ambassador Alistair MacDonald graced the opening ceremony, along with representatives from the DA, BFAR, and General Santos City Government. The City Government prepared a cultural show to showcase the culture and diversity of Mindanao particularly General Santos. Ambassador MacDonald was not only delighted with this warm hospitality, but also enjoyed the fresh seafood that General Santos has to offer. Ambassador MacDonald also led the tuna slicing ceremony that the City incorporated in its cultural presentation.

In the course of the training in General Santos City, all the relevant stakeholders took the opportunity to clarify various is-

ssues affecting their respective countries. The site visits proved interesting, as the delegates played the role of an inspector (as if they were doing one in their own country). These were very well managed, with sufficient time for the conduct of the inspection itself, discussions on-site with the experts and to clarify issues. Debriefing discussions were also held on the findings/issues on-site, particularly on the important elements that should be considered given the situation of the establishment and key critical decision points.

In the site visits conducted, the EU experts stressed to the delegates that they need to analyse their findings/concerns, problems, etc. based on risk; not to force the management/establishment to agree to their decision but to discuss what the issues are and how best these should be remedied; and not to advise the establishment as this is not their role to do so. The importance of gaining their trust was also discussed, and in this context, an inspector has to know about the subject matter on hand to be able to discuss/argue intelligently with the stakeholder (be it a fisherman, the owner of the establishment or its staff). There are protracted discussions each time on what exactly the requirement are of the EU regulations (e.g., precise temperature levels required in specific stages of the food chain, etc.) – the EU trainers stressed the fact that there are no rules cast in stone, as each situation varies and would therefore depend on the risk associated with a particular problem/issue.

Finally, private meetings were organised between the participating country representatives and the EU experts/officials. The delegates were all unanimous in saying that the workshop was very helpful and the site visits were important in better understanding of the EU requirements. The discussions with the experts after these visits and also the private meetings also helped clarify their roles as representatives from the competent authorities in their respective countries.

BFAR gets boost and link with EU expert

By SIMEONA E. REGIDOR, *Chief, Fish Health Section, BFAR*

a special sanitary and phytosanitary issue

Philippine aquaculture is one of the most widely recognized in the globe. By its very nature as an archipelago, the country's fate and its economy have direct and important ties to the water. The government is constantly endeavouring to improve the quality of Philippine aquaculture through programs that strengthen our ties with leading institutions of research from other countries.

BFAR STEPS UP

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), the government's main arm in the management and protection of Philippine aquatic resources, gained a welcome boost to its capabilities with the visit and consultation of Dr. Eric Verdon of the AFFSA-the French Food Safety Agency and the Community Reference Laboratory for veterinary drugs.

During his mission, Dr. Verdon embarked on various ventures to strengthen the BFAR's competency, one of which is a Training on Residues and Contaminants Control, a joint project of the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and the European Commission.

The training, which was held from during the last quarter of the year at the Mutya Hall of Sulo Hotel in Diliman, Quezon City was graced by BFAR Asst. Director Atty. Benjamin F. Tabios and Mr. Holger Rommen, head of the Contracts and Finance Section, Delegation of the European Commission to the Philippines. It was attended by a total of 44 participants coming from government and private laboratories involved in the implementation of the National Food Safety Program in the Philippines.

Dr. Verdon spoke about EU Regulations, the Community Reference Laboratory, and National Reference Laboratory activities, methods validation, Decision

2002/657 concerning the performance of analytical methods and the interpretation of results. The applications for banned antibiotics i.e. chloramphenicol and nitrofurans, dye, i.e. malachite green and for multi-microbials were also discussed.

Majority of the participants were Fish Health Officers (FHOs) from the 15 regions of the Philippines, who implement the National Residue Monitoring and Control program in fish and fishery products complying with the EC Directive 96/23/EC. The FHO assists in setting the national sample target and conducts the actual sampling in the field.

After the three-day training Dr. Verdon conducted informal visits to two BFAR laboratories, the Central Office Laboratory and the Region IVA Laboratory, and a BFAR-recognized private laboratory, the Societe Generale Surveillance (SGS) Laboratory in Makati.

The technical assistance is just one of the responses to the recommendations of the EC FVO mission in 2006 when they conducted an audit of the BFAR laboratories.

According to the 2006 audit: *"The performance characteristics of the analytical methods need to be fit for the purposes and able to generate reliable results, considering all parameters laid down in the relevant Community legislation, in particular Directive 96/23/EC, Decision 2002/657/EC, Regulation (EC) No 2073/2004."*

To comply with the aforementioned observation, a request was forwarded by BFAR in consideration of its existing conditions. The request aimed to clarify important issues like validation of the existing methods, and the current control activities of the Fish Health Management and Quality Assurance Laboratory as the National Reference Laboratory for residues of fish and fishery product.

ENCOURAGING RESULTS

Much was learned during the three-day training. The FHOs who attended gained a newfound appreciation of the significance of their sampling, monitoring and surveillance activity as part of the National Residue monitoring program. The

analysts of the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS) of the Department of Agriculture learned about the validation for the confirmatory methods with the LC/MS/MS, which they consider to be helpful especially as they are set to acquire the equipment this year.

Further, the representative from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) commented on the vast amount of knowledge gained from the training, citing more efficient documentation procedures as just one example learned.

For their part, a representative from SGS said that the company gained a new understanding of the importance of their role as a BFAR-recognized laboratory, saying that they will be even more mindful of the requirements set by the Competent Authority.

The visit of Dr. Verdon to the central and regional laboratory of BFAR assured BFAR analysts on the control measures that need to be implemented to comply with Decision/657/EC. Dr. Verdon shared his own experience on the work done in AFFSA as Community Reference Laboratory for veterinary drugs, and provided his recommendations on possible improvements that may be considered by BFAR.

KEEPING UP WITH THE COMPETITION

Proper national food control systems are necessary to protect the health and safety of domestic consumers. They are also essential in ensuring the quality and safety of the aqua-cultured products entering the international trade and make sure that the product conforms to international requirements.

International fish and fishery trade requires transparency on how products are produced, processed and marketed relying on the governments to take bigger responsibility for food quality and safety assurance. They require supplementary efforts and proactive behavior from the authorities and private sector in an increasingly competitive environment by establishing food safety control structures or its equivalent.

The Philippines has to keep up with the dynamic trade requirements and notably with the technical requirements and sanitary and phytosanitary measures to gain better access to foreign markets. Trading partners have become more serious and the corresponding technical requirements tend to become more complex and stringent.

Assurance of the quality of the results of the National Reference Laboratory on fish and fishery products, the Fish Health Management and Quality Assurance Laboratory, is one of our positive responses to the aforementioned stringent requirements to strengthen the country's laboratory capability and turn the Philippines into a major player in the world market.

EC Workshops on the Prevention of Avian Influenza

By EMELINDA L. LOPEZ, DVM, Dip.VPH, MsC, Senior Agriculturist
Animal Health Division, Bureau of Animal Industry

The European Commission (EC) organised training workshops on the prevention of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in the Philippines during the third quarter of the year. This technical assistance is made possible through the Better Training for Safer Food initiated by the Directorate General for Health and Consumers (DG SANCO). The workshops were organised in cooperation with the Department of Agriculture particularly the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI). Development Solutions was engaged to undertake all the arrangements required for the training in the country, and the training courses were conducted by two international experts, namely Dr. David John Hadrill and Mr. Andrew Almond.

Three workshops were designed for the Philippines covering one week each in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. These workshops were aimed toward assisting the veterinary services in the Philippines to effectively prepare against possible outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), and provide training on effective methods of biosecurity, outbreak control, disease surveillance, stamping out and further training techniques. Regional Avian Influenza Coordinators, Provincial Veterinarians and City Veterinarians attended the workshops which were held in:

- Angeles City on September 8-12 for 19 participants from Regions I, II, III, IV and V;
 - Cebu City on September 15-19 for 18 participants from Regions VI, VII, VIII and IX; and
 - Cagayan de Oro City on September 22-26 for 19 participants from Regions X, XI, XII, XIII and CARAGA.
- Mr. Gabriel Munuera-Viñals, Head of the Political, Economic, Trade and Public

Affairs Section of the Delegation of the EC to the Philippines, and relevant officials in the Department of Agriculture led by BAI Director Davinio P. Catbagan welcomed the participants during the first day of these workshops. Mr. Munuera noted that the country remains Avian Influenza free, but there is still the risk due to the presence of the disease in the neighboring countries. He stressed not only the fact that these comprise the first series of technical assistance funded by the EC on Avian Influenza but also the importance attached by the EC in its commitment to continue to provide technical and financial assistance to countries to help bolster their efforts to contain, control and eliminate the virus in affected poultry and prepare for a possible pandemic. Director Catbagan encouraged the participants to engage actively the experts during the workshops. An overview of Avian Influenza (AI) in the country emphasizing more on the current disease prevention and control measures under the AI Protection Program (AIPP) was also presented by the BAI during these workshops.

Overall, the participants found the training excellent and fully appreciated mostly the topics on disinfection, field visit risk assessment and simulation exercises.

The topics covered during the workshops were, among others: Socio-Economic Aspects of AI, General AI Epidemiology, Participatory Epidemiology, Farm Biosecurity, Disinfection and Chemical Use, Disinfection, Personal Protection and Hygiene and Risk Assessment.

On the second day of the workshops, field visits were organised to undertake a risk assessment exercise in a poultry farm. The participants were required to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to have the real experience of how it is like

to be working and wearing the required PPE. Interviews were conducted with the farm manager so the participants could make a good risk assessment on the AI incursion in the farm. A demonstration on disinfectant spraying was also done to make the participants realize that disinfectant concentration and contact time on application were very important in effective decontamination of an infected area. The participants also had to make actual measurements on the floor area to be covered in order to determine the right amounts of disinfectants to prepare. Overall, the participants considered that it was an educational experience doing all these activities.

Learnings, Comments and Insights on the Course

1. Disinfection and Chemical Use – This was a very useful topic which made the participants realize the importance of appropriately selecting disinfectants for effective decontamination of pathogenic agents. What is more important is the correct application and contact time of disinfectants which is sometimes taken for granted.

2. Disinfection, Personal Protection and Hygiene - The participants found it very important to have the proper materials issued as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and that these should be suitable to the working conditions and

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a special sanitary and phytosanitary



weather in the country. All had difficulty working while wearing the PPE during the brief visit to the farm, raising concerns on how effective the veterinarian and the farm personnel could work in case of an AI outbreak. Training for the private sector on the use of PPEs and proper farm disinfection was also found to be an important area for future training.

3. Training of Trainers – This was a good practical exercise since the participants were told to join in activities like speaking about oneself and doing physical games to make their audiences more attentive and alert for the training. This was considered to be an effective way of making participants effective trainers through learning by doing. For some, this was a most interesting part of the workshop.

4. Culling Methods – Cervical dislocation is one method of culling (killing) birds for disposal in HPAI affected farms or areas. It was a surprise to realise that most participants have their own idea of doing cervical dislocation to kill poultry and that most do not know how to do this properly. As such, it was considered important to emphasize the correct and standard procedure of doing this.

5. Simulation Exercises - This was a useful exercise for participants to actually experience planning, organizing, and making immediate response measures for an impending outbreak. The method used was a systematic exercise for the participants to realize on what should be done. Though they were in panic initially, the guides, references and pro-forma reports were very good tools for them to keep tab on the situation and rightfully address the different angles of the disease outbreak and coping up with other complicating factors. The lessons were many as they went through the exercise.

Though the participants went through the different aspects of contingency planning, it is important that they realize also the importance of good teamwork. SOPs should be clearly written beforehand specifically the job description for each member of the Rapid Action Team. The participants also became conscious of the importance of handling the media well during these situations.

Laboratory Training in Diagnosis of Avian Influenza

The European Commission funded a “Laboratory Training in the Diagnosis of Avian Influenza” in cooperation with Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale delle Venezie (a European Reference Laboratory for Avian Influenza and Newcastle disease based in Legnaro, Italy) at the Veterinary faculty of the University of Padova from 26 to 28 January 2009. The purpose of the training is to help strengthen the country’s laboratory capacity on Avian Influenza.

A total of twenty participants (four from each country) from Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Morocco and Philippines participated in this three-day training. The participants from the Philippines were:

- **Dr. Cristina F. Legaspi**, Senior Agriculturist, Head of Virology Section, Philippine Animal Health Center, Bureau of Animal Industry, Department of Agriculture
- **Dr. Milagros R. Mananggit**, Regional Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (RADDL) III, San Fernando, Pampanga, Department of Agriculture
- **Dr. Rachel R. Azul**, Veterinarian II, Philippine Animal Health Center, Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), Department of Agriculture
- **Dr. Marie France Ramirez Que**, Veterinarian II, Regional Animal



Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (RADDL) IX, Tumaga, Zamboanga City, Department of Agriculture

First day of the training was devoted to a series of lectures; A talk on the general introduction to AI was delivered by Dr. Ilaria Capua, followed by the general diagnostics of AI by Ms. Raffaella Nisi. Drs. William Dundon and Filippo Ciloni lectured on the molecular diagnostics. Identification of HPAI by sequencing was lectured by Ms. Adelaide Milani and the last lecture given was on the vaccination of AI and the DIVA (Differentiate Infected from Vaccinated Animal) strategy by Dr. William Dundon.

Second day was devoted to lecture-demonstration of RNA extraction, conventional and real time H5 and H7 RT-PCR and sequencing of H5 and H7 cleavage sites. This was held at the Veterinary Faculty of the University.

On the third day, the participants visited the different laboratories and animal house in the Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale delle Venezie. At the end of the tour, they had their final discussion, course evaluation and closing ceremony.

Overall, the group’s assessment of the training was rather fairly satisfactory. The lectures were very informative and helpful to our laboratory work. All the lecturers were very accommodating and experts in their respective fields. The 3 day-schedule of the workshop was not enough because one day was only devoted to a lecture demonstration of the laboratory procedures. The group was expecting to have more hands-on training on the real time - pcr and sequencing to be able to master the technique. It would have been very helpful if the training period was extended. At least two weeks hands-on training would ideally have been preferred.

Bridging the Boundaries Peace and Community Development

(First of two parts)

by : Emily M. Mercado, EC and Eronio P. Muno

Municipal Planning and Development Coordinator of Polomolok, South Cotabato

The Mindanao Trust Fund Reconstruction and Development Program (MTF-RDP) is a multi-donor trust fund being managed by the World Bank, on behalf of a number of donors, including the European Commission. It was established in 2005 following a request from the Philippine Government to strengthen assistance to conflict-affected areas in Mindanao. Specifically, it aims to assist in the economic and social recovery in the conflict-affected and vulnerable areas of Mindanao through the implementation of community-driven development (CDD) sub-projects. To-date, the EC is the largest donor to the MTF-RDP (• 2 M) with further support in the pipeline.

Since the official start of the program in 2006 until the end of 31 December 2008, some 53 sub-projects (e.g. potable water systems, tire path, community livelihood centers, solar dryer, etc.) have been approved under MTF-RDP, of which 47 have been completed in 41 municipalities in Mindanao. The key government counterparts are the: 1.) Office of the Presidential Adviser for the Peace Process (OPAPP); 2.) Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA); and 3.) local government units (LGUs). Other important stakeholders are the civil society organizations; peoples' organizations and the indigenous peoples.

The following report describes in detail the experience of the municipality of Polomolok in the implementation of MTF-RDP, specifically, in the construction of a Community and Livelihood Center at Purok 3-A, Barangay Koronadal Proper, Polomolok, South Cotabato. The proponent of the sub-project was the Strongly United Koronadal Proper Organization (SUKOR). The total sub-project cost was Php 819,825.22, of which 85% (Php 696,851.44), was funded by the MTF-RDP, 13% (Php 106,577.28) was funded jointly by the municipal LGU and barangay LGU and 2% (Php 16,396.50) funded by SUKOR.

Koronadal

The history of conflict in Koronadal can be traced back to the ILAGA-Black Shirt clashes in the 1970s. The ILAGA was a group of Ilonggo and Ilocano who was at war with the Black Shirts that was organized by the Moros to defend themselves against the ILAGA. In 1972, when Martial Law was declared, harassment against the Muslim community continued as they were suspected to be rebels. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was organized by the Muslim communities in the area to continue the struggle of the bangsamoro people. An armed clash in the area occurred in 1986 between the MNLF and the AFP. In 2000, then President Estrada declared an all-out war against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a splinter group of the MNLF. Koronadal used to be the passage area of the MILF in going to their camp at Barangay Bentong.

The sub-project aimed to provide an income generating structure by providing a venue for trainings, seminars and other special occasions from within the community or outside who are interested to use its services for a fee which is to be prescribed by the SUKOR. The fees that will be collected directly go to the coffer and in the special account of SUKOR with the intent of using these for its future programs, projects and activities.

The Community and Livelihood Center was the result of a very strong collaboration among the interested and concerned stakeholders. Historically, some government programs in the past miserably failed to attain its purpose and objectives primarily because of the absence of a good working relationship between the major players, in this case, the LGU and the community, represented by the peoples' organization. Programs of similar nature sometimes incur economic losses on the part of the funding institutions simply because there are skepticisms on their part to allow the local government units to have access to information and the nature

of projects to be implemented. Ironically, when projects fail, the LGUs are oftentimes blamed for lack of proper monitoring. In the first place, how can the LGUs monitor a project that is not privy to its records? Incidentally, those projects that have failed involved millions of pesos and the Municipality of Polomolok has all of these experiences.

The genesis of the MTF-RDP in Polomolok is practically a paradigm shift from the perceived "normal", top-down process of project implementation. It started from a stakeholders' forum held at the Waterfront Hotel attended by concerned officials of MTF-RDP, BDA personnel, representative from OPAPP and the concerned LGUs. Few months thereafter, the MTF-RDP and BDA officials made a courtesy call on the Mayor of Polomolok to discuss further the objectives of MTF-RDP and how these are linked to the peace and development efforts. Not only that, MTF-RDP officials through the BDA also made a courtesy call on the members of the Barangay Council, explaining to them the program's goals and objectives. The idea here is to make known in advance the funding scheme so that in the budgetary allocations of the MLGU and BLGU the same could now be integrated in their respective Annual Investment Plans. Further, the BLGU was given the opportunity to ask clarificatory questions to further strengthen the networking efforts. It was observed that, compared to 100% dole-out projects, counterparting was a more effective scheme in as much as the recipient barangay becomes more involved in monitoring the expected output of the sub-project.

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a special sanitary and phytosanitary issue

Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation-Integrated Development Centre (JPIC-IDC) initiated a Cinemobile presentation to the youth of San Lorenzo Church in Bayugan, Agusan del Sur headed by Fr. Cielito Urias.

JPIC-IDC, Inc. Unfolds its Story

Quo vadis, ye Children of Agusan del Sur?



SAN FRANCISCO, Agusan del Sur – The province of Agusan del Sur in Mindanao, Philippines, the largest territory and with the biggest population of the five provinces of Caraga Region, sits atop one of the country's rich deposits of gold, silver, copper, iron, nickel, chromite, and manganese. Then there is its vast rainforests and fertile valleys and plain.

Life is full of ironies.

Notwithstanding these bounties, it is second to the province of Western Samar in the Eastern Visayas Region in the list of the poorest provinces in the Philippines with a 64-percent poverty incidence, based on a 2007 report of the Philippine National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB).

This, in itself is not surprising since Caraga Region has the fourth highest poverty incidence level of families among all the regions in the country for years 1997 to 2000 and the third highest poverty incidence in terms of incidence of families in the island of Mindanao.

The worsening widening gap between rich and poor in the Caraga Region further aggravated poverty woes, spawning an unabated trafficking of women and children majority of whom are from hinterland villages and whose parents mostly farmers have no choice but to participate in the unending cycle of exploitation.

This is more than true in Agusan del Sur, which, from 2004 to 2007 topped the list with recorded 24 human trafficking victims among the provinces of Caraga, Butuan City, 13 victims, Bislig City, 9, Surigao del Sur, 9 and Surigao City, 4 and their numbers are growing, figures presented by the Filipino Initiative Against Trafficking (FIAT) road show campaign forum in Butuan City showed.

The Caraga Regional Inter-Agency Committee against Trafficking in Persons-Violence against Women and Children (IACAT-VAWC) organized the event on April 1, 2008 in Butuan City through the Rule of Law Effectiveness (ROLE), a project of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and The Asia Foundation (TAF).

Why this state of human trafficking?

Figures presented in that forum by the

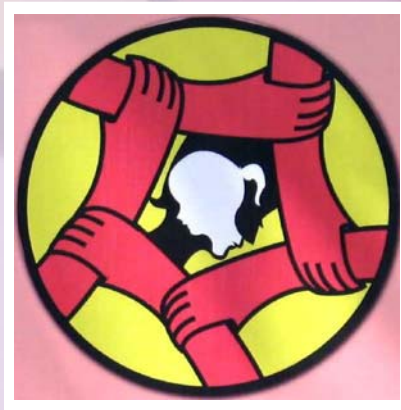
national government claimed 47% of the victims were minor mostly female aging 13 to 17 and less than half aging between 29 and 33. And they are getting younger and younger. More and more is falling prey to the false promises of people offering better life.

JPIC-IDC, Inc.

About a month after the anti-sex trafficking road show campaign in Butuan City, the Cebu-based Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation-Integrated Development Centre (JPIC-IDC) set up a camp in Agusan del Sur.

The centre is a faith-based non-government organization started through the efforts of priests of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) in partnership with Karl Küebel Stiftung (KKS) of Germany.

JPIC-IDC workers work with marginalized partners like dump settlers, informal settlers, streetchildren, prostituted women, fisherfolks, and farmers.



Cinemobile Logo

In Agusan del Sur, the JPIC-IDC staff focuses on raising awareness on sex trafficking through the Cinemobile, a campaign from one place to another that employs holding movie sessions with target audiences, documentary presentations, and other videos that talk about trafficking of minors for commercial sex exploitation.

Cinemobile started in April 2008 and staffed by a project director, Fr. Marcelo E. Cattaneo, SVD, a project coordinator, Analeh C. Patindol, a training officer, Joan Cris H. Gonzales, a bookkeeper, Geraldine Husain, and a technician/driver Arnelito Tecson.

Geared on an approach to prevent, if not eliminate, the trafficking of women and children from Agusan del Sur, Cinemobile immediately established advocacy partnership with the Caraga regional offices of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Department of the Interior and Local Government, the Philippine National Police in all levels, the Provincial and Municipal Social Welfare and Development Offices, the Barangay Council, various radio stations (Kuyaw FM, San Franz Radio, Real Radio, Radio Natin and DXDA), parishes and Inter-churches organization of the targeted Municipalities, and the academe.

The centre organized its information-dissemination drives in the four pilot municipalities of Prosperidad, San Francisco, Bayugan, and Trento, selected because of their heavy population concentration. As entry and exit points to and from the province, the four towns are very vulnerable to human smuggling.

To institutionalize the partnership, JPIC-IDC and the four municipalities have signed a Cooperation Agreement to pursue the drive against sex trafficking.

Bayugan lies along the main highway to the port of Nasipit and the port and airport of Butuan City. Prosperidad, the capital of the province, lies on the same highway to Butuan City. San Francisco is the crossroads to and from Nasipit, Butuan City, Surigao del Sur, and Davao City. Trento is the province's southern exit along the national highway to Davao City.

The campaign

In less than three months, the centre worked feverishly to strengthen its partnerships and linkages. It organized orientations, sessions, forums, in schools, communities, and appeared with Cinemobile in government offices and legislative councils to promote the preventive approach against sex trafficking.

The staff saturated the 17 villages of the four pilot towns with 29 movie sessions, documentary presentations, and other videos. A total of 4,299 parents, local government officials, students, farmers, teachers, employees, and church men and women or 2,430 women and 1,869 men attended the sessions.

The communities unreached by the campaign were accessed through the radio airwaves beamed to and outside the pilot areas. The regular Saturday one-hour radio program hosted by the staff of JPIC-IDC gives out information on the realities of trafficking, the modus operandi of traffickers, local situationer reports and updates on the different initiatives to address the problem. The broadcast blitz includes radio interviews and guestings in public affairs programs of the different AM and FM stations in Agusan del Sur.

The centre likewise participated on November 13, 2008 in Butuan City, A Validation Workshop (Comprehensive Pilot Intervention Project on Gender-Based Violence in CARAGA Region), organized by Miriam College – Women and Gender Institute.

Networking with the Provincial Government of Agusan del Sur, JPIC-IDC has been gladly accepted by Governor Maria Valentina G. Plaza. Because of strong promotion and campaign, Governor Plaza allocated PhP50,000.00 for anti-sex trafficking initiatives in the annual budget for 2009. The Provincial Council of Agusan del Sur has adopted a Provincial Children's Code authored by Vice Governor Santiago Cane Jr. And to cement the province's commitment to stamp out the trafficking of women and children, the province has created a Provincial Inter-

Agency Committee Against Trafficking (PIACAT).

Signs of the Times

Last December, a woman was surprised to see three minors, her neighbor's daughters, crying inside the chartered van she was riding on the way to Butuan City from Bayugan. Asked where they were going and why they were crying, the minors said they missed but were leaving their parents and were to meet with someone in Butuan City who would transport them to Manila.

The children had no escort, but they assured that their recruiter was in touch through text messages. No, they had not informed their poor parents.

Until today, the fate of the three minors is unknown.

Fr. Cielito Urias, parish priest of San Lorenzo Ruiz Church in Bayugan confirmed the story about the three minors. Their parents, farmers, had sought his help. But it was too late, the children were gone.

Fr. Urias admits the problem on human sex trafficking is difficult to solve. All the church could do was to warn the parish about the danger and help prevent a social nightmare from happening. The priest had greatly welcomed that day, last February 7, 2009, Cinemobile's presenta-

tions before the regular meeting of the San Lorenzo church parish leaders. Some 50 participants were present.

During the presentation, JPIC-IDC alerted the participants to the fact that Bayugan is one of the centres of human trafficking in Caraga Region. Giving his share of the campaign, Fr. Urias encouraged the participants to create a group to monitor their area and to be vigilant about possible recruitment activities in their communities and to immediately report suspicious activities.

Bayugan is only one of the major population centres of Agusan del Sur. There are other towns and cities in the whole Caraga region with more. At a time when the young population is overlapping the older groups and with poverty and the resultant deterioration of moral values, more victims are waiting innocently in the wings and more preventive work has to be done.

Expanding Cinemobile outside of the four pilot towns may yet contribute to informing communities on the sex-trafficking threat.

The dent on the armor of sex trafficking may not be as big as expected in the short term initially, but still it is a small victory in the fight against the unscrupulous preying on those who have less in life.

The ball has started rolling. Let it not be stopped.

Bridging the Boundaries...from page 11

On the basis of the first hand information, the BDA catalyst and the BDA Municipal Facilitator invited representatives from the 10 *puroks* (sitios) of Koronadal Proper to attend and participate in the scheduled orientation briefing. Take note that the BDA representatives did not speak of Muslims, Ilonggos and Cebuanos alone. It was made clear that the invitation was addressed to concerned purok-based individuals and not on the basis cultural identity.

The orientation-briefing was done by the BDA Field Facilitators and consultants. Clarifications on the purpose and objectives of the MTF-RDP as a program was made for the guidance of concerned stakeholders. After all the salient features of the program were presented, the *purok* representatives proceeded to an organizational meeting from which the Officials and Chairmen of the different Committees based on their line of expertise including the official name of the proposed Peoples Organization were selected.

During the organizational meeting, the *purok* representatives decided to name the peoples organization as the STRONGLY UNITED KORONADAL PROPER ORGANIZATION (SUKOR).

After its organization, a series of capability building seminars were conducted

by the BDA Consultant and BDA Field Facilitators. The identification of the MTF-RDP sub-project was not a creation of one person alone nor by the officials themselves, but a collegial decision coming from the SUKOR. As agreed, all members went to the different *puroks*, other than their own to conduct interviews on priority projects. SUKOR consolidated all the suggested sub-projects and considering the limited funds, a priority project was made. Finally, SUKOR decided to recommend to MTF-RDP the construction of the COMMUNITY and LIVELIHOOD CENTER.

It is worthy to note that while the identification of the priority sub-project is ongoing, the Office of the Municipal Mayor through the representation made by the BDA Municipal Facilitator issued Executive Order No. 7, series of 2008. The Executive Order identified the composition and functions of the Multi-Sectoral Committee (MSC), which was, primarily to evaluate and recommend the components of the MTF-RDP sub-project.

The MSC consisted of the following: (1) government sector: Mr. Eronio P. Muno, MPDC; Ms. Lailyn A. Ortiz, Municipal Local Government Officer; Hon. Eleazar G. Jovero, *Sangguniang Bayan* Member; and Hon. Rodolfo E. Doctolero, *Sangguniang Bayan* Member; (2) non-gov-

ernment sector: Ustadz Mohamad Taha A. Abdulgapor, MILF Representative; Mr. Manto Catocan, MNLF Representative; Ustadz Arafah Macabangin, Respected Muslim Elder; Ustadz Jed Sadalao, Muslim Religious Leader; Mr. Stemson Pino, Christian Religious Leader; Mrs. Coraisa Padasan, Muslim Women Representative; Ms. Rose Ardiente, Christian Women Representative and; Fulong Fred Malompong, IP Representative.

The feasibility study of the sub-project was prepared by SUKOR through the assistance of the consultants and BDA Facilitators and the engineering design was made jointly by the program-hired Engineer and the Engineers of the Municipal Engineering Office. The design was subject to the validation, suggestion and confirmation of SUKOR. In fact originally, it was supposed to be an open structure, but the members of SUKOR suggested that it should be a covered structure to have that privacy among the users. After the design was made, SUKOR, together with BDA submitted the proposal including the engineering design to the MSC for its review, evaluation and recommendation to the MTF-RDP.

(Continuation will be published on the next issue)



Old and new problems: The environmental situation of the Philippines

by Juan Echanove

The Philippines has rich and diverse natural resources. However, overall, the environment outlook is bleak. In the last years, the environmental conditions of the country have continued to worsen, and the implementation of environmental policies offers a mix result.

Certain positive trends can be observed in fields such as illegal logging control; watersheds' management; promotion of renewable energy sources (the much expected Renewable Energy Bill was finally approved in 2008); environmental crimes' persecution ('green' courts established in 2007); or inter-agency co-ordination (the 'convergence' process among DENR, DA and DAR is now pushing through), but the underlying causes of the current depletion of the natural resources remain in place, such as the high population pressure; rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation; conflicts of interest between long term environmental concerns and short term profit considerations; absence of political will and poor environmental governance.

Together with these 'old' issues, new

factors have arisen in recent times, contributing to accelerate the degradation of the Philippine ecosystems, particularly its forests, such as (1) the reboot of the mining industry, (2) the inadequate implementation of the Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) policies, (3) the diminution of the financial resources for conservation and (4) the need to confront the new challenge of global warming.

(1) In recent times the mining industry in the Philippines has been experiencing a dramatic rebound. Although the Philippine Mining Act includes provisions for the protection of the environment, these provisions are generally not enforced. Many mining concessions cover areas of high environmental importance claimed by and/or already titled to indigenous communities, whose endorsement to the mining investment is reputedly obtained through unfair consultation processes. The NCIP and the DENR lack means to follow-up the environmental and social standards of ongoing mining activities.

(2) CBFM is the leading strategy for managing the country's forests. In theory,

CBFM gives extensive rights and responsibilities to local people in managing forests. Over the last years unstable policy, overly bureaucratic procedures and weak institutional support system, have been deterring CBFM effective implementation. Progress on the ground remains elusive.

(3) Public resources for conservation are still very low. The reduction of the ODA to the environmental sector (DENR's foreign assisted projects has declined by 35% from 2001 to 2007) and aggravates the situation. To worsen this scenario, certain environmental responsibilities have been devolved to the LGUs, but without transferring financial sources to implement them.

(4) In the Philippines, as elsewhere, the issue of climate change is gaining momentum in the political arena. This impetus is driven by two main factors: the country's high exposure to natural calamities and the lofty cost of petrol (the main power source in the country) in recent times and the subsequent need to enhance energy efficiency and renewable sources. Despite the high exposure of the Philippines to global warming, the country still lacks a proper integration of climate change adaptation into development policies. Certain initiatives have been conducted at the local level, but there is an urgent need to scale-up those initiatives and to provide capacity building in order to streamline adaptation.

Asia-Europe Cooperation Strengthened Towards Sustainable Development

The European Commission (EC) Delegation to the Philippines has recently hosted the last of the 5-ASEAN city lecture tour of Ms. Marta Szigeti Bonifert on "Transition to Sustainability through Cooperation" in its office in Makati. This lecture tour series is a mechanism by which the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) is strengthening linkages and cooperation between Asia and Europe. It involves Asian experts lecturing in Europe and vice-versa on alternating basis. Ms. Bonifert's lecture, the second under the environment field, was organized in the Philippines by Earth Council Asia-Pacific in cooperation with the EC Delegation, Earth Institute Asia, Inc., and Brain Trust Inc. through its Environmental Forum part of a series in partnership with Asia-Europe, (BTI), and The speaker during the said event was Ms. Bonifert, the Executive Director of the Regional Environment Center (REC) of Central and Eastern Europe based in Hungary, talked about the impacts and imperatives of climate change, and provided information on key initiatives of REC that

REC examples of these are the **Green Pack**, a multi-media environmental education curriculum kit that focuses on particular aspects of environmental protection and sustainable de-

velopment; **Courses for Sustainable Development**, an educational programme for key government officials that provides different approaches to sustainable development; **NGO Support** in terms of financial resources, access to information and capacity-building assistance; **Climate Change initiatives**, which supports efforts to comply with the commitments and respond to the opportunities created by the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol; and **Zero Emission Conference Center**, REC's office building, which is the biggest solar power plant in Hungary that could produce 30 kW electricity.

The lively discussion focused on key environmental issues led by mining, climate change, illegal logging and deforestation and waste management.

Ms. Camilla Hagstrom, Deputy Head for the Operation Section, welcomed the participants who were composed of representatives of NGOs, media, academe, business, diplomatic community and international institutions (e.g., ASEAN Biodiversity Center) and a representative from Czech Embassy and she emphasized the importance and commitment the EC Delegation puts on poverty alleviation and environmental protection and integrity as demonstrated in the

level of support it has been providing to the Philippines in these area. Ms. Elisea Gozon, the Chairperson of the Earth Council, gave the keynote address. Accompanying Ms. Bonifert was Ms. Susanne Wallenoefer, Project Executive for Intellectual Exchange of the Asia-Europe Foundation, who introduced ASEF and the Lecture Tour series. Dr. Corazon Claudio, President of the EARTH Asia Inc., invited the participants to EARTH's various activities especially the radio program and the launching of the climate change vulnerability map.

Ms. Ella Antonio, President of Earth Council Asia Pacific, Inc and Brain Trust Inc., served as the lead organizer and facilitator of the lecture.



Rizal na, Europa pa!

Photo credit : Knights of Rizal in the Philippines

This year's Europe Month celebrations in May have a focus particularly close to the Filipino heart – Jose Rizal and his connections with Europe. The topic is especially relevant as this is the European Year for Creativity and Innovation. And why not? Dr. Jose Rizal, the Philippine's national hero has strong links with the EU and is also regarded as one of the world's greatest humanists and artists, a classic icon for creativity and innovation.

On 3 May 1882, he travelled to Spain for his *Licentiatat in Medicine* from Universidad Central de Madrid. He also studied at the University of Paris and at the University of Heidelberg. In Berlin, he was inducted as a member of the Berlin Ethnological Society and the Berlin Anthropological Society.

In 1890, Rizal went to Brussels from Paris to prepare for the publication of his annotations of Antonio de Morga's *"Sucesos de la Islas Filipinas"*.

Overall, Rizal is documented to have travelled extensively in other European countries such as Austria, Italy, Czech Republic, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

Because of Jose Rizal's strong affiliations with Europe, the Europe Month celebrations will feature two Rizal-related and youth-oriented highlights, the EU Whiz and the essay contest, both with *"Jose Rizal and Europa"* as their theme.

Prizes of these two major contests (EU Whiz and Essay Contest) for the grand winners are trips to selected European Union countries courtesy of KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, Air France and the Knights of Rizal. The European Community led by the EU Presidency, the Embassy of the Czech Republic and the Delegation of the European Commission to the Philippines are organising the quizzes in coordination with the SM Mall of Asia and with support of Manila Bulletin. The awarding ceremony and the grand finals will be held on 18 June in the SM Mall of Asia.

The Europe Month festivities opened with the *"Bersong EuroPinoy"* – *"European Poetry Recital"* on 25 April in Instituto Cervantes de Manila. Known Filipino writers including Edgar Maranan, Gémino H. Abad, Joel Toledo, Marjorie Evasco, Mookie Katigbak and Ricky Ungria have been invited to read literary pieces together with European diplomats led by no less than Czech Ambassador who is a poet himself, His Excellency Jaroslav Ludva.

A European Children's festival dubbed *"Lakbayin Natin ang EU"* (Journey to EU) enabled Filipino children to experience a weeklong programme of children's films, literature, storytelling, arts and crafts and lots of merrymaking and fun from 6 to 9 in May in Museo Pambata, Roxas Boulevard, Manila.

On 7 May, the awarding ceremony for Europe Ko To's assemblage contest was held in Ayala Museum in Makati City. The Ayala Museum is a partner of the Delegation of the European Commission to the Philippines, the Philippine High School for the Arts and the Los Banos National High School with the EU cultural group in Europe Ko To's awarding ceremony and in the

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OTHER ACTIVITIES:

28 April to 20 June

"Portraits de Chaussures, histoires de pieds"
"Portraits of shoes, stories of feet"
by French Curator Yves Sabourin
Yu Chengco Museum, Makati City

This exhibit offers the best possible look at French historical knowledge about shoes, shoemakers and boot makers as well as a glance at the vision of contemporary artists and creators on the same subject. The "historical" shoes on exhibit are accompanied by drawings, photographs, videos. The exhibition associates works of Filipino and German artists, through the cooperation of the Goethe-Institut in Manila.

2, 9, 16, 23 and 30 May
All Saturdays at 6pm
Cine in Instituto Cervantes
Free Admission

Vampires and Demons is a mini-retrospective of Spanish horror films from 1929 to 2005 which examines this peculiar genre, beginning with the silent film *El sexto sentido*.

4 May
Training Workshop on Paper Restoration and Conservation Techniques
The National Library, T. M. Kalaw, Manila

In continuation of Goethe-Institut Manila's co-operation with The National Library, it organises a training workshop on paper restoration techniques for archivists of public Philippine libraries.

5 May
Romanian Wine Fest
Spicy Fingers Bar and Restaurant
Greenbelt 2, Ayala Center, Makati City
(By Invitation only)

The Embassy of Romania offers an exclusive opportunity to taste and experience the exquisite flavours of the noble Romanian wines.

6, 13, 20, 27 May
All Wednesday at 8.30pm
Free Admission
Ciné-club at Alliance Française

Screenings of the best French films are being held all Wednesdays in Alliance Française.

On 6 May, Filipino film *"Baler"* by director Mark Meily

will be shown in Alliance Française to be followed by a Q and A with the Director.

8 and 9 May
El Columpio Asesino at Boracay Ecovillage Convention Center

The most exceptional, personal and unclassified bands of the Spanish independent pop-rock, "El Columpio Asesino" performs in Boracay Ecovillage Convention Center at 8pm. These performances are presented by the Instituto Cervantes in Manila.

11 May
ECCP Annual Golf Challenge
Sta. Elena Golf Club

The European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines will hold its Annual Golf Challenge with a shotgun start at 8:00AM and a System 36 format. Exciting prizes from event sponsors await all participants. Further information: Anna Medina or Dawn Cabigon at 845-1324/759-6680 or email golf@eccp.com.

12 May
Akragas Folk Dance Group
Traders Hotel - Manila

The Embassy of Italy brings you into the charming world of Sicilian traditional music, dance and food. The "Akragas Folk Dance Group" was founded to research, spread and stage the folkloristic, historic and cultural traditions of the Sicilian people. The costumes, musical instruments, the songs, the dances and the staging instead embrace a greater historical period which includes: the Greek, Roman, Turkish, Arabic, Spanish and Norman dominations of the Island, all of which have moulded Sicily throughout the centuries.

14-26 May
La tentazione dei colori
Exhibit of Italian artist Luigi Giacobbe
ArtistSpace, 2nd Floor, Glass Wing, Ayala Museum

Italian artist Luigi Giacobbe, now based in Manila, after living in France, Russia, Japan and South Korea, presents 22 mixed media paintings to better express the diversity of his long artistic journey whose common thread is the power of color enhanced by structures and materials.

16-17 May
European Food & Wine Festival at Rockwell Tent
Makati City

Enjoy British pies, German sausages, Spanish tapas, French pastries, fine wine selection and a lot more without actually flying to Europe. Visit the European Food and Wine Festival at the Rockwell Tent for an international gastronomic experience that will surely give you a taste of Europe's best offerings. Minimal entrance free applies. This event is organized by the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines together with the British Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, German-Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Camara Oficial Espanola de Comercio and Le Club French Chamber of Commerce & Industry, in cooperation with Rockwell Land, The Philippine Star, BusinessWorld, HighLife and The Radio Partners Inc. For more information: Zai Tan-Perez of European Chamber at 8451324 or 7596680.

30 May
German Films in Fully Booked
U-View, Basement, Fully-Booked, Bonifacio High Street, Taguig City
Free Admission

<http://www.goethe.de/ins/ph/map/de4138360v.htm>

Every last Saturday of the month, 5pm
Status Yo! (2004), 123 minutes
Directed by Till Haastreiter
Cast: Sera Finale, Yan Ee, Jamie, Pepi, Saession, Yesim, DJ Quest, Codeak, Vern, Storm, 5 Amoks

A fast-paced film that gives viewers a look at the Berlin hip-hop scene. This part-documentary, part-film follows a number of people over the course of a day in Berlin. Yaneq is trying to organize one of Berlin's biggest parties in just 24 hours. Tarek dreams of turning Berlin into an enormous graffiti sculpture, while Session is trying to flee from debt-collectors and protect his girlfriend. The fantastic break dancers the 5 Amoks also make an appearance, as well as many others. In one night and the following day, the various strands of this story blend into a pulsating film that celebrates all things associated with the youth: young love, youth problems, their dreams, and, of course, their music.

April to June 2009
Embroidered Multiples at the Ayala Museum

Exhibits of rare garments that show the evolution of Philippine dress and the convergence of cultures evident in Philippine colonial society. A unique cultural partnership celebrating the extremely rare Bregard Collection of Philippine costumes at the Museum Volkenkunde (National Museum of Ethnology), The Netherlands.

CATCHWISE

Visayas-based Consortium of NGOs Against Trafficking wins the first Communications Award for Asia in the European Commission's special ceremony in Brussels

A Visayas-based consortium of civil society and non-government organisations, barangay-level local government units in seven provinces in Visayas and Mindanao has won a "Communications Award" for its work against trafficking of women and children.

The consortium is called CATCHWISE and implemented the five-year project entitled, Capacity Building Program for Civil Society Organisations and Local Government Units to Prevent Child and Woman Trafficking for Commercial Sexual Exploitation in the Visayas and Mindanao Regions of the Philippines.

CATCHWISE is composed of Karl Kubel Stiftung, Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, Belen sa Cebu, Belen Extension, Children's Legal Bureau, End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes, Philippines, Inc., and Holy Spirit School Center for Women Integrating in New Growth and Services. The European Commission provided • 523,508.25 or Php 35.07 million for the consortium project.

The first EuropeAid Communication Award was presented in a simple ceremony held in the European Commission headquarters in Brussels to Ms. Maria Luisa Andrade, Asia desk officer of EuropeAid. The Award given was to encourage better communication of the results of EC-supported actions as well as highlight the successes of the projects based among others on originality, high replication potential and impact.

Mr. Nicholas Taylor, Head of Operations of the Delegation of the European Commission to the Philippines, commends the efforts and successes

of CATCHWISE in addressing trafficking of human beings in the Visayas and Mindanao regions. He hoped that partnerships between civil society organisations and local government agencies are further inspired to continue actions promoting and protecting the human rights of children, women and men, most especially the poor and vulnerable sectors.

The CATCHWISE campaign was initiated by civil society organisations and local government units in the Visayas and Mindanao regions to effectively plan, implement, monitor and evaluate strategic interventions to significantly reduce child and woman trafficking for sexual exploitation. This campaign contributed to the localisation of the Anti-Trafficking Law (RA 9208) in 31 of 48 communities. Through this project, resources from the local gender and development (GAD) budget were able to supplement local initiatives at the barangay or city or provincial levels even after the EC funding has ended.

In addition, local anti-trafficking committees have been created, 20 legal/prosecution cases using RA 9208/anti-trafficking law and related cases have been filed. More than 500 women and children victims of trafficking were rescued and provided legal, medical, psychological and support services.



Rizal na, Europa...from page 15

exhibition of the award-winning works of students from Los Banos, Laguna. The theme of this contest is the EU's motto "Unity in Diversity". The exhibition runs until 14 May 2009.

Far Eastern University in Manila joined Europe Month 2009's celebrations for the first time by spearheading a choral contest in collaboration with the EU cultural group. The choral performances and competition was held on 14 May in FEU, Manila.

A display of UNESCO Czech Monuments in the Czech Republic opened on 14 May with a seminar on heritage conservation by Architect Augusto Villalon.

The Europe Month festivities are presented by the European Union's representatives in Manila, including the Embassies of the EU Member States (the Embassies of Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, Spain, United Kingdom) the European cultural institutes (Alliance Francaise, British Council, Goethe Institut, and Instituto Cervantes) and the Delegation of the European Commission to the Philippines. Partners for joint EU activities include: KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, Air France, Knights of Rizal, SM Mall of Asia, the Manila Bulletin, Ayala Museum and Museo Pambata.

European Year of Creativity and Innovation 2009

The modern world puts emphasis on better use of knowledge and rapid innovation. There is a need for skills and competences that enable people to embrace change as an opportunity and to be open to new ideas in a culturally diverse, knowledge-based society. Europe needs to boost its capacity for creativity and innovation to respond effectively to the challenges and opportunities of globalisation.

With the slogan "Imagine. Create. Innovate", the European Year of Creativity and Innovation aims to raise awareness of the importance of creativity and innovation as key competences for personal, social and economic development. The EU will offer a framework for raising awareness of the issues concerned and promoting a policy debate on how to increase Europe's creative and innovative potential.