



EUROPEAN UNION
Delegation to the Philippines

Joint EU-DENR School Visit – June 24, 2014

Message of H.E European Union Ambassador Mr. Guy Ledoux

Secretary Paje, Department of Environment and Natural Resources,

Ms Luz Almeda, DepEd Regional Director,

Mr Rodolfo Modelo, Principal of the Commonwealth Elementary School,

Dear members of the press, Dear participants,

I am extremely happy to be with you this morning in one the leading Philippine elementary schools to raise awareness on the dangers of exposure to toxic chemicals on children.

Allow me to start with a few simple facts on lead contamination. 120 million people across the world are still overexposed to lead. The majority of them are in the developing world and children are the most severely affected. (As you have heard from previous speakers), lead exposure in children affects brain development leading to lower IQ, mental retardation and kidney damage. These effects have a negative impact on school performance and are non-reversible. 600,000 new cases of children with intellectual disabilities due to lead exposure occur every year according to the World Health Organization.

The danger of lead exposure in the Philippines are real. A study funded by the European Union in 2013 found worryingly high lead

concentrations in more than 60% of paint samples collected in the country. Average concentrations measured by our contractor - a certified laboratory based in Italy - reached levels up to 200 times the maximum level authorised in many countries. Such paints are widely available to the public. They affect us and they affect the most vulnerable of us, namely children, pregnant women and workers.

The situation is well-known to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and I would like to congratulate Secretary Paje for his rapid and effective intervention to address the issue. The recent Chemical Control Order signed by DENR to limit the use of lead in consumers' products is a breakthrough. I was especially encouraged by the broad consensus reached by stakeholders advocating for a lead free Philippines. The Philippine Congress contributed to raising awareness on the issue (I would like to thank Congressman Anthony del Rosario for his support). Local civil society groups, led by the EcoWaste Coalition, were also instrumental in the process. Finally, industry representatives having taken part in the constructive dialogue and having voluntarily phased out the use of lead should also be commended.

Lead is easy to replace. Alternative, less harmful chemicals exist. Many leading brands produced in the Philippines have already adopted lead (and mercury) free formula with no impact on production costs. Lead-free paints available on the market are not more expensive.

The European Union too has taken bold steps in order to phase out the use of lead in paint in its common market. In 1989, members of the EU collectively banned the use of lead in paint after the adoption of a Directive which states that lead compounds "*May not be used as substances and constituents of preparations intended for use as paints*".

This regulation was completed by other directives banning the use of lead compounds in key consumption products, notably toys and cosmetics. To a very large extent, the newly passed Philippine regulation on lead control echoes the European legislation.

The EU extended a PHP 80 Million grant through the *Asian Lead Paint Elimination Project* to seven Asian countries willing to consider lead elimination strategies. Results so far have been encouraging although with various levels of achievements. Countries such as Sri Lanka have passed legislation on the use of lead in paint while India and Thailand for example are still consulting with stakeholders. To my knowledge, the Philippines has proven to be a leader by passing the most comprehensive and ambitious regulation in the region to control the use of lead.

The *Asian Lead Paint Elimination* project forms part of the SWITCH Programme – an EU-funded programme implemented in 16 countries across Asia. Seventy projects are on-going with the objective to promote clean production practices. Four SWITCH grant projects with total EU funding of PHP 400 Million are implemented in the Philippines.

Again, I hope today's visit will serve to raise awareness on the invisible threat of chemical exposure and emulate other schools willing to protect our children. The Philippines' ongoing switch to non-lead paint production is key to protecting the health of children and other vulnerable populations. A school environment that is safe from lead, mercury and other harmful chemicals will have a positive impact on children's potential to grow and succeed in life. Simply put, it will have a positive impact on the development of the Nation. Thank you!