

PH firms join hands to prepare for disaster



Following the launch in April of the Disaster Operations Center (DOC) by the Philippine Disaster Recovery Foundation (PDRF) and the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA), 45 private companies have pledged to pool their expertise in facilitating metro-wide preparedness and recovery efforts for disasters such as earthquakes, typhoons, conflict and pandemics.

It is hoped that this initial group of 45 will grow and contribute to developing a culture of preparedness among Filipinos.

These companies, some of the largest from various business sectors, were identified as those that could provide the continuity of critical economic lifelines such as water, electricity and telecommunications in the event of a calamity.

As part of the next phase of the launch, representatives and technical staff from the companies, called DRR focal points or business continuation officers who will have direct contact with the DOC and be empowered to make decisions, attended a second workshop on July 10, called the “Building Disaster Resiliency Forum”.

The forum was designed to get them together and participate in an open discussion on how they can collectively organize for recovery.

What we are doing in the DOC has never been done before, said PDRF president Rene S. Meily, Nowhere in the world has a group of companies initiated such a venture for disaster management.

Meily, along with Marilou Erni, PDRF executive director; Francis N. Tolentino, MMDA chair; Manuel V. Pangilinan, PDRF co-chair and head of the PLDT/Smart and Metro Pacific group,

and Undersecretary Corazon T. Jimenez, general manager of MMDA, on the same day signed a memorandum of agreement to work together in mitigating the impact of, preparing for and responding to disasters.

Scenarios, such as the Kathmandu, Nepal earthquake, were presented during the forum, and the different companies were tasked to find priority areas, bring in each particular proficiency, and interweave their recovery plans into an overall continuity plan.

Companies from vital sectors such as water, power, communication and logistics were organized into clusters, based on their industry.

The ambition is to build a roadmap and have a common goal by working together, said Erni, What each company can bring to the table will help streamline the recovery and get critical lifelines back up and running.

The success of the DOC lies within our participation in events like [the forum], where we will define roles and responsibilities of our strategic cluster approach, Erni added.

Since July is also National Disaster Consciousness Month, the MMDA organized a Metro Manila Shake Drill on July 30.

Most of the National Capital Region (NCR) was divided into four quadrants. Each was given a particular scenario, such as fire, destruction of buildings, and the local communities, local government units and private firms will be asked to respond to the drill.

MMDA's Metro Oplan Yakal called in groups from the religious, business, BPOs, hospitals, barangays and communities, malls and commercial establishments, education, and funeral services to participate in the four-quadrant disaster drill and come up with their own disaster preparedness plan, said MMDA's Jimenez.

We need to have everyone on the same page. The nation's resiliency will greatly depend on it, said Meily.