

PRESS RELEASE

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Award-winning mayor organizes first-ever Asian city-to-city learning event with Sri Lankan mayors

San Francisco (Philippines), 26 August 2011 – Vice-Mayor Al Arquillano from San Francisco, a small town in the Cebu municipality, has been showing off. He has been demonstrating the ingenious ‘Purok system’ which won worldwide attention and the 2011 United Nations Sasakawa Award for Disaster Risk Reduction. Four mayors from the Sri Lankan cities of Balangoda, Mannar, Tangalle and Puttalam recently participated in a three-day practical study visit to learn from the town’s experience.

Central to the Making Cities Resilient: “My city is getting ready!” World Disaster Reduction Campaign is a partnering initiative of local government alliances for disaster risk reduction with peer learning opportunities. San Francisco is taking the lead by hosting the first-ever peer learning event in Asia, including the study visit by the Sri Lankan. The aim of the campaign is to encourage mayors, local governments and national authorities to take action towards making cities resilient as part of sustainable urbanization.

“The Purok system gives us a practical example on how to empower local communities to reduce disaster risk and adapt to climate change,” shared Balangoda Mayor Weerasinghe.

The Purok system is a unique methodology of self-organization at the sub-village level devised to help communities better adapt to climate change. This increases their resilience to disasters and contributes to better community development. A Purok ‘Capital Build Up’ programme has people depositing an amount agreed on by residents as initial capital for emergency purposes. This has increased fluid assets of the Puroks to use as a post-disaster assistance fund.

With limited access to the Internet, cellphones and radios, the Purok system is used to disseminate information and risk assessments, with Purok coordinators acting as couriers of information to the residents. To strengthen the city's human resources capacity and to complement the effort of everyday citizens, teachers are sent to seminars and trained on solid waste management and disaster risk reduction.

“Our experience in San Francisco must be shared to vulnerable communities here and abroad if we wish to convey that reducing disaster risk makes good development sense,” said San Francisco’s Vice Mayor Al Arquillano who also received for the third time the eGWEN Award (Expanded Greening, Wholesome Environment that Nurtures Award) given annually by the provincial government of Cebu.

"Unless we act now, we will see more and more disasters due to unplanned urbanization and environmental degradation. And weather-related disasters are sure to rise in the future, due to factors that include climate change." said Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction.
