



**FORUM TACKLES PREPAREDNESS FOR PWDs and SENIORS DURING CALAMITIES.**

People with disabilities (PWDs) and senior citizens are more likely to be adversely affected during calamities as they account for more than double the mortality rates during emergencies.

This was bared recently by Carmen Zubiaga, Executive Director for the National Council for Disability Affairs (NCDA) during the first SM Cares Earthquake Resiliency Conference for PWDs and Senior Citizens at the SMX Convention Center at the Mall of Asia.

She said that because of their condition, PWDs and senior citizens are put at an extreme disadvantage during times of emergencies which is the reason why the death rate during times of calamities are more than double because of these specific sectors.

Bien Mateo, Vice President for Operations and Program Director of the Disability Affairs of SM Cares, the corporate social responsibility arm of SM Prime Holdings, said this is the reason why they decided to organize this first ever conference which is aimed to make PWDs and senior citizens better prepared for earthquakes and other emergencies.

Zubiaga said while a lot have been done for PWDs and senior citizens, their vulnerability during earthquakes and other emergencies has yet to be addressed. “We all need to be prepared for any emergency but there are lot to be done for the PWDs and senior citizens with respect to making them resilient during calamities. Accessibility is still a major concern for us in this sector and it is where we need to focus,” she said.

She noted that they are now in the process of coming up with the manual on disaster risk reduction for PWDs, senior citizens and children to make planning and operations more attuned to their specific needs. There is also a move to provide representation of PWDs in all local government councils to help officials address their needs.

Johnny Yu, OIC of the MMDA Manila Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council, for his part said during the conference, that they are now putting in place a program that will give PWDs and senior citizens their own evacuation centers during calamities. “We recognize the fact that our evacuation centers now do not meet the specific needs of our PWDs and senior citizens that is why there is plan among Metro Manila mayors to allot evacuation centers for the use exclusively of PWDs and senior citizens,” Yu told the forum.



## PRESS RELEASE

Philippine Institute for Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) Director Dr. Renato Solidum Jr., who also attended the forum, gave several pointers to make everyone, not just PWDs and senior citizens, better prepared for earthquakes and the emergencies that go with it.

He said everyone must identify the hazards that may arise specific to their place of residence and workplace because not all areas in the country face the same risks. He added their locations must be checked if they are located along the fault lines. Structures like houses and buildings must also be examined to determine if they comply with the building code and that an emergency plan must be put in place in case of any disaster.

“We are blessed with hazards and we cannot do anything about it. What we can do is prepare and to prepare we must make use of our imagination. He have to learn how to imagine what our homes, workplaces and environment will look like after an earthquake or any calamity so that we will know what to prepare and how to prepare,” he said.

For PWDs and senior citizens, Solidum said it is important that they are also taught the emergency plan and actually go through it with the person in charge to assist them. “We have drills in school and our offices. We should also have drills in our homes especially for our family members who have special needs,” Solidum said.

Mateo said the conference is part of SM’s continuing advocacy to support communities, especially the causes of PWDs and senior citizens. This is only the start of a series of such conferences to empower our PWDs and senior citizens.

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