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Lapus Assumes SEAMEO Presidency

The Philippines takes the lead in meeting the challenges of the 21st century in areas of education, science and culture as Education Secretary Jesli Lapus is installed president of the South East Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO).

Outgoing SEAMEO president Chinnaworn Boonyakiat of Thailand will turn over the presidency to Lapus during the 45th South East Asian Ministers of Education Council (SEAMEC) Conference and 5th ASEAN Ministers of Education (ASEM) Meeting to be held at the Shangri-la Hotel in Mactan, Cebu on January 27-29.

The meetings will be attended by the Ministers of Education of 11 SEAMEO-member countries namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam.

Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin bin Yassin and Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister Prof. Dr. Nguyen Thien Nhan served as Education Ministers of their country.

As president, Lapus is set to steer SEAMEO into a more dynamic organization that gives special focus on two main thrusts: early childhood care for learners and the use of technology in education.

"Our assumption of the helm of SEAMEO on its 45th year is critical as it is the crossroad between the 20th and 21st century with a myriad of exciting challenge," Lapus said.

Established in 1965 SEAMEO predates the ASEAN. It is a chartered international organization which has been successfully promoting cooperation in education, science and culture in the South East Asian region.

The SEAMEO has 19 specialist regional centers spread in the different ASEAN countries. These centers serve the member-states by undertaking valuable training and research programs in various fields of education, science and culture.

The Philippines hosts thereof these centers: namely the SEAMEO- Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology (Innotech), SEAMEO Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture in Los Baños (SEARCA) and SEAMEO Regional Center for General and Tropical Medicine (TROPMED) in UP Manila.

"The success of the newly established China - ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) which forms an economic block of 1.9 billion people demands

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concerted adjustments and improvements in the education standards in the ASEAN Region. Our human resource is key,” Lapus added.

China ASEAN trade is targeted to hit \$200 billion by 2010, making it the third largest free trade zone in trade volume after the European Union and NAFTA.

SEAMEO has built a strong infrastructure of extensive physical and equipment resources. Almost every center has its own campus, training, research and information dissemination, dormitory facilities to enable it to carry out its functions successfully.

Lapus added that the Philippine presidency of SEAMEO is a vote of confidence on the country’s competence and initiative in education.

The SEAMEO’s areas of priority are agriculture and natural resources; culture and tradition; information and communications technology; language; poverty alleviation; preventive health education and quality and equity in education.

Related to this, Lapus in 2007 was elected into the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Executive Board in Paris, France. He served as Vice President of the 34th UNESCO General Conference which gave the country a chance to press forward issues facing Philippine public education to the international agenda.

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