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Lapus to UNESCO: Prioritize investments in education

[Paris, France] Department of Education Secretary Jesli Lapus and Executive Board Member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said in his major speech at the recent plenary session here that the global crisis cannot be an excuse to cut spending in education.

“Focused national efforts by education ministers, matched with vigor by international organizations like UNESCO, now more than ever will ensure better protection for the vulnerable. We recall that simply maintaining present priority goals already translates, in reality, to slippage and backsliding,” said Lapus.

The Philippines successfully implemented its internationally acknowledged fiscal reforms in 2006. For the past three years, national budgetary allocation for basic, higher and technical education increased by over 50%. Sec. Lapus made it clear that the investments were strategically spent on basic school inputs as well as educational support programs leading to marked improvements in key education indicators - participation rates increased, drop-out rates significantly reduced, and the national student achievement tests scores improved by 18%.

Resource gaps are being addressed by innovative tapping of private sector support for public education. The Adopt-A-School Program, starting with only 400 million pesos of corporate social responsibility funds in 2005, now has six billion pesos of contribution.

The result is unprecedented numbers in additional principal and teacher items and in new classrooms to boost school-based management efforts. DepEd figures show that the expanded pre-school program is on track to serve two million five year old children by the 2010-2011 school year.

The re-vitalized Alternative Learning System empowers DepEd bureaus to cater to more learners from the agricultural areas, out-of-school youth, adults and indigenous groups with the deployment of mobile teachers at an all-time high.

It may be noted that the Department of Education was recently ranked number one in public approval rating and number one least corrupt agency in a 2009 Pulse Asia Ulat ng Bayan national survey. Secretary Lapus was also voted best performing cabinet secretary in the same poll.

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