

Poor regions vital in attaining UN goals

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BY BERNICE CAMILLE V. BAUZON REPORTER President Benigno Aquino 3rd welcomes United Nations representatives to Malacanang on Wednesday who were led by Resident Coordinator Dr. Jacqueline Badcock seen in this photo shaking hands with the President. MALACANANG PHOTO An official of the United Nations (un) said that if the Philippines wants to achieve the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by the UN, the Aquino administration needs to focus on helping the country's poor regions, particularly the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in southern Mindanao.

"There are a lot of things happening, but there are also a lot of things not happening. In terms of MDGs . . . in particular ARMM, they are not achieving it. If you can pull up those [regions] that are not achieving it, then the country can still [reach] the goals," Jacqueline Badcock, resident coordinator of the United Nations Information Center, Manila, said during an exclusive roundtable with The Manila Times on Tuesday.

She added that Mindanao, where armed conflict has been ongoing for many years, is a region that "the UN wants to focus on more."

The eight MDGs—eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality rate, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS (human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome), malaria and other diseases, ensure environment sustainability and develop a global partnership for development—were laid out by 192 member-states of the United

Nations and some 23 international organizations in September 2000.

The goals were set to be achieved by 2015.

Badcock's view reflects a statement made by former Health Secretary Dr. Jaime Galvez-Tan who believed that the five poorest regions in the country —ARMM, Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan), Eastern Visayas, Bicol and Zamboanga Peninsula—are pulling the rest of the nation down when it comes to achieving the eight millennium goals.

The former Health secretary said that it is more likely that these regions will not be able to achieve the MDGs.

But he added that if the five regions achieve the MDGs at the local level, the country as a whole can attain the same goals in five years.

The Health secretary of the Ramos administration said that there is still hope to achieve the eight MDGs if the Aquino administration has the "political will."

No mention of MDGs

While President Benigno Aquino 3rd did not mention the MDGs in his first State of the Nation Address (Sona) on Monday, Badcock said that he mentioned how the goals could be achieved.

"He [President Aquino] didn't mention the word. I didn't expect him to mention the word, but it was in the context of his speech. The crop of what he is saying speaks to the [completion of] MDGs," she told The Times.

Together with other key UN officials in the country, Badcock met with the President also on Wednesday to discuss the MDGs.

On Tuesday, she said that they will be inviting Mr. Aquino to attend the UN summit on the millennium goals in New York City in September, which will give him a chance to reiterate his stand on the attainment of the MDGs by 2015.

"[We need to] reach out more to people to let them know what we are doing and learn what other people are doing. One thing the UN can do is bring global lessons, what you can take to other countries and what you can learn from other countries," Badcock said.