

**KEYNOTE SPEECH FOR SECRETARY FRANCISCO T. DUQUE III, MD, MSc. For the 3RD
NATIONAL HEALTH EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CONVENTION**

DECEMBER 5, 2005 (9AM)

Theme: Global Threats, Local Actions

Greetings (VIPs)

Good morning to everyone. It is a great honor for me to join our nation's experts and health professionals...and also our friends from the international community in a mutual venture to find solutions for today's challenges in health emergency management. Allow me to acknowledge the support of our partners from the World Health Organization in strengthening the capacity of the DOH for emergency preparedness and response.

In any situation, whether in resolving issues in our daily lives...or in facing major conflicts with potentially massive consequences, we are always given 2 choices: we can either choose to REACT or RESPOND. 'React' pertains to an instant and rapid mechanism...something that is done knee-jerk without much careful thought or planning. During an emergency, this usually springs from a lack of preparedness and an abundance of fear among victims. Hence, we see scattered actions unfortunately leading to fatal outcomes.

Today's enormous challenges in health emergency management impose upon us the necessity to go beyond this kind of impulsive action. In the past 4 years, the world has gone through quite a whirlwind of disasters killing people in an unprecedented feat never before witnessed in our own time.

Through raw, unedited media coverage, our generation has been a unique witness to the great tsunami devastation in Asia, which is now considered one of the worst disasters in history. We have also seen the increasingly violent extremes of climate leading to the historic season of gigantic floods and hurricanes across the globe. In real-time, we've seen thousands of homes and lives swept... whole cities destroyed...and anarchy created even in the most civilized settings. We have also learned that even the most advanced emergency health systems can easily collapse in the face of extraordinary disasters such as what happened with Hurricane Katrina in the US.

. Aside from the emergence of these mega-disasters, public health systems are also facing the challenge of the rising threat of global terrorism. While we have harnessed technology before to advance human gains, a new kind of evil lies hidden and real. Who can forget the deep tragedy that struck the World Trade Center in New York City back in 2001? That day transformed the world in which we live today. That day redefined and stretched the meaning of evil infinitely.

Terrorists have now the means and objective of using modern technologies as weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against the rest of the free world. Biologic, Chemical, and Radionuclear (BCRN) agents can all be used to devastate economies, threaten national security, and cause massive deaths and human suffering.

Indeed, we now live in a world that has been significantly altered...one that is less innocent and increasingly more like a dangerous battlefield. We also face a great period of change in the field of emergency management.

RESPOND is an acronym for the 7 elements that will allow us to have a more comprehensive strategy in facing today's disasters and emergencies.

First, there is the vital need for *READINESS and RAPIDNESS in action at all levels*. Global, national, and local systems should take mitigation steps to equip, protect, and prepare nations and communities against emerging threats. We should also ensure that the emergency management system has the capacity necessary to respond to mass casualty events.

In *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu, emphasizes the importance of *readiness* in winning battles. The general who is victorious, according to him, "makes many calculations in his temple before the battle is fought." Further his great work pointed out the equal need for *rapidity* by saying that "the greatest importance in war is extraordinary speed. One cannot afford to neglect opportunity."

The second element stands for *EFFECTIVENESS, EFFICIENCY & EQUITY IN RESPONSE* during emergencies. This element entails speed and coordination at all points of the emergency management chain. All means must be rapidly provided to save lives, preserve social order, and limit the other untoward effects of disasters to communities.

Equally essential to emergency management is the third element --- *SKILLS AND TECHNOLOGY*. The need to train and educate people to make sound decisions and manage increasingly complex emergencies under extreme pressure is necessary. We also have to utilize the best available technology...using telecommunications in all phases of emergency, for example...so that we can modernize and speed up emergency response. Skills and technologies will have to be brought to the public so that they can improve their local emergency management capability.

Sharpening POLICIES to reduce vulnerability to disasters is the 4th element in the RESPOND strategy. The past 2 conventions had been successful in strengthening Disaster preparedness and response in the country through issuance of the *National Policy on Disaster Management* and the *Guidelines on Mass Casualty Incidents*. Through this 3rd convention we hope to forge strategies and directives which will help us fight the increasing threat of terrorism and the weapons used by its perpetrators to spread fear and cause unjust human suffering.

The 5th element is *ORGANIZED ACTION* at all points in the emergency chain. This is central to a responsive emergency management system especially for drawing mutual defense against rising global threats. Collaboration should start at the local communities and LGUs where disaster preparedness and prevention actions will be most effective. Partnerships should pervade all levels supported by regional and national efforts and strengthened by alliances with the international community. Indeed, no country can survive alone without networking with its neighbors to solve present day challenges such as the looming global threat of Avian Flu.

The 6th element entails *periodic NEEDS ASSESSMENT*...assessing our vulnerabilities and risk against the evolving face of disasters and emergencies. This is one major purpose in having today's conference. We need to navigate through our local past responses so that we can assess our capabilities to deal with future disasters.

Finally, the last element calls for steering common *DIRECTIONS WHICH ARE CLEAR, DELIBERATE AND PRACTICAL* in our own settings. Every misfortune...every disaster can be a focal point for gaining new knowledge and an opportunity to move forward. We have to seize

every chance presented to us to improve the entire health emergency management system through enhancing the capacity of involved public agencies and other responders. We might also need to look into new methods of communicating and working together so we can streamline our efforts into a comprehensive and integrated all-hazards approach in emergency management.

In closing, the past disasters and terrorist attacks have dramatized how countries are now closely linked and how globalization is now a defining reality of our time. There is no choice but to accept these precedents and create empowered coalitions with other nations so we can jointly address globally shared disasters and threats.

We also have to prepare through effective local actions. While our people have been known for their resilience against past natural disasters, there is still an urgent need to act now and plan for future major threats...whether they are disasters already known to us or are so-called "surprise events." More than REACTING or mounting short-term fixes, we have to draw early, deliberate, and collaborative action. This is how our local actions can best RESPOND to newly emerging global threats.

Thank you and good morning to everyone.