

Speech of Secretary Francisco T. Duque III, MD, MSc during the launching of the intensified anti-dengue campaign in Metro Manila (delivered by Usec David J. Lozada, Jr.)

Our Local chief executives from Metro Manila, city health officers and barangay officials, and our dengue program managers in NCR, partners from ADB and PRIMEX, DepEd, DILG, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

First, let me acknowledge the presence and participation of the city governments of Metro Manila during this launching of the intensified anti-dengue campaign in the National Capital Region. The ongoing surge in cases since the last two to three years has prompted the Department of Health to take more aggressive measures against dengue.

In 2007, we experienced the worst outbreak of dengue in the country in 10 years. More than 45,300 cases were recorded exceeding the record high infection rates we had in 1998 when other countries in the Southeast Asian region also reported major dengue outbreaks.

This year, we may be witnessing a far worse outbreak of dengue fever. In the first six months of 2008, we've seen an early dramatic peak in the number of cases and there are no signs of letting up of this intensifying epidemic. Already, there have been more than 11,300 dengue cases admitted in our sentinel hospitals. This marks a 32 percent increase in proven cases that the same period as that of 2007.

Meanwhile, after going through the worst outbreak in 2007, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar seem to be also in the midst of another epidemic year. The World Health Organization has already warned the Philippines and other member countries of the Western Pacific Region that we may be heading for another crisis situation for dengue unless urgent measures are taken and stronger political commitment is effectively put in place in affected communities.

Although we have kept the case fatality at 1% this year, dengue fever is a growing problem in the country and all over the world. Serious outbreaks continue to occur in highly endemic regions particularly in the Asia-Pacific which already account for 70% of all dengue cases. But the threat of dengue is increasing at a particularly alarming rate and into new geographic areas where it was not found before. New outbreaks are exploding as temperatures warm and as rains come in longer and earlier expanding the lifespan of the dengue epidemic each season. Climate change, rapid urbanization and international travel have all made dengue the "*world's most important viral vector-borne disease*" and the country's most disturbing health concern among all reemerging infectious diseases.

That is why beginning 2006, the DOH has considered dengue a year-round public health threat, and in January this year, we embarked on an early offensive against dengue by launching the Nationwide Anti-dengue campaign starting in Metro Manila followed by similar initiatives in the high-burden provinces and regions of the country.

We are thankful to the ADB and the WHO for helping us come up with public information materials which have been disseminated to different schools and provinces in coordination with the DepEd, the DILG and the Liga ng mga Barangay. The 300,000 USD additional grant under ADB's Regional Technical Assistance (RETA) also enabled us to train our primary health care workers, community leaders and hospital as well as non-hospital personnel on how they can take extra measures to prevent and manage dengue. Today, we have enlisted their support to help us to search and destroy breeding sites in the communities, monitor cases in dengue hotspots and effectively manage clinical cases. And this morning, we further strengthened social mobilization against dengue with the organization of Barangay and School Dengue Task Forces in Kalookan City, led of course by the Honorable Mayor Echiverri.

The challenge of dengue, however, remains daunting and we need the help of all local authorities to better fight the menace. Key interventions against dengue – primary preventive action – must stem from the affected and at risk communities. Right now we see clustering of dengue cases in 6 regions of the country but the cities of Metro Manila are in the eye of this brewing storm. Valenzuela and Kaloocan City have seen dengue cases more than triple as of May 2008. Dengue is also spreading aggressively in the cities of Paranaque, Manila, Navotas, Pasay, and Quezon City.

Dengue needs urgent action and we need it now. *In the absence of the usual cures and vaccines, we have to rely on the basics of early prevention and community action.* Key program areas including effective surveillance, integrated vector management, case identification and management and more importantly, the mobilization of the public must be led by our local governments.

So I call on the leadership of our local chief executives to take emergency measures to combat dengue in their respective localities. Partnerships are needed for the success of our dengue prevention and control program.

The DOH has already made sure that the leadership and political commitment are well in place at the national level. But we need good local initiative and the support of more partners including development and funding agencies, the media as well as civil society to take the battle to our communities. Thus, today, I call for a more intensive and collaborative approach toward dengue prevention and control all over the country.

Thank you and good afternoon.