

► Belgian National Day Celebrations in Cebu and Manila



Some impressions from the Belgian National Day Celebration in Cebu City
Pictures © 2012 Enrique Benedicto

The Belgian National Day was celebrated in Cebu on July 19, with a gracious reception hosted by the Belgian Honorary Consul, Enrique Benedicto, and his wife, Helena Benedicto. The event at the Manila Room of the Marco Polo Plaza Hotel was attended by Cebu Governor Gwendolyn Garcia, Cebu Mayor Michael L. Rama and the Belgian Ambassador, H.E. Christian Meerschman. Governor Garcia recalled that eight years ago after her election as governor, the first diplomatic event she attended was also the Belgian National Day. Together with Mayor Rama, Governor Garcia toasted to the health of the Belgian King Albert II.

On the occasion of the Belgian National Day, Consul Benedicto was awarded the Knighthood in the order of Leopold I. This order was created by Belgium's first king shortly after his accession to the throne in 1831. To confer the honor, Ambassador Meerschman asked Consul Benedicto to come up on stage. In his response, Consul Benedicto said it was 26 years since he was appointed Honorary Consul of Belgium in Cebu. "Foremost task for me", said Consul Benedicto "was to strengthen the close ties of friendship between the Philippines and Belgium. These ties have long-standing roots, especially in Cebu. For one thing, the image of the Santo Nino, venerated here since 1521, was originally made in Antwerp, Belgium, at a time when it was a possession of the Spanish Hapsburgs."

In Manila, the Belgian Filipino Business Club (BFBC) also organized a well-attended family Barbeque in the garden of the Ambassadors' Residence on the occasion of the Belgian National Day.

► **AWEX Trade Mission to ASEAN Countries**

From 17-28 March 2012, the Wallonia Foreign Trade and Investment Agency (AWEX) has successfully organized the annual Wallonia Trade Mission to the ASEAN countries (Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines). This trade mission was a continuation of the Belgian Economic and Commercial Mission headed by Prince Philippe to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on 10-16 March 2012, designed to provide opportunities to participating companies to explore trade prospects and potentials in three emerging countries in a single mission. The trade mission is an excellent opportunity to launch beneficial partnerships between companies from the Walloon Region and the Philippines.

The Philippine leg of the multi-sector ASEAN Trade Mission was hosted by the Belgian Trade/AWEX Manila office from 25-28 March. The delegates included CEOs, managing directors and export managers of important companies from various industries. The participating companies were: Archinterior sprl, Corisbio Concept, Cosucra Groupe Warcoing, Craft Engineering sa, Difra, Extense Pharma, Glass Furnace Solutions, Groupe Autosecurité, Hombler Diffusion, Magermans, Microbelcaps, Odyscience sprl, Succes Granen, Trasis and Zentech.

The activities of the entire economic and commercial mission were covered by a TV crew team from IC production SA and will be broadcasted over the French language channel TV5 Monde. The team also conducted a special coverage on Zentech's collaboration with the Philippine Newborn Screening Reference Center, an office under the National Institutes of Health (NIH) at the University of the Philippines. It will be broadcasted over TV5 Monde's program series « C'est pas le bout du monde »; an excellent opportunity to promote the Philippines in the European audience.

A reception was hosted on March 26 by Ambassador Christian Meerschman. The delegates were pleased with the outcome of their visit to the Philippines and the business-meetings programs that have been organized for them. The delegation was accompanied by Mr. Laurent Paquet, AWEX Project Manager for Asia and Pacific, and Mr. Philippe Delcourt, Trade Commissioner for Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines.

Prepared by Mia Santamaria-Abela - Belgian Trade Office - Manila (AWEX + Brussels Export + FIT)



L-R: S Arnold (IC Production); J-C Havaux (ZENTECH); F Nazar (GFS); C Malnero-Fernandez (Cosucra Groupe Warcoing); M Abela, (Belgian Trade Office)



E Halleux, (Groupe Autosecurité) and Mr R Ferrari

Pictures © 2012 Mia Santamaria-Abela

► **Belgian Project creates overview of the Philippines Church Organ Patrimonium**

The Philippines have a unique cultural position in Far East Asia. For centuries they were part of the Spanish Empire, but after that there was always a link with Europe. The vast majority of the Philippines are Catholic, respecting its liturgical tradition, in which singing and pipe organ music have a prominent position. Already in the first contacts with the Spanish in the mid of the 16th century, liturgical song books and small pipe organs were included in the galleons. There is overwhelming written documentation over the centuries stressing the rich liturgical music culture of the Philippines.

The immense conflict between the Spanish throne and the Jesuits resulted in the destruction of most of the materials from that initial period. Therefore, the historical organ patrimonium of the Philippines is mainly 18th and 19th century based, and strongly influenced by the Augustinians. The number one monument, preserved and restored until now, is the famous bamboo-organ in Las Pinas, Manila, build in the beginning of the 19th century by Fr. Diego Cera. Most of the organs have been destroyed, partially by earthquakes, but mostly because of the dramatic results of World War II.

After the Second World War, several liturgical congregations (including the Belgian CICM fathers and ICM sisters) remained active in teaching, caring and liturgy. One main result is the fact that the largest pipe organ of the Far East, in the Manila Cathedral, was build by the Belgian-Dutch organ builders Pels. Other milestones in the further deployment of the pipe organ culture in the Philippines were the restoration of the bamboo organ, and the creation of a Philippines Organ Building Company: Diega Cera Organ Builders (which was made possible by apprenticeships in Germany and Austria).

The pipe organs patrimonium of the Philippines is too unique to be neglected. Nevertheless, the quite difficult tropical climate conditions for the preservation of pipe organ technology, as well as the commercial pressure from electronic substitute devices, results in a continuous loss of instruments, in particular in remote churches in the provinces. Fortunately, there are exceptions, and some very interesting new pipe organs were constructed by the Philippine organ builders.

To make a systematic inventory of the Philippines pipe organ patrimonium, the Catholic University of Leuven (KU Leuven) started a project under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Guido Dedene. He is full professor Management Information Systems at the KU Leuven (and also organist of the university). He was involved in several teaching projects in the Philippines (SLU Baguio, IBM,...) and performed at the International Bamboo Organ Festival in 1999, and Manila Cathedral in 2008 and 2011.



Welcome to Organographia Philipiniana!

A multi-media cultural project on Philippines Pipe Organs.

Pictures © 2012 Guido Dedene

Today the first version of this database is ready for public consultation. In this first run, the main goal was to make as soon as possible a complete list of what is still preserved and available today in the Philippines, hoping that none of the materials in this database can disappear anymore. Based on working visits for 3 years, a basic list was constructed which gives for each pipe organ a concise description (including its stoplist) as well as a description of its location (mainly historical churches). This is the first database of this kind for the Philippines. The result was baptized “Organographia Filipiniana” and can be found under: <http://beta.orgph.com>

The technical realisation is based on a newly developed state-of-the-art dynamic content management system, developed by the Belgian startup ZENJOY, guided by ir. Peter Dedene (www.zenjoy.be). A lot of the content was gathered by Agnes Cabiara, the Philippine wife of Prof. Dedene. She also helped establishing the local contacts.

In the coming months and years, this web based database must grow into a central documentation point for all relevant resources and materials concerning the pipe organs in the Philippines. For each organ, all available picture galleries will be added, as well as the documentation on the history of the instrument. Information on Philippine Organists and organ builders will be added, as well as links to all relevant documentation in the web. In the long run, the database will also be available in Tagalog and Visaya, allowing further accessibility.

We hope that this project may contribute to the fostering of the pipe organ culture in the Philippines, and its ongoing deployment. Belgians, such as the responsible CICM-fathers for the bamboo organ (Fr. Marc Lesage and Leo Renier) were pioneers and until now still new initiatives for training church organists are ongoing. Let it also be clear that this project would not have been possible without the local support of Diego Cera Organ Builders, and in particular their CEO Cealwyn Tagle.

Contribution written by Prof. Dr. Guido Dedene

More information can be found at:

[http://www.researchportal.be/en/project/design-and-implementation-of-a-webbased-multimedia-database-on-the-church-organs-of-the-philippines--\(KUL_3H090289\)/](http://www.researchportal.be/en/project/design-and-implementation-of-a-webbased-multimedia-database-on-the-church-organs-of-the-philippines--(KUL_3H090289))

<http://www.kuleuven.be/research/researchdatabase/project/3H09/3H090289.htm>

► Belgian ornithologist discovers new owl species on Camiguin Island

On August 17, scientists in Cebu unveiled the existence of two new species and one subspecies of Philippine hawk owls. Belgium’s Bram Demeulemeester was part of the team that distinguished the Cebu hawk owl (*Ninox rumseyi*) and the Camiguin hawk owl (*Ninox leventisi*) as two different new species of Philippine hawk owls that are endemic only in Cebu and Camiguin, respectively. Furthermore, another new subspecies of hawk owl (*Ninox spilonota fisheri*) from Tablas Island has been uncovered during the study. The Belgian Bram Demeulemeester was also the first to capture a photograph of the newly discovered Camiguin Hawk owl.



Newly discovered Camiguin hawk owl

Picture © 2012 Bram Demeulemeester

More information can be found on:

<http://news.msu.edu/story/11142/>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxkolqGfFaQ&feature=player_embedded

The sound of the new Camiguin hawk owl can be heard at:

<http://avocet.zoology.msu.edu/recordings/14378>

<http://avocet.zoology.msu.edu/recordings/14373>

► **Belgian Pianist Lies Colman performs for the benefit of Human Rights**



Pianist Lies Colman and Soprano Rica Nepomuceno together with H.E. Ambassador Meerschman and the volunteers of the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers - Picture © 2012 Nicole Herrera

Together with the National Union Of Peoples' Lawyers, an Association of Filipino lawyers giving free juridical advice to victims of human rights' violations and their families, the Belgian Embassy organized a music concerto titled "Legal Legato" last July 24. On this occasion, the Belgian pianist Lies Colman performed some classical pieces by Mozart and Chopin, while the Filipina Soprano Rica Nepomuceno brought some flavours of Filipino music. About 150 people attended the concert at the Aldaba Recital Hall of the University of the Philippines. All proceeds will benefit the work of the National Union Of Peoples' Lawyers in the field of human rights.

► **Nonviolent Peaceforce invites visitors from Caucasus to Mindanao**

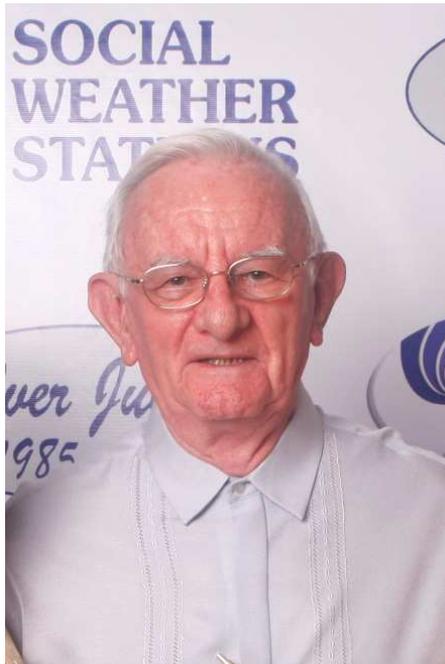
Through its "Peacebuilding Program", Belgium is supporting the activities of the international NGO Nonviolent Peaceforce, both in the Caucasus and on the Philippine island of Mindanao. From August 20 until September 4, Nonviolent Peaceforce organised an exchange visit to Mindanao for a group of representatives from different Civil Society Organizations in the South Caucasus and in Central Asia (Georgia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan). At the end of the visit, Ambassador Meerschman organized a meeting at his Residence with the participants and with representatives from different European Embassies to discuss their findings with regard to conflict monitoring and supporting peace processes.



H.E. Ambassador Meerschman and Atif Hameed, representative of Nonviolent Peaceforce, together with the visitors from the Caucasus in the garden of the Belgian Residence in Manila

Picture © 2012 Lubomir Frebort

► **Professor Gerard Rixhon, 1925-2012: A Life in the Service of Scholarship**



Professor Gerard Rixhon

Pictures © 2011 Social Weather Statistics

On September 1, 2012, Prof. Gerry Rixhon, beloved author and teacher, passed away after a massive stroke. He had just turned 87 on August 20.

Prof. Rixhon spent a good part of his life studying Sulu and its rich culture. In 1968, after his graduate studies at the Ateneo de Manila, he returned to Sulu amidst political turmoil and uncertainty to work in the Coordinated Investigation of Sulu Culture, the research arm of the Notre Dame of Jolo College. His dream of preserving Tausug verbal arts was met with challenges on several fronts - from an initial lack of enthusiasm for the project displayed by young educated Tausug, to outright disapproval by some religious leaders; from the restrictive atmosphere created by martial law, to the destruction and disappearance of recorded material as research became an added casualty in the crossfire.

His last book, VOICES FROM SULU (2010), tells of the heartbreaking loss of documented artifacts: after the Army took control of the Notre Dame college in early 1974, “the soldiers recorded radio music” over cassettes that contained Tausug ballads, songs, proverbs, which represented hundreds of hours of painstakingly taped interviews and performances.

But Prof. Rixhon proved to be of sterner stuff than all the obstacles that came his way. He eventually published articles about these oral traditions in subsequent issues of a journal called Sulu Studies from 1972-1994. In many more venues - classrooms, conferences, conversations - his passion for the study of Tausug life and culture would be palpably felt. And through all this time, his desire to propagate knowledge about and appreciation for it had been unwavering.

To the young people he had encountered and converted to his cause decades ago, and to those of us whom he had infected with his enthusiasm in more recent times, Prof. Rixhon showed how it is to dedicate one’s life to scholarship as a way of instilling greater understanding of and respect for ourselves and one another.

Obituary written by Maricor Baytion

► **Belgian Filipino Business Club: Election of New Board**

On May 15, the Belgian Filipino Business Club organized its Annual General Meeting at the New Horizon Hotel. The BFBC members took the time to thank the outgoing Board with President Pascale Vermeerbergen, who was about to leave the Philippines. During a marvelous dinner, a completely new board was elected. We have asked the new board members to introduce themselves:

Quentin van Meerbeeck – President: Originally from Antwerp, Quentin has travelled around a bit and has been living in Manila since 2010. He is currently the Business Development Manager of Santa Fe Relocations and is married to a Filipina.

Frederic Tshidimba - Vice-President: Entrepreneur and marketer living in Manila for more than 3 years, he is the Country head of a Digital advertising agency and co-owner of a Belgian outsourcing IT company in Bonifacio Global City. He has 3 kids and a lovely wife, an artist that recently exhibited paintings in Manila.

Antoine Installé – Treasurer: is from Namur, Belgium. Aside from Belgium, He spent two years in Paris and has been now in Manila for 1 year working in an international company.

Philip Hermann - Board Secretary: He is Belgian but from a Filipina mother. In Manila since 2009, he is assisting and representing various technology providers (large and small) from Belgium and Europe with their environmental projects in the Philippines (Water, Waste Water, Energy efficiency, Renewable energy).

Jorinda P. Badilla-Flour – Event Manager: was born in Gitagum, Mindanao, but raised in Marikina, Metro manila. She is currently the Business Development Manager of Le Cellier French Wine Selection (Quality Store Corp.) and is married to Bernard Flour (French).

In the mean time, the new Board has already organized some activities, such as the Filipino Cultural Evening during the month of June and the BBQ on the occasion of the Belgian National Day.



BFBC Annual General Meeting at New Horizon Hotel
Pictures © 2011 Chantal Wanten

For more details on upcoming activities of the Belgian Filipino Business Club or for membership enquiries, please contact: BFBCMANILA@gmail.com

► **Consular news**

On October 14, 2012, local elections for the municipality and provincial councils will take place in Belgium. Belgian citizens who have their official residence address in the Philippines cannot participate in these elections. Belgians who have their official residence address in Belgium, but who are temporarily residing in the Philippines, on the other hand, are obliged to participate in the elections. More information is available: http://diplomatie.belgium.be/nl/Diensten/Diensten_in_het_buitenland/Deelname_aan_verkiezingen/
http://diplomatie.belgium.be/fr/Services/services_a_letranger/participation_aux_elections/

The Philippine authorities have informed the Belgian Embassy about new guidelines for the extension of non-immigrant visas issued under section 47(a)(2) of the Philippine Migration Act. This category of visa include those employed as executives, supervisors or consultants with companies registered in the Philippines, as well as exchange professors, scholars, trainees, students, volunteers and some other groups of foreign nationals. Under these new guidelines, persons covered by section 47(a)(2) who are in the Philippines and who wish to extend or renew their special non-immigrant visas will need to file their applications with the Department of Justice only. For more information, please visit the website of the Philippines Bureau of Immigration: <http://immigration.gov.ph/index.php>

The Belgian Federal Public Health Services have informed us about the possibility for Belgians with an official residence address abroad to make a “Declaration of Permission for Euthanasia” at the Embassy. This declaration will, however, only be applicable in Belgium, not abroad. More information can be obtained on the following website: <http://www.health.belgium.be/> .

► **Introducing a new colleague at the Belgian Embassy: Patrick Czyzak**

The month of August is traditionally the time when there is a change of staff in the Belgian embassies worldwide. After more than four years in Manila, Mrs. Anne Bloemen left the Philippines for a new assignment in Angola. She was replaced by M. Patrick Czyzak.

M. Patrick Czyzak worked already for many years in the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He has carried out several missions abroad, mainly in Africa. His first assignment was in 2004 in the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) where he remained until 2008. After Congo, he was appointed to Luanda (Angola) until taking up his new position as an Administrative Officer at the Belgian Embassy in Manila starting September 2012.



Mr Patrick Czyzak joined the Belgian Embassy in Manila at the beginning of September

► **And last but not least**

Feel free to make contributions to our next edition by writing to jozef.naudts@diplobel.fed.be

Christian MEERSCHMAN
Ambassador

Jan VERBEECK
Consul

Jozef NAUDTS
First Secretary

