

## NGOS WARN 'SAFETY VALVE' MAY IMPEDE ADB'S SMALL SUCCESS IN TRANSPARENCY



HANOI, VIETNAM, 5 May 11 — NGO Forum on ADB today warned the public over ADB's move to providing the bank president power to veto any request for information. "This attempt by the ADB would not only be counterproductive to the gains it has achieved in its ongoing review of its disclosure policy but will result in violations of affected people's right to

information," Forum Executive Director Dr. Avilash Roul said.

The Public Communications Policy (PCP) of the ADB is presently undergoing review and is already in its final stage. The working paper (W-Paper) on the ongoing PCP review has already been submitted to ADB Board of Directors for review.

Referring to the veto power clause as Safety Valve, ADB Department of External Relations Director Ann Quon said, "The reason for putting such restriction to information disclosure is to guard and spear ADB from unexpected situations where it might risk its credibility."

The Bank watchdog acknowledged the few bold steps that ADB has taken in the ongoing review of the Public Communication Policy. "One of the glaring positive points the ADB has included in its PCP W-Paper is its expressed recognition of the right to information," Nepomuceno Malaluan of Action for Economic Reforms said at a panel organized by the Forum.

"However, the veto power given to the ADB Board over board-related documents and to ADB president on any information requests totally undermines the autonomy of the independent appeals panel it is intending to create."



According to Quon, the PCP review team is suggesting the setting up of an independent appeals panel, which she considers a big step forward by the ADB. Under the PCP W-Paper, the independent appeals panel will take on information requests that have been denied by the Bank's internal appeals panel. "We assure you that this safety valve would be thoughtfully used. ADB won't treat this mechanism lightly."

At the panel, affected people from the Mekong Region and Central Asia also



recounted the lack of access to information by project-affected people. "Most of the project documents are available online," Forum said. "However, people in the rural areas do not have access to internet. How can they get hold of project documents to participate meaningfully in consultations?"

Responding to lack of

translation of project document into the Russian language, Quon said ADB is now planning to set up a Russian site.

Kay Leak of the Conservation and Development Cambodia said ADB and borrowing governments have the joint responsibility to provide affected people access to project information.

Forum is presently urging the ADB Board of Directors to open the PCP W-Paper for public comments. Forum maintains its position that the ADB will be wasting its resources and good-faith participation by the public in the review process if it continues to evade remaining concerns of affected communities.