Belgian fish breeder wins international award in Singapore

A Belgian living in the Philippines and his Filipino wife were major winners in the Singapore Aquarama 2011, held during the month of June.

Michel Capot and wife Marie took home the Grand Champion Discus Trophy and won five more category awards for their other discus varieties of fish. Another Filipino, Eric Tiu, also shone in the event, which is one of Asia’s biggest international ornamental fish and accessories exhibitions. Tiu won a trophy in one category, four first place awards and two silvers for his Betta entries.

The Capots live in Binangonan, Rizal. For the last seven years they have bred and developed strains of world-class discus. Michel’s first love is the Japanese Koi. He runs a thriving business in Japan that breeds and exports Japanese Koi mostly to European countries. Michel settled in the Philippines seven years ago, taking advantage of the lower labor costs. He decided that the country was the best place to breed and develop exciting varieties of discus fish.

The Capots bought stock from all over the Southeast Asian countries in their quest to develop new and colorful strains of discus. They built a world-class facility in the heart of Metro Manila, investing in such technology as Reverse Osmosis equipment. Filipinos had flocked to Aquarama primarily as principal buyers or distributors of both aquarium accessories and equipment or live fish of different species.

The achievements Michel Capot and his wife Marie have been reported in the Manila Bulletin and in the Belgian Newspaper De Morgen.

Celebrating 65 years of diplomatic relations between Belgium and the Philippines

On July 14, His Excellency Enrique A. Manalo, Philippine Ambassador to Belgium and Luxembourg and Head of the Philippine Mission to the European Union, hosted a reception at the Philippine Embassy in Brussels to commemorate the 65th Anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between the Republic of the Philippines and the Kingdom of Belgium.

In his speech, Ambassador Manalo highlighted the significant cooperative undertakings that mark the strengthening of ties between the two countries since the establishment of the diplomatic relations on 4 July 1946.

Among Belgium's most prominent development cooperation projects in the Philippines are the Phase II Modernization of the Light Rail Transit (LRT) System in Metro Manila and the Belgian Integrated Agrarian Reform Support Program (BIARSP). The Belgian Government likewise donated monetary assistance for the victims of typhoons Ondoy and Pepeng in 2010.

He also mentioned the key role of Belgium in the history of the Philippines when in the 1890s Dr. Jose Rizal wrote and edited his *El Filibusterismo* in Brussels and published the said book in Ghent, Belgium. The Ambassador also articulated that Belgium is one of the biggest trading partners of the Philippines in the European Union, with a remarkable growth of 222.9 percent in Belgium's foreign direct investments (FDI) inflows to the Philippines in the years 2009 to 2010. "Much can be recited on but allow me to end this nostalgic trip through our common history by expressing confidence that our strong and deeply rooted relations will endure for years to come," Ambassador Manalo concluded.

In his reply, Ambassador Bertrand de Combrugge, Director of the Department for Asia and Oceania at the Belgian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, mentioned the robust and strengthened relations between the two countries with the initialing of the Philippines-Belgium Joint Partnership Agreement (JPA) on the fields of Mutual Interest, the increasing number of Belgians registered in the Philippines and the increasing number of visas granted by the Belgian Embassy in Manila to Filipinos (from around 3,000 to 7,000 a year in two years time). He also specifically mentioned that, for the first time in history, the balance of trade between the two countries has shifted in favor of Belgium in 2010. He expressed enthusiasm in the eventual signing of the JPA and the Philippines-EU Partnership Cooperation Agreement. He then assured the Philippines of Belgium's commitment to a stronger bilateral diplomatic relation in the decades to come. Ambassador de Combrugge thanked Ambassador Manalo for his cooperation during his tenure in Belgium and recalled their close work together particularly during Belgium's Presidency at the European Union and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). He also personally expressed his best wishes to Ambassador Manalo in relation to the latter's preparations for his new posting in London.

During the past 65 years, the diplomatic relations between the two countries have developed steadily in a spirit of harmony and close cooperation.
**Invitation for launching new book by Prof. Dr. Françoise Orban**

The University of St. La Salle invites all interested persons to attend the launching of the book “Participatory Geographic Information Systems and Land Planning: Life Experiences for People Empowerment and Community Transformation”, written by Prof. Dr. Françoise Orban. For many years already, Prof. Dr. Françoise Orban from the Facultés Universitaires Notre Dame de la Paix (FUNDP) in Namur is working in close collaboration with different Filipino Universities and Research Institutes on the development of Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Earlier this year, she celebrated her 50th scientific mission to the Philippines. The launching of her new book will take place on Tuesday, August 23 at 4.00 pm in the English Café, University of St. La Salle, Bacolod City, Philippines. Those who want to attend can confirm their presence on the following e-mailaddress: cer@usls.edu.ph.

**Volunteers from the City of Kortrijk participate in Social Housing Project**

The Bajau Integrated Area Development Project (BIAD-P) aims to elevate the lives of the indigenous people of the Sama-Bajau community, living in Alaska Mambaling, Cebu City, and to transform them into a progressive and self-reliant community through the process of social mobilization and community development in partnership with the Cebu City Government. 10 volunteers from the city of Kortrijk (West Flanders, Belgium) travelled to the Philippines this summer to participate in the implementation of the Bajau Integrated Area Development Project.

The groundbreaking ceremony for the Bajau Integrated Area Development Project was held on August 1, in the presence of M Enrique Benedicto, Consul a.h. of Belgium in Cebu City.

**Opening of Francis Home at the Lourdes Centre for the Handicapped**

In 1994, then Archbishop of Manila, Jaime Cardinal Sin, asked Fr. Luke Moortgat, CICM, to establish a centre for people with multiple disabilities who had been abandoned by their family. Hence, Fr. Moortgat established the “Handicapped Centre Lourdes”, located in the Caritas compound in Manila. For the past 17 years Fr. Moortgat, together with a team of dedicated staff members and volunteers, has been caring for a group of extremely needy people living with multiple handicaps.

Following the growing number of inhabitants and their need for specialised care, the Lourdes Centre needed additional facilities. With the support from the Province of Limburg and the City of Hasselt in Belgium, the “Filipijnen Noodfonds” under the direction of M Francis Leyssens managed to collect the necessary funds to construct the additional facilities. These facilities include a dormitory and living room (separate for boys and girls), specialised sanitary installations and a patient room for medical treatment. The new building was called “Francis Home”, in honour of the benefactor from Belgium.
On the occasion of the 17th anniversary of the Lourdes Centre, on August 6, the new “Francis Home” was opened by His Eminence Gaudencia Cardinal Rosales and Mr Jozef Naudts, First Secretary of the Belgian Embassy. The program included the celebration of a Holy Mass, unveiling of a commemorative plaque, visit to the new facilities, dinner and evening show by the staff and inhabitants of the Lourdes Centre.

Cardinal Rosales, Fr. Luke Moortgat, the staff and inhabitants of the Lourdes Centre asked the Belgian Embassy to convey their sincere gratitude to the people in Limburg and Hasselt for their support.

► Forum for Belgian Development Workers in the Philippines, October 29

Although it has been many years now since the Philippines was removed from the list of partner countries for the official Belgian Development Cooperation, there are still a lot of Belgian organizations, missionaries, religious congregations and private initiatives involved in development work in the country. A cautious estimate of the Belgian Embassy in Manila shows that in 2010 the Belgian support to the Philippines, from various sources, amounted to at least 5 million Euros.

However, since the closure of the development section of the Embassy, about ten years ago, there has not been any occasion to meet with Belgian development actors working in the Philippines. That is why the Belgian Embassy organizes a “Forum Belgian Development Cooperation in the Philippines”. The program of the Forum foresees in different thematic group sessions, focusing on one particular sector of development cooperation. There will also be a presentation wall with posters and pictures from different organizations and their activities in the Philippines.

All Belgians working in or interested in development work the Philippines are invited:

- Representatives and collaborators of Belgian NGOs or NGOs that receive support from Belgium;
- Belgian missionaries and missionary sisters, representatives of their religious congregations, Filipino religious clergy who have been living in Belgium;
- Belgians working for international organizations in the Philippines (UN agencies, Delegation of the European Union, Red Cross, Asian Development Bank, etc.);
- Representatives, volunteers and collaborators of private development initiatives that are being supported from Belgium;
- Other Belgians or Filipinos who want to learn more about the work of Belgian development actors in the Philippines.

The Forum will take place on Saturday, October 29, at the Ambassadors Residence. Participation in the Forum is free of costs. People or organizations that want to participate in the Forum can register with Ms. Christina Suzara of the Belgian Embassy: E-mail christina.suzara@diplobel.fed.be, Tel: 02 845 18 69.
► **Reunion of Filipino Alumni who studied in Belgium**

Belgium has a long tradition of involvement in higher education in the Philippines. Over the years, a large number of Filipinos came to Belgium to follow a study program in one of the Belgian Universities. Often, the Filipinos who lived and studied in Belgium had very successful careers after their return to the Philippines or abroad. In the same time, there is also a growing interest of Belgian students who come to the Philippines for studies or for research in order to obtain their MSc. Or PhD. Degree.

May 28, the Embassy of Belgium, together with the Belgian Filipino Business Club (BFBC), organized a Cocktail Reception Reunion at the Ambassadors’ Residence in Forbes Park to strengthen the ties with alumni of different Belgian universities, as well as with Belgians who are studying or doing research in the Philippines. This networking event was attended by some 45 alumni, students and BFBC-members, and it was a unique opportunity for former classmates who studied in Belgium some time ago to meet with each other and with students of today.

![Pictures © 2011 Jozef Naudts](image1)

**Belgian Filipino Business Club - Belgian Party July 21**

Since some years, it is customory that the official celebration of the Belgian National Day on July 21 takes place in Cebu City, while King’s Day (November 15) is celebrated in Manila. The Belgian Filipino Business Club (BFBC) could however not let pass our National Day without organizing a “Belgian Party” in Manila. Participants greatly enjoyed the presentations of Belgian products, Belgian music, Belgian and Filipino food and Belgian Beer.

For more details on upcoming BFBC activities or for membership enquiries, please contact: BFBCMANILA@gmail.com

![Presentation of Belgian Products on July 21](image2)

![Enjoying good food & Belgian Beer on July 21](image3)
New Consul takes his position in the Belgian Embassy in Manila

The month of August traditionally marks the time of the year that there is a change of staff in the Belgian Embassy. After 4 years of service in the Belgian Embassy in Manila, Consul René Peeters left the Philippines for his new posting in Budapest (Hungary). He will be replaced by a new Consul, M Jan Verbeeck.

Consul Verbeeck joined the consular carrier in 1993. His first posting was London (UK), where he stayed until 1997. That year he was asked by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to open a Consulate General in Rio de Janeiro (Brasil), where he remained until 2001.

From Rio de Janeiro he moved to La Paz (Bolivia) and in 2004 he was appointed to Atlanta (USA) to downgrade the existing Consulate General to Consulate. He worked for 4 years in Atlanta as head of the Consulate, before being sent in 2008 to Bucharest (Romania).

And last but not least

Feel free to make contributions to our next edition by writing to jozef.naudts@diplomatie.bel.be

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