

# At the 1st International River Summit: Success and Then Some ...

By Rajita Majumdar



## Mega Finish and a Great Start for Philippines

The [1st International River Summit](#) ceremoniously ended in Iloilo City, Philippines, on June 1, 2012, with a keynote speech by the Philippine President Benigno Aquino lauding the city's efforts in river restoration and a declaration of 5 major river-driven policy recommendations for the nation to act upon. A sweet end to the 3-day extravaganza and a great start for a nation at the frontline of climate change.



The vibrant Iloilo hospitality - cultural entertainment for delegates on May 30, 2012

The [World Bank](#) lists Philippines at the top of the climate change hit-list - the country most vulnerable to storms, ahead of Bangladesh and Madagascar. At the far east in Pacific, the country's 7,000+ islands lie directly in the path of battering tropical storms and typhoons, making a landfall on an average of 6 to 9 times per year. A scenario where the rivers can swell and turn deadly. "Achilles Heel" is how Mr. Heherson "Sonny" Alvarez describes his country's rivers. Mr. Alvarez, a former two-term senator, is considered to be Philippines' environmental trailblazer and is currently serving as its Commissioner for Climate Change.

All in all, the focus of the event - protecting local rivers - is a quintessential one for the country, the importance of which can not be emphasized enough!

## Great Success Was Had

The International River Summit at Iloilo City was a huge success beyond doubt. Maybe beyond the expectations of its organizers even. Mayor Mabilog is on a mission to make Iloilo a world-class city and the event has surely placed it on the global map, as he himself describes the success of the event. His energetic and devoted team of volunteers had counted over 1000+ participants and representation from over 15 different countries by the end of the event.



Mayor Mabilog (center) flanked by Rivers of the World delegates (Indrajeet Sen, Matthew Perry on Mayor's Right and Rajita Majumdar to the left) and sponsor SMART Telecommunications' representative (far left of the Mayor )

It was a mix of NGOs, academia, local government units, private sector and financing institutions. The topics covered spanned river basin governance, climate change and disaster risk reduction, water quality and water resources management, biodiversity management and eco-tourism.

## [Presentations and other details](#)

### **However, the Real Success ...**

While the delegates visiting from the world over were sharing a wealth of expertise and experiences in best practices and proven scientific models, real event success was hinted at not in the packed halls of the break-out sessions, but in the mood of the audiences captured in Q&A sessions. It was heartening to hear the attending heads of local government units respond with simple, basic questions like - "Can you help us solve our (river) problems?" and "Would you partner with us in managing our river?" The questions rang of leaders stepping up to the initiative. A desire for change. A beginning of environmental leadership.

The dramatic turnaround of Iloilo River easily figures as the outcome of the efforts of Iloilo City's Mayor Jed Mabilog and Senator Franklin Drilon, a native of Iloilo. For their vision and unrelenting perseverance, these leaders are popularly known to be the "architect" of the successful rehabilitation of Iloilo River.

*The most poignant takeaway from the 1st International River Summit? There exist ample necessary technical and financial resources to put our rivers on a healthy course. **The starting point though lies in having or maybe even identifying a champion for the cause amongst the local government leaders.***



ROW's Indrajeet Sen (left) and Dr. Matthew Perry (right) with the Summit's man behind the scenes at the center, Mr. Noel Hechanova - Iloilo's Environment & Natural Resources Officer

For more coverage: [Wanhandredwan Blog](#), [Iloilo City Government](#), [SUN STAR Iloilo](#)

**[Speech by President Aquino III on June 1, 2012 at the Summit.](#)**

<http://www.gov.ph/2012/06/01/speech-of-president-aquino-at-the-1st-philippine-international-river-summit-june-1-2012/>