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PH faces rising IT-BPM challenge

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by **Kristyn Nika M. Lazo**

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The Philippines faces growing competition in the information technology-business processing management (IT-BPM) industry with various countries in Africa, Central America and Eastern Europe, Asia CEO Forum chairman Richard Mills said Friday at the First Annual Noda Contact Center Forum.

Other speakers remain optimistic that the Philippines will retain its leading position in the global IT-BPM arena, citing various factors that will work in the local sector's favor.

"South Africa is the one that everyone talks about. It's in the same time zone as Europe and it is much closer to North America. It also has a profusion of European languages, such as French, German, English and Dutch, and this is an opportunity," said Mills, who is also the chairman of IT industry consultants Chalre Associates.

"Every month, there is a new announcement of a new telecommunications line in parts of Nigeria and some upgrade in Zimbabwe. All of these things are happening and it is now the fastest-growing region in the world. So this is something we have to worry about because they are a lot less expensive," he added.

Contact Center World Association president Raj Wadhvani said the IT-BPM industry is growing at a robust pace in certain countries in Central America and Eastern Europe, as well as in South Africa.

"But what I like about the Philippines is that the culture is very similar to that in the United States and Europe. Doing business can be done with great ease," Wadhvani said.

Penny Bongato, executive director for talent development at the IT-Business Processing Association of the Philippines (IBPAP), said the Philippines will retain its No. 1 position in the global IT-BPM industry as Filipinos surpass their global peers in terms of "customer satisfaction." She described Filipinos as very accommodating, with ready smiles on their face and this is a unique characteristic which often attracts foreign IT-BPM investors to the country.

She said the IBPAP is updating its roadmap to 2020 that will focus on enabling the Philippines to retain its top spot in the global IT-BPM arena. Under this scheme, training and education programs for teachers and applicants are to be included in the curricula of 17 state universities. Courses relating to BPM specialization will also be offered to Grade 11 and 12 students. The roadmap also calls for tapping unemployed nursing graduates as they can be useful for the health care services sector.

The IT-BPM not only caters the voice and non-voice services, but also to the gaming, health care, animation and knowledge processing management segments, she said.

Bongato said the IT-BPM industry is aiming to provide direct employment to up to 1 million people this year and generate revenue of about US\$18 billion. By 2016, the sector is forecast to employ 1.3 million people and generate revenues of about \$25 billion.

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