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## *Public school teachers and non-teaching personnel to benefit from housing loan*

MANILA, Feb. 8 (PNA) (PinoyGlobal) – The Department of Education (DepEd) on Friday said that a throng of public school teachers and non-teaching personnel are expected to flock the DepEd's central office in Meralco Avenue, Pasig City as venue for the first Housing Fair hosted by the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC) on February 13-15.

The Housing Fair eyes DepEd personnel from National Capital Region, Bulacan, Rizal, Cavite and Laguna. Thousands of foreclosed properties of participating government agencies will be offered at low interest rates and payment terms of up to 30 years during the three-day event. Discounts of up to 20 percent are available to cash buyers.

The participating government agencies are Pag-IBIG Fund, National Home Mortgage Finance Corporation (NHMFC), Home Guaranty Corporation (HGC), Government Service Insurance System (GSIS), Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) and Social Security System (SSS).

Loan counseling sessions will be conducted during the fair to answer questions of home borrowers who have problems with their existing loans and to brief new borrowers on how to avail of a housing loan. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo lauds inter-agency partnerships like these because they allow shared knowledge, resources and opportunities, which are ultimately beneficial for the partner agencies. DepEd remains focused in improving the teachers' living standard through monetary and non-monetary benefits. Education Secretary Jesli Lapus said, "Teachers' welfare and benefits are our utmost concern." He stressed, "Since last year, we have successfully addressed the decade-old unpaid obligations."

In its year-end report, DepEd stated that in 2007 it paid some P1.7 billion in arrears representing government shares in GSIS contribution. The

arrears were a result of the increase in GSIS premium from 9.5 percent to 12 percent for the period of July 1997 to December 1998.

Meanwhile, P400 million were released last year to partially settle unpaid loyalty pays, step increments and other entitlements of DepEd personnel especially teachers. DepEd field offices are already reconciling records for any other unpaid obligations. DepEd has also released P388 million to cover PhilHealth premium adjustments. The government health insurance company increased its premium from P100 to P112.

According to Vice-President Noli De Castro, concurrent Chairman of the HUDCC, "Teachers are the most important workers in our society, yet they are also among the least paid. We recognize their hard work and commitment to the task of educating our children despite their low incomes. This Housing Fair is one way of repaying them for their sacrifices by giving them the information on how to own decent homes at the most affordable terms."

Meanwhile, health and nutrition personnel of the DepEd began receiving hazard pay benefits according to their salary grade retroactive CY2007. Secretary Lapus has issued DepEd Order No. 82 series of 2007 directing central office finance officers, regional directors and schools division superintendents to provide the hazard pay of the public health workers. Those with Salary Grade 1 to 19 are entitled 25 percent of their actual present salary while those with Salary Grade 20 and above shall receive no more than P4,989 a month.

The DepEd Housing Fair is part of the continuing effort of the government to give civil servants access to some of the most affordable housing units in the market today. The HUDCC is now on its third year of conducting housing fairs for the general public as well as specific government sectors like the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines. (PNA)#

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