

'Protect women's rights'

by KATHERINE ADRANEDA
Philstar.com

Philippines include domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment, extrajudicial killings, unequal job opportunities, internal displacement due to armed conflict, health care including reproductive health, education and literacy, and proper treatment in the criminal justice system.

"Equality and non-discrimination are not achieved by having gender-neutral laws per se, or by having laws that are equally applicable to men and women," De Lima also said.

"Instead, equality and non-discrimination are fulfilled by having laws that, in their implementation allow both genders to live their lives in dignity and in full enjoyment of their human rights," she said.

De Lima explained that whether as victims, witnesses, suspects or even when already convicted, the specific needs of women have to be addressed in terms of proper facilities and gender-sensitive official personnel and procedures.

De Lima urged the police, judiciary, and "all pillars of the criminal justice system" to fully implement the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004 (Republic Act 9262).

The CHR said some judges and police officers have been reluctant to apply RA 9262 purportedly feeling that it is not applicable to Filipino families. The CHR cited several cases of judges urging women to return to husbands who abuse them physically, emotionally or psychologically.

"Personal feelings aside, the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act is already part of Philippine law and therefore all law enforcers and members of the bench—as well as government

agencies such as the Department of Justice, Department of Social Welfare and Development are required to apply existing law," pointed out CHR Commissioner Cecilia Quisumbing.

"If they feel the law is wrong or faulty, they should campaign in Congress for amendment or repeal of the law or test it in the Supreme Court. For now, the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004 is law," she also said.

In 2006, a petition was filed before the Supreme Court questioning the constitutionality of the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act, but it has not yet been decided upon by the High Court.

Meanwhile, Gabriela members waved purple banners during their commemoration of International Women's Day.

At the rally Gabriela called for the junking of VFA "in defense of the Filipino women's dignity" and for the country's sovereignty.

"There is no better time than on Women's Day for thousands of Filipinas all over the country to come forward, reclaim the dignity of women and defend the sovereignty of our Motherland against the ravaging of US intervention," stressed Emmi de Jesus, secretary-general of Gabriela.

"Today, we will show the perfidious woman in Malacañang, that unlike her, we stand with the Filipino people and we will fight to end any and all forms of unequal relations with the United States government," she said.

According to De Jesus, the problems besetting Filipino women stem from the continuing "unequal relations" between the United States and the Philippines.

She said that the "capitalist

crisis" of overproduction in the United States impacts on the export-oriented and import-dependent Philippine economy and had caused the current massive retrenchment of tens of thousands of Filipinos.

Most Filipinos who lose jobs nowadays, here or abroad, are women, she added.

Gabriela said that for every 100 workers that are laid off, 70 to 80 of these workers are women.

Gabriela has been demanding the immediate scrapping of the VFA especially when the SC ordered the transfer of Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith to a Philippine detention facility last Feb. 11.

Smith was found guilty of raping 21-year-old "Nicole" in Subic in 2005. Since his conviction by a Makati City court, Smith has been held at the US Embassy in Manila, which, in effect, meant that he remains under the custody of the US government.

"Arroyo has consistently shown she is a shame to Filipino women. For years since she has occupied the seat of power in Malacañang, she has cheated and robbed women and their families," De Jesus said.

"In the midst of the current global crisis, Arroyo peddles Filipinos to foreign economies as migrant workers to keep the failing Philippine economy afloat. The Arroyo regime had killed many honorable women and men who fought for the interest of the people. Treachery, tyranny and terrorism are the ways of the Arroyo regime in its loyal servitude to US imperialism," she added.

Aside from commemorating International Women's Day, Gabriela also celebrated its 25th anniversary last March 10.

'SSS should enhance, not withhold, benefits'

by LIRA DALANGIN-FERNANDEZ
Inquirer.net

An activist lawmaker lambasted Social Security System (SSS) president Romulo Neri on March 9, calling him "unjust and unbecoming" for serving notice that workers laid off because of the world financial crisis would not longer be able to secure salary loans.

Anakpawis (Toiling Masses) party-list Representative Rafael Mariano said Neri should not deny workers their right to the social security fund.

"Mr. Neri is missing the point," Mariano said. "[The] SSS was created and maintained for the purpose of providing social security fund for its members. SSS members can access and are entitled to member loans. It includes the provision of emergency loans for members, especially workers who lost their jobs due to the economic crisis."

The lawmaker said workers often rely on the government-run pension fund agency in emergencies.

"At this time of global economic crisis and uncertainties, the SSS should, in fact, enhance its social security benefits and assistance to its members...It is unjust and unbecoming of Neri as SSS President to deny workers their right to the social security fund," he added.

At the Northern Mindanao Regional Development Council forum last week, Neri announced that the SSS had already exceeded the 10-percent ceiling for loans allowed by law.

"SSS can no longer grant its members separation loans, because that will already be against the law," Neri had said.

Neri also said the pension fund was having a hard time collecting from over five million members whose arrears now exceed P25 billion.

Mariano also criticized Neri for readily committing P12.5 billion of pensioners' money to Malacañang's stimulus package without consulting SSS' members or approval from its board.

"He says SSS cannot grant loans for displaced workers but he readily committed P12.5 billion to Malacañang's stimulus package even without consultation with SSS members or approval from the SSS Board. In reality, enhancing direct benefits and assistance to SSS members is the real stimulus," he said.

Mariano cited a policy of the SSS that says: "It is the policy of the State to establish, develop, promote and perfect a sound and viable tax-exempt social security system suitable to the needs of the people throughout the Philippines which shall promote social justice and provide meaningful protection to members and their families against the hazards of disability, sickness, maternity, old-age, death and other contingencies resulting in loss of income or financial burden. Towards this end, the State shall endeavor to extend social security protection to workers and their beneficiaries."

Corporate altruism reaches all-time high

PBSP members spend P76M for social projects in '08

CORPORATE altruism among member-companies of the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) reached an all-time high in 2008 when the world financial crisis was just beginning to be felt, figures from the group showed.

PBSP chairman Manuel V. Pangilinan reported during the Annual Membership Meeting and 38th Foundation Day Celebration of the PBSP that last year, member companies contributed P75.84 million for social development projects and generated P247.6 million from donor agencies and

partners during the year.

Over P300 million went to fund various projects nationwide, reaching 200,000 poor Filipinos through its education, enterprise development, health and water, and area resource management projects.

"It is precisely at this time

when that support is most needed, when people are out on the streets without a job, when reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development must not be set aside in the midst of a downturn," said Pangilinan. He is also chairman of the Philippine Long Distance Co.,

and was recently cited in *Forbes magazine* as one of the country's four heroes of philanthropy.

Pangilinan said corporations should do more to reduce poverty during difficult times.

"With a difficult period ahead of us, we should be compelled to do more and to give more, both for altruism and our own survival. There will be new needs and urgent calls that we must respond to, some of them outside our corporate paradigm and comfort zone," Pangilinan said.

"The times offer us the opportunity to commit more support for programs that will mitigate the plight of many, if not the majority, of our countrymen. As we see it, our current programs are the appropriate response in this critical situation, and must be vigorously pursued," added Pangilinan.

PBSP's membership increased to 238 and it reached out to over 300 companies to help them implement their own corporate citizenship programs. (*Inquirer.net*)

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