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FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Gawad Kalinga spreads its nation-building message at UCLA

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of the world. GK, meaning "to give care", was considered a daring initiative to rehabilitate juvenile gang members and help out-of-school youth in Bagong Silang, Caloocan City, north of Manila, then the biggest squatters' relocation area in the Philippines. GK, today, has evolved into a movement of nation-building. Together with its partners, GK is now transforming poverty-stricken areas in the Philippines, with the goal of building 700,000 houses for 7,000 communities in 7 years. It is now in over 900 communities all over the Philippines and other developing countries.

"Today, I am presenting a global model of development that is starting to become of great interest to the rest of the world," Meloto told about a hundred cheering students and other guests during the *GK Awareness Day* held last week at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The two-day symposia was organized by a consortium of UCLA students' organizations spearheaded by Filipinos for Community Health, headed by Charmaine Jamias, and

Josie Castro, a Filipino town Rotary Club member and chief financial officer of the UCLA School of Public Health.

"This is an Asian model that started in the Philippines, and this is the seventh university that will hear about it in the US," Meloto began. He said that Asians here in the US—not just Filipinos—are the least likely group to go on welfare. "So many Asians—including my people—have become patriots to this country, and it is interesting that we are in this university, for and of itself. Filipino doctors and nurses, and other medical practitioners have healed the sick of this country, and our soldiers have been fighting wars for America." Meloto told the students and GK volunteers that the first generations of Asians—including Filipinos—want to make that connection to their motherlands. "They have pursued the American dream and have achieved it. Most of them now want to go beyond success. They want to go for greatness."

"I found out from my uncle, (in the Philippines) that 400 years ago, before the Spaniards came and occupied the Philippines, there was a culture of Bayanihan," said Tony Olaes, a successful, first generation Fil-Am who was born, raised and educated in the US. "It's a beautiful culture, people working together to build their houses and build their community." Olaes, who is about 40 years old, had volunteered to build a GK village in the Philippines, and he was hooked. "I am brown in the outside and white in the inside because of my US upbringing and education. But now, slowly, the inside is also turning brown."



Meloto, Eustaquio Abay, Jonathan Wittig and Tony Olaes
AJPress photo by Rene Villaroman

Another American GK volunteer, Texas-born Jonathan Wittig said that he was always asked why he was working with the poorest of the poor in the Philippines when there are also poor families in the US. "Being born in the US is a gift and a blessing," Wittig said. "I seem to like GK because it is where the best work is being done," Wittig attests. "GK is an organization that gets together to build a nation. GK is about passion from the heart."

GK is in the US and around the world. Its partner, ANCOF (Answer to the Cry of the People) has offices in the US, Canada, Denmark, Spain, Switzerland, and Australia. "We have enough lands for our poorest of the poor because we have triggered a response from mayors and governors. They are land-banking," Meloto reveals. "Everyone's a builder, a social artist, a social scientist. Those from Bicol design for Bicol, and those from Pampanga help Pampangos, and so on."

"Only you can put limits to what you can do," advised Dr. Eustaquio "Boy" Abay, a Wichita, Kansas-based neurosurgeon and GK supporter. "Don't forget to look back." The two-day symposia were generously supported by the Seafood City markets chain, one of GK's corporate sponsors and partners. Says first year nursing student Grace Lopez: "It is a great opportunity to give back to our country and to help our people. After I graduate from UCLA, I am going to join Gawad Kalinga." (Rene Villaroman)



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