

OPINION & FEATURES

Hoping for world peace

WE often hear people say how they want "world peace." However, every nation has its culture and beliefs that usually clash with another. For one, religion or "faith" holds a strong bearing to a people, which is why it is important to arrive on a common ground in spite of religious differences.



Ambassador Hilario G. Davide, Jr., the Philippine Permanent Representative to the United Nations, believes that it essential for the UN to take further steps to promote religious and cultural understanding through an interfaith dialogue

and the mass media. An interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions and spiritual or humanistic beliefs.

Last year, the UN General Assembly concluded a two-day interfaith dialogue conference with a call for member states to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all—including religious beliefs. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that it "brought together people who might not have a chance to interact."

Effective information dissemination is crucial to any peacekeeping goal. Throughout the world there are local, regional and international interfaith initiatives; many are formally or informally linked and constitute larger networks or federations.

Hope is still alive—and in this case, we are hoping for world peace. And we can only achieve this if we continue to open the doors of communication and understanding. (AJPress)

EDITORIAL

Intimidation

CCHECHE Lazaro's husband Del told her a joke before she appeared before the Manila Regional Trial Court to post bail in the case of wiretapping filed against her by Government Service Insurance System public relations head Ella Valencerina.

"Jail isn't so bad in the Philippines," he told her, "but watch out for the mosquitoes."

And that is why, Cheche told a joint meeting of the Makati Business Club and the Management Association of the Philippines (with a sizeable delegation of TOWNS women in fighting red), among the things in her bag when she went to file bail was a bottle of insect repellent. If only the insistent buzzing of Arroyo administration apologists against the media was as easy to swat away!

There has been for quite some time now, ABS-CBN vice president for news and public affairs Maria Ressa told the same gathering, a "pattern of intimidation" against the Philippine media, with Cheche's warrant of arrest being only one of many instances.

I've commented previously about the extraordinary run of luck that members of the Arroyo family and her favored officials have had when filing libel and other suits against critical media commentators and reporters. Inevitably, the prosecutors find a prima facie case against the journalists, and judges have shown an unusual willingness to issue warrants of arrest against them.

In the wake of events like the siege by rebel soldiers at the Manila Peninsula (ironically the site of the MBC-MAP meeting), the government chose to go after the journalists who chose to remain at the side of the mutineers even after they were told to vacate the premises. The journalists were herded into groups and handcuffed and led into waiting buses like common criminals. And let's not even talk about the killings of journalists (and activists), which largely remain unsolved despite the many public pronouncements and promises of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

The latest incident of media harassment I can cite is the inclusion of Caloy Conde, correspondent of a number of foreign publications and a former outspoken official of the National Union of Journalists in the Philippines (NUJP), in the "order of battle" of the military. With a single stroke, the Armed Forces of the Philippines has placed him in the company of communist New People's Army commanders and leaders of the Abu Sayyaf, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and other rebel groups, and put his life in peril.

Maria, recalling her own career in local and international journalism, remembered that it was Cheche who was mainly responsible for keeping her in the Philippines and convincing her to remain here after more than a decade with CNN. During one of *The Probe Team's* earliest court suits, Maria recalled how inspired she was when Cheche declared in court: "We will never, never, never, never be intimidated." In her own talk, Cheche reiterated this statement, although this time she had used only one "never," maybe because, joked Maria, she has mellowed with age.



AT LARGE
Rina Jimenez-David

But one need not be a journalist to appreciate Maria's vow that even in the face of veiled and actual threats from the powerful, they would continue to "balance our fear for our personal safety with our duty to tell the truth."

But it isn't just journalists who need to link arms in the face of this attack on press freedom and the public's access to information—information people need to make decisions about our officials, the policies they craft, and the way they spend our money.

Maria cited ABS-CBN's election-related advocacy campaign: *Boto Mo I-Patrol Mo: Ako ang Simula*, which aims to convince some 9 million first-time voters to register and vote in the 2010 elections. The campaign also appeals to ordinary citizens not just to do their civic duty by casting their vote, but also to keep an eye out for electoral anomalies and shenanigans and send video and text reports to the network.

Another form of civic involvement is the all-out support being shown Cheche, who like Maria is a TOWNS awardee for broadcast journalism, by her sisters in this group of women awardees. In fact, apart from filling two tables at the MBC-MAP affair, the TOWNS women held a press conference the day before, presenting to the media a statement on the arrest of Cheche. Also present at the press con were representatives of public school teachers, whose complaints about being shortchanged by the GSIS in the computation of their retirement pay triggered the story by *The Probe Team* and the subsequent lawsuit by the GSIS official.

Boracay may have all the trappings of "paradise," but the recent spate of violent incidents is fast creating a reputation of lawlessness for the idyllic island, the country's top tourism draw.

Many of the shootings stem from disputes over land, which given Boracay's extremely limited land area, is a precious but profitable commodity.

A few days ago, workers were constructing a fence around a vacant lot behind the "One White Beach Boracay" resort when they were confronted by security men of "One White Beach" and were fired upon. Two workers were hit and had to be rushed to a hospital. The owners of the lot, who belong to the Tirol clan, said that the owner of "One White Beach," a certain Teodoro Jaresco, had begun developing the lot without their permission or knowledge. But when, on a recent trip to Boracay, they noticed the unauthorized construction work, they decided to start fencing the lot to which they hold title. Apparently, the owner of the beach front resort needed the lot, which is forested and hilly, to give them access to the main highway.

When I asked a family representative what the local authorities have done about the dispute, he said the police have taken a hands-off stance, preferring to leave both parties to settle matters. No wonder violence flourishes on the island! (*Inquirer.net*)

Creeps

WHAT'S worse than a kiss-and-tell lothario? A lothario who secretly videotapes his sexual encounters, and then posts them on the Internet.

During the Marcos years, that sort of creep was personified by a provincial governor from Northern Luzon.

Today it's Hayden Kho.

Anyone who has seen the video footages of Kho with different women, now proliferating on the Internet and in pirated DVDs, will tell you that capturing his sexcapades on video appears to be the handiwork of Kho himself.

Uploading the materials on the Internet, on the other hand, could be attributed to other people, though Kho can't easily wiggle out of this. Last May 21, the National Bureau of Investigation summoned Kho together with his partner, Vicki Belo. The NBI reportedly wants to know how Belo, cosmetic surgeon to the stars, got hold of a sex video featuring her lover with another woman, which prompted her to dump Kho several months ago.

Kho, in case you missed the entertainment headlines, subsequently tried to kill himself, and then tearfully filed a motion for reconsideration with his fuming ex, who is old enough to be his mother. The MR was granted and, until recently, Kho and Belo were still a couple.

Also likely to be summoned by the NBI is another doctor identified as Eric Johnston Chua, said to be Kho's friend. Chua is suspected to have had a hand in uploading the sex videos on the Internet.

The motive for spreading the video in cyberspace could lead NBI probers to the culprit(s). It certainly wasn't Katrina Halili, the victim in this scandal.

Other women should thank the young actress for mustering the courage to surface and file a complaint against Kho. Halili could have simply kept quiet and pretended that her sex video with Kho has been digitally altered and the woman in the grainy footage is not her. This was the tack adopted by the so-called Brunei beauties when video footage showing them in hard-core porn scenes proliferated a few years back.

Now that Halili has gone public with her complaint, it could help move legislation to spare others from similar humiliation.

Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago has a pending bill seeking to penalize "photo and video voyeurism."

Amid the Katrina-Hayden scandal, Sen. Pia Cayetano has also filed a similar bill, which seeks to prohibit and penalize the recording, sharing, showing or exhibition of private acts without the consent of the persons involved.

These new laws are needed particularly with the advances in information and communication technology. For P4,000, you can buy at any major shopping mall a tiny wireless surveillance camera, mount it in a concealed spot and watch on a computer screen an event or person you are interested in from several hundred meters away.

Camera phones have also made snooping and invasion of privacy easier. These days anyone can be a paparazzo. The subjects of such scrutiny won't mind, mainly because they won't know, if the photos or video footage simply end up in the



SKETCHES
Ana Marie Pamintuan

personal collection of a fan or souvenir hunter. But making the images public is another matter. Everyone is entitled to a measure of privacy, including celebrities and public officials.

Sex workers, unless they make a living as porn actors, also do not relish ending up in publicly circulated sex videos without their knowledge or permission.

Among the biggest victims of voyeurs are teenage students who have the misfortune of falling for

sleazebags in the same league as Kho.

A few years ago a sex video of a couple who looked like high school or college students spread. The rumor was that the two were both students in one of the top exclusive schools in the country, and that the girl was eventually forced to go abroad. The video spawned a porn video series whose titles all ended with the word "scandal."

Fearing social humiliation, these young girls and their parents are unlikely to pursue a complaint for the spread of sex videos of the teenager and the guy she thought was the love of her life.

Now Katrina Halili, barely out of her teens, has overcome shame and is fighting back. Her case will show other women that there are existing laws protecting them from such humiliation, if they will dare to file a complaint.

A five-year-old law offers broad protection for women and children against physical and psychological violence.

The law, Republic Act 9262, was enacted in March 2004. I was surprised when this law was passed with no opposition from men.

Under the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004, a man stands to lose the kids, the house and the car, and is prohibited from even peering into the window to get a glimpse of his children if he is accused of domestic violence by his wife, common-law wife or regular girlfriend.

The forms of violence penalized under RA 9262 include treating women and children as sex objects, making demeaning sexual remarks, and psychological acts that cause mental or emotional suffering such as ridicule and humiliation. Also included is the sale of audio-video materials showing the woman in a sexual pose or act.

The maximum penalty under this law is 12 years with a fine of up to P300,000 plus mandatory psychiatric treatment for the offender.

Kho and his friend Chua may soon face a criminal indictment, a separate complaint for violating human rights, plus the suspension and possible loss of their license to practice their profession.

The circus generated in Congress by Katrina Halili should also be put to good use. Laws against video voyeurism and cyber porn must be passed soon.

Creeps who chronicle their own sexual encounters, and creeps who spread the video in cyberspace need to see a psychiatrist.

And they need to be sent to prison. (*Philstar.com*)



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