

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

RP out of 3rd world status...

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GK leading a culture of change not just in the Philippines but around the world as well.

Dr. Alex Brillantes, Dean of the UP-National College of Public Administration and Governance (NCPAG), said that GK could be an emerging and possible template for development in the Philippines.

"If we look at the UN Millennium Development Goals that seek to reduce poverty by half by 2015, among others, we can see that each of these goals has a counterpart among the various programs of GK, almost a one-to-one correspondence," Brillantes remarked.

The model that Brillantes discussed refers to the convergence of the state/public, business sector and the civil society in order to come up with the solution to the pressing problems in the Philippines, key among them poverty.

"What we have here is a nascent indigenous Philippine development model for public administration and good governance, one which has become a converging point for partnership and a usable template for others," he added.

GK as a genuine model of poverty alleviation vehicle and paradigm has all the ingredients to become a template since it meets the most basic criteria, according to Brillantes.

"From the leadership of Tony Meloto as the transformative and credible leader, to the network of donors and supporters, to the fact that the organization is both local and faith-based, something that is very Filipino and ingrained in our culture, those make up for a very workable model," he added.

Meloto turned over the reins of GK a couple of years ago to Luis Oquiñena, who has been working with him when the latter was just 16 years old.

Oquiñena represented GK when it was chosen as the lone Filipino non-governmental organization to participate in the Clinton Global Initiative in the New York in 2007, a gathering of key people and reputable organizations addressing pertinent global issues among them poverty. Strictly by invitation only, the Clinton conference back then saw Gawad Kalinga as an emerging successful template for development which could be adopted by other developing countries such as Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, and Indonesia where there are now existing GK communities.

"GK in its simplest form is *bayanihan*. It is all about engaging without judging, embracing without secluding. Both the public and private sectors have the transformative capacity to collaborate and develop programs to eradicate poverty, and we will all do it the GK way," Oquiñena said.

Change

The historic Boston summit gathered partners from all over the world, including Singapore, Brazil, Colombia, Philippines and Canada. Each one, through a piece of paper, proclaimed their resolve to end pov-

erty of the five million poorest families in the country by 2024 and gave their pledges.

Among those who gave their pledge was Su-Chzeng Ong, a resident of Singapore and the director of GK Hope Institute, who is a strong believer in the project.

"There may not be poverty in Singapore, but we want to bring GK and make it relevant there. What we have there I think is emotional poverty, and through giving to GK, we can address that," she said.

As the organization grows exponentially, so does its network of partners. This is one of the reasons why the organizers thought of bringing the first global summit to Boston.

"Boston is the most prestigious city as far as education is concerned, it is home to Harvard and MIT, and we would like all these great minds here to study what we have here in the academic setting so that we can grow properly," Meloto said.

Since its launching as a patriotic movement for nation-building in 2003, GK has evolved into an international organization where competing brands and corporations have collaborated to work on a singular goal. McDonald's and Jollibee, ABS-CBN and GMA, Ateneo and La Salle, Smart and Globe, among other rival corporations have banded to support the cause.

"People need to be inspired to rise above partisanship and parochial interests and whatever rivalries we have because as Filipinos, we keep on dividing, whether it is politics or religion," Meloto added.

UP and Ateneo are also working together with GK on research ventures to bring the science into the spirit of community development. The partnership aims to form an academic curriculum to bring organizational and technical expertise to the GK villages.

GK has become a transcendent cause, and through the numerous villages and homes that have been built around the country, it has also successfully bridged the Muslim and Christian communities and fostered a closer relationship among the partner organizations.

Various Filipino-American organizations have also come together to sponsor villages in the Philippines and have been doing so immediately after GK was launched in the Philippines.

"We are also here in the summit to honor the outstanding GK partners starting with the GK village builders of North America, who have made heroic sacrifices to grow the GK movement and to attract more patriots and partners to our cause of nation building," Meloto said. "You were among the first communities who responded to our call and we would like to thank all of you," he added.

Changing Lives

"The past seven months have been the most fulfilling I have ever experienced," said Jonah de Lumen, who left a lucrative job as a global brand manager at Unilever in New York to pursue a full-time GK work. "I did

global work with Unilever and I thought that was big but doing small things that make big impact on people's lives is really amazing," she added.

For now, De Lumen has to contend with what she considers as her primary challenge: dealing with the bureaucracy in the government.

"I am still getting used to it," she said, "There are gems in the rubbles and there are people who are really out there to help."

"The calling became very strong probably a year ago through a conversation. I really felt very blessed that I wanted to give back to the country especially when I know that there's a lot of people who do not have enough," De Lumen added.

Earlier this year, GK and the Department of Agriculture launched Bayan Anihan, which is GK's food sufficiency program. De Lumen is helping in this project, through its food sufficiency program.

"The whole idea is to empower communities by teaching the families to farm. We give them the seeds and we teach them how to farm and they reap what they sow. The primary purpose is food on the table. Whatever surplus, they can sell," she explained.

GK is on the process of perfecting the model, which they intend to replicate on a nation-wide scale. They have launched 115 farms in the past three months, with 25 metric tons of vegetables harvested and over 17,000 individuals fed.

Like the other GK projects, Bayan Anihan is also a multi-sectoral endeavor involving the government, local government units, youth, non-government organizations and the academe.

A lot of things have been achieved since GK's official founding in 2003. Over 900 communities all over the Philippines and in other developing countries, such as Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and East Timor have welcomed Gawad Kalinga with open arms.

GK groups based outside of the Philippines were also established in recent years. GK Hope Initiative Limited (GK HI) was incorporated in February 2009 and registered as an International Charity Organization in the Singapore Economic Development Board to give Gawad Kalinga an official presence in Singapore.

GK HI is composed of volunteers who work to promote GK and its vision in the Lion City. Singapore volunteers have participated in a number of builds and immersions in the Philippines. They have also been involved in charity work for orphans in East Timor and for the elderly and handicapped in Singapore.

Delegates from Singapore led by GK HI director Su-Chzeng Ong and active supporter Antonio del Rosario, president of Coca Cola Singapore and Malaysia officially announced that the country will be hosting the 2010 GK Global Summit next June. ■

2,000 Fil-Ams Attend...

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"Helping is a sign of patriotism," Ms. Umayam reminded the committee members to please help. "A bottle of dextrose in Manila hospitals costs Php1,000 each. Please help in other things," Ms. Umayam pleaded.

The executive committee went to work immediately after the 110th Independence Day Ball in June, 2008, engaging various Filipino-American organizations in the Southern California area. The Philippine Consulate, a traditional partner through the years, provided the Rizal Hall at the mid-Wilshire headquarters of the Consulate as a free venue for the executive committee meetings. The Consul General, Mary Jo Bernardo Aragon and the Deputy Consul General, Dan Espiritu, were always on hand to lend support and encouragement.

Ticket sales began in earnest following the first meeting of the 142-member executive committee in summer 2008. As early as April this year, 1,350 tickets had been distributed. "After we have reached 1,950 tickets sold, we will not accept any more payments," Ms. Umayam said. "Fifty of the tickets will be allotted for the beneficiaries in the Philippines."

As early as fall 2008, the names of prospective guest speakers were already known. The short list included Energy Secretary Angelo Reyes, Vice President Noli de Castro, Senator Manny Villar, Batangas Governor Vilma Santos, and Senator Francis "Chiz" Escudero. Two of them - Energy Secretary Reyes and Senator Escudero - attended on Saturday.

The lobbies of the Sacramento and the San Francisco Ballrooms of Westin Bonaventure were humming with excitement as early as 6pm on Saturday evening.

Pianist and music teacher Juliet Posadas and *Asian Journal* photographer and violinist Andy Tecson serenaded the guests who were milling around the lobby. Television networks ABS-CBN and GMA-7 were there too, making on-the-spot interviews of the prominent guests and speakers.

The grand ball began in earnest a few ticks before 8pm, when the executive committee members, waving little Philippine flags, made their entrance, at the heels of a smartly-uniformed three-person color guard "commanded" by Bing de la Vega of the Philippine Emergency Disaster Response Organization (PEDRO).

A parade of flags, featuring the evolution of the Philippine flag, from the revolutionary period to its contemporary guise, came next. Bishop Oscar Solis delivered the bi-lingual invocation.

Chair Darna Umayam paid tribute to the men and women of the 142-member executive committee by asking them to rise and be acknowledged, saying: "These are the people that worked very hard to make this celebration a success. *Mabuhay ang dakilang lahing Pilipino! Mabuhay ang Pilipinas!*" Ms. Umayam declared. (Long live the great Filipino race! Long live the Philippines!)

"Let us work toward a progressive and economically-emancipating Philippines, said Consul General Mary Jo Bernardo-Aragon, quoting from a statement from the Office of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. "Before I finish, we at the Consulate are calling our *kabayans* to register with us so that you can vote in the elections next year. So those who are qualified to vote, please register as an absentee overseas voter. For those of you who are also interested to re-acquire your Philippine citizenship, under the dual citizenship law, please come and visit us. You can also log on to our website at www.philippineconsulatela.org."

"We are happy to report that the Consulate in Los Angeles has registered so far more than six thousand OAVs, second only to our Consulate in Hong Kong," Aragon said. "Registration period will end on August 31, 2009."

Secretary of Energy Angelo Reyes, said, "We should all be proud; we should all be happy."

"Now we already have political independence. We are free from foreign oppression, but the drive and the journey and the struggle to achieve nationhood continues. And we are still seeking freedom

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