

OPINION & FEATURES

Nurturing our own



Consul General Cecile Rebong introduces Seafood City's Steve Go to Vice President Noli de Castro, while GMA International's Joseph Francia looks on.
AJPress Photo by Momar G. Visaya

AMIDST the political turmoil and outrage caused by the now infamous constituent assembly, amid the chaos being caused by the onset of the presidential campaigns, representatives from various sectors in the Philippines converged in Boston, Massachusetts for the 2024 Gawad Kalinga Global Summit 2009. The summit ran from June 12-14, working towards a single-minded and altruistic goal—"A World Without Poverty."

Prominent figures as Vice-President Noli de Castro, Philippine Daily Inquirer's Conrad de Quiros, Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay, GK Champion Tony Meloto and GK Builder Dylan Wilk took time from their hectic schedule to discuss possible solutions to fight the never-ending battle against poverty in the Philippines.

Even Cambridge Vice-Mayor Sam Snyder, in behalf of the City of Cambridge, gave his full support.

"The city of Cambridge supports the GK global summit to unveil the GK vision of 2024 of poverty eradication. What a noble goal that is, to discuss and think about it and chat strategies on how to do it. The two countries (Philippines and US) have a special relationship. There are 3 million Filipino-Americans residing in the United States, about 100 percent of them are gainfully employed. They participate in all facets of American life and strengthen the bond between our countries. I believe that sponsoring this kind of activity livens our commu-

nity and creates avenues for a better world," Snyder said.

"We launch GK as a global movement, to bring Filipinos out of poverty, slum after slum, town after town. Based on our experience, it is possible that we can get the Philippines out of Third World with-

EDITORIAL

out having to depend on foreign aid, depend on too much funding, we have the land, resources and talent," were the words of GK Champion Tony Meloto, urging Fil-Ams to contribute to the effort.

"The difference between a rich and poor country is the citizens' love for the country. If we love our country, we will bring it out of the Third World even before 2024. We believe by 2010, we can do that because of our partners, our target now is to get land for 5 million families by 2024," he further said.

An impossible feat, it may seem, especially since Fil-Ams are going through tough times with the economic recession as well. If we think about the miracle of the five loaves and two fish that fed a multitude in the Bible, we would probably come to an unlikely yet valid conclusion—more than the miracle itself, the resources possibly came from what little people had that they volunteered to share that day—an act that turned meagerness into a veritable feast. (AJPress)

The swine flu and heroism



STREET TALK
Greg B. Macabenta

I UNDERSTAND everyone is concerned over the swine flu pandemic in the Philippines. But that's nothing compared to the national illness being spread by the swine in the House of Representatives (yes, that's what the abbreviation Rep. before their names means.).

And we know who the swineherd is. She is Mistress of the Piggery by the Pasig where the trough is and where the pigs converge to gorge themselves.

With such disheartening news coming out of Manila, it was such a great relief to attend the first Gawad Kalinga Global Summit in Boston, Massachusetts from June 12 to 14.

It was a Gathering of Heroes.

Even those who would otherwise have been classified as villains back in the Philippines were at their heroic best during the three-day gathering of GK advocates and volunteers from all over the world.

Most of the delegates were based in the US, but there was a large delegation from the Philippines that included Vice-President Noli de Castro; Senators Kiko Pangilinan and Migz Zubiri; Congressman Rufus Rodriguez; Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap; Metro Manila Mayors Jojo Binay of Makati, Freddie Tinga of Taguig and Jun Bernabe of Paranaque; Governors LRay Villafuerte of Camarines Sur, Sally Ante Lee of Sorsogon and Victor Yap of Tarlac; provincial Mayors Dennis Go of Gerona, Tarlac, Tito Arion of Daet, Camarines Norte; and Sonia Lorenzo of San Isidro, Nueva Ecija; and Brig. Gen. Natalio Escarma III, Marine Corps Deputy Commander and Commander of the Marine Forces in Southern Philippines. There were two other provincial mayors, one from Iloilo and the other from Southern Leyte whose names I failed to note.

Among the former cabinet officials present were Nonong Cruz, DND, and Cito Lorenzo, Agriculture.

Lorenzo is among the key movers of GK.

There were also delegates from Malaysia, Colombia and India and a large delegation from Singapore, which will host the next summit in 2010. The Colombia and India delegates said they would like to adopt the GK concept in their home countries.

Friday and Saturday, June 12 and 13, were spent on GK testimonials, an exercise in restoring faith in men and hope for the nation. Both days saw the public officials talk about the impact of GK on their respective constituencies and their own efforts to adopt the "GK Way" in their governance.

The unspoken rivalry between Makati, Taguig and Paranaque as the most progressive Metro Manila cities with enlightened policies and comprehensive social services for their residents was obvious in the presentations of Binay, Tinga and Bernabe. They all spoke with pride of their respective accomplishments. Despite my cynicism, I noted that the claims were grounded in fact.

I must confess to being partial to Makati and to Paranaque, being a resident of the latter and having created the slogan for the former ("Makati—Mahalin natin. Atin ito") over two decades ago. But after listening to Tinga speak, I could not help being impressed.

Another truly admirable presentation was that made by Gov. LRay Villafuerte of Camarines Sur ("Just call us CamSur"). The young son of a traditional politician, Luis Villafuerte of the Lowest House of Congress, dispelled the old saying that one cannot expect good fruit from a tree of questionable qualities (of course, the elder Villafuerte washed his hands of responsibility for the reprehensible plot to railroad the Con-Ass, so maybe he deserves some credit).

In the few years he has been in office, LRay Villafuerte, who currently chairs the League of Provinces of the Philippines, has transformed his province into one of the most progressive in the country, and the fastest growing in terms of investments, tourist traffic and revenues.

In recognition of his accomplishments, he was

named Outstanding Young Person of the World by the Junior Chamber International for Business and Entrepreneurship and conferred the TOYM Award for Entrepreneurship in Exports by the Philippine Jaycees. He also received the Tourism Entrepreneur of the Philippines Award from the Department of Tourism and the Philippine Center for Entrepreneurship.

In subsequent conversations I had with Jojo Binay and Jun Bernabe, I pointed out the contrast between what I had heard from them and what was routinely written about the national government, specifically about the occupants of Malacañang and Congress.

"The real hope of the nation are the LGUs," said Binay. "If, at the city and municipal level, there is progressive governance and a delivery of social services, the provinces will follow suit. And the rest of the country will also be progressive."

To say that Binay provides adequate social services to his constituents is actually an understatement. Makati has a hospital and a university for its citizens and even the squatters who have been relocated to a 3.2-hectare location in San Jose Del Monte are entitled to unheard-of privileges.

Unlike other cities that ejected their squatters, relocated them to far-flung places and left them to fend for themselves, Makati has allowed former "informal settlers" to avail of the city's social services, including free education.

A project of GK and the Makati government, the "Dreamland" will have 480 homes in a community complete with a school, a medical clinic and a chapel. Makati purchased the land and provides the civil works and community facilities while GK handles project management, as well as the spiritual and moral guidance required to truly transform the former slum dwellers.

In his presentation, Binay said that the city has provided attractive tax incentives to private companies that have contributed to the project, such that, in one pledging session alone, they raised P11 million.

Despite owning a home in Paranaque for the past

41 years, it was only at the GK Global Summit that I met Jun Bernabe, a junior of the multiple-term mayor Florencio Bernabe, Sr. But he impressed me with his vision for the city and its improved services.

I acknowledged that I actually had a pleasant experience at city hall on my last trip to Manila. I had decided to apply for a senior citizen's card, having heard about the many privileges enjoyed by people in that age category. I had expected the usual long wait and disinterested over-the-counter attitude of the stereotypical government employee. But not in that instance. When I asked how I could apply for the senior's card, I was ushered by a clerk to another office in a far corner of the building and entrusted to a team that immediately attended to my needs. In 15 minutes, I had my senior's card, along with literature on privileges and how I could avail of them.

Two other mayors who should have been present at the GK event and would have bared impressive city histories were Sonny Belmonte of Quezon City and Bayani Fernando of Marikina. They, too, have proven the validity of Binay's thesis that true progress and reform can happen at the local level.

One can argue that the Gawad Kalinga Global Summit simply allowed the government officials present to show their "good side" but that they inevitably have their "bad" side—the side of kickbacks, overpricing, ghost employees, monopoly of businesses and the rackets and every conceivable sin attached to politicians.

But that, precisely, is what I find admirable in Gawad Kalinga and its founder, Tony Meloto.

Two years ago, at the 10th Filipinas Magazine Achievement Awards—which usually confers the honor only to Filipinos in America—we made an exception of Tony Meloto—we gave him an Award for International Achievement.

In doing so, I pointed out that, while Meloto is a *bona fide* hero, his real heroism is in his ability to bring out the heroes in everyone else.

Maybe, Meloto should be asked to clean out the Pig Sty by the Pasig. ■

What if your daughter has a sex video?

by LITO GUTIERREZ
Inquirer.net

MANILA—Years ago, on the occasion of my birthday, I was brought to a strip joint on San Francisco's Broadway Street by a couple of friends who wanted to show me what the City by the Bay was all about. Being, as it were, fresh off the boat then, I felt rather overwhelmed. It was like stepping into an X-rated movie. I had barely sat on a stool when a blonde, perhaps barely out of her teens and, save for high heels and oversized earrings, bare as she was when she came out of her mother's womb, came up to me and started grinding her butt on my groin.

My pals were as boisterous as hyenas circling their prey. "It's ok," one yelled over the din. "We've taken care of that already." The other piped in, "If you don't like her, there's plenty more out here." And he was right. Girls in various stages of nakedness were roaming like livestock in a fair.

Saying thanks but no thanks, I gently shoved the girl away. I wanted to look for her father and beat the crap out of him. What self-respecting father would let his daughter go into something like this? I also wanted to bolt and go home and hold my then two young daughters as tightly as I could.

I relate this passage in the rippling wake of the video sex scandal

starring Hayden Kho and an assortment of unsuspecting young women. I was asked to write about it from the perspective of a father—as in, what would I do if one of the girls in the videos were my daughter? My instantaneous reaction was: You know what? My daughters would know better than get involved with a sleazebag like that.

But the question does persist: What if? Well, I'll drop everything and be with her until she gets her head back on her shoulders. I will let her cry as much as she wants and tell her everything is all right because she's in her Daddy's arms and no harm will ever come to her again. I won't even ask her to tell me anything. No explanations, no excuses. If I have to tell her anything at all, it would be to remind her that I'll be there for her and that it's time for her to move on.

But what about the guy? Well, what about him? Wouldn't I want to rip his thing off him? Not really. That, for me, would be descending into the sewer.

In fact, I feel rather sorry for Kho. He seemed to be young enough to be my son. And if he were my son? I'd tell him to suck it up and face the music. I'd also tell him I would still be there for him, though at the back of my mind, my question would be: How did this guy ever get a medical degree? And without being too judgmental, if that were possible, what kind of upbringing did he have?

Still I hope that one day, he could redeem himself. And he could start by shedding his cowardice and taking responsibility for his acts,

instead of blaming drugs and all the piffle he has been pathetically dishing out.

But what I am really angry about is the hypocrisy swirling about this sordid issue, and I am not just referring to the congressional phonies (led by a senator, whose self-righteous pronouncements remind me of the pot calling the kettle black) who have largely ignored the more critical issues, such as the immorality of tampering with the Constitution for personal gain, the ZTE broadband scandal, the Joc-joc fertilizer scam, etc.

Many Filipino fathers would rant about tearing Hayden's head off, if those were their daughters in the video, but later they'd be salivating over these illicit images in the secrecy of their computers.

They'd also be disappointed at the video which also features an alleged Brazilian model, because the webcam was aimed too high toward the ceiling. "Harang!"

I am also sure not a few men and women alike, knowing that one of the girls in the videos is a "bold" (Do they still call it that?) actress, are saying she, the unsuspecting "star," got what she deserved for acting like a slut in the movies.

We rail and wail against the corrupt and the immoral, and yet we hail and thus aspire to be like them.

Once, over dinner with friends, the editor of a leading newspaper asked in the wake of another Arroyo scandal: "Where is the outrage?"

If we take a collective look at ourselves in the mirror, I'm pretty sure we'll know where the wrath has gone. ■



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