



Paglaum

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USAID RESPONSIVE, NOT DICTATORIAL



Ms. Gloria D. Steele (holding mic) discusses the work of the USAID in the Philippines at the Roundtable Discussion held at Campus Crusade for Christ in Marikina City (February 13).

By Jay Dejaresco

When the Mission Director of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) spoke in a roundtable discussion of the Pimentel Institute for Leadership and Governance PILG, a positive shift in strategy in the way aid programs have been implemented in the country was noticed.

Aquilino Q. Pimentel, Jr. Chair of the PILG who hosted Director Gloria Dino Steele, remarked that we now have a USAID that listens to and responds to the genuine needs of the people it seeks to assist.

This was confirmed by Ms. Steele when she said under her leadership, they made a "re-strategization" of what USAID does in the Philippines.

One of the changes is to involve more loan recipients, instead of limiting beneficiaries to the same recipients, some of whom actually do not need the

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Word from the Institute

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE IPU

A two-day conference on human rights was held in Manila from the 26th of this month to the 27th.

It's a good thing that it was held here.

For one thing, human rights advocates - local and foreign - who attended the conference learned more about how countries in the ASEAN deal with human rights issues.

And, more important to the locals, is that some discussions were focused on how human rights are promoted and protected right

here in our own country.

In general, our people are in the dark about what legal structures exist that may be availed of by them in the event their human rights are violated.

They are only vaguely aware, if at all, that there is a Human Rights Commission that was created and mandated by the Constitution, itself, to take care of their human rights.

While the human rights of our citizens are not intentionally violated by the

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HUMAN RIGHTS: AN EQUALIZER

By Clarisse Aquino

Respect for human rights is a great equalizer.

This was the statement of Aquilino Q. Pimentel, Jr. Chair of the Pimentel Institute for Leadership and Governance (PILG), in his speech before international delegates participating in the Inter Parliamentary Union Conference hosted by Manila last February 27, 2015.

Pimentel, a former Senate President was once a member of the Committee on Human Rights of the IPU when he was still in the Senate.

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Word from the Institute *From Page 1*

authorities, like for instance, their right to clean air, some sectors of our society continue to suffer outright human rights harassments in other fields.

One recent example deals with a tenant farmer, by the name of Agapito Silva.

He was shot dead early this month, on February 3, at 530 p.m., at his home in Barangay Imok, by a police-military team in Calauan, Laguna.

The police and the military men were reportedly out to arrest him for drug trafficking.

Nobody as yef knows what really

happened.

The Silva family asserts it was a rub-out because he was ready to surrender. But, instead of taking him alive, they shot him dead.

The Silva incident is probably one reason why the country's record on human rights is, at best, ambivalent.

Nonetheless, it may not be right either to claim that there is no progress in the government's attempt to promote and protect the human rights of our citizens.

But, it would, certainly be folly to just leave the matter solely at the hands of the authorities.

The people must courageously assert their human rights, and stand up for them.

Unless they do so, the powerful, the wealthy, and the well-connected would continue their predatory ways at the expense of the poor, the deprived and the oppressed in the country.

Then, might becomes right.

That, certainly, would not be in the best interest of our people.

Without human rights, people are reduced to the status of animals.

Hence, human rights are vital to make life worthy of human beings.

Human Rights an equalizer *From Page 1*

“Bereft of human rights, people are reduced to the status of animals,” Pimentel pointed out.

They become beasts of burden of the affluent, servants of the powerful, or robots of their well-off masters, he explained.

In such a situation, might becomes right, even in the political social and economic fields, he added.

“But, when recognized and respected, human rights become



Nene Pimentel, former Chairman of the Committee on Human Rights of the IPU talks about human rights (February 27).

the great equalizer of peoples,” Pimentel stressed.

In his speech Pimentel cited the heroic actions of organizations promoting the protection of human rights around the world, including the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

He stressed that the development of human rights protection around the world was not easily attained.


“In the recall of events relating to the development of the concept of human rights, it may sound as if getting Human Rights accepted by peoples of varied races, traditions and cultures in their own jurisdictions was the easiest thing to do, but it was not” Pimentel said.

A great part of the tribute to the heroic deeds of parliamentarians in the promotion

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Nene Pimentel with IPU Secretary Akiyo Afouda.



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USAID responsive, not dictatorial *From Page 1*

loans, Steele reported.

She disclosed that the aid by the USAID to the Philippines has risen from US\$90-million a year to US\$140-million a year, although an additional twelve Pacific countries including Mongolia has been appended.

“But most of the aid goes to the Philippines,” she assured.

Pimentel recalled that when he was mayor of Cagayan de Oro, he also had his encounters with USAID officials then who often tend to dictate where and how the programs are to be implemented in his jurisdiction, which he said caused problems.

At times, the programs of the USAID were not what actually was needed by the people such that aid programs went to a certain direction while the real need was on another direction, Pimentel recalled.

But now, specially under the leadership of Ms. Steele, it was noted that suggestions and ideas were openly welcomed, and even encouraged by USAID.

Gloria D Steele, who has headed USAID for the Philippines and Pacific islands for the last five years, is a former a Philippine citizen.

She graduated in Maryknoll College and did further studies in Letran.

She worked in the office of the Secretary of Agriculture then Secretary Jesus Tanco during the Marcos years.

She said by heading the USAID in the Philippines, she has come full circle, recalling that she was given a break when she received a scholarship from USAID, which paved the way for a career in the international aid agency.

Here stint with USAID in the Philippines will end in August this year.



Gloria D. Steele

“Having grown up in the Philippines, made me understand better the situation here,” she said.

She was assigned in the Philippines in 2010 after the election of the current President.

She said she was quite impressed that a candidate running a campaign against corruption won in the elections and she thought it was something that needed support.

She said weak governance spurred by corruption is one of the reasons why the Philippines is not where it should be.

What the USAID wanted to do was to contribute something to a more stable and prosperous Philippines with a growth that benefits more people, she said.

The roundtable discussion on the USAID was held at the headquarters of the Campus Crusade for Christ in the Philippines in Marikina through Pastor Chris Uy.

Chair Pimentel of PILG stressed that the USAID, while it gives aid to worthy programs, cannot provide all the solutions to all the problems plaguing the country.

That is why the Philippines must also work to solve the critical problems it faces, specially those that it is able to handle and not totally rely on aid, he said.

She also bared that the Philippines is one of four countries selected by US President Barack Obama to engage in a partnership with the United States of America to address the most binding constraints to economic growth.

These binding constraints that need to be addressed include weak governance which is manifested by corruption.

Another constraint is on the rule of law, where it takes so long to resolve cases.

The third constraint is the lack of infrastructure. She cited the need to improve on education, build roads, modern airports.

She also cited the downgrading of human capacity, particularly in the field of education.

Having been educated in the Philippines, Steele said the quality of Philippine education has diminished over the years.

“Back in the day, Philippines schools were the best in Asia,” she recalled.

“Unfortunately, this is no longer the case,” she added.

In a survey conducted among Filipino students, she bared 75% could not read.

A quarter of those surveyed could read but could not comprehend what was read, she said.



Pastor Cris Uy (holding mic) welcomes the participants of the Roundtable Discussion.



Director Gloria Steele (middle) receives the Plaque of Appreciation and Books.(L-R) Alex Brillantes, Cris Uy, Gwen Gana, Nene Pimentel, Winnie Marbella, Hugh Nguyen and Jay Dejaresco.

Human Rights an equalizer *From Page 2*



OPEN FORUM. (L-R) Nene Pimentel, Chief UPR Branch, UN OHCHR Sharzad Tadjbakhsh and India National Human Rights Justice Cyriac Joseph.

and protection of human rights belongs to the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, and to its parent organization, the IPU, Pimentel said.

The Committee's ceaseless concern for the protection and promotion of human rights the world over, and the IPU's noble espousal of those rights make the cause relevant to the peoples' lives, he stressed.

In his speech, Pimentel also gave an update at efforts to promote human rights in the Philippines.

"In the Philippines, we now

have a Human Rights Commission (CHR) was created by mandate of the 1987 Constitution of the country," he explained.

He further said that the Commission is mandated by the basic law of the land to find ways and means of promoting and protecting the human rights of the people of the country.

"In the assessment of international observers, the country's record on human rights is, to say the least, ambivalent," Pimentel said.

"But to those of us, who had our share of oppressions during the

Marcos 14-year authoritarian rule (from 1972 to 1986), the promulgation of the new constitution has created a new environment that obliges all concerned to respect the basic rights and fundamental liberties of our people," he stressed.

"This is not to say that everything is all right regarding the protection and promotion of human rights in this country, Pimentel emphasized.

He added that much still has to be done so that the human rights of peoples regardless of rank, race, wealth or status would be adequately protected and promoted.



Nene Pimentel (middle) with Senator Koko Pimentel, the program chair of the Conference.



IPU representative from Bhutan Khandu Sangay requests Nene Pimentel to sign his book.