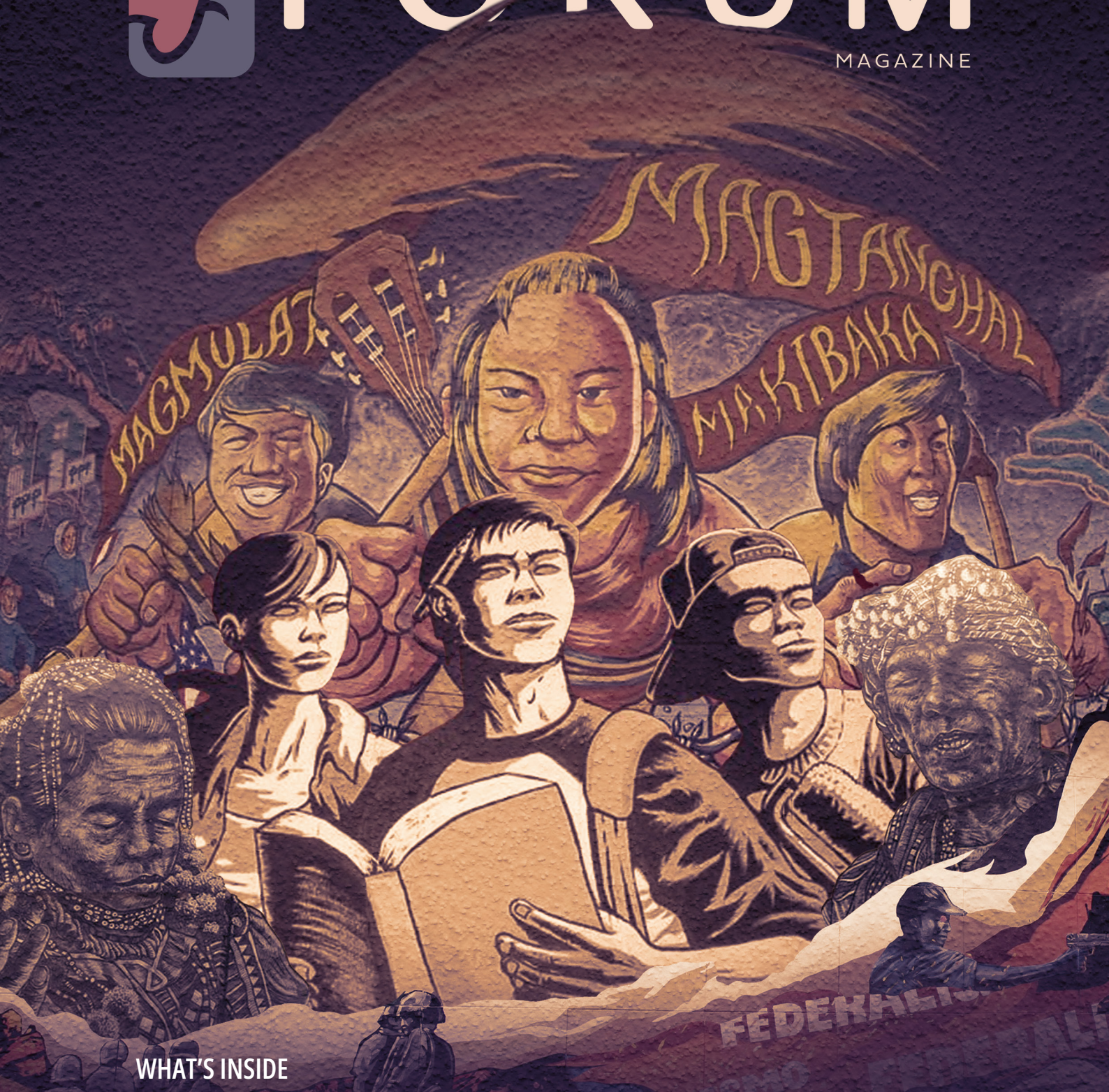




UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES

# FORUM

MAGAZINE



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## Mensahe mula sa Patnugot

# Aktibismo mula Martial Law hanggang Gen Z

Mga 1920 nang unang umusbong ang salitang “activism” sa politikal nitong pakahulugan na masigabong pagkilos para magdulot ng panlipunang pagbabago. “Aktibista” ang piniling identidad at pagkanilalang para manghimok ng pagbabago, makapagpabago ng mga kalakaran sa pamahalaan kundi man sa lipunan at mundo.

Ang aktibismo at aktibista na kilala o kinatakutan ng mga magulang *maging* ng kanilang mga anak sa UP ay historikal na penomenon na nailuwal noong dekada 1970. Bahagi ang nagaganap sa UP noon sa mas malaking pagluluwal at pamamayagpag ng mass movement sa bansa na bahagi naman ng global na anti-establishment anti-authoritarian movement: Third World solidarity, anti-imperialist nationalist, women’s liberation, gay at lesbian, free love, free sex, drugs, hippie at iba pa.

Sa bansa, ang people’s movement ay nakaangkla sa pagsagka kay Ferdinand Marcos, Sr. na maghahari lampas sa dalawang four-year term na itinalaga sa 1935 Constitution. Umalagwa ang serye ng malawakan at maramihang protesta noong 1970 na tinawag na First Quarter Storm. Na-seige o nakubkob ng mga aktibista ang UP campus sa Diliman noong Pebrero 01-09, 1971. Lumalakas, lumalawak, lumalaban ang sambayanan.

Dagdag pa, hindi nagtagumpay ang ipinatawag ni Marcos, Sr. na 1971 Constitutional Convention para makatakbo muli sa binabagong saligang batas. Pero sa “Game of Thrones” move, inunahan ni Marcos, Sr. ang mga kalaban, nagdeklara ng martial law noong 1972, lampas isang taon bago dapat magtapos ang kanyang ikalawang termino sa Disyembre 1973.

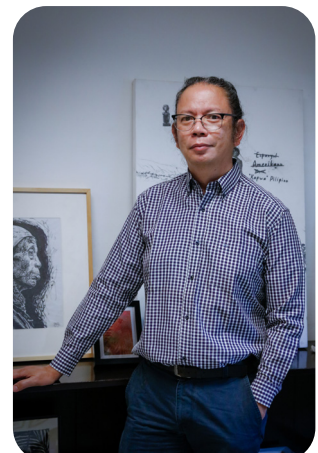
Marami sa mga aktibista ng panahon ay nakulong bago makapag-underground, nag-underground bago makulong, nag-underground pero nakulong din, nakulong-napalaya-nakulong muli o nakulong, napalaya, nagturo sa UP. Sa ilalim ni Pangulong Salvador Lopez (1969-1975), hindi lamang niya naipagtanggol ang autonomy ng UP noong Diliman Commune, naging sanctuary rin ang UP sa mga nagbabalik na mga estudyante at ex-detainee na naging mga guro.

Bago kay Lopez, institusyonal ang kalakaran ng proto-aktibismo sa UP: pro-active na makinarya ng lokal na human resource development kay Murray Barlett, ang unang pangulo nito, at pagpapalawak ng mga akademikong programa nang malipat sa lokal na pangulo, at sa partikular, ang GE (General Education) curriculum ni Vicente Sinco. Mula sa “change the world” at “question authority” mode ng 1960s (1970s sa bansa), ang aktibismo na may angklang historikal ay lumawak nang dumami ang mga uri nito, pero kumitid nang mapakat ito sa identity politics: student activism, gender, eco-activism, animal rights activism, at iba pa na gamit ang mga napapanahong moda ng protesta: online, planking, noynoying, hashtag, occupy at iba pa.

Mula sa mga ex-detainee, sympathizer na hindi nakulong, political exile na nakabalik at nakapasok sa UP, sa ilang henerasyon ng aktibistang estudyante na naging aktibistang guro, sa mga estudyante, faculty at staff na sa labas ng UP nagkaroon ng aktibismo, kahit pahinain ng estado at neoliberalismo, limliman ng mga nagtataasang hindi tapos na gusali o mabarahan ng traffic ng pribadong sasakyan sa kalsada sa campus, kahit may pakiwaring matamlay ang kasalukuyan, parati pa ring may pag-asa, parating may pag-asa na may kikilos, may mababago, may pagbabago.

Paalaala sa atin parati ng alaala ni Ditto Sarmiento, *Philippine Collegian* editor at desaparecido sa diktaduryang Marcos, ng ilang henerasyon ng aktibista at pagbabagong naging dulot ng aktibong aktibismo, “Kung hindi ngayon, kailan pa? Sino ang kikibo kung hindi tayo kikibo? Sino ang kikilos kung hindi tayo kikilos?”

**Rolando Tolentino**  
Punong Patnugot





# Revolutionary Walls

## The Activist's Canvas

 *Kevin Roque*

“

**The wall is alive. It continually evolves, reflecting the nation's pressing concerns.**

*- Ides Josepina D. Macapanpan*

”

For ten years now, artistic expression and social activism has materialized on campus in the form of murals, with the help of students from the College of Fine Arts (CFA) in the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman. This dynamic canvas for change stands as a visual testament to the collective voice of the students, serving as a commentary on pressing social issues and showcasing the power of collective action to provoke thought and inspire dialogue within the University.

Ides Josepina D. Macapanpan, an Instructor in UP Baguio and a member of Artist Circle and UgatLahi, says that activist murals are a form of public art; they convey messages related to social, political, environmental, or cultural issues with the intention of raising awareness, inspiring change, and fostering community engagement. They address topics such as human rights, justice, equality, and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, the collaboration in these murals challenges the individualistic approach prevalent in the academic art scene.





Photo by Kevin Roque, UP MPRO.



## History of the Fine Arts (FA) Wall

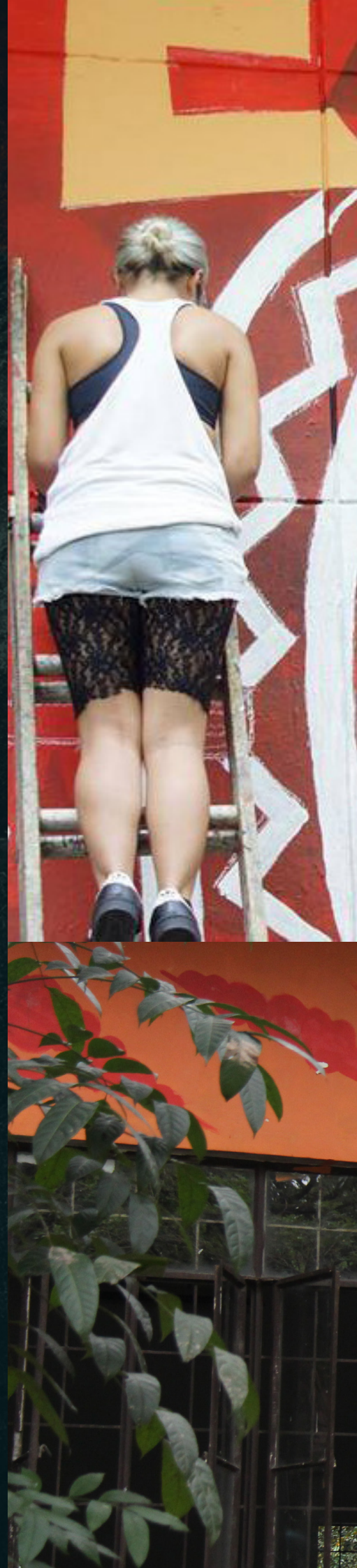
As recounted by Ana Patricia Non, the initiator of the community pantry and an alumna of the UP Artists' Circle (AC) and the CFA Student Council, even before the launch of the FA Wall initiative there was already a freedom wall for freshmen to express themselves through graffiti and doodles. As these works were spontaneous and unplanned, the quality tended to reflect the hasty execution.

Dean Florentina Colayco spearheaded the removal of graffiti on all the walls in CFA by painting over them. The Gerilya artist collective was among the first few to redefine the said FA wall. The wall is now more purposeful, and progressive sentiments are now seen straight away with their "Maki-Usisa, Makibaka, Makilahok" work.

In subsequent years, in the context of extrajudicial killings of Lumads followed by the massacre of farmers in Kidapawan, Cotabato, the students seized the opportunity to use the main wall to create visual commentaries on these pressing issues.

Through the joint efforts of the CFA Student Council and organizations such as AC, Alay Sining, and UgatLahi, students crafted their political stances as visual narratives. The paintings from that point onward were carefully planned and improved through further collaboration with professors, like Leonilo 'Neil' Doloricon and Joey Tañedo, who offered critical insights on design and composition.

This new FA Wall exposed fellow students, as well as the University community, to the prevalent issues in the country, and became a starting point for further discussion and action.



(Top) Photo by Aliona Silva. Taken from Alay Sining Facebook page. (Bottom) Photo by Kevin Roque, UP MPRO.









## Role of UP

Macapanpan asserts that UP plays a crucial role in providing a free space for art with progressive sentiments. The FA Wall, placed prominently along the street, is easily visible to the public, and its presence within the campus implies institutional support for the right of the community to make such statements. UP does not censor or gatekeep, but protects both the artwork and students' freedom of speech from vandalism and bias.

Luigi Almuena, a member of AC and UgatLahi, emphasizes that these murals go beyond mere advocacy; they embody activism through their underlying ideology. Unlike safer and more indirect forms of advocacy, the murals are a hands-on approach to addressing issues and struggles faced by the marginalized in society.

The initiative is open to all UP students, and not restricted to Fine Arts majors. Anyone can join the effort, fostering a sense of inclusivity and collaboration in the pursuit of artistic activism. The wall is kept alive as long as there are volunteers who give voice to the voiceless and make the marginalized and injustices visible.

Photo by Kevin Roque, UP MPRO.







## The Murals

### *Doodles (before 2013)*

Some of the doodles from Fine Arts students during the time when it was just a freedom wall.

### *Maki-Usisa, Makibaka, Makilahok (2013)* by Gerilya

In this composition by the Gerilya artist collective, the background encapsulates the current events while the foreground shows the diverse spectrum of fine arts students.

Photo by Aldrich Alarilla.



### *Protect Our Culture, Save the Lumads (2015)*

This work stands as a protest against the onslaught on Lumad schools in Southern Philippines, encompassing red-tagging, military encampment, threats, harassment of educators, students and parents, as well as the distressing acts of closing and burning school buildings.

Photo by Luigi Almuenra.







### *Bigas Hindi Bala (2016)*

A mural championing the cause of genuine agrarian reform and justice for North Cotabato farmers during the Aquino administration.

Photo by Luigi Almuena.

### *Pulutan ng Dayuhan (2018)*

A portrayal of betrayed sovereignty, where Duterte's administration leaves the Philippines exposed, caught between the grasp of American imperialism and the rising influence of China.

Photo by Luigi Almuena.



### *Hear Them Pray (2018)*

Depicting often overlooked members of society, such as indigenous people, Archie Oculos portrays them with raised hands engaged in prayer.

Photo by Kevin Roque, UP MPRO.





## Sigwa (2019)

Luigi Almuenas pastiche composition resonates with the turbulent First Quarter Storm during Martial Law in the '70s, drawing parallels with contemporary challenges, like the 13-year-old age limit for imprisonment, martial law in Mindanao, proposed charter change, and the 'tokhang' campaign during Duterte's administration.

Photo by Luigi Almuenas.



## Tribute to Tanya Domingo, Ian Dorado, and Renz Lee (2020)

Martyrs of CFA: Renz Lee, Tanya Domingo, and Ian Dorado, activists who lost their lives in service to the people and their cause.

Photo from Alay Sining.

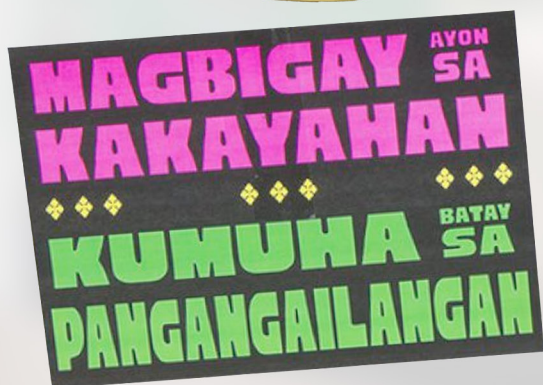
## 'WE Resist!' (Women Educators Resisting State Attacks) (2023)

A tribute to the unwavering courage and determination of women educators during Women's Month. The mural is a testament to the defense of union rights and academic freedom. It features resilient figures, such as UP Professor Melania Flores, UP alumna and ACT Region VII Coordinator Dyan Gumanao, and ACT Teachers Partylist Representative France Castro, all survivors of recent state repression. This was crafted by UP Cebu lecturer, Armand Dayoha, a dedicated development worker who, along with Gumanao, faced an unjust abduction by state forces in Cebu City early this year.

Photo by Kevin Roque, UP MPRO.







# On Pantries as Art and Kindness as Activism

Celeste Ann L. Castillo

Ana Patricia “Patreng” Non of the UP College of Fine Arts has become a household name—and if not her name itself, then her community pantry, which spawned as many as 6,700 other similar initiatives nationwide. The community pantry that she set up in Maginhawa street, Diliman at the height of the COVID lockdowns was the first of this wave of free-food-for-the-poor projects. She has since reaped recognition for this act: the Rotary Golden Wheel Award (2021), AirAsia’s First Stellar of the Year Awardee (2022), US Ambassador’s Woman of Courage Awardee (2022), among others. The now-28-year-old has also been named one of Asia’s Most Influential PH in 2021.

All these accolades—and on the flipside, all the red-tagging, unfounded accusations of “extortion”, “terrorism”, and “satanism”, and the furious campaign to discredit her and the movement she started—arose from a single act of radical kindness. She put into practice the tenet painted on a sign hanging in that community pantry along Maginhawa street: “Magbigay ayon sa kakayahan, kumuha batay sa pangangailangan.”

Over two years since she first set out her bamboo cart laden with canned goods, rice, and vegetables, Patreng Non sat down with the *UP Forum* to talk about how her experiences in UP led her to engage in her chosen form of activism.



## If you were to tell your own story, how would you do it?

Gusto kong ikwento kung ano 'yung relationship ko with UP. Ang college life ko ay love-hate relationship with UP. Kasi, okay, galing akong Catholic school at dream school ko ito, the best school sa Pilipinas. Tapos nag-promise ako na hindi ako magiging aktibista pagpasok ko sa UP kasi yung dalawa kong kapatid naging aktibista.

Pero pagpasok ko sa UP, naabutan ko yung STFAP, STS, tuition fee—iba't-ibang isyu. Tapos nag-Student Council (member) ako sa UP Fine Arts (FA), at ang una kong isyu ay yung mga security guard ng FA na love na love namin, mawawala na lang sila dahil ibang agency 'yung nanalo. Tapos yung mga UP staff, delayed ang mga sahod. Noong time ko, nag-aagawan ang mga estudyante sa mga dormitory. 'Yung mga transferee mula sa UP Tacloban [survivors of Super Typhoon Yolanda] na nawalan ng bahay, nawalan ng pamilya pero gusto pang mag-aral, kailangan pang i-prove na nahihirapan talaga sila para lang matanggap sa UP Diliman. Batch 2012 ako—batchmate ko si Kristel Tejada. Org-mate ko si Chad Booc. Kasama ko sa Council sina Kevin Castro at Renz Lee. Marami kaming natutunan, totoo, pero malungkot. Mahirap. Noong estudyante ako, inisip ko minsan, "UP, bakit mo ginagawa sa amin ito?"

At the same time, gusto ko pa ring bumalik sa UP. Gusto ko kasing mag-aral ulit. Hindi pa ako actually graduate sa FA, may ilang unit pa akong natira. Kinailangan kong tumigil sa pag-aaral noon dahil kailangang kumita. At na-diagnose ako with depression kaya din ako tumigil sa pag-aaral.

Gusto kong ikwento kung paano ako nag-survive sa college. Na kapag walang perang pambaon kasi mahal ang mga material sa FA, pupunta ako sa bakery at 6 AM bago magklase at bibili ako ng meringue at toasted siopao. Tapos maglalako ako sa mga klase ko sa AS (Palma Hall), sa FA, sa mga GE class. Pero magdress at boots ako para hindi ako mukhang kawawa. Na minsan bibili ako ng isang kilong saging sa KNL at buong araw dala ko yung saging dahil 'yan lang ang pagkain ko. At kapag desperate na ako, anim na Milo sachet—breakfast, lunch, dinner. Na 'di ako makapag-aral nang maayos dahil puro raket ako, kaya hindi ako naka-graduate.

Doon sa UP na-develop yung lungkot. But at the same time, doon ko na-develop yung sense of empathy. Noong nag-pandemic, alam ko yung gagawin ko sa community pantry kasi na-train ako sa UP na kailangang tulung-tulong tayo. 'Yung collective action, 'di lang siya dogmatic phrase. Kailangan siyang gawin. Natuto talaga ako. At siguro kaya ko nagawa 'yung pantry kasi gano'n yung mga experience ko sa UP.

## How do you define activism?

Nag-iba na kung paano ko dinefine ang activism noong mas bata ako. Kung ide-define ko ang activism noon, ito 'yung ibibigay mo 'yung buhay mo, magsa-sakripisyo ka.

Ngayon, sa tingin ko: activism is a way of life. We empower other people. Oo, nakakaawa kung nakakaawa, pero hindi dapat nagtatapos sa awa. I-celebrate natin 'yung kakayahan ng mga taong mag-serve. At dapat gano'n din sa mga aktibista—i-celebrate natin 'yung kakayahan natin. Kaya ko gusto 'yung community pantry, 'yung pagbibigay ayon sa kakayahan, kasi respectful ito sa kung ano ang kakayahan ng tao and sine-celebrate 'yon. Kung lahat tayo ay may maliit na ambag, maliit na kontribusyon, may mararating tayo.

Photo by Stephanie Esperida, UP MPRO.



### What are your insights from running the community pantry?

Sa totoo lang, wala akong sense of ownership sa idea ng community pantry. Kasi para syang art work. 'Di ba, kapag naglabas ka ng painting o sculpture, bahala na 'yung audience na magsabi kung ano sya? Ang community pantry, para syang art work na binigay mo sa audience. Pwedeng uy, blessing 'yung art work para sa audience, or superspreader event sya, or about kindness sya, or about activism. Kung tungkol ito sa pagiging communist, pwede rin. Hindi ko pine-personal because it's not about me, it's about them. Tungkol ito sa kung ano ang reflection ng pantry sa kanila. Ito 'yung truth nila.

Ako, may sarili akong truth kung bakit ginawa ko ito. Laging tinatanong 'yan sa akin sa mga interview: "Ang galing mo, ano? Ginawa mo 'yung pantry kasi kailangan ito ng mga tao." Pero ang sinasabi ko: "Hindi po. Kaya ko ginawa 'yung pantry kasi kailangan ko ito. Kailangan ko ng closure for myself."

Yun 'din ang gift ng pag-experience ko ng gutom, ng pagiging galing sa kahirapan, ng pagiging desperate sa college na makapag-aral lang nang maayos. Kaya ngayon, ayokong nagugutom. Kaya naisip ko 'yung pantry.

Na-realize ko din na ang daling i-hate ng mga Pilipino ang isa't-isa. Ang dali nating sisihin o i-persecute ang kapwa-Pinoy. Pero may isang time na wala nang donation sa pantry, may mga farmer mula sa Nueva Ecija na nagdala ng kamote para sa pantry. Hirap na hirap sila, pero kaya nilang magbigay. Tumatak sa akin 'yon. Mula sa masa, tungo sa masa—kung sino ang hirap na hirap, sila ang magbibigay kasi alam nila.

'Yan 'yung pinaka-proud ako tungkol sa pantry. Kwento ito ng mga simpleng tao—magsasaka, mangingisda, LGBTQ community... Isa ang LGBTQ community sa mga unang nagtayo ng pantry, at may hotline, contraceptives, at HIV testing pa sa mga pantry nila. Hindi nakukulong sa isang form lang ang mutual aid. Pwedeng sa iba-ibang paraan 'yung ambag natin. At ang

pantry, concept sya ng bayanihan. Lahat tayo ay nagbubuhay ng bahay kahit hindi natin ito bahay. At 'yung mga taong hindi kayang magbuhay, sila ang naghahanda sa next location, naghahakot, naglilinis, nagdadala ng mga gamit. May kanya-kanyang ambag.

### What about the red-tagging and information campaign to discredit you?

Noong na-red-tag ako, doon ko natutunan na ang magliligtas pala sa iyo ay honesty. Kasi kung hindi ka maging honest, kung may pino-project kang image, magkakamali ka lang.

May time noong nare-red tag yung pantry na oo, takot ako noon pero alam mo? Meron din akong certain level of strength, na "ay, nagkamali sila ng kinalaban." Siguro three or four years ago, kung na-red-tag ako iiyak ako, maglulupasay, at magagalit ako. Pero ngayon, at peace na ako sa sarili ko. May fear pa din—'di okay, may fear. At sinabi ko sa pamilya ko na kung may mangyari sa akin, ako pa rin ang may control.

Ang community pantry, katulad ng activism, ang hirap-hirap niya. Mahirap siyang i-sustain, nakakapagod siya, nakakapuyat, tapos nare-red-tag ako. Ang daming challenge, pero sa totoo lang, ang dami niyang magandang kwento na hindi ko rin ipagpapalit. Ang dami kong natutunan. Kaya ngayon, kung babalik ako sa UP, ready na ako kasi mas kalmado na ako ngayon. Alam ko na magulo ang mundo, at hindi pa rin perfect ang UP. Pero babalik ako kasi hindi na siya about me. At maghanda rin ang UP kasi mas wise na ako. Alam ko na kung sinong sisingilin ko ngayon.





### What can you say to the young people who go through the same struggles?

Noong time ng pantry, may isang UP professor na nag-invite sa aking magsalita sa klase. Tanong ng isang estudyante: "Anong advice niyo po sa amin kung nahihirapan kami?" Sabi ko: "Kung nahihirapan kayo, pakinggan ninyo sarili niyo."

Isa pang advice ko sa estudyante ngayon: Ang laban, nasa community. Plus points lang ang social media. Kasi ang pag-unlad, hindi lang para sa sarili. Ang pag-unlad ay tungkol sa community. Mabigat kung mabigat, pero hindi naman kailangang in one day or one month or one year maso-solusyonan ang problema. Activism is a way of life. Kaya magpahinga kung kailangan, magbigay nang ayon sa kakayahan, at huwag nating iisipin ever na mag-isa tayo kasi totoong may community. Malaki ang community.

### What does the community pantry say about the world and about us?

Parang weird siya pero kailangan, eh. Syempre maganda kung sustainable ang mga pantry, pero wala akong nire-require sa mga ibang pantry organizer. Kung ano 'yung ginagawa nila, kung ano ang binibigay nila, more than enough na ito. Thankful na ako doon. Ang mahalaga ay ang mga tao, hindi yung output nila. Ang mahalaga 'yung kakayahan nila, 'yung kaya nilang ibigay sa ngayon. At okey na okey na 'yon.

## Inspiring Stories from Community Pantries

### Tricycle drivers

Unang recipients ng pantry, at sila din ang unang volunteers. Noong second day, late ako ng dating, at pagpunta ko sa pantry nag-ambagan sila, bumili ng plastik at sila yung nag-repack ng bigas. Pumipila sila sa umaga tapos babalik sila sa hapon para mag-ambag ng 20 o 50 pesos galing sa pasada nila.

### Indigenous people

'Yung mga katutubo, namimigay ng mga extra nilang harvest.

### Youth

May youths na isolated na ng communities dahil nasa Drug List sila ng War on Drugs. Pakiramdam nila wala na silang future, pero naisipan nila mag-start ng community pantry. Doon nila na-realize na may chance pa sila at nakahanap sila ng purpose. Nandoon din 'yung forgiveness sa sarili.

### Doctors

Community pharmacy at free online consultations. Nakipag-partner din ang mga doctors sa pag-explain ng importance ng vaccines sa communities.

### Farmers

'Yung mga magsasaka dito sa Pilipinas, hindi sila katulad ng mga farmers sa ibang bansa na mayayaman. Madalas, kailangan nila umutang sa landlord para magbungkal ng lupa tapos kapag anihan, lugi ang benta nila ng produce kasi naka-rely sila sa mga middlemen na mababa yung bili. Tapos kailangan nila magbayad ng utang.

Pero nakapagbigay sila sa pantry ng mga goods na hindi nila nabenta. Sa kanila ko natutunan at na-embrace 'yung concept na magtiwala sa masa.



Photo by Stephanie Esperida, UP MPRO.





# On the Screen and in the Streets: Student Activism during the COVID-19 Lockdowns

 Frederick E. Dabu

The Filipino youth, particularly UP students, did not yield in their advocacies despite the restrictions and limitations imposed by the spread of the coronavirus. Instead, they adapted their methods and rallied for change, even amid the worst of the lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Political repression, disinformation, and violence enforced by State agencies, politicians, and their supporters worsened during the country's COVID-19 pandemic years, according to progressive organizations and international observers. The Philippines, with a populist-authoritarian bureaucracy and inter-agency pandemic task force, implemented one of the world's longest and harshest lockdown policies starting March 2020 up to 2021, in various forms of community quarantines to slow down the spread of COVID-19, at the

time when emergency-use vaccines, economic relief, and related policies beneficial for the most-affected populations were being rolled out by the government. These lockdowns resulted in countless human rights violations, massive job displacements and unemployment, economic losses, shifts to online classes and flexible work arrangements, and social isolation that affected the people.

People clamored for ayuda or economic aid, health interventions such as mass testing and roll-out of vaccines, access to basic services, upholding of Constitutional freedoms such as rights to mobility and organization, and in worst cases, the right to due process. Even in UP and other schools across the country, the government's red-tagging of individuals and organizations, and unauthorized entry of police or the military in campuses persisted.

These issues, lumped together, under an abnormally restrictive environment, were what mobilized youth and students who shifted their methods of organizing their discussions and protests. Initially, during the harsh lockdown, they regrouped online, using freely available apps such as Zoom and Google for their meetings, while conducting community-based activities such as relief drives, community kitchens, and localized protests. They amplified their campaigns via online protests, using creative visuals and hashtags; and spread their statements across social media platforms such as websites, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter. Eventually, protest actions made a comeback with physical rallies, further pushing back against the online and offline violence unleashed foremost against perceived critics of the administration.



Photos of online and on-ground activism at the peak of the pandemic lockdown years:



Hundreds of youth and students, who were prohibited by government to go out of their homes during the lockdown, regained their freedoms for the first time during the COVID-19 pandemic as they took to the streets and converged in UP Diliman during the nation's commemoration of Independence Day on June 12, 2020. The UP Diliman campus served as a safe space and a venue for the exercise of democratic rights when use of all other streets and venues was restricted. The protesters called for mass testing, proper medical treatment, and compassionate support for everyone affected by the pandemic. Hashtags #MassTestingNowPH and #SolusyongMedikalHindiMilitar were just some of the phrases used in online campaigns. The on-ground rallies were never proven to cause transmission of coronavirus infections, contrary to warnings made by government officials. Photo by Fred Dabu, UP MPRO.

The country's Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 (Republic Act No. 11479) was known as the "Terror Bill" when it was still being debated in Congress. From the time the first versions of the "Terror Bill" were drafted, various organizations and forms of activism were erroneously linked by government officials to terrorism. #JunkTerrorBill was used to amplify opposition to the legislation of this new law. #AktibistaHindiTerorista aimed to challenge the conflation by the State of activism and terrorism. Photo by Fred Dabu, UP MPRO.







Filipinos from all walks of life, holding placards or wearing creative expressions of their indignation, again gathered on University Avenue in the UP Diliman campus to stage the People's SONA on the same day as President Rodrigo Duterte's State of the Nation Address (SONA) in Congress on July 27, 2020. No other public space was open to more than 5,000 protesters, who had also earlier been under threat of police dispersals due to government prohibition of such gatherings. The traditional march to Batasan and protest programs along main roads were not allowed by authorities, who cited COVID-19 protocols. The University functioned as a haven for democratic exercises such as these protest actions. Photo by Fred Dabu, UP MPRO.

UP Student Regent Renee Louise Co spoke at an indignation rally held on January 19, 2021, in response to the Department of National Defense (DND) officials' unilateral termination of the UP-DND Accord. Members of the UP community viewed this as a threat to the University's academic freedom and security. #DefendUP and #DefendAcademicFreedom were hashtags used to unite the UP community in various activities asserting academic freedom. Photo by Jonathan Madrid, UP MPRO.



**Read Article**  
UP protests against threat to academic freedom





The Office of the Student Regent organized online meetings to unite members of the UP community and campaign for students' rights and welfare. They used relevant hashtags such as #DefendUP, #DefendAcademicFreedom, and #LigtasBalikEskwela. Photo from the Office of the Student Regent Twitter account.



Lumad youth who were studying in UP Diliman joined the protests in their traditional attire during the People's SONA in UP Diliman on July 27, 2020. Photo by Fred Dabu, UP MPRO.




When the government's lockdown policies were revoked or relaxed, hundreds more youth and students joined on-ground activities that included forums, community-organizing and big rallies. Their facemasks could not hide their joy when they were finally able to meet for the first time, or see one another again, during the Bonifacio Day rally in Sampaloc, Manila on November 30, 2021. Photo by Fred Dabu, UP MPRO.



# Voices for the Voiceless

## Compassion for Animals as Activism

 Celeste Ann L. Castillo

At the height of the pandemic, when UP's campuses were emptied of their usual denizens, there were some who were left behind. Among them: the population of community cats and dogs that called the campus buildings their home.

Soon, reports emerged from UP's campuses of acts of compassion. Some faculty, students and staff, including the security guards and custodial workers, had gone out of their way to feed and take care of the community cats and dogs during the lockdowns.



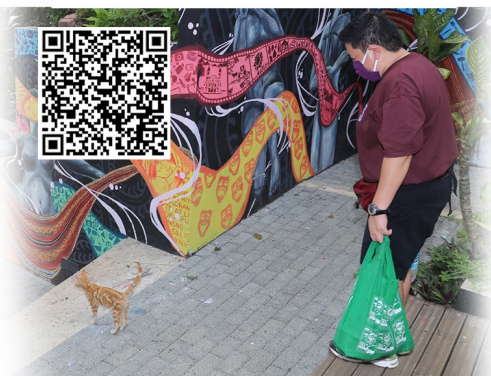


## The Cats of UPB

In UP Baguio, the animals were not left unattended. A Facebook post dated May 11, 2020 featured photos of some of UP Baguio's resident cats being fed by Jennifer Inovero, Assistant Professor of Physical Education. An earlier Facebook post also showed a student-volunteer making the rounds to feed UP



"During the pandemic, nagpalista ako sa Chancellor namin as a frontliner under the Animal Welfare Committee," explained Inovero. This allowed her to enter the campus to feed the cats. "Nakatulong din 'yung mga cats sa mental health ko since ang hirap ng buhay natin noon," Inovero said. "And going around their feeding stations, I treated it as (cardio) exercise ko na din. So the benefit was mutual, and siguro naman masaya 'yung cats kasi matataba sila noon."



Baguio's "UPCats". Yet another post showed a security guard conducting temperature checks on the cats per COVID safety regulations. This post tugged the heartstrings of the public so much that it caught the attention of mainstream media.



## CATS: Compassion for Animals Through Service

In UPLB, at around the same time, something similar was taking place. Rosa Mia Cabanting, who now works for the Institute of Crop Science, UPLB College of Agriculture and Food Science, was a graduate student at the time and staying at the International House Residence Hall along with the other grad students who had been stranded in the campus during the lockdown. She and her fellow dormers took to feeding the cats in the dorm and eventually the surrounding buildings as well. When Cabanting found herself offering up for adoption a kindle of kittens from two mama cats via the Facebook group, UPLB Lockdown Diaries, that was when Chiara Karenina Manuel, UPLB alumna, development communicator, entrepreneur and

animal welfare advocate, reached out to her. Working with fellow volunteers, they managed to have the mama cats spayed at the Philippine Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) in Quezon City, along with an initial batch of 10 cats.

This led to KaponHeist, wherein the volunteers take animals to PAWS and the Philippine Pet Birth Control Center Foundation to be spayed or neutered. They soon realized that they needed to make the operation more sustainable. Plus, they needed to document the animal population and the impacts of spaying and neutering on both the animals and the community in general, and to educate the community on how to conduct proactive community

animal management. They started welcoming more people who wanted to help, created a Facebook page, and in May 2021, the student volunteer organization Compassion for Animals Through Service of UPLB Students or CATS of UPLB was created.

"We needed to communicate to the people who approached us that we are not a rescue group. Hindi kami veterinarian. We have to ask veterinarians for assistance. Nagdadala kami ng mga alaga sa vets because we want other people or organizations to emulate us as responsible colony managers. Community animal care ito for us," Manuel said.



## An uphill battle

Inovero and the UPB faculty volunteers, as well as CATS of UPLB, are among the organizations, units and individual volunteers whose focus is responsible pet ownership and caring for the wellbeing of UP's campus animals. Others have been standing up for UP's non-human community members for a while now. In UP Diliman, for instance, there is the Friends of Campus Animals UP (FOCA UP), the first animal welfare volunteer group in UP Diliman, created in July 2015 by a UP Journalism professor, Khrysta Imperial Rara, and Dr. Jonathan Anticamara, a professor at the UP Diliman Institute of Biology (IB), who on his own has been taking care of the cats and dogs around the IB building since 2010, and who often partners with Rara in conducting spay-neuter programs in the UP Diliman campus, as well as educational campaigns even in other UP campuses.

Whether they are veteran or relatively new volunteers, they all agree on one thing: that caring and advocating for UP's community animals is often "an uphill battle", and that it is the human side of the equation that makes the problem so complicated.

"First of all, some officials don't fully understand what animal welfare is," Rara said. "Akala nila, basta napakain mo lang at napasunod mo sila sa gusto mo, tapos na. But welfare is not from the humans' point of view. It must be from the point of view of the animal. Look at it through

the animal's eyes. How does he see the world? What causes his stress, his fears? What motivates a female dog to do certain things? In animal welfare, the animal must be allowed to make a choice. Like if a campus dog doesn't want to be touched or petted, then we should respect that."

Failing to gain the support of authorities can make the job exponentially harder. As priorities shift, some initiatives meant to benefit the most ignored sector of the UP community can be left high and dry. The UP Baguio Animal Welfare Committee, which was formed in 2018, lasted only three years. "Now we're only faculty volunteers," Inovero said. "Kung ano yung ginagawa namin before, tinuloy lang namin. At saka we're already attached to the campus cats." The volunteer caretakers rely on sporadic donations to provide for the cats, but mostly the funds come from their own pockets. "Mabigat sa akin financially, at kapag may nagkakasakit, emotionally and psychologically din," Inovero admitted. "Minsan parang gusto ko nang bumigay, pero iisipin ko lang, kung tumigil ako, paano na yung mga cats?"

In 2023, UP students were shocked to learn that Balay Kaibigan, UP Diliman's center for animal-related activities, was going to be permanently closed. Balay Kaibigan, located on Juan Luna Street, was established in 2019 as a spaying and neutering initiative for UPD's campus

animals. By 2023, at least 872 dogs and cats had been neutered and at least 150 of them were adopted; now, only the six resident dogs that serve as Emotional Support Animals (ESAs) for the students remained.

For Rara, this "setback" came with a twist as earlier, in August 2023, UP Visayas launched its Balay Kalagday under the UPV Animal Care Program through the Ugnayan ng Pahinungod, in partnership with the Office of the Chancellor. Balay Kalagday in UPV's Miagao campus would serve as a "halfway house" where campus cats and dogs would be cared for following the "trap-neuter-vaccinate-release" (TNVR) framework. If this sounds familiar, it's because Balay Kalagday was, by UPV Chancellor Clement Camposano's admission, inspired by Balay Kaibigan.

"Balay Kaibigan inspired volunteerism," Rara said. "From June to December 2023, an average of 10 UP and non-UP students and even working professionals visited Balay Kaibigan daily to walk the rescued dogs and play with the cats and prepare them for adoption. Even now, FOCA still gets a lot of inquiries and requests to volunteer for the dogs and cats." In fact, UP Diliman is a recognized pioneer in campus animal welfare and management. "We were a beacon of light for other campuses. Other schools and universities, and even some subdivisions, have asked UP Diliman and FOCA for guidance in managing their community animals."





Photo by Jonathan Madrid, UP-MPRO.







## Animal welfare, human management

It's not just trouble with animal politics. Too often, it's trouble with humans in general. CATS of UPLB has a policy of maintaining their members' anonymity to protect them from online and physical harassment as they go about their tasks of feeding and caring for the animals. Cabanting and her fellow volunteers have been yelled at by irate people after some cats or dogs defecated inside buildings or knocked over trashcans, despite the fact that it was humans who covered up the grounds with concrete and left trashcans without lids full of food waste. "Parang since wala silang nakikitang benefits doon sa hayop, ang daling magbitiw ng mga salitang katulad ng 'lalasunin ko 'yang mga pusa na 'yan kapag hindi ako nakapagpigil,'" she said.

For Anticamara, this is all rooted in a widespread culture of cruelty. "There's a lot of cruelty in the Philippines. Sometimes this cruelty isn't obvious na pananakit but, for example, hinahayaang dumamiyung mga anak ng cats and dogs tapos kapag nanganak na, itatapon. How can a system like UP not address that or consider that a priority?" Especially since there are practical solutions to the problem of stray animals, such as scientifically based TNVR, management and monitoring of stray populations, adoptions, public education against all forms of animal cruelty, and policies that support humane stray animal management. "We need public support in UP and in the Philippines to run and implement regular programs that, hopefully, will lead to UP and the country becoming a zero-stray campus and country," he added.

## Stronger together

Anticamara, for his part, considers his efforts to care for the campus animals as simply part of being a biologist who considers long-term ecological impacts. "I want to seek solutions through science. I know there's a problem—sobrang daming strays, sobrang daming abandoned animals that are suffering. I think that's a problem with a solution, so para sa akin, it's more of what's the best scientific solution to this problem."

For people caring for animals in UP, the struggle is very, very real, and so is the worry of how long one can keep it up. "I made an action and so far it's working. But I don't think I can sustain it. Ito ang problema ko: if I'm not here, what will happen?" Anticamara admitted. "I can wish that there's a systematic solution that everyone in UP can agree on. Doesn't matter who you are—economist, mathematician, engineer, psychologist—we share, as one humanity, a common environment. Hindi pwede na ang value lang natin is how much money this will give me. Lahat ay sa Nature nanggagaling."

In UP Baguio, the cats are as much a part of the community as the humans. "I believe that dogs and cats have real emotions," said Inovero. "Let's just leave them be. They have the right to live in a clean, safe environment. Let's care for them like we care for our family members."

"Mahirap itong work pero at the end of the day, very fulfilling sya," Cabanting said about why they persist. "We do this for the University, para maging stable ang population ng animals. We do this for the people, so you don't need to deal with a lot of unvaccinated animals or para walang nangungulit sa inyo sa dorm na nanghihingi ng food. Ito ang kino-communicate namin: na hindi mo kailangang kumuha ng something from these animals para alagaan mo sila. Buhay kasi ang pinag-uusapan, buhay ng mga aso't pusa."

"How to be an animal welfare activist? In your own little way, number one is: be kind to animals," Rara said. "In your heart and mind, dapat may compassion ka na. Be compassionate and kind to all living things."

"And number two, if you're a UP student tapos nakita ninyo na marami nang stray cats or dogs sa college ninyo, form a group then do research on animal welfare. Kasi you can do more as a group than alone. You're stronger together."



# UP and the Fight for Climate Justice

 Frederick E. Dabu

Since 2011, the Philippines has outranked all other countries as the most at-risk territory in terms of exposure to natural hazards and societal capacity to respond, according to the World Risk Index. Being typhoon-prone, the country often experiences 'super typhoons' that bring strong winds and intense rainfall, ravaging affected communities through the destruction of houses, properties, crops, livestock, and infrastructure, and resulting in numerous casualties, displacement of families, and economic loss.

Flooding, landslides, and storm surges caused by typhoons usually result in mass casualties. For instance, Yolanda (Haiyan, 2013) caused over 6,000 deaths in the Central Philippine Region; more than 500 died in New Bataan, Compostela Valley after Pablo (Bopha, 2012); Sendong (Washi, 2011) left more than 1,260 dead in Cagayan de Oro and Iligan; and Ondoy (Ketsana, 2009) resulted in over 460 deaths in Metro Manila. The costliest typhoons have caused damages amounting to several billions of US dollars: Yolanda (Haiyan, 2013), 2.2 billion USD; Odette (Rai, 2021),

1.02 billion USD; Pablo (Bopha, 2012), 1.06 billion USD; Glenda (Rammasun, 2014), 771 million USD; and Ompong (Mangkhut, 2018), 627 million USD. On the other hand, timely government interventions have resulted in "averted disasters", where affected communities had zero casualty, or minimal deaths, in spite of high risks.

## Preparedness saves lives

While the frequency and strength of typhoons that hit the Philippines in the past decade did not decrease, the overall fatalities per year were reduced by about 75% due to combined interventions by stakeholders across all sectors of society, according to Dr. Alfredo Mahar Francisco A. Lagmay, Executive Director of the University of the Philippines Resilience Institute (UPRI). Based on counterfactual evidence, in the past 10 years there were an estimated 6,750 lives that were saved from hazards during severe weather conditions. Lagmay noted that the average deaths due to typhoons would have remained above 1,000 every year, based on

1986 to 2013 data, without climate change adaptation (CCA) and disaster risk reduction (DRR) interventions. Since 2014, that number decreased to about 250 deaths per year. "If everyone is concerned, there is more awareness. And better awareness leads to better preparedness and actions on the ground," Lagmay said.

There are testimonies of such positive results from government officials. In video messages aired during the launch of UP's online courses on resilience on December 5, 2023, two local government unit (LGU) heads praised the University's DRR efforts.

Balanga, Bataan Mayor Francis Anthony S. Garcia said that when Typhoon Glenda (Rammasun) hit the country in 2014, they were able to use information from Nationwide Operational Assessment of Hazards to prevent the loss of lives and properties. Quezon City Mayor Ma. Josefina "Joy" Belmonte's message was on the city's partnership with the UPRI in formulating the city's drainage masterplan to ensure that floodwater would flow to the tributaries, thereby helping the city government minimize risks due to floods.



## From climate change to climate justice: Global challenges at hand

Climate change is here and the world's scientists have raised the highest alarm.

The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has repeatedly warned that climate-related risks to health, livelihood, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth are projected to increase with global warming of 1.5°C, and increase further with 2°C.

Calls for urgent climate action, CCA, DRR and climate justice, have come from both international and national multi-sectoral organizations.

"Climate justice" focuses on addressing the global environmental crisis using justice and human rights frameworks, with the assertion that developed countries, specifically their corporations and their governments, are the most accountable and should, therefore, be held responsible for the severe impacts of climate change, i.e., climate change mitigation, climate finance, and adaptation. On the other hand, developing nations, like the Philippines, need the most support, being the most severely affected and disadvantaged.

## A great imperative

The University of the Philippines (UP), as the national university, also plays a leadership role in climate action.

At the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation University Leaders' Forum held in San Francisco, California on November 13, UP President Angelo A. Jimenez raised the question: What can our universities do to fight or mitigate climate change? He also said that facing global threats due to climate change, and ultimately, fighting for climate justice, could be the greatest moral imperative of our time. This forum was organized by the University of California-Davis, the University of California-Santa Cruz, and the Association of Pacific Rim Universities.

Jimenez remarked, "The Philippines, which has contributed less than one percent to global greenhouse gases emissions, is among the top five countries considered most vulnerable to climate risks."

Jimenez reiterated the call for all sectors, especially those in the academe, to come together for greater climate action. "Let us work together to amplify our impact, inspire change, promote transformative education, and usher in an era where investing in tomorrow's biodiversity is not just a choice but an inescapable responsibility for all," he said. "Aside from measures to save and repair the planet, climate justice involves social justice, in that it must empower the most vulnerable victims of climate change to articulate their concerns, demand accountability, and seek proper redress for their grievances."

The UP President also asserted that green transition must be just and transformative, and lead to a better life for the communities. Government and industries must ensure that their workers and communities are not unduly displaced while transitioning to green industries; and these changes must lead to a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy.





## UP's climate action hub

UP contributes in many ways to climate change mitigation and adaptation through the UPRI, which serves as a proactive hub that aims “to empower local communities through multidisciplinary actions toward resilience”. Faculty members and researchers, together with partner national government agencies, LGUs, and various organizations, continuously work with local communities, from planning to implementation and completion of their programs. They also make their data and research accessible and more useful to the public.

As UP's proactive hub for CCA-DRR, the UPRI works with its partners for the production and dissemination of knowledge products; engages in data collection and mapping projects; conducts trainings, forums, and conferences; facilitates the development and implementation of master plans, and many other activities to promote resiliency.

The UPRI launched the Basics of Resilience Online Courses, in collaboration with the UP Open University Faculty of Management and Development Studies, on December 5. These online courses are designed for crises managers, CCA-DRR practitioners, and other partners and stakeholders.

Another milestone event was the 2nd National Conference of the Philippine Academic Society for Climate and Disaster Resilience held in UP Diliman from October 25 to 27, where the importance of undertaking research and resilience-building in communities was again emphasized.

The UPRI also hosts webinars, trainings, forums, and conferences. One such webinar is “Resilience Live”. In the episode, “The Role of Universities in Anticipatory Planning: A Systems Approach to Climate Change Action”, efforts from UP were highlighted, including local development planning capacity building activities for state universities and colleges (SUCs). “SUCs play a



Photo by Misael Macani, UP MPRO.

## Attaining climate justice

significant role in promoting sustainable growth and economic development (and resiliency) in all cities and municipalities of the entire country,” said Lagmay.

One example of the UPRI’s trainings for UP constituent units and partner educational institutions was the two-day training-workshop on the crafting of the Emergency Preparedness Plan for the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, UP Diliman, on August 17 to 18.

Another activity of the UPRI was with the Philippine Social Science Council on its 10th National Social Science Congress held at Silliman University, Dumaguete City from July 27 to 29. The event gathered around 300 participants, including social scientists, experts, researchers, academics, policymakers, legislators, local officials, development workers, and members of donor agencies and civil society organizations.

The goal of attaining climate justice can be summed up as attaining what is needed by the people and their communities, for them to be able to mitigate the impacts of climate change, to be able to adapt, and to become more resilient in the face of worsening natural hazard impacts “so that we can develop and attain our sustainable development goals despite all of these,” said Lagmay. He affirmed that countries and industries that are most accountable for global warming and greenhouse gases emissions should provide the needed resources, including information, tools and technologies to the countries that are most affected by climate change.

**“To be able to reduce poverty, to have enough food, good health. . . that is justice,” he said.**

“We will have to live with all of these natural hazard impacts. We will have to live with climate change. Our lives will change, and we will have to adapt,” Lagmay concluded.



# A Clearer Vision for the Future

 Arlyn VCD Palisoc Romualdo

## "Sayang naman."

Imagine hearing that as a response to "I want to be a doctor." Unusual, right? Now, imagine that comment coming from an educator interviewing a UP student who was about to earn his Biology degree, *magna cum laude*, and was being considered as the "Most Outstanding Graduate." Surprising, but perhaps a little less so, when that educator was seemingly more impressed with the leadership qualities the student displayed.

"I was told I could go into community leadership instead," an ophthalmologist and a researcher, Dr. Leo Cubillan, recalled that incident in 1986. He had asked himself then why his dream of going into medicine was deemed a waste. He believed the path he saw for himself, especially after four years of studying in UP Diliman (UPD), would lead him to render greater service to the country.

More than three decades later, he would mark one of the greater milestones in his professional career. In 2019, one of the research projects he led became Republic Act No. 11358 or the National Vision Screening Act. Turning research into national policy showed Cubillan that it was not "sayang" after all.





## 'UP shaped me'

At age 16 years, he left Surigao with a National Science and Technology Authority scholarship to pursue his pre-med in UPD. His undergraduate days, 1982 to 1986, were not exactly years of peace and quiet. Those turbulent times awakened something in him. "When you see that there are problems that need to be addressed, you also feel compelled to act, in your own way, to try and make change happen."

Among his many activities, he noted one of his more significant initiatives as councilor of the then Institute of Biological Sciences in the College of Science student council: the proposal of a "pass or fail" grading system. It stemmed from the recognition that students—in the middle of social and political turmoil in the country, when faculty members were finding it difficult to give numerical grades—needed to be able to continue their studies and graduate. And they needed academic marks to do so.

When he went to UP Manila to earn his medical degree, his training at the UP Philippine General Hospital (UP PGH) widened even more his view of the country's problems. After his External Eye Diseases fellowship in 1996, Cubillan became a university researcher at the Philippine Eye Research Institute (PERI) of the UP National Institutes of Health and a clinical associate professor at the College of Medicine.

Seeking to build up his capabilities as an eye doctor, he went to the US to undergo more training on cornea, uveitis and external eye diseases at the University of California (UC), San Francisco. It was there that he developed a deeper love for research, which strengthened his belief that it was a powerful tool with which to improve the lives of Filipinos.

The dire situation in UP PGH, the issues in health care access he saw, stayed with him. "It was always on my mind and I knew I had to somehow do something about it," he said. That was when he decided to pursue his Master of Public Health at UC Berkeley to "better contribute to the improvement of the Philippine health care system."

Cubillan could have stayed in the US. There were certainly more lucrative opportunities for him there, especially with his advanced training. But there was no pull for him to remain. Instead, it only pushed him to go back. "It was really how UP developed in me that desire to serve, that I should use my abilities and do what I can for my country."





## Envisioning better eye health for Filipinos

Back in PERI, he was involved in the country-wide surveys on blindness and eye diseases. “We had population-based studies that we used to help the Department of Health (DOH) in creating national programs to reduce or prevent blindness in the Philippines.” But he was not content with his work. Cubillan, who had become the PERI director in 2011, wanted to do more to address visual impairment at the early stages to prevent conditions from worsening.

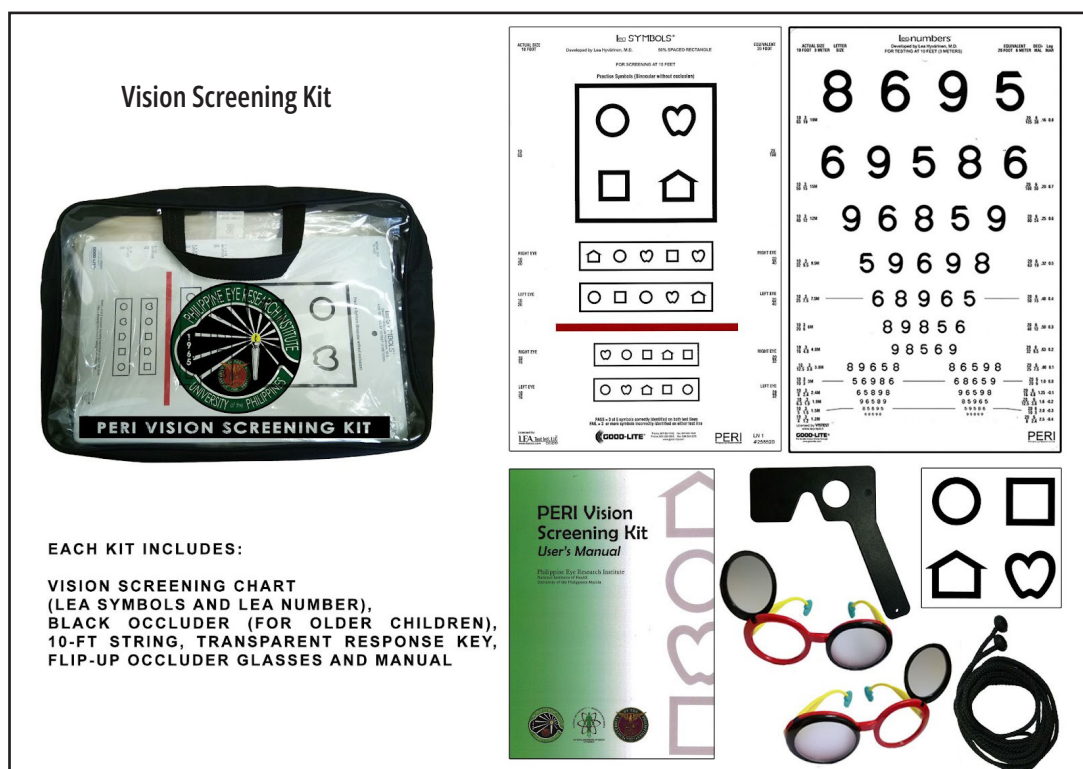
“What do we know? What can we do?” were the questions he asked himself. Using research data, he knew that in a class of 40 Filipino children, around four would have vision problems. Three might have errors of refraction (EORs)—blurred vision and inability to focus. This usually manifests as myopia or nearsightedness, where things are clearer up close and more blurred farther away. One of the four affected children, meanwhile, might have amblyopia or lazy eye, where one eye has blurry vision while the other sees clearly. Lazy eye has a prevalence of 2 to 5% in children and is one of the causes of visual impairment and preventable blindness.

As an ophthalmologist, he knew that myopia in children had a tendency to progress rather quickly, and while influenced by genetics, progression may slow down with

early detection and intervention. He also knew that lazy eye would get worse if left untreated, but if caught before a child reached the age of seven, was totally treatable. Vision problems affect how children learn and behave. Some may be able to verbalize the problems they experience, while there are some who are either too shy or scared to speak up.

He realized that vision screening on a national scale was needed if greater impact was to be made on the lives of Filipino children, so that there would be less incidence of visual impairment as they grew older.

As an administrator and project leader, he knew there was a lot of work to be done, from having the appropriate screening tools and a simpler screening process, to mobilizing the resources for training and implementation nationwide. PERI already had a close working relationship with the DOH. It needed to get the Department of Education (DepEd) on board. It found the agency supportive of this initiative, especially with the implementation of the K-12 curriculum, where children may be screened as soon as they start kindergarten as early as the age of five.







## From program to national policy

In 2015, PERI formally launched the National Vision Screening Program during its 50<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary. An age-appropriate, culturally-neutral screening kit was developed. Its tools were simple and easy to use, making training of kindergarten teachers uncomplicated as well.

During pilot runs of the program, teachers and parents of kindergarten students found that there really was more than meets the eye in children who appeared inattentive and disruptive in class, resulting in poor academic performance. It turned out that they just could not see clearly. For those with lazy eye, a simple patch over the eye with better vision forced the affected one to develop until vision in both eyes became equal. For nearsighted students, the first step was to move them to the first row. “In one of the classes we screened, there was one student who was noisy and would not pay attention to the lesson. When we came back months later, the kid was already top of his class after moving to the front row! Hindi lang pala niya makita nang malinaw yung blackboard.”

The PERI-DOH-DepEd collaboration was strong enough to make partners of both houses of Philippine Congress as well. It may have taken years before the law was passed and signed, but Cubillan was proud that he was able to help rally PERI to push for the translation of its research into actionable policy. He also said that they were working with PhilHealth to cover the expenses of prescription eyeglasses for these children. COVID-19 may have hampered the rollout of the program, but activities have resumed since restrictions on physical mobility and conduct of classes were removed.


The journey of the National Vision Screening Act is also the journey of someone who saw the world through the lenses of social awareness and responsibility that UP equipped him with as a student. Lenses that allowed him to work towards giving Filipino children a clearer vision for the future. Now that Cubillan is the University's Vice President for Academic Affairs, he intends to make sure that UP continues to provide those lenses to its students, so that they, too, may see and walk the path that will eventually lead them to change the country for the better.





# University of Identities

## Gender Equality and Inclusivity in UP

 Jo Florendo B. Lontoc

Ephh is glowing, head held high, as she marches down the aisle of the Baguio Country Club Convention Center, a candidate for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Sciences, major in Anthropology, minor in Psychology. Red, black, and white stripes on her collar, sleeves, belt, and pants replicate the Ibaloy Indigenous Weaving Motif of Benguet. The UP Sablay hangs from her shoulder, where it meets her long wavy hair, to her hip.

“No matter what my identity was in UP Baguio (UPB) as a member of different marginalized sectors, I was able to fully experience life as a student, which I could not have experienced in another university,” she later tells the *UP Forum*.

The eyes of the fresh graduate tear up as she recalls how, coming from the poorer sector of her remote, underserved community, she was able to gain a foothold in the country's most prestigious university. She was right about the school as one that would nurture her for all that she was. Having received her diploma, she gives back to her community not just as a UP graduate, with *magna cum laude* honors, but also as a community achiever staying loyal to her ancestors, to the earth that her family tills, and to herself.

Her Sablay, in turn, symbolizes a body of sociological-anthropological work that pays homage to her culture, and a veritable watershed case in traditional, conservative, and remote environments such as hers, up in Luzon's tallest mountain, considered the playground of the gods.

As she blossoms in academia, many pieces fall into place to form the bigger picture of her identity. The picture includes a University that gives freedom for one to make choices and gives space for the individual's many inescapable contexts.

“Pilmi iyaman tan dadsak kod emin ja semek tan anus ja en-akan jo son sikak.”

The picture thus includes, first and foremost, her family and community. “My family's unwavering support has been the cornerstone of my achievements. I am profoundly grateful for the enduring strength and belief they've instilled in me, shaping the person I am today,” she says.



"UP Baguio Paggawisan Tako Am-In or PAGTA, a socio-cultural organization that has served as my Indigenous circle, and the Program for Indigenous Cultures helped me thrive on campus," she then points out. She cites the lifeline extended by the UPB Office of Scholarship and Financial Assistance (SLAS and other Financial Programs) and the National Commission on Indigenous People-Benguet, which allowed her to focus on her studies and personal growth.

She speaks of the transformative power of academic freedom and "enrichment" of different kinds of students of UP Baguio, clearly evidenced with the faculty members and teaching fellows of the Anthropology and Psychology Divisions at the College of Social Sciences. "The resources, mentorship, openness and opportunities provided have significantly shaped my educational path," she recalls.

"Sapay kuma undite-diteng kayon emin!"

"Your laughter echoed through the triumphs, and your comforting presence provided solace during the challenges. The shared experiences and camaraderie made my college years unforgettable." Ephh, shown doing field work in Kabayan, Benguet, acknowledges the love and compassion of her friends.







Groups and couples expressing solidarity with the LGBTQI+ community in its quest for equality and justice gather at Quezon Hall and the Oblation Plaza in UP, a known sanctuary for liberal thought, academic freedom, and center of human rights education, research, and advocacy. Photo by Misael Bacani, UP MPRO.

## Things fought for

Thus, little by little, the liberal tradition of the University is making space for positive changes in the lives of the marginalized, many of them rendered as such on many levels. By her own example, Ephh is a champion of authenticity and self-determination, which both UP and her community value.

The University continues to work on being a safe space for the expression of all identities. Its liberal tradition may have encouraged people of diverse persuasions to find their niche, succeed, and be liberated from the pressures of society that may lead them to disavow their identities. But to remain free of society's creeping norms and lingering power structures is a continuing battle.

One that has a powerful hold in society is the man/woman binary, with the man still having the upper hand. This has been a long-drawn-





Prof. Marby Villaceran, director of the UP Center for Women's and Gender Studies, confers with the Center's staff. She and Gina Rose Chan, extreme right, whom she calls a bearer of the Center's institutional memory, narrate how the advocacy against discrimination of women evolved to include protecting the rights of all regardless of sex, gender, sexual/gender orientation and identity. In the middle of the Center's driveway stands "Dakila", a piece of feminist art, which CWGS describes as a "symbol of the strong, virile, empowered Filipina spirit". Photo by Misael Bacani, UP MPRO.

out battle for women. Feminist activists paved the way for more marginalized sectors to assert themselves against the oppression of a hetero-normative society. Even in the University, there was a need for women to assert equality. By the late 1980s, a group of women needed to organize themselves so that the University could establish an institution to promote gender equality.

Thus, the Center for Women's Studies was born.

The Magna Carta for Women was passed in 2009, further bolstering the Center's mandate. Obviously coming from a man/woman binary mindset, the law mentioned LGBTQI+ rights only as an emerging issue. But gender rights advocacy had gone past emergence in the University, with Babaylan, the pioneering university-based gay advocacy

organization, established in the early 1990s. The Center was ready not just to spearhead implementing the Magna Carta in the University, but also to lead the way in formulating details of its LGBTQI+ provision.

"This was highlighted during the time of [Sylvia E.] 'Guy' Claudio [CWS director from 2008 to 2014], who was an advocate of the LGBTQI+ community. We were partners with the Babaylan. At that time, we were also advocating the passage of the Magna Carta for Women," Gina Chan, research associate of the Center, recalls.

The Center is currently in partnership with activist LGBTQI+ groups Babaylanes Inc., Lagablab Network, the Library Foundation, and Galang Philippines. "There should be genuine friendships among activists because of shared beliefs and set of values," Marby Villaceran, the current director



of CWGS, says. Atty. Leo Batad was on board in drafting the first UP gender guidelines.

"The Center supports the LGBTQI+ movement," Villaceran affirms. "We should not represent them, because they can represent themselves and can instigate change on their own. What we can do is amplify their voices, give safe space and resources for whatever activity they need, and be people they can safely trust to work with them," she points out.







## UP, the rainbow university

As the Gender and Development (GAD) office of the UP System, CWS coordinated with the GAD offices of all the constituent universities in conducting a gender audit and drafting gender guidelines for the entire University. Gender guidelines were legally mandated on institutions by the Magna Carta for Women in 2009. Localizing the Magna Carta with its partners, the CWS grew from being merely a center of women's studies and coordinating body for implementing a legal mandate to an advocate of rights protection of "all members of the community regardless of sex, gender, sexual/gender orientation and identity".

Resulting from consultations with and feedback gathered from stakeholders, offices, and organizations in all the CUs, UP's gender guidelines feature provisions that go beyond issues stemming from the men/women binary. In UP Baguio, Ephh is fully aware of the space afforded to LGBTQIA+ through the efforts of Kasarian Studies Program, UPB's GAD office. With UPB's expertise in the preservation of the cultural traditions of the Cordilleras, Northern Luzon, and Cagayan Valley, and its catchment of IP constituents, its GAD office input is nuanced with the IP experience.

In 2015, CWS was appropriately renamed the Center for Women's and Gender Studies. This reflected the University's commitment to "creating enabling mechanisms for enriching knowledge in the complexity and overlapping topics of women's issues, gender, sexuality, and the different systems of society".

"Activism is pushing for something—not always against something. It's pushing that something right to be done," Villaceran adds, touching on the pioneering aspect of activism. UP's gender guidelines were a first, and have been used by many other educational institutions and LGUs as the basis of their own gender guidelines.

They know that UP's activism for the rainbow cause is always a benchmark. Most feminist activists in the University are scholars, Villaceran says. "As a research center, we always start on the ground: the attitudes, the perceptions, what's happening."

Now regularly conducted, the University gender audits are rich sources of knowledge. Recent cases of mis-gendering and dead-naming, and other evidence gathered from the University are investigated to update gender policies. Like all

knowledge, gender knowledge expands and thus necessitates new action. From the beginning, it has not just been the Magna Carta for Women or a pending SOGIE bill that has guided University policy on gender issues.

"Even before the policy, we already had guidelines against sexual harassment," Chan says. "The Center was laboratory for programs before they could take off on their own," Villaceran adds. She mentions providing proofs of concepts for programs, such as the Lunas Collective chatline during the pandemic and the Ba-Yi training of leaders for feminist transformative leadership, where the leaders are able to pass pro-gender ordinances in their localities. The Center also provides a training laboratory for gender advocacy and sensitivity in traditional and new media. Recently, CWGS supported the establishment of the Rainbow Research Hub, which provides access to educational resources for doing LGBTQI+ research.

The Center continues to provide the rainbow community with the brushes to paint their colors on the canvas of society.



## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

# Activism in the Academe UP as the 'University of the People'

The history of the University of the Philippines is marked by a proud tradition of commitment to activism and service, towards genuine and sustainable national development. Three UP sectoral leaders sat down with the *UP Forum* to discuss their views on activism given the challenges facing the University and the country today: Carl Marc Ramota, Political Science professor at UP Manila and Faculty Regent; Rommel Rodriguez, union leader and a professor of Philippine Literature and Creative Writing in Filipino at UP Diliman; and Fauzhea Alexandra Guiani, a BS Food Technology student and former UP Mindanao Student Council chair.



**Carl Marc Ramota**

Faculty Regent  
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**Fauzhea Alexandra Guiani**

Former USC Chair  
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**Rommel Rodriguez**

VP For Faculty  
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## Q1: What is activism?

We must always see activism as part and parcel of democratic politics and a legitimate and effective avenue to realize social change. We see it as a measure of accountability, that crucial arrangements and the decision-making process ought to be transparent and inclusive.

And in the context of the University of the Philippines, we owe it not just to our history, but to our progressive tradition as an institution of higher learning, and at the same time to our mandate as the national university. It's an affirmation of our social responsibility as a community of scholars, of academics, otherwise known as public intellectuals. To borrow the words of former President Dodong Nemenzo, we're also seen as knowledge producers and social critics whose main purpose is to challenge orthodoxies or established ways of thinking.

Sa point of view naman ng student leader na may panawagan, 'yung mga nais namin baguhin sa sistema, aktibismo ang platform namin. Hindi lang sa loob ng Unibersidad kung hindi maging sa on-ground kasama ng masang Pilipino. Related siya sa public service at sa mga advocacies kasi ang mga kampanyang bitbit ng masa mula sa mga estudyante ay hindi naman nalalayo sa kung ano ang panawagan ng masang Pilipino—kung saan man 'yan, sa mga magsasaka man 'yan o sa mga jeepney drivers natin. Hindi naman natin binibitbit 'yung mga kampanyang masa kung hindi natin sila nararanasan talaga on-ground. 'Yung aktibismo ay porma siya ng public service, and we really want genuine social change sa ating bansa.

Hindi natin maikakahon ang depinisyon ng aktibismo batay lang sa teorya bilang konsepto lang, pero magiging kongkreto ito sa praktika. Ang tunay na layunin ng pagiging aktibista, meron kang pagnanais na mabago ang lipunan para sa isang mas malaya, mas maunlad, at mas may pagkakapantay-pantay sa mamamayan natin sa Pilipinas, para sa konteksto ito ng ating pulitikal, ekonomik, at kultural na kalagayan bilang bansa. Sa konteksto ng Unibersidad, kapag meron kang nakitang hindi pagkakapantay-pantay sa usapin ng benepisyo, sa usapin ng promosyon, nais mo itong baguhin. Sa konteksto naman ng mag-aaral, kapag sa usapin ng aktibong partisipasyon, hindi dapat sila ituring bilang mga tagatanggap lamang ng kaalaman, kundi bahagi sa pagbuo ng kaalaman sa Unibersidad.

Makikita natin, may historical na konteksto [ang aktibismo sa UP]: Na ang UP ay isang pamantasan na nagkaroon ng malaking partisipasyon para sa pagbuo ng ating bayan.



Watch the full video of the Roundtable Discussion on Activism in the Academe on UP's official YouTube channel.





## Q2: For the different sectors of the University, how is activism enacted? How do faculty, students, employees and others engage in activism within and outside UP?

Even if we belong to different sectors in the University, first and foremost, we are all citizens so that's where we situate ourselves.

And on top of that, we are members or part of the community of the University of the Philippines, the national university. There's an added social responsibility on our part not just to produce knowledge, but to ensure that the knowledge that we produce is something that can be used for national development and transformation. It also comes with a moral impetus and imperative on the part of the members of the University as scholars, as academics, as students, as staff, and even those who are in the communities surrounding our campuses to speak up whenever there are questions related to policies, governance in general, both at the national and local levels of government, and at the same time to speak up against

injustice, human rights violations, whenever civil liberties are being challenged, whenever there's corruption.

Hindi natin dina-dichotomize ang ating papel bilang mga akademiko, bilang mga estudyante, bilang mga kawani at komunidad ng Unibersidad doon sa ating tungkulin bilang mga mamamayan. The challenge is: how do we transform our teaching, our research and publication and in this case, public service in all its forms, not just in a language that can be easily understood by ordinary people who do not have the means or the opportunity to enter institutions of higher learnings such as UP, but also to ensure that this is something that they can benefit from? Kumbaga, hindi natin hinihiwalay ang Pamantasan sa komunidad, sa sambayanan.

Sa pananaw naman ng mga estudyante, marami naman kaming nagagawa na iba't ibang porma ng aktibismo. Hindi naman limited sa pagdalo sa mga rally ang pagpapakita ng aktibismo, so nandiyan din ang paglikha ng mga sining, paggawa ng mga murals, paggawa ng mga tula, pagkasa ng mga dulaang bayan. So marami po talagang porma ng aktibismo na pwedeng maging involved 'yung mga mag-aaral.

Especially with the current attacks of the state, merong mga apprehensions ang mga students na ipakita ang resistance nila, kaya ine-encourage namin na, okay lang kahit di ka maka-attend ng rally. Ano pa ba ang gusto mo gawin o ano ba ang forte mo na sa tingin mo na makaka-contribute ka sa mga panawagan natin? Open tayo sa marami pang mga means of how we can show our activism and our resistance in order to achieve genuine social change.



**Carl Marc Ramota**  
Faculty Regent  
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**Fauzhea Alexandra Guiani**  
Former USC Chair  
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Maganda nating tignan na ang akademiya ay isang institusyon na nagsisilbi bilang social critic. Mahalaga 'yun, sa aking palagay, dahil may espasyo tayo, may panahon para suriin ang ating lipunan, at ang layunin natin ay magkaroon ng isang makatarungang pagbabago. Mahirap siyang gawin, kung tutuusin. 'Yung pinakahamon siguro ay kung paano ito magiging concrete sa ating mga actions. Sa aspeto at sa bahagi ng mga artists, sa mga writers, for example, kung saan ako bahagi, lumilikha kami ng mga akda na tumatalakay sa mga matitingkad na may panlipunang usapin, kung paano namin kini-critique ang machismo, seksismo, mga pang-aapi sa lipunan, o kung

paano namin tinatalakay sa aming klase gamit ang panitikan hinggil sa historical disinformation, mga fake news, etc. Kinakailangan makita ito bilang salinbayan. Ibig sabihin, hindi siya magkakahiwalay na aspeto, kundi papaano nagkakaugnay-ugnay ang mga bagay-bagay.

Kailangang mag-zero in kami kung paano nagagamit ang sining, ang panitikan sa paglilingkod sa bayan. Dito ko rin tinitignan ang mga artist bilang mga conscience of society. Dahil mas nakikita natin ang katotohanan sa bayan na puno ng pagpapanggap. Ibig sabihin, may pagkakataon tayong suriin ang tunay na kalagayan ng lipunan na pinapalabo ng

kasalukuyang estado natin. Ito 'yung hamon na kinakailangang kolektibo, ibig sabihin, iba't ibang sektor.

Ideyal ang UP sa gano'n dahil nagkakasama ang buong komunidad —ang mga guro, mag-aaral, at iba pang bahagi ng ating komunidad sa UP—kapag meron isang isyu na dapat nating sinusulong. Sabi nga nila, parang ang UP ay microcosm of Philippine society, which is true. Nandiyan 'yung mga tunggalian, ang conflict, pero at the same time, nandiyan ang resistance and progressive na pagtingin sa mga bagay-bagay.

**Rommel Rodriguez**  
VP For Faculty  
All UP Academic Employees Union





### Q3: Are there alternative forms of activism you can share, based on experience?

Last year, when I was USC Chair, I had councilors na hindi talaga gusto na mag-join ng mga rallies. Sabi nila, “Fau, gusto ko makapagbigay ng mga diskusyon, ng mga ED (educational discussions).” Ah okay, eh di maganda. Instead na ikulong natin sa branding ng activism na ina-associate with the University, mag-open tayo ng platforms for them.

Nag-end na ang term namin, continuous pa rin ang pagbibigay nila ng mga diskusyon sa mga estudyante, jeepney drivers, even sa family nila.

Recently lang, natapos din ang mural dito sa UPMIn.

Personally, ako po ay isang Food Technology student. Mainit na usapin ngayon ang golden rice na isa sa mga research ng ating University. But natutunan din namin sa aming mga professors na hindi talaga sila gano’n ka-convinced sa golden rice when we viewed it with our farmers. Hindi siya sustainable in the long run. So marami pang mga issues. Better if hindi nagpapakulong ang mga estudyante sa kung anuman ‘yung nile-label sa atin ng state.

**Fauzhea Alexandra Guiani**  
Former USC Chair  
UP Mindanao



Bilang nasa unyon, maraming iba’t ibang paraan o porma ng partisipasyon.

For example, yung mga petition signing, mahalaga ‘yon kasi nakikita ang solidarity sa community, nauunawaan nila ang mga issues na dapat natin harapin sa University. Papaano sila nakikiisa sa CNA campaign, ang ating collective negotiation agreement—napapatupad ba ang nilalaman nito? Halimbawa ang campaign ngayon ng academic union sa inflation mitigation grant—30,000 na grant from the University. Papaano natin sila hihimukin sa mga benepisyo nito? Dapat nag-o-office to office ka, kung sa estudyante, RTR o room to room. Ngayon naman, kami sa unyon, meron kaming tinatawag na Ikot Unyon. likot kami sa iba-ibang CUs para talakayin ang mga usaping may kinalaman sa benepisyo at empleyo sa University. Napapalalim ang pag-unawa ng mga kasamahan natin sa University hinggil sa mga issues na kinasasadlakan ng ating mga kasamang guro, REPS, at kawani sa University.

**Rommel Rodriguez**  
VP For Faculty  
All UP Academic Employees Union





Isa pa, halimbawa, ang pagdalo sa mga gawain. Nag-zumba kami—form of activism ba 'yon? Definitely, kasi ginagamit mo ang popular mode ng pagzu-zumba pero at the same time, nakikita mo ang solidarity with the workers, with the faculty, within the University. Noong Academic Union Month noong nakaraang Oktubre, napakaganda ng partisipasyon ng iba't ibang CUs natin para maging matagumpay ang mga campaigns natin ng democratic governance, academic freedom, pagpapatupad ng CNA. Pero at the same time, kailangan mong iugnay sa mas malawak na usapin ng bayan. Hindi ka lamang dapat nakasentro sa UP, kasi pag gano'n, very parochial 'yung concern mo. Kinakailangan maisakonteksto mo kasi kaya may ganito pala sa University, ay dahil sa resulta siya, sintomas siya ng kalagayan sa ating bansa.

Mahalaga ang institutional support ng University. At nakita natin ang active participation ng ilan, hindi man lahat, sa ating administrators na kasama natin sa pagsulong ng academic freedom and human rights.

I think the first thing that we should challenge is the way state authorities vilify the more radical means of activism, one of which is the parliament of the streets. There are so many means by which we can contribute to the process of raising consciousness among people. People do have different levels of consciousness, just like there are different issues, interests, and concerns that appeal to various individuals. The challenge for organizers, for socio-civic groups, for unions, for activists in general, is to find ways, provide venues by which individuals or group of individuals can participate in this day and age of social media.

It's also challenge for today's generation of activists in how are we going to maximize this digital age

in creating more valuable, useful, relevant content online.

But at the end of the day, it's also important for people to show solidarity, to mobilize themselves especially when the venues for redress of grievances—the so-called institutions of governance, democratic institutions—are being dismantled systematically. We've seen in history that it has induced change, even leadership transition, in different countries, including ours. That's why state authorities continuously vilify, demonize such radical ways of advocating change, because they know the potency not just of the parliament of the streets but also of other radical means of advocating change.

**Carl Marc Ramota**  
Faculty Regent  
University of the Philippines





## Q4: What would you say to the current generation of young activists in UP?

I think we can always draw inspiration from our progressive history and tradition as an institution of higher learning, as the University of the Philippines, as the national university. You know, we did not really start that way. UP is a colonial institution, originally intended to train the next set of leaders, technocrats that will govern the country in the old colonial way.

But during the '50s, the '60s, especially during the turbulent, dark decade of the '70s and the '80s under the Marcos dictatorship, we saw the seeds of progressive thinking, how these were sown and then how they flourished and how they led to the radical transformation of the University, the University that we know at present. Even in the very traditional Greek letter community, a number of fraternities and sororities were transformed and fashioned in the progressive tradition during those turbulent years.

After the first EDSA, we saw the rise of public sector unionism in government offices and agencies. That's when we witnessed the establishment of our own unions. And it continues up to the present. In the '90s, there was a move to further democratize decision-making process, governance structure in the University. For example in UP Manila, nando'n ang pagtatayo ng multisectoral na pamantasang asembliya, not to be mistaken with the University Council, which is primarily comprised of academics,

but it also involves other sectors of the University.

And also from the '80s up to the present, unionism continuously challenged existing governance structures and decision-making processes to be more representative and inclusive, not just at the unit level, at the CU level, but up to the Board of Regents. There is clamor at the moment to expand sectoral representation and to transform the current governance structure in the University in the Board of Regents.

So even within the University itself, makikita natin how 'yung organized action towards social change ay makikita sa iba't ibang yugto ng Pamantasan. This is our own contribution not just to the history of our University as an institution of higher learning but also to the nation itself: 'yung democratization movement, 'yung unionization at iba't iba pang mga initiatives, innovations within the University, which, hopefully, will be emulated by other institutions of learning and also ng iba pang mga ahensya.

It's also important for the University to provide a conducive environment, provide counterpart institutional support to recognize, incentivize all forms of public service, and ensure that our existing process, institutional arrangements—for example, in promotion, tenure, our hiring standards, in our policies and programs—can accommodate our newfound goal of public service.

We continuously challenge our University community to always go out, share our knowledge, go to the communities where they are needed the most. But then when they are terror-tagged, when they are vilified, when they are harassed, when they are intimidated by state security agents and other groups, what kind of protection does the University afford its constituents in the performance of its public service goals as an institution?

In 2023, we witnessed the consistent, wide, multisectoral clamor to establish the University Committee on the Promotion and Protection of Academic Freedom and Human Rights as UP's own response to the growing threats and incidents against civil liberties, human rights, and academic freedom. We're very happy that, across the System, the University Councils, in an unprecedented move, even issued statements, passed resolutions to support the creation of this university committee, with UP Manila, in December last year, starting the move to actually create the committee itself. We've been monitoring the developments in other campuses as well. There's the commitment on the part of not just the sectors, but also the University administrators to establish the same committee in their respective constituent universities. The challenge now is not just at the CU-level but also at the System level.

**Carl Marc Ramota**  
Faculty Regent  
University of the Philippines





Unang gusto kong sabihin, walang mali sa aktibismo. May mali kaya may aktibista. Ibig sabihin, patuloy ang mahalagang kolektibong pagkilos lalo sa mga miyembro ng komunidad, partikular sa ating mga unyonista. Sa ngayon, natutuwa akong sabihin, na more than 50% ng population ng faculty at REPS ng University System ay miyembro na ng unyon, at ang layunin natin ay palawakin pa ang membership ng ating mga union members dahil nakita natin na mas malakas kapag mas marami. At ang mga benepisyonang tinatanggap natin sa kasalukuyan, ang CNA natin, ang negotiation with the UP administration ay nagagawa natin dahil alam ng administrasyon na malakas ang suporta ng ating mga guro at kawani sa ating mga unyonista.

Ang ating unyon ay check and balance sa ating administrasyon; at the same time, lagi itong binabanggit ni Carl as campaign center. Mahalaga na itambol natin ang usaping may kinalaman sa kalagayan natin bilang empleyado ng UP. Walang

ibang makikipaglaban para sa ating benepisyo at karapatan, walang gagawa nito.

Sa bahagi ng mga unyonista sa University, kabahagi ang panawagan ng mga manggagawa sa Pilipinas sa pagpapataas ng sahod. Sa papaano natin hinaharap ang inflation rate. Ngayon merong campaign ang union natin sa salary upgrading. Ang SG 1 sa University, sa mga kawani, hindi na sapat 'to para mabuhay ang kanilang pamilya. Ang mga REPS natin, for example, ang promotion nila ay hindi vertical. Nakakahon ang promotion sa kung ano ang item na inupuan nila. Kakulangan ng items, usapin ng tenure, merit... ang dami nating dapat pag-usapan, ang dami dapat nating baguhin sa sistema within and outside the University. Hindi mo 'to magagawa nang mag-isa. Subalit, napatunayan na sa ating kasaysayan, sa mahabang tradisyon ng kilusang guro, estudyante, at kawani sa Unibersidad, may nababago, at unti-unti 'yon. 'Yan ang hindi dapat nating kalimutan bilang kontribusyon ng Pamantasan para mabago ang lipunan.

Para sa mga kapwa ko mag-aaral, get yourselves organized, join organizations na aligned sa interests ninyo and sa principles ninyo.

Isa sa pinaka-importante ay bigyan or kumuha tayo ng inspirasyon sa mayamang history ng UP of being involved in genuine social change. Sabi nga ni Lean Alejandro, "In the line of fire is a place of honor." Bilang mga Iskolar ng Bayan, hamon talaga sa atin na makipamahagi at makipamuhay sa mga mamamayang Pilipino at gamitin natin ang ating mga degree o diploma sa pag-forward ng interest of the Filipino masses. Huwag matakot na maging involved at huwag matakot na magsalita dahil hindi ka naman mag-isa at sama-sama tayong kikilos para sa tunay na malayang lipunan.



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# Activism and UP's Mandate of Public Service

 *Mary Grace R. Concepcion, Ph.D.*

According to its Charter of 2008 (RA 9500), the University of the Philippines has the right and responsibility “to serve the Filipino nation and humanity, and relate its activities to the needs of the Filipino people and their aspirations for social progress and transformation”. This clearly delineates the role of the University to produce critical thinkers who will shape a liberal, humanistic, rational and compassionate society. The public service character of the University is not limited to teaching, research and extension service. It is also to initiate public discourse that may challenge the ways the state and other authorities exercise their power through despotic means. Thus, activism, through conducting educational discussions, writing statements and holding political demonstrations, is important since its militancy ensures that democratic processes are still in place. It encourages people to be aware of their collective strength in fighting for their rights.

Photo by Misael Bacani, UP MBRO.



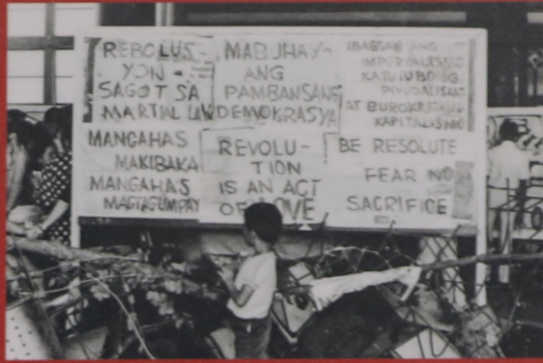
The University of the Philippines' history of militancy has played an important role in the critical junctures of our nation's past. Even before, universities have borne the brunt of state persecution, which shows how much the government is afraid of producing a critical and enlightened populace. The Philippine Congress targeted progressive students and professors during the anti-communist witch-hunting instigated by the 1961 Committee on Anti-Filipino Activities (CAFA), patterned after McCarthyism in the United States. Instead of quelling dissent, the anti-communist witch-hunting caused the revitalization of Marxist study sessions, and saw the increased production of nationalist and liberal writings and the organization of numerous youth and student formations against the CAFA and other repressive state measures. This decade also saw the establishment of militant youth and student organizations such as the Kabataang Makabayan (KM) in 1964 and the Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan (SDK) in 1968.

At the onset of the First Quarter Storm in 1970, the youth and student movement was at the forefront of demonstrations protesting against increasing poverty, government debt spending, and Philippine involvement in the Vietnam War. A year after in 1971, UP students, faculty and residents supported the jeepney strike against the oil price hike and barricaded the entrance to the campus in the historic Diliman Commune. In the ensuing scuffle, Mathematics professor Inocentes Campos fired at the "communards" and killed a freshman student, Pastor "Sonny" Mesina, Jr., the first martyr of UP Diliman waging the anti-Marcos struggle. The police and the Philippine Constabulary Metropolitan Command (MetroCom) tried to dismantle the barricades by throwing tear gas, chasing students, assaulting them with truncheons and firearms, and arresting them. This showed the very realness of military intrusion and violence within the campus. The call to serve the people continued during the Martial Law years up to the present, as UP students, faculty and alumni marched beyond the walls of the classroom and organized in factories, slums, and the countryside.

Photos from the Diliman Commune, taken by Nori Palarca, highlighted in the exhibit. Photo by Jonathan Madrid, UP MPRO.







**Photos from the Diliman Commune, February 1971**  
Photos taken by Nori Palarca







NEVER AGAIN  
NEVER FORGET





This history of militant struggle should constantly remind us of the public character of the University. At the same time that UP produces capitalists and bureaucrats working within the machineries of the state, so too does UP create scholars who are critically aware of the systemic nature of oppression. And indeed, present events have shown that nothing much has changed; the country is still beset with problems stemming from government corruption, class inequalities and foreign intrusion. More particularly, the polarities caused by Duterte's blatant disregard for human rights, and the historical revisionism that has reinstated the Marcoses to the highest government positions have imperiled the University's academic freedom. The red-tagging incidents targeted towards the University's constituents, whether these be anonymous yet orchestrated social media troll posts, or direct-naming in government "inquiries", are not just mere speech acts to be downplayed. This generates a culture of fear and silence that has a chilling effect on students, faculty and researchers. The very activities that define the University, such as doing fieldwork, publishing scholarly and creative work, and speaking in public engagements, are now regarded with suspicion. But equally as frightening as these rabid attacks on scholars or institutions within the University are the downright trivializing and dismissal of critical thinking, which renders history and conscientization obsolete.

Detractors dismiss activism as a public nuisance, or a fleeting and fancy phase in one's youth that one would eventually outgrow. Nonetheless, activism is still relevant in the University, given the current threats on democratic governance and the demonization of critical thinking. The current obsession with university rankings where learning is reduced to measurable terms, may cause the University to be atomized. Research and teaching activities are now mere points to bolster university rankings; and faculty must thrive within the "publish and perish" culture to survive in the academe. This, despite the state encroaching upon the ways the University governs itself, and the continuing attacks against scholars and public intellectuals who are critical of repressive government policies. By promoting a culture of individualism, the University just might create academics who are detached from and sadly apathetic to the country's existing realities. Activism makes the University vibrant and relevant because it breeds a discourse that challenges conventional ways of thinking. Thus, it is important that the voices of academics seep into public discourse. The challenge is also to go beyond this fixation with university rankings and to think about the greater good and the impact of what we do for society.



# Truth-telling as Advocacy

## From the *Collegian* Pages to Community Journalism

Marjohara Tucay

Learning that journalism's "first obligation is to the truth" seemed easy and logical for a freshman. My first lessons as a BA Broadcast Communication major focused on the value of facts and verification in reporting. Kovach and Rosenstiel's words were a key tenet in their book, *The Elements of Journalism*, one of our basic texts in the College of Mass Communication; and I soon learned that they were more complex than I had initially thought.

I had been practicing campus journalism since grade school, making me confident that applying for a stint in the *Philippine Collegian* (*Kulê*) would be a breeze. By the end of my first week in UP, I was already climbing the stairs of Vinzons Hall without losing my breath, going up to the infamous Room 401, where the *Collegian* office was. I passed the exam and was soon a cub reporter in the Features Section.

"Easy," I told myself complacently.

Illustration of sampaguita garlands by Kevin Roque, UP MPRO.





## Chance encounters

The first story my editor assigned me to was to find out whether there was a syndicate behind the sampaguita vendors plying the campus streets and nearby main avenues. Seeking to ace the assignment, I walked from University Avenue to Kamuning, asking sampaguita vendors where they were sourcing their wares.

"Nanay ko po ang gumagawa," a girl I met along Agham Road told me. Heading there, I realized the sampaguita garlands were not products of a nefarious syndicate, but of a community fighting for survival. That was my first encounter with the struggle of Sitio San Roque, a community in the heart of Quezon City under the constant threat of being wiped away by big-ticket development. Right now, that same community remains, undaunted, persistent, yet smaller in size, as tall condominiums and malls have already carved out their lion's share of the land area.

After learning that the sampaguita garland business was not an illicit trade, I told myself, "This won't work. This wasn't the assignment."

I persevered. Walking along Agham Road, I caught sight of small kids getting on board a jeepney, with rags in their hands, polishing commuters' shoes clean.

"Kailangan namin ng pambaon, Kuya," a child explained to me. And that became my first *Collegian* article, the story of the shoe shiners of Agham Road and the threat of demolition looming over their families' heads.

Thus, my collegiate journalistic journey began. Months into the rigorous weekly presswork, I realized that to understand Kovach and Rosenstiel's point, I needed to fully digest the second half of that eponymous line, that journalism's first loyalty is to the citizens. The *Collegian* reporting tradition enabled me to realize that we need to adhere to facts; but what facets of the multiple versions of the truth should we highlight? The answer—the version that will empower the marginalized, as we recognize that journalism can help those being silenced to be heard and included in the narrative.

During my time in *Kulê*, I encountered a kaleidoscope of experiences that shaped my understanding of the journalistic profession. Interviewing figures of authority and influence, such as retired Major General Jovito Palparan, was a deep dive into the complexities of power and accountability. These interviews, tense and fraught with unspoken undercurrents, taught me the importance of probing beneath the surface and uncovering the layers hidden behind the veneer of public personas.

Yet the most impactful and profound stories unfolded beyond the university walls, in the streets, the haciendas, the picket lines. Covering the plight of those affected by demolitions, the struggles of laborers, and the fervor of protests, I came to see that these stories were not mere journalistic assignments, but profound insights into humankind's capacity to foment change.



## A voice for communities

After leaving UP, I spent years working with youth and advocacy groups, including Kabataan Partylist in Congress, before making the shift to community journalism. Returning from a consultation with youth groups in Mindanao in January 2017, I had a near-fatal car accident that left me in a coma for a few days. The convalescence period for that accident took over a year as well as four surgeries.

When I was stable enough to move around, I volunteered for Altermidya Network, the country's broadest network of regional alternative media outfits and community journalists. Being an Altermidya journalist was

the balance I was latently looking for; it allowed me to unabashedly continue my activist pursuits, while being able to cover and write stories that mattered.

Unsurprisingly, Altermidya was founded in UP in October 2014, with the late College of Mass Communications Dean Luis Teodoro serving as its founding chairperson. The verdant campus that opened the world of journalism for me also happened to be the birthplace of the network I now serve.

Transitioning to being a community journalist was like venturing into a broader landscape, where the

stories were more diverse and the stakes even higher. Here, the lessons from *Kulê* took on new dimensions as I navigated the complexities of national and community narratives.

The rigorous research and critical analysis that were the backbone of my work at the *Collegian* became even more crucial at Altermidya. Tackling national issues, exploring the intricacies of policy, and giving voice to marginalized communities required a commitment to thoroughness and accuracy. Each article was crafted as a report and a comprehensive analysis, offering insights and perspectives that went beneath the surface.

The author interviews a farmer who is experiencing threats of land grabbing in San Jose Del Monte, Bulacan.



Reflecting on this journey from the *Collegian* to Altermidya, I see a continuous thread of growth and evolution. *Kulê* was not just a starting point but a foundational experience that shaped my worldview and approach to journalism. It instilled in me a profound respect for the power of words and a deep understanding of the responsibility of wielding them.

As I continue to navigate the ever-changing landscape of journalism, the teachings and experiences from my *Kulê* days resonate in every story I craft for Altermidya. These experiences have reinforced my belief that journalism is more than

a profession; it is a commitment to storytelling that seeks to inform, engage, and, most importantly, connect. In every narrative I weave, I strive to capture the essence of the human experience—the struggles, triumphs, and unyielding spirit that defines our collective journey.

My journey from the *Philippine Collegian* to Altermidya is a testament to the transformative power of storytelling. It underscores the belief that every story matters and that each narrative is crucial to the larger societal mosaic. This journey has been a tapestry of experiences, each thread representing a story, a lesson, or a moment of insight.

From the vibrant campus of UP to the diverse communities served by Altermidya, my path has been one of continuous learning and adaptation. It has been a journey of discovering the many stories that make up our world and finding the best ways to tell them. As I move forward, I commit to helping hone a future where journalism continues to be a force for good, a medium for truth, and a bridge that enables the marginalized to be visible in the daily narrative.

*Marjohara Tuay is a community journalist and news producer for Altermidya Network, a coalition of national and regional alternative media outfits and community journalists in the Philippines.*

Photos of Altermidya screenings at Quezon province during the 2023 Tulaog Festival, for members of the Dumagat community.


To distribute the news reports they produce, Altermidya journalists go to communities who are usually deprived of access to relevant news and information. Pictured is one of the regular community screenings in a fire-hit community in Brgy. Tatalon, Quezon City.





Teacher-mappers of Valderrama together with UP Visayas study leader, Prof. Jose R. Taton, and research assistant, Ms. Dimple Rios, during a fieldwork at Sibalom, Antique. Photo by Ramon Ramirez, 2021.

# Mapping Cultures, Building Communities

 Arlyn VCD Palisoc Romualdo

“By locating our cultural heritage, we ascertain our origins and future,” Anna Razel Limoso Ramirez stated emphatically. The UP Visayas (UPV) publications officer is the overall co-project leader of the Cultural Mapping of Panay and Guimaras (CMPG), along with Director Anthea Redison of the UPV Center for West Visayan Studies.

Formally launched in December 2023, CMPG comes after the Cultural Mapping of Antique (CMA), the pioneering regional initiative for Western Visayas, of which Ramirez

was overall project coordinator. She and Dr. Alice Magos, whom Ramirez referred to as the “backbone” of CMA, were invited back in 2018 by the Office of then Deputy House Speaker and Antique Representative Loren Legarda to help lead CMA, following their work, *From Seas to the Mountains (Kadagatan Tuftub Kabukidan): Traditional Knowledge Practices of Panay and Guimaras*, which was funded by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.



## Ila tingog: Their voices

Through cultural mapping, communities are given a platform to raise their voices, and proclaim and elucidate what is significant to them. Ramirez emphasized the non-negotiable condition of “we don’t tell them, they tell us” when documenting heritage. Cultural mappers should record without bias, without asking leading questions to satisfy preconceived notions. CMA field workers were trained in cultural mapping by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), using its own developed toolkit. It will be the same for CMPG.

### DOMAINS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

1. NATURAL HERITAGE
2. TANGIBLE IMMOVABLE AND MOVABLE HERITAGE
3. INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE
4. PERSONALITIES AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS
5. CIVIC HERITAGE AND CULTURAL PROGRAMS OF LGUs

\*As enumerated in NCCA Cultural Mapping Toolkit.

The province of Antique is largely rural, and most of what was mapped in all 18 municipalities were part of intangible cultural heritage. This, according to the NCCA toolkit, includes social practices and rituals, as well as practices regarding nature and the universe.

One common tradition among Antiquenons that was seen in CMA, for example, was panguyang. It is the practice of making a food offering to a divine being, environmental spirits, and ancestral spirits before planting or fishing, to ask for good harvest and to give thanks for guaranteed protection from misfortune and harm. Panguyang is done again to show gratitude after harvest, whether bountiful or not. In both instances, members of the community partake of the offered food, as they, too, are seen as helpful partners in livelihood.

Another is the practice of consulting the babaylan, community healers who are also respected elders, in decision-making. Whether building a house, getting married, or having a child baptized, one seeks the advice of the babaylan, asking them to mediate in making offerings to the spirits. Again, Ramirez pointed out that local belief systems should be respected because “we can only help them articulate, but the communities must always be the lead because those are their stories to tell. Who are we to contradict their cultural heritage?”

Research assistant, Ms. Dimple Rios, in pink, with Ms. Kyla Agnes Ramirez, interviews Wildito Fernando, the chieftain of the Iraynon Bukidnon indigenous community of San Agustin in Valderrama, Antique. Photo by Ramon Ramirez, 2021.





## From Antique to the whole of Panay and Guimaras

Antique is only one of the four provinces in Panay Island, the other three being Aklan, Capiz, and Iloilo. And those four make up most of Region VI or Western Visayas, where the other two provinces are Guimaras and Negros Occidental. With CMPG following CMA, almost the whole region will be culturally mapped.

CMA was coursed through the Department of Education (DepEd)-Division of Antique, which was given funds in the 2019 general appropriations. "But cultural mapping was not a usual task for teachers and undertaking the project was overwhelming for them," Ramirez explained. This is why, apart from Legarda's office and DepEd Antique, CMA also involved NCCA for cultural mapping know-how, UP Visayas for research and publication expertise, and the Provincial Government of Antique for logistical support, especially since the work started and was done in the middle of a pandemic riddled with lockdowns and travel restrictions.

Despite the challenges of online training, COVID-19 testing, securing medical clearances, getting insurance, navigating harsh mountain terrains, and possible red-tagging, the CMA team, including the 90 cultural mappers composed of elementary and high school teachers, and Ramon Ramirez who had the unenviable but necessary task of photo documentation in remote communities, pulled through. In November 2022, the 21-volume *Duna, Kinaiya, kag Parangulion* (A Cultural Inventory of the Province of Antique) was launched. Seven of the 21 books contained uniquely Antiquenhon folklore and songs.

CMPG, originally intended to run for two years with funding from the 2023 general appropriations, will only have 2024 to do field and editorial work as the budget only became available in the third quarter of 2023. This time, UPV has partnered with seven state universities, and eight government agencies and offices to conduct the massive cultural mapping of 98 municipalities and three cities across four provinces. Discussions for Negros Occidental to complete the cultural mapping of the region have begun as well.

In August 2023, signed into law was Republic Act No. 11961, An Act Strengthening the Conservation and Protection of Philippine Cultural Heritage through Cultural Mapping and Enhanced Cultural Heritage Education Program, Amending for the Purpose Republic Act No. 10066, otherwise known as the "National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009". Local government units (LGUs) have been mandated to conduct comprehensive cultural mapping of their areas of jurisdiction and maintain inventories of their cultural properties and natural properties of cultural significance.

Teacher-mappers of Barbaza, with Ms. Anna Razel Ramirez in far right, during a courtesy visit with the barangay official in Barbaza, Antique, to relay the plans to conduct fieldwork in the area. Photo by Ramon Ramirez, 2021.





**4**  
**PROVINCES**

**98**  
**MUNICIPALITIES**

**3**  
**CITIES**

**62**  
**CULTURAL MAPPERS**  
Research assistants

**7**  
**PARTNER SUCs**

Aklan State University, Capiz State University, University of Antique, Guimaras State University, Iloilo State University of Fisheries Science and Technology, Iloilo Science and Technology University, West Visayas State University

**8**  
**Partner Agencies**

National Commission for Culture and the Arts, Provincial Government of Aklan, Provincial Government of Capiz, Provincial Government of Antique, Provincial Government of Guimaras, Provincial Government of Iloilo, City Government of Iloilo, Office of Senate President Pro Tempore  
Loren B. Legarda



Ms. Anna Razel Ramirez, project leader of the Cultural Mapping of Antique, shows the contents of the NCCA toolkit to the Council of Elders of the Ati community in Sitio Igcaputol in Poblacion Norte, Tobias Fornier, Antique. Photo by Michelle L. Villabert, 2021.

## Beyond cultural mapping

While the creation of a cultural map, by itself a comprehensive and visual cultural heritage registry, is the end product of cultural mapping, it is also a tool to be used for community development by local governments, policymakers, educational institutions, and citizens.

It can guide the creation of programs to preserve and protect environments and populations of endemic and critically endangered flora and fauna. It can provide indispensable information for disaster risk reduction and management initiatives. As it has begun in Antique, it can enrich education through contextualized cultural information. Higher education institutions can use cultural data to conduct further research and contribute to knowledge creation.

For the community and its people, a cultural map of the documented past and the practiced present asserts a sense of self that allows them to confidently determine how to shape their future.



# Facts vs Fakes

## UP Fact-checking Initiatives Against Disinformation

 *KIM Quilinguing*

Just four days after the May 9, 2022 National and Local Elections, Tsek.ph released its report on how bogus vote tallies and supposed disqualification of some candidates proliferated online during election day.

The Tsek.ph report said fake news proliferated “overwhelmingly on Facebook, and occasionally on Twitter and YouTube, mostly by Marcos supporters, including Showbiz Fanaticz channel, whose election-related claims have been previously fact-checked”.

In an earlier report, Tsek.ph said disinformation flooded in “multiple formats and platforms that is unprecedented in the country’s history”. Foremost in the targeted candidates, they said, were then presidential candidates Leni Robredo and Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. The disinformation efforts on the two competing candidates,

they added, is indicative of the “high political polarization” of the politically conscious demographic in the country.

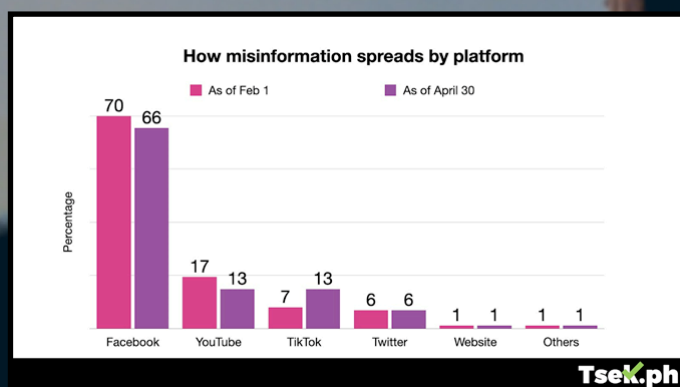
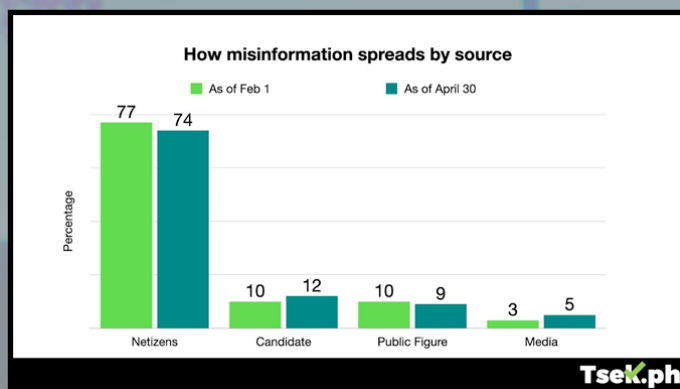
Spearheaded by the Department of Journalism in the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman, Tsek.ph is a multisectoral fact-checking initiative involving 34 institutions in the academe, news industry, and civil society. The project is supported by UP, Google News Initiative, Rakuten Media, Meta, Meedan, and the Embassy of Canada in the Philippines.

Initially launched in 2019, Tsek.ph was conceptualized due to the “growing threats of disinformation and misinformation in traditional and online media that affect the health of democratic countries and the power of citizens to make informed choices during elections”.









Graphs showing data on how misinformation spreads in different sources and platforms. Images taken from Tsek.ph.

In 2019, the Tsek.ph team fact-checked 131 materials on disinformation and misinformation “targeting candidates and political groups vying for positions in the May elections”. Out of those gathered, 84 were found to be false, 21 needed context, 19 were misleading, and two had no basis. Most of the materials were disseminated via social media, while others were included in the speeches of candidates, stated during their appearance on television programs, and even included in their own curriculum vitae.

Also active in the fight against disinformation for the empowerment of voters is the UP sa Halalan project, headed by the Department of Political Science in UP Diliman. Banking on the expertise of their faculty members and their partners, the initiative provides analysis, think

pieces, and insights on the elections, as well as on social issues which confront the Filipino voter.

In 2022, UP sa Halalan joined hands with Tsek.ph for the May 2023 elections. Constituent universities of the UP System also signed up with the network, such as UP Baguio, UP Cebu, UP Visayas, and UP Open University. They joined a consortium of universities, news media, and civil society organizations in efforts to combat disinformation.

In 2023, UP sa Halalan was active during the Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections, providing voter education and information, as well as analysis and insights on the electoral process and its impact in the communities. Aside from publishing their analyses on their website and disseminating

these via social media, their experts also appeared on national news programs, providing perspectives on the elections.

UP sa Halalan began as an election initiative of the UP Office of the Vice President for Public Affairs (OVPPA) in 2012, for the May 2013 elections. The result of a collaboration between UP, the Commissions on Elections (COMELEC), and ABS-CBN Corporation, the project launched a website which provided voter information and education materials, a precinct finder, interactive election map, think pieces, analysis, infographics, and, of course, fact checks.

Collaboration with the COMELEC also allowed the project access to much-needed data on the voting population, as well as on candidates



running in the regions. Partnering with ABS-CBN also allowed for the creation of multimedia materials that best put the data in a good and creative use.

Notably, the fact checks of the time focused more on verifying the claims of candidates for the senatorial positions, and not on claims from dubious individuals disseminated on social media platforms. A series of the fact checks were produced and disseminated on the University's social media platforms.

In 2015, the UP sa Halalan was revived in anticipation of the May 2016 National and Local Elections. Capitalizing on its efforts three years earlier, the project expanded its engagement with the news media by engaging not only ABS-CBN, but also GMA. With this approach,

the University's experts sought to provide analysis and information to more members of the public through their appearance on television programs, radio programs, think pieces, as well as fact checks of claims made by candidates.

In 2019, UP sa Halalan officially passed from the OVPPA to the UP Diliman Department of Political Science, in recognition of the contributions by many of its faculty to the previous two iterations of the project. With assistance from the UP Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs (OVPA), the Office of Extension Coordination, and the UP Diliman Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Development (OVCRD), the project continues its aim to provide perspectives on political issues confronting Philippine society,

particularly during the elections, as well as to provide the public with correct information on the country's institutions, the electoral process, and the candidates during elections.

With the country's midterm elections just a couple of years away, organizations like Tsek.ph and UP sa Halalan will continue to provide perspectives, analyses, information, and, most of all, fact checks for both the online and offline world now saddled with misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation. And these initiatives are manifestations of not only the honor and excellence of the national university's experts, but more importantly, its commitment to inform, educate, and empower the Filipino nation.



Infographics of fact-checked materials disseminated via social media. Photo taken from Tsek.ph.





# Rep. Arlene D. Brosas

## An Activist in the Halls of Power

 Celeste Ann L. Castillo

The life of an activist can be challenging enough as it is. But for an activist in the halls of power, dealing directly with both the communities you serve on the one hand, and with hostile members of the opposition themselves on the other, juggling conflicting needs and interests while still continuing to do the right thing, the challenge can be on a whole other level.

Rep. Arlene D. Brosas, member of the Philippine House of Representatives for the Gabriela Women's Party-list group since 2016, knows how tough it can be for an activist working inside the system, and specifically, in the lower house of Congress. This UP alumna, former UP faculty member, and child rights and women's rights activist sat down with the *UP Forum* to talk about some of her experiences as an activist in the Philippine legislature.



## Q How do you define activism, and what differentiates activism from public service?

Sa tingin ko mas general ang activism. Both the public and private sector can engage in it. Pero ang public service, may position ka in the public sector. Nasa barangay ka, o nasa level ka ng munisipyo, o nasa level ka ng city hall—hanggang sa Congress, hanggang sa Senate, public service

‘yan. Kahit naman ‘yung ginagawa ng gobyerno, dapat buong-buo. Public service ‘yon.

I think the distinction is in the coverage or scope. Doon magkakatalo kasi malawak ang aktibismo per se. Private individuals

and the general public can be activists, each according to their own causes and beliefs. Not only in terms of ideologies, but in all spheres—the environment, political issues, and so on—there is activism.

## Q You’ve been in Congress for seven years. Is this your last term?

Tapos na ako! Nakakapagod, eh! [Laughter]

Grabe talaga ang ginagawa ko. Tumambling talaga ako sa loob ng Kongreso. Sometimes you have positions that really collide with the majority of them. It’s really about the principles; labanan ng prinsipyo

sa buhay sa loob ng Congress. And it’s even more difficult when you don’t come from their ranks. Like me—especially me, coming from the ranks of the ordinary people.

But of course, kaya naman kami tumatagal diyan, lalo na sa Makabayan bloc (Makabayang

Koalisyon ng Mamamayan), it’s because we serve the people. We always abide by our principle na paglingkuran ang mamamayan na walang interes ng iilan kung hindi para sa majority.

## Q What has it been like for you, being an activist in the halls of the legislature?

It’s been very difficult for me. Syempre, nanggaling ako sa mahirap talaga. And then coming from a non-government organization and from the teaching sector—hindi talaga nag-jive dito sa Congress.

Pero bakit kami tumatagal? Because we see that, in all spheres, kailangan ‘yung mga katulad natin. The so-called activists. ‘Yung mga iba mag-isip. We need this in a democracy; it wouldn’t be a real democracy without it. Kailangang may mga ibang tinig na naririnig; in fact, dapat nga mas marami ‘yung tinig ng mga majority na naririnig. Ako, sa tingin ko, ang composition natin sa Kongreso ay dapat mga magsasaka, mangingisda, manggagawa, kasi ‘yun naman ang marami sa atin. But this is not the case. Mahirap kasi kapag nasa powerful class ka. Iba yung lente mo. You may favor the big businesses; may mga ties pa nga ‘yung iba. May problema talaga sa gano’n, di ba?

Sa amin, madali para sa amin ang magsalita. We can name names because we’re not connected to any interests. Kaya naming pag-usapan ang mga mining companies na pumapasok, halimbawa. Ang mga kailangang ikundena. The activities we should be indignant about.

Photos from the House of Representatives.



Q

What are the pluses and minuses of not being in the majority in Congress?

Even in governance, we have not been getting any pork barrel. Ang medical assistance, which is given to all, sabi namin dapat hindi dumaan sa mga Kongresista kung hindi dapat i-diretso sa ospital kasi dapat wala tayong tinatanggihang pasyente. Kung gusto mo talaga na asikasuhin ang universal healthcare, di dapat universal siya, dapat lahat ng mga nangangailangan, naaasikaso. Pero hindi gano'n, eh.

We study all of that. Ang activism namin, doon ang point niya—the

different voices. The voices that are not usually heard within the halls of power. Dito, sa tingin ko hindi naman kami second-class citizens, kasi matatapang kami.

Pero kakaunti lang kami. We're just a minority among the 300+ na kasama namin na iba ang itotono o susunod lang sa kung ano ang sasabihin ng mga nasa poder. Kami, ang critical voices, ay limited sa loob ng Kongreso, kaya napakahirap ng sitwasyon.

Pero ang sabi nga namin, hangga't hindi nagbabago ang sistema, hindi rin kami magbabago. Hindi kami mga national heroes, at hindi rin 'yon namin ginusto na mapunta sa pag-frame nang gano'n. But the situation calls for it. Until such a time that the people will realize that we need radical change, and that radical change is in their hands. Nasa taumbayan 'yan eh. At hindi tanga ang mga tao. It is because the problems are systemic, and the root causes of all these problems in our nation have not been resolved.

Q

What does an average day in Congress look like for you?

Oh my God! Tatlo, apat, lima na gawain sa isang buong araw. This includes 'yung paglabas mo, kasi syempre, you don't explain the issues here. Hindi ka naman makakakuha ng simpatya dito, kasi buo na ang mga desisyon dito. So what do you do? Pupunta ka sa baba. Makikipag-usap ka talaga sa mga communities and organizations na nangangailangang malaman ang mga ito.

So most of the time, nasa labas kami. Pero kapag may mga pukpukang laban sa usapin ng mga pinapasang batas na tax reform na hindi naman nakakatulong—dagdag tax lang ito sa taumbayan—at mga usapin pa ng national budget, confidential funds, at iba pa, kailangan talaga namin tutukan. At madugo ito. For example, committee hearings usually start at 9 AM here. Marami 'yan: Public Order, Justice, etc.

So, sometimes, I have to choose kung aling committee 'yung may mga tina-tackle na matitindi. Hangga't kaya, gagawan ko ng

paraan na mapuntahan lahat, pero hindi nga 'yon posible minsan. So I have to choose one, two, or three that I need to focus on. Primarily, ito yung, at least, mga may pusisyon ang ating mga mangingisda, manggagawa, magsasaka, gano'n. Then I go on to the 3 PM Plenary. Sa Plenary ita-tackle ang mga bills at legislations. So kapag meron nang mga naka-tackle doon na for interpellation or Plenary debates, 'yun ang kailangan naming unahin, pag-aralan, etc. Since we are not in the majority, hindi namin agad-agad nalalaman 'yon.

Then you end the day sometimes at 8 PM, 9 PM, 12 AM, depending on the time allotted for the Plenary. Pagka-budget na ang pinag-uusapan, mas malala pa dyan. Mga isang buwan halos na Committee hearings, at walang tulugan 'yun kasi bawat ahensya kailangan naming himayin. Doon lumuluwa ang mata ko.

So talagang mahirap para sa amin. Trabaho talaga. Kaya kailangan mo rin ng matibay na legislative staff.

Kailangan naming paghati-hatian ang trabaho.

Fortunately, sa amin sa Makabayan, as a collective namin pinag-uusapan ang mga bagay-bagay so we don't decide na anu-ano na lang. We consult one another. Meron na kami kaagad na positions sa bawat isyu, depende sa isyu. Minsan may nagkakamali. Minsan hindi namin naaasikaso ang ilang mga bagay, pero tinitiyak talaga namin na, lalo na sa mga pinaka-general na isyu, napag-usapan namin. We make sure our decision-making is consultative.

Pero 'yun nga. We need more people [in Congress] who will speak up for others. Kasi, syempre, ang gusto lang ng majority ay ang status quo, kaya hindi talaga ire-resolve ang education problem, ang health problem. But the young ones, ang mga kabataan natin na bago at mabilis mag-isip, kailangan natin 'yon. We need more youth involved in all aspects.

Photo by Al Nikko John Nagutom, UP MPRO.



**Q What are some of the challenges activists in governance face?**

It's very dangerous for us. Gano'n 'yung nangyayari sa amin, nire-red-tag kami. Madalas ang sasabihin sa iyo, "NPA ka kasi!" Lalo na noong panahon ng Duterte administration, ginawa nilang norm na patayin ang mga aktibista—ite-terror-tag ka para ma-isolate ka, gagawan ka ng kung anu-anong intriga para hindi ka makapagsalita. Kaya parang nile-legitimize nila na sampahan kami ng gawa-gawang kaso, tapos sasaktan kami o gagawan kami ng masama. And they make it seem that it's okay. This is the narrative they try to push, kasi hindi masagot ang mga tanong namin. Hindi kami ma-engage sa aktual na mga isyu. Kaya gano'n ang ginagawa.

I have experienced surveillance. Ni-rally na ako sa mga lugar kung saan sasabihin na gano'n kami. Naranasan ko na rin ang sinusundan ako sa highway, 'yung nakikita mong naka-motorsiklo sila. Kakabahan ka talaga kasi parang, ano? Papatayin ka ba?

Ang pamilya ko, takot din sila, pero wala naman silang magagawa because this is my choice. Sabi ko sa kanila, kahit na ano'ng mangyari, kahit ikamatay ko ito, mas gugustuhin ko na may ginawa ako para sa pagbabago.

**Q How did your UP education help to shape your career, character, and life decisions?**

Malaking bagay ito sa akin. Ang resilience ko, tingin ko, galing talaga 'yon sa survival ko sa education sa UP. Kaya ang appreciation ko sa UP education ko—grabe, sobra! Ito ang humubog sa akin. Iba mag-isip sa UP, eh. Napaka-liberal, napaka-democratic. And the academe should be just that. Hindi siya dapat hinahaluan ng kung anu-ano, at hindi dapat siya pinapasista.

At para sa mga susunod na henerasyon: Papayag ba kayo na hindi nagsasalita ang mga tao? Ang mga susunod na kabataan: Ano na? Susunod lang, hindi mag-iisip? Ang hirap noon, lalo na sa ating mga taga-UP. Hindi madali para sa atin ang tanggapin na nakakahon ka sa ganito na lang.


Kasi, di ba? Iba kami!





# Courts as Policymakers

## Untangling Judicial Activism in the Philippines

 Alicor Panao

Theories of democracy generally value citizen activism as an essential component of a healthy democratic system. Hence, when people engage in protests, participate in signature campaigns, and contribute to online and offline public discourse, there are bound to be inconveniences, but democracy would certainly still be thriving.

What happens, however, if instead of individuals, institutions or branches of government engage in activism? Consider courts, for instance. What if judges interpret laws based on their

own normative beliefs or political predispositions, or if courts make a habit of striking down an action of either the Congress or the President?

As the questions hint at, judicial activism is far from one's usual notion of political activism. Simply put, judicial activism refers to the judiciary's willingness to interpret the Constitution and laws in a manner that actively shapes public policy. In the literature, there is judicial activism when a court undertakes any of the following: a court invalidates the constitutional action

of another branch (e.g., legislature, executive); a court fails to adhere to a precedent; a court engages in judicial policymaking; a court departs from accepted interpretive methodology; or when a court engages in result-oriented judging (Kmiec, 2004). In judicial restraint, judges limit their interpretation to the text of the law; whereas in an activist court, members delve into broader societal issues and make themselves architects of legal and social change.

## Distinguishing judicial activism from political activism

Although conventional political activism and judicial activism share advocacy as a common thread, the similarity ends there. As a distinctive form of activism, judicial activism unfolds within the hallowed halls of courts rather than on bustling streets or in community centers. Conventional activism typically conjures images of impassioned protesters and grassroots organizers. Judicial activism, on the other hand, operates within the legal system, with judges leveraging their interpretive authority to shape legal precedents and to influence policy.

Another significant difference between judicial activism and political activism evolves around the issue of democratic legitimacy.

Political activism, inherently requiring citizen participation, operates within the principles of representative democracy. Activists seek to influence elected officials and operate within the structures of accountable governance. In contrast, judicial activism involves unelected judges who make decisions that have far-reaching repercussions on public policy, but who are insulated from democratic accountability.

Another point of contention is the timing of response. Political activism is often reactive and undertaken to address pressing social concerns or issues requiring immediate public attention. Judicial activism, on the other hand, operates within the more deliberate and reflective temporal dynamics of legal proceedings. Decisions require contemplation and a good amount of legal scholarship.







## Judicial activism in the Philippines

A major critique of judicial activism is its potential to undermine democratic legitimacy. When courts engage in policymaking through excessive judicial activism, they are not only usurping legislative prerogatives but also undermining electoral accountability. Unlike legislators whom citizens can discipline by not reelecting, for instance, members of the judiciary cannot be made directly accountable to the citizens except perhaps by public opinion. Excessive judicial activism can also result in inconsistent legal decisions, as when courts interpret laws differently, based on their members' ideological or moral predispositions. This lack of consistency can create uncertainty in the legal system, and may erode confidence in the ability of the judicial branch to provide stable legal interpretations.

However, some also contend that judicial activism is a crucial safeguard against executive overreach, a means to champion minority rights, and a framework to pursue social justice. In the Philippines, in particular, instances of judicial activism by the Supreme Court seem to underscore

its dynamic role in shaping a socially conscious legal milieu. During martial law, when confidence in political institutions was low, the high court was said to have actively engaged in redistributive policymaking in favor of the have-nots as a means of preserving its own legitimacy (Haynie, 1994). When democracy was restored under the 1987 Constitution, on the other hand, the high court is said to have performed a balancing role consistent with the pursuit of social justice as a constitutional principle (Panao & De Leon, 2018).

There are numerous accounts of the high court actively interpreting and applying the law to address significant legal, constitutional, and societal issues. For instance, in the case of *Association of Small Landowners of the Philippines v. Secretary of Agrarian Reform* (G.R. No. 78742, July 14, 1989), the Court creatively construed agrarian reform legislations as both compensable taking and police power to ensure equitable land distribution. In the groundbreaking case of *Ang Ladlad LGBT Party v.*

*Commission on Elections* (G.R. No. 190582, April 8, 2010), meanwhile, the Court recognized the right of the LGBTQ+ community to political representation, thereby marking a significant step towards inclusivity and equality.

Judicial activism in the Philippines also extends to environmental matters, as seen in the oft-cited case of *Oposa v. Factoran* (G.R. No. 101083, July 30, 1993), where the court recognized the right of the present generation (erstwhile having no legal standing) to sue on its behalf and that of future generations for the protection of the environment. The Court also actively made sure that equal opportunity and freedom of speech are protected, as when it upheld the right of a perennial nuisance candidate to run for public office (*Pamatong v Commission on Elections*, G.R. No. 161872, April 13, 2004); and recognized the importance of properly conducted exit polls to ensure orderly and credible elections (*ABS-CBN v. Commission on Elections*, G.R. No. 133486, January 28, 2000).



## Citizens and activist courts

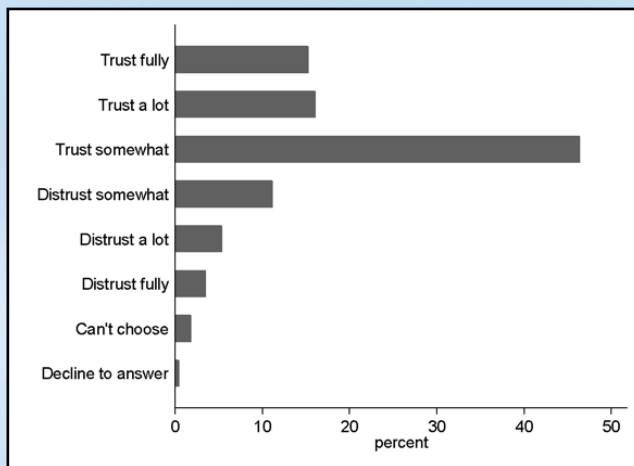
Notwithstanding scholars' mixed views of judicial activism, what do citizens make of an activist judiciary?

It is interesting to note that even though members of the judiciary do not need to court votes, courts seem to be among the most trusted government institutions in the Philippines. The fifth wave of the Asia Barometer Survey for the Philippines, for instance, shows that Filipinos generally have a high regard of courts as government institutions. As Figure 1 indicates, 78% of respondents say they either trust courts fully or trust them somewhat. However, survey results do not necessarily imply that people want courts to perform more proactively than necessary. As to the question whether it is essential in a democracy for courts to protect people when there is abuse of government power, in particular, people's opinion is generally mixed (see Figure 2). Although about a quarter of the respondents say it is definitely very essential, 21% take the middle ground. Nevertheless,

as Figure 3 suggests, about six in 10 Filipinos disagree that courts are passive and cannot do anything when government leaders break the law.

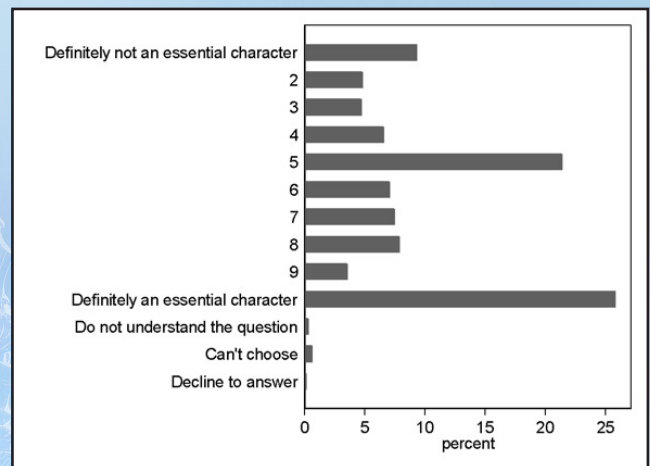
In summary, the extent by which judicial activism undermines democracy remains to be an empirical question. It is possible that despite the absence of electoral accountability, citizens ultimately shape the environment within which judicial actions take place. In the case of the Supreme Court, one study even suggests that such strong public support provides motivation for the high court's exercise of its review powers over other political actors (Deinla, 2014). As societies evolve and face new challenges, the ongoing discourse on the appropriate role of judicial activism in democracies will remain a crucial aspect of legal and political discussions.

**Figure 1. Filipinos' trust in courts**



Note: The survey question reads: "I'm going to name a number of institutions. For each one, please tell me, how much trust do you have in them? (Do not read: Do not understand the question, Can't choose & Decline to answer)." Source: Asia Barometer, 5th Wave (2022)

**Figure 2. Opinion on the function of courts**



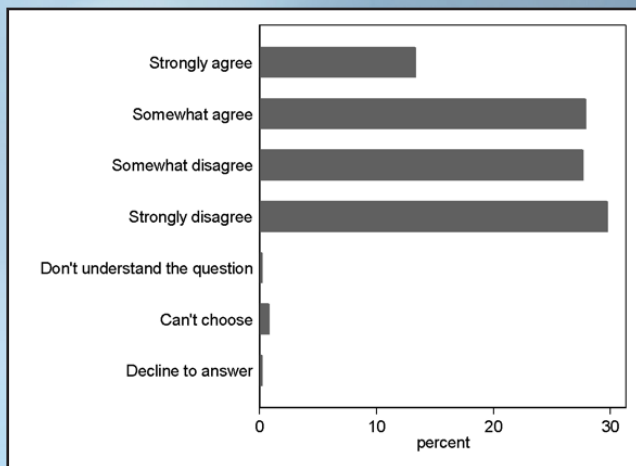
Note: The survey question reads: "Many things may be desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. On the scale of 1 to 10, one meaning not an essential characteristic of democracy and 10 meaning an essential characteristic of democracy, please choose the level for each statement: Q91. The court protects the ordinary people from the abuse of government power." Source: Asia Barometer, 5th Wave (2022)





Photo taken from the Facebook Page of the Office of the Court Administrator, Supreme Court of the Philippines.

**Figure 3. Belief in a proactive judiciary**



Note: The survey question reads: “Now I am going to read to you a list of statements that describe how people often feel about the state of affairs in [country name]. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of these statements: Q111: When government leaders break the laws, there is nothing the court can do.” Source: Asia Barometer, 5th Wave (2022)

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# Activism for Indigenous Peoples

## Interview with Paul Belisario of IPMSDL

Jo Florendo B. Lontoc

The plight of indigenous peoples (IPs) in the Philippines is often overlooked, with over 100 IP groups in the country facing high rates of unemployment and illiteracy while struggling with discrimination and the prevalence of militarization and armed conflict in their ancestral territories. To give more background and context to these issues, and to discuss the efforts of advocacy groups to raise awareness and support for IP communities, the *UP Forum* sat down with Paul Belisario, a graduate of UP Diliman and currently the Global Coordinator of the Indigenous People's Movement for Self-Determination and Liberation (IPMSDL). The IPMSDL, founded in 2010, is an international network of IP rights activists and organizations.

**YOU ARE WORKING IN AN INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (IP) ORGANIZATION. HOW DID IT ALL START?**

In a way, I believe that UP played an important role in all these during the *Lakbayan ng Pambansang Minorya*. UP Diliman housing thousands of Lumad, Moro, Igorot, Aeta, Dumagat, among many others, pulled me closer to the cause of IP and national minorities. I remember visiting the *kampuhan* and listening to and being moved by stories about the harshest attacks IP experience. It was also the moment I met IP from other countries and watched how cross-border solidarity works in action, an important lesson I carry until now in my work for IPMSDL.



## WHAT ARE THE PECULIARITIES AND SPECIAL DEMANDS OF WORKING FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES?

Indigenous Peoples have their unique identities and distinct ways of life. And that is both the beauty and the challenge of working with them. There's a huge need for sensitivity and recognition of their universal right to self-determination as distinct peoples, which goes with their rights to lands, territories, culture and traditions, self-governance, political, economic, and social structures. On the other hand, you cannot just lump IP together in one basket, because one indigenous community can have a very different set of belief systems and practices from the others, even though they are from the same country, island, or larger ethnic group. But one thing for sure is that the chance to integrate with the diversity of each community's food, songs and dances, and history is always a new learning experience.

Our dream in IPMSDL is to be a global IP movement and a campaign center of indigenous victories and struggles. Amid the difference between one IP group from another, there are common problems, like the violation of their rights, systemic discrimination, and marginalization, all of which can bring IP together in solidarity.

Working with IP on an international scale also demands being adept at the compounding crises of climate change, environmental degradation, wars and territorial conflict, peace and security, and the race to "development", because much of the impacts of these issues intersects with indigenous territories and rights.





### WHAT HAS SPECIFICALLY BEEN YOUR WORK AND HOW WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH IP?

I initially joined IPMSDL as a communications officer managing the publicity, written and multimedia content, and linking with our members, partners, and advocates. Then I became the campaigns officer looking at the movements' short- and long-term grants and projects, and also building our portfolio in terms of global positions in major IP issues, like the trend of criminalization, terrorist-tagging, and attacks against IP human rights defenders, the defense of ancestral territories, the development policies encroaching on IP rights, climate change and IP rights, among others. It is extra challenging that most of our IP members live in far-flung places with no one even knowing their community exists, or are caught in the middle of highly conflicted areas.

Later on, I will be the Assistant Global Coordinator overseeing other platforms that IPMSDL hosts, like: the support network for West Papua; a study commission on IP, national minorities, oppressed nations, and nationalities; a constituency in the larger Development Effectiveness platform; a working group on conflict and fragility; and, a network for Asia IP youth.

I am thankful that I am with the best IP and Moro leaders and mentors. Our previous coordinator, Bontok-Kankanaey Beverly Longid, a UP Baguio alumna; an Ibaloi leader, Joanna Carino, also from UP Baguio; and, a Moro woman leader Amirah Lidasan from UP Diliman, are just some of those who selflessly guide me in the intricacies of IP activism.

I think the chance to travel out of the country and sometimes represent my organization at international conferences is just a bonus. More than anything, the opportunity to integrate with our partners' communities, live with them for some time, exchange stories, and build campaigns and solidarities matters the most, especially in times of growing rights violations towards IP.

### IS THIS WHAT YOU DREAMED OF DOING AFTER GRADUATING FROM UP?

I finished Journalism at UP Diliman and right after graduation, I joined one of the biggest media networks here in the Philippines as a creatives and events specialist under their radio subsidiary. It was more than five years going around the country, working with corporate clients and their campaigns, and navigating through the demands of mainstream media. During my stint in media, I tried to continue volunteering for human rights organizations and contributing my media skills to write, edit, or organize small activities. But then I felt the need to go full blast with something that speaks louder about my advocacy and upbringing as an Isko, which is to directly work with the people and the marginalized. Again, it was the Lakbayan and this craving to go back to grassroots and peoples' organizations that made me decide.

### HOW WERE YOU AS A UP STUDENT AND HOW DID THIS INFLUENCE THIS CURRENT PATH THAT YOU TOOK?

I want to see myself as a writer, artist, and activist student. I was into campus student politics, organizing students into local and national rallies, and using my love for art and writing as a student journalist and poet. Together with my UP upbringing, and my training in Journalism to ask the hardest questions and investigate, it felt natural to follow this arc toward questioning society's wrongs and taking the side of the voiceless.

And I think UP is in the best position to champion the cause of IP in the country and beyond. It has a record of advocating for the Igorots' culture and studies in UP Baguio, and giving spaces for IP in different curricula and research. But more than that, an instituted, system-wide center for IP studies is most timely, with the University having a presence near IP communities in Southern Luzon, Central Luzon, Visayas, North Luzon, and Mindanao.

It's a big task, I know, and the greater the challenge, the greater the lessons and victories.

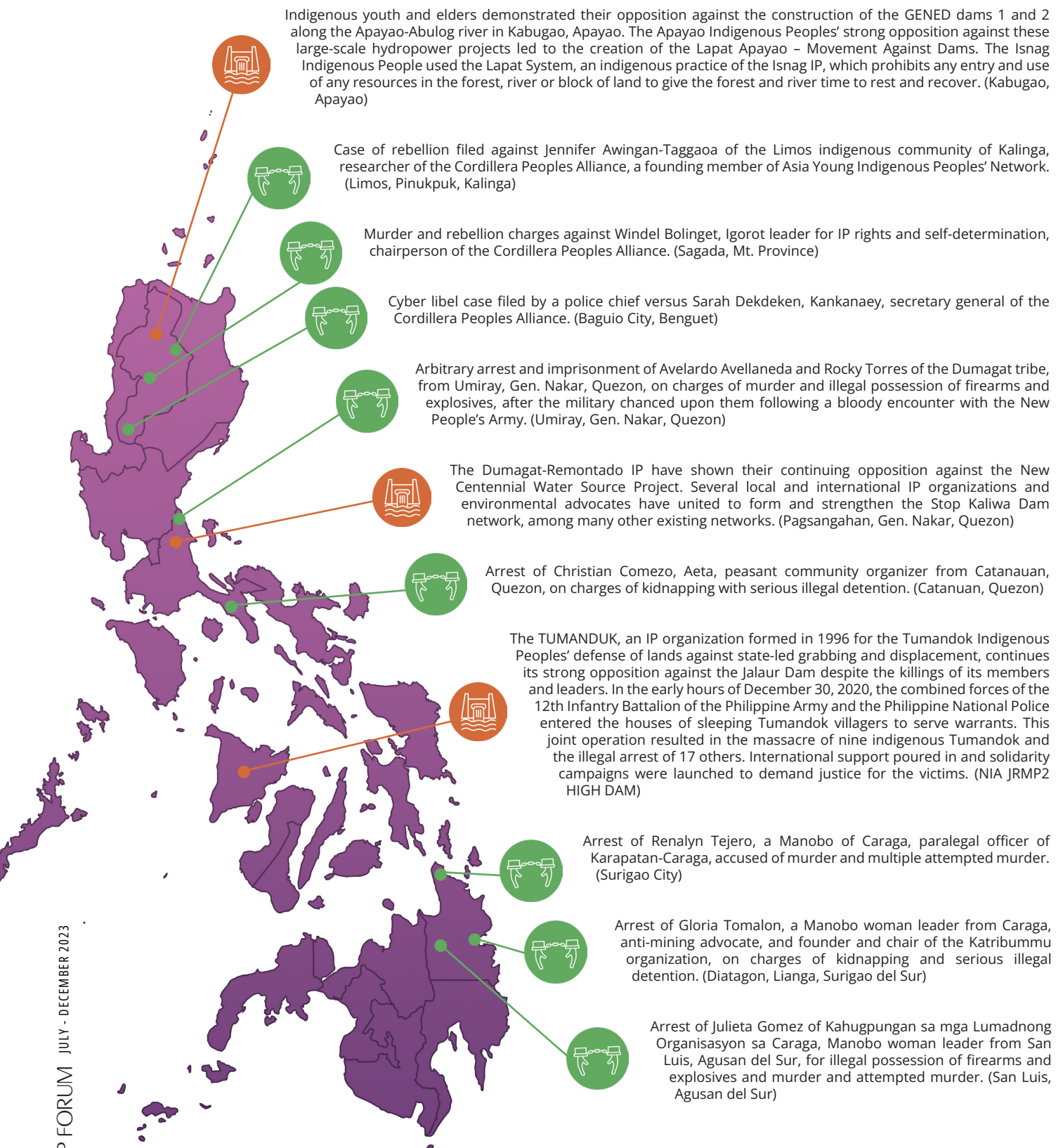






# Development Projects and Judicial Harassment Cases (since 2020)

## Monitored by the Indigenous People's Movement for Self-Determination and Liberation







ACTIVISM  
IS NOT  
TERRORISM



