

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNIT MAGAZINE

# LEAGUE

VOL. 5 NO. 6 PHP 250.00

**BIÑAN  
CONGRESSWOMAN  
LEN ALONTE**  
PROVIDING  
WHOLEHEARTED  
SERVICE

**CABADBARAN CITY  
MAYOR JUDY AMANTE**  
MAKING GENUINE  
CHANGE HAPPEN

**ZAMBOANGA CITY  
MAYOR BENG  
CLIMACO**  
READY TO FACE  
ANOTHER CHALLENGE

**QUEZON CITY MAYOR  
JOY BELMONTE**

# SERVANT LEADER



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FOR OTHERS

**ATTY. ALEX LOPEZ**  
AN ECONOMIST'S  
GAME PLAN

**ARJO ATAYDE**  
EMPATHY-DRIVEN  
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CONGRESSWOMAN  
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**NURTURING BIÑAN**



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**JUAN CARLOS CAMPO "ARJO" ATAYDE**

# EMPATHY-DRIVEN SERVICE



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**DR. TEODORO HERRBOSA**  
THE PHILIPPINES INCHES  
CLOSER TO THE 'NEWNORMAL'

**ATTY. AGAY CRUZ**  
RARING TO TAKE ON  
NEW CHALLENGES

**GUIGUINTO,  
BULACAN  
MAYOR AMBROSIO  
'BOY' CRUZ**  
RARING TO TAKE ON  
NEW CHALLENGES

**ATTY. ALEX LOPEZ**  
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# TRILODENT GOLD Mouthwash

Gargle for 30seconds para Oral Health ProtekTodo!



Grovic Pharma Inc., the exclusive distributor of Trilodent Gold Mouthwash, launched a massive donation campaign drive which aims to help quarantine facility of key city that has an increasing number of Covid-19 (Omicron variant) cases that is why the company decided to provide Trilodent Gold Mouthwash as the Oral Health partner of the LGU and their facilities and for the protection of our dear frontliners.

We are truly overwhelmed by the warm response of all the correspondents who accepted our donations. Trilodent Gold Mouthwash Oral Health ProtekTodo was spearheaded by Grovic Pharma Inc. President/COO Mr. Ronel Lalic with their Sales and Marketing Teams as they intensify the effort in responding to Covid-19 patients.

Our warmest gratitude to all City Mayors who partnered with the company by accepting our donation to be used in the health facilities and one of them is Presidential candidate Hon. Mayor Francisco "Isko" Moreno Domagoso of the City of Manila and Infectious Disease Head, Dr. Rey Salinel for the very warm welcome in our **Oral Health ProtekTodo Caravan Program** as Grovic Pharma donated more than 10,000 sachets.

It was a great experience to be in partnership with the City of Manila as he share his time to discuss the importance of good oral health in order to prevent and protect ourselves from Covid-19 virus and other oral infections during this pandemic with the aid of



Trilodent Gold Mouthwash. Truly, he was the Man in Action by immediately distributing the product to their facilities for the patients and frontliners who needs immediate relief of symptoms of oral & throat discomforts.



Key cities like Valenzuela with Hon. Mayor Rex Gatchalian and Malabon with Hon. Mayor Lenlen Oreta, were also the recipients of the distribution of Trilodent Gold Mouthwash. The local leaders are very happy on the said donations as it will also take part in the solution fighting Covid 19 symptoms. In all of the communities we engaged in, both patients and frontliners are happy to received a Natural Product from Korea from Grovic Pharma Campaign: Oral Health ProtekTodo which will continue not only in the community setting but also in the selected hospitals in NCR.

Last March 11, 2021 we had our brand tested by the country's respected testing center, SGS Laboratory. SGS Lab conducted a microbiological testing analysis with Laboratory No. PHL21-02107.001. Where the sample was analyzed for 1 minute after inoculum was added.



Based on analysis result they sent to us last April 20, 2021, an amazing results for the final count of Streptococcus Mutans reduction that gave a score of 99.9% kill on this bacteria and 82.9% for Candida Albicans (Fungal Infection) which are the main cause of oral problems like mouth sore, and sore throat which make Trilodent Gold the Natural Remedy.

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**MEDICAL ASSISTANCE FOR BATAAN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE CONTINUES**

**B**ataan Governor Albert Garcia revealed on April 07, 2022 that a health program for indigenous people (IPs) in Bataan is continuing, with more Aetas from upland villages taking advantage of the project launched by the Provincial Health Office (PHO).

IPs from Barangay Biaan, Mariveles, were the most recent participants of the program. According to the governor, 108 Aetas received medical help, 32 availed of dental services, and four were vaccinated against COVID-19. This was made possible through the PHO's "Kalusugan hatid sa Katutubong Kapatid" program.

Previously, 150 IPs from Barangay Binaritan, Morong, and 134 IPs from Barangay General Lim, Orion, were given medical treatment. One hundred from Binaritan and 32 from General Lim availed of additional dental services. Four people from Binaritan and 37 people from General Lim were vaccinated against COVID-19.

Garcia concluded, "We assure everybody that we will bring health programs and services to the people so that no one will be left behind as we walk the path towards a brighter, healthier, and more progressive life."



Photo courtesy GOV. ALBERT GARCIA FACEBOOK PAGE

**US EMBASSY DONATES WASTE COLLECTION VEHICLES**

**T**o aid the community's waste collection efforts, the United States (US) government has supplied eight waste collection vehicles to Barangay Banca-Bancao in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan.

The US Embassy in Manila said in a March 28, 2022 statement that the donation, which was made through the Clean Cities, Blue Ocean program of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) consists of five bicycles, two motorbikes with sidecars, and one four-wheel multicab.

These vehicles, according to the embassy, will increase the prior collection capability of Barangay Banca-Bancao and improve garbage collection for an estimated 3,000 residents in Puerto Princesa.

In the community, these waste collectors are known as Eco Warriors, a phrase used by Project Zacchaeus to represent a group of informal waste collectors that the organization helps with solid waste management education. These informal waste collectors help to sustain their families while also helping keep the environment clean.

US Embassy Chargé d'Affaires Heather Variava said, "We are pleased to turn over these vehicles to the Eco Warriors, who have emerged as local leaders in sustainability and waste management, as we work together in curbing ocean plastic pollution and building sustainable circular economies."

These vehicles were made available thanks to a donation to Project Zacchaeus, which strives to address ocean plastic pollution as well as the critical issues of those working in the informal waste and recycling sectors.

Project Zacchaeus Marketing Cooperative (PZC) founder John Gastanes and Eco Warriors president Lydia Casiano received the waste collection vehicles.

Bancao-Bancao Barangay chairman Gayjun Dangan expressed gratitude for the donation. "Truly, these will help improve our city's waste collection system and increase the income of our Eco Warriors," he added.

In collaboration with PZC, the city government of Puerto Princesa, and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), USAID is also training 60 Eco Warriors on proper waste management, occupational health and safety, and leadership, according to the embassy.



U.S. Embassy in the Philippines Chargé d'Affaires ad interim Heather Variava leads the turnover of eight waste collection vehicles to USAID grantee Project Zacchaeus

Photo courtesy US Embassy in the Philippines

**PHP3.3 MILLION MULTI-PURPOSE BUILDING INAUGURATED IN BARANGAY TALUB, LANA DEL SUR**

**A** Bangsamoro leader has turned over a multi-purpose building to a barangay in Tamparan, Lanao del Sur, as a gift to the local women.

Diamila Disimban-Ramos, a Bangsamoro parliament member (MP), led the facility's ribbon-cutting and turnover rites on March 19, assisted by a delegate from the autonomous government's Ministry of Public Works (MPW-BARMM), which is a project partner.

The Php3.3-million multi-purpose facility was built from Ramos' 2020 Transitional Development Impact Fund (TDIF) to give space for cooperatives and women's activities such as seminars, training, lecture-forums, meetings, workshops, or focus-group discussions in the municipality of Tamparan.

In his speech, MP Ramos said, "I am happy because the project is

finally completed, and this is the first multi-purpose building in Lanao del Sur under the term of Chief Minister Ahod Al Haj Murad Ebrahim with the aim of contributing to the development and improvement of our women and cooperatives. Please take care of this multi-purpose building so you can use it for the different programs of your barangay.”

“We are inspired when we see our leaders implementing projects and governing their communities,” she added.

Ramos noted, “Indeed, this program and all other programs of the current administration are effective solutions that directly respond to the significant needs of the Bangsamoro people.”

Barangay Talub Chairperson Amirodin Dumpa vowed to properly use the facility in his acceptance message.



Photo courtesy MP Diamila Disimban-Ramos

### OUTREACH PROGRAM BRINGS SERVICES TO LANA DEL SUR BARANGAY

A government convergence outreach event held recently in the municipality of Piagapo successfully brought essential services to hundreds of locals in a remote community in Lanao del Sur province.

Barangay Kalungunan outreach program is a collaborative endeavor in which the Piagapo Rural Health Unit (RHU), the Army’s 51st Infantry Battalion (IB), and the Philippine National Police (PNP) extended various services to the village residents to meet their basic needs.

At the barangay’s covered court, 200 food packs and hygiene kits were distributed during the celebration. Free medical consultations and medicines were provided to 145 residents, including senior citizens, breastfeeding women, and newborn children.

In addition, 68 children received toys and school supplies as well as food, while 25 people received a free haircut and 35 people benefited from the Operation Tuli (circumcision).

Vaccination against COVID-19 and routine immunization for



Photo courtesy PIA LANA DEL SUR

children were also among the services provided.

Piagapo Vice Mayor Ali Sumandar said the outreach initiative reflects the government’s ongoing efforts, in collaboration with different stakeholders, to reach out to geographically isolated and disadvantaged communities.

Speaking in Meranaw, he said, “These services that we brought here are part of the LGU’s mandate to provide for its constituents. These are services that are not easily accessible here.”

The vice mayor also explained the Alternative Learning System (ALS) to the villagers, which is now being implemented by the 51st IB in Barangay Gacap, also in Piagapo, and emphasized the importance of literacy in maintaining peace in the municipality.

He stated that the ALS scheme would be replicated in Kalungunan.

A peace dialogue involving residents, the LGU, and security forces was also carried out as part of the community outreach initiative to prevent violent extremism and monitor infrastructure projects in the community.

### CEBU RECEIVES FUNDS AND FARMING STARTER KITS FROM DAR



Farmer-members of the Don Virgilio Gonzales ARB Association planting vegetable seedlings.

Photo courtesy DEPARTMENT OF AGRARIAN REFORM (DAR)

The Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) provided funds and farming starter kits to a group of farmers in Medellin, Cebu, to help them start and sustain a livelihood initiative.

The Don Virgilio Gonzales Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Association, a DAR-assisted organization, received the aid under the DAR’s ‘*Buhay sa Gulay*’ project, which was launched last December, according to DAR Cebu Provincial Agrarian Reform Program Officer Lilian B. Guanzon.

According to Guanzon, however, the project’s implementation was delayed due to Typhoon Odette.

The organization was given Php63,000 worth of starter kits, which includes vegetable seeds, fertilizers, and gardening equipment. These will be used on a 5,000-square-meter plot of land in Barangay Don Virgilio owned by agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs).

The project aims to promote the significance of “high-value farming” among ARBs “to encourage them to have an alternative source of income by planting and selling fresh vegetables.”

The association’s chairman, Fernando Jumao-as, thanked the DAR for the vegetable seeds and gardening equipment they received from the agency and promised to continue the effort.

Okra, string beans, pepper, and pechay have been sown, according to Jumao-as. He also stated that they expect to harvest their first crop by the end of April.

According to Marmee Padul of the DAR Program Beneficiaries Development Division, the program is part of the agency’s Agricultural Business School, which teaches farmers how to successfully manage their farm output and maximize their profits.

Padul encouraged the farmer-members to put what they had learned at Farm Business School into practice in order for their crops and farms to thrive. The organization, which now has 88 members, was founded in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic conference.

## SMART GREENHOUSE WORTH PHP200 MILLION FROM THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

On Thursday, March 31, 2022, a Php200 million smart greenhouse and capability-building project has been awarded to the Department of Agriculture in Western Visayas to encourage farmers, entrepreneurs, and investors to grow high-value vegetables.

The Western Visayas Agricultural Research Center in Barangay Buntatala, Jaro in this city received a grant from the Republic of Korea through the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (MAFRA) Education Promotion and Information Services (EPIS) to improve small and mid-sized farmers' production competitiveness.

Secretary William Dar who led the inauguration of the project said, "Malaking tulong sa atin ang project (This project is a big help) so that we can have more production with regard to vegetables and fruits using this facility."

Smart greenhouses, which are equipped with current sensor and communications technology, automatically record and disseminate information on the environment and crop 24/7.

A smart greenhouse allows producers to reduce labor costs, increase resource and chemical efficiency, and increase output rates by releasing massive plant data.

Growers will be able to plant off-season crops, resulting in year-round production.

The Secretary noted in a press conference that Western Visayas is one of the beneficiaries of the initiative, which is also being implemented in Tanay, Rizal, Baguio, and Bukidnon.

He added, "Strategic locations are targeted to showcase these newer technologies. The greenhouse technology will lead to masaganang ani (more produce), mataas na kita (higher earnings)."

According to DA Western Visayas Regional Executive Director Remylyn Recoter in a separate interview, the smart greenhouse, comprises nine units with a controlled environment, temperature, and drip irrigation.

"It's more on training activities. This is an opportunity to encourage individual farmers and other non-farmers but are interested to invest," she said, in terms of high-value vegetables, the region is still lacking.

She also mentioned that by the end of the year, more smart greenhouses will be built in the provinces, particularly in tourism areas.

Dr. Park Eui Jeong, Hankyong University's Project Associate Expert in Performance Management, EPIS President Dr. Lee Jong Soon, and Agriculture Assistant Secretary for Strategic Communications Noel Reyes also attended the inauguration.

Dar also provided a worth Php64.58 million in facilities and vegetable seeds to their target farmer's associations, as well as production support for sectors hit by Typhoon Odette and financial assistance to target universities for the Rapid Appraisal of the Province-led Agriculture and Fisheries Extension System (PAFES).

## 5-MEGAWATT POWER PLANT TESTS RUN IN LAMITAN CITY

### LAMITAN CITY POWER PLANT thru THE R.O.S.E. PROGRAM (Reinventing Our Services in Electricity)



# MayorRoseFurigay Abante Lamitan | City Government of Lamitan www.lamitancity.gov.ph

Photo Courtesy Abante Lamitan

The city of Lamitan in Basilan province is testing a locally-funded 5-megawatt land-based diesel power plant, which promises a reliable power supply on an island plagued by frequent brownouts.

Vice Mayor Roderick Furigay of Lamitan said last April 1 (Friday) that the power plant is currently coordinating electricity supply with the National Power Corporation's (Napocor) power barge, which began a test mode last March 30 at 2 p.m. until 9 p.m.

Furigay said in an interview, "We are a step close to having a reliable energy source."

On the other hand, Furigay also stated that the Lamitan government-run power plant will only be used in an emergency to ensure that residents and businesses in the city have access to electricity.

The Basilan Electric Cooperative (Baselco) is the province's primary electricity supplier, although its capacity is insufficient to deliver consistent power to the entire region.

"We have to operate our power plant, especially during peak hours. If not, the entire city will experience brownout for long hours daily," he said.

The local administration spent Php150 million on the purchase of the lot and construction of the structure that contains the 5-megawatt power plant, according to the vice mayor.

As per the 2020 census, Lamitan City has 45 barangays and a population of 100,150 people.

## FARMER BENEFICIARIES IN ANTIQUE WILL UNDERGO TRAINING

Farmers in Antique who are beneficiaries of the Department of Agriculture's Provincial Agricultural Commodity Development Program (PACDP) will receive training this month on how to use agricultural machinery for rice and corn.

The availability of new farm equipment, such as hand tractors, rice threshers, and corn shellers, will eliminate the recipients' reliance on expensive machine rentals from private individuals. Farmers needed to be oriented because this will be their first time using the new machinery, as agreed with the equipment suppliers.

In an interview on April 01, 2022, the Office of Provincial Agriculture (OPA) Engineer Caroline Juadiong, in charge of the machinery distribution said, "The farmer-beneficiaries in the 18 municipalities (of Antique) will be trained by the suppliers on how to use the machines third week of April based on their schedule."

She added that the farmer associations were recognized by their respective Municipal Agri-Fishery Council (MAFC) and their Municipal Agricultural Officer (MAO).

"The machinery will boost the production of the farmers because they will now have something to use for their farms that they could rent from their association," Juadiong said.



Photo Courtesy Department of Agriculture



Farmers' associations will be in charge of the farm equipment and will set the rental rate that their members will pay for its operation and maintenance.

The PACDP has granted 269 farmers' associations in the province a total of Php50 million in incentives.

In October of last year, the first group of recipients, made up of 108 farmer associations, received their new machinery, which included 33 floating tillers, 31 units of hand tractors with implements, 64 units of corn shellers, and 12 units of hammer mills worth roughly Php16 million.

On March 24, the second batch of equipment was delivered to 161 farmer associations around the province according to Juadiiong.

The second batch of machinery includes eight four-wheel drive tractors, 40 granule applicators, 33 rice threshers, 33 rice cutters, 20 portable electric rice mills, 52 portable diesel rice mills, three tiny rice mills, and 31 multi-purpose seeder worth Php34 million.



Photo courtesy Province of Antique

## LOW-COST HOUSING UNITS IN PAMPANGA

The Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) announced on March 30, 2022 that 937 employees of the San Fernando City administration in Pampanga had been given housing units.

The formal turnover of housing units to the recipients was led by DHSUD Secretary Eduardo del Rosario and Social Housing Finance Corporation (SHFC) President Ricardo Arnolfo Cabling last March 29.

The housing project is a one-story rowhouse with a loft that was constructed through the SHFC's Turnkey Community Mortgage Program, which began two years ago.

Del Rosario said in a statement that he is pleased with the housing unit designs.

The project, according to the housing czar, demonstrates the government's commitment to providing every Filipino, particularly the poor, with quality, sustainable, and more affordable housing units.

DHSUD will also provide a grant to build a perimeter fence around the settlement site "to safeguard the security of the people," according to Del Rosario.

It will also construct a multi-purpose covered court and a daycare center, eliminating the need for residents to drive outside of their communities.

Del Rosario stated, "This is a model community. *'Yan ang tinatawag nating township—para andito na lahat, mami-minimize mga movement ng mga tao. Ang aalis lang yung mga empleyado na nakatira dito para pumasok sa mga opisina.'*"

He further said that the project will serve as a model for additional socialized housing projects in San Fernando that will be pushed forward by the DHSUD and SHFC.

"*Yan po ang programa ng Duterte administration, with regards to housing. Gusto natin na ang mga housing projects, housing units, ay disente, livable at pwedeng mong ipagmalaki,*"

del Rosario said.

Mayor Edwin Santiago of San Fernando said that the initiative will be a big benefit to low-income civil officials who want to acquire a home.

Cabling pledged that they will continue to cooperate with the government, through DHSUD, and local governments, to pursue programs that will benefit low-income earners around the country.

SHFC's Turnkey Community Mortgage Program aims to improve the living conditions of underprivileged Filipino families by providing an affordable financing scheme that allows them to borrow as a community to purchase land they want to occupy or relocate to, with a cheaper amortization rate.

Last year, more than 8,000 informal settler households received government loan assistance totalling Php1.6 billion, with the Community Mortgage Program benefiting more than 350,000 families since 1988.



Photo courtesy Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD)



## 50 DEFENSE TRAINING SLOTS OPENED FOR THE PHILIPPINES

Under its flagship development effort, the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program through the Indian government will release 50 defense training spots for the Philippines in 2023.

The assigned slots for the Philippines, according to Indian Ambassador to the Philippines Shambhu Kumaran will be the highest in Southeast Asia, highlighting the two countries' strengthening relationship on capacity building.

87 Filipino defense personnel have been taught in India over the last five years in a variety of sectors, including security and strategic studies, defense management, logistics and management, and engineering.

At the moment, defense training cooperation between Manila and New Delhi is

"bidirectional," with defense professionals from both countries attending each other's flagship courses.

Recently, two Indian military officers participated the General Staff Command Course of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)

During ITEC day reception in Taguig City, Kumaran said, "India's approach to development partnership is based on the principles of equity and mutual respect. It is shaped by our belief that strengthening and augmenting national capacities are essential for bringing progress and prosperity to our people." He adds, "Our capacity-building initiatives with partner countries stem from the spirit of solidarity to enhance mutual learning for shared and sustainable growth."

AFP Deputy Chief of Staff for Education,

Training, and Doctrine, Commodore Donn Anthony Miraflor said that the India-funded courses would complement the AFP's competency-building initiatives and would help the organization generate more well-rounded leaders.

Reading the message of AFP Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Andres Centino, he said, "In light of the volatility of our domestic and internal security environments, our mutual training and capacity-building cooperation are truly vital in ensuring that both our defense forces are capable to respond to any security threat, and other exigencies under all circumstances. After all, peace and progress is the concern of every nation, across all regions."

Given the commotion of our domestic and internal security environments, our mutual training and capacity-building cooperation is critical in ensuring that both of our military forces are prepared to respond to any security threat or other emergency at any time. After all, every nation, in every region, is concerned about peace and progress.



Photo courtesy Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme

Shri Dammu Ravi, Secretary (ER) and Shri Prabhat Kumar, Additional Secretary (DPA) release the latest edition of the ITEC Chronicle' quarterly newsletter

## ROAD SAFETY EXCELLENCE AWARDED TO 37 LGUS

On April 05, the Philippine Department of Transportation (DOTr) and the Land Transportation Office (LTO) presented 37 cities and municipalities with awards in honor of their efforts to make Philippine roads safer.

The DOTr and LTO, in collaboration with law firm ImagineLaw, recognized the country's tremendous accomplishment in lowering speed limits on Philippine roads by rewarding 33 local government units (LGUs) that passed speed limit laws and four cities that passed comprehensive road safety rules. The cities of Antipolo, Batangas, Cebu, and Naga for speed restriction regulations, and Ormoc, Quezon, and Tuguegarao for comprehensive road safety ordinances, are among these LGUs.

As he congratulated the LGUs awarded for enacting speed limit ordinances compliant with the Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) 2018-001 of the DOTr, Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), and Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), the LTO Secretary Edgar Galvante said, "LGUs have done their part by enacting and enforcing local traffic ordinances to lower speed limits and promote safe driving practices, but this is just the beginning. We hope to continue our efforts to reduce motor vehicle speeds and make roads safer for all road users."

Road classification, speed limit setting, and road crash data gathering are all governed by JMC 2018-001. It also offers a sample speed limit ordinance that specifies the lead agency and requires speed limit signs to be installed. It includes procedures for enforcing the law, as well as penalties and funding to commence the procurement of enforcement equipment such as speed guns. It also discusses how local governments might work with the federal government to propose lower speed limits on national highways.

Tuguegarao City Mayor Jefferson Soriano said in a video message, "We found out that Tuguegarao City has the most number of road crashes in region 2 and Cagayan Valley has the most number of fatalities due to these crashes. When we enacted the road safety ordinance, road crashes in Tuguegarao City went down by 62 percent."

The event emphasized the significance of multi-sectoral coordination between national government agencies, LGUs, and civil society organizations in ensuring that road safety measures are effective and save Filipino lives. It also highlighted the need to continue working with local governments to sustain and enforce safer speed limits.

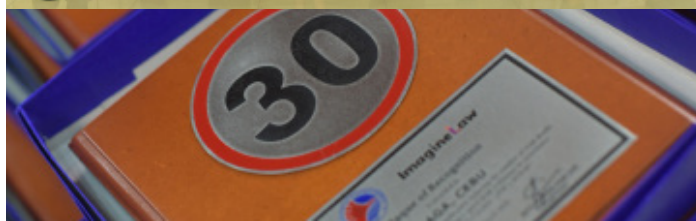
ImagineLaw Road Safety Project Manager Atty. Daphne Marcelo said, "The road safety status of the Philippines remains to be a work in progress. The LGUs that we award today comprise less than 2 percent of all LGUs in the country. We are certain that the DOTr and LTO are ready

to continue providing technical assistance in developing and enforcing speed limits so that in the future, vehicles are traveling at safe speeds everywhere in the country."

DOTr Undersecretary Mark Steven Pastor also said as he congratulated the winning LGUs, "May this award serves as your motivating force in eradicating road crash deaths in cities and municipalities. We may be slowing down vehicles on the road, but never our progress in making our roads safer."

Among the LGUs recognized for enacting speed limit ordinances today are: Agoo, La Union; Antipolo, Rizal; Balaoan, La Union; Balatan, Camarines Sur; Baras, Rizal; Batangas City; Bontoc, Mountain Province; Calabanga, Camarines Sur; Cebu City; Consolacion, Cebu; Dipaculo, Aurora; Don Carlos, Bukidnon; Gasan, Marinduque, General Mariano Alvarez, Cavite; General Trias, Cavite; Guiguinto, Bulacan; Guinobatan, Albay; Mabitac, Laguna; Mahinog, Camiguin; Mangaldan, Pangasinan; Maramag, Bukidnon; Minabalac, Camarines Sur; Naga, Cebu; Naga City, Camarines Sur; Norzagaray, Bulacan; Pagbilao, Quezon; Salay, Misamis Oriental; San Fernando, Camarines Sur; San Jose, Batangas; Sta. Maria, Laguna; Tiaong, Quezon; Tudela, Misamis Occidental; and Urbiztondo, Pangasinan.

While Danao City, Cebu; Ormoc City, Leyte; Quezon City; and Tuguegarao City are among the LGUs that have passed road safety codes.





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# The Power of Collaboration

EpiC Philippines on ending the HIV epidemic: 'We are all in this together'

BY ROSY MINA

IMAGINE THIS: THE PHILIPPINES WITHOUT THE HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (HIV) EPIDEMIC IN EIGHT YEARS.

## IS IT TOO FAR OUT?

If you ask the team involved in the Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) project in the Philippines of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the answer is no.

“By helping 95 percent of the estimated number of people living with HIV (PLHIV) to know their HIV status, 95 percent of them to access life-saving antiretroviral treatment (ART), and 95 percent of those accessing ART to achieve undetectable viral loads, we can stop the epidemic transmission of HIV and end most of the suffering and disease caused by the virus,” EpiC Philippines Project Director Teresita Bagasao told LEAGUE Magazine.

The “95-95-95” target may be ambitious, but it is something that the Philippines and other countries have been working on diligently in order to achieve HIV epidemic control by 2030.

“Ensuring that PLHIV is actively in treatment and achieves viral suppression is an excellent way to control the epidemic and prevent new infections. This minimizes the transmission of the virus and avoids mortality among diagnosed PLHIV,” added Bagasao.

As of December 2021, the Department of Health (DOH) noted that the country has an estimated 133,800 PLHIV, and an accomplished target of “66-63-95” so far. However, HIV infections in the Philippines increased by 200 percent between 2010 and 2018, as reported by the World Health Organization (WHO). There is still a lot more to be done, including greater investments in public health and more efficient implementation of policies for the welfare of PLHIV.

Bagasao also mentioned the importance of reaching out to more PLHIVs and ensuring that they have access to medicines as well as prevention efforts like free condoms, lubricants, and free HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

### The EpiC effect

EpiC Philippines serves as a gateway for communities to learn quickly what works—whether community-based HIV screening, motivational counseling for clients, or access to PrEP—and adapt to reach key populations.

It strives to ensure that populations with a higher likelihood of exposure to HIV can access services for prevention, testing, treatment, and care. The team also holds campaigns and training sessions for stakeholders, assists with accreditation of diagnostic sites, provides laboratory support to PLHIV, and gives technical assistance to facilities.

Working on EpiC Philippines as the Project Director has brought Bagasao out of retirement after spending over 30 years in HIV work. The experience has reinforced her realization that constant collaborations are crucial in the quest to meet the “95-95-95” global target.

“We cannot win and make significant progress without communities being empowered and taking the lead,” she said.

“We are all in this together,” she added, underscoring the importance of building partnerships with national and local governments, development partners, and the private sector.

### Introducing a groundbreaking regimen

An example of a collaboration between EpiC Philippines and the Philippine government is the current transition to Tenofovir, Lamivudine, and Dolutegravir (TLD), a new type of ART drug regimen.

ART drugs, which suppress the HIV virus to levels undetectable with viral load testing, are procured by the Philippine government to be given for free in treatment hubs across the country.

According to studies, those who have achieved an undetectable viral load with daily adherence to ART can live long, healthy lives

free from HIV-related illness, and will not transmit HIV to their sexual partners.

As there is still no available cure for HIV/AIDS, TLD is regarded as a new gold standard for HIV treatment. It is said to be a groundbreaking regimen that has fewer side effects and achieves undetectable viral loads more quickly. In fact, EpiC was able to provide clinical evidence of TLD, and this has led to its inclusion in the Philippine National Drug Formulary.

To propagate the science behind TLD and how it can help maintain the quality of life of PLHIV, EpiC has been holding webinars for healthcare providers and PLHIV communities.

### **Adapting to the online world**

Other areas of focus are increasing case finding and improving enrollment and adherence to treatment of PLHIV for viral suppression.

Based on national data, 88,964 of the 133,800 PLHIV are currently diagnosed, with about 44,836 PLHIV unaware of their HIV status. Of the 88,964 currently diagnosed, only 56,385 are on ART.

EpiC Philippines aims to address this by widening its reach and testing social and sexual networks of key populations. It has tapped into virtual means by launching QuickRes.org, a website that allows clients to easily book health services such as HIV testing and treatment.

With support from the U.S. President's Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and USAID, EpiC Philippines is piloting the QuickRes.org platform in select Mega Manila sites.

The website, which also helps health facilities manage clinic appointments and HIV-related care, has been successfully rolled out in more than 20 countries in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean.

"With the help of the government and other development partners, we envision having a standard service booking application that works with most, if not all, HIV clinics that are convenient for people to use throughout the Philippines," said Bagasao.

Going online also coincides with the release of January 2022 data from the DOH, which said that about 32 percent of new HIV cases occurred among those aged 15 to 24, and around 49 percent were from those aged 25 to 34.

Bagasao emphasized that such age groups represent proportions of productive people, which is why it is important to provide them access to continued HIV treatment.

"If we are unable to ensure that HIV services are accessible to them—from services

that allow them to know their status to them accessing HIV treatment—new cases may continue to soar and if it continues to impact people at a younger and younger age, it may not only impact their well-being but also their development as productive contributors to society."

### **EpiC projects amid the pandemic**

With the "95-95-95" global target just eight years away, EpiC Philippines has had initiatives lined up, until the COVID-19 pandemic made it "incredibly challenging" to address the HIV epidemic.

Bagasao mentioned that access to HIV services during community lockdowns was hampered because of the lack of mobility of clients as well as clinical and community HIV workers. Health personnel in HIV facilities nationwide were also repurposed to address COVID-19.

The piloting of QuickRes.org has proven to be timely amid the ongoing pandemic, as it seeks to overcome gaps in access to life-saving services, including free services in government and community-led clinics.

EpiC Philippines has also supported facilities by using courier services to send ART drug supplies to PLHIV and deliver specimens and commodities to sites. A total of 1,743 courier deliveries were completed as of October 2021.

In addition, EpiC Philippines saw the opportunity to strengthen its support for interventions such as the multi-month dispensing of ART drugs and community dispensing of PrEP. And on top of recently introducing the game changers, TLD and QuickRes.org, EpiC Philippines looks forward to rolling out more innovative approaches to improve the access to HIV services. These include HIV screening in community settings and HIV self-testing with oral fluid-based HIV test kits.

### **Getting the public involved**

With the various projects and programs of EpiC Philippines, the government, and community-based and private organizations, Bagasao points out that the biggest barrier to their efforts taking flight is still the stigma around HIV.

"Misconceptions and myths are still present on what HIV is and how it is transmitted and managed and these create stigmatizing perceptions around HIV," she said.

To tackle this long-standing problem, EpiC Philippines launched U=U, a global campaign that stands for "Undetectable is equal to Untransmissible."

The core message of U=U is that once a person's viral load is undetectable, they can no longer transmit the virus through sex.

Another campaign is Free To Be U ([facebook.com/freetobeu](https://facebook.com/freetobeu)), in partnership with the DOH's Healthy Pilipinas, which raises awareness and understanding of accessible HIV programs and services in the country.

The lifestyle campaign also seeks to destigmatize HIV by encouraging a welcoming approach towards its prevention, testing, and treatment, thus, empowering everyone regardless of HIV status.

"Through the public's participation in lifestyle campaigns such as the U=U campaign and the Free To Be U campaign, the public can help normalize conversations about HIV, sex, and the pleasures and risks around it," commented Bagasao.

"Through this, we will be able to ensure that there is an enabling environment where people affected by and have a higher likelihood of exposure to HIV can freely express themselves and access free services without stigma."

With the empowerment of all stakeholders in the PLHIV community, including the public, and with the continued partnerships and collaborations to curb the HIV epidemic, the seemingly impossible "95-95-95" target by 2030 does not seem so far-fetched after all.

With the current progress being made, it is expected that EpiC Philippines and its partners will take greater strides in minimizing and, hopefully, eradicating the HIV epidemic so as to improve the country's global target achievement in the coming years.

# The Modern BUREAU OF CUSTOMS

BY FRAULEIN OLAVARIO



The modernization of the Bureau of Customs is key to ridding it of graft and corruption, regaining its credibility, and accomplishing its mandate.

**T**he Bureau of Customs (BOC) is at the frontline of nurturing the country's economy by generating revenue for public services and protecting it from the entry of contraband. However, the BOC's invaluable service to the nation has been tarnished in the public eye by the actions of some unscrupulous personnel.

Until the arrival of Commissioner Rey Leonardo Guerrero, efforts to correct the bureau's image have failed, as inefficiencies hampered revenue generation and corrupt elements have taken advantage of these same inefficiencies for their own nefarious ends.

But since taking over in October 2018, Guerrero has made headway in turning the BOC around, in keeping with the task charged to him by President Rodrigo Duterte himself, making the BOC more responsive and capable of meeting the challenges set by its mandate.

“While transformation and reform remain a big challenge, we recognize the significance of investing both time and resources to improve our service, regain our credibility, and accomplish our mission,” says Guerrero, cognizant of the enormity of the task at hand, especially since President Duterte appointed him as “the demands of public service and the need for honest men required his presence in the BOC.”

## **PRIORITY PROGRAM**

In its quest for reformation, the BOC formulated the 10-point priority program for 2021 to further improve organizational and operational efficiency, upgrading the individual proficiencies of the workforce, and strengthening institutional capabilities of the BOC as a whole.

The most important aspect of this program is the implementation of the Customs Computerization Program to meet global standards in operations and practices. The BOC achieved 90.65 percent implementation of this aspect of the 10-point priority program, and 88.94 percent accomplishment rate overall.

The BOC has consistently implemented projects to automate customs operations and processes in furtherance of trade facilitation, such as the implementation of the No-Contact Policy. In minimizing face-to-face transactions, opportunities for graft and corruption are eliminated, while the power of information and communication technology is fully harnessed.

Since 2019, a total of 30 information technology (IT) projects were implemented, including the establishment of the Customs Operations Center, a facility that serves as a fusion center of the Bureau’s intelligence, enforcement, risk management, and imaging capabilities for effective situational awareness and command and control of operations nationwide.

As of 2021, 17 Customer Care Centers in the 17 BOC Collection Districts nationwide have gone fully operational. These centers serve as a one-stop-shop for all types of customs transactions, including document receiving and releasing, and filing of goods declaration, among others.

Despite the economic slowdown brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the government’s arm that is an essential cog in the supply chain of essential commodities ensured that government services are rendered without interruption.

Notwithstanding the pandemic’s disruption of businesses, trade, and commerce, the BOC has automated and streamlined 139 or 82 percent of its 170 processes and procedures through its continuing modernization program that has resulted in seamless and simplified services to stakeholders.

This has enabled the bureau to continue its critical operations, which include the processing and releasing of essential shipments, such as personal protective equipment (PPE) and COVID-19 vaccines in a timely and accurate manner.

“As a result, sustained productivity and efficiency in the delivery of customs services were achieved, as most of our processes shifted from manual to electronic. Stakeholders now avail of the services of the BOC through our online portal and are also able to pay for particular services through an e-payment scheme,” Guerrero remarks.

The modernization effort has made itself felt in the performance of the bureau. The 17 Collection Districts of the BOC have generated a total of Php1.81 trillion in revenue from 2019 to end-2021, even as the COVID-19 pandemic wrought havoc on global trade and the economies of almost every nation on Earth. The BOC no longer underperforms and delivers what the Duterte administration needs to sustain its COVID-19 response efforts.

**“As a result, sustained productivity and efficiency in the delivery of customs services were achieved, as most of our processes shifted from manual to electronic. Stakeholders now avail of the services of the BOC through our online portal and are also able to pay for particular services through an e-payment scheme.”**



In 2020, BOC collections reached Php539.7 billion, Php33.5 billion more than its Php506.2 billion target for the year. Proving it is not a fluke, the BOC again exceeded expectations in 2021 by collecting Php29 billion more than what was asked of it, bringing in a total of Php645.8 billion to the nation’s coffers against a target of Php616.7 billion.

## **MEETING STANDARDS**

The improvement in performance was not felt only in peso terms. The BOC’s automation efforts have also enabled it to meet performance standards and exceed targets, validated by the recent United Nations Global Survey which highlighted the success of

the Philippines in implementing trade facilitation measures, being ranked third among the 10 Southeast Asian nations. The World Bank also took notice of this improvement, with the World Bank: Doing Business Report 2021 and Trading Across Borders report showing substantial improvement in the BOC's ranking.

The BOC's mandate to protect the country's borders from the entry of contraband also received a boost, with the bureau seizing a total of Php87.3 billion worth of smuggled goods, such as agricultural products, cigarettes, counterfeit goods, general merchandise, and steel products, among others. The bureau's efficient profiling and non-intrusive inspection of shipments have led to the seizure of illegal drugs with an estimated value of Php15.4 billion since 2016.

Individuals responsible for such crimes have been haled into court, with the BOC filing 294 criminal cases with the Department of Justice (DOJ) against importers and customs brokers involved in illegal importation and other forms of customs fraud. The BOC also looked to its own personnel and showed it no longer tolerates corrupt behavior. A total of 1,407 personnel were issued with show cause orders, 360 were investigated, and 183 were slapped with administrative cases. Moreover, 164 cases were transmitted to the Office of the Ombudsman, and 71 cases were transmitted to the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI). As a result, 24 personnel were dismissed, 26 were suspended, and 22

**“We must regain the trust of those whom we serve. Without trust, we cannot make change happen. Trust is a basic element in building teamwork.”**

were reprimanded, 192 were relieved from service, and 3,855 were reshuffled or transferred.

“We must regain the trust of those whom we serve. Without trust, we cannot make change happen. Trust is a basic element in building teamwork,” the former Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) administrator said in 2018 after President Duterte ordered him to “double the zealousness” in fighting corruption in the BOC.

“Organizational morale improves if employees know what behavior is expected of them and the rules are being enforced fairly and consistently. This foundation laid by the BOC in the past years makes the prospect of transformation not only a possibility but a natural outcome of its efforts,” Guerrero says more than three years later, as he assessed the result of the BOC's intensified anti-corruption efforts.

“The disciplinary actions that we undertake are part of building a culture of integrity and accountability, which promotes public trust and confidence,” he adds.

Seeking to institutionalize these successes through the pursuit of good governance, the BOC enrolled in the Performance Governance System (PGS) of the International Solidarity in Asia (ISA), a program

for achieving breakthrough results that bring about lasting reforms in private and government institutions. The PGS is hinged on the Balanced Scorecard Approach, a performance management tool developed at the Harvard University Business School.

“The challenges we encountered were not just issues of graft and corruption, but include the alleged lack of competence of personnel, the antiquated systems, slow and protracted processes, and the existence of smuggling,” Guerrero explains. “Drastic measures were needed, and we deemed it best to tap the help of the ISA through its PGS program to bring about bureau-wide change that would effectively address not just the above challenges but other organizational problems as well.”

Moreover, the bureau has successfully passed three stages of the 4-Stage PGS pathway and was conferred the highest honor—Gold Trailblazer Award—for all three stages of initiation, compliance, and proficiency. The BOC is currently in the final stage towards the conferment of the Institutionalized Status.

Professionalism and standardization have also been given emphasis in the improvement program of the BOC. Several offices and ports have undergone ISO certification audit, nine of which were awarded the ISO 9001:2015 Certification, another first in the history of the BOC. The certification is a widely known and internationally accepted standard for quality management. It recognizes organizations with a system that consistently provide services at par with international best practices and meets customer and regulatory requirements. Meanwhile, other offices are in various stages of compliance.

Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III lauded the BOC for a “great job done” on the agency's modernization efforts.

“Without your leadership, this modernization program would not have gone as far as it has, and your collections certainly would not have been as good,” Dominguez told Guerrero.

While reformation is always a continuous process, the BOC leadership has indeed taken strides in giving the agency the reputation it deserves for its invaluable service to the nation. | ■







# Uplifting Filipino Workers' Lives

BY FRAULEIN OLAVARIO

As the country celebrates Labor Day, DOLE Secretary Silvestro Bello III looks back on the government's relentless battle to uplift the lives of Filipino workers in the Philippines and overseas amid the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has not only posed an unprecedented public health crisis but also severely hit the economy and financial markets on a global scale. This resulted in reductions in income, a rise in unemployment, and disruptions in numerous industries. In the Philippines, the economic impact was felt as the unemployment rate spiked to 17.6 percent in April 2020, equivalent to 4.14 million unemployed Filipinos, at the height of the strictest form of lockdowns in Luzon at the onset of the pandemic.

Two years later, as the COVID-19 restrictions in the country ease up, employment figures have seen a stark improvement. The latest figures from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) on April 7, 2022 show that there were 48.6 million Filipinos in the labor force in February 2022, 2.67 million more than the figure in January, as the unemployment rate in February settled at 6.4 percent.

As the Duterte administration draws to a close, Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) Secretary Silvestro H. Bello III recalls the government's relentless drive to fulfill its vision that every Filipino worker, whether in the Philippines or overseas, attains full, decent, and productive employment, despite the gargantuan challenge brought about by COVID-19. As we commemorate Labor Day, Secretary Bello shares his insight on some of our questions:

## 1 Can you share the Department of Labor and Employment's eight-point agenda?

DOLE serves the country's labor force with the vision that every Filipino worker attains full, decent, and productive employment. To achieve this, we link people to employment opportunities, invest in human capital development to enhance workers' employability, promote and protect the rights and welfare of workers by ensuring just and humane working conditions and better terms of employment, maintain industrial peace, and provide social protection for workers.

The department's thrusts and priorities center on employability of workers through enhanced employment facilitation programs that link people to employment opportunities, protection of workers' rights through ensured compliance to labor laws and labor standards, social protection for vulnerable workers through the implementation of social protection programs to help improve the condition of workers in the informal sector, and protection and security of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) by strengthening measures and mechanisms to promote the welfare of Filipinos overseas from deployment, while onsite, and upon return.

DOLE formulated the 8-Point Labor and Employment Agenda as a core strategy for achieving these thrusts:

The first item in the 8-point agenda is to continuously enhance and transform DOLE into an efficient, responsive, purposeful, and accountable institution. DOLE established the One-Stop Service Centers for OFWs that house all government frontline services and the DOLE

24/7 Hotline to ensure that labor-related queries and concerns will be immediately acted upon. All DOLE offices must complete transactions/processes within 72 hours.

Second point is to address the persistent problems of unemployment and underemployment. DOLE also implements various programs to address inadequate employment opportunities, jobs and skills mismatch, and limited access to labor market information.

The third item on DOLE's agenda ensures full respect for labor standards and the fundamental principles and rights at work. The DOLE ensures job security by ending all forms of illegal contracting arrangements through strict enforcement of labor standards and the development of enabling policies to protect workers' right to security of tenure. Since the start of the campaign, DOLE intensified its inspection of private establishments to ensure their compliance.

Fourth agendum is to strengthen the protection and security of OFWs. The ultimate policy goal of President Duterte is to create enough jobs locally so Filipinos would no longer seek employment abroad out of necessity. But, as long as there are Filipino workers overseas, it is our responsibility to protect them by adopting measures and mechanisms that promote their welfare at every stage of the migration cycle—from recruitment to deployment to reintegration.

We will also bring more focus and accessibility to workers' protection and welfare programs. Establishing a minimum social protection floor guarantees that workers are protected from poverty and vulnerability. We have been working with key government agencies to assess the existing policies and programs on social protection and address identified gaps.

The sixth point in the agenda is to achieve a sound, dynamic, and stable industrial peace with free and democratic participation of workers and employers in policy and decision-making processes affecting them. DOLE continuously enhances collective

bargaining and other forms of labor-management participation within and outside enterprises and reconstitutes tripartite bodies for social dialogue to ensue.

To provide labor justice speedily and fairly, DOLE also seeks to have a dispute resolution system that ensures just, simplified, and expeditious resolution of all labor disputes. The labor department continuously promotes conciliation-mediation as an effective alternative dispute resolution mechanism.

The last item on DOLE's 8-point agenda is to ensure responsive, enabling, and equitable labor policies, laws, and regulations. DOLE supports the creation of decent work opportunities, knowing fully well that there must first be decent work to make rights at work effective in law and practice. In addition, the Department recognizes and nurtures the right of workers to participate in policy and decision-making processes directly affecting them and employers to reasonable returns on investments and growth.

## 2 What are the notable projects of the Department of Labor and Employment in recent history?

Since 2016, the Philippines has signed 22 bilateral labor agreements with our international counterparts all aimed at providing better protection for OFWs while in host countries.

Through the several Philippine Overseas Labor Offices worldwide, we have assisted more than 7 million OFWs with workers' training, case management, custodial services, repatriation assistance, and other welfare assistances.

To support OFWs upon their return to the country, we also continuously provide various reintegration programs through the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA). Over a million OFW returnees were provided with either livelihood or training assistance. The DOLE also facilitated the establishment of the Overseas Filipino (OF) Bank.

This year, we are also set to open the country's first-ever hospital for





OFWs, which offers free services to overseas workers and their dependents.

The DOLE also inspected 404,756 establishments covering 22.93 million workers to monitor strict compliance with labor laws and labor standards, particularly the right to security of tenure.

I am also pleased to share that DOLE's aggressive efforts in ending illegal contracting arrangements resulted in the regularization of over 600,000 workers from August 2016 to February 2022.

We also continue to provide labor justice speedily and fairly through conciliation-mediation. More than Php 23 billion worth of settlements have been awarded to over 370,000 workers through labor dispute resolution mechanisms. DOLE also successfully disposed of 375,808 cases resulting in approximately Php 85 billion monetary benefits covering 1.74 million workers.

To enhance the employability of workers and competitiveness of the micro, small, and medium enterprises sector, which contributes to 99.5% of the total number of business establishments in the country, DOLE implements employment facilitation programs that link people to employment opportunities.

We also implement programs to keep youth in school and provide them with relevant training, work experience, and access to full-cycle employment facilitation services to make them job-ready. A total of 930,683 youth were assisted under programs such as DOLE's Special Program for Employment of Students, Government Internship Program, and JobStart Philippines.

DOLE also intensified employment facilitation services to enhance access of job seekers to the labor market. Through our network of Public Employment Service Offices (PESOs), approximately 11 million job seekers were placed in various employment opportunities.

Since 2016, DOLE has already issued 71 wage orders raising the minimum wage for domestic and private establishment workers.

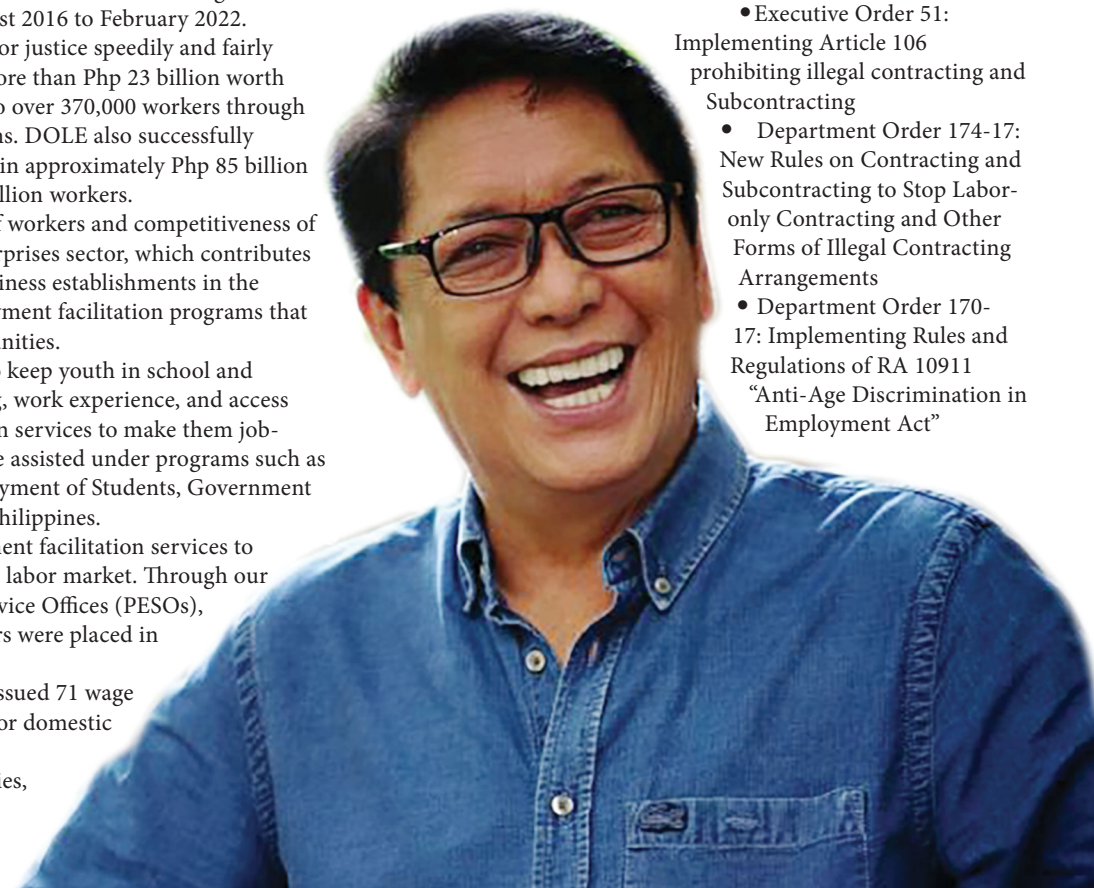
In times of disaster and calamities,

DOLE also implements livelihood and emergency employment to provide income support to workers and keep them out of poverty. A total of 477,007 beneficiaries were provided with livelihood assistance under the DOLE Integrated Livelihood Program (DILP), while 6.55 million beneficiaries were provided with emergency employment under the *Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD)*.

### 3 What policy measures have we pushed for or issued to protect workers' rights and promote their welfare?

Some of the policies that we were able to issue since 2016 are the following:

- RA 11551: Integrating Labor Education in the Tertiary Education Curriculum
- RA 11230: Tulong Trabaho Act
- RA 11199: Unemployment Insurance
- Department Order 202-19: Implementing Rules and Regulations of RA 11165 "Telecommuting Act"
- JMC 001-19: Implementing Rules and Regulations of RA 11261 "First-Time Jobseekers Assistance Act"
- Department Order 198-18: Implementing Rules and Regulations of RA 11058 "An Act Strengthening Compliance with Occupational Safety and Health Standards and Providing Penalties for Violations Thereof"
  - Executive Order 51: Implementing Article 106 prohibiting illegal contracting and Subcontracting
    - Department Order 174-17: New Rules on Contracting and Subcontracting to Stop Labor-only Contracting and Other Forms of Illegal Contracting Arrangements
    - Department Order 170-17: Implementing Rules and Regulations of RA 10911 "Anti-Age Discrimination in Employment Act"



#### **4** Everyone is affected because of COVID-19.

**What are the difficulties the agency is facing right now because of the pandemic? How did we cope during the pandemic?**

We acknowledge the challenges that confronted our workers during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, DOLE implemented various social amelioration measures/ assistance to ease the impact of COVID-19 on affected or displaced workers.

##### **DOLE's TUPAD**

Program provides emergency employment assistance to displaced workers in the informal economy for 10 days. A total of 2.01 million beneficiaries have already been paid wages amounting to Php 9.71 billion under TUPAD.

Another program launched to aid displaced workers during the pandemic is the COVID-19 Adjustment Measures Program (CAMP). The program provides Php 5,000 worth of cash assistance to affected workers of private establishments that implemented flexible work arrangements (FWAs) or suspended business operation, regardless of the status of employment. A total of 2.17 million beneficiaries were paid, amounting to Php 10.91 billion.

DOLE also provides US\$200 or equivalent to Php 10,000 financial assistance to affected OFWs under the CAMP—*Abot Kamay ang Pagtulong sa* OFWs (AKAP) Program. A total of 518,648 OFWs have already benefitted from the program, with grants amounting to Php 5.25 billion.

Since the pandemic started, DOLE has provided food, transportation, financial, and accommodation assistance to 986,043 repatriated OFWs. In coordination with other agencies, remains of about 900 OFWs were also brought home. Medical assistance amounting to Php209 million has also been extended to over 20,000 OFWs infected with COVID-19 as of March 15 this year.

In terms of educational assistance, over 37,000 qualified OFW dependents have received grants under DOLE's Educational Assistance Scholarship in Emergencies (Project EASE) and *Tabang* OFW Program. Under Project EASE, Php10,000 will be provided per annum for a maximum of four years to the beneficiaries, while a one-time Php30,000 cash aid to the beneficiaries will be provided under the *Tabang* OFW Program.

We also partnered with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) to facilitate the speedy and safe travel of seafarers, including the processing of employer accreditation and workers' documentation online.

A total of 18,783 frontline workers who suffered from COVID-19 because of their employment beneficiaries also received Php10,000 cash from DOLE-Employees' Compensation Commission. Additional EC policies to enhance social protection for workers



include providing a one-time Php30,000 cash assistance for public sector employees due to work-related COVID-19 and authorizing the grant of one-time Php30,000 cash assistance to Employees' Compensation pensioners in the private sector, among others.

DOLE further advocates safe and humane working conditions by issuing various guidelines on health and safety, flexible working arrangements, and employment preservation.

**5** In a citizen's charter wherein you ordered a minimum wage review, you said: "Setting and adjusting the wage level is one of the most challenging parts of minimum wage fixing. The minimum wage cannot be very low as it will have a very small effect on protecting workers and their families against poverty. If set too high, it will have an adverse employment effect. There should be a balance between two sets of considerations." Can you further expound on this? What

**outcomes are we expecting and hoping for following this review?** Building a consensus between the workers and the employers is vital in creating effective and inclusive policies.

The mandatory minimum wage is set slightly higher than the poverty threshold without exceeding the average wage to meet the basic needs of workers and their families without impairing their employers' capacity to pay.

Balancing these considerations is also aligned with the two major criteria set under Republic act 6727, also known as the Wage Rationalization Act: the (1) needs of workers and their families and the (2) capacity to pay of employer/industry.

Also, the minimum wage is set in a regular, predictable, and moderate manner to prevent unnecessary impact on employment, inflation, and GDP growth. This also prevents a substantial impact on the viability of micro and small enterprises and urges them to relocate to the countryside where labor costs are generally lower.

**6** Balancing between corporate and business interests and the betterment of the labor force is always a struggle. Could you take us through your thought process when making a decision that would heavily affect both sides?

Industrial peace is at the core of DOLE's thrust and priorities. The labor department recognizes the vital economic roles played by both the labor and the management sectors. Looking at a broader perspective, you will realize that one is a vital component of the other. The business sector needs empowered workers to flourish. In the same vein, more opportunities for our workforce are created when we capacitate the industry.

At the end of the day, it is about reaching a compromise and a consensus that is beneficial to both the worker and the employer.



## 7 What do you have planned for the Filipino workers and for the department itself?

We want to assure the people that this government is doing its best “to provide every Filipino worker with full, dignified, and meaningful employment” because we believe that Filipinos deserve decent and comfortable lives.

This is also anchored on our country’s AmBisyon Natin 2040, which envisions a **matatag, maginhawa, at panatag na buhay para sa mga Pilipino**, as well as the DOLE’s vision that “every Filipino worker attains full, decent, and productive employment.”

We will continue to build on the good things that we have accomplished in the past years and carry on with the learnings from program implementation and service delivery. We will remain responsive to the needs of the people and make a difference in the lives of Filipino workers.

DOLE will continuously promote the retooling and upskilling of workers to address the ever-changing market demands. We will also continue to strengthen our labor inspection arm to ensure safe and healthy workplaces. During the pandemic, social protection programs and services will continuously be extended to needy workers.

Our OFWs can also expect relentless welfare and reintegration programs to aid them in returning from their employment.

Lastly, in line with the efforts toward economic recovery, DOLE joins the call to prioritize essential economic frontline workers in COVID-19 mitigating programs. Workers must be safe to reopen the economy effectively. More economic activities mean more job opportunities, which can reduce poverty and boost the economy.

## 8 Considering your colorful history as a public servant (having served as Justice Secretary, Solicitor General, and Cabinet Secretary), how is being the DOLE Secretary different from your previous roles? What are the unique challenges that you’ve encountered as Labor Secretary?

Whatever position they may hold, government workers should only have one goal: to serve the public. The roles that I have held in my several years in public service are

all challenging yet truly rewarding. Every role is an opportunity to serve different sectors of society and make a difference in the lives of the Filipino people.

Each time, the challenges that I encounter and overcome are also different. In the past two years, we have been valiantly combating the health and economic adversities of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the height of this health crisis, many Filipinos here and abroad lost their jobs, making our working population vulnerable to poverty.

Apart from flexibility and resilience, I believe that it also nudged us to rethink and realign our goals and aspirations as a country, highlighting the importance of balance between our country’s health and wealth.

## 9 What would you say is your leadership style?

I do not believe that there is a particular way of effectively leading and mobilizing people in the government. My leadership style depends on what the situation calls for. Most times, I prefer a more consultative approach taking all inputs and perspectives into consideration before arriving at a policy decision. This is particularly true in crafting labor and employment policies, which requires consensus among the tripartite council. But, I can also be direct and bureaucratic when the lives of our workers are at stake.

## 10 What is your message to the Filipino people?

Let me direct my message to all Filipino workers in and outside the country. The past two years have been truly challenging for you and your families. The threats of the pandemic have resulted in high unemployment rates and low work morale, among others.

At the labor department, we are firm believers that a strong economy requires an enabled and empowered workforce. Hence, we are relentlessly pushing for relevant and effective labor and employment policies and programs to help you overcome economic adversities and create more opportunities to improve your lives.

Our road to recovery may be paved with various labor and employment hurdles. But, I am certain that we are on the right path. Let us continue to work together towards attaining a better, stronger, and more resilient labor and employment sector. In unity, we can triumph over these big challenges and attain recovery for all. |



# Grassroots Approach To Global Innovation

Israel Ambassador Ilan Fluss highlights innovation as the key to developing each country, while further strengthening bilateral ties.

BY HELEN HERNANE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROMEO PERALTA JR.



Ambassadors often have a very glamorous, jet-setting image with most of their duties and responsibilities shrouded in mystery. At least to those not involved in governance, ambassadors are representatives, travelling the world while rubbing elbows with country leaders, the rich and the famous. It's a huge misconception that Israeli Ambassador to the Philippines, His Excellency Ilan Fluss, is trying to address by engaging in grassroots projects.

## GLOBAL TITLE, LOCAL WORK

"It's hard work, not just going to cocktails and parties. It's constantly looking for new opportunities to enhance relations between countries. It's important to engage with as many people and partners as possible—a lot of thinking, planning, implementation, outreach, and engagement. And then the follow up, which is the most important thing," Fluss stresses.

He shares that interacting with government secretaries and other similar leaders is still very much important because they make the decisions. But at the end of the day, the projects they push for are for the benefit of the public.

"We want and need to address everybody, interact and be relevant. And that's the challenge for the ambassador because, especially here in the Philippines, they look very highly at ambassadors. There's no expectation for us to go down [to the local level]. But for me it's extremely important, touching the grassroots," the University of Haifa alumnus says.

Fluss cites one example, a project that the embassy is spearheading in Tarlac. They visited the Tarlac Agricultural University (TAU) and he met with several students who are operating greenhouses with hydroponics technology. Students actively teach their fellow students regarding the latest in agriculture, but they also encourage teaching the surrounding communities.

During his visit, the Israeli ambassador sampled some of the produce and remarked that its quality is at par with those in his home country. However, their visit also revealed some concerns and challenges with the existing technology.

"When we visited and were made aware of their issues, we found an opportunity for partnership. So we are contributing some upgrades to their technology. Some Israeli experts will visit soon in order to consult and provide more training. That's an example of how we help develop



partner countries; we join local initiatives and support, enhance, help.”

He also shares another experience when they went to a remote village in Nueva Ecija to donate food and water purification systems to indigenous communities. Fluss explored the village to understand the community and living conditions. It’s these experiences, he explains, which are very helpful when it comes to their work and creating projects and it’s why he tries to travel outside Metro Manila as much as possible.

## SHARING INNOVATIONS

Fluss highlights fostering development as their key objective as ambassadors, “For me, one of the most important things is to identify development challenges in the [host] country and to contribute to solving these challenges. Israel is a very far away country which has technologies; we can provide different solutions that are very relevant to the Philippines.”

Even though Israel, whose total area is only around 7 percent of the Philippines’ total area, is a small country with a different culture and challenges, the ambassador shares that there are similar approaches in developing solutions. In principle, the Israeli approach is finding out how to do more with less resources.

“The approach and challenges are very similar. Like, for example, with agriculture. How can you produce more [crops] with less inputs? It’s important to consider climate change and environmental challenges, and it’s also relevant when you have less resources. It’s a constant search for a better approach; you can always improve,” he reveals.

Despite its size, Israel, Fluss stresses, is a strong country and is a global habitat of innovation. He likens their country’s technological capabilities to that of United States’ Silicon Valley and it’s this strength that they could contribute to the country.

Every year, 400 Filipino students are invited to Israel for an 11-month practical internship. This program would allow them to



work with Israeli farmers five days a week, work for one day, and study or rest for the remaining day. While there, they are to conduct a research program and before the program ends, the students should have prepared a business plan. The expectation is for them to bring home different approaches to agriculture.

“In the Philippines, I think close to 30 percent of the workforce is involved in agriculture. In Israel, it’s less than 2 percent. Because it’s very mechanized and technology-intensive. Farmers in Israel look at this agriculture venture as a source of income,” Fluss explains.

“You have to make money, it’s a business. It’s not backyard farming. So, you have to maximize your outputs and minimize your inputs because you’re investing. And that’s a different approach [compared to how agriculture is done in the Philippines]. So, the students are learning the technologies and practices and are exposed to a different mindset. When they come back, they could bring home a different approach.”

But as a foreign envoy, Fluss clarifies that the goal is simply to introduce Filipinos to a different perspective. But ultimately, these new programs shouldn’t change the culture. It’s all about introducing something new.

The ambassador shares that the embassy is also in talks with Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary William Dar regarding dairy production. Israel, he reveals, is the world leader in milk production. Annually, the country produces over 12,000 liters of milk, which is roughly three times more than many countries in the world. In the Philippines, around 98 to 99 percent of milk is imported. By using their approach and technology, Fluss hopes to see more local production of milk or dairy farming.

Food security is another issue that Fluss would like to address. In one food security hackathon that he attended, they shared Israeli innovations on agro-technology. Among the things they shared were improved seeds which was developed to be resilient against drought and other effects of climate change; drip irrigation which uses remote sensing through the Internet of Things (IoT) technology and artificial intelligence (AI) which detects if a field needs more



Israelis also visited the Philippines. With direct flights, he expects that tourism between the two countries will flourish more. The travel link will also serve the business community, government, and more.

“We have close to 30,000 caregivers in Israel, which is critical for our society. It’s a mutual relationship [between Israel and the Philippines]. It’s not a one-way [relationship], it can’t be. It wouldn’t be sustainable if it’s one-way. A partnership benefits both sides,” the veteran ambassador stresses.

## ISRAELI-PHILIPPINE RELATIONS

Historically speaking, the relationship between Israel and the Philippines has always been strong, and there’s a bond that dates

back to World War II. Fluss enlightens the team with a little history lesson, sharing the two significant historical events that formed the connection between our countries and also, sent out “a very strong moral message.”

Because of anti-Semitic sentiments, the Nazi regime led by Adolf Hitler took over Germany in the 1930s. Over 6 million European Jews were murdered in a genocide, The Holocaust. Thousands of Jews fled the region, seeking refuge in various countries. Then-Philippine President Manuel Quezon approved a special immigration programme in 1938 which helped save 1,300 Jews.



Quezon’s ‘Open Door Policy’ was considered controversial at the time and he was heavily criticized by many. “It was a unique policy because most countries closed their doors,” the Israeli ambassador reveals.

The president stood his ground and even planned the immigration of 10,000 more Jews through the ‘Mindanao Plan.’ Plans fell through, however, when the Japanese invaded the country. But since the end of the war, many have praised Quezon for his policy.

“[Quezon] assured us that big or little, he raised hell with every one of those persons,” Jewish-American businessman Alex Frieder shared in 1939. “He made them ashamed of themselves for being a victim of propaganda intended to further victimize an already persecuted people.”

The second event which Fluss believes strengthened our bilateral ties was when the Philippines voted in the United Nations for the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel. Our country was the only country in Asia who supported the establishment of Israel.

“Recently, I approached the Philippine government and suggested that they recognize the international definition of anti-Semitism, which is coming out of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), composed of Israel, Europe, and other countries relevant to the Holocaust,” he shares.

After his visit to the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Fluss shares that they received a letter from Foreign Affairs Secretary

irrigation, pesticides, or other interventions. They also shared alternative food sources, such as vegetarian options for dairy, or beyond meat (which would be plant-based, 3D meat). With over 400 food technology startups in Israel, Fluss elaborates that there are plenty of practices and innovations that they could share here in the Philippines.

Apart from their assistance in agricultural programs, Israel could also help develop our military and defense initiatives.

“Defense is a strategic issue for any country to be able to secure itself. Our countries are both dealing with a global challenge, with is international terrorism. I believe we share principles and the values of a democracy that has to defend itself,” Fluss explains.

Developing by encouraging the innovation sector to create local solutions also helps strengthen bilateral ties by making Israel a meaningful partner. This pandemic also provided many opportunities for collaboration and cooperation.

“During the pandemic, Israel sent PPEs (personal protective equipment) and test kits. Israel was leading also in terms of our vaccination campaign and we sent a delegation here to share our experience and practices. Another delegation also came to share the clinical work and management of hospitals,” he shares. “I think the COVID-19 pandemic taught us that global issues need global approaches, which means sharing practices and learning from each other.”

But it’s not just helping or forming business partnerships, but partnering in a sense that their country also learns and benefits from the Philippines. Philippine Airlines hopes to soon launch a direct flight from Manila to Tel Aviv, which will greatly improve access between countries.

Fluss illustrates that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, roughly 30,000 Filipino tourists would visit Israel and a similar number of



Teodoro Locsin which states that the Philippine government is joining in the recognition of the international definition of anti-Semitism.

“Today, all over the world, we see growing anti-Semitic [sentiments] and we see this, not necessarily in the Philippines, but in many countries. More attacks, more expressions of anti-Semitism. [Accepting the international definition] is a very important message coming out of the Philippines.”

### **BALIKBAYAN**

Fluss started his foreign service career in 1994, serving from 1995 to 1998 as the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Israel in the Philippines. Afterwards, he became the Spokesperson and Cultural Attaché at the Israeli Embassy in the Hague, Netherlands. Over two decades, he has served in various capacities in many regions all over the world. In October 2021, he returned to the Philippines, this time as the Israeli Ambassador.

“I don’t consider myself a diplomat. I’m a *balikbayan*,” Fluss says, noting his time in the late 90s in the Philippines. “I opted in a request to come back as an ambassador [to the Philippines] because I felt that I could contribute a lot to this country.”

He also highlights that while we have different cultures, one thing he highly appreciates in the country is our very welcoming nature which makes them, as foreign ambassadors, feel very accepted. Following his departure in 1998, he said that he had plenty of good memories and experiences which also made him want to come back to the country.

“As a diplomat, you move country to country, assignment to assignment. We always look back favorably, but we also look

forward to the next challenge. However, when I was given the option, I chose to come back here. I very enjoyed the hospitality and the openness of the people. But I also came back because the embassy grew in size and areas of activity,” he shares.

Almost two years ago, the Embassy of Israel opened two new offices—one representing the Ministry of Economy and the other representing the Ministry of Defense. Fluss explains that this expansion demonstrates their keen interest in promoting relations in those fields. On a personal level, however, he shares that his action-oriented nature also drove him to return to push for more programs.

Needless to say, the work of a diplomat is not all pomp and circumstance. And with the constant travelling, it is a challenge socially. But Fluss finds that the reward is the fulfillment in boosting international relations. Among his many achievements, the seasoned foreign representative shares that he helped establish the relations between Israel and Arab countries, a clandestine mission as a special envoy which eventually led to the Abraham Accords, a peace treaty which was a “dream come true” for Fluss.

During his time serving as Israeli Permanent Mission Counsellor to the United Nations (UN), he led a resolution named “Agricultural Technology for Development.” Agriculture, he reveals, is a very sensitive issue. But after 11 months, the resolution was adopted with an enormous majority supporting the initiative. “It was a new resolution and the first time that Israel initiated one on a developmental area, nothing to do with the Middle East or the Holocaust,” he explains.

With their responsibilities, it seems that being a foreign representative is a heavy undertaking fraught with difficulties and pressure. But it’s an important duty that ultimately helps change lives.

“At the end of the day, you influence people and you touch people’s lives. It’s really about trying to uplift the standard of living of people,” Fluss ends. 🇮🇱



# EMPATHY-DRIVEN SERVICE

Choosing between prioritizing show business or public service was an easy decision for the altruistic Arjo Atayde.

BY HELEN HERNANE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
ROMEO PERALTA JR.

In December 2020, Juan Carlos “Arjo” Campo Atayde won the Best Actor Award at the 2020 Asian Academy Creative Awards, beating actors from China, Taiwan, and other Southeast Asian countries. He also earned the distinction of being the first Filipino actor to win such an award and as an additional stroke of luck, he nabbed the award just as he was about to celebrate a decade in the entertainment industry.

## UNDERSTANDING HUMANITY

Atayde won the award for his portrayal of Benjo *Malaya* in the movie *Bagman*, a barber who, due to circumstances, becomes a ‘bagman’ or henchman for the governor of the fictional province of Magdiwang. Released in streaming sites, the two-season series depicts the family man getting caught up in “a dangerous web of crime, corruption, and political turmoil.” His character’s many tasks include being a getaway driver for an assassination, a vote buyer, and an intimidator. While the series paints a convoluted world, it still, as one *Esquire* review puts it, “hits close to home.”

Playing the anti-hero who eventually became the governor of Magdiwang, Atayde admits, has been one of the most difficult challenges in his career. In one interview with *Philippine Star*, the actor explains that the film “depicts the despicable nature of





corrupt politics that could be happening in any part of the world.”

“I hate to think it’s reality but [corruption is] definitely something we’re all turning a blind eye to—something that needs attention, solution and action,” Atayde adds.

Further, he shares that playing Malaya made him realize the nuances behind people who commit crimes, that some people have to because they have no choice, citing the famous adage—“Desperate times call for desperate measures.” While he assures that it’s not something he agrees with, Atayde muses that this is part of the realities of life, that sometimes these ‘desperate measures’ are simply ways for people to cope.

One popular acting technique is method acting, developed by Russian theater director Konstantin Stanislavski. There are many ways to go about the technique, but in general, an actor using the ‘Method’ is encouraged to dive deep into their character’s inner thoughts and emotions, looking for the motivation behind their actions and behavior in order to produce a realistic and powerful performance. For many actors, even those who don’t use this technique, their work

allows them to understand people by ‘living in their shoes.’ It’s this level of empathy developed in his line of work that Atayde believes is the key driving force which would make his transition from being an actor to being a public servant a seamless one, should he win in the upcoming elections.

“Politics is different, of course. I think one reason why [some] actors are turning towards politics is because every day, for every role and human experience we go through, we have to dissect and understand people. We develop our humanity with the job and find it easier to empathize with people. [To be a public servant], you’ve got to understand humanity,” the 31-year-old actor tells LEAGUE.

Undoubtedly, his role in *Bagman* had a huge impact on the aspiring politician, but his empathy for the plight of the masses and his resolve to bring about change stems deep within Atayde. Bringing about change in ‘traditional governance’ is his ultimate goal in his bid to become Quezon City 1st District’s congressman. He laments the fact that corruption is so commonplace in

the country that it’s become the immediate thought amongst people whenever politics is brought up.

“We’re the new generation [of politicians] who want real change. For me, I know I can make a difference, not just by creating pieces of legislation for the district, *pero para sa buong Pilipinas* (but also for the entire Philippines). I promise to be one with the people and *makikinig ako sa mga tao* (I will listen to the people). I will not tolerate anything, no one can buy my principles and values, that’s for sure. People will not be disappointed [if they vote for me] because just like them, we want change. [Politics] is a platform that I want to use to bring about change and it’s not just a title for me,” Atayde stresses.

“The way people see congressmen, *laging kontrabida sa pelikula* (they’re always villains in films),” he adds. “But hopefully, this time, the next generation will uplift the image of politicians. [*Gagawa kami ng gobyernong maaasahan, gobyernong tapat, gobyernong may puso*] ([We will create a] government that you can rely on, trust, and one that has heart).”



**“[Acting] is my livelihood, my source of income. But I have to focus first on the 1st District, get a grip of everything, start projects that I promised, and prioritize the people.”**



## UNCONDITIONAL HELP AND SUPPORT

For the neophyte politician, an ideal public servant respects the people and has a heart that is ready to listen and solve their problems, whether big or small. “*Handang magbukas ng pinto, makipag-usap sa mga tao* (Whose doors are always open and are ready to talk to the people). Looks at the problem, observes, analyzes, and provides solutions. That’s our responsibility as public servants,” Atayde says.

The ease with which the aspiring congressman shares his thoughts on politics reveals that he has spent years pondering its essence and numerous facets. So when the opportunity presented itself, Atayde knew right away that he has to act on his beliefs and serve the public, even if it means turning away from the limelight for a while.

“[Acting] is my livelihood, my source of income. But I have to focus first on the 1st District, get a grip of everything, start projects that I promised, and prioritize the people. Maybe someday I’ll shoot another film or series, but definitely my focus is on District 1 and I’ll lessen [my acting commitments],” he shares.

Aiming for a seat in Congress, Atayde hopes to serve the 37 residential and commercial neighborhoods that include Barangays Bagong Pag-asa, Project 6, and West Triangle. Among the priority pieces of legislation he wants to enact for the district are enhancing the bill on fire protection, citing fire incidents as one of the major problems of the district.



“*Palaging may sunog dito sa* (There’s always a fire here in) District 1. They don’t even have fire hydrants. We were able to give fire extinguishers and other stuff, but knowing the situation of the houses here, made of wood, cement, and *yero* (corrugated aluminum sheets), and crammed together. So when a fire starts, it spreads very easily,” he reveals.

Another priority for Atayde would be the ‘*Ayuda* (assistance) bill’ which would allocate a certain budget per barangay on a monthly basis to enable them to provide necessities to their constituents in the form of medicine, food, or other basic needs. This COVID-19 pandemic, he shares, highlighted the necessity for the bill.

But how will it be different from the various assistance given by different government agencies throughout the pandemic? He explains that the *ayuda* “is not conditional. *Nakaka-receive lang ng tulong ang mga tao kapag eleksyon* (People only usually receive plenty of help when it’s election season). This bill will allocate a budget that would



**“They say that I’m new in politics so I might not be able to accomplish anything. But tell that to the new doctor, or lawyer, or saleslady, or taho vendor, anyone. Everyone starts by being new at something. And I might be a ‘newbie’ in politics, but I’ve been helping people ever since.”**



immediately help people. Since there’s no money involved and it’s goods, the bill also lessens corruption.”

Lastly, he shares that he also aims to push for the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) Bill and is fully supportive of legalizing same-sex marriage in the country, or at least in Quezon City. Atayde again emphasizes the importance of respect when it comes to governance.

“It’s 2022, things have changed. People are now discovering their identity and whatever it is, they deserve respect. [Respect] is where every relationship starts and it’s how you build a community. There are some who are not for [same sex marriage] and I understand that older generations are a bit harsh when it comes to understanding the LGBTQ community. But for me, as I’ve always said, I will be their *kakampi, kaalyansa sa pagsusulong ng kanilang karapatan. At di lang ng LGBTQ, pati na rin ang mga kababaihan* (supporter, their ally in pushing for their rights. And not just for the LGBTQ community, but also for women),” he elaborates. “We just celebrated International Women’s Month *at marami pa rin sa mga kababaihan ang naaabuso* (and there are still plenty of women who are abused). We will help and take care of them, also solo parents. We are trying to build a better community, and a more friendly, reasonable government.”

### **A CHALLENGING OPPORTUNITY**

These bills are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to what the budding politician has in store for the 1st District of Quezon City.

With this upcoming election as the actor’s first foray into politics, achieving his ambitious plans is a considerably tall order. But

Atayde is not daunted nor afraid, even if he is rallying up against a seasoned politician.

“They say that I’m new in politics so I might not be able to accomplish anything. But tell that to the new doctor, or lawyer, or saleslady, or *taho* vendor, anyone. Everyone starts by being new at something. And I might be a ‘newbie’ in politics, but I’ve been helping people ever since,” Atayde says. For him, he adds, his bid for a Congressional seat stems from his desire to fight for the best interest of the people of Quezon City.

“We have no time for politicians who prioritize their personal interests over the people’s. You have to give everything to the people. [Congress] would be a big platform for me to help people and develop the district. It could also be a chain reaction which would help the entire city and even Congress.”

As a ‘newbie,’ Atayde fully understands that he has a lot to learn and why some people would have doubts about his ability or his motivation behind running. He assures the people that his intentions are pure; all he wants is to serve and make a positive difference. With the support of no less than incumbent Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte, Atayde assures that, given the opportunity, he will stay true to his word.

Atayde shares that his generous and philanthropic nature are mainly because of the influence of his parents—businessman Art Atayde and veteran actress Sylvia Sanchez. Ever since they were kids, Arjo and his siblings (Pia, Ria, Gela, and Xavi) would visit their mother’s hometown of Nasipit, Agusan del Norte yearly and hold outreach activities. They would also help local charities and donate whenever they can. Atayde reveals that this exposed him to the provincial life and the needs of the



people and subsequently, also led to him meeting city mayors whenever they would turn over donations.

“During one turnover, I met Mayor Joy Belmonte. Atty. Carol was with me, she’s like family to us, and it turns out she’s also a friend of Mayor Joy. She mentioned my interest in politics and after a few weeks, Mayor Joy called to talk to me about running. We spoke for almost an entire day and that’s what led me here,” he recalls. “I had no idea that I’ll end up here; this was unplanned. But I’ve always wanted to be a public servant.”

And now that the election draws near, Atayde derives inspiration from the leadership and character of those around him, including Mayor Belmonte and his parents. He shares that he has no hesitation when it comes to being in Belmonte’s corner as she is “straight as an arrow.” Last year, the QC local government received

an “unqualified opinion” rating from the Commission on Audit (COA) for its 2020 annual audit report. It is the highest audit rating that COA can award to a local government unit.

“Besides Mayor Joy, my parents are also my guide. My parents inspire me to be an efficient and respectful leader. My dad also stressed that, I mean it goes without saying, but he would always remind me to focus on the people. No stealing, no ‘hocus pocus,’ no [advancing of] business [interests]. We’ll take care of [his] business, but not as congressman.”

### DRIVING FORCE

The entertainment industry is notoriously messy and it’s a running joke in this country that we often hold our celebrities to a higher standard than politicians. But with the Philippine political landscape being just as messy (and notorious too),

moving from showbiz to politics seems a lot like moving from a lion’s den to a tiger’s den. “*Magulo ang mundo ng politika. Magulo sa showbiz, pero iba ang gulo ng politika* (Politics is messy. Show business is also messy, but politics is different),” Atayde muses.

What compels the young actor to take the leap anyway is his deep-seated inclination towards helping people. His compassionate nature may come across as naivety to those who are jaded by the dirty workings of politics. But as we continue to live in a world that often discourages caring for others and pushes for a selfish, dog-eat-dog culture, empathy, as it turns out, is a sign of bravery.

As former United States President Barack Obama said, “Learning to stand in somebody else’s shoes, to see through their eyes, that’s how peace begins. And it’s up to you to make that happen.” |



# TEAM AKSYON AGAD

**A**long with the support of incumbent Quezon City (QC) Mayor Joy Belmonte, Arjo Atayde is also grateful for the support of the councilors included in his Team Aksyon Agad under Belmonte's *Serbisyo sa Bayan Party* (SBP). Atayde expresses his admiration for each councilor and should he win in the elections, the aspiring congressman vows to offer his support for each councilor and their projects that aim to further develop the 1st District and the whole city.



## **DR. DORAY ANCHETA DELARMENTE-BAGTING**

**T**he University of the Philippines (UP) alumna is the daughter of former QC 1st District Councilor Elizabeth Delarmente who served from 1998 to 2007 and recently from 2016 to 2019. Her father, Atty. Teodoro Delarmente, is a retired Army colonel who also served as an assistant commissioner for the Bureau of Immigration. With such a sterling lineage that has a background in government, it's no wonder

that Delarmente herself decided to enter politics. But before she became a councilor from 2007 to 2016, and currently since 2019, she had been serving the people as a doctor.

Dr. Doray, as she is commonly referred to, graduated from UP Diliman with a degree in Psychology, finishing with Latin honors. Afterwards, she earned her Doctor of Medicine degree and served in the Philippine General Hospital (PGH). But the doctor is not one to rest on her laurels and is currently studying in her alma mater to get a Master's degree in Public Management.

She is married to retired United States Naval Officer John Norman Bagting and they have two children—Robert Theodore and Sarah Elizabeth. Fueled by the love and support of her family and her fellow councilors, Delarmente has managed to push for pieces of legislation that have changed the city for the better.

Among her many legislative achievements are environmental ordinances that regulated the use of plastic bags which eventually turned into a total ban on the distribution of plastic bags in the city; and created the Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Department, and Department of Sanitation and Cleanup Works of Quezon City. She also championed the causes of women and the LGBTQ community, co-authoring an ordinance against discrimination on the basis of SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression). The seasoned politician also pushed for health-related ordinances, such as one Instituting a Comprehensive and Unified Policy for Tuberculosis Control, an anti-discrimination ordinance which protects COVID-19 infected (or suspected) persons and healthcare workers.

Her steadfast commitment towards the betterment of the city has earned her multiple awards, all of which she credits to the support of her fellow public servants and dedicates them to the people of QC. In 2021, she was named the Outstanding Public Servant of the Year at the 16th *Gawad Filipino* and received the Amazing Alumni Achiever Award from Miriam College. The year prior, she also earned the *Gawad Bagong Bagani*.

## **CHARM FERRER, CPA**

**A**spiring councilor Charm Ferrer is the daughter of veteran QC Councilor Victor "Jun" Ferrer who has been serving the district for 24 years collectively. Ferrer, however, is determined to create her own legacy that would match, if not surpass, the achievements of her father.

Ferrer, professionally speaking, is a force to be reckoned with. She graduated from St. Paul University with a degree in Accountancy, eventually becoming a certified public accountant (CPA). She also has a Juris Doctor degree from Arellano University School of Law. The PICPA (Philippine Institute of CPA) member spent her post-graduate years gaining professional experience.

Among her many titles, she has served as a finance analyst, finance manager, a junior associate for Pulido & Tiamson Law Office, and a senior auditor for De Guzman, Cristobal & Associates. She was also a senior tax consultant for Edwin R. Abella & Associates Law Office and an associate auditor for Villaruz & Co.

But life had other plans and Ferrer was pulled into public service. She has served as the 1st District representative for the *Liga ng mga Barangay* and was an assistant auditor for the *Liga ng mga Barangay Kagawad*. Since 2019, Ferrer has been serving the people as a *barangay kagawad* in Brgy. Bahay Toro while simultaneously working as a legal associate for Manaog-Mendoza, Mejia, Fernandez and Associates Law Office in Makati. Balancing both duties has proven to be a challenge, but for the battle-hardened Ferrer, it's simply her job—serving the people both in a public and private capacity.

With her at the helm of the 1st District as one of its councilors, Ferrer vows a clean government, especially in terms of finances. People, after all, should feel the positive changes brought about by the taxes that they diligently pay with their hard-earned money.

## **TJ CALALAY**

**T**any Joe "TJ" Lora Calalay is a first-term councilor who's aiming for a second term. He graduated from the International Academy of Management and Economics (IAME) with a degree in Business Administration. In 2015, he also earned a Public Administration degree from the Cavite State University.

As 1st District councilor, Calalay championed the causes of workers as chairman of the Committee on Labor, Employment and Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW). He is also a member of various other committees, including Urban Poor & Human Settlement;





# TEAM AKSYON AGAD

Public Order & Security; Trade, Commerce & Industry; and Youth & Sports.

During his stint as councilor, Calalay managed to push for several pieces of legislation, such as the resolutions on recognizing the Galak Niño Festival of Bago Bantay as a cultural celebration in the city, encouraging all job order personnel and contractual employees of the QC city government to join as voluntary members of the Social Security System (SSS) under the Kaltass Collect Program, and the resolutions which authorized Mayor Belmonte to enter into a memorandum of agreement with the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) for the regular plantilla employees of the city government to avail of the GSIS Financial Assistance Loan (GFAL).

Beyond his legislative achievements, the councilor has also spearheaded several programs and projects (some in coordination with various organizations, QC city departments, and national government agencies). Calalay provided medical assistance, free legal aid, free eye refraction for public school students ('Sight for Kids'), provision of wheelchairs for senior citizens and persons with disabilities (PWDs), and food carts for business start-up (*Kaalalay sa Kabuhayan*). He also spearheaded blood donation drives, anti-rabies vaccination drives, a mobile SSS registration caravan, and during this pandemic, disinfection drives and vaccination rollouts.



## BERNARD HERRERA

Alex Bernard Ramirez Cruz-Herrera is also another incumbent councilor in the 1st District of Quezon City. He graduated from the University of Asia and the Pacific (UA&P), earning a degree in Management and an Applied Business Economics Program certificate. He furthered his studies by learning Mandarin and Business Economics at the Tianjin University in China.



Prior to joining politics, Herrera worked as an administrator for the PIVO Training School (a TESDA-accredited technical vocational school in Ortigas district). He joined the world of politics by working as a consultant for the Office of the Mayor of the Municipality of Quezon, Nueva Ecija from 2015 to 2016. Afterwards, he worked as chief political affairs officer and Congressional staff of Bagong Henerasyon (BH) Partylist, a position he held until 2019.

Herrera's fruitful first term led to a number of legislative measures—an ordinance that provides scholarship for QC residents or local government employees who are studying medicine, law,

or post-graduate and international degrees, another creating the City Real Estate Management and Control Office (CREMCO), one ordinance providing financial assistance for frontliners who tested positive for COVID-19, and another strengthening the basic education enhancement program by adopting blended learning.

Community service is another part of public service that Herrera considers just as important as legislative work. His notable projects were guided by his H.E.L.P.S. (Health, Education, Livelihood, People Empowerment, and Sustainable Development) advocacy. Among his numerous initiatives are medical assistance, Mercury Drug pharmacy vouchers, anti-dengue misting, scholarship assistance, TESDA-accredited training, computer literacy programs through mobile computer schools, provision of startup capital for micro businesses, urban poor assistance, and support towards backyard farming and distribution of disaster kits.

## JOSEPH "SEP" JUICO

Sep Juico began his political career when he became chairperson of the *Sangguniang Kabataan* (SK) of Barangay Paraiso in District 1, QC from 1996 to 1999. Throughout his 25-year career, Juico has been involved in various aspects of government and public service. From 2004 to 2013, he served as chairperson of various committees of the *Sangguniang Panlungsod* (16th to 18th City Council) and was the President Pro-Tempore during the 18th City Council.



Afterwards, he left the local government of Quezon City and served as assistant secretary at the Office of the Executive Secretary, lead coordinator for LGUs under the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and director of the Bases Conversion & Development Authority (BCDA). Juico, however, was destined to serve QC and returned as officer-in-charge of the Local Economic and Investment Promotion Office and the Cultural and Tourism Affairs Department. He also served as assistant secretary under the Office of the Secretary to the Mayor and led the Investment Affairs Office. Because of Juico's excellent track record, he was assigned as co-chairman of the QC Task Force COVID and Vaccination.

Juico has championed many pieces of legislation over his two-decade career, including ordinances that required businesses within the city to install CCTVs, assigned express lanes for senior citizens, encouraged establishments to hire PWDs, and established the Local Youth Development Council in QC, and the Population and Reproductive Health Management Policy.

As with his fellow councilors who have gone above and beyond their duty and responsibilities, Juico also provided programs such as medical and educational assistance, legal aid, relief operations, mass wedding and baptism, dental missions, anti-rabies vaccination, feeding programs, and various trainings for solo parents, LGBTQ, and urban farming.

A portrait of Atty. Alex Lopez, a middle-aged man with dark hair, smiling and wearing a dark blue suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. He has his arms crossed and is standing against a blue background that transitions from a darker shade at the top to a lighter shade at the bottom.

# An Economist's Game Plan

Manila mayoral candidate Atty. Alex Lopez talks about reclaiming Manila's image and glory as the country's premier city.

BY LAKAMBINI BAUTISTA  
PHOTOGRAPHY DANIEL SORIANO



**T**hriving in the private sector for most of his career, one wonders why Lopez Lopez decided to run for public office only at this point in his life. The 63-year-old businessman will be up against four candidates for the mayoralty in the City of Manila, including incumbent Vice Mayor Honey Lacuna.

“I’ve always considered Manila to be my home,” the Tondo-born gentleman says simply, when asked about his decision to run as Manila mayor. “But most importantly, I’ve always kept the people of Manila in my heart. As a son of a politician from Manila, I grew up thinking of the welfare of Manileños.”

The politician that Lopez was referring to is his late father, former Manila Mayor Gemiliano “Mel” Lopez, who served as the capital city’s chief executive after the EDSA Revolution in 1986 until the end of former President Cory Aquino’s term in 1992. The younger Lopez, then in his late 20s to early 30s, was his father’s private secretary during the old man’s stint as mayor.

As his father’s right hand man, Lopez—who completed degrees in Economics and Law at the Ateneo de Manila University—didn’t only manage his father’s private affairs. The official profile provided to LEAGUE indicates that he had a huge influence in the way the city was run in those times.

Lopez says he was responsible for the prioritization of the construction of more than 2,000 classrooms citywide. He was instrumental in the increase in allowances of the city’s teachers in 1987, the creation of the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila’s (PLM) College of Medicine, and the increase in the city’s subsidy for the PLM.

Lopez also assisted his father in undertaking strong economic reforms—“to erase the debt of Manila City Hall, leaving with it a budget of Php700 million which was turned over to Mayor Alfredo Lim.”

Since the early 1990s, Lopez had decided to focus on growing the family-owned Pacific Concrete Products Inc., which he’s proud to say has received the Philippine Accreditation Board’s highest accreditation as a Quadruple A (“AAAA”) construction company. Some of the firm’s notable projects are SCTEX, TPLEX, CLEX, Bonifacio Global City and SM Mall of Asia Road Networks, NAIA 1 to 4, and PAL Terminal Runways.

### HEEDING THE CALL TO PUBLIC SERVICE

Lopez says he decided to run for mayor because he sees the need to do so. “I feel that there’s another calling [for me],” he says. The



man has been forthright in his interviews, stressing his discontent in the way current Manila Mayor Isko Moreno Domagoso has been running the city. He mentioned about wrong priorities, funds that have been misspent, and ordinances that were not responsive to the needs of Manileños.

“They borrowed Php 15 billion. Php1.7 billion was spent on the [Manila] zoo. It was clearly a wrong priority,” he says, shaking his head. “That’s too much. That’s budget already for three small provinces. I think I could have renovated the zoo for a hundred million bucks and made it look better.”

He mentions the school buildings that were demolished and rebuilt during the pandemic. “There’s a pandemic; a lot of people are suffering. Why would you demolish school buildings that are still ok?” he says. “These are not condemned buildings. These are heritage buildings. They were demolished for the sake of having projects, which I think were not timely projects.” He says the incumbent mayor should have prioritized providing the basic needs of the people of Manila—jobs, shelter, medicine, and support (honoraria) for frontliners.

“I am an astute student of economics. I think my economics background will help bring more jobs. I will help uplift the lives of our people. There are many economic principles and policies which I



**“I believe that a public office is a public trust. It must be served with the highest degree of integrity, honesty. Your willingness to serve should be paramount. You have to sacrifice your personal interests for the common good. Your personal gain and political career should take a backseat.”**



think are not being adopted by the city,” he says, when asked what he could contribute should he get elected as mayor.

Lopez says he’s not discounting the fact that Domagoso has done a good job in trying to promote the city’s image. “He’s an image builder,” he says. “As for me, being an economist, I want to institute change by empowering the marginalized.”

He continues, “There is a saying that goes, ‘You give a man fish, you feed him for the day. You teach a man how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.’ But that’s not exactly true. You may know how to fish, but that’s not enough if you don’t have a boat and a fishing net. So that’s what I want to do in the City of Manila—provide financing. We’ve done that during my father’s time. We put up cooperatives to help the marginalized.”

The lawyer-economist says he wanted to restore Manila’s image and glory as the country’s premier city. “Today, we’re number three in Metro Manila and eighth nationwide among LGUs in terms of income. That means business has slowed down. Many other cities have overtaken us. I think it’s because of the wrong policies, wrong priorities,” he says.

Lopez believes his rich background in business can help the city get back on track. “Running private corporations, I give value to our shareholders and stakeholders. That’s also what I intend to do if I become mayor of Manila,” he says.

### **MAJOR CHALLENGES**

Lack of housing is one of the biggest problems of the city. Lopez intends to solve this “not by destroying schools,” but by expropriating informal settlers. “There are about 200 estates with informal settlers [in Manila]. We’re going to build housing units for the poor in those areas,” he tells LEAGUE.

To address traffic congestion, he’s planning to have more one-way streets and build more parking spaces. He also intends to help improve the city’s mass transport system. “You know you have a good transport system if the rich like to ride the train,” he says.

Strengthening peace and order means starting from the grassroots—by that, he means providing additional allowances to the *barangay tanods*. “Did you know that a *barangay tanod* earns Php1500 in Manila? Php50 a day. Let’s give them additional Php1000 or Php2000 allowance.”

Camera capability of the barangays should also be improved. So he’s planning to install more CCTV cameras and provide a few drones per police precinct, so that their uniformed personnel can properly monitor and maintain peace and order in the streets of Manila.

“The police force of Manila was once Metro Manila’s finest. How can that be if they’re using scooters? I want to bring back Manila’s Finest again,” says Partido Federal ng Pilipinas’ mayoral bet. There should be more police visibility, mobile patrols going around. Police precincts should be refurbished and the policemen’s support equipment updated and improved. “Let’s give additional Php1000 allowance to the city’s 5000 policemen. If we have 5000 policemen, that’s only Php 5 million. You can build a zoo worth Php 1.7 billion but you can’t add Php1000 to the policemen’s allowance?”

In six years’ time under his administration, Lopez says he’s hoping to see less poverty and more jobs. “We do that through empowerment of the marginalized, building more housing units for the poor,” he says. “I’d like to see river walks and more dolomite beaches. I’m proposing to have two in Parola, and one in Baseco. More fishports. More trading activities.”

Lopez believes he’s got what it takes to be a good leader. “A good leader should have the people’s welfare in his heart. The people’s welfare should be your primary goal,” he says. I believe that a public office is a public trust. It must be served with the highest degree of integrity, honesty. Your willingness to serve should be paramount. You have to sacrifice your personal interests for the common good. Your personal gain and political career should take a backseat.” | 📱

Hair and Make-up by Ann Lomibao





# NURTURING BIÑAN

Public service is not a job; it's a purpose. One can quit a job but not a purpose—for the latter keeps one going.

BY ELAINE FELICITAS  
PHOTOGRAPHY DANIEL SORIANO

HON. MARLYN ALONTE-NA  
CONGRESSWOMAN





**R**ep. Marlyn “Len” B. Alonte-Naguaiat, from No.1 councilor to mayor to representative of the Lone District of Biñan City, has a purpose that drives her to deliver on her commitments to her constituents. Her brand of public service is her covenant to the people of Biñan. A promise that keeps her going, with a steady momentum and a resolute will. The congresswoman’s brand of leadership shines with her desire to help people and make their lives better.

While the people are the heart of public service, the elected officials are equally important in that they can be beneficial or detrimental in improving the lives of other people. Choosing the right leader has become crucial to the success of a city or a province, and is very timely as the national and local elections are just around the corner.

With her 24 years in service, Alonte has proven that her contributions to her constituents and her hard work have paid off with their continued support in keeping her in office. Her projects show her advocacies on different aspects of the community and have transformed lives in the process.

#### **KNOWING THE CONGRESSWOMAN**

Alonte says her father, former Mayor Arthur Alonte, and her mother, Fe Erlinda Belizario, have opened her eyes to the idea of public service.

“I grew up seeing my father use his position as municipal mayor to change the lives of Biñanenses for the better. There was no shortage of ways to help people. My mom Fe, a devoted wife, also taught me the many important values I carry now.”

Heeding the call of the people, Alonte started public

service as a councilor at the age of 23. She recalls, “At a young age, I already had that desire to help people and do something that will make the lives of people around me better. So when public service knocked at my door, I took the chance and poured my whole heart into it.”

No matter what position has been entrusted to her, she ensures that she’s giving her one-hundred percent with the values and learnings she’s gained from her parents. This passion for serving other people has also been fully imbibed by her staff.

Alonte’s vast experience in the municipal council served her well when she became vice mayor and eventually Biñan’s youngest and first female mayor in 2007. She was first elected as congresswoman of Biñan in 2016, and was reelected in 2019. In recognition of her performance, she was recently named as one of the Deputy Speakers of the 18th Congress.

Her father’s legacy, dedication, and hard work have become her inspiration to choose the same path of public service. Along with her mother’s virtues, her father’s wisdom and guidance have moored her to be of service to others. They are her “foundation and moral compass.”

The seasoned public servant finds raising her two beautiful children, Nico and Isabel, with her husband Steve as one of her biggest achievements in life. There were times she had to choose attending to her constituents’ needs over spending time with her family, and she’s grateful that her family has been very supportive of her life mission. Getting the right kind of support, Alonte says, uplifts her spirit and makes her political life easier.



## UNIQUE BRAND OF LEADERSHIP

Alonte's experience with her family shows how much she has learned from the examples of her parents to craft her own style of leadership. She also leads by example to her staff and constituents, which draws them to her leadership.

Furthermore, the congresswoman ensures that her actions and hard work are directed toward the improvement of Biñan and encourages other people to do the same.

Alonte describes her leadership as hands-on and people-centric. She ensures that each program is well-crafted by asking questions such as "Will this benefit the people we serve? Will this make their lives better? Will this put value in their day-to-day living? Will this create equal opportunities for positive changes leading to a better and brighter future for as many people as possible?"

With all these considered, she goes ahead and plans her actions thoroughly, guided by public response and expert consultations.

The University of Santo Tomas (UST) alumna and recipient of Doctor of Humanities honoris causa from the University of Perpetual Help System-Biñan simplifies her brand of leadership as similar to that of a mother who prioritizes the welfare of her children, and in this case the







**Heeding the call of the people, Alonte-Naguit has started public service as a councilor at the age of 23. She recalled, “At a young age, I already had that desire to help people and do something that will make the lives of people around me better. So when public service knocked on my door, I took the chance and poured my whole heart into it.”**

people and city of Biñan. A mother’s love endures and sacrifices to make sure that her children are “safe, comfortable, and happy.” Supporting her constituents to uplift their lives has been her priority as a public servant, which is reflective of her nurturing nature.

Alonte’s leadership style worked well for her in different roles she has held as a public servant. She has received numerous commendations and awards, including The Outstanding Young Men of the Philippines (TOYM) award in 2014, which recognized her efforts in introducing changes that resulted in minimizing corruption and simplifying government transactions.

### **FOCUS AND ADVOCACIES**

People remain the focal point of Alonte’s career as a public servant and most of her projects are geared toward introducing changes to benefit them. One of her biggest achievements was the cityhood of Biñan.

She says, “The cityhood of Biñan will always be one of my biggest achievements during my term as mayor of this beloved city. More than the change in status, cityhood was about bringing more investments to the city, which meant more livelihood and job opportunities for our people.”

Her advocacies are clearly focused on education, healthcare, and the overall welfare of the people of Biñan. The Iskolar ng Biñan has provided tertiary education for over 10,000 underprivileged students, giving them a headstart in life. Her project of providing quality healthcare for the disadvantaged residents of the city through the Health Assistance Program for Indigent Families (HAPI) Card. HAPI provides medical benefits including free medicine, doctors’ services, and other fees. Its accredited hospitals include Biñan Doctors’ Hospital, University





of Perpetual Help Medical Center-Biñan, Ospital ng Biñan. Discussions are currently ongoing to add Philippine General Hospital (PGH) in the future.

Meanwhile, the 'Alagang Len' program supports different aspects of life in community. It provides bereavement assistance, livelihood programs, and infrastructure projects. It encompasses all of Alonte's advocacies to give the best to the people.

She mentions that one of the most difficult aspects of being a public servant is time management. There are times when she feels that the 24 hours in a day are not enough to do projects but she still continues because there are a lot of people who are relying on her. She also proceeds with all her projects and advocacies because of the "love, trust, and confidence of the people of Biñan. That gives me the assurance that I am doing a good job leading and representing them."

As a mother to her constituents, she feels satisfied with helping her children achieve some of their goals and improve their lives.

### **FOR THE PEOPLE OF BIÑAN**

Much like how her leadership has been for many years, being a congresswoman is no different. Her response to the COVID-19 pandemic is clean and clear—every life saved matters. She has been commended for her swift and steady response to the pandemic by focusing on how her constituents can adjust to the new normal.

Multiple projects have been in full swing and simultaneously being done for Biñanenses, especially displaced workers, to have access to sustainable employment and livelihood opportunities. Supporting the Department of Labor and Employment's (DOLE's) Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD) program, the city government of Biñan provided employment by hiring people to clean areas in different barangays and giving compensation for the work they have provided.

Another project that's also being implemented is the initiative to vaccinate all the people in Biñan. This proactive response to the COVID-19 virus aims to minimize casualties and severe cases was borne out of the realization that a holistic approach to the pandemic is still best.

Aside from vaccinations and financial assistance, Biñan is prepared to respond to the pandemic by activating its response team and adding safety protocols to prevent the spread of the disease. Medical consultations through E-Konsulta, an app



**Alonte-Naguit's leadership style has become beneficial for her different roles in public offices. She has received numerous commendations and awards which shows how her virtue as a mother in protecting her children, and as a child learning from her parents.**

that provides consultation for Biñanenses with COVID-19-related symptoms, also proved as an important innovation.

While serving the city of Biñan for 24 years, she has been consistent with the services that she provides her constituents. Her message to her constituents emphasizes her true brand of leadership and motivation as a public servant, and her pledge to continue to work harder for them.

“Thank you for trusting me to lead and represent the City of Biñan in the House of Representatives. The transition from a quiet town to a dynamic powerhouse city was for and because of you. We shall not rest on our laurels. Instead, we will continue to work even harder because our priority will always be to try to give all Biñanenses a better life, a life that will make you even more proud to be a resident of this city and lone district.”

#### **WHAT'S NEXT**

Asked about her plans for the future, Alonte reveals her priority is to focus on her role as a member of the House of Representatives. She has authored several bills including one in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to help accelerate the recovery of the country through different steps.

Other bills also reflect her advocacies on health, education, and children and women's welfare, featuring steps similar to what she had implemented as a vice mayor and mayor of her city. As a congresswoman, her success affects not only the city of Biñan but also other cities and districts throughout the country.

Clearly, Congresswoman Alonte's vast experience, leadership characteristics, and drive have molded her to become the leader she is today. Ever improving despite the many accolades she has received, she continues to inspire more people to also do their best and help improve the lives of others.

Hers is a leadership by example—purpose driven, results oriented. Nothing more. Nothing less. | ■



# The Servant Leader

Mayor Joy Belmonte talks about empowered, transformative leadership.

BY JOYCE REYES-AGUILA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROMEO PERALTA, JR.

A progressive leader who chooses a path away from traditional politics—that’s how Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte wants to be known. She insists that she entered politics not for wealth, power, or prestige, and what drove her was a burning aspiration to reform government and improve its performance.

“I have been described as forward-thinking,” she tells LEAGUE Magazine. “I am a crusader and a change-maker, and in this regard, I can say I am an idealist in a world of pragmatists. My vision is to strengthen institutions and standardize internal processes, protocols, and procedure for the purpose of maximizing the city’s resources in the delivery of basic services to our people, as well as to ease out corruption.”

Belmonte has been serving Quezon City for 12 years now. She was previously the city’s vice mayor for three consecutive terms before vying for its highest office in 2019. On top of her agenda then were women’s rights, gender equality, enhancing social services particularly for the marginalized and migrating all government transactions online to eliminate face-to-face interaction that can lead to anomalous behavior. Belmonte says this ensures proper and honest collection of taxes.

She also focused on decentralizing governance through the establishment of satellite action offices in all districts to enable her government to attend to the essential needs of their constituents efficiently, responsively and more conveniently. Belmonte also included the renovation and modernization of Quezon City’s health centers to ensure the digitalization of medical records, that medicine supply is immediately replenished and that each location will have one doctor.

The city’s 11th mayor also imposed zero tolerance for corruption in the city by “ensuring that every peso is well-spent on projects that are meaningful, sustainable, and effective.” This resulted to the local government earning an “unqualified opinion” from the Commission on Audit (COA) for its annual audit report for 2020—a first in Quezon City’s history. It is the highest audit opinion that COA can render to a government agency, including a local government unit (LGU).

Belmonte considers the audit opinion as a testament to the realization of her vision for good governance that has been internalized by the city’s leaders. “This is the most important recognition that a local government unit like us can get,” she avers. “This is the validation of our efforts for good governance in Quezon City, and this is also a welcome surprise since we received this in our first term.”





**Belmonte has been serving Quezon City for 12 years now. She was previously the city's vice mayor for three consecutive terms before vying for its highest office in 2019.**



Introducing and sustaining reforms in government is one of the many challenges the mayor has had to hurdle. She continues to believe that many things detrimental to progress and development have been institutionalized, such as corruption and a culture of mediocrity. “There is a need to restore the people’s faith, trust, and confidence in government,” she maintains. “People are cynical and many view government very negatively, and there can be no real ‘good governance’ if the people and government do not enhance their working relationship through a more mature participatory environment, real transparency, and better accountability.”

This is one reason Belmonte believes she was elected to office. “A wise man once told me that we all must strive to live a life of meaning, and I believe that a commitment to good governance as the means through which we can ensure better service delivery to our people is the reason... I have been entrusted this role,” she continues.

#### **FURTHERING PURPOSE**

Maria Josefina Tanya “Joy” Go Belmonte is the youngest child and only daughter of former Quezon City Mayor Feliciano “Sonny” Belmonte Jr. and journalist Betty Go-Belmonte. Her father also served as the Speaker of the House under the Aquino presidency, while her late mother is one of the founders of *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* and *The Philippine Star*.

She says her parents are two of the many people who inspired her to become a public servant. “My mother was especially influential to me because she embodied all the traits of a great woman leader,” Belmonte maintains. “She was fearless but compassionate. She was an activist until her last breath; she always wanted to make the world a better place for others and worked hard to do so even if the effort seemed futile, and she did so for the most part through the power of the pen. The status quo was never good enough. She was idealistic, God-fearing, engaged, extremely principled, selfless, and a moral compass to all who knew her.”

After obtaining her social sciences degree from the Ateneo de Manila University, Belmonte joined the Jesuit Volunteers Philippines and became a high school teacher in Kadingilan, Bukidnon. “It was my experience as a volunteer teacher in a far-flung and underdeveloped community that opened my eyes to the sad reality of life in the Philippines, most especially to the

flawed socio-economic and political structures in our society that are designed to concentrate power, status, and wealth in the hands of a few, and make it almost impossible for those born in uncomfortable circumstances to rise above these conditions,” she recalls.

She then worked at Caritas Manila’s Communications Department for six months and joined the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) after. “My stint here prepared me for eventual postgraduate studies abroad,” says the mayor. Belmonte then moved to the United Kingdom to train to become an archaeologist. She has two master’s degrees, one in Museum Studies from the University of Leicester and one in Archaeology from the Institute of Archaeology, University College London. She specialized in Southeast Asian archaeology and travelled extensively in the region.

Belmonte continued her humanitarian work and sat on the boards of several non-government and non-profit organizations, while lecturing at the University of the Philippines Archaeological

**“I believe our biggest concern is the imminent need to raise the standard of living of every QCitizen by providing them with a more dignified life. This means focusing our attention on providing our people with safety and security in terms of housing, improving the standard of education to include not just improvements in competencies, but also an emphasis on developing critical thinking.”**

Studies Program and joining expeditions to archaeological sites.

“It was while I was working on an archaeological site in Manila that I first entertained the idea of running for public office,” she recalls. “I had an appointment at city hall to meet the mayor so I could explain our work to him, and how it could benefit his city in terms of tourism. After waiting for several hours, I found out he had already left. I then told myself, if I really wanted to draw attention to an advocacy I truly believed in, it would be best if I were to hold a decision-making position myself.”

When her father’s third term as mayor ended, she decided to give politics a shot. She became vice mayor in 2010 and considers three projects as among her biggest achievements: the physical transfer of the Quezon Heritage House from Gilmore to the Quezon Memorial Circle (thus saving it from demolition); the establishment of the Quezon City Experience Museum (QCX), and the founding of QCinema or the Quezon City International Film Festival—which is already on its 10th year.

It was during one of her terms as vice mayor when she “trended on social media as the most hated person in the Philippines.” As acting mayor, Belmonte “refused to suspend school over a forecast of ‘light to moderate rains with occasional thunderstorms.’” She and Makati Mayor Abby Binay were the only city heads who decided to do so. “I got bashed overwhelmingly. And I trended very negatively.”

Belmonte issued an apology and took ownership. In a social media post, she said “I welcome all the hate and vileness of your messages. I truly deserve it.” She went on to explain that her team relied on the weather forecast, adding that “sometimes we in government depend too much on data and statistics and not enough on gut feel.” She acknowledged her shortcomings in the situation and added that it was “time to step up” for her constituents.



## FUTURE FORWARD

Belmonte, who is running for reelection this year, says that she still has a lot to do in Quezon City. “I believe our biggest concern is the imminent need to raise the standard of living of every QCitizen by providing them with a more dignified life,” she explains. “This means focusing our



attention on providing our people with safety and security in terms of housing, improving the standard of education to include not just improvements in competencies, but also an emphasis on developing critical thinking.

“This is over and above the physical and infrastructural

needs of our learners such as facilities, gadgets, and connectivity. We also need to provide more opportunities for employment and livelihood for all those who

desire to earn an income, whatever their status and circumstances in life are. Finally, access to healthcare remains an area of concern, as well as improvements in health-seeking behavior. All these require additional infrastructure, manpower and improved operational systems.” She also includes climate change, environmental protection, public order and safety, as well as enhancing investor confidence in her priority list.

“The people must be convinced that we are here to protect them and promote their welfare above all,” she stresses. “I believe that the foundation of effective, efficient and responsive service delivery still lies in the proper management of the city’s resources, shifting paradigms from whimsical decision-making to data-driven decision-making, motivating our personnel to adopt a framework of excellence and merit, and most of all, enhancing the trust and confidence of the people in government, so together we can actively participate in the work of city-building.”

Belmonte considers some accomplishments as the closest to her heart. These include the Quezon City Protection Center for Victim-Survivors of Gender-



“I also consider myself a servant leader,” she shares, and adds that author Simon Sinek describes her leadership style in these words from his book *Leaders Eat Last*: “The true price of leadership is the willingness to place the needs of others above your own. Great leaders truly care about those they are privileged to lead and understand that the true cost of the leadership privilege comes at the expense of self-interest.”







Based Violence and Abuse and the *Bahay Kanlungan* temporary shelter—a one-stop-shop for women, children, and members of the LGCBTQIA+ who need medical, legal, protective, and social services. With Grow QC, Belmonte introduced urban farming to promote food security, encourage healthy diet, and enhance livelihood. “I am proud of this project because during the pandemic, our urban farms were instrumental in providing nutritious meals to thousands of our neediest constituents,” she says.

With No Woman Left Behind, Belmonte provides holistic support to Women Deprived of Liberty (WDL) at the Camp Karingal correctional facility. They are given health services, livelihood opportunities, and a chance to finish secondary and tertiary education through partnerships with the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Quezon City University. The *Kabahaqi* Center for Children with Disabilities provides free services for indigent Children with Disabilities (CWD), including diagnostic services, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and physical therapy, among others, in partnership with specialists from various universities and organizations. It also provides training on how to care for these children and provides livelihood opportunities to the parents of CWDs.

Belmonte also established the “Made in QC” program to assist and support micro and small business owners from Quezon City who make unique and high-quality artisanal products. These products are featured in a five-volume book collection that is given away to corporations, the diplomatic corps, and the political elite, among others, to provide them with options for gifts, especially during the holiday season.

Other notable accomplishments for the mayor include the Cash to Trashback program that makes “caring for the environment economically rewarding” for people who trade in recyclable wastes for points that can be used to pay for groceries and pay their electric bills through a memorandum of agreement with Meralco; the Animal Welfare and Adoption Center that rehabilitates rescued dogs for adoption, and trains these to become emotional support companions for mental health patients or to assist in police work; and the QCity Bus, a free bus service modeled after those in the cities of Boston and Seattle in the United States. “While it started as part of our pandemic response to help frontliners get around, we have decided to retain it as a permanent feature of our city to help our workers and employees save on public transport fares. The route doesn’t overlap with any route of the LTFRB so as not to negatively affect the earnings of franchised transport.

Belmonte says that the 14-point agenda she introduced in 2019 when she first ran for mayor will continue to guide her plans for Quezon City. The agenda focuses on human and social services, economic development, environment, and climate change, building a livable, green, and sustainable city, infrastructure, and institutional development.



She has some big-ticket projects identified, including the rehabilitation of the Amoranto Sports Complex into an international standard sports facility, rehabilitation of the Quezon Memorial Circle after the MRT 7 construction, and establishment of three additional campuses of the Quezon City University, among others.

“You will continue to feel your taxes working productively for you, this time in a non-pandemic situation,” Belmonte insists. “I ask our constituents to trust in their government, cooperate with us in exposing all irregularities and anomalies, and help us to build the epitome of clean and honest public service in our beloved Quezon City.”

She has no plans to run for higher office and describes her role as “the kind of job that you either love or you hate,” adding, “I love the feeling I get when I’ve made a positive difference in the life of a person or a community. I hate the dirt that comes with politics. Fortunately, the psychological rewards of genuine public service far outweigh my disdain for the gutter politics I need to swallow when running for office. The most difficult aspect of being a public servant is having to put my family second or even third in the hierarchy of priorities.”

“I also consider myself a servant leader,” she shares, and adds that author Simon Sinek describes her leadership style in these words from his book *Leaders Eat Last*: “The true price of leadership is the willingness to place the needs of others above your own. Great leaders truly care about those they are privileged to lead and understand that the true cost of the leadership privilege comes at the expense of self-interest.”

Belmonte is driven to be a leader whose actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, she says. “In other words, for me, leadership must be empowering and transformative.” | ■

# Pino: Filipino Fusion Cuisine at Its Finest

Coffee crusted Beef Brisket with Bistek sauce



HERE'S A HEALTHIER WAY TO INDULGE IN YOUR FAVORITE PINOY DISHES!

BY KAREN ROJAS

**P**ino Restaurant and its sibling-brand Pipino Veg is now closer to the heart of the city, as its new branch in TriNoma opened in 2020. The Filipino fusion restaurant, popular to residents of Diliman, Quezon City, and foodies who frequent Maginhawa-Malingap Street, now has a wider space that can accommodate more families and groups of friends in their restaurant.

#### Serving Fusion Cuisine Since 2008

Since 2008, Pino has been leveling up our all time favorite Filipino foods and plant-based dishes with modern twists that leave patrons asking for second servings.

Pino Restaurant's name comes from Pilipino or Pinoy, which for the owners means unique.

It is recognized as the "Home of Kare-Kareng Bagnet" by Quezon City residents and Maginhawa regulars, a well-earned title for their best-selling Kapampangan curry with Ilocano crispy, deep-fried, air-dried pork. Its sibling-brand, Pipino Veg, is home to local vegan and vegetarian foodies looking for delicious and flavorful comfort food.

When asked if he thinks Filipinos are more accepting of modern fusion cuisine, Sonny Fortuna, one of Pino 77 Foods Corporation's partners, said Filipino food still has a lot of impact so there are still many that enjoy Filipino dishes on a regular basis.

#### Impact of Filipino Cuisine

Compared to their other venture, Limbaga 77, Pino serves Filipino dishes we have all grown up eating. Only this time, these are served with a twist.

"Filipino food still has such a strong impact. Of course, we support traditional Filipino food and our food fused with food from other cultures," Fortuna said.

It's not only the food itself that the partners focus on, but also how they market the restaurant and make the dining experience at their restaurant one that customers will enjoy and always remember. "[It's] not necessarily 'yung tanggal eh (whether or not people have a liking for the food). It's how to market the restaurant, how to market the food, and the service itself," Fortuna shares.

Buffalo Cauliflower



Mushroom Salpicao





Kalabasa Soup

He says the experience is more important than the food itself, especially since we go to restaurants not just for the food but for the service and experience as well. “The experience is very important, [so the focus is] not just the food. Normally, we go to a restaurant because of the food, but the service and the [guests’] experience tells a lot about the restaurant,” Fortuna adds.

**Plans of Expanding**

Pino currently has two branches, both located in Quezon City. When asked about their plans of expanding to other parts of Metro Manila and beyond, Fortuna says they

are currently focusing on Quezon City, but they are open to new opportunities.

He adds that patrons of Pino should expect more branches coming soon.

**WHAT’S NEW?**

Here are some dishes that you should try when you visit Pino restaurant!

**KARE-KARENG BAGNET**

This is made up of authentic Ilocano crispy pork belly, vegetables, and annatto-peanut sauce. Their oozing peanut butter sauce compliments their white rice. Their kare-kare is claimed to be their best selling main dish.

Php377 SINGLE  
Php777 SHARING

**COFFEE-CRUSTED BEEF BRISKET WITH BISTEK SAUCE**

This mouth-watering dish is made of oven-roasted beef belly, crusted with local ground coffee, with Pinoy beefsteak sauce. If you want to try beef brisket with a new taste, this is a must!

Php577

**MUSHROOM SALPICAO**

This dish features mixed mushrooms sautéed in ground pepper, wine, salt, garlic, and spices. If you’re looking for something healthy, this one’s for you.

Php227

**KALABASA SOUP**

If you want a guilt-free soup, this kalabasa soup is a must-try! This soup of puréed local squash cooked with spiced soy milk is every vegan’s delight.

Php197

**BUFFALO CAULIFLOWER WINGS**

Getting sick of the same buffalo wings? Why don’t you try this buffalo cauliflower dipped in vegetable batter served with hot buffalo sauce? This is surely something satisfying yet healthy!

Php277

You can try Pino Restaurant for yourself, with your friends, or family. You may pair their dishes with their fresh juices that will surely quench your thirst.

For more of Pino Restaurant, check their Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/PinoRestoPH/> and Instagram account @pinorestoph.



Kareng-Kare Bagnet



# People-centric Service

With his 15 years of public service experience, Congressman Dale “Along” Malapitan continues to uphold the family name, ensuring that they are approachable and willing to help.

BY ROSY MINA  
PHOTOGRAPHY ROMEO PERALTA JR.

A regular Thursday at the Malapitan household in Caloocan City is unusual for most—with the home bustling with strangers from all walks of life, bringing forth their concerns to the patriarch, Mayor Oscar “Oca” Malapitan.

“*Labas-pasok sa bahay namin kaya madidinig mo ‘yung mga problema, at kung papaano niya sinusolusyunan* (They freely go in and out of the house. You get to hear their problems, and how he finds solutions to them),” Mayor Oca’s son, Caloocan 1st District Representative Dale “Along” Malapitan, tells LEAGUE Magazine.

The weekly event is dubbed “People’s Day,” wherein Mayor Oca reaches out to more constituents and provides ways to alleviate their situation. It is also a play on their last name, “Malapitan,” which means to get close to or easily approachable in Filipino.

Consequently, being a witness to such initiative and welcoming nature was one of the reasons why Malapitan decided to follow in his father’s footsteps, even if he had no intention of joining politics.

“*Doon sa kaniya ko nakita ‘yung papaano maging isang leader, gaano kasarap ‘yung tumutulong* (I learned how to be a leader by observing my father, [and] the fulfillment in helping others).”

He saw the needs of the people of Caloocan and wanted to help address them, too. Just like his father, who started out as a councilor before becoming vice mayor, mayor, and congressman, Malapitan worked his way up the public service ladder.

At 24 years old, he started his political career by operating his father’s district office. Three years later, in 2007, he won as a barangay chairperson, counting among his constituents his childhood friends whom he played with on the streets of his beloved city.

His experience spanning 15 years also saw him become a councilor and president of the *Liga ng mga Barangay* before being elected as a congressman.

“*Nakita ko lang ‘yung daddy ko, ‘yung masaya siya sa ginagawa niya. Nakita ko ‘yung every day na kahit pagod ka, umuuwi kang masaya kasi nagiging productive ‘yung araw-araw mo* (I saw my father who is genuinely happy in his work. Every day, I experienced going home happy because even if I’m tired, the day is always productive). It is fulfilling,” he shares.

### ‘PEOPLE’S DAY’ AMID THE PANDEMIC

Extending help to Caloocan constituents in various forms, such as medical and livelihood assistance, was at the core of “People’s Day.”

“*Lahat ng kailangan nila na puwede naming ibigay na tulong* ([We took care of] all their needs that we could possibly solve),” he adds.

However, due to the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, constituents trooped to their home more often, turning the weekly “People’s Day” into a daily engagement.

It became so overwhelming, and he shares, “[There were times that] you really had to dive into your own pockets, your own savings [to provide for their needs].”

They also had to relocate the venue of “People’s Day” in order to protect the elders in their household from contracting the novel coronavirus. Because of this, he remarks that the pandemic that began in March 2020 is the most challenging problem he has ever encountered in his public servant life.

“*Kailangan siyempre mag-adjust ka din ng galaw mo dahil kailangan mong mag-ingat dahil siyempre, ayaw mo rin mahawa ‘yung pamilya mo. Pero hindi rin naman pupuwedeng magkulong ka dahil may obligation ka rin sa city mo* (Of course we had to adjust our operations because we had to keep ourselves and our families safe [from the virus]. But you also can’t stay at home forever because you have an obligation to the city).”

Medical assistance continued to be free for as long as the recipient is from Caloocan, and several programs of the national government were brought forth to help displaced workers.

“Many people lost their jobs. [This led to] many going hungry so we prioritized providing food. As for their jobs, we coordinated with agencies and this led to the implementation of the TUPAD programs of the government.”

TUPAD, which stands for *Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers*, is under the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) also has programs to distribute *ayuda* or assistance. One of these is the Assistance for Individuals in Crisis Situations (ASICS).

Malapitan believes that aside from providing assistance to those in need, greater help is done when work opportunities are given to beneficiaries, even if these are menial tasks such as sweeping one’s street front.





*“Importante lang, may ginagawa. Ang mahirap kasi ‘pag puro ayuda, ang tao masasanay na maghihintay lang (It’s important for people to have something to do. The problem with just giving dole-outs is people will get used to simply waiting for assistance),”* he says.

*“Mas masarap kumita kapag pinaghirapan mo (It feels much better to earn money that you know you worked hard for). It’s also important to maintain people’s dignity. They’re not beggars, they can work in exchange for financial assistance and such. They just need opportunities.”*

### UPHOLDING HIS FATHER’S LEGACY

Helping those in need is at the core of the Malapitan leadership, and the congressman says that thinking of those in need truly drives him to carry on. It is the same driving force for his mayoral candidacy this year, as his father is in his last term. And he vouches to continue with his brand of leadership that is straightforward and efficient.

*“May nagsasabing influencer daw ako. Pero ako, ginagawa ko lang kung ano ‘yung nakikita kong kailangan. Tapos ‘yung vision ko lang sa city na gusto kong ituloy, pinu-push ko lang (Many call me an influencer. But for me, I’m just doing what needs to be done.*

And I continue to push for my vision for the city).”

The father of two also assures that there will be continuity in Caloocan should he be elected to succeed his dad.

“Because for me, Caloocan has greatly improved. Caloocan has changed [for the better] under the administration of my daddy. So that is what I want, to continue [his good work],” he explains.

*“Kailangan ituloy kasi magpapalit ka. Kahit gaano kagaling ang pumalit kay Mayor Oca, kung hindi mo itutuloy ‘yan, back to zero eh. Kaya ang kailangan ngayon, ituloy mo, dagdagan mo (It has to be continued*



because the election will change things. No matter how good the successor of Mayor Oca is, if he will not continue [those projects], things will be back to zero. That's why I need to continue his work, and add more improvements.)"

No matter the result of the polls in May, Malapitan assures his constituents of his constant concern and support for them.

"Lagi naman nakahanda akong tumulong sa kanila (I am always ready to help them)," he states. "Kung saan man ako makarating, maging mayor ako o sa ibang posisyon man, hindi mawawala na ang Caloocan magiging priority ko lagi (Whatever happens to me, if I become mayor or end up in another position, Caloocan will always be my priority)."

## GETTING THINGS DONE

Malapitan has no qualms about possibly shifting from a legislative to an executive position, given his 15 years of experience as a politician.

"Enjoy kasi ako sa public service. Mismo na pagtulong eh so andun 'yun, pasok siya sa pagiging barangay captain,



pasok din siya sa pagiging congressman (I truly enjoy public service. Helping others is integral to the job, whether you're a barangay captain or congressman)."

He has had many memorable moments in his political career but considers the first bill that he steered into enactment as the best so far.

"Yun 'yung in-upgrade ko 'yung bed capacity ng (That was when I upgraded the bed capacity of) Jose Rodriguez Memorial Hospital from 200 beds to 800 beds. And then from a tertiary hospital, naging medical center siya (it became a medical center)."

He also puts a premium on education, being the author of free college education at the University of Caloocan City (UCC). Malapitan also authored the creation of the College of Law at UCC as well as the provision of allowances to students of Caloocan Science and Technology High School.

"And then 'pag tinignan mo ang records ng DepEd (Department of Education), magmula dati sa lahat ng mga previous na naging congressman ng Caloocan, ako 'yung may hawak nung record na may pinakamaraming classrooms na napagawa (If you check the records of DepEd, considering all previous congressmen of Caloocan, I hold the record of having most classrooms built)."

As his term as a lawmaker ends soon, he proudly shares that he has passed the bill on having a Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) in Caloocan.

"We are just waiting for the approved bill to be signed into law. We are just waiting for the signature of the President and then we will have a PUP here in Caloocan."

With his accomplishments, Malapitan chooses not to identify a big event or achievement as his greatest or proudest moment in public service. For him, the simple things are just as significant.

"Siyempre every day, 'yung sa akin, basta umuwi akong nakatulong, masaya ako (Of course when I get home every day knowing that I've helped, I'm already happy)."

This also holds true for days when he does not have a busy schedule and would just go around, citing that what matters most is "every time na may nagawa kang nakatulong ka, na alam mong nakabago ng buhay ng tao (Every time that you've done something to help someone, that you know you have changed a person's life)." | ■







# WOMAN LEADER FOR OTHERS

Zamboanga City Mayor Beng Climaco did not choose to become a public servant; the city chose her to be one.

BY GODFREY T. DANDEL

Fate, indeed, has a way of changing the course of even the best-laid out plans. A good example is the story of a Zamboanga City Mayor Maria Isabelle “Beng” Climaco.

“My father told me before not to run [for an elective post] because politics is a thankless job,” she says. “That someday, after years of service, I will walk down the street and people will not recognize me.”

When the opportunity to help the city came knocking, however, she took a leap of faith. That decision proved to be a turning point not only in her personal life but in the political history of Zamboanga City.

## CITIZEN BENG

By the early 1990s, Climaco had found her niche as teacher at her alma mater, the Ateneo de Zamboanga University, where she earned a degree in education before pursuing her master’s degree in family counselling at the Ateneo de Manila University. A few years later, she found her way into mass media, working as a part-time newsreader at a local television station.

Aside from the above, she was also known as an advocate of quality education and cancer awareness. She was, in more ways than one, already serving the city as a productive citizen.

## ANSWERING THE CALL

Climaco describes herself as a late bloomer. “I was very shy. I had been supportive of my father, during the campaigns, making sandwiches, being at the sideline,” she recalls, referring to her father, then Zamboanga City Vice Mayor Jose Climaco. “He would bring me around Zamboanga City, to show me the people and what it’s like to be a public servant.”

“I was fearful because that was a career change,” she recalls feeling as she became a first-time city councilor in 1998. “My life was to change, but I never expected that it would last long. I’m not really ambitious in a sense... I just thought, ‘well, I’ll be a city councilor, that’s it.’ In fact I did not really resign from the Ateneo de Zamboanga,



thinking that I would go back anytime. So my primary career has always been and will always be as a teacher.”

Before she knew it, however, the niece of Martial Law activist and Zamboanga City Mayor Cesar Climaco and granddaughter of suffragist Isabelle Cortez Climaco had been entrusted with being the city’s chief executive.

## BAPTISM OF FIRE

The first few months of Climaco’s first term as mayor in 2013 was eventful, to say the least. Less than three months after

assumption of office, she had her baptism of fire.

On September 9, 2013, a band of rebels staged what eventually became known as the Zamboanga Siege. A faction of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) laid siege on the city and held hundreds of residents hostage as they wanted to declare the formation of an independent Bangsamoro

Republic. The 19-day-long crisis resulted in the displacement of about 100,000 residents and billions of pesos worth of damage to property.

“I would say it was by faith alone that I was able to manage that crisis,” Climaco shares as she looks back on the fateful events that made headlines even abroad. “I look back at the interviews, videos and listen to the recordings and I am amazed at the words that came out of my mouth, very calmly, very sincerely. I really looked at it as ‘Here is a challenge, the magnitude of which we did not expect,

and my penultimate goal is really to save the hostages.' That was what was at the back of my mind, and to take care of the displaced residents. The tools that I had, entering a major crisis, were the tools I could trace back to college, being taught what leadership and service really meant, and that's how I applied inclusiveness, involving our Muslim brothers, respecting the diverse voices of our community, and reaching out to the diplomatic community and international humanitarian organizations."

"That is the reason that even up to now, nine years since the siege, we still have our humanitarian partners continually helping us," the mayor reveals. "We have the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Community and Family Services International (CFSI), all implementing programs for Zamboanga City and Mindanao."

Climaco sees the above-mentioned continuing to play major roles not only in Zamboanga but in adjacent provinces in the years to come. "I have invited them to make Zamboanga City their base because I want that Sulu, Basilan and Tawi-Tawi would also equally benefit. I understand that Zamboanga City is the center of gravity in terms of commercial, economic, educational and health services in the region and we would want to keep it that way because it is one way of protecting ourselves inside our regional bubble," she stresses.

### FOCUS: SHE

Through the years, Climaco has had a holistic approach to addressing the concerns of the city.

"To sum up the three major points of our administration, it is SHE—Security, Health, and Education," she states. "It is gender-fair because if you remove the S, it becomes HE. That is because I am an advocate of gender equity."

She reveals that the city government put in Php2.2 billion pesos in the nine years of her administration, investing on security. The city now has an elaborate command center that enables law enforcers to make use of technology to respond to security and peace and order concerns. A new police station was also built for the city police, aside from being provided with new vehicles, firearms, communication equipment, and Kevlar helmets. As a result, the Zamboanga City police force was adjudged as being number one all over the country in 2018.

To further beef up security, the city has two combat-ready battalions, one each from the Marines and the Army. Together with the Philippine National Police (PNP) and all the force multipliers, these soldiers have made the city a showcase of how peace and order can bring about not just economic growth, but development whose benefits trickle down to the people.

Climaco's efforts to highlight the importance of human security as a pillar of national resilience—as embodied by the





**Mayor Beng's efforts to highlight the importance of human security as a pillar of national resilience—as embodied by the inclusion of human security in resilience programs—has really made a big difference.**

inclusion of human security in resilience programs—has really made a big difference.

“We introduced the human security pillar because we realized that Zamboanga City’s edge has to be staying a safe city in order for investors to come in,” she says. With this, the people’s mindset has changed because “down to the barangays, in the communities, we have asked the people to always be alert, on the lookout for suspicious-looking items and people. This has led us to zero kidnapping, zero bombing, zero kidnapping, and zero piracy incident in the past six years.”

With resources and systems in place, the city government was still able to deliver needed services even at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“In terms of the pandemic,” Climaco shares, “it’s really ‘heal the sick and feed the hungry,’ with the competencies of *curada, comida, busca vida, y vacuna*: cure, food, livelihood and vaccination. These are the four core elements of our pandemic response program.”





The city government, recognizing the need for decisive and proper action to address the pandemic, had to shift resources and focus on pandemic response. Funds were set aside for RT-PCR tests and isolation facilities. Meanwhile, frontliners were provided with the needed equipment and ayuda (assistance).

With regard to education, the city government provided books for learners, ranging from daycare children to college students at the height of the pandemic.

### ENSURING INCLUSIVITY

The city is known as a melting pot of people of different faiths and ethnicities. As such, Mayor Beng made sure to turn this into a positive factor with regard to peace and order and advancement of general welfare among her constituents.

“We have really adopted [the principle of interfaith harmony],” Mayor Beng, who was a principal author of World Interfaith Harmony



Day in Congress, reveals. “We really engage ourselves with NGOs and citizens’ groups. There is ZABIDA (Zamboanga-Basilan Integrated Development Alliance) organization of Father Angel Calvo funded by AECID (Agencia Espanola de Cooperacion Internacional y Desarrollo) and Manos Unidas from Spain. And there is also the Silsilah Foundation headed by Father Sebastiano D’Ambra.”

Mayor Beng takes pride in the formation of the City Interfaith Council. “The City Council passed an ordinance creating the Interfaith Council. We have representatives of different faiths sitting together and charting programs,” she says.

Part of the mandate of the council is to

formulate and recommend policies on various interfaith initiatives; establish and sustain linkages with various faith-based groups; and conduct interfaith activities. “This created a ripple effect of inclusivity,” stresses Climaco. “Our Muslim leaders and even the Indigenous Peoples, such as the Sama Banguingui and Subanen tribes, have been recognized. For the first time in our history, we adopted indigenous peoples’ representation in the council. This has had a very important impact on peace and order.”

Zamboanga City eventually became the first city in Asia to become part of the Strong Cities Network, a global network of local governments working together to eliminate hate, polarization, and extremism in all its forms.



## PROOF OF EXCELLENCE

Not a few awards have come Climaco's way.

She was given recognition by Xavier University in 2013 in relation to the Masterson Award which she received with Social Welfare Secretary Dinky Soliman. This was followed four years later by being chosen by the Philippine Federation of Local Councils of Women to receive the Jesse Robredo Most Outstanding Mayor award.

Also in 2017, Zamboanga City was conferred the Seal of Child-Friendly Local Governance by the Departments of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG). After two years, Zamboanga City became a the lone Philippine City to emerge as finalist in the Child-friendly Cities competition in Cologne, Germany.

Another major personal award came in 2018, as Climaco became part of the All-Female Selection and finalist for the World Mayor Prize of the London-based City Mayors Foundation. This was in recognition of her efforts toward inclusivity in the rehabilitation of Zamboanga City.

In all of the above, the lady chief executive is quick to deflect credit to the people who make up her team, particularly the city government's department heads and the millennials who introduced innovations in the delivery of public service.

## READY TO FACE ANOTHER CHALLENGE

From two-term city councilor (1998-2004) to vice mayor (2004-2007), to two-term congresswoman (2007-2013) and three-term city mayor (2013-present), Mayor Beng has proven her mettle as lawmaker and local chief executive.

Despite her record, Climaco claims that she is "not [a] *sigurista*, that is why it has never been my ambition to become a councilor, congresswoman, vice mayor or mayor at all. I've never really chartered my political career." Still, she is a hundred percent ready to face another challenge, this time as Congresswoman of the 1st District of Zamboanga.

"Given the chance, God willing and with the people's support that I get elected, it will be a very meaningful opportunity because I was eligible for one more term in 2019 but I ran for mayor instead," she says. "So this is a continuation of what I had begun, and I really have my sights on really helping out to finally settle issues [the district is facing]," she says.

Maria Isabelle "Beng" Climaco, public servant, may very well be donning another hat come June 30, but one thing is certain. She will still be offering the "leadership of care, of compassion, and concern for the welfare and benefit of others" that she has demonstrated for more than two decades. | ■



# THE CITY OF FLOWERS

Plenty of natural and man-made attractions can be found in the jaw-dropping City of Zamboanga.

BY NOVIE ROSE O. NUÑEZ

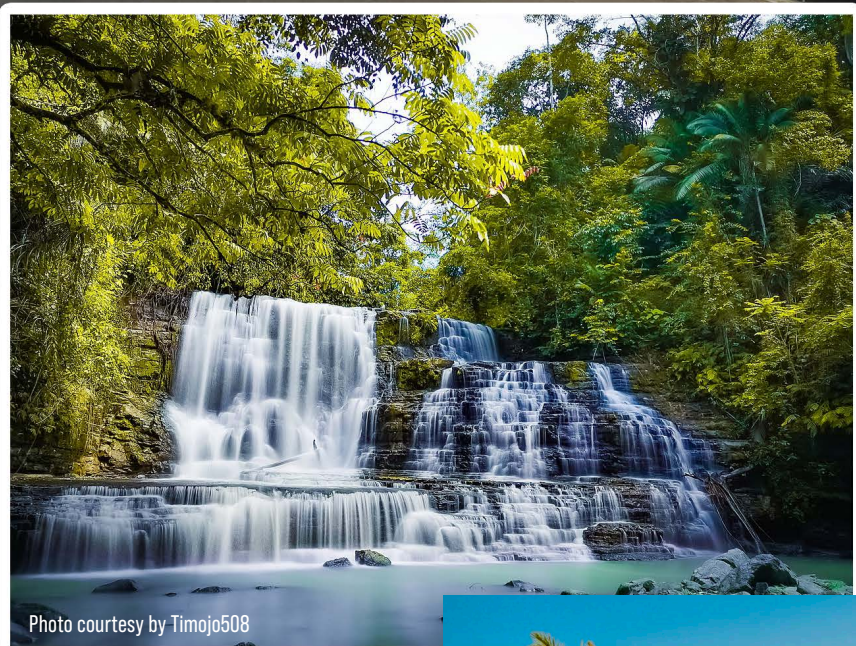
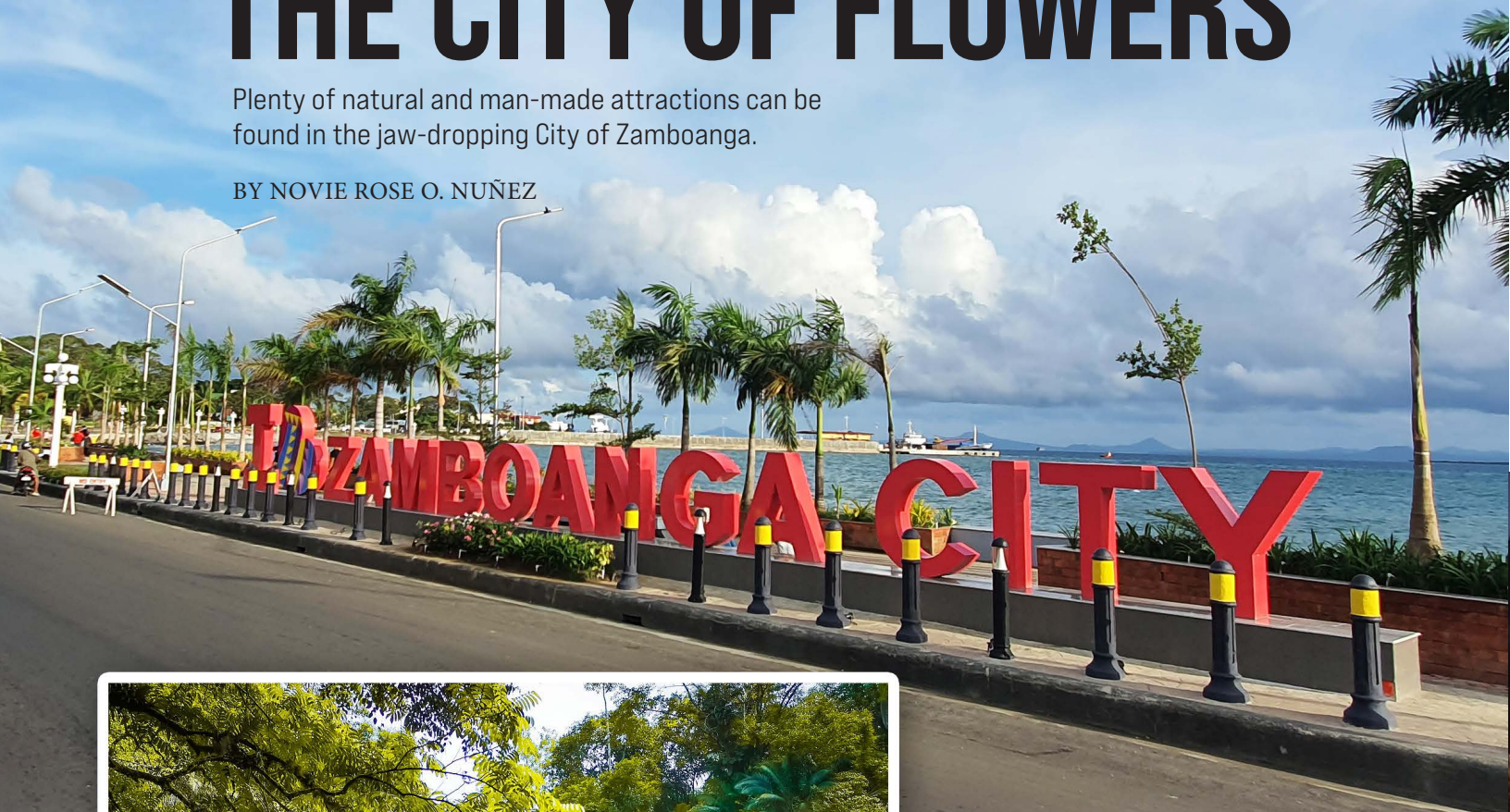


Photo courtesy by Timojo508

## MERLOQUET FALLS

Visiting this scenic waterfalls in Barangay Sibulao, Zamboanga City will require a two-hour travel time away from the city and a 10 to 15 minute downhill hike. But the breathtaking view will not disappoint you. If you are into hiking and have half a day to spare, this is definitely worth a visit. Merloquet falls has two tiers with a height of 10-meters and five meters, respectively. Tourists can climb up using thick rope and tree roots but they must be careful not to slip in the rocks.



Photo Courtesy by RobloxianMoth



### Metropolitan Cathedral

Built in 1998, the present structure of this cathedral was designed by Msgr. Crisanto de la Cruz of Abarro and Associates. Inside the church is the marble statue of Immaculate Conception created by the Philippine National Artist for Sculpture Napoleon Abueva. However, the original statue can be found on the old church's main altar at the parish office. You can also spot stained-glass symbolic images of Mindanao dioceses from 1910 to 1984.

### Pasonanca Park

Pasonanca Park is the perfect family hangout place with three public pools, one of which is a children's pool with water slides. The well-known Pasonanca Tree House can be booked for a minimal fee for special occasions or to spend the night in. There are plenty of things to do to keep yourself engaged as well; several uncommon birds, a lovely butterfly; and lush vegetation. There are also scout training campsites and an amphitheater with various amenities for events or group activities.



Photo courtesy Akhmad Jaafar Albese

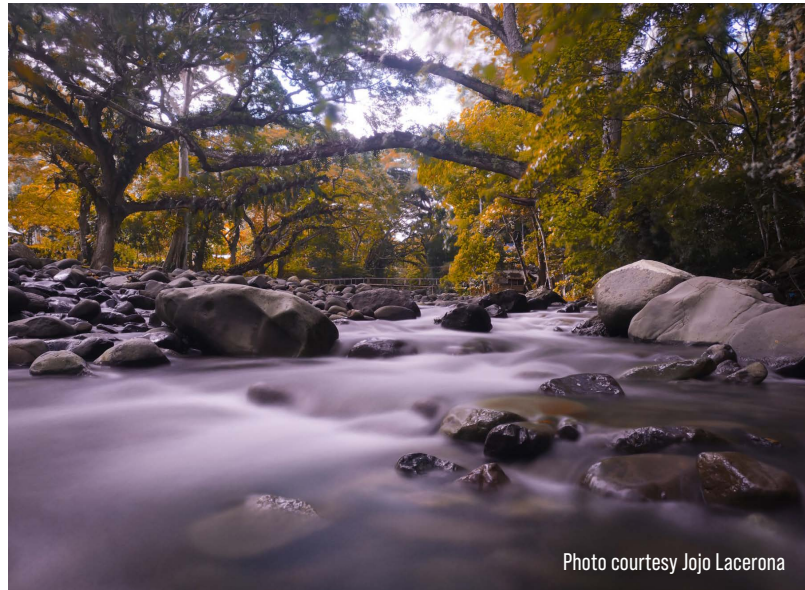


Photo courtesy Jojo Lacerona

### STA. CRUZ ISLAND

Great Santa Cruz Island is a small populated island located four kilometers south of downtown at the Santa Cruz Bank in the Basilan Strait. It is home to the Philippines' only pink sand beach. The pulverized red organ pipe coral from ages of surf erosion blends with the white sand to give the sand its signature pink hue. Sta. Cruz Island is actually composed of two islands. The Little Sta. Cruz is closed to the public and is used as a military base. While the larger island, Great Sta. Cruz features the famous pink sand beach in Zamboanga. It is a small island inhabited by a small population of Badjaos that is open to the general public but only by prior arrangement with the Zamboanga City Tourism Office.





Zamboanga City Economic Zone

### ZAMBOANGA ECOZONE

Although it is still under development to become Mindanao's leisure center, this 60-hectare industrial area now includes a clubhouse, a seminar training center, condotels, casitas, and boathouses. Its facilities include swimming pools for adults and children, a bowling center, a zip-line area, and other recreational facilities. The amenities are open to the public, and picnics, parties, seminars, conferences, and other group events can be scheduled.

### JARDIN DE MARIA CLARA

This lovely garden is one of Zamboanga City's many newly opened tourist attractions. The park, named after the late mayor Maria Clara Lobregat, is home to a variety of butterfly, orchid, and rose species. It also contains a parrot, turkey, and eagle aviary park.



Photo courtesy Wowzamboangacity



Photo courtesy Wowzamboangacity



## PASEO DEL MAR

Located in Barangay Zone IV and only around 30 meters from Fort Pilar, the park has several cement benches and a long boardwalk that runs along the shoreline. When there are visitors in the afternoon, the badjao kids in their boats paddle along the shoreline walks, enticing tourists to toss coins into the sea.



Photo courtesy Zamboanga City Tourism Officer



Photo courtesy Zamboanga City Tourism Officer



Photo courtesy Zamboanga City Tourism Officer



Photo courtesy Zamboanga City Tourism Officer

## HERMOSA FESTIVAL

The Zamboanga Hermosa Festival, also known as Fiesta Pilar, is an annual event honoring the city of Zamboanga's patroness, Our Lady of the Pillar.

The celebrations last for the entire month of October. Among the highlights, this includes a nine-day novena, fashion shows, dance and song competitions, trade fairs, a pageant, and the iconic Regatta, a race of colorful vintas.

The Zamboanga Hermosa Festival is one of the city's and region's greatest and most anticipated events. It exemplifies Zamboanga City's beauty plus its rich and diversified culture and tradition.



## FORT PILLAR SHRINE

This museum is located within the historic bastions of Fort Pilar and is dedicated to the city's patron saint, Nuestra Senora del Pilar. It features the local marine life of Zamboanga and the adjacent islands, as well as underwater archaeological artifacts from the "Grifim," a ship that drowned in the waters northwest of Basilan

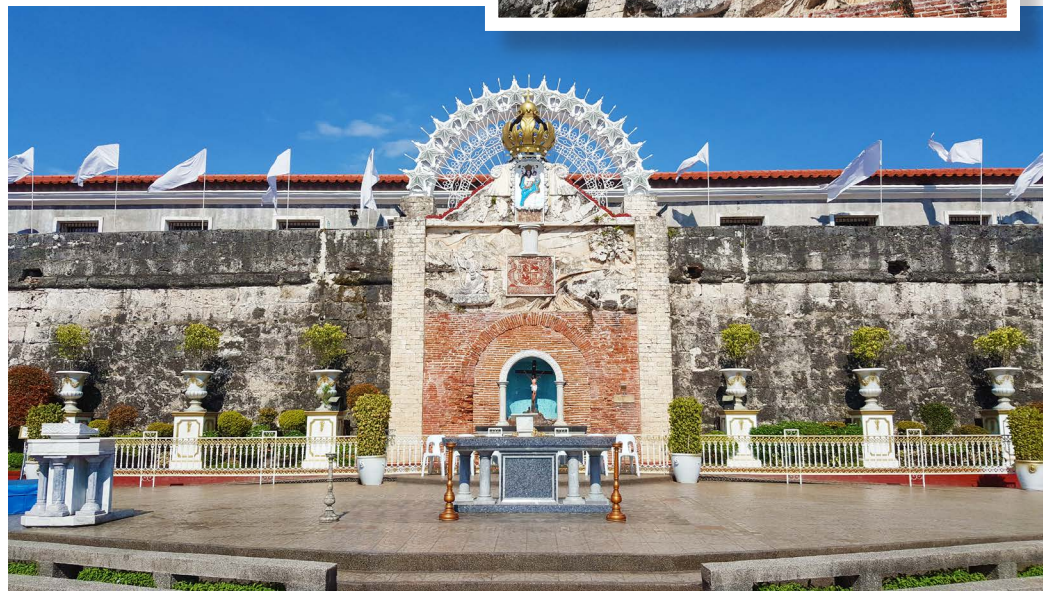


## EL MUSEO DE ZAMBOANGA

Established by city ordinance 378 and first opened to the public in 2012, the El Museo de Zamboanga is located at the Pasonanca Butterfly Garden in Zamboanga City. The museum displays many antiques and antiquities that tell the province's rich history. If you miss seeing a real banca with vinta, one is on exhibit here for you to see up close.



Photo courtesy Zamboanga City Tourism Officer



# REALIZING DREAMS

Struggles and hindrances did not stop Marilao Mayor Ricardo 'Ricky' Silvestre from becoming who he is today, someone constantly serving the people.

BY NOVIE ROSE NUNEZ

Two hours away from Metro Manila, tourists visiting the 1st class municipality will be greeted by colorful and vibrant surroundings. The atmosphere in Marilao, Bulacan can only be described as calm and peaceful, a textbook countryside vibe accentuated by the sunflowers and warm breeze. Beyond the soothing aesthetics of the town, its citizens are just as welcoming, a positive sign that reflects their culture and governance.

## SERIES OF FORTUNATE EVENTS

Behind the current success of Marilao is none other than Mayor Ricardo "Ricky" Silvestre. But before all the achievements that led to him leading the municipality was a life full of struggles.

"Noong 14 years old ako, second year high school, *napilitan lang akong tapusin ang second year sapagkat ang kuya kong marino ay nagkasakit kaya minabuti ko na ako na ang magtrabaho para sa pamilya niya. Tumigil ako ng pag-aaral, nag-gapas ako ng palay, nagtibag ng bato, hanggang sa napunta ako sa construction* (When I was 14 years old, I was in second year high school, and I was forced to stop my education because my older brother who was a seaman got sick and I had to work for his family. My schooling ended, I mowed rice wheat, excavated rocks, and then eventually I hopped into construction)."

Silvestre says that their life was simple back then, he tried almost every manual labor available at the time. He became a carpenter, electrician, plumber, and even mason. Then in 1992, he became a contractor and started his own construction firm, Silvestre Builders.

His luck started to turn after he launched his own business. At the young

age of 19, Silvestre managed to buy a *padiri, pugad ng baboy*, and a rest house. Two years later, he married his wife Maria Luisa.

"So, *'yun ang pinagsimulan natin at nangarap [pa] noong 1994 na magsilbi sa barangay* (So, that's where I started to dream of serving our barangay, in 1994)."

Back then, his vision and ultimate goal was to eradicate drugs within Barangay Patubig in Sta. Maria, Bulacan. He says, "*Noong panahon na 'yon, masyadong malalaki 'yung drugs kaya sabi ko rin sa sarili ko na why not mag-try akong lumaban na punong barangay para ma-abswelto ko naman 'yung drugs na 'yon at ang nangyari doon sa barangay namin noon, nawala yung ganong klase ng droga* (Back then, there were a lot of illegal drugs [in our barangay]. I then thought of running to become the barangay chairman to eliminate the drugs, and [when I was elected], we managed to get rid of the drugs)."

After eliminating illegal drugs in his barangay, Silvestre implemented more projects and programs. He proudly shares that during his first term as barangay chairman, he offered school supplies and medicines to its constituents for free.

"*Naging barangay chairman ako ng labing anim na taon, barangay pa lamang ginawa ko ng libre lahat ng gamit pa-eskwela. Libre lahat ng gamot sa pangkaraniwang sakit, kami lang ang bukod tanging barangay na naglagay ng sariling doktor sa barangay. Sapagkat mahal ko ang kabarangay ko* (I was the barangay chairman for 16 years. I gave free school supplies. Even medicine for common illnesses—it's all free. We were the only barangay that had a doctor on staff. Because I love my constituents)."



## MOVING FORWARD INTO BIGGER DREAMS

Silvestre's love for his constituents, beyond the confines of Barangay Patubig, flourished over time. The beauty of *liwasang pangkalikasan* has been Silvestre's vision since he became a barangay chairman and when he got a chance to realize it in the municipality of Marilao, he then grabbed the opportunity. He says that his vision of *liwasang pangkalikasan* is something he hopes to apply on a national level someday.

In 2019, during his campaigning in mayoral race, he told people, "*Basura niyong nabubulok, ibalik ko sa tahanan ninyo sa pamamagitan ng mga namumungang halaman* (We will use your trash to plant fruit-bearing plants in your homes)."

He adds, "*Ang ginawa ko rito, 'yung lupang mataba, tinamnan namin, pinamunga namin, tsaka namin dinala sa mga kabahayan. Nagtanim ako ng limampu't libong talong, okra, kamatis, sili para siyang ipamigay sa bahay-bahay at sila ay makumbinsi ko [na] ang basura nilang nabubulok ay ihiwalay nila para magamit namin ito [at] para magawa naming lupang mataba. Ganon ang ginagawa natin* (We planted and flowered the fertilized soil, and then brought it to their houses. I planted five thousand seedlings of eggplants, ladies' fingers, tomatoes, chili to distribute to their houses and to convince them as well that they should segregate their waste to produce fertilizers. It's something we do until today)."





**Even after nearly 20 years of public service, he has never forgotten the initiatives he launched in his barangay which he now carries over as a mayor. One of these, as mentioned above, is education.**

Silvestre's movements toward the *liwasang pangkalikasan* benefited not only the environment but also its citizens. Aside from the abovementioned, the town also has a Materials Recovery Facilities (MRF) which, after segregation, wastes are turned into tiles, vases, and pillars.

Livelihood is another proud achievement for the public servant. Silvestre shares that because of this initiative, dozens of Marileños have jobs. He shares, "*Kahit wala silang sweldo sa pamahalaang bayan pero yung nagpipili ng basura, kanila na 'yung makukuha nila. Nakapagbenta ang bawat isa [ng mga] limang libo pataas bawat linggo. Ibig sabihin, kumikita sila ng dalawampu't libo kada isang buwan* (Even if they don't expect salary from the government, but the wastes that they pick, it's all for them. So, they trade it, it costs up to five thousand pesos every week. That means, they are collecting twenty thousand pesos per month)."

Although they do not have compensation from the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Marilao, Silvestre made sure that they are still supported by giving them additional assistance from the LGU like uniforms, gadgets, face masks, alcohol, and boots to keep them from the hazards of garbage and chemicals.

He gratefully shares that they are a huge help in the municipality's goal to diminish the 15 percent waste of Marilao, Bulacan. This is 15 percent of over 7 million waste materials produced by the town. In addition, Silvestre mentions that the LGU has managed to save money by only using over a million pesos budget to collect the waste materials.

#### **AHEAD OF HIS VISION**

*"Kapag ang bawat lugar [ay] maraming mas mahirap kesa may pera, lahat ng bayan nangangailangan ng libreng hospital* (When every community has more deprived than those who has money, then every municipal needs a free hospital)," Silvestre reveals when asked about the biggest concern he faces in Marilao.

In order to accomplish this, he has allocated a budget of Php200 million every year. Silvestre also adds that he is planning to build a hospital with up to a 100-bed capacity. *"Ang talagang kailangang pera ay Php200 million a year. 'Yun ang panggastos mo para mai-operate mo ang isang pang-publikong hospital* (We need a Php200 million annual budget which will cover operational expenses of a public hospital)," he adds.

Silvestre also plans to provide an MRF for each barangay. He explains, “*Para sa ganon sa barangay palang may pagkukunan na ng pera ‘yung mga nandoon. Pwede na sila na bawat barangay ay mayroon silang makuha na 2-3 [percent] na basura* (So that even in a barangay-level, the people will earn money. It’s possible that each barangay will collect 2-3 [percent] of wastes).”

He further says that his initiative in barangays’ waste management was done when the LGU donated a garbage truck to each of Marilao’s 16 barangays. Aside from garbage trucks, Silvestre also purchased 16 ambulances.

“*Sabay sabay kong pinurchase ang labing anim na ambulance dahil ayokong bawat isang kapitan o may sakit tatawag sa Office of the Mayor [para sabihing], ‘Wala pong ambulansya.’ Kung apat ang ambulansya ng Marilao noon, talagang mas-short* (I purchased 16 ambulances in one go because I don’t want a barangay chairman or a sick person calling in my office saying, ‘We don’t have an ambulance.’ If there are only four ambulances in Marilao before, there will be really a shortage).”

## EXPANDING VISIONS

Even after nearly 20 years of public service, he has never forgotten the initiatives he launched in his barangay which he now carries over as a mayor. One of these, as mentioned above, is education.

“*Ako ang nagsimula ng scholarship program sa bayan ng Marilao. Kasi sa barangay namin, may kinuha agad akong scholar. Ang unang binigay ko sa scholar ko ay unang sweldo ko sa barangay tapos taon-taon nagdadagdag na ako [ng budget]* (I started the scholarship in Marilao. In our barangay, I used to have a similar program. The first educational assistance I gave was actually from my very first salary in barangay then eventually, every year, I would gradually increase the budget).”

Through his ingenuity, Silvestre says that this program was considered by then-Mayor Epifanio Guillermo and continued by former Mayor Juanito Santiago. He also shares that when he was first seated in the office, the program only had 900 scholars but now they currently have 1,600 scholars. They are still accepting applications and expect to add 1,500 more, serving more than 3000 scholars in total.

He further explains, “*Ang programa mo, sundan na lang nang sundan ‘yon dahil*

*palakihin mo na lang nang palakihin ‘yung scholar* (You should constantly continue your program because all you have to do is to increase the number of scholars).”

“*Ganon tayo nag-iisip. Kailangan yung isang project ay maging continuous, hindi mapuputol. Kailangan mahaba vision mo* (That’s how we think. It’s important that that one project should be continuous, not unsustainable. You have to expand your vision),” he notes.

## DELIGHTED TO SERVE

Although Silvestre was not raised and born in Marilao, as he is natively from Sta. Maria, he has learned to love the town and its people. “*Paano ko hindi mamahalin [ang Marilao]? Dito ako nagka-pamilya, dito ako nagka-anak, dito ako nagka-apo, dito ako umasenso. Sabi ko nga sa sarili ko, mas mahal ko ang bayan napuntahan ko kesa sa bayan sa kung saan ako isinilang. Kaya mahal na mahal ko ang bayan na ‘to* (How could I not love [Marilao]? This is where I built my family, where we had children, where I had grandchildren, where I became successful. I love this place more than my hometown. That’s why I really love this town),” he ends.





# Traversing Her Unusual Road to Public Service

BY: FREDERICK N. CASTILLO  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
ROMEO PERALTA, JR.

**T**he surname “Amante” is quite familiar in local (Agusan del Norte) and national politics, and Cabadbaran City Mayor Judy C. Amante is exerting the necessary effort to ensure that the legacy of the family name will continue during her leadership. In particular, she finds inspiration from those who came before her as she navigates the challenging responsibilities of an elected public servant.

### UNUSUAL ROAD TO PUBLIC SERVICE

Amante admits that public service “was beyond my wildest dreams,” and that her “passion was always in business—buying and selling.” She was not born into a political family and her background is also not typically characterized as that of traditional politicians. “I grew up a simple girl with no clear ambition in life. My typical lower middle class family could barely provide for our needs. I remember I would even share with my classmate our recess time snack—half a piece of bread and half a 12-ounce bottle of soft drinks. We could only ‘wish upon a star’ for a new pair of trendy shoes.” Evidently, her road to public service was unusual, but even more unusual was her actual foray into the realm of electoral politics.

Amante shares that she met her ex-husband, former Rep. Erlpe John Amante, in college and eventually got pregnant at age 17, while still trying to obtain a degree. Inevitably, the challenges of juggling her responsibilities as a young mother and a student forced her to forego her studies and concentrate on her family. “We had lived a simple life—away from politics—until my ex-husband decided to run for governor in 2004. Even so, I stayed out of the limelight all those years.” Despite Amante’s effort to preserve her marriage, circumstances became challenging when they had their third child, ultimately leading to their separation. “I had to take care of all my children’s needs and attend to all of the important moments in their lives... alone.”

Thereafter, Amante’s world would radically change, as she was thrust into a new arena amidst her personal struggles: politics. In the 2016 local elections, her sister-in-law, then Governor Maria Angelica Amante-Matba, supported her bid to run for mayor against Katrina M. Mortola, who was supported by her ex-husband and, at that time, rumored to be in a relationship with him. However, even the governor’s backing failed to ensure Amante’s victory as she lost by a slim margin to Mortola. Instead of losing heart, the setback appeared to further strengthen her resolve, as she again challenged the incumbent mayor in the 2019 elections. She eventually won by a landslide. Amante says that “God’s time is, indeed, the perfect time. It was truly a sweet victory for my slate as we all won in that election.”

### ‘AMANTE’ BRAND OF LEADERSHIP AND INSPIRATION

Amante confides that her decision to run as mayor was replete with difficulties. “For one, I didn’t have the slightest idea of how to run a city,” she admits. However, she drew strength from the support of her sister-in-law, who did not approve of her ex-husband’s alleged relationship with the former mayor. “She gave me the opportunity to redeem myself from all the shame that controversy had brought us and to correct what was clearly wrong.” Amante adds that her sister-in-law not only guided her while she was struggling in her married life but also served as mentor and inspiration in exploring her leadership potential and ability to serve. “She has not only followed and imbibed the legacy of genuine public service of her parents, but also raised the bar of public service even higher, creating a name for herself and making a brand of public service worthy of emulation, respect, and admiration,” the mayor elaborates.



Despite the difficulties, Amante stresses that challenges have “strengthened our resolve to really create meaningful projects that will help make our people survive during challenging times like the pandemic and the aftermath of a super typhoon.”



Mayor Amante also considered the legacy of her parents-in-law—former Congressman Edelmiro Amante and former Mayor Rosario Malbas-Amante—in her public service endeavors. In particular, she personally witnessed the quality of public service, leadership, and dedication of her parents-in-law. They “had set the bar of excellence in the area of public service,” Amante proudly shares.

#### **REALITIES OF PUBLIC SERVICE**

Meanwhile, winning the elections is one thing but facing the serious tasks that come with it is another matter. Amante immediately met the harsh realities of being an elected public servant once she assumed office. Foremost among these challenges was proving her capabilities and her worthiness of her constituents’ votes. “The biggest challenge that I had to initially face was how to meet the expectations of the people regarding the quality of service and the kind of leadership I could offer. I knew that some of our constituents were still doubtful of my capabilities,” she admits. Despite the initial uncertainties and reservations, Amante immediately buckled down to work, emphasizing that she “cannot afford to slack off, perform lousily, and shortchange [her] constituents in terms of quality and meaningful service.” Her ability to learn on the job was likewise enhanced with the presence of supportive co-workers, who share her vision and goals in governance. Despite her initial success, little did she know that she was about to face the most difficult problem of her months-old leadership.

Similar to all local officials, Amante had to face the raging COVID-19 pandemic as the most serious challenge during her term. Given that nobody was prepared for it and there were no templates for procedures to follow, she and other city officials had to





find ways to better mitigate the pandemic's impact on the people's lives. "The last two years of my term were spent mostly on creating measures to survive and to fight a pandemic, managing meager resources to help our constituents survive on a daily basis," the mayor confesses. Typhoon Odette did not help their situation, as Amante was again forced to address the people's basic needs (i.e., food, shelter) while continuing to focus on pandemic response and local governance.

Despite the difficulties, Amante stresses that challenges have "strengthened our resolve to really create meaningful projects that will help make our people survive during challenging times like the pandemic and the aftermath of a super typhoon." She likens these problems to her personal battles, in that there are silver linings that will enable her city to survive and overcome immense difficulties. In particular, Amante shares that addressing these challenges has honed her management skills on disaster and calamity response, as well as her ability to productively utilize resources, while continuing with normal local government operations.

### PROGRAMS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Amante says that coming from a Chinese family and inheriting her father's meticulousness in investments have helped her scrutinize the effectiveness of programs and projects funded by her administration. "I have always been concerned in the identification of priority programs and projects and also in the completion of flagship infrastructure." Whether concerning social programs or public works projects, she consistently reminds her department heads to take risks "by thinking outside the box in terms of crafting more impactful and vision-oriented programs that will fast track development."

To illustrate, Amante instructed those in charge of the city's production of squash pancit to rethink their pricing scheme, marketing strategy, and production sustainability to maximize the potential of the product. Meanwhile, given that initiatives aligned toward the protection and preservation of the family have consistently been close to her heart, she is also proud of their mass wedding celebrations for those who cannot afford to spend for

weddings on their own. She also supports livelihood programs to provide sustainable income for the underprivileged. "Let's face it, love is not enough to keep the family going; there has to be food on every table to keep the harmony in the relationship."

Equally important to Amante is the city's comprehensive program for senior citizens, which was first introduced by then Mayor now Governor Dale Covera. The program, she explains, represents the city's token of gratitude to its senior citizens. Amante further honed this program when she took over the city government. Among the important components of this undertaking are free daily vitamins, quarterly birthday party for senior citizens dubbed "*Pa-birthday ni Lolo ug Lola*" medical assistance, Php5,000 mortuary assistance, social pension, and Localized Milestone Award for Centenarians (instead of giving a lump sum of Php100,000, the amount is given on a staggered basis beginning at Php20,000 when they reach 86 years old, Php30,000 when they reach 90, and the remaining Php50,000 when they reach 100 years old). The mayor proudly states that "in our city, we have always been believers that we can only be successful in the future if we know how to express our gratitude to our past (referring to senior citizens)."





## FUTURE PLANS

Amante will run unopposed in the May 9 elections, but her focus and priorities remain centered on what she can give and offer to the residents of Cabadbaran City. “I am just on my first term... I honestly feel that there is still so much to be done, so I really want to complete three terms,” the mayor answers when asked about her future political plans.

In particular, she mentions institutionalizing the drive to strengthen micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to provide more opportunities that will lead to the creation of jobs, given that the country is now recovering from the pandemic. The city’s Work Internship Program is likewise addressing students’ needs for the needed work/professional experience before joining the workforce. More importantly, their funding initiatives for agriculture, which include investing on post-production and harvest facilities, will enable them to accelerate the processing of agricultural outputs into reliable income for farmers.

## DRIVEN TO SERVE

Undoubtedly, Amante is a driven public official, and she acknowledges that apart from her children, what drives her to wake up each day and continue with this “exhausting job” is the idea that an entire city depends on her. She explains that “it is important to look after the general welfare of those who entrusted me with their confidence to make genuine change happen being their mayor.” Despite the difficulties associated with being mayor—constant public scrutiny, limited resources, continuously increasing needs of the people—Amante insists that being mayor gives her “the opportunity to change people’s lives, give solutions to their problems, provide them with their needs.”

Overall, Amante says that she is grateful to the people of Cabadbaran City for the trust and confidence they have given her. “As we continue to journey with our *‘Serbisyong Tinuoray, Serbisyong Walang Pili’* (Genuine Service, Service that Doesn’t Discriminate)... I am highly optimistic that this will set a new direction for the way we deliver services to our people.” Given how Amante had adeptly navigated the challenges in her personal and political affairs, Cabadbaranons are undeniably proud that she is continuing the legacy of the family name that is synonymous to public service in their city. | 🗳️

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# As Sweet as Candy

For Candy Medina, being councilor of Quezon City couldn't be more gratifying.

BY GAY ACE DOMINGO

PHOTOGRAPHY ROMEO PERALTA JR.



In the places that she visits, Quezon City (QC) Councilor Candy Medina gets welcomed like a movie star—with people carrying welcome banners and chanting her name, and groups of youth dancing to a hit song to honor her arrival.

*“Kapag dumarating ako sa barangay, feel na feel ko ang love ng mga tao (Whenever I visit barangays, I could really feel the people’s love),”* Medina says of her experience. The long-time QC councilor describes her constituents’ efforts as equivalent to mounting a variety show. *“Sabi ko [sa kanila] ‘Masyado naman kayong production number! Eh, binigyan ko lang ng tent at mga upuan (I said, ‘You really went all-out with this production! I just gave you some tents and chairs).’”*

In the years she’s been serving the city of the stars, Medina has won the people over through her performance as a public servant, particularly through the ordinances she’s successfully filed and the projects and programs for the marginalized sectors closest to her heart, such as the youth, women, LGBTQ+, senior citizens, solo parents, and the unemployed.



## IN THE FAMILY

Observing how she's so comfortable and confident in interacting with people from all walks of life, one wouldn't believe that she was once a quiet young lady who shied away from politics.

"I actually wanted to be a dentist," she reveals. "In my family, I am the only girl who was not exposed to people because of my introvert personality."

But serving in government runs in the Medina family. Candy Medina's grandfather, Rey Medina, and father, Eric Rey Medina, were both councilors of Quezon City. Five of her uncles are in the police force. "Every morning, *nakikita ko maraming tao ang pumupunta sa bahay namin humihingi ng tulong sa Dad ko para sa* (I would see many people going to our house to ask help from my father for) financial assistance, medical assistance, scholarships," Medina relates.

In high school and college, it was inevitable for Medina to join her grandfather and later, her father at their barangay visits and house-to-house campaign activities. Eric Rey also assigned Medina to serve as project director for a few of his office's outreach projects.

## BRAVE DECISION

In 2007, when Eric Rey was on his last term as QC councilor, he had a heart-to-heart talk with his introverted daughter about continuing the family legacy. "*Wala silang makitang papalit sa kanya* (They couldn't identify anyone else taking over his place),"

Medina remembers her father telling her. Plans for her brother, a barangay councilor, to run for city councilor did not push through so Medina—who was barely 24 years old then—ended up running for public office as an independent candidate. In spite of her inexperience and the lack of a political party to back her up, Medina defeated older and more established names—becoming the youngest Quezon City councilor to be elected in 2017.

Right after she took her oath of office, she quickly rolled up her sleeves and buckled down to work, so to speak. Medina says, "*Nag-research ako. Nagtanong ako sa mga tao. Nag-consult ako sa Daddy ko kung ano ba 'yung problems sa barangay* (I did my research. I asked the people. I consulted with my dad on the problems of the barangay)."

## INNOVATIONS

Her consultative style of leadership and service paved the way for programs and projects that were relevant as they are innovative such as the setting up of the Violence Against Women and Children protection center (launched during Medina's second term as councilor) and the creation of the first-ever Quezon City Museum.

Medina is especially proud of the Protection Center. "It's a 'one-stop shop' at the Quezon City General Hospital wherein *merong abogado, doktor, at iba pang key persons na handang humawak at litisin ang mga kaso ng pang-aabuso sa mga kababaihan at kabataan, bukod sa ito rin ang kanilang*

**"When I tested positive for the COVID-19 virus, I was in limbo. I was afraid for my family because they might also get infected, and I was worried about how I could still perform as a public servant and help my constituents cope with the dreaded pandemic."**



*tahanan habang nililitis ang kaso* (there's a lawyer, doctor, and other key persons that are ready to handle and litigate the cases of violence against women and children, aside from this is the safe house for the victims while the case is ongoing). It's a first in Quezon City and in the Philippines and I must say that having this is one of my proudest moments as a public servant."

Aside from the usual scholarship programs for poor students, and cash assistance to indigent constituents, Medina endeavored to implement programs with impact that go beyond the financial dole-out. She coordinated with barangays and parishes to organize mass baptisms and weddings; the latter is particularly special for Medina who is a wife and mother who desires couples to be more blessed. Medina smiles as she explains, "*Kasi for me, dapat lahat happy lalo na sa larangan ng love* (Well for me, I think everyone should be happy, especially when it comes to love)."

### COVID-19

When COVID-19 hit the country, Medina worked harder to provide help to those who needed it the most by distributing personal protective equipment (PPEs) and bicycles to frontliners, thermal scanners to establishments, gadgets for the online schooling of underprivileged students, and groceries to poor families. When supplies ran low, she sought help from friends and associates who willingly donated to Medina's constituents. "*May good friends ako na nag-donate like Mega Sardines and Reva Noodles, and may iba pang friends na nag-donate in kind, mga gustong tumulong sa district* (I have good friends that donated Mega Sardines and Reva Noodles, and other friends also donated in kind, they want to help the district)."



Going around various communities at the height of the surge brought about by the COVID-19 Delta variant made Medina vulnerable to the virus. In spite of strictly adhering to health protocols, the councilor also acquired the disease. She recounts that it was one of the most difficult moments of her personal and professional life. "When I tested positive for the COVID-19 virus, I was in limbo. I was afraid for my family because they might also get infected, and I was worried about how I could still perform as a public servant and help my constituents cope with the dreaded pandemic."

In her period of isolation and rest, Medina drew strength from her loved ones. "Because of the messages of support from my family, friends, loved ones, and constituents, I stayed optimistic and asked God for help. Eventually, I recovered."

### REACHING OUT

The time of sickness allowed Medina more introspection. After battling COVID-19, she emerged stronger physically, mentally, and more so, emotionally. When the vaccination program was rolled out,





she supported the city's vaccination drive and promoted to her constituents to get themselves vaccinated against COVID-19. Medina's district had the most number of vaccination sites and the most number of vaccinated individuals in Quezon City. "Kahit sa Araneta Center, pati sa villages [meron tayong vaccination site]. Meron pang drive-through (Even in Araneta Center and villages [we had vaccination sites]. We also had a drive-through [vaccination site]," Medina says.

Another innovative program that Medina launched during the pandemic was the distribution of food carts particularly to solo parents who lost their livelihood because of the lockdown. This program benefitted around 150 single parents and is also replicated in other QC districts.

For Medina, true service is reaching out to the needy regardless of who they are or, in her case, where they live. "Kahit ibang city or district, tinutulungan ko pa rin (Even if they belong to another city or district, I still help them out)," she says. "Lalo na ngayon na sa Facebook, Instagram, daming nagdi-direct message sa akin, kahit mga taga-Caloocan, Makati, Laguna, binibigyan ko pa rin ng tulong (Especially now with Facebook, Instagram, there are a lot of people sending message to me, even those who live in Caloocan, Makati, Laguna, and I help them as much as I can)."

While she tries to help whenever she could, Medina admits that there are times when she can't. "You can't please everyone. *Hindi mo mapagbibigyan lahat at may sasama ng loob pa rin sa iyo* (You can't help everyone out and some will detest you for it)."

But in general, the impact of her work is more than enough motivation for her to keep serving. "It's really heartwarming to be an instrument of change to many people and I thank God for choosing me to be a blessing to my constituents and vice versa." |



**"You can't please everyone. *Hindi mo mapagbibigyan lahat at may sasama ng loob pa rin sa iyo* (You can't help everyone out and some will detest you for it)."**

# Always for the People

Get to know Marikina City 2nd District Councilor Joel Relleve, who is both a doctor and a public servant.

BY KAREN ROJAS

PHOTOGRAPHY ROMEO PERALTA JR.



Marikina 2nd District Councilor Joel Relleve was always passionate about helping people, thus, he became a doctor. Even as a pre-medicine student, he was always a natural leader, but entering politics was never in the cards. Little did he know, years later, he would find his calling as a public servant.

## THE SPARK THAT STARTED IT ALL

Relleve, who was born and raised in Atimonan, Quezon, describes himself as a “typical *probinsyano*.” Although not the youngest of four siblings, Relleve has always felt as if he were the *bunso* (youngest) in the family, being the last of the Relleve children to finish his studies as a medical doctor.

He took his time pouring in work to establish his own career. While he was focused on being a young medical doctor, he also spent his free time taking gigs as a singer. In one of the events Relleve performed in back in 2010, he met former Vice Mayor Jose Fabian Cadiz by chance, and Dr. Cadiz somehow took a liking to him. After knowing he’s also a doctor, Dr. Cadiz reached out to Relleve trying to convince him to work with him. “*Ang offer niya sa ‘kin* [was] (His offer was for me) to manage all his private clinics,” Relleve shares.

Relleve didn’t even know that Dr. Cadiz had served as vice mayor then. The politician would often call him to ask where he was and suggest meeting as he had a “proposal.” Months later, Dr. Cadiz’s persistence finally bore fruit and Relleve met with him personally in Marikina City. It was only when Dr. Cadiz invited his fellow doctor into his office that Relleve figured out who he was.

During that time, Relleve was not yet based in Marikina but coincidentally, he previously bought a house in the area and was actually planning to move to the city.

Although Relleve had so many responsibilities then, also teaching in universities while practicing medicine, he ended up saying yes to Cadiz. “In 2011, officially, *sabi ni* [former] vice mayor, *bibili raw siya ng L300 na tatawaging Kalusugan*





*Patrol, tapos ‘yung Kalusugan Patrol may doktor na sasakay* (In 2011, officially, the [former] vice mayor said that he will buy an L300 [van] that he would call health patrol, and then that health patrol will be manned by a doctor),” Relleve narrates and laughs as he recalled how Dr. Cadiz told him he would be the doctor onboard. It all started from that, then the *Mega Tuli* project, and so on.

## DECIDING THE FIRST STEP

From the field of medicine to politics, although very different fields and somewhat on opposite ends of the spectrum, Relleve was always ready to take on a challenge for the benefit of the public.

In time for the campaign season in 2013, many saw Relleve’s potential as a politician. But he himself tried not to think about that just yet. As the 2013 and 2016 elections came and went, Relleve heard the encouragement of his peers to run for a position. “*Pero ‘di ko pa pinapansin* (But I paid them no attention),” Relleve says.

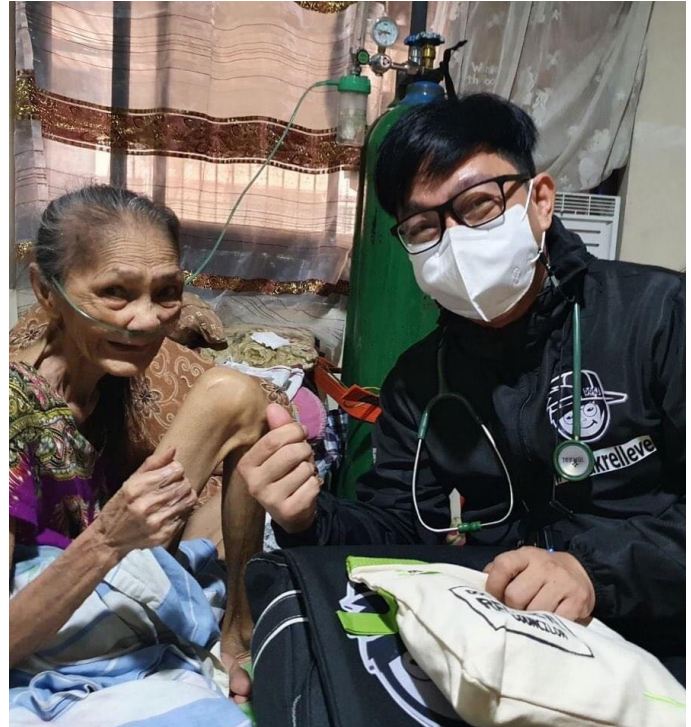
“[Eventually] I started to appreciate the work of Vice Mayor Cadiz,” Relleve mentions. But Relleve had his worries about running, as his family had neither riches nor political background. In addition to that, he wasn’t even from Marikina originally. It was then that Dr. Cadiz assured him to follow in his footsteps and run for a position regardless.

“He always told me, once *Ang taga-Marikina, pag nakita nila ‘yung dedication mo sa public service, mamahalin at mamahalin ka. Same ng nangyari sa kanya* (Once Marikeños see your dedication to serve, they will love you even more.’ Same thing happened to him),” Relleve shares.

Still unsure of his next move, Relleve decided to take up a Master’s degree in Public Administration at *Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Marikina*. When he finished the program in 2018, he finally realized what he wanted to do moving forward.

## GREATEST CHALLENGE

When Relleve finally decided to run for a position and won, he didn’t expect his term would coincide with one of the most challenging in the country’s history, governance-wise.



**“Once Marikeños see your dedication to serve, they will love you even more.”**

“*Kami ‘yung mga pandemic termer eh* (We are the pandemic termers),” the councilor explains. “July 2019, I assumed my post as a newly elected councilor. I very eagerly studied the work [of a councilor]. I worked for the passage of ordinances, I was so idealistic,” Relleve adds.

Sadly, the Marikina community and the local administration’s attention was abruptly diverted—firstly because of Typhoon Ulysses, then the COVID-19 pandemic.

Relleve and the other councilors share disappointment and pressure to up their game and go beyond their job description to serve the people. “The pandemic made people demand more from us. They see you as not good enough if they don’t see you around,” Relleve says.

## THINKING AHEAD

When the national government initiated the lockdown, Relleve was quick on his feet to make sure the vulnerable are attended to. One of his projects, was to give out free prescription medicine to senior citizens. “Senior citizens weren’t allowed to go out during the lockdown, so what I did was I had their medicines delivered to me. Afterwards, I delivered the medicine to their doorstep,” the councilor narrates.

The doctor-councilor also made sure to continue former Vice Mayor Cadiz’s legacy of health-related projects such as free medicine for the public, free check-ups, and regular medical missions. Of course, these are more challenging to implement now that there

are health restrictions to keep everyone safe, but Relleve and his team made sure to plan every detail of the project to ensure that the people continue to receive public service, while also being safe from the virus.

Another problem that they pointed out is the public's hesitation to go to hospitals bearing in mind that they could contract the virus and go home sicker than they initially were. To address this, Relleve started an initiative to provide nebulizers, oximeters, and oxygen tanks to barangays for the use of the community. These are fruits of the councilor's partnerships with various organizations.

As donations came pouring in, volunteers—whose number also continuously increased—made sure that these would reach all Marikeños. “*Bunga ng tiyaga ko sa mga organization ko. Kasi ‘pag nakikita talaga nilang tumutulong ka, mas gusto rin nila tumulong* (That’s the fruit of my perseverance towards my organizations. Once they see that you are really helping, they’re also more willing to extend help),” Relleve says.

Months after the pandemic hit the country, all the projects Relleve started still stand strong and continue to serve the locals. “*Sabi ko nga, mapagbigyan lang ako, hindi ako titigil* (As I said, if they give me a chance [to serve them], I won’t stop),” the councilor assures.



## ADVOCACY

As a doctor and the current director of the Philippine Red Cross (PRC) Marikina Chapter, Relleve is very passionate about highlighting the importance of knowing your blood type. In fact, every time Relleve has the chance to speak and talk about his platforms, he always proclaims “*Walang Marikenyong hindi alam ang blood type* (No one in Marikina is unaware of their blood type).”

From his experience working with the PRC, he noticed a lot of



*“Kalusugan N’yo, Ayudahan Ko!”*

**“TYPE KITA!”**

**HINDI MO LANG ALAM...**

*Alamin ang inyong*  
**BLOOD TYPE**



A Community Project of:

**COUN. JOEL V. RELLEVE, MD**



### SHIFTING CAREERS, SAME GOAL

From being a medical doctor to a university professor, then a public servant, Relleve realizes the importance of people-oriented skills and public speaking. The work he did for each field he has ventured in is different, producing different outputs, but talking with people and building relationships is an ever-present responsibility. It wasn't always easy and he had to learn along the way but it's as if his previous experiences in different setups molded him to be the person he is today. He might have shifted his career but the purpose is always to serve the people.

Hair and Make-up by Jhef Cadion

people needed blood from the blood bank, and as per Red Cross policy, you would have to donate blood in exchange for the bags of blood you will get. But a lot of individuals did not know their blood type and this worried Relleve.

Because of this, the “TYPE KITA... *Hindi mo lang alam*” blood typing census was implemented by Red Cross volunteers led by the doctor-councilor. This program is done per barangay in Marikina City and is open to the public and is often done simultaneous with Relleve's other projects. Blood typing census is a community project spearheaded by Relleve in partnership with the PRC-Marikina Chapter.

“Marikina is a disaster-prone area. What if there's an earthquake, and many of us are brought to the hospital? In triage, since I know my blood type, they will treat me first,” Relleve shares. “*Kasi ‘yang blood type, hindi ‘yan magbabago eh. Pagkatao mo ‘yan* (Because your blood type won't change. That's part of your identity),” he adds.

He became more eager to push for his advocacy when it was announced that the National ID is starting to be implemented. “I heard that they will implement the National ID system, and do you know that one of its components is the blood type? I don't want people to put ‘I don't know’ or guess,” the councilor says.

To add, Relleve shares the importance of knowing your blood type in the context of fatal COVID-19 conditions saying that when you need a plasma transplant, you would first be asked what your blood type is.



A portrait of Jana de Leon, an aspiring Pasig City councilor. She is wearing a light beige suede motorcycle jacket over a white top. Her dark hair is pulled back, and she is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. Her hands are resting on a grey, textured surface in front of her. The background is a soft, neutral-toned wall.

# DARNA NG PASIG

For aspiring Pasig City councilor Jana de Leon, a good leader motivates others to be the best that they can be. "It's not about the power that a leader possesses, but their ability to empower others."

BY LAKAMBINI BAUTISTA  
PHOTOGRAPHY ROMEO PERALTA JR.

To be “*Darna ng Pasig*” is a tall order for Pasig City councilor aspirant Jana de Leon. But it’s also a title that she is willing to live up to.

The past few years, especially during the pandemic, the people of Barangay Pineda, Pasig have seen her in the frontlines tirelessly doing relief operations, even going as far as Tanay, Rizal to provide aid to their relocatees there. She’s been actively supporting her father, Barangay Chairperson Francisco de Leon, in carrying out programs and charity work for their community.

Today, de Leon is ready to take her public service efforts to the next level by running as councilor in Pasig City’s 1st District. It was a path she initially didn’t plan to take, she says. What made her decide to run?

### CALLED TO SERVE

Coming from a family of politicians, the 39-year-old proud daughter of Pasig says she has seen both the good and bad side of politics. Her grandfather, Filomeno A. De Leon, was one of the longest-serving councilors in the city. Her uncle, Fortunato D. De Leon met an untimely demise in an ambush while campaigning in 1989.

Naturally, their family was reluctant when her father, Francisco, decided to dedicate his life to public service. He ran as barangay chairperson in the 2018 elections and won. To make sure that her senior citizen father would get his much-needed rest, the dutiful daughter found herself becoming a regular fixture at the barangay hall. “He was dubbed ‘24/7 Kap’ because he would hardly get any rest. I would help him because I want him to get home early and be able to spend time with my mom,” she says.

This exposure to public service led to a realization. She could do so much more if she is holding a government post in the city. She could ensure that the poor and marginalized have a voice in the political process. “You could easily do charity work. But when it comes to other essential things like crafting ordinances and coming up with programs, these are more easily done when you occupy a certain position,” she says.



### EMPOWERING THE MARGINALIZED

One of the important things she would like to focus on if she wins as city councilor is the provision of livelihood programs to different neglected sectors—especially solo parents, persons with disability (PWDs), senior citizens, and persons deprived of liberty (PDLs).

She shares with LEAGUE her conversation with a solo parent who’s raising three children, one with special needs: “I hope we could have programs aimed at helping solo parents so that they could attend to their children and at the same time, provide for their family’s needs,” says de Leon, who is co-parenting her two kids, aged six and nine.

De Leon also had a chat with a PWD who had lost hope after her feet were amputated.



“She was formerly a security guard. Now, she’s a PWD. She couldn’t land a job and has no source of income. If only we had livelihood programs for constituents like her,” she says.

She says there are also a lot of hardworking senior citizens who only need work opportunities so that they can help their families. “Best example—we have a lot of grandmothers who know how to sew. We could give them opportunities through livelihood programs.”

As for the inmates, de Leon—who used to be a teacher herself—is thinking of providing them with online courses that they can take while they are in jail. This way, they can have a source of livelihood once they have completed their jail sentence.

### **STANDING UP FOR LGBTQ**

A proud ally of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) community, de Leon believes that heterosexual people (those who are ‘straight’) should also stand up for the rights of the LGBTQ community. “*Kung sila-sila lang din maninindigan para sa isa’t isa, parang mahihirapan din sila na ipatanggap sa society ang kanilang ipinaglalaban* (If we leave them to stand up for themselves, they could have a hard time getting society to accept what they are fighting for),” she says.

She decries the lack of aid or ayuda for the LGBTQ sector during the pandemic. “The government always says that heads of family and those with children will be given priority. When will the LGBTQ community be prioritized more? They were also hit hard [by the pandemic]. They are also breadwinners. And their businesses closed down,” she says.



De Leon also hopes that HIV patients will be given more consideration this pandemic. Especially in getting their COVID-19 vaccines, since most of them does not want to disclose their personal information.

The aspiring councilor believes that inclusivity should start at the barangay level. *“Hangga’t hindi nagiging inclusive ang mga barangay natin, hindi natin mabibigyan ng equal access to benefits ang mga tao* (As long as our barangays do not embrace inclusivity, we won’t be able to give people equal access to benefits [due them]),” she says.

### LEADING BY EXAMPLE

De Leon believes that a government leader should be able to inspire others to do more and to dream more. She should be someone that people would like to talk to and listen to. “She should speak in such a way people would love to listen to her and listen in such a way people would love to speak to her,” she says. *“Hindi sila mahihiyang lapitan ka kasi alam nila makikinig ka* (They won’t think twice about approaching you since they know that you’d listen),” she says.

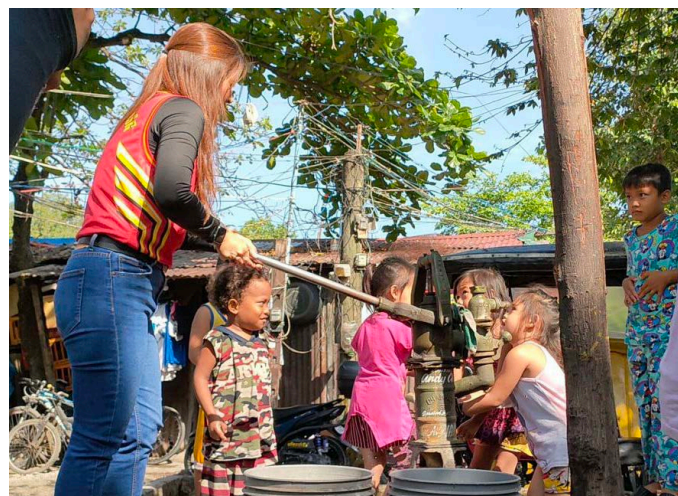
As a member of the Philippine Army Reserve Force, de Leon would also like to encourage the younger citizens of their city—especially out of school youth and drug surrenderees—to undergo the Basic Citizen’s Military Training. “I believe in the discipline that the Philippine Army has instilled in us soldiers. And I think if we could do the same with drug surrenderees, we could keep more youngsters away from drugs. With this, we will be able to slowly but surely improve the peace and order situation in Pasig,” she says.

A good leader motivates others to be the best that they can be. “It’s not about the power that a leader possesses, but her ability to empower others. You can only call yourself successful if you lead others to success. If you could not help people to improve their situation, then you are not a good leader but just a boss. *Para sa akin hangga’t hindi ko po natutulungan ang mga taong nasa likod ko, ilalim ko at nasa tabi,* (Unless I could help those behind me, below me, and those on the sidelines,) then I cannot call myself a good leader,” she says.

The would-be councilor fervently believes that there is a need for women to be represented in government. “I think we need to balance the city council. *Hindi puwedeng puro lalaki lang ang [bubuo sa] council. Iba pa rin po ang may boses ng kababaihan. Iba ang may puso ng babae, iba rin po ang may puso ng nanay* (We couldn’t have an all-male council. One that carries the voice of women could make a difference. A [council member that has] a woman’s heart, a mother’s heart, could make a difference,)” she says.



**A good leader motivates others to be the best that they can be. “It’s not about the power that a leader possesses, but her ability to empower others. You can only call yourself successful if you lead others to success. If you could not help people to improve their situation, then you are not a good leader but just a boss.**



De Leon urges Pasigueños to never let their idealism waver and to continue dreaming bigger dreams. *“Nakakalungkot na tinanggap na lang natin kung ano ang traditional way, kung ano normal na nakasanaan. Hindi dapat ganito. Ang mensahe ko sa Pasigueño ay patuloy sana tayong magmithi ng mas maganda, mas maayos at nagkakaisang gobyerno* (It is saddening that we just accept the traditional way, what’s considered normal. This shouldn’t be the case. My message to Pasigueños is to continue advocating for a better, cleaner government),” she says. | ■

THOUGHT LEADER

WAR IN EUROPE:

# The Russian Invasion of Ukraine

BY HERMAN JOSEPH S. KRAFT





The world was rocked by the news on February 24, 2022 that Russia had launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Even after weeks of warnings from western intelligence sources of the likelihood of Russian military forces crossing the border into the territory of Ukraine, as well as warnings from the government of President Vladimir Putin of Russia about the need to act against Nazi political forces in the government of Ukraine and the genocide being perpetrated against ethnic Russian population in the Donbas region, it was still an event that caught most people around the world by surprise. Nonetheless, the response was not long in coming as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) overwhelmingly adopted a resolution on March 2, 2022 demanding that Russia immediately end its military operations in Ukraine. Together with nearly 150 countries, the Philippines voted in favor of the resolution and even strongly expressed its “explicit condemnation of the invasion of

Ukraine.” President Rodrigo Duterte has since then emphasized the need for the Philippines to remain neutral in the conflict, even noting the danger of an escalation into a nuclear war (and the subsequent possibility of a Chinese invasion—though he did not clarify what he meant here). This expression of the need to remain neutral in the face of this conflict, however, tends to confuse the issue. More so as arguments about how different or not is the action of Russia from past invasions and military actions by the United States (US).

### CONFLICT AFTER “THE LONG PEACE”

The Philippines has together with most of the world had to deal with the consequences of the war in Ukraine and the far-reaching effects of what many had thought unlikely—a war in Europe. Since the end of the Second World War, European states had largely been able to manage their relationships in a way that made war between them less and less likely and nearly unthinkable. In fact, the academic literature on International Relations had taken to describing the Cold

War in Europe as the period of “the Long Peace.” The conflict that led to the dismemberment of Yugoslavia is not part of this analysis (although, in its own way, it shook European complacency about the peace dividend following the collapse of the Soviet Union) because it started out as a civil war that gave birth to new states. Russia’s self-declared “special military operations” against Ukraine was the first time that one state had conducted a “full scale military invasion” of another sovereign state in Europe since the end of the Second World War.

### SPILL-OVER CONSEQUENCES

The point about wars in Europe is their tendency to have spill-over consequences into different parts of the world. The two World Wars of the 20th century have their origins in European conflicts. In the current case of the war in Ukraine, the economic sanctions imposed on Russia by Western Europe and the United States (as well as other major economic powers

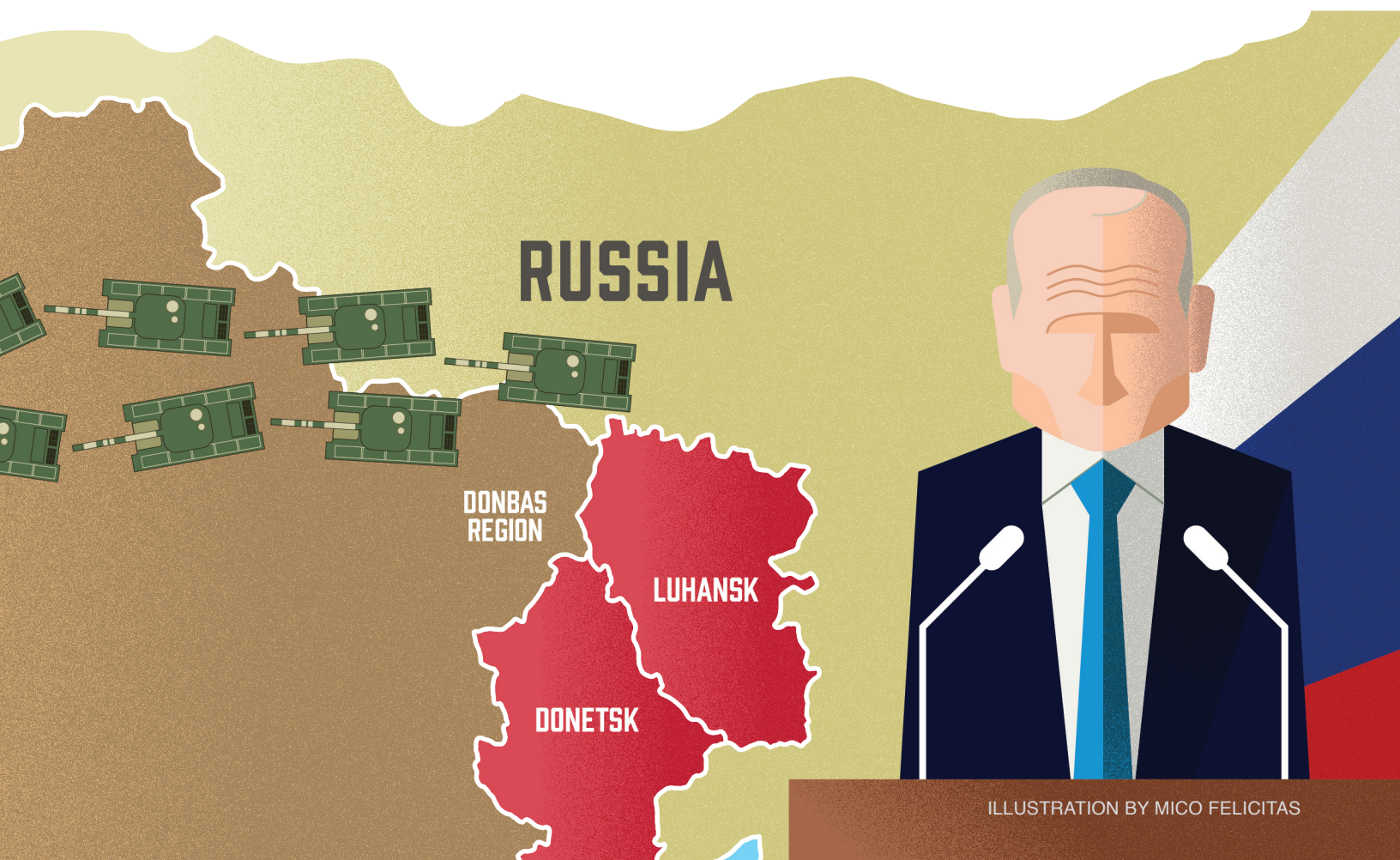


ILLUSTRATION BY MICO FELICITAS

around the world) have had an impact on oil and gas prices as well as supply chains of key mineral and other resources needed in manufacturing and agricultural production across the world. European wars tend to have ramifications well beyond the continent.

More significantly for countries like the Philippines, however, are the implications of a great power justifying military action against a smaller country and violating its sovereignty for reasons of its own security. In his book *Destined for War* (2017), Graham Allison used the explanation given by the ancient Greek historian Thucydides for the origins of the Peloponnesian War as a parallel for great power dynamics between an emergent China and the threat it poses to the hegemonic position of the US in regional, if not global, politics. There is another aspect of Thucydides' history of that ancient war, however, that resonates in the case of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This has to do with the justification given by Athens for not allowing the small state of Melos to remain neutral in its war with Sparta. Either it took the side of Athens or would be considered as a threat that Athens had to address. In one of the most infamous passages from what became known as the *Melian Dialogue*, the Athenians boldly stated to the magistrates of Melos that there was no point in any discussion about rights since "right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power." Ultimately, the passage quoting the representatives of the Athenians declares that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."

The official statements from the Russian government justify their "special military operations" against Ukraine in terms of the need to "de-Nazify" Ukraine's government and to act against the genocide being perpetrated in the Donbas region. The Donbas region is a part of Ukraine which has significant parts controlled by pro-Russian and anti-government forces that have been involved in an armed secessionist movement since 2014. The self-declared Luhansk People's Republic and the Donetsk People's Republic never received international recognition until Russia did in 2022. The conflict in the region, however, has been going on for eight years with a casualty count that has been estimated at around 14,000 having been killed being mentioned in the Philippine statement delivered at the UNGA. This conflict has been at the core of the claim of genocide directed against the Ukrainian government and which was one of the justifications given for Russia's invasion.

Underlying all these, however, is the paranoia affecting the Russian government regarding the provision in the Ukrainian

## **Yes, US military adventurism in the past seems to bespeak the hypocrisy of its criticisms of Russia's present actions. Nonetheless, this should not prevent clear-thinking people from understanding that the situation is not about the positioning of the great powers against each other, and scoring propaganda points against each other.**

constitution about joining the European Union (EU), and the application to be a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) that has been part of Ukrainian foreign policy since 2014. For Russia's Putin, admission into NATO of Ukraine extends the common border between NATO and its member states with Russia. Russia has accused NATO of encouraging Ukraine to join up in order to force Russia into a position of geopolitical disadvantage in its dealings with NATO. It seems though that this is a narrative that is being encouraged by Russia with very little evidence behind it. Ukraine has been interested in joining NATO, but the official response from the latter has been tepid at best. It was recognized within the leadership of NATO that admitting Ukraine would make relations with Russia even worse than it was.

Nonetheless, Ukraine's application to join NATO is something that as a sovereign state it is entitled to decide on. Does it increase Russian insecurity? Maybe so, if the Russian government chooses to look at it that way. Does it justify military action? This is the crux of the issue. It could have chosen to negotiate with Ukraine and continued negotiating even in the face of Ukrainian intransigence. Instead, it chose to act like Athens and forced Ukraine to accede to its demands or face its consequences. The demands of its own security trumped Ukraine's interests and its rights as a sovereign country.

### **COMPARISONS WITH US ACTIONS**

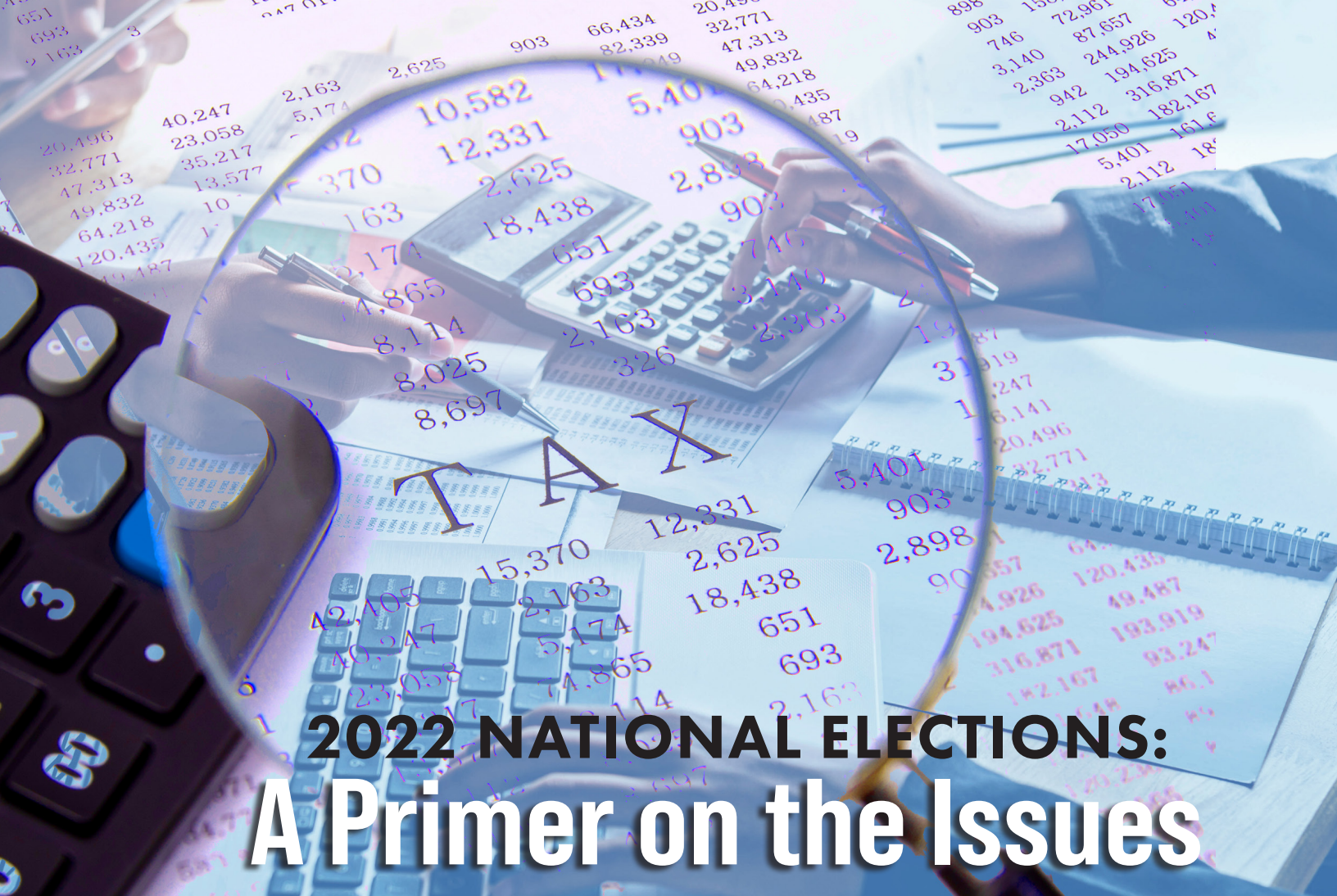
The question of comparisons with US justifications and eventual actions against those that it perceived to be threats to its security has also been bandied about. If the argument here is that US actions against states like Iraq and Afghanistan (and others in the past decades since the end of the Cold War) excuse Russia's own action against Ukraine, then the argument reinforces the idea of the great powers being exceptional and their actions explained in terms of their security as sufficient justification to run roughshod over the interests of smaller and weaker states. It could be argued that

the US was wrong then, and that there is a significant amount of hypocrisy involved in criticisms directed at Putin's Russia (or should that be Russia's Putin?). This, however, is beside the point.

Even in the face of US hypocrisy, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is inexcusable. The amount of destruction wrought on historic cities like Kharkiv, Mariupol, and Kyiv belies claims of understated objectives and military activities. Explaining military failure in the face of "Nazi" fanaticism in an attempt to put its version of the story across does not change the fact of the destruction that a war that Russia had initiated has and continues to wreak. This does not even include the human cost of the war, particularly in terms of civilian deaths. The human tragedy, however, can already be seen just in the number of refugees who have fled to Poland and the other countries neighboring Ukraine. Just taking the example of Palestine into consideration, these kinds of consequences reach out across time and across generations. It took Europe more than two generations to cut the cycle of conflicts arising from *revanchism*, or actions arising from a policy designed to recover lost territory or status.

Yes, US military adventurism in the past seems to bespeak the hypocrisy of its criticisms of Russia's present actions. Nonetheless, this should not prevent clear-thinking people from understanding that the situation is not about the positioning of the great powers against each other, and scoring propaganda points against each other. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is wrong regardless of the US. Ukrainians fighting for their sovereignty against a foreign invader should be exhorted. Filipinos should understand that this is not just a war in a far away country that does not directly impact us. In the face of intensifying great power dynamics in our part of the world, we should understand what lessons we should learn from Ukraine. Sovereignty is not to be taken lightly, and Ukraine's fight in this context should be our concern. | ■

*Herman Joseph S. Kraft is a University of the Philippines (UP) Professor and Chair of the Department of Political Science.*



# 2022 NATIONAL ELECTIONS: A Primer on the Issues

BY ATTY. JOSE MARIA B. SANTOS AND ATTY. KATRINA CRISTA M. ARTIAGA

**E**lection season has always been an exciting time for any country. In the Philippines, however, the stakes seem higher, and the atmosphere grows more intense with each moment we come closer to election day.

For the candidates, glory awaits those who win, while political persecution is expected to follow those who lose. The atmosphere is not less interesting for the electorate as election season often brings out the best and sometimes the worst in the voting population. A diverse political landscape this 2022 has certainly led to colorful, if not toxic, political discourse between friends and strangers alike.

This article hopes to shed light on some of the legal issues which have been raised against certain candidates in the upcoming 2022 national elections.

## DISQUALIFICATION OF CANDIDATES

In every election season, petitions for disqualification of candidates are filed left and right. A petition for disqualification may be filed by any individual of voting age, or duly registered political party, organization or collation of political parties,<sup>1</sup> who believe that a candidate should not be one of the choices in the upcoming elections.

The legal basis for disqualification is found in Section 12 of the Omnibus Election Code which provides that “any person who... has been sentenced by final judgment... for any offense for which he has been sentenced to a penalty of more than eighteen (18) months or for a crime involving moral turpitude, shall be disqualified to be a candidate and to hold any office, unless he has been given plenary pardon or granted amnesty.”

While there are several grounds for disqualification, we shall focus our discussion on disqualification based on a candidate having been sentenced by final judgment for a crime involving moral turpitude.

This is for readers to understand what exactly is meant by the term “moral turpitude” and how it may affect the upcoming elections and even beyond.

## WHAT IS MORAL TURPITUDE?

Moral turpitude has been defined to mean everything which is done contrary to justice, modesty, or good morals; an act of baseness, vileness or depravity in the private and social duties which a man owes his fellowmen, or to society in general, contrary to justice, honesty, modesty or good morals.<sup>2</sup>

Through the years, there has been a noticeable shift in the Supreme Court’s appreciation of what constitutes a crime involving moral turpitude.

In a 1979 decision,<sup>3</sup> the Supreme Court held that “moral turpitude implies something immoral in itself, regardless of the fact that it is punishable by law or not. It must not merely be *mala prohibita*, but the act itself must be inherently immoral. The doing of the act itself, and not its prohibition by statute fixes the moral turpitude. Moral turpitude does not, however, include such acts as are not of themselves immoral but whose illegality lies in their being positively prohibited.” Essentially, the Supreme Court’s basis for determining moral turpitude was whether the crime was *mala in se* or *mala prohibita*.

However, in later cases, the Supreme Court re-assessed its previous decision and ruled that the question of what constitutes moral turpitude cannot be solely determined by classifying the act as being either *mala in se* or *mala prohibita*. The Supreme Court went on to explain that there are crimes which are *mala in se* and yet rarely involve moral turpitude and there are crimes which involve moral turpitude and are *mala prohibita* only.<sup>4</sup> The Supreme Court thus declared that the meaning of moral turpitude should ultimately be left to sound judicial

discretion depending on the circumstances of each case.<sup>5</sup>

Given the foregoing, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) must be guided by recent Supreme Court decisions to resolve petitions for disqualification based on a candidate's conviction of a crime involving moral turpitude. Even then, whatever the COMELEC decides on may still be subject to further review and ultimately be decided by the Supreme Court.

## MALA IN SE AND MALA PROHIBITA CRIMES

In the previous section, we discussed that crimes involving moral turpitude have been determined based on their classification as either a *mala in se* or a *mala prohibita* crime. But what do these concepts mean?

Acts *mala in se* are those that are inherently wrong or immoral, while acts *mala prohibita* are those not inherently wrong but are punishable because a law forbids their commission. In *mala in se*, intent governs; while in *mala prohibita* the only inquiry is whether the law was violated.<sup>6</sup> In *mala prohibita*, when an act is illegal, the intent of the offender is immaterial.<sup>7</sup>

An example of a *mala in se* crime is murder under the Revised Penal Code, while an instance of *mala prohibita* is carnapping under the New Anti-Carnapping Act of 2016.

A lot of people assume that crimes under the Revised Penal Code are *mala in se*, while those under special penal laws are automatically *mala prohibita*. This is inaccurate. The Supreme Court has already ruled that plunder, which is a crime under a special penal law, is a heinous offense which makes it *mala in se*.<sup>8</sup> The Court has likewise also ruled that technical malversation under the Revised Penal Code is a *mala prohibita* crime.<sup>9</sup>

## TAX MATTERS

Perhaps the most often-quoted principle in taxation law is that taxes are the lifeblood of the government. Thus, taxes must be collected without unnecessary hindrance.<sup>10</sup> As a result, when a taxpayer refuses to pay his/her taxes or fails to file his/her annual Income Tax Return (ITR), there are consequences for its violation under the National Internal Revenue Code (NIRC). Indeed, our government has all the resources to run after erring taxpayers if it wanted to, so long as due process and proper procedure are followed.

## ESTATE TAX

Estate tax is a type of national internal revenue tax that is not commonly heard of by ordinary individuals. By definition, estate tax is a tax charged on the privilege of transmitting property upon the death of an individual. It is not a tax on an individual because the owner of the estate is already deceased. The responsibility, therefore, of paying estate tax falls on the executor, administrator or the legal heirs of the deceased upon the filing of the estate tax return.<sup>11</sup> Failure of any of these individuals to pay the estate tax makes them criminally liable under Section 255 of the NIRC.

Some pundits have opined that if one has unpaid taxes then his wealth could never be "ill-gotten." In other words, unpaid taxes mean legal sources of income. This argument is wrong and baseless.

In taxation law, income derived from whatever source,<sup>12</sup> whether legal or illegal, forms part of a taxpayer's gross income and is thus taxable. This means that ill-gotten wealth, once discovered as being under a claim of ownership by an erring taxpayer, is always taxable.

## ENFORCEMENT AND COLLECTION

The unfortunate reality, however, is that several erring taxpayers, particularly those with the right connections and deep pockets, have faced minimal consequences for their actions.

On this point, several people have questioned why the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), the government agency primarily charged

with assessing and collecting taxes, has been inefficient in running after erring taxpayers, particularly those with political influence.

At the outset, the BIR should not shoulder this heavy burden alone. It must be pointed out that the BIR is not wholly equipped with the proper legal authority and resources to directly run after every erring taxpayer. The BIR does not even have the power to issue warrants of arrest,<sup>13</sup> so it cannot, on its own whims, arrest any person who fails to pay their taxes. At most, the BIR can only file criminal complaints against erring taxpayers before the Department of Justice (DOJ) for their violations of the NIRC. The DOJ can then prosecute the case before the appropriate court.

All in all, the BIR and the DOJ, along with the courts, have to work hand-in-hand in running after taxpayers who have been remiss in their duties in paying taxes. It is thus imperative for the government to apply the law equally to all, so as to avoid criticisms from the public that they have promised to serve.

## RELEVANCE TO THE 2022 ELECTIONS

The foregoing concepts have been at the forefront of the discussion surrounding the 2022 national elections. These issues have hounded one presidential candidate who was previously convicted for non-filing of his ITR which was used by several parties to file a petition for disqualification with the COMELEC. These petitions alleged that non-filing of an ITR is a crime of moral turpitude which should disqualify one from running as president.

The COMELEC dismissed several of these petitions for disqualification and ruled that non-filing of one's ITR is not considered *mala in se* and is therefore not a crime involving moral turpitude that could disqualify a presidential candidate. The COMELEC First Division's decision cited the 1979 case of Zari v. Flores,<sup>14</sup> which held that "moral turpitude implies something immoral in itself, regardless of the fact that it is punishable by law or not. It must not merely be *mala prohibita*, but the act itself must be inherently immoral."

Those who seek a reversal of the COMELEC decision might refer to the more recent case of ABS-CBN Corporation v. Gozon,<sup>15</sup> where the Supreme Court held that the determination of whether a crime involves moral turpitude cannot be limited to the question of whether the crime is *mala in se* or *mala prohibita*. At any rate, the question of which crimes involve moral turpitude depends on the facts of each case and is ultimately for the Supreme Court to determine.<sup>16</sup>

1. Part V, Rule 25, COMELEC Rules of Procedure.

2. *International Rice Research Institute v. National Labor Relations Commission*, G.R. No. 97239, 12 May 1993.

3. *Zari v. Flores*, A.M. No. (2170-MC) P-1356, 21 November 1979.

4. *International Rice Research Institute v. National Labor Relations Commission*, G.R. No. 97239, 12 May 1993.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Calleja v. Executive Secretary*, G.R. Nos. 252578, 07 December 2021.

7. *Department of Finance-Revenue Integrity Protection Service v. Enerio*, G.R. No. 238630, 12 May 2021.

8. *Estrada v. Sandiganbayan*, G.R. No. 148560, 19 November 2001.

9. *Ysidoro v. People*, G.R. No. 192330, 14 November 2012.

10. *Commissioner of Internal Revenue v. Algue, Inc.*, G.R. No. L-28896, 17 February 1988.

11. Title III, Chapter 1, Sec. 91(A), National Internal Revenue Code.

12. Section 32(A), National Internal Revenue Code.

13. Title I, National Internal Revenue Code.

14. A.M. No. (2170-MC) P-1356, 21 November 1979.

15. G.R. No. 195956, 11 March 2015.

16. *Dela Torre v. Commission on Elections*, G.R. No. 121592, 5 July 1996.

*Atty. Jose Maria B. Santos joined GSE Law Firm's Litigation, Labor, and Immigration Practice Groups in June 2019. In law school, he interned at ACCRA Law, Romulo Mabanta Buenaventura Sayoc & De Los Angeles Law, and Garay Law Office. Santos previously worked as an associate at Gatmaytan Yap Patacsil Gutierrez and Protacio Law Firm. He earned his Juris Doctor degree from the Ateneo de Manila University and Bachelor of Science degree in Legal Management from the De La Salle University. Santos was admitted to the Bar in 2018.*

*Atty. Katrina Crista M. Artiaga*

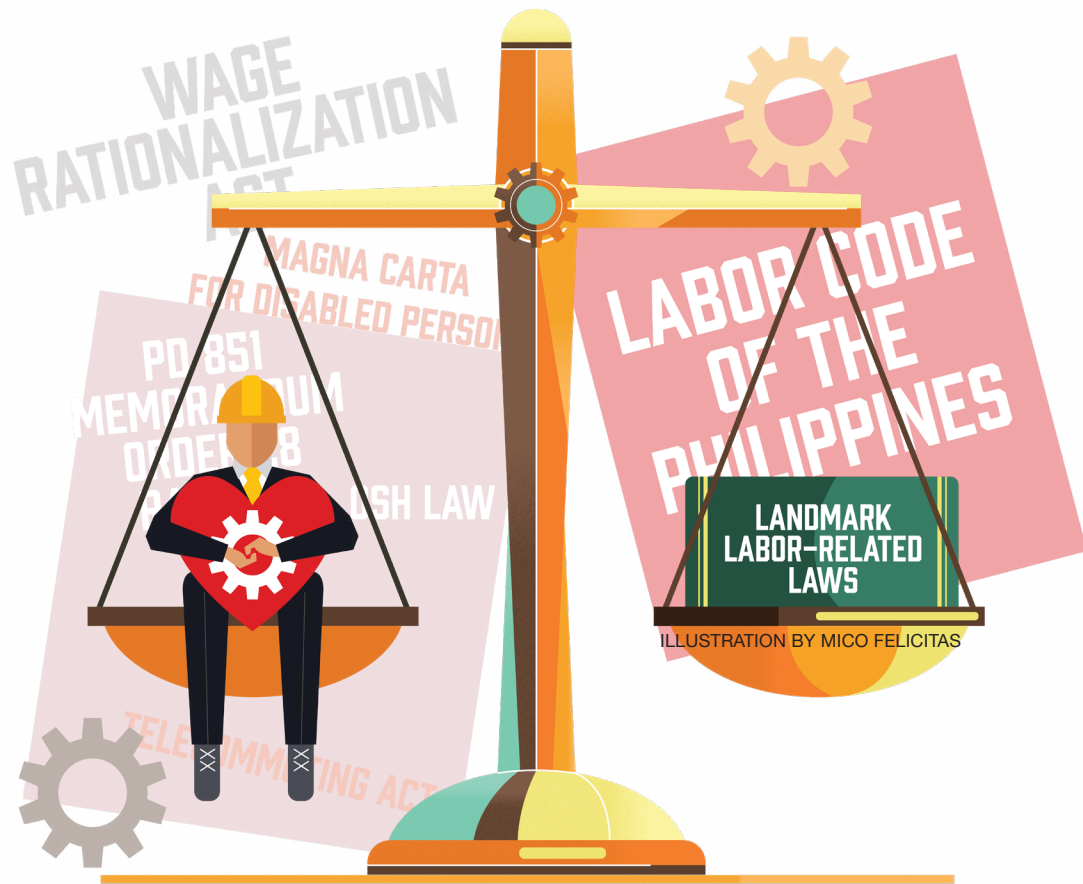


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# LABOR OF LOVE FOR LABOR: Landmark Labor Laws in the Philippines

BY FREDERICK N. CASTILLO

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly exposed the labor sector as among the most vulnerable sectors in the country. Factories shutting down, scaled-down operations, massive retrenchment, and job losses, and even displaced workers begging on the streets are heartbreaking experiences that the labor sector had to endure and is still enduring more than 2 years into the global health crisis. However, as restrictions are lifted and the majority of the country is now on Alert Level 1, a semblance of “normalcy” is gradually happening, although workers are particularly the first to admit that they are far from going back to their pre-pandemic, normal situation.

Despite the seemingly dire situation, workers have historically pursued reforms to uplift their lives and livelihood, mostly bringing their causes and ideologies to the streets, through mass actions directed toward the government. Inevitably, the long years of this “labor of love for labor” have likewise resulted in the passage of landmark laws to ensure their productivity and dignified way of life.

## LABOR MOVEMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES

The country’s labor sector has consistently been at the forefront of the movement and struggle to provide quality jobs to Filipinos, and

more importantly, to uphold and protect the rights of workers. The formal labor movement in the country can be traced to the American colonial period, when Isabelo de los Reyes unified various labor groups with the establishment of *Union Obrera Democratica Filipina* on February 2, 1902.

The organization is considered the first modern trade union in the country, and was founded on the following goals: improve working conditions through protective labor legislation, locate work for the unemployed and assist their families, provide free education for workers’ children, assist sick members and those in distress, and emancipate workers through saving and related projects. Eventually, the union evolved to become part of a much larger movement that worked for the country’s independence.

Between the founding of *Union Obrera Democratica Filipina* in the early 1900s and the present time, thousands of labor unions, federations, and organizations have been established with the objective of assuming the responsibility of championing the cause of labor and laborers nationwide. Among these groups are the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines, *Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino*, and *Kilusang Mayo Uno*. In general, these groups and the millions of workers toiling daily have directly

and indirectly contributed to the effort to improve their economic and social standing. Their selfless undertakings and sacrifice have inevitably led to or influenced the passage of important laws that form the foundation of the country's labor sector.

### **LANDMARK LABOR-RELATED LAWS**

*Labor Code of the Philippines.* The Labor Code was enacted on May 1, 1974 by former President Ferdinand E. Marcos through Presidential Decree (PD) 442. It is the law that governs labor practices and relations in the country. The Labor Code prescribes the general rules governing labor matters and employee-employer relationship through its various provisions, including those on hiring and termination of private employees, work conditions (e.g., maximum work hours, overtime), employee benefits (e.g., 13th month pay, retirement benefits), guidelines in organizing and membership in labor unions, the pursuit of collective bargaining, and staging of strikes.

Significant amendments to the Labor Code include the passage of Republic Act (RA) No. 6715 (i.e., "Herrera Law") authored by former Senator Ernesto Herrera, as well as amendments introduced by former Senator Leticia Ramos Shahani to strengthen the "prohibition on discrimination against women with respect to terms and conditions of employment."

*Wage Rationalization Act.* A just minimum wage has constantly been at the forefront of workers' struggle for reforms in the labor sector. Although earlier pieces of legislation were enacted related to the provision of a minimum wage, the passage of RA 6727 (Wage Rationalization Act) on June 9, 1989 provides a general mechanism to rationalize the fixing of minimum wages throughout the country, ensuring a decent standard of living for workers and their families.

RA 6727 stipulates that "the minimum wage rates for agricultural and non-agricultural employees and workers in each and every region of the country shall be those prescribed by the Regional Tripartite Wages and Productivity Boards." The law also created the National Wages and Productivity Commission, which is the policy-making body on wages, income, and related aspects of labor.

*PD 851, Memorandum Order 28, RA 6686.* The issue of who employees have to thank for the 13th month pay they receive is relatively contentious, given the modifications made in the law. On December 16, 1975, President Marcos issued PD 851 "requiring all employers to pay their employees a 13th month pay,"

although a number of employers at that time were already giving 13th month pay to their employees. Moreover, there were exclusions to this benefit, including those receiving a basic salary of over Php1,000 (at that time), government employees, household helpers, and those earning on a commission or boundary basis.

On August 13, 1986, former President Corazon C. Aquino issued Memorandum Order 28, expanding the scope of PD 851, specifically by removing the Php1,000 ceiling for the 13th month pay for all rank-and-file employees. However, the directive still did not grant a 13th month pay to government employees. On December 14, 1988, RA 6686 was passed, which, in effect, granted government officials and employees the equivalent of a 13th month pay and an additional cash gift of Php1,000.

*OSH Law.* RA 11058 or the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Law was signed by President Rodrigo R. Duterte on August 17, 2018, further strengthening the effort to protect workers from various safety and health hazards in the work environment. The OSH Law requires employers to strictly comply with various occupational safety and health standards. These standards include updated training requirements, on-site clinic/health facilities, audit and tracking of compliance, providing workers with information on all types of workplace hazards, giving workers the right to refuse to work in an unsafe environment, and providing safe facilities and personal protective equipment.

*Telecommuting Act.* RA 11165 or the Telecommuting Act was signed into law by President Duterte on December 20, 2018, and could be critical as many workers and employees are now returning to their physical workplaces even though we are still in a pandemic. The Telecommuting Act defines telecommuting as "a work arrangement that allows an employee in the private sector to work from an alternative workplace with the use of telecommunication and/or computer technologies." Accordingly, the law formalizes the option for employees to work from home or any other location outside their formal workplace, as well as provides the rights and duties of employers and employees availing of such a work arrangement.

*Magna Carta of Women.* RA 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women is an inclusive women's human rights legislation that aims to eliminate discrimination against women. In general, this law recognizes,

protects, fulfills, and promotes the rights of Filipino women, particularly those in the marginalized sector. Among the salient provisions of the Magna Carta specific to the labor sector are non-discrimination in employment, including opportunities and promotions, in the military, police, and other similar services; opportunities to participate in third-level civil service, development council, and planning bodies; and assistance to migrant workers, particularly those in distress.

*Expanded Maternity Leave Law, Paternity Leave Act.* RA 11210 or the 105-Day Expanded Maternity Leave Law was signed into law on February 22, 2019. This legislation grants employed mothers who just gave birth over 3 months of paid leave. In particular, their maternity leave has been increased from 60 days (normal delivery) or 78 days (caesarian delivery) to 105 days (regardless of the method of delivery). The law also grants a 60-day paid leave in case of miscarriage or emergency termination of pregnancy.

Meanwhile, RA 8187 or the Paternity Leave Act of 1996 stipulates that married male employees in the public and private sectors are entitled to a paternity leave of 7 days for the first four deliveries (defined by law as childbirth or miscarriage) of the legitimate spouse.

*Magna Carta for Disabled Persons.* RA 7277 or the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons was enacted primarily in recognition that persons with disabilities (PWDs) have the same rights as other people, and promotes PWDs' participation in and integration into society. Chapter 5 of the Magna Carta focuses on the rights and privileges of PWDs in terms of employment. Specifically, the law emphasizes that "No disabled person shall be denied access to opportunities for suitable employment." Moreover, a qualified PWD employee is subject to the same terms and conditions of employment (i.e., compensation, benefits, privileges, incentives, among others) as any qualified able-bodied individual. Provisions on sheltered employment, apprenticeship, and incentives for employers are also provided in the law.

### **'LABOR OF LOVE'**

Indeed, the country's workforce, laborers, workers, or whatever term is used symbolize the struggle of the people not only to survive but to thrive with dignity in an extremely challenging environment. The "labor of love" of Filipino workers throughout history reminds us of what the country can achieve because of their hard work and sacrifice. | ■

# NEW BREAKTHROUGHS AHEAD

DOST's Sibol returns this year with 238 new ideas and innovations for a better Philippines

With the country slowly returning to normal, the Department of Science and Technology's (DOST's) Science and Innovation Budding Opportunities for Leverage (Sibol) 2022 projects were launched with 238 new ideas amounting to Php1.7 billion in funding.

The Philippine Council for Industry, Energy, and Emerging Technology Research and Development (PCIEERD) of the DOST introduced the new breakthroughs, with at least 100 of them to be presented this year.

The Sibol projects recently kicked off with the first of 10 webinars focused on the newest breakthroughs in nanotechnology, governance, education, and human security. The following are some of them:

Eduardo Magdaluyo of the University of the Philippines Diliman's (UP) Department of Mining, Metallurgical, and Materials Engineering has published AeroComp: Enhanced Lightweight Fiber-reinforced Composites Structures for Defense Applications. The goal of the project is to use fiber-reinforced polymer as a cost-effective replacement to ballistic protection materials used by the military.

Engineer Arnold Gutierrez of Holy Angel University is the man behind the development of Platform for Short Range, Heavy Payload, Multi-Mission Unmanned Aircraft System. Its objective is to create an unmanned aircraft system that specializes in transporting critical products and supplies in emergency scenarios and to remote, hard-to-reach locations.

Mia Barbara Aranas of the DOST's Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development developed and institutionalized the DOST Foresight Framework and Protocol. This institutionalized foresight framework protocol aims to track and strategize incoming research and developing technology trends.

Joseph Onate of the Camarines Sur Polytechnic College founded the AI Research Center for Community Development (AIRCoDE). AIRCoDE intends to create an artificial intelligence research facility where AI enthusiasts, faculty, and students may study and explore topics such as deep learning and computer vision.

Kristine Mae Adlaon of the University of the Immaculate Conception established the Mindanao Natural (MinNa) Language Processing Research and Development Laboratory. The proposed study facility will serve as the Minaoan region's endangered language library. This initiative focuses on the creation of ethnographies of Filipino indigenous peoples whose languages are slowly fading out due to discrimination.

Davie Jone Niverca of Adamson University created Project AutoLABS: RFID-based Automated Equipment Borrowing and Management System with Mobile App Reservation for School Laboratories. Project AutoLABS is a computer-assisted logistics management solution for schools.

The Internet of Things (IoT) Research Laboratory and Training Center was established by Engineer University of the Perpetual Help System Dalta's Mariciel Marcial-Teogangco. The proposed research lab focuses on the IoT and can provide the necessary environment to mimic IoT implementation.

Nelson Andres of Bataan Peninsula State University (BPSU) proposed installing automated guide way transit (AGT) in the university's main campus, as a laboratory facility for the proposed railway engineering program and existing engineering programs. It's meant to run and operate the AGT coaches given by DOST on the BPSU campus. The project will also act as a test bed for the university's proposed railway engineering degree.

DOST-PCIEERD Executive Director Dr. Enrico C. Paringit said, "Let's start the year by hitting the ground running and planting the seeds of innovation. We hope that through the Sibol launches, we can inspire researchers to hope for a brighter Philippines."

Sibol is an annual demonstration of Filipino ingenuity and originality in science and technology, with innovators presenting their work via a series of webinars held by DOST-PCIEERD.

Throughout 2021, 11 Sibol webinars were held via Zoom, with 2,686 attendees exhibiting 149 research projects by Filipino scientists and researchers. The webinars were produced by S&T Media Services.

The image is a promotional poster for SIBOL 2022. It features a dark purple background with orange and white geometric shapes. At the top right is the SIBOL logo. The main title "SIBOL 2022: Emerging Technologies and Innovations for the New Normal" is in large white font. Below it, the date and time "15 March 2022 | 9:00 AM via Zoom LIVE" are shown. The central part of the poster is filled with 3D isometric illustrations of various technologies: a laptop with a fingerprint scanner, a tablet with a brain scan, a smartphone with a QR code, and a tablet with a graph. At the bottom right, there is a QR code labeled "REGISTER HERE" and "SCAN ME". The bottom of the poster contains social media icons and contact information: @dostpcieerd, pcieerd.dost.gov.ph, and pcieerd@pcieerd.dost.gov.ph.

# HOW TO CAST YOUR VOTE IN THE MAY 2022 ELECTION

Issued by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC)

## STEP 1



Have your temperature checked before entering the voting center.

## STEP 2

Proceed to the Voters' Assistance Desk (VAD) to secure your precinct and sequence numbers and assigned room or clustered precinct.



## STEP 3



Go to your assigned room and introduce yourself to the Electoral Board by stating your name, precinct and sequence numbers.

## STEP 4

Get your ballot, ballot secrecy folder & marking pen and fill-out the ballot at the voting area.



## STEP 5



Accomplish the ballot by fully shading the oval appearing BEFORE the name of the candidate you wish to vote for. Do not over vote.

## STEP 6

Feed the ballot into the Vote Counting Machine (VCM).



## STEP 7



Check your voter's receipt and then deposit it in the receptacle.

## STEP 8

Have your right forefinger nail stained with indelible ink.





