THE ROLE OF THE YOUTH AGAINST DISASTERS

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Strength requires exuberance

The Philippines is almost a never-ending sanctuary of disasters, a home of catastrophes-both man-made and natural, and an often victim of destruction and hopeless.

Some of the lethal natural disasters were a tsunami triggered by a magnitude 7.9 earthquake that devastated the Moro Gulf on the southern island of Mindanao on August 16, 1976, killing between 5,000 and 8,000 people, Tropical Storm Thelma that unleashed flash floods on the central city of Ormoc on Leyte island on November 15, 1991, killing more than 5,100, and Typhoon Bopha that smashed into the main southern island on Mindanao on December 3, 2012. Rarely hit by cyclones, the region suffers about 1,900 people dead or missing. Then there was Typhoon Yolanda which is one of the world’s strongest and deadliest typhoons, prompting a rare public storm signal No.4 in the Visayas. It also caused a massive devastation that killed 6,300 people. We even commemorate natural disasters under the Executive Order 136 or the “National Disaster Consciousness Month” every July.

However, up to what extent can we face these adversities? How long can we sacrifice the lives of our families whose faces and dreams are forever buried into the deepest core of the Earth, where muds became the ocean, the houses became boats, and where a piece of cardboard became the only symbol of survival. We stick to whatever object our
hand can land on to continue hoping that at the end of this tumultuous struggle is a light waiting to save us. But for some, that light never comes most of the time.

This grim scenario and all the dark photographs of death and despair are enough to nag our consciousness as a nation and ask what we are doing to safeguard the lives of our fellows. We have organized forums, attended international conferences about climate change, posted signage, cleaned out backyards, imposed and curated rules and laws, and tapped the help of public private sectors but the youth, which is a vital element in nation building, has still a lot to offer.

First, the voice of the youth is the voice of the many. Whatever the youth is echoing now is a transcendental call which stems from the inevitable experience that molded them to rise from the ashes. The voice of the youth arises from their day-to-day experiences, their spirituality and morality, their penchant to fads and crazes, and their surroundings. The youth never fails to utter their sentiments of positivity or pessimism about the things in our planet. Through social media accounts or through oral rhapsodies, they soar high in magnifying the truth in the status of our environment and all we have to do is to listen at the yearnings of their hearts and the still ideologies which keep them in walking at the streets of Manila or that which keep them in posting opinions in Facebook.

Specifically, the voice of the youth comes from the individuals who are in the fulcrum of childhood and adulthood, who have direct experiences with the environment around them, and who thrives at individuality and dynamism. This is also the phase where Jose Rizal, Andres Bonifacio, and Gregorio del Pilar showed their patriotism to our country. The gift of youthfulness never failed to fuel them in their nationalistic aspirations.

Second, a voice without an action is just a vision. It is also with the youth that physical vitality thrives. It is true that ideas and plans are important in creating strategies which
can save the people from disasters but these ideas must be concretized. It is the core reason why using the mind is not enough in every endeavor; rather, the mind and the body make a great combination. The physical strength that the youth can offer will result to drastic implications when we start the implementation of whatever action plan we can create.

Third, the youth is capable of exuding exuberance. These young bloods are capable dreaming dramatically and almost romantically, of formulating huge plans, and envisioning a country free of environment injustices. The youth period, as they often call it, is the apex or the supreme period of being a man. It is where we start to build our own selves, discover our own beliefs, and do many countless possibilities. Other people will smirk and will display a face of disappointment whenever youth voices out its goals in life yet the youth remains steadfast while equally holding all the courage and perseverance they have.

Exuberance, as defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary as the quality being filled with energy and excitement, is also a form of idealism. Idealism, on the other hand, is the principle which believes in high or noble purposes. To be exuberant is to be idealistic. It is the reason why teenagers continue to pursue their dreams despite the endemic poverty and corruption in our society, despite the many faces of injustices which loot us right from our core, and despite the seemingly unending narratives of hopelessness, misery, and contempt in our country. The youth is filled with exuberance and idealism too precious to be wasted. This is the very reason why the youth is capable of stepping forward because they believe in the expressions of their hearts no matter how tough the journey is.

Therefore, it is right time to call all young individuals who are brimming with exuberance to be the frontrunners in the fight against natural and man-made calamities. We can never really win over the threatening and continuous arrivals of these disasters but just like the proverbial quote “Prevention is better than cure”, we can definitely do
things before destruction strikes. Youth, together with all the sectors of our nation, can create a stronger and bigger nation. We must also review, refurnish, and reformulate the rules and regulations concerning our disaster management plans as every year we are faced with different forms of catastrophe. Moreover, the issue of creating a tougher management plan does not only concern the environmental sector or risk reduction agencies. This matter is also political, educational, moral, and economical issue. One affects the other.

Indeed, tough problems need tougher solution. And this is what youth has proven over the past millennia: to stand stronger than its adversities. The Filipino youth’s fortified determination accounts from its glorious past where heroes spilled their blood to build a nation free of any oppression, from its challenging present where their beliefs and principles are continuously put into a test, and from its future where all of their dreams are waiting to be a reality.

At the end, to be a youth of exuberance is to be a man of strength. As teachers and leaders, let us make every youth strong and powerful.

References:

Worst Natural Disasters in the Philippines


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