

PHILIPPINE YOUTH CHARTER ON RESPONSIBILITIES

We are the Filipino young people who attended the Youth Festival held December 1-3, 2006 in Rizal, Philippines. We came up with this Youth Charter on Responsibilities after analyzing our situation, particularly in relation to our education, environment, peace and rights, and identity. From this discussions, we formulated our vision of Philippine society and came up with recommendations on what the young people can do to exercise responsibilities as a citizen of the country.

Our Strength and Resources

The Filipino youth have been important actors in shaping our country's history. Prior to Spanish colonization, young people were active in hunting and gathering for the livelihood of the community, just as they were involved in nurturing the community's children. During the Spanish period, young people were active in building bridges, roads, churches, and other buildings. In the midst of Spanish oppression, the youth were central in the various revolts that took place, which culminated in the Philippine revolution of 1896, with the objective of seeking independence. Against the American and Japanese, who subsequently colonized the Philippines, the young were also at the forefront of the independence struggle. From then until today, the young assume important roles in building our society.

These days, we concede that majority of the youth have to yet to understand their role in society and take action on current events. However, we are also aware that there are a number of young people, individuals and organized, who are taking positive actions to resolve issues affecting the community and the larger society. They are exercising responsibilities in development work, taking action on issues regarding education, environment, peace and rights, and identity.

After all, the youth are a very potent force, comprising 60% of the country's population.

Challenges of the Filipino Youth

Inspite of our contributions in society, we are faced with a number of challenges.

We are affected by the widespread poverty in our society. Because of this, many young people are forced to work. Many of us are addicted to alcohol, drugs, solvents, cigarettes and other vices. Although we recognize the benefits of new technology like cellphone and internet, we become victims of its negative effects like prostitution, pornography, and addiction to violent online gaming.

Also because of poverty, many young people are forced to stop studying and are deprived of education. Education is then a privilege and not a right. Many of us are forced to work and/or thrown out of the streets to find a living.

In public schools, the quality of education is low because of lack of facilities and teachers due to insufficient government funding and corruption within. In private schools, education is treated mostly as a business and not as social service, making these inaccessible to the majority. In wartorn Mindanao, schools are used as housing for soldiers resulting in suspension of classes. In disaster-stricken areas, schools are used as refuge of victims, also resulting in disruption in classes.

As for those who get to complete a college or technical course, jobs available are scarce, making many of us unproductive.

In truth, education should not only be the responsibility of schools. The family, the church, media, the community, the government, and society in general should participate in the education of children and the young. Although a large number of parents give emotional support for their children's education, many parents are not up to the challenge. Many parents are forced to leave the country as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) to provide a better life for their children, but in the process leave them parent-less. Then there is this powerful media, a big sector of which has become an instrument to develop and spread unethical behavior. What we need is that all sectors of society should contribute in providing life and academic education to children and youth.

Actually, there are many young people who in their individual capacities or as part of an organization, participate and are involved in community, social and environmental concerns, majority of the young are passive because of poverty, lack of education and the negative effects of a consumerist media.

Problems in Specific Issues

Environment

Young people are not conscious of protecting the environment. They do not understand the connection between environment and human life. The Philippines is rich in natural resources but we, the young, do not and will not benefit from its bounty. Forests are destroyed by logging, ocean resources are depleted because of dynamite fishing and the like, and mining damages the land. Air and water pollution causes health and safety problems, resulting in greater poverty of the people.

Peace and Rights

The right of young people to freely express, organize and participate in the political process is trampled on by human rights violations. Our capacity to decide for ourselves is underestimated and undermined. In our young age, we already see the face of violence inside the home (domestic violence), in the streets, and in the community,

especially in war-torn areas. Aside from this, we also feel the violence outside our country as our parents are OFWs working in war-torn countries.

We believe that lasting peace can only be achieved if the rights of individuals are respected and if social justice will prevail. Peace also entails that families have sufficient sources of livelihood. Rights should not only be political, but economic and cultural rights should also be respected.

Identity, Gender and Culture

The youth should be aware of their identity, capacity and knowledge. Discrimination - sexual, cultural, religious, class, age, physical and mental ability - should be discarded as this may distort the identity of young people. In fact, the rich culture and traditions of different ethno-linguistic peoples are slowly being eroded. Young people are also not sensitive to gender issues that would foster respect for women, recognition of women's equality as well as women's reproductive rights.

Vision

We envision a society where there is equality; where there is space no exploitation; a society that is progressive and where all people are productive; a humane society where rights are recognized and where religious, cultural and gender difference are respected; where all children and young people acquire an education; where there is no child-laborer and where basic human needs like food, health and housing are met; where communities are peaceful at free of violence, abuse and war; where understanding, nurturance and responsibility reigns among people; where natural resources are protected; where there is democracy, political freedom, and freedom from any form of oppression; and where society recognizes the talents, capacities and strengths of the youth.

Resolutions on Responsibilities

In response to the challenges and toward realizing our vision, we unite to do the following:

General Responsibilities:

1. We will respect the diversity in religion, culture, gender, and physical and mental abilities of each other;
2. We will be critical of and concerned in what is happening in our community and society;
3. We will unite with each other and with other sectors for the welfare of the youth, the community and the society;
4. We will contribute what we have learned to organize young people in the community, schools, churches, and other places to become empowered and to address their various concerns; and

5. To voice out our thoughts and feelings in the proper forum.

Responsibilities in the field of Education:

1. We will provide information to our parents, relatives and other young people on the rights of children and young people to study in schools and/or to acquire an informal education at home or in the community, so that they would grow to be responsible citizens;
2. We will collect books, chairs and other school materials to give to public schools especially in the provinces to support the education of young people there;
3. We will convince young people to launch activities to support the education of other children and also to keep them away from vices. These activities can include tutorials, outreach programs, sports, theater, and joining organizations; and
4. We will influence government to put in more funds for education.

Responsibilities in the field of Environment:

1. We will organize youth groups to be at the forefront of environmental education;
2. We will join forces with environmental programs of the government and NGOs for the protection of the environment;
3. We will convince young people to plant trees and engage in other activities for the environment;
4. We will be involved in advocating for laws to protect the environment and teach people on the bad effects of destructive forms of mining, fishing, and logging, and also on issues of global warming, and towards this end, to use the facilities of schools, organizations, and media;
5. Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle; and
6. Launch a campaign to "Save the World, our Home".

Responsibilities in the field of Peace and Rights:

1. Provide information on human rights and speak out against any violations on rights;
2. Aide fact-finding missions studying forms of harassment and violence;
3. Assist victims of violence by seeking legal or other help; and
4. Organize groups to promote rights, responsibilities, and peace.

Responsibilities in the field of Identity, Gender and Culture:

1. Know and respect oneself so that others will respect you;
2. Be sensitive in one's action and words when dealing with other people;
3. Respect the culture and traditions of different ethno-linguistic groups in our country;
4. Be informed on reproductive health rights;
5. Study issues on women and gender, and struggle for the equality of males and females, and respect gender preferences; and
6. Be proud of our traditional culture and traditions.

Conclusion

We offer our knowledge, capacities, and time to unite young people in different parts of the country to effect positive change and progress for the Filipino youth.