

OPENING REMARKS

Sr. Crescencia L. Lucero, SFIC

TFDP Co-Chairperson

Remember Repression...Remember Courage...Remember Resistance

A Gathering of Human Rights Defenders

July 11, 2014, Max's Restaurant, Quezon City Memorial Circle

On this fateful day, and also about this time, 29 years ago, Fr. Rosaleo Rudy Romano was last seen leaving the Redemptorist convent in Cebu City. According to witnesses, armed men on board a white Ford Cortina with government license plate number RP 402 and two motorcycles, blocked Fr. Rudy, who was on board his motorcycle. A witness identified Wilfredo "Boy" Dagatan, a Tisa resident, who turned out to be an operative of the Military Intelligence Group (MIG), as the man who alighted from the white car. He snatched Fr. Rudy's handbag, removed his crash helmet and dark sunglasses, and shoved him into the same white car. The car then sped off to the city's direction.

Fr. Rudy has never been found.

Fr. Rudy Romano's disappearance was just one of the thousands of cases of human rights violations that happened during the Marcos regime. Thousands have been arrested and tortured. There were those who disappeared but were fortunate enough to have surfaced alive. Some were found, but already dead. Others were killed outright – salvaged, massacred – left with no chance to survive.

For 40 years now, the Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP) has remained witness to incidents of human rights violations. And as we gather here today, we remember the repression during the dark years of Martial Law. We remember the 5,531 victims of torture whose bodies were mangled, whose spirits were crushed; the 2,537 whose lives were put to an end; the 783 who disappeared, with their future put on hold and their families clinging for hope, however small, that they will still be reunited with their loved ones; the victims of 238 incidents of massacre who were barbarically killed and whose bodies were even paraded in the streets; and the 92,607 who were arrested during mobilizations, raids, and even as they were going about their routine in broad daylight.

But as we remember the repressive policies and methods, we also recall the people's strong resistance and struggle against the Marcos regime. Amidst all the atrocities and sufferings, the people endured, their spirits refused to give up. The desire to be free from the chains of the dictatorship remained alive and grew stronger.

We remember the courage of those who have fought to bring down the dictatorship – those whose lives were sacrificed for freedom to be attained, and those who survived and continue to struggle and fight any form of repression.

The years I spent as a religious and in human rights work has made me stronger, braver. But despite my optimism, there is a bothersome thought that I continuously struggle to push away.

It has been said that we Filipinos are known to have a short memory. And because of this, I am afraid. I fear that with the way things are going, there may be a chance that there will come a day when the Marcoses will once again be at the helm of power. This early, there are talks that in the

coming years, Bongbong Marcos will become our country's president. God forbid! That is one nightmare I would never wish for anyone to go through.

Not only for those like me who experienced firsthand how it was to live in the dark years of Martial Law, but more for today's generation, and the generations to come...let us commit ourselves to the struggle against any form of dictatorship and tyranny.

Later today, we will be launching TFDP's virtual Museum of Courage and Resistance or the Martial Law Museum. Let it be TFDP's small contribution in the resistance against lies and deception being spread to portray the martial law years as this country's glory days. The truth must come out. It must be told and upheld at all times.

Republic Act 10368 or the Human Rights Victims Reparation and Recognition Act of 2013 is now in place. I urge all of you who have been victims or are relatives of victims of martial law to come out and apply for compensation under the law. Yes, no amount of money will be enough to pay for what you or your relatives have gone through, but you must claim what is rightfully yours. From what I have heard, the number of those who have applied has not even reached half of those who have become victims. Let us not let the law go to waste. Let us not allow that the outcome of the law will not be consistent with our country's history. With this, TFDP commits itself to assisting the victims in their application for compensation.

We owe it to ourselves; we owe it to Fr. Rudy Romano and all those who have been martyred during martial law; and we owe it to the future generations to remain vigilant. Let us not become complacent.

Let this gathering be a sharing of experiences and ideas on how we can carry on what have been started by the martial law heroes and martyrs.

We may be easy to forgive. But we must not forget. Let us never forget.

Let not the sacrifices of those who have gone before us be in vain. Let us continue their struggle. Let us always remember.

Never again to Martial Law! Never again to the Marcoses!

Magandang umaga sa ating lahat.