

HUMAN FACE by Ceres

Column pieces ("Human Face"), feature stories, news, investigative and special reports by journalist Ma. Ceres P. Doyo in the Philippine Daily Inquirer. Plus photographs and other stuff.

HOME

Home » Human Face columns » Pearl of great price

Pearl of great price

Thursday, November 11, 2004 Human Face columns

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"Dahil sa paniniwala ng mga Palawano na ang isang isda ay pinahahati sa lahat, nang dumating ang mga Gagayancillo tinanggap namin sila, nang dumating ang mga Muslim tinanggap namin sila, nang dumating ang mga Kristiyano tinanggap namin sila, nang dumating si Cojuangco ay pinaalis kaming lahat. Masakit ang nangyari." (Because of the Palawanos' belief that a fish is to be divided among all, when the Gagayancillo came we accepted them, when the Muslims came we accepted them, when the Christians came we accepted them, when Cojuangco came we were all driven out. This is painful for us."

Words of Pala'wan elder Upo Gariba in his narration about Apu, also known as Bugsok Island. He was quoted in Akbayan Rep. Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel's Nov. 8 privilege speech. The congresswoman condemned Jewelmer Inc. and the Philippine National Police's blocking of Pandanan Channel, preventing fishermen and their supporters from entering what they claimed were their ancestral fishing grounds.

Jewelmer has filed a case against the groups involved.

Last week, this column came out with Jewelmer's response to the NGOs and PO's accusations that the pearl farm, owned by business tycoon Eduardo Cojuangco Jr. and partners, have displaced indigenous groups and barred them from fishing in their ancestral domain.

Sambilog and Task Force Bugsuk strongly belie Jewelmer's claims point by point. Excerpts.

"Our struggle to fish in the waters currently prohibited by Jewelmer is a struggle to claim both our rights as indigenous peoples (IP) under the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) and our rights as small municipal fishers under the Fisheries Code. We believe (Jewelmer has) violated our rights as fishers. We have learned about the case of Puyat Pearl Farms in Culion, Palawan. The local government ruled that the farm operator should open navigational routes because they were established traditional navigational routes...

"Our members come from barangays Puring, Tagnato and Buliluyan in Bataraza town; and barangays Sibaring, Pandanan and sitio Marihangin of barangay Bugsuk of Balabac town. We do not have members from barangay Bugsuk itself. The residents there now are workers of the corporations under Cojuangco. Many of them were from Tarlac and Negros, brought in in the 1970s to the early 80s to work in Cojuangco's farms and ranches. That barangay is known to residents in surrounding barangays as 'the private barangay'.

"The Pala'wan and Molbog along with the settlers were forced to leave their land in Bugsuk and Pandanan. They were compensated for the trees, but not for their land. Many of them were relocated in areas which were not as productive...Remember this was martial law time. The people said that they were rounded up in a meeting by Danding Cojuangco himself, and soldiers with their guns surrounded them all. And during that meeting, they were given two options: to sell or to leave.

"What is full compensation (and being) willingly, properly, legally relocated? (Y)ou cleared the land, made it productive, loved it, built your dreams on it, then one day, you are told to sell or to leave...to sign blank documents, and under the gun, they tell you the price of your tree, instead of you naming your price.

"The proof that this happened? No legal document, of course. No pictures, of course. This was at the beginning of martial law. And Danding Cojuangco was good in hiding behind the cloak of legality by having those Deeds of Exchanges, using the Republic Act 926 (for the land swap), by forcing people to sign documents. But there are still living testimonies from Pala'wan, Molbog and settlers, on what happened

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ABOUT



MA. CERES P. DOYO

a journalist for more than 30 years, writes special reports, features and a column, "Human Face," for the Philippine Daily Inquirer.

Ceres' written works have earned awards and citations. She has contributed to several major book projects. Many of her stories are in her book "Journalist in Her Country."

Her other books are "Bituin and the Big Flood" (2010), "Human Face: A Journalist's Encounters and Awakenings" (2013), "You Can't Interview God: Church Women and Men in the News" (2013) and "Macli-ing Dulag: Kalinga Chief, Defender of the Cordillera"

during those fateful years.

“We will pursue and welcome a full and independent investigation on this gross historical injustice and for government to put a just closure by giving back the land and waters to the victims and to the small fishers and farmers who have been given rights over these resources by new legislations after the EDSA Revolution such as the Fisheries Code, the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) and IPRA.






“Records furnished us show that since the formation of SAMBILOG in 2000 no SAMBILOG members have been caught doing cyanide and dynamite fishing in these areas...We assert that these (accusations) are vain attempts of Jewelmer at harassing the small fishers and drawing attention from Jewelmer’s illegal operations, their use of brute force to govern over the area and their illegal closure of the traditional navigational passage of the channel between Bugsuk and Pandanan islands.

“We question Jewelmer’s authority in confirming whether members fall within the purview of indigenous peoples (IP). This process is under the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples...

“We learned that several groups, composed of Pala’wan and Molbog tribes, were being formed, allegedly through the help of Jewelmer to contest SAMBILOG’s claim and to make their own ancestral claim. If Jewelmer does not believe that the area was inhabited by the indigenous peoples, why are they forming groups to also lay claim on ancestral domains? Some of their leaders said that Jewelmer promised them boats and fishing equipment, and allowed them to fish in their ‘prohibited areas’.

“On August 18, 2003, The Environmental Management Bureau of the DENR Region IV office filed a notice of violation to Jewelmer /Ecofarm Systems and Resources Inc. stating that their Pearl Farm Expansion project located in Balabac, Palawan was implemented without the required Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) and in violation of Section 6. Article IX of DENR Administrative Order No. 96-37...”

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winner of the 2016 National Book Award for Journalism. Her latest book “Press Freedom Under Siege: Reportage that Challenged the Marcos Dictatorship” was launched on March 23, 2019.. Ceres traces her roots to Iloilo and Albay. She finished college in St. Scholastica’s College in Manila and has a master’s degree in psychology from the Ateneo de Manila University. She was a Jefferson journalism fellow at the East-West Center in the U.S. She serves in the board of the Office of Women and Gender Concerns of the Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines.

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- ▶ 2021 (9)
- ▶ 2020 (18)
- ▶ 2019 (55)
- ▶ 2018 (56)
- ▶ 2017 (51)
- ▶ 2016 (53)
- ▶ 2015 (66)
- ▶ 2014 (60)
- ▶ 2013 (58)
- ▶ 2012 (59)
- ▶ 2011 (69)
- ▶ 2010 (80)
- ▶ 2009 (79)
- ▶ 2008 (56)
- ▶ 2007 (56)
- ▶ 2006 (53)
- ▶ 2005 (53)
- ▼ 2004 (54)
 - ▶ Dec 2004 (5)
 - ▼ Nov 2004 (5)
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- ▶ Oct 2004 (4)
- ▶ Sep 2004 (5)
- ▶ Aug 2004 (4)
- ▶ Jul 2004 (5)
- ▶ Jun 2004 (4)
- ▶ May 2004 (4)
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JOURNALIST IN HER COUNTRY:
Articles, Essays and Photographs
(Anvil, 1993)

**BITUIN AND THE BIG FLOOD/SI BITUIN AT
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Announcements/Invitations (5)
Book Review (2)
Feature Stories (89)
Global Sisters Report (7)
Human Face columns (831)
News (24)
Special Reports (14)

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