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OpinionAnalysis

*COMMENTARY*

Healing, empowering the nation through culture

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The 1986 peaceful People Power Revolution is inscribed in the UNESCO Memory of the World as a testament of the Filipino people's gallantry and unity to restore democracy through the unedited record of the *Radyo Bandido* broadcast of this significant event. UNESCO states "*Memory is a force for solidarity that brings societies together around shared values and provides a foundation to build a more peaceful future.*"

Amidst the pandemic, the 35th Anniversary was commemorated by the EDSA People Power Commission under the Duterte administration, according to health protocols to effectively harness the EDSA story permeated by the values of courage, compassion, solidarity and sacrifice as a non-violent weapon to win the global war against this deadly virus. In this crucial battle for health and safety, the cultural dimension must not be forgotten.

Development plans will be accelerated or retarded depending on the dynamic application of culture. Philippine development plans must be seen in the context of the realities and challenges faced by our country with the character, traditions, resources, and capacities our people exhibit in coping and overcoming the daily grind and periodic calamities we face. While economic indicators, political intrigues and social issues continue to dominate airwave

discussions and legislative initiatives, the cause of culture and its place in our national psyche have been reduced as peripheral concerns. This should not be the case.

The **Education for All** policy of the government for unlocking the gridlock of poverty must be geared to reinvigorate tourism, building discipline and disaster resilience, mitigating violence, crime and corruption for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. This goal can be fast- tracked through the sensitive, relevant integration of cultural communications based on appreciation of heritage, history, habitat, human rights, language and creative industries.

The marketing paradigm and lifelong learning mission must showcase not only the rich, exciting breathtaking coastal beaches, but also our nation's diverse indigenous rituals, customs, folk festivals and distinctive crafts peppered with humor, warmth and affectionate reception of our people with bilingual proficiency in English. We must underscore the respect we place for diverse life forms which are interconnected with our own lives. Degraded ecosystems can be rehabilitated with political will as manifested by the clean-up of Boracay and the current effort of regreening our denuded forests. In like manner, human resources even if damaged, such as the physically challenged and those in difficult circumstances can be sensitively developed through the effective interdisciplinary cross-cutting approach of using all arts discipline and varied media platforms as teaching tools for capacity and confidence building of the marginalized, to cope and transform their social realities.

Moreover, participation in this distinctive methodology allows connectivity to social issues popularizing science in cultural symbols people understand to motivate involvement in an action agenda to better their condition.

The recent successive climate change catastrophes since the lockdown wreaking devastation, deepening poverty and hunger has generated spontaneous volunteer efforts, rescues and rehabilitation from the government and the private sector. New homes are being built, food, even temporary shelters through tents have been made available. Basic services are being restored. But the essential complementary initiative to address the trauma and the damaged psyche suffered by the victims has not been given full attention. Their angst, their fears, their grief and despair, their losses need to be attended through creative healing arts workshops that also focus on the environmental causes of the disaster with preventive health information.

This is a therapeutic process that must be a necessary ingredient in a total effort to restore balance and equanimity for the afflicted communities and families so they can become productive members of our country. The will to continue with faith of overcoming adversity must be underscored. Physical well-being must be integrated with mental health, spiritual strength with knowledge to decarbonize, to mitigate global warming,

Linking economic and physical survival with environmental concerns in cultural ways, means initiatives within a lifelong learning framework of caring, love and concern. Harnessing creative interdisciplinary teams of artists, teachers, psychologists, social

workers, media experts and supporters who will dedicate themselves to this process of rebuilding hope and restoring sanity must be a key ingredient in the current agenda of pump priming the economy.

This cultural caregiving service particularly to vulnerable groups and those in difficult circumstances has been profiled by the Earthsavers founded by Senator Heherson Alvarez that has been applauded by UNESCO with the twin honor awarded to its socially integrated performing ensemble and training academy as UNESCO Artist for Peace, selected as the 6<sup>th</sup> in the world as UNESCO DREAM Center personally inaugurated by UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova. Creative programs in prison, for abused women and children, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), the sick, drug rehabilitation centers, the refugees of armed conflicts and disasters have been undertaken.

Our country through the Philippine Center of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) and its Social Change Network has successfully organized in 2006 with the support of an Administrative Order from President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo for the hosting of the 31<sup>st</sup> ITI Congress and Theatre Olympics of the Nations, the first to be held in Southeast Asia attended by UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura. The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of World Theatre was held at the Department of Foreign Affairs auditorium with NCCA support. The Global Indigenous Cultural Olympics and Summit (GICOS) merited a resolution of satisfaction from the UN General Assembly. The UNESCO launch of the International Movement for Peace and Climate Justice linked to the SDGs has produced the Manila Declaration that provides us the distinct continuing honors in 2021 to be in the frontline of a **Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ResiliArt Festival Forum/ Workshops** under the patronage of UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay. This historic event is welcomed by the Duterte Administration through the endorsement of DFA Secretary Teodoro Locsin, Jr. It has the support of the Senate headed by Senate President Vicente "Tito" Sotto, hosted by the City of Manila under Mayor Isko Moreno for the 450<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Manila on the **3rd to the 10th of October** of this year, on the occasion of United Nations and Indigenous Peoples Month. Best practices from different continents will be shared to help stop violence against mankind and Mother Earth. The Philippines is the site to harness and mobilize a creative rainbow army of cultural animateurs to reimagine and help actualize a post-COVID-19 world in pursuit of good governance, social cohesion, climate justice and responsible citizenship.

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