Comments of
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On Dean Melencio Sta. Maria's lecture:
Human Rights, Politics, International Law and Trade Arrangement and Economic Prosperity: A Reading of the Philippine Situation

Good afternoon everyone.

The title of the speaker is … sorry, it's really a mouthful; lots of concepts and I think how do we really define all these concepts and how do we put them all together because Dean Mel attempted to explain how they are all inter-connected. How he tried to simplify the impact of these connections but there are also a lot of push and pull factors and my reaction would be based on five points.

First point is, what are human rights for? My background is on human rights, so it would be a lot on human rights, what are human rights for. Second is, what are human rights? Third, what is the rule of government regarding human rights? Fourth, what is the relationship of human rights and law? And fifth, what is the relationship of economics and human rights? And when you talk about economics, that's where the trade and businesses all fall in and I won't take as much time as Dean Mel because I'm here only to react to his paper.

What are human rights for? First point, and Dean Mel has hit it spot on, __ simply for the dignity of a person, our own dignity, our dignity and that's it. Human rights exist in order for us to be evolved, to enhance the dignity of a person, to be human.

Second, what are human rights? And I will not give a list of human rights but Dean Mel has already discussed what are the different human rights based on certain conventions or different international

core treaties, but when we talk about human rights it comes very naturally, it comes very naturally and this is where the relationship of law and human rights come in, but nowadays when we talk of human rights we only hear of more of the civil and political rights as the narrative now goes we would now see that it is the rights of the criminal in fact that is misleading. Because when you say criminal presupposes that there has been proper conviction of that person, so the proper term is that the rights of the accused and that is where law and human rights intertwine. But human rights is not merely civil or political as outlined by the good dean, we are talking now about economics. Economics, when you talk about jobs, wages, salaries, social security are part and parcel of human rights. When you talk about social rights, the right to belong, the right to found a family, human rights. When you talk about cultural rights, intellectual property, our relation, our roots, ethnicity, our being part of an indigenous community these are part and parcel of human rights. So human rights are not only civil and political; all of these are all interdependent and interrelated, again, for the dignity of the person.

Third point, what is the rule of thee government? When we look at the literature, the three-fold obligation of the government is to respect, protect and fulfill human rights. Respect, the government itself will not violate the rights. Protect, if rights are violated then there must be a mechanism in order to exact accountability. Fulfill, if there is none then the government must then do something to provide that lack or void in human rights protection. And you might ask “why the government?” and this has been what the narrative has been about recently. When you talk about human rights, what about rights being violated by private persons so why the government? Because the government is the one big institution where we surrendered part of our freedoms and rights.