

Special Citation-Diokno Award
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Brother, Friends and Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is such a great honor for me to be here to receive the Special Citation of Ka Pepe Diokno Award. Although it is not a Diokno award per se but, still, I keep on asking myself if I really deserve it. I learned that “the citation from the Board of Trustees is specially for me” as the criteria of the award is that the recipient must be a Filipino citizen. And, as far as I understand I am the first living person and non-Filipino to be granted this Special Citation.

About almost 30 years ago I was hired by UNICEF to work in an emergency program for the Cambodian refugees. It was in late 1979 when there was an influx of Cambodian refugees into Thai border. We were the first group when we first went there. By that time, the Thai authorities did not allow the setting up of any refugee camp yet. During the first few months of the operations, we had to walk into Cambodian territory as refugees were still staying on another side of the border. I have witnessed scenes that no one should have seen, mother holding dying babies or some times even dead body of the babies. I had to interview those who were tortured during Khmer rouge regime. All scenes and information were beyond our imagination. I kept on asking myself how and why human beings did such a thing to other human beings. After some times, I had to quit my works but those questions and terrible scenes remain vividly in my head.

That was about almost three decades ago but terrible things are going on in our societies today. These appalling things are part of all of us and we could not escape from them. One of my colleagues, Max Ediger, who was declared persona non grata by the Thai authorities said in his writings “Dialogue with the Dreams” that

“we can choose to ignore, or we can choose to see”.

“We can choose to gain, or we can choose to share”.

“We can choose to isolate ourselves, or ^{we} can

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Nevertheless, what I have been doing so far seems to be so little when compared with the challenges that all of us are facing. A friend of mine always says that if only each of us tries to do some little things we can bring about changes. And that has been why, I guess, we all keep on making our little contribution to human rights cause, because, to quote Jose Wright Diokno's famous words " no cause is more worthy than the cause of human rights. They are what makes a man human. Deny them and you deny man's humanity".

I am grateful that my little contribution is being recognized by the Graduate School of Business of De La Salle Professional Schools and the Ka Pepe Diokno Foundation. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for that. However, I would like to say that building something new requires a lot of energy, patience, and commitment as it is always a colossal work. Throughout all these years I have been working and walking together with colleagues and friends. Without them, my little contribution would have been totally impossible voire insignificant. I dedicate this special citation to all of them. I also would like to dedicate this special citation to Mahidol University for allowing us to pursue the works that we have been doing since 1998. And finally, I would like to dedicate this special citation to those who are oppressed as it is with them and to them that our works seem meaningful.

My final words as a teacher who has been learning human rights together with our students and those who are suffering human rights violations would be about human rights education. Although I have been in a formal education system but I share what one of my colleagues wrote some years ago. He said "the best and most useful education is often not gained in the formal classroom. The field of struggle - struggle for survival, struggle for justice, struggle for peace - provides one with an invaluable degree". I strongly believe that if each of us teaches our students how to live with others and how to care about suffering of others, one day we will have a better society.

Thank you very much.