

COVID-19 in the Philippines

While many people around the world view being locked in their homes as a nuisance, many Filipino people risk their health to fend for their lives. Ironic as it sounds, the Philippines is a country where poverty and economic inequality prevail, and where the fear of starvation and inability to provide for one's family surpasses the fear of contracting the novel coronavirus.

The Philippine government has implemented measures similar to those around the world: lockdowns, travel restrictions, business closures, and so on. It is also experiencing similar difficulties, such as overcrowded hospitals and lack of medical equipment. Funds have been allocated for the procurement of medical equipment and financial support for those of the population who need it. Although the measures taken by the government may look good, the situation gets more complicated when one dissects the repercussions of these measures. With the closure of non-essential businesses came the loss of livelihood for many. For people who were living pay-check by pay-check, this meant they didn't know where their next meal was coming from, that did not have income. This meant that their lives were no longer in their control.

Other issues arise from the government not delivering on their promises. Despite the promise of food supply, there have been complaints from people living in underprivileged communities saying that they are receiving little to no help, forcing them to break quarantine and find ways to make money. There have been accusations of corruption after people pointed out that the large amounts of money spent in the government reports didn't align with the supposed market value of the medical supplies purchased. There have been cries of social injustice as the president threatened violence upon those who did not adhere to the measures placed.

As the cases continue to rise, we must remember that these are lives, not mere statistics. Dehumanization should not be a symptom of this pandemic. It is my hope that the Philippine government provides its people with the means to stay home, because here, you have to be able to afford to stay home. It is a privilege. People would not be breaking quarantine if they were not forced to. But when you have mouths to feed, and no means of feeding them, what more can you do?

There is a Filipino word, *bayanihan*, which refers to a community effort in accomplishing a difficult task. The world is faced with a difficult task, and it is our duty as humans to contribute in the efforts to flatten the curve. Staying home, and providing whatever help you can to those who may not have the privilege to do the same (be it due to finances or working as frontliners) are considered contributions to the worldwide effort to address this virus. In this way, the whole world practices *bayanihan*.

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