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Heart to Heart

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A travesty of justice

Now that the three musketeers of the pork barrel scam, and their mastermind Muse and Cheerleader Janet Napoles, are behind bars, and all the rest of their fellow (35 or so) plunderers or conspirators joining them, another deviant facet of our Philippine culture, besides the culture of corruption, has started to emerge and come under the spotlight once again. I am referring to the government's and some people's warped sense of justice and fairness in dealing with criminals in jail.

The jail cells for these criminals have been refurbished with our taxes, the people's money, specifically for their incarceration. Why the special treatment for these legislator law breakers? Instead of spending the funds for the reconstruction, it should have been given to the homeless and the hungry, and for the schooling of those children in poverty.

Bong, who has been most arrogant, hostile, contentious, and bellicose of all, has been complaining of rats in his jail cell. There is nothing wrong with that. Rats belong to where rats are. Besides, the more than 30 percent of Filipinos in the gutter of poverty today would gladly take these jailed plunderers' place, with free air-conditioned shelter, with security guards, free food and free medical care, etc.

Jails are for criminals and criminals must be in jail. That's what our constitution and penal code state. There is no provision in either of those two which states that plunderers who are VIPs, celebrities, or legislators, or even a former president of the country, proven guilty of their crime, should be accorded a special treatment, housed in a Hilton, or even a cheap pension house, version of a jail, and allowed to have amenities like a TV in their cell, special beds, microwave oven, etc., and to party and receive visitors all they want.

The plunderers and those yet to be indicted in the public sector corruption have caused our government and tax payers about P250 Billion annually. That massive hemorrhage from the national coffers could have provided more than one million new homes for the homeless, 523 classrooms, feeding more than 7 million hungry people, rehabilitation of more than 5.5 million hectares of damaged farmlands, medical care for 210 million indigent families, purchase of more than 94,000 ambulances, 12,500 fire trucks, 400,000 non-polluting electronic jeepneys, more than 17 million school computers, 50 million scholarship programs from the Commission on Higher Education, all for our

people, especially those in the gutter of poverty, the very direct victims of these plunderers, led by Enrile, Bong Revilla and Jinggoy Estrada.

Common criminals in jail for stealing food or money for care of their sick family members or for education of their children are the ones we should show understanding and compassion, and give special treatment to, if at all, compared to these plunderers.

Legislators and all government officials or employees, like those in high offices, Supreme Court, members of Congress, priests, policemen and others in law enforcement offices, and other public servants, must be treated to a higher standard.

A priest raping someone is worst than a common rapist; a policeman, justice of the supreme court, or members of congress, who steal commit a graver crime than non-official thieves. These criminals must be held fully accountable for their crimes, and not be rewarded with VIP treatments compared to those others in jail. The maximum penalty required by law must be meted to them, without mercy. They did not show mercy to our suffering, disenfranchised, people now wallowing in abject poverty, with their nose barely above water.

Why should Enrile be shown extra mercy, or Bong and Jinggoy given special care? We must respect and follow our laws, our penal code. They must be housed and fed, and not be abused in jail. If they are legitimately ill, they must, like other prisoners, be given medical care in jail, or, be hospitalized, if medical justified. They must be treated like other criminals in jail. No special treatment. The jailed criminal must suffer the consequences of their act. Of all people, Enrile, the framer of the Marcos Martial Law, and legislators Bong and Jinggoy, ought to know. They knowingly and with premeditation, violated the law, now they must suffer for that.

If the government wants to give special amenities (TV, cushion, cellphone, microwave oven, etc.) it must also give the same benefits to all the other prisoners in all jails in the country, without exception.

As a cardiovascular surgeon, I know that the common irregular heart beat is not a justifiable reason for Gigi Reyes not to be in jail or for her to be in a hospital, like Gloria Arroyo, whose condition does not really require hospitalization. There are hundreds of millions of people round the world active and working normally with the common irregular heart beat or neck arthritis and pain. Only life-threatening medical and surgical conditions should be accepted as an indication for hospitalization, which is standard practice in the medical community around the world. Our justice system is being abused by these medical excuses to stay out of jail, and our government seems to be falling for it.

Physicians who certify that such and other trivial medical condition are excuses to be out of jail, or require hospitalization, when proven wrong by our Department of Health or reputable medical societies, must themselves be brought to court and jailed. These physicians are then, as corrupt as those plunderers they are trying to shield from justice.

When former president Gloria Arroyo, while in office, now in hospital arrest herself for plunder, etc., pardoned Erap Estrada, who was jailed for plunder, she irreparably damaged our justice system and the reputation of the Philippines in the eyes of the international community, who has branded the Philippines as a most corrupt country.

In some countries, who we, a democratic and basically a Catholic nation, call barbaric and unchristian for speedy trials and public executions of plunderers among their officials, graft and corruption is rarer, compared to the Philippines, where VIP plunderers and murderers could escape the justice system.

Are we really more democratic, more Christian, when we turn our cheek the other way and allow the plunderers in our government to proliferate and continue decades after decades to rob the nation's coffers, people's tax money at the expense of those millions in poverty and the countless victims of the various natural disasters, and when the plunderers are caught, give them pardon and allow them to run for public office again?

Why are we so stupid and masochistic? Why do we have that self-destruct culture in us? We are an intelligent people, so why can We, the People, not be a united majority and condemn these plunderers to the maximum penalty, without mercy, and simply abide by the penal code of the nation?

If Christ did not turn His cheek the other way and aggressively condemned usury and the evils that went with it during His time, you can imagine how He would treat these plunderers in our midst today.

I say, we, Filipinos, as a nation, are more unchristian, less compassionate, more barbaric to our nation and its people to be soft on plunderers, compared to those nations who expeditiously kill in public squares the massively guilty few to protect the greater majority, especially their marginalized poor.

Besides putting the plunderers behind bars for life (reclusion perpetua), the government must take back the total amount these legislators stole and confiscate their properties and other assets as a payment of the penalty to the amount prescribed by law. All these billions of pesos could then be used to ameliorate poverty in the country.

These corrupt legislators and their coconspirators need a painful lesson. Let's give them one.

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