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## Should the squatters be sympathized?

Posted by jacques08 - 2007/06/29 11:08

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this is a common topic I love debating with my friends. I live in Valenzuela, a city surrounded by cities where the squatter's areas are the main attraction. Every single day on my way to work I would pass by these areas and can't help but notice the usual sights of children as young as 2 y/o without underwear running around the place barefoot not minding the always wet and muddy ground and the running cars just a few steps away from them. Also there are those ranging from 7 y/o up wandering up a mountain of crap scavenging for things like plastic, metal, or if lucky left over food. Then on the other side of the street, you see mothers cooking up chicken. What a surprise right? They are heating up chicken that looks like those in fast food chains. Glancing a little over beside the mother is a black garbage bag with which you could see a little of what seems like styrofoams of Jollibee. Yes, they took fast food's chickens from the garbage then re-heating it for that fresh-from-the-oven taste. This made me sick to my stomach. I can't believe these are the things parents would make their children eat!

I've always been fascinated and stressed at the same time with how squatters live their life. Back when I was younger, I pity them especially children of my age seeing they do not go to school and can't eat or do things that my age would enjoy. As I grew older that pity became curiosity especially with the alarming exponential increase of their kind in the city. In college, we had the subject Sociology and were asked to submit a thesis about current social problems. I saw this as a chance to finally find out about it personally, therefore never had 2nd thoughts on what topic I shall be involving myself with. For the 1st time, I'm finally making a research about something I'm so engrossed with at the same time is essential in fulfillment to the requirement of my professor.

After gathering enough courage, I finally forced myself to go down in their area to conduct interview with some "locals" (if this term is applicable to them). I talked to some of them asking questions like what they do for a living, where they originally came from, what they think is the cause of their status in life and what they plan to do about it. Most of the women said their husbands are the only one bringing money in the family, for they are left taking care of the children (take note: minimum number is 3). Job description of husbands? Jeep barker (earning less than 100 per day); cargo carrier (1 peso per sack of rice transferred from the ship to the cargo truck) <-- this made my jaw dropped! a guy needs to carry a sack of rice hundred times just to earn at least P100 at the end of the day!; the rest of them were carpenters, construction workers, industrial contractors, etc. (all under the minimum wage). My mind stopped grasping the rest of their words for I just can't imagine how in the world they survive everyday if they have so many mouth to feed with less to spend. I'm doing the math in my mind and I kept ending up to the simple equation of any number divided by zero. Answer is: indefinite. It would result in error in the world of logic. It just wouldn't work. Realizing I'm already unconsciously shaking my head in anxiety, I listened again. From their tales, most of them came from the provinces of Visayas who took the chance of finding a better life here in Manila. Ran away from their so-called miserable and hopeless lives of being just farmers or fishermen, they opted to try their luck here but ended up worse than before. When asked what they thought caused all of these to them, 1st in their list is the government. According to them, the gov't. doesn't provide enough for people less fortunate like them. 2nd, the companies discriminate them just because they are poor thus not trustworthy enough to give them a job (what a mind set!). Then some other reasons that they seem to never run out of. And how about what they plan to do about their life? Ideally, they want their children to finish school so that they will have better future. But are their children going to school? Uhm, either just one of them or none at all. The reason: their family needed more money so the children are working to have some additional income. Plus, they couldn't afford to put them to school because what they have is just sufficient to buy them food to get them through the day. During this point of the interview, my handwriting becomes heavier every second. I want to say out loud what my head is screaming. "You can't afford to send kids to school, couldn't even afford to feed your own selves adequately, then why in God's name do you still produce so many children?!?!" I wanted to ask them this but I know I shouldn't. This will not convey a good thing for them.

After talking to the adults, I went on to chat a little with the kids. I found them running after another. Just enjoying their time, this is a lot since they don't go to school. I asked them to answer a few questions for me and I'll promise to give them P20 each after the interview. Without hesitations they agreed. I only had one question for them: what do they think about education. Surprisingly, they said they don't need it. "I'm better off working than to waste my time in school.", "None of my parents went to school so why would I?", "We can't afford it.", one girl said "I used to but my father said I'm not bright so we're just wasting money for my school supplies that's why he stop sending me to school.". I sat there astounded with mixed emotions. I just need to get some air. I need to be out of that place.

This, my friends, was my appalling personal experience of it. The mind boggling perspective of these people towards life and towards education. Is it still wrong for me to feel unnerving about them? I still feel sympathetic for the children. I really do. But I feel exasperated about those in their proper age already and mature enough to think on their own. The offspring deserve better chance of survival by having them become educated. The only dilemma with this is that they have nobody to motivate them to aspire for more. They look up to their parents who are just contented of what they are consequently the kids see life as it is and aims for no more than what their parents lived to love. It's not innocence that's rotting our economy but indolence. There are ways to live life to the fullest. There will always be ways to improve your state of living if you would only strive in looking for them. Life is a jungle. You don't expect to be spoon-fed to reach a desirable existence.

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It was never your fault to be born poor, but to die poor is.

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## Re:Should the squatters be sympathized?

Posted by kayum - 2007/06/29 12:37

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Hi Jacques08,

I feel your concern over our poor countrymen who lives by the shanties. :( I am a Filipino too and I have seen the sights myself. Personally, I don't think I can blame any of them from trying out their luck in the city though I can't exactly comprehend why the situation has completely gone out of hand. It is obvious that coming to the present day, the governing bodies have had a hand in not addressing the problems stacking before so this is the end result. I cannot generalize nor pick one reason why they've multiplied their dilemmas as time went by but what I'm sure of is that none of them wanted to die poor and most of them had to at least try. It is apparent though that over time, most of them, if not all, lost hope and gets frustrated thus the direct effect on urban crime rate becomes obvious.

I am a former Sampaloc, Manila resident and though not a squatter myself, behind our former house is a squatter's area. Their common denominator is survival... same as our's.

I believe that it is wrong to turn our backs on them because they do deserve a chance to share or gain a better life but I do not condone squatting or settling on land unlawfully due to lack of land title. I don't believe though that solutions hasn't been devised because like I said earlier, this is a problem ages ago so whatever the best solution, it should be implemented soon and everybody should be willing to cooperate.

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## Re:Should the squatters be sympathized?

Posted by Sandvand - 2007/07/02 22:18

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Thank you, Jacques, for your thoughtful piece!

This is a very complicated issue. But I think we can safely assume that people generally do not choose to remain poor. Assuming that, we are left to consider whether people indeed have the chance to move up the ladder in a society.

Of course there will always be some success stories - and that is good! But that does not mean that most squatters by will are able to make a better living for themselves. In most countries social structures are hard to fight. I think you will see that also in the Philippines, where a few powerful families have held so much formal and informal power in the society.

I have been to several of the slum areas in Manila myself as a journalist. The situation for the children there is indeed very bad. But I think you are wrong, Jacques, when you assume that most parents can just decide to move their children out of this poverty and miserable life.

Life as squatters just isn't that simple.

I think.

John

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## Re:Should the squatters be sympathized?

Posted by pokkha - 2007/07/03 14:13

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I've had immersions with the urban poor a few years ago when I took units of Development Communication course in graduate school. Because my professor then was an urban poor leader, he required us to immerse ourselves with some poorest of the poor communities in the country's capital. He introduced us to the communities where he lived with the most underprivileged Filipinos.

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The experiences were an eye opener for me. I saw how much difficulty the squatters are facing day after day in order to survive. They live in shanties. Some are much unfortunate that they've become street dwellers. When asked about what the future holds for them, the answers were almost the same. They blame the government for not taking care of their welfare. They're poor because the government doesn't provide for them the opportunities to alleviate their lives.

Instead of empathizing with them, I felt some irritation upon learning that they depend their lives on the government. That instead of using their minds to work on ways to improve their situation, they perpetually blame others for their misfortune.

It's true that it's not their choice to poor. They must have been born poor but life doesn't stop from there. We are not to be blamed for being born to a poor family but it's going to be our fault if we remain poverty-stricken all our lives. :huh:

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## Re:Should the squatters be sympathized?

Posted by larryberry - 2007/07/14 02:27

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As an American who has visited the Phil 8 times i am always interested in how the people of the Phil look upon their less fortunate bretheren. Some of my chatmates tell me anyone there can help themselves by just applying themselves and trying hard to improve their life. Others seem to blame the government for their plight. My personal opinion is that the Catholic Church has to accept some blame for their insistance that their members do not use any artificial birth control and thus so many children are born to parents who can hardly feed themselves much less give a better life to their children. I just wonder if anyone has asked the Church about this issue and if so what is their reply.

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## Re:Should the squatters be sympathized?

Posted by jacques08 - 2007/07/16 07:23

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i dont think that the church has something to do with this. realistically, these people couldn't afford artificial birth controls such as pills or stuff like that. Their daily income that's normally USD2.00 is not even sufficient enough to feed them. So every cent is as crucial as life and death. the only issue we can somehow throw against the church is that they dont do much about the problem. they keep talking about it and pushing people to pity the poor and that we should all reach out and help. but are they? the church confine themselves inside their walls. sure they do charitable missions but obviously those are not enough. catholic churches are seen everywhere in the phils. and every church has its priest and his assistants. if only they would do something about the community around their church. preaching alone is not enough. to lead by example is the best way to influence people. i hope that they could fulfill their spiritual calling not by praying and devoting themselves to the lord alone. they will serve a better purpose if they would go out and start giving other people some paradigm shift towards life. :silly:

Post edited by: jacques08, at: 2007/07/16 07:25

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## Re:Should the squatters be sympathized?

Posted by jacques08 - 2007/07/16 07:23

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Post edited by: jacques08, at: 2007/07/16 07:26

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## Re:Should the squatters be sympathized?

Posted by larryberry - 2007/07/16 12:09

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After thinking about the last post of Jacques08 ,I agree that the poor in the Philippines do not have the money necessary to practice birth control even if the Catholic Church allowed them to. Maybe this is where GMA and her government needs to step in and offer the condoms and birth control pills at clinics. Of course the Church would still have to give it's blessing before people would avail themselves to using what the clinics could offer.

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## Re:Should the squatters be sympathized?

Posted by ruth - 2007/07/27 03:22

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sympathy will not get you nor the squatters anywhere.

The problem of this breadth and depth can never be solved or addressed in our generation.

It will take a super leader and garnatuan citizen nation wide effort, similar to what Japan did after World War 2...to solve this issue once and for all.

I lived and breathe squatter's air from when I was in highschool until I finished college.

We are not squatters anymore and it took a lot of conscious effort to get ourselves from the mire...but we are still poor folks..

a little comfortable and a little more dignified way of living but still poor nonetheless..if you are born out of a generation of poor folks...you cannot be rich overnight unless you have given up your values and character or sold you soul to the devil.

what I am trying to drive at is that not all squatter's people are lazy and clueless as what most of you are preempting here.

some maybe be lazy...some maybe hardworking but still clueless..i dont blame..nor sympathize..i do whatever i can whenever I can to alleviate my ex-neighbours plights...it does not mean doling out..but giving sensible advices..

i think most of you are too detached from their plight..that you are really looking from vantage point of a crow perched on top of a tree...

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## Re:Should the squatters be sympathized?

Posted by ruth - 2007/07/27 03:45

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quote: jacques08

It was never your fault to be born poor, but to die poor is.

ruth:

am not sure what you are trying to say, the Philippines, there are just two kinds of people. THE POOR and the RICH. There is no middle class anymore. It was gone since the time of Marcos.

Now I wonder, what you mean by dying poor is someone's fault.

On a more spiritual note, one can die poor materially, but can die rich spiritually.

Back to economics, I still cannot fathom, how a poor invididual born of a poor family and only have poor friends (no connections, no networks) and poor relatives...can die rich in his or her lifetime.

If you know how..can you teach me how?

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## Re:Should the squatters be sympathized?

Posted by stormrage10 - 2007/07/30 12:25

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ruth wrote:

quote: jacques08

It was never your fault to be born poor, but to die poor is.

On a more spiritual note, one can die poor materially, but can die rich spiritually.

those facts/ideas are true...

i guess you should pity those poor people who has the talent and skills to work but cant work due to discrimination..

the church already done some charitable works like "pondo ng pinoy" which already help some of our fellow filipinos..

then again like the government the church cant accommodate all of citizens here in the philippines and thats why our government and even the church calls each and every one of us to help each other..

Post edited by: stormrage10, at: 2007/07/30 12:26

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## Re:Should the squatters be sympathized?

Posted by ruth - 2007/07/31 09:02

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stormrage,

i do not want to be pessimistic here, but "helping each other" seems to be wishful thinking..

unless there is cultural and nationwide reformation so that everyone, church, government and the citizens have nothing to turn to but themselves.

Should squatters be sympathized? no, but they should equally be respected. Some squatter dwellers are productive and are tax payers too...these are the tax payers who does not have any choice but to pay correct taxes ..unlike rich people who can get away with not paying the correct taxes.

Also squatter dwellers is the biggest market for food products...biggest number of voters too.

They should be uplifted for what they contribute and not tolerated for what they do if they commit mistakes (along with other people who commit mistakes too, squatter dwellers or not).

IF they are dwelling on public property let the government impose laws so that those who do not follow the law will be punished. Let the government reinforce the law instead of tolerating squatters to get more votes.

If they are dwelling on private property and that property happen to be YOURs, then dont tolerate them, sue them.

But if you are not the owner of that property, you do not have the right to complain.

You as a Filipino is only as strong as your weakest link. Don't bash your own countrymen.

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## Re:Should the squatters be sympathized?

Posted by ms ott - 2007/08/25 05:03

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You are asking the wrong question. Squatters are the result of the country's leadership failure to continue the building of the nation that President Quirino started but never materialized after Marcos messed up the country's struggle to follow the democratic process modelled after the USA. The squatters' lot is the responsibility of the government...to plan and

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execute economic policies that will help the Filipinos, specially from the hinterland (rural areas, fishing villages, etc.) engage in productive livelihood. The question to ask is how can the Philippine Government help the Filipinos find jobs that will give them enough salary to support their families? At the same time, how can the government, religious establishments, the media (newspapers, television) and educational institutions work together to discourage Filipinos from siring too many children when they cannot afford to feed them?

There are lots of work to do. Pitying them will not solve the problems we call "squatters".

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## Re:Should the squatters be sympathized?

Posted by karlom87 - 2007/09/05 07:04

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Yes, pitying them will not do any good.

Also, demolishing squatter communities is a superficial solution to an otherwise deeper problem. This cannot be adequately addressed without solving the basic concerns (poverty, lack of opportunities, high cost of education, rising prices of basic goods, etc.) afflicting the nation. The poor people from the countrysides who build shanties on owned land do so because of the lack of real choices.

Let me share Manuel Quezon III's thoughts from his writings on the matter. He offers a solution to this problem: "National and local government should accelerate the transformation of squatter areas into well-governed communities, the question of who holds the title to the land being the last priority."

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## Re:Should the squatters be sympathized?

Posted by ann - 2007/10/18 08:12

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Well, I can relate to this topic very much because I myself lived in the squatters for 10 years. My parents, cousins lived there. But I didn't let my situation hinder me to continue to study and look for a better job. Now, I can say that I am successful because I can now provide a better life for my family, my struggles and experiences really helped me a lot on how to become a better person. I do believe that squatters don't need to be sympathized, they should be educated and motivated on how to improve their lives. And that the government plays an important role as to how the community should improve by focusing on a long-term program. It reminds me of this phrase, "Don't give a person a fish, you teach them how to fish."

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## Re:Should the squatters be sympathized?

Posted by jerminix - 2008/05/09 02:25

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I think the government should do something about it, I mean people are getting more depressed as they have no trust in the current government situation,

But the most important factor is the parents, if you cannot take care of your children then why you still continue to make one, overpopulation is also a problem, and the demand of food is greater than the current supply

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