

Gender Equality in the Philippines: The LGBTQ Community and Their Fight for Freedom

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On October 11, 2014, a transgender woman was found lifeless while her body was slumped on the floor, her neck covered with injuries, and her head leaning against a toilet bowl in the bathroom of a hotel in Olongapo City, the Philippines. The prime suspect of her murder was a 19-year old US Marine Pfc. who was in the Philippines for a joint military exercise under the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) between the United States of America (USA) and the Philippines. According to the investigations, the suspect checked in with her for sexual services. Then he found out that his sex partner was a trans woman, which triggered the murder. This is a hate crime against the transgender woman.

This horrendous case was a wake-up call sent not only to the Philippines, but also to the whole world about the threats and dangers the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) communities are facing.

Fight for LGBTQ Rights in the Philippines

Through the Global Gender Gap Report 2014, the World Economic Forum assesses and evaluates the gender disparities and tracks the gender progress of 142 countries over time. As a means of achieving this, “The Global Gender Gap Index seeks to measure one important aspect of gender equality through relative gaps between women and men across four key areas: health, education, economy, and politics.” Among the top 10 countries with high gender equality, the Philippines is ranked 9th, followed by Belgium in 10th place. This was a great achievement made by the country towards gender equality. But the question is: what does this case imply and what is happening to the people of LGBTQ community?

In 1994, the first organized gay pride parade in the Philippines was held. The Metro Manila Pride March gathered LGBTQ rights advocates and supporters in Manila to express solidarity with one another, despite a lot of pressure from the Roman Catholic Church. It must be taken into consideration that the Philippines is predominantly a Catholic nation and it prohibits same-sex relationships and sexual activities. In 2013, another pride march was organized wherein “the parade emphasizes the ability of the LGBTQ community to rise up from oppression” (Tamboon, cited in Rappler 2014). Despite their fight for acceptance, the LGBTQ community believes that a lot of work should be done to fight discrimination. One avenue to be considered is the legal system

and its gender fairness not only for women and men, but also for the LGBTQ community.

Gender Fair Policies towards the LGBTQ Community in the Philippines

The Anti-Discrimination Act was filed in the House of Representatives of the Philippines in 2013. This bill aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination which offends the equal protection clause in the Bill of Rights. According to the proposed bill, discrimination “shall be understood to imply any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference, which is based on any ground such as sex, sexual orientation, gender identity..., and which has the purpose or effect of...impairing the recognition...by all persons of an equal footing of all rights and freedoms.” Unfortunately, the bill remains in a pending stage due to countering efforts by the Catholic Church.



2013 Pride March held at the University of the Philippines. Photo from Buena Bernal/Rappler.com

Quezon City, the largest city by area in the Philippines, made a historic move for the LGBTQ community through the passage of a pro-LGBT ordinance of the city in 2014. The “Gender-Fair City” ordinance aims to protect LGBTQ rights in the workplace, schools and accommodations, as well as their rights to access basic services. Moreover, this ordinance prohibits discrimination against homosexuals.

LGBTQ rights as gender rights

Let us all remember that it is not only women and men who should be considered when gender equality is discussed. True gender equality deals with the empowerment of the marginalized sectors of society; women who are deprived of their basic rights, men who are abused and laughed at due to social anomalies, and the LGBTQ community that continues to face discrimination and hatred, which hinder their full potential as persons and human beings.