

Philippines: Martial Law survivors relive torture as dictator's son assumes power

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Four decades since they experienced grave abuse as political detainees under the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand E. Marcos, three survivors say they cannot accept his son as president

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MANILA, Philippines – Ka Rey was only 18 when Martial Law was declared. Three days after its imposition, state forces raided his family's Quezon City residence. He got away that time, but the Kapulungan ng mga Sandigan ng Pilipinas (KASAPI) member soon found himself behind bars.

Now 68, Rey, who asked Rappler not to use his last name, still remembers the physical and mental torture he experienced as police tried to force him to confess to being a recruit of the Communist Party of the Philippines and to squeal on his alleged comrades.

Every denial and attempt to explain his status earned him blows, he said at a gathering of Martial Law victims at the Bantayog ng Mga Bayani in Quezon City on the same day Ferdinand Marcos Jr. took his oath as the country's 17th President.

"Tatanungin pa ako kung kilala ko si ganito. Hindi ko naman alam, hindi naman ako maka kaliwa. SocDem ako," Rey recalled. (They would ask me if I knew this person. But I didn't know anything. I was not a leftist. I was a social democrat.)

As President Marcos delivered his inaugural speech, stressing his campaign theme of unity, Rey and other survivors of the Marcos dictatorship took an oath to keep on fighting human rights violations.

"Masakit sa amin 'yan kasi pinaalis mo na eh, tapos pabalik mo pa," Rey told Rappler. (It hurts, knowing our people toppled that family, but then brought them back.)

PHOTO: SURVIVOR. "Ka Rey" says his jailers during the Martial Law regime of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s father and namesake refused to listen to his pleas. (Photo by Justine Garcia)]

Loyalists and Marcos Jr. have described the two-decade Marcos dictatorship as a "golden age" But the Philippine state has had to pay compensation to more than 11,000 victims of human rights violations under the late dictator's rule.

Amnesty International has said that in the ten years of Martial Law 70,000 people were jailed, 34,000 tortured, and 3,240 killed.

[PLAY VIDEO Martial Law survivors relive torture as dictator's son assumes power]

Treated like a football

Recalling the hardships of his four years in jail, 73-year-old Danilo Dela Fuente, told Rappler he cannot accept Marcos Jr. as president.

The former labor organizer was 33 years old when state forces arrested him.

Four decades later, the pain, anger, and feeling of helplessness continue to haunt him.

Being punched in his solar plexus –a sensitive part of the stomach – was the easier part of his ordeal.

At one time, ten torturers treated him “like a football” during a “tea party”.

Every time he got called in by his jailers, Danilo prayed for the luck to emerge alive.

However, during one torture session, he thought that his luck had finally run out.

“Totoo pala yun, nagdilim na lang bigla. Akala ko wala na,” Danilo said, recalling that time he was electrocuted. (Everything went black. I thought it was the end.)

Although Danilo survived all the physical abuse, the pain never left. He told Rappler that seeing Marcos Jr. as president means there is little hope of reprieve from suffering, especially since the dictator’s son refuses to acknowledge the past.

Dungeon days

Anacleto Ocampo’s “crime” was being the brother of Satur Ocampo, a respected business editor who went underground when Marcos declared Martial Law and became a leader in the underground National Democratic Front.

Anacleto, then 20 years old, was an engineering student. Since he was not an activist, he thought his lack of knowledge of activism would shield him.

He was wrong. State forcers took his lack of answers for defiance. It almost cost him his life.

After being isolated in a dungeon for a week, Anacleto underwent a harsh beating that ended with him barely able to walk.

Inside the interrogation room, his jailers took out a long metal bar from a steel cabinet.

Like he was wielding a sword, a police officer stroked the metal piece across the young man’s body—in his back, thighs, and stomach. And then repeatedly slammed it down hard on Anacleto.

The 30-minute beating was so severe, Anacleto’s urine the next day was red in color.

That experience transformed him into a determined activist, one who doesn’t believe Marcos Jr.’s unity message.

At the least, the son will try to erase the real history of Martial Law, said the 69-year-old Anacleto.

“Sa naging karanasan ko sa tatay niya, palagay ko, may gagawin sila...lilinis nila ang pangalan nila. [Kaya] dapat pa rin tayong mag matyag. Huwag basta-basta magtiwala, baka maulit na naman,” he told Rappler. (With my experience during his father’s term, I think they will do something to clear their name. So we need to be vigilant. Do not trust easily, the past might happen again.)

[STILL FIGHTING. Victims and survivors of Martial Law stand in front of the Bantayog ng Mga Bayani wall to show that those who died or suffered during the Marcos dictatorship will never be forgotten. (Photo by Justine Garcia)]

Anacleto also believes human rights defenders have no reason to rest.

“Hindi mawawala ‘yung pinaglalaman namin noon. Dapat ipagpatuloy yan-tunay na kalayaan, demokrasya, walang historical distortion,” he said. (The things we fought for will not be erased. We should continue fighting for genuine freedom, democracy, without historical distortion.)

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P.S.

- Rappler.com. JUN 30, 2022 8:10 PM PHT:
<https://www.rappler.com/nation/martial-law-survivors-relive-torture-marcos-jr-assumes-power/>
- Justine Garcia is an active member of MovePH, the citizen movement arm of Rappler.