

Philippines SONA 2017 day: in defense of rights

Tuesday 25 July 2017, by [#BlockMarcos movement](#), [DOCENA Herbert](#), [Partido Manggagawa](#) (Date first published: 25 July 2017).

The march of those who cannot march

“Hanggang ‘photo op’ lang kayo!” sneered someone from an otherwise respectful and supportive group of protesters who marched by the over 1,000 pairs of shoes and slippers we had installed near the Batasan Pambansa for yesterday’s SONA to represent just a fraction of the at least 8,000 who have been killed under Duterte’s bloody regime—and of the thousands more who may be killed if he succeeds in continuing to sanction extra-judicial killings and in imposing martial law in the entire country. It’s true that we wanted pictures—lots of pictures. We wanted, in our own quiet way, to capture the true “state of the nation”: a nation descending to barbarism in the name of ‘progress,’ a nation marching to the tune of a foul-mouthed pied piper towards perdition.

More than just tugging at people’s hearts, however, we also wanted, without using too many words, to send out a “call to action”: This is what would happen, we wanted to say, if Duterte succeeds in building a fascist mass movement and imposing a fascist dictatorship in the country. There’d be no more protest marches during SONA, just traces of our footsteps, because we’d all likely be locked up in jail if not ‘disappeared’ by Duterte’s own “black shirts.” So the time to act is now—while we can still march on the streets—rather than later.

For that message to reach more people, we needed media coverage and thus, a “photo-op.”

But this was also not just another publicity stunt. We had been convinced that, contrary to what they’d like us to believe, there are actually thousands if not tens of thousands of other Filipinos out there who do not necessarily approve of how things are going in our country—who are outraged by all the bloodshed on the streets, who reject extrajudicial killings and martial law, and who are ready to rise up against fascism. We just need to find a way to encourage them and convince them that they’re not alone, and we just need to find a way to enable them to express themselves in their own way.

Such was how the idea of a *“Martsa ng mga Hindi Makapagmartsa”* was born. We appealed to our friends and our family to join us in expressing our resistance to Duterte’s bloody regime by sending us their old shoes or slippers (or their cash if they were away or had no more shoes to give) if, for whatever reason, they can’t join us on the streets. And we deliberately decided to install the shoes somewhere near the community where so many have been lost to state-sanctioned EJKs so that they too can be part of the conversation—and also somewhere close enough to Batasan to keep the action’s confrontational and antagonistic edge.

At first, we thought we had failed yet again. By Friday last week, over a week after we sent out our initial call and just three days before the SONA, we had less than a hundred pairs of shoes and other footwear. Dejected and desperate, we considered just calling off the action altogether, and decided to scale down our target to 300-500 shoes.

But then something unexpected began to happen.

A friend of mine from college had apparently taken it upon himself to act as a one-man collection brigade, appealing to all his friends and driving all over the city to pick up their old shoes. He came to me on Saturday morning, opened his trunk, and revealed a trunkload of shoes.

And apparently, so many other friends of #BlockMarcos members—many of them not necessarily “activists” or “political”—were also quietly doing the same.

Also without being prodded, another coalition—one which #BlockMarcos doesn’t necessarily agree with on many fundamental things—also decided to support us by mobilizing its members to collect shoes for us.

Another friend from college—one who I had somehow lost in touch with—sent a message asking for our bank account: he wanted to participate despite being overseas.

Meanwhile, another #BlockMarcos member currently based in London, reported that she too had managed to raise funds and committed to raise even more for the action—in part by baking and selling cassava cakes.

Yet another friend agreed to give up his Sunday getting hundreds of cheap *tsinelas* from Divisoria.

By Sunday night, we had a different, unexpected—but welcome—problem: we suddenly had over 1,000 shoes and slippers!

Because many #BlockMarcos members are also involved in other organizations mobilizing on SONA, our problem now was that we wouldn’t have enough people to staff the installation.

But then the unexpected happened again: More volunteers who, instead of working or enjoying the holiday, decided to come to the ‘installation,’ drop off even more shoes, face off with the cops, and play ‘*patintero*’ with some of the onlookers who wanted to get their hands on some of the shoes. (Let’s be clear: we don’t blame them—what kind of society drives people to scramble for old shoes and slippers?)

So many people stepped up and made the installation happen.

Among the most inspiring was one otherwise soft-spoken and shy #BlockMarcos member who usually keeps quiet during meetings but who—when forced to suddenly act as one of our ‘spokespersons’—turned out to be one of the most eloquent, most articulate speakers I have heard in some time.

Thanks to the help of all those who came and stayed on throughout the day, we managed to have the deeper conversation we were aiming for—in the shadow of a funeral home where so many EJK victims had been taken: So many members of the nearby community, along with so many other commuters and passersby, came by, usually asking, “*Ano po ang ibig sabihin nito?* (What does this mean?)” we replied not just by answering the question but by asking even more questions—about the rightness and effectiveness of Duterte’s ‘solution’ to the drug problem, about whether they agreed with martial law, about what they thought of where Duterte is taking the country. Many shared our concerns and anger; many others disagreed with us—but I think/hope that they at least walked away with new questions in their minds.

One of them asked: “Sir, are those really the shoes of the people who were killed in the ‘war on drugs?’”

“No,” I replied. “They’re just symbols.”

But it turns out this was not entirely correct.

One of the volunteers later told us that at some point, as we were collecting the shoes to rearrange them, an elderly woman with gray strands of hair and who was wearing a loose skirt, rushed to secure a particular pair of shoes. Asked why, she said, the shoes belonged to someone she lost, and that she came because, “*nawalan din kasi kami... (We also lost someone...)*.”

Apparently, at least one of the hundreds of shoes we had yesterday belonged to someone who had actually been killed in the ‘war on drugs.’ Lola apparently heard of our action somehow, and she rushed to Commonwealth because she, too, wanted to join the “march”—and wanted whoever she lost to be with us.

It’ll, of course, take more than just evocative ‘protest art installations’ to block—and defeat—dictatorship. We need more conversations, more on-the-ground organizing, more mobilizations.

But perhaps, this is how we begin to win.

(Thanks to all those who made the *Martsa ng mga Hindi Makapag-Martsa* possible. There’s too many of you to mention—you know who you are!)

Herbert Docena, #Blockmarcos

MARTSA NG MGA HINDI NA MAKAPAGMARTSA

#BLOCKMARCOS

Today, the President will once again report on the state of a mythical nation: a nation united, marching in cadence towards the promised land of progress.

But, just as in the past several years, thousands of us will again be marching on the streets to express the real state of the nation: a nation divided, mired in poverty and hunger, being led away from the land of freedom.

This year, however, there will be many Filipinos who—even if they might have wanted to march with us and protest—will not be able to join us: all those who been killed by cops, soldiers, and vigilantes emboldened by Duterte’s sanctioning of extra-judicial killings, promotion of impunity, and imposition of martial law in Mindanao; all those who have been silenced and disempowered by an army of propagandists who have spun a web of deceit around them.

And in the coming years, if President Duterte succeeds in restoring full-blown dictatorship, none of us will be able to march at all. There won’t be any more protests during the SONA because all of us have either already been locked up in jail—or simply terrorized into just staying at home and keeping silent.

This is why, while we still have time, we need to put ourselves in the shoes of all those who can no longer march—and of all those who will not be able to march in the future—to do what they cannot or will not be able to do: to march on and occupy the streets—during the SONA and in the coming weeks—to #BlockDuterte and resist tyranny.

“Never again!” cannot just remain a slogan, it must also be a commitment to put our bodies in the line of fire in order to join the people in charting a better future.

Join us in fighting dictatorship; join us in building a real democracy.

Harangin ang diktadura! Baguhin ang sistema!

Workers reaction to SONA 2017

Partido Manggagawa (PM), Labor Party - Philippines

So has the promise of change been delivered?

The SONA was full of sound and fury but signifying nothing for workers. Workers got absolutely nothing from the two-hour long SONA speech of President Duterte. The SONA started on the theme of the promise of change. Thus workers waited for Duterte to elaborate on the delivery of the promises. But not a single word on ending endo. And not much else too on other social reform issues.

Instead, the narrative of whether promises were delivered was overshadowed by Duterte’s rambling rants against his critics, principally human rights advocates, the mass media and international rights organizations. Indeed the rants were a convenient distraction from the embarrassing topic of undelivered promises. Paradoxically only China was unreservedly praised.

After the hours-long stories, curses, and boasts, how will the lives of the workers and the poor be changed permanently? Of that, there was no answer. The only thing certain in Duterte’s SONA are death and taxes. People will die. Filipinos will be taxed. Taxes will be used for the war on drugs and martial law instead of for social services.

Monday, July 24, 2017
