

PRESS RELEASE

DepEd honors hero teacher

Taking the 'father' role of all the basic education teachers in the country, Education Secretary Armin Luistro leads the entire Department of Education family and the rest of the Filipino people in honoring Teacher Lorna Pulalon, a grade 2 school teacher in Talisayan Elementary School, Zamboanga City who was stabbed and killed by a former rape convict as she used her own body to cover and protect her young pupils from the assailant.

Just like how various groups have joined the DepEd in recognizing the nobility of the teaching profession during the World Teachers' Day on October 5, many Filipinos, including President Benigno S. Aquino III, have expressed sympathies for the untimely demise of a model teacher last Friday, October 22, in a tragic incident inside her school.

"It's just heartbreaking for the entire department to experience such tragedy and to lose a dedicated teacher who could have helped in the molding of young minds and transformation of more lives in her school and in Zamboanga City," expressed Luistro.

The Education chief expressed his dismay on how some people take advantage of teachers' helplessness rather than value the sacrifices they undertake as they share their heart and soul to their learners.

"They are here to teach and to care for our students. They are one important foundation of the society and yet, for whatever reason which I personally cannot understand, they have been the target for kidnapping, harassment, violence, and worst, killing by some. They prepare our young for the future and now their own future becomes uncertain because of recent incidents costing some teachers their lives," stressed Luistro.

Time and time again, DepEd appeals to lawless elements and other individuals to spare the teachers from their ill intentions or any attempt to harm them.

Pulalon, 27, has just been transferred to Talisayan Elementary School but the courageous act she displayed has proven that teachers' love and care for their little soldiers will come naturally regardless of how long they have been with their students.

Luistro described Pulalon as "one great guard" ready to risk her own life to protect the children under her care "in the same way she did in saving these children from illiteracy."

"Teacher Lorna is one teacher who finds joy in touching the hearts and minds of the youth, who loves her learners unconditionally that she will do everything she can for them. Because of these qualities, she is a great loss to Talisayan, to DepEd, and more importantly, to the nation," added Luistro.

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Being a Muslim, Teacher Lorna's body was buried within 24 hours after her death. But along with her death, many dreams were shattered. One of which was her plan of getting married in two months.

Pulalon is the youngest among ten siblings. She is not just an inspiration to her students but is also a loving and responsible daughter and sister. She generously provides for her family, helping her father, who is a vendor, and mother, who is a housewife, in making ends meet.

"What makes tragedies like this more disheartening is that teacher victims usually come from poor families who depend mainly on the teachers' salary for their daily needs. With Teacher Lorna's death, her family's hope for a better future suddenly vanished. The chance to improve their lives was taken away from them," Luistro told.

Teacher Lorna was to man the polls in the Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections last October 25. Her fellow teachers recalled how Pulalon maintained her integrity as a teacher after refusing a bribe from a candidate in the elections despite her being the family's breadwinner. They remembered her saying "I cannot be bribed, I'm a teacher".

"How i wish we could clone Teacher Lorna and replicate her inspiring qualities. I am sure that there are many more stories of sacrifices and hardships that she had endured in the name of the teaching profession and words cannot explain how much we have lost losing a selfless and noble teacher like her," Luistro said.

Until Teacher Lorna's last breath, she selflessly lived up to the mission of the profession she chose to be in. That is, "teachers' greatest mission in life is to use teaching in order to shape, define, influence, even change lives of his/her learners, and to share with us that learning can be a joyful journey of discovery," furthered Luistro.

Luistro assured that Teacher Lorna's supreme sacrifice will always be a reminder to all of us to renew our commitment to the cause of education. "We will keep in our heart the commitment she has carried on. We will remember her for the two important things she has left behind: She revived the image of teaching as a vocation and she has put a new face to heroes of these times, our teachers."

What seemed to be just an ordinary day turned out to be a bloody Friday when Felin Mateo, 52, entered the school premises and ran amuck with his knife, leaving Pulalon and grade six pupil Cess Doreen Orpiano dead. Ruben Flores, grandfather/guardian of one of the pupils, was also stabbed and killed after he came to assist and protect the children. Six others were seriously wounded. These include grade 6 teacher Joni Torres who is still confined at the Intensive Care Unit; grade 5 teacher Ludivina Balilo who sustained a slight stab wound but was already discharged from the hospital and is now recovering; and students Joshua Demco, Mara Lyka Basing, Mica Ella Joy Diacoma, and Princess Briones who are now recovering.

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Per instruction of Luistro, Undersecretary for Regional Affairs Rizalino Rivera flew to Zamboanga City on October 23 to personally visit the victims and their families, to assure assistance to the victims, and to pay tribute to Pulalon. He was accompanied by City Mayor Celso Lobregat who instantly coordinated with DepEd after the incident took place.

“We honor the bravery of these teachers. They risked their own lives just to ensure our students’ safety and protection. These are the very kind of teachers whom parents would want to entrust their children to. Unfortunately, we lost one of them,” said Rivera.

The Presidential Management Staff has also extended assistance to the victims and to the families of those who were killed. Lobregat has also been doing everything the city government can to help the victims and their families.

Rivera said that DepEd is now coordinating with the Department of Health and Department of Social Welfare and Development to provide stress debriefing and psychosocial help to the teachers and students who may have been traumatized by the incident.

Luistro, along with other DepEd officials, flew to Zamboanga City yesterday to pay their respects to those who lost their lives in the incident and to visit those who were injured. After a meeting with local officials led by City Mayor Celso Lobregat, they all went to Fort Pilar shrine to light candles and say prayers as they pay tribute to our modern day heroes. Luistro and Lobregat were joined by Zamboanga Archbishop Romulo Valles, Fr. Tony Moreno and other DepEd and local officials.

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