Pinay shares her dream, wins King tilt in US

PRESIDENT Arroyo attends the 22nd National Migrants' Mass officiated by Manila Archbishop Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales (beside her) at the Archdiocesan Shrine of the Nuestra Señora de Gula in Ermita, Manila.
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By Melvin Gascon
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BAYOMBONG, NUEVA VIZCAYA—Lamenting the spate of political killings and how her country had sunk into poverty due to a long-running "political circus," a Filipino woman clinched the top prize in this year's Martin Luther King Jr. oratorical contest held at New York University.

Anne Richie Garcia, a 29-year-old English teacher at the Philippine Science High School-Cagayan Valley campus here, won first prize in the recent 3rd Annual MLK Contest, sponsored by NYU's Steinhardt Graduate Student Organization, according to Ena Hilaire, NYU graduate assistant.

At the NYU event honoring America's civil rights martyr and 1964 Nobel Peace Prize winner, the speeches were supposed to address the theme, "Dare to D.R.E.A.M" (an acronym for Deconstruct, Reflect, Envision, Act, and Mobilize).

The contest's theme was "The Time is Always Right to Do What is Right."

Garcia, who is at NYU on a two-year masteral study grant under the Ford Foundation-International Fellowships Program, spoke about "Altruism above Poverty" and focused on human rights violations against indigenous peoples, student activists, peasant leaders and journalists in the Philippines.

GARCIA

In one part of her speech, Garcia said: "It pains the heart to see the Philippines crawl in the darkness of poverty due to the political circus that's been fooling her people. Government officials buy votes in broad daylight, abuse of power is done in a snap, and leaders who fight for the poor are killed."

But what Garcia thought clinched the top prize for her was the resolution she offered in her speech: "The dream beyond my play, beyond my scholarship grant, beyond this speech, is my dream to participate in the world's quest for social justice. Yes, to dream with commitment is more than enough to comfort a people's grief."

"I was somehow inspired by my subject in world drama last semester. It was about human rights violations in the world, which, according to my professor, is the real world drama," said Garcia, whose specialization is Educational Theater.

Delivering a speech about poverty and strife in her country in front of an audience composed of different races, she said, was "the most difficult speech that I had to do, even more difficult than the eulogy I delivered for my father."

"I thought the audience would not care but would just say, 'Girl, you seem to have ended up in the wrong place, talking about the sorry state of your country because, you know what? we don't care,'" she said.

"I tried to establish the mental attitude that winning is not what is important." More important is to be given a chance to be heard, to voice the sentiments of our people, she said.

To Garcia's surprise, the audience, composed mostly of Americans, was visibly sympathetic. After her speech, a school official, a black American woman, approached her, shook her hand and said, "Your speech was powerful. I could not hold back my tears."

Garcia said she is working on a play that would try to focus on the victims of extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances in the Philippines.

"I gathered data from the Internet and I was shocked by the sheer number. It was a different feeling writing a play just for the sake of it, compared to writing a play for the victims purposely to tell the world about their plight," she said.