

POV Community Engagement & Education

TOOLS FOR FACILITATION



DELIKADO

a film by Karl Malakunas

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DELIKADO

Palawan is a tropical island paradise and one of Asia's tourist hotspots. But for a tiny network of environmental crusaders struggling to protect its spectacular forests and seas, it is a battlefield. *Delikado* follows three land defenders as they brave violence, death threats, and murder while trying to stop politicians and businessmen from destroying the last ecological frontier in the Philippines.

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This guide, developed for *Delikado*, serves as an invitation to dialogue on some of the most pressing issues of our day. In contrast to initiatives that result in debate, this resource aims to foster human connection by sharing new ideas and viewpoints, encouraging active listening, and expanding individuals' points of view.

To help you prepare for your screening event, additional background and film-specific discussion questions for *Delikado* are included and can serve as guideposts for a wide range of audiences. Rather than addressing all of the topics in this guide at your screening event, consider choosing one or two to prioritize that best meet your community's needs and interests.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips and to check out *Delikado* for a screening, visit <https://communitynetwork.amdoc.org/>.

LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKER

In 2011, as a journalist for Agence France-Presse based in Manila, I was preparing for a trip to Palawan to write an article on ecotourism. Palawan is home to the last great rainforests in the Philippines, and it's one of the most beautiful places in the country.

But my contact for the story, an environmental campaigner, was shot and killed just before I was due to go. I went anyway, to investigate his murder. When I was there, I discovered this seemingly idyllic island was being destroyed by the people in power who were meant to be protecting it. I also discovered a small group of people putting their lives on the line to try to stop the destruction.

One of them was Bobby Chan, a charismatic lawyer from Manila. Bobby had a tree outside his office made of chainsaws that he and his men had confiscated from illegal loggers in Palawan's rainforests. Bobby told me stories about the citizen's arrest law he used as the basis for the confiscations, and about his men being murdered for doing this type of work. The chainsaw tree was a not-so-subtle indication to local businessmen and politicians that he and his men would not be intimidated. I decided then that I had to make a film about the land defenders of Palawan.

I also knew the struggles of the land defenders in Palawan spoke to a global phenomenon. Land defenders are being killed in record numbers. In 2020, 227 were reported killed around the world. An average of four a week have been killed since the 2015 U.N. climate accord in Paris. These land defenders are on the frontlines of mankind's efforts to save the planet from the worst impact of climate change. I felt the strength and courage of Bobby, Nieves, Tata, and other land defenders featured in *Delikado* could be a source of inspiration as we search for hope in our fight to restrain climate change.

I spent many years researching, documenting, and investigating the specific issues in Palawan, as well as building trusting relationships with the main characters in the film—and many others who add to this important story. I slept in the forests with Bobby's team of barefoot renegades as they tracked down illegal loggers and confiscated chainsaws. I went on the campaign trail with Nieves, an environmental-heroine-turned-politician, as she waited for an assassin's bullet.

I filmed *Delikado* with the intention of making an intimate thriller about the lives of the land defenders, to ensure that audiences would feel an emotional connection with the subjects while learning about extremely compelling social and environmental issues.

-Karl Malakunas, Journalist and Director of *Delikado*

As Karl Malakunas shares in his director's letter, Delikado illuminates many issues that will be of special interest to audiences exploring the following topics:

- Corruption and impunity
- Ecotourism
- Environmental activism
- Environmental laws
- Grassroots organizing
- Impunity and corruption
- Land defenders on the frontlines against climate change
- Land protection
- Legacy of colonization
- Necropolitics
- Privatization of public lands



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Review this section in order to better inform your pre- and post-screening conversations..

COLONIZATION OF THE PHILIPPINES

Before European contact with the Philippines, hundreds of Indigenous communities lived and flourished in this archipelago of over 7,000 islands. It is believed that as early as 1000 A.D., Chinese, Arabic, and Indian traders engaged in extensive commerce with these diverse islands. By the 15th century, European supremacist belief systems motivated political, missionary, military, and commercial conquest of the area we know today as the Philippines.

In 1521, during Spanish colonization, Ferdinand Magellan was the first European to be recognized as documenting an encounter with the islands, followed by Ruy López de Villalobos in 1548. It was Villabos who, under royal decree, demarcated the islands as a single colonial territory, naming them Las Islas Filipinas for Prince Philip, later King Philip II of Spain. For over 300 years (from 1548 to 1898) the Spanish crown governed these islands.

The United States Then colonized the Philippines, claiming it as a U.S. colony immediately following its victory in the 1898 Spanish-American War—a war justified, in part, by the United States declaring support of Filipinos against Spanish rule. Philippine nationalists, who had just thrown off the yoke of more than 300 years of Spanish rule soon found themselves in a second war for independence against a power that was a former ally.

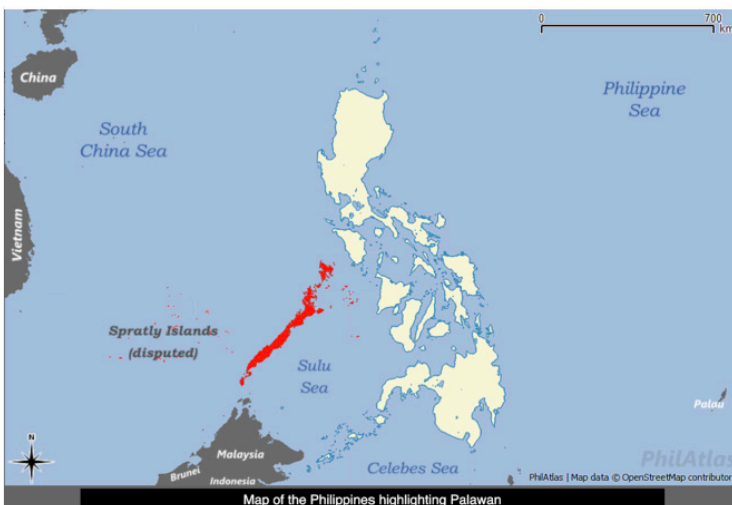
Rudyard Kipling’s poem “[The White Man’s Burden](#)” was written during this time and captured the racialized climate and brutality of the era. It is estimated that over one-tenth of the Filipino population and thousands of American soldiers were killed during America’s conquest. (Historians debate the scale of civilian deaths, with estimates ranging from 200,000 to almost 1 million.) Following this war, the United States justified its colonial occupation of the Philippines as a struggle to suppress the insurrection between a Filipino Catholic nationalist rebellion movement and American soldiers. It also exploited education as the most expedient tool for “spreading democracy” and “civilizing” the Philippines, all with an eye to achieving the goal of colonial rule rooted in supremacy and racism and ensuring subordination and control.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On December 8, 1941, in an attack targeting the United States, Japanese bombers attacked the Philippines, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, “So long as the flag of the United States flies on Filipino soil as a pledge of our duty to your people, it will be defended by our own men to the death.” Tens of thousands of Filipinos enlisted in the war on the promise that they would receive the same veterans benefits as U.S. soldiers. An estimated 1 million Filipinos died fighting in World War II. While the Philippines gained independence from the United States, in 1946, veterans and widows of World War II Filipino soldiers were denied the promised benefits after passage of the Rescission Act.

The United States continued to exert heavy political, military, and economic influence over the Philippines in the decades after the end of colonial rule. The United States supported the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, until the People Power revolution ended his rule in 1986. The United States maintained military bases, vital to its strategic footprint across Southeast Asia, until national sentiment in the Philippines led politicians to force their closure in the early 1990s. The Philippines remains an important U.S. ally in Asia, but it has also established closer ties with China in recent years.

A CONTEMPORARY SNAPSHOT OF PALAWAN, PHILIPPINES



Palawan is the largest island in the province of Palawan in the Philippines. With its natural beauty, stores of critical minerals, and old-growth rainforests, the island has attracted increasing tourism and development, resulting in growth in population and annual income. The island’s population grew from 35,000 in 1903 to more than 900,000 in 2020.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Leadership

Palawan governor Jose Alvarez (in office from 2013 to 2022) also led the [Palawan Council for Sustainable Development](#) (PCSD), the agency mandated by law to protect Palawan's rich biodiversity. Alvarez, who was the richest elected official in the country, gained his fortune from logging Palawan's forests and owning hotels and other significant real estate on the island. Under his leadership, in 2018, the PCSD passed a resolution to rezone and shrink protected land. This resolution was passed to accommodate extraction, tourism, and large-scale production of cash crops.

Tourism

While prioritizing tourism may seem benign, dramatic increases in tourism have deeply impacted Palawan and its people. Since 2008, El Nido has been one of the top three destinations on Palawan, along with Puerto Princesa City and Coron.

Between 2011 and 2016, tourist arrivals in El Nido rose by approximately 100,000 visitors; readers of the popular magazine Condé Nast Traveler listed Palawan as one of the top three island destinations in the world. As newly defined top marine-based ecotourism destinations, Coron and El Nido saw tourism arrivals surge from just 76,815 in 2008 to 903,166 in 2019, according to data from the Asian Development Bank, leading to what has been described as overtourism in these destinations. Accommodating tourists (along with the development of agro-industrial plantations and mining) to foster economic development has become a major motivation for converting formerly protected lands so that they are used for restricted development and ecotourism activities.

Protecting Palawan and Forests Around the Globe

Forests are vital for maintaining biodiversity. They are also responsible for the majority of carbon dioxide removal. Forests [sequester carbon](#) and are [carbon sinks](#). The older and bigger a tree is, the more carbon it holds. Research has found that in multi-aged forests around the world, half of the carbon is stored in the trees with the largest diameters. Keeping older and middle-aged forests intact is called [proforestation](#). In a typical old-growth forest (a forest that's more than 150 years old, consisting of both living and dead trees, and with a diverse ecosystem free of clear visible human influences), preserving old-growth forests has more profound impact on slowing climate change than planting new trees.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The rainforest in Palawan covers more than half of the island. One of the highest peaks, Cleopatra's Needle, is home to 85% of Palawan's endemic and endangered species. In 1992, the Strategic Environmental Plan for Palawan (SEP) Act, or [Republic Act 7611](#), was passed to protect what a 2021 Pulitzer Center article described as “natural forests, including first-growth forests, residual forests and edges of intact forests; areas above 1,000 meters, mountain peaks or other areas with very steep gradients; and endangered habitats and habitats of endangered and rare species.” While such laws are essential for forest protection, they have not proven to be sufficient to stop the increase in both legal and illegal deforestation across Palawan.

Palawan's Biodiversity

Palawan is often called the Philippines' last ecological frontier. It stretches for 270 miles and includes most of the nation's remaining primary forests, renowned for their biodiversity. The island is part of UNESCO's [Man and Biosphere Reserve](#), which includes [Palawan Biosphere Reserve](#), [Puerto-Princesa Subterranean River National Park](#), and [Mount Mantalingahan Protected Landscape](#) (MMPL). These protected areas are home to over 105 of the 475 threatened species of flora and fauna in the Philippines.

Current Environmental Threats

Though a range of motivations are used to justify deforestation—from changing agriculture patterns to urbanization and the needs of the forestry industry itself—the primary motivation is [commodity-driven deforestation](#). In Palawan, those commodities include mined minerals, palm oil, and construction materials.

Mining: On the southern tip of Palawan sits the mining town of Bataraza, home to Palawan's oldest nickel mine, Rio Tuba. Nickel is a [critical mineral](#) in the development of lithium batteries for electric cars. In a 2021 Pulitzer Center article examining the impact of electric cars on the region, authors determined that “with the demand for nickel skyrocketing, the Rio Tuba mine is now on the brink of expanding deeper into the rainforest, adding almost 10 square miles to its current footprint. Local environmentalists fear that it will wipe out the forest's fragile ecosystem and increase toxic runoff into the rivers that flow past the farmland down below, jeopardizing the crops.” The image below shows one path of the nickel supply chain, beginning with its extraction in the Philippines and its being shipped to the United States to be used in Tesla vehicles.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Rio Tuba nickel supply chain



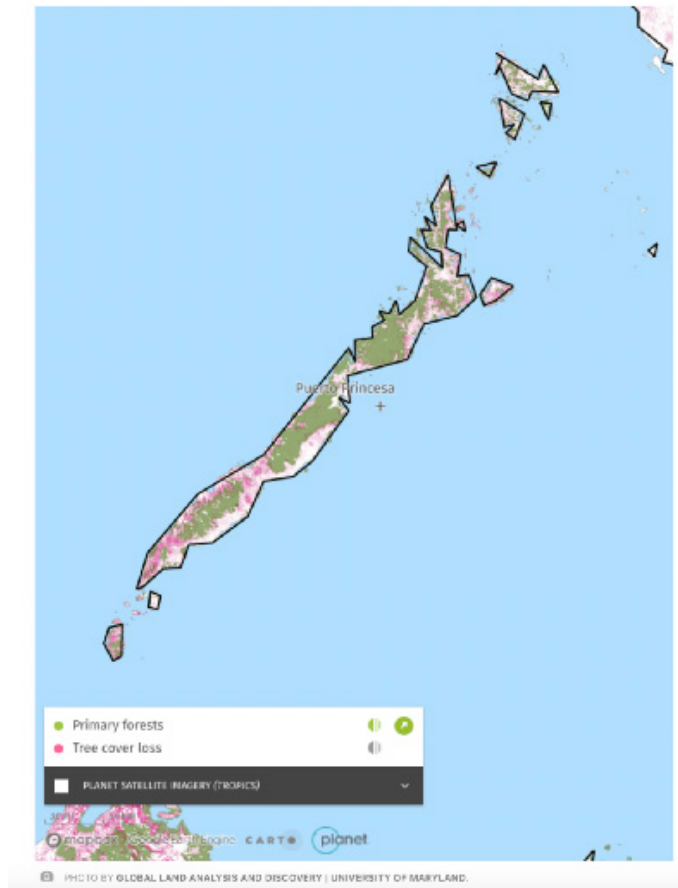
Source: NBC News review of company records and shipping records

(Source: <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/how-rise-electric-cars-endangers-last-frontier-philippines>)

Old-growth Deforestation: Palawan is home to one of the country's largest old-growth primary rainforests. These types of forest have native tree species with no visible indications of human activity and no significant ecological disturbance. Secondary forests, however, regenerate on native forests that have been cleared by natural or manmade causes, such as agriculture or ranching.

The level of deforestation is disproportionately greater on Palawan than in any other province in the Philippines. From 2001 to 2021, 170,000 hectares (or approximately 421,000 acres) were lost on Palawan as compared to an average of 16,500 hectares (or 41,000 acres) lost in other provinces of the Philippines. In the graphic below, you can see how much tree cover loss Palawan sustained from 2001 to 2020.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION



Mangrove Removal

Palawan's mangrove forests are also being illegally cleared. Mangroves sequester up to four times more carbon than rainforests. Yearly they provide 1.6 billion U.S. dollars in ecosystem services, such as supporting fisheries, filtering pollutants and contaminants from coastal waters, contributing to healthy coastal marine water quality, and protecting coastal development and communities against storms, floods, and erosion.

Land Defenders

Land defenders (defenders for short) are communities trying to protect their homes, livelihoods, and home environments. They are on the frontlines of tackling the climate crisis to achieve environmental justice. Anyone in any part of the world—from an individual taking a stand against toxic water, to a community taking a local stand against the pollution of air as a result of mining operations—can be a defender.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Violence against defenders remains a systemic and global problem, spanning many regions and vital industries, including coal, agribusiness, logging, and mining. As we see in *Delikado*, defenders fight on the frontlines of environmental justice and are often in direct opposition to economic interests and political power, and their work can be a matter of life and death. In 2012, the NGO Global Witness started reporting and documenting the killing of land defenders. Ten years later, it has documented 1,733 defenders killed trying to protect their land and the resources, yet because of restrictions on a free press, corruption, and the lack of independent monitoring, this data tends to go underreported.

A Decade of Killing

By Country:



In the Philippines, the Palawan NGO Network Inc. (PNNI) is a group of defenders working to prevent illegal logging, illegal fishing, and illegal wildlife poaching on the island. As seen in *Delikado*, the PNNI fills the void created by the failure of government accountability by exercising the right to make citizen's arrests outlined in the [Philippine Constitution Rule 113, Section 9 of the Revised Rules of Criminal Procedure](#).

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DISCUSSION PROMPTS

I would like to believe that God is pushing us to do this work. When you try to save his creation, you get a glimpse and a feeling of something that's divine. It's indescribable.

-Bobby Chan, PNNI Executive Director

Our struggle to protect the environment here in Palawan is actually a war for us. We have so many enemies.

-Tata Balladares, PNNI Para-Enforcer

Starting the Conversation

- The title *Delikado* translated from Tagalog means danger.
 - How do you explain notions of danger in relation to this story?
 - What scene do you feel reflects your understanding of danger?
- In the film, Bobby Chan says, "Para-enforcers create the deterrent for illegal logging and illegal fishing because nobody else would."
 - What is your response to his convictions?
 - When elected officials act with impunity as they do not uphold the rule of law or protect the environment, what is the role of the individual to protect and defend?
- How do you connect with the world's forests?
- What different feelings surfaced for you as you watched this film?
- What do you think it takes for defenders to risk their lives to protect their lands?
- What are your thoughts regarding ecotourism after watching *Delikado*?

Reflecting on the Legacy of Colonialism

The Philippines is one of the deadliest countries in the world to be a land defender, environmental campaigner—but also a journalist, human rights activist, or even a member of the judiciary—anyone who stands up to authority faces death threats.

-Karl Malakunas, Journalist and Director of *Delikado* quoted in "A War for Our Future," *Otago Daily Times*

- After viewing *Delikado*, what connections are you making between the legacy of colonialism in the Philippines and the current challenges facing Palawan?
- In *Delikado*, Bobby Chan says that he believes politicians are either pro-conservation or utilitarian, with the latter group viewing natural resources as things to be used: trees to be cut down, fish to be killed, and the like.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What echoes of colonial rule do you hear in this frame of the utilitarian politician?
- How would you suggest steering politicians away from a utilitarian focus?

Civil Society Acting in Response to Corruption

Who else will do this? No one else, right? We are the only ones. Only a few of us are doing this, so it's really hard. This is the government's job. Why are we the ones having to do this? It's grueling. We're sacrificing our lives here.

-Tata Balladares, PNNI Para-Enforcer

For us to have oversight of governmental functions in the environmental field. It can be done.

-Bobby Chan, PNNI Executive Director

- What NGOs or organizations in your community fulfill roles that elected officials overlook, ignore, or remain indifferent to?
- Why do you think grassroots organizers and organizations remain a lifeline in civil society around the world?
- What did you observe motivated Bobby Chan, Tata Balladares, Kap Ruben, and Nieves Rosento to work tirelessly in the face of violence and corruption?
- What scene from *Delikado* taught you something new about organizing?

Acting with Impunity

Palawan is critical. Very critical. For me, this is not just a beautiful place, it is a resort. You know what I tell everyone, including in the villages here? Just follow rules.

At least I kill to protect people.

-Rodrigo Duterte, Former President of the Philippines



(Source: <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/duterte-administration-blood-violence-drug-war-lawyers-activists-mayors-vice-mayors-killed/>)

- Another notion to help understand the Philippines under Duterte is necropolitics. Coined in 2003 by Cameroonian scholar Achille Mbembe, necropolitics reflects the idea that war, genocide, refugee “crises,” environmental destruction, and impoverishment are used as tools to govern through direct and indirect exposure to death.
 - How was necropolitics exercised in Palawan?
- How do you better understand acting with impunity after watching *Delikado*?

Weighing Ecotourism

I will fight for the land because it has belonged to my ancestors for thousands of years. The way we natives feel for the land is different. Our feelings are fused with the earth. The earth is like our parent. The forest is the lifeblood of the indigenous people.

-Remedio Cabral, Tagbanua Elder

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

They are defending their communities. It is a matter of survival for them. It is such desperate stakes. If the forests are destroyed it leads to the flooding, it leads to the silt washing down into the farmlands and then on to the corals and destroying their fisheries. If all the illegal fishing happens, they lose their fish stocks. So it is not an esoteric kind of environmental campaign for them, it is a matter of survival.

- Karl Malakunas, Journalist and Director of *Delikado* quoted in "A War for Our Future," *Otago Daily Times*

Slowly, the last frontier is becoming the lost frontier.

-Bobby Chan, PNNI Executive Director

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education," meaning education of both staff and guests.

TIES sets for the following ecotourism principles:

- Minimize physical, social, behavioral, and psychological impact.
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Generate financial benefits for both local people and private industry.
- Deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors that help raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climates.
- Design, construct, and operate low-impact facilities.
- Recognize the rights and spiritual beliefs of the Indigenous people in your community and work in partnership with them to create empowerment.
- Old-growth tropical hardwoods used to furnish El Nido's boutique resort hotels generate huge profits for a small number of Filipinos. To extract these materials, illegal logging occurs that requires the building of new roads. As we see in the film, this also provides employment opportunities for people needing work.
 - Are there effective counterbalances to this cycle that do not put the lives of defenders on the line or further contribute to the climate crisis?
 - How would you recommend balancing conservation, tourism, and economic viability for local populations?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Can ecotourism guidelines yield any benefit if tourists are flying to developing countries and burning so much carbon in the process?
- Which of the TIES principles of ecotourism listed do you believe are beneficial and which do you feel are problematic?
- What does sustainable travel look like if the traveler is burning a large amount of carbon?
- Who does ecotourism benefit?
- What is the cost of luxury?

Protecting the World's Forests

- What do you see as the connection between the old-growth forests left in Palawan, the global demand for monoculture crops such as palm oil, critical minerals, and climate change?
- The 2022 Global Witness report Decade of Defiance states that the majority of defenders murdered in the Philippines were Indigenous people campaigning to protect their land and the environment. One-third of these murders were linked to the mining industry and agribusiness.
 - Given the demand for critical minerals for electric vehicle batteries and monoculture crops, what global and state-based protections (human and environmental) could be exercised moving forward?

Closing Reflection: Putting Your Life on the Line for Your Convictions

Last year, the Philippines became the most dangerous country on earth with more killings than anywhere else of environmentalists and land rights activists. Activists faced not only murder, but systematic threats, attacks, imprisonment, attacks against them, their colleagues, but also their family members. Crimes that are rarely ever prosecuted. This is fueled by corruption and conflict of interests among companies and local politicians, such as governor Jose Alvarez in Palawan, leaving the burden of environmental protection to fall upon civil society, to fall upon defenders, and to fall upon those communities most impacted by abusive business projects and by climate change...

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

It seems pertinent to ask if we cannot protect the people defending the planet, how are we going to protect the planet?

-Ben Leather, Global Witness

Delikado has been described as an environmental thriller, and certainly there are many moments of suspense and adrenalin. It is also a story of individuals committed to interrupting and reversing the climate crisis despite danger and threats to their lives.

Consider bringing your event to a close by reading aloud these excerpts, one from Bobby Chan the other from Tara Balladares—two of many people who know the cost of their work yet continue to fight to save Palawan from environmental catastrophe. After sharing, take time to approach the final discussion prompts.

My daughter used to be close to me. Now she's closer to my wife. They have to be relocated to Manila and stay there so that they won't be in harm's way. My wife doesn't want me to do this. The wife of Tata doesn't want him to do this. All our families don't want us to do this, but it's like, you have this singularity of purpose that makes your mind clear that this is what you have to do when you get up in the morning. Yeah, I'd like to believe it's grace.

-Bobby Chan, PNNI Executive Director

When I think about it if I look at everything I've done over the years I feel I have done enough. Okay, you guys eat well, but if our group stops working my granddaughter and her future child won't be able to see the beauty that she sees today. Perhaps someday, my family can be proud and tell others, "This is what my grandpa did. He was one of those protecting the environment."

-Tata Balladares, PNNI Para-Enforcer

- What qualities do you admire in Bobby Chan and Tata Balladares?
- What is your response to Chan's idea of grace?
- How would you answer this question: If we cannot protect the people defending the planet, how are we going to protect the planet?
- Finally, how do you want to celebrate the work of the defenders and honor the fighters who sacrificed their lives?

RESOURCES & TAKING ACTION

Stop the Silencing. It is more important than ever that we break the cycle of silence that allows the powerful to trample over human rights and the natural world. We must ensure that the voices of land and environment defenders are heard.

Know and investigate projects from energy to agriculture development. Projects driving environmental and human rights abuses are often funded by ordinary people’s savings or investments, more often than not without their knowledge.

Support efforts to stop deforestation. Uphold the Paris Agreement while maintaining human rights obligations, and protect land rights of Indigenous and traditional communities while promoting sustainable economic development.

Protect land defenders. Access and share the recommendations put forth in the Global Witness 2022 report [Decade of Defiance](#).

Your economic power matters a lot. You can encourage and support a new culture where ethics, not illegalities, result in financial reward—and these ideas don’t have to apply to being a tourist. They can be powerful right in your neighborhood or state.

- Think about where you spend your money. Be sure the hotels, shops, restaurants, and companies you frequent are locally owned, so you are supporting your community and not a foreign corporation.
- If you travel and want to decrease your carbon footprint, keep in mind that “greenwashing” is also a common practice, so take a close look at “ecolodge” and “ecotourism” claims. Look for those who can demonstrate they are committed to following sustainable practices.
- Spread your support around. Get away from the well-worn tourist spots and head to areas that don’t receive as much traffic.

Actions to take in the Philippines.

- Domestic and international businesses have a duty to ensure their customers are not unwittingly supporting projects that drive people out of their homes or devastate ecosystems.
- Consumers have a right to demand that these companies live up to their responsibilities.

Learn more [here](#).

RESOURCES FOR TAKING ACTION**How to support defenders and the passing of the Human Rights Defender's Protection Bill.**

- Philippines government guarantees the security of all the PNNI and Palawan NGO Network.
- Read [Global Witness: Defending the Philippines](#) (PDF download).
- Learn more about human rights in the Philippines [here](#).



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Our work at Blueshift Education is to develop curriculum, resources, and relevant tools to deepen understanding on social justice issues in order to empower people, foster empathy, and bring about meaningful and lasting change.

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