To gauge how human rights issues figure in the 2010 elections, PhilRights looked into the platforms and sampled some public appearances of the presidential candidates.1

Campaign Platforms2

Of the eight platforms reviewed, five parties/candidates contained provisions which expressly mentioned human rights: Liberal Party (LP), Nacionalista Party (NP), Bangon Pilipinas, Lakas-Kampi-CMD (Lakas)3 and Sen. Jamby Madrigal (Independent). Of the five, LP’s platform offered the most elaborate discussion on human rights. Three political parties (Pwersa ng Masang Pilipino or PMP, Bagumbayan, and Ang Kapatiran) did not explicitly mention human rights in their platforms.

Provisions for accountability and participation were also looked into. Not surprisingly, the various parties/candidates view accountability from different perspectives: Bangon Pilipinas and Lakas discuss accountability in relation to transparency in government transactions; NP and Madrigal believe that the government should be accountable for human rights violations. LP discusses accountability from the perspective of citizen’s power over State institutions.

Participation is discussed in all but Bagumbayan’s platform. Participation is defined as decentralized and participatory democracy (LP and Madrigal), working with local NGOs and civil society groups (Ang Kapatiran and Madrigal), building capacity of LGUs and increasing local government autonomy (PMP and Lakas), peoples’ participation in the screening of the members of the judiciary (Bangon Pilipinas).

For the most part, the platforms examined reveal that programs related to basic ser-
services were not discussed as rights but as programs.

Survey Results

Ang Kapatiran

Ang Kapatiran expounded on the relationship between integrity and human rights, defining integrity as “the steadfast adherence to a strict ethical or moral code”, and underscoring the principle of respect for life and dignity of the human person.

The party believes that corruption “is the biggest culprit and major cause of the nation’s poverty and hunger. It violates human rights and is a social and moral cancer.” To address this problem, Ang Kapatiran has a six-point program that seeks to address the structures that promote corruption.

The party rejects the Reproductive Health (RH) Bill; is for the dismantling of the “culture of guns” and seeks the prohibition of political dynasties and pork barrel. It also promises to improve delivery of basic services in education, health care and housing.

Bagumbayan

Bagumbayan “assigns the highest priority in upholding the rule of law, uplifting the level of dignity of our people and good governance,” and promises to protect basic human rights to life, liberty and property.

Gordon’s top human rights issues are: a) addressing the huge gap between world standards and local conditions in education and health care; b) solving the war in Mindanao through sustainable development; and c) addressing the numerous cases of extra-judicial killings through better enforcement of the law.

Bagumbayan will encourage the creation of a deep pool of knowledge workers by providing scholarships directed towards greater access to vocational training and science/engineering programs.” It also plans to “utilize school systems to improve health outcomes for the youth.” To solve the war in Mindanao, Gordon notes that people turn to violence because of the absence of better opportunities and thus calls for sustainable development. Claiming to be the son of a victim of extra-judicial killing, Gordon emphasizes that there must be swift action against EJKs, and calls for better law enforcement.

Lakas

The party’s human rights platform is based on what it calls a “Centrist Humanist Agenda” which believes that “politics and government should serve the greater good of the greatest number of people in society.” Lakas advocates the principles of a democratic system and believes in people empowerment as the basic requirement in the advancement of democracy.

Its top human rights issues are: a) protection of migrant workers; b) urban poor resettlement; c) solving extrajudicial killings and disappearances and d) the rights of indigenous peoples, including ancestral domain.

Lakas proposes safeguards and support systems that will protect migrant workers at all stages (from recruitment to employment) and will assist in matters of legal issues, repatriation and support. It plans to address housing insecurity of the poor through the use of productive economic projects. It also stresses opposition to all forms of violence. It will work with the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) in investigating and prosecuting perpetrators of HR violations. It also calls for stronger implementation of the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act (IPRA) to promote the cultural, economic and social welfare of IP communities.

Pangmasa

Pangmasa affirms “the importance of developing the full human potential of a person” to ensure maximum contribution to society. It recognizes the importance of people’s participation in an “authentic participative democracy”, and believes in equal sharing of the fruits of economic activity. It also places importance on gender sensitivity “that respects the unique contributions of men and women”.

Pangmasa’s top three human rights issues are: a) abolishing private armies; b) re-opening investigations into extra-judicial killings; and c) releasing detained military men and women who are fighting for rights and reporting abusive plans and actions in all military departments.

Media Forums

In the media forums sampled, the issue of accountability was often discussed. The presidential candidates believed in the need to prosecute erring officials, and the need for transparency in government transactions.

Health issues were also discussed constantly in relation to the RH bill. De los Reyes of Kapatiran was against it because of “respect for life,” stressing instead that the health industry should improve on basic health care services. Others propounded on the concept of choice in justifying their position on the bill, such as Villar (NP) and Gordon (Bagumbayan), who stressed that a huge yet educated and skilled population is an asset to the country. Aquino (LP) pushed for responsible parenthood, while Teodoro (Lakas) called for a “moral obligation” of individuals to be responsible for their families.

Of the three media forums sampled, Inquirer’s Presidential Debate touched on more HR issues compared to the other two, even as the questions and answers were not expressly framed as human rights per se.

Lakas standard-bearer Gilbert Teodoro was asked whether he would defend the rights of IPs when mining, logging and other programs threaten their communities. Teodoro said that it is necessary to get the consent of IPs to ensure sustainability of these projects.

Villar (NP), on the issue of impunity, stressed the importance of strengthening the human development index in places where private armies are rampant, through the enhancement of entrepreneurial skills, health and access to education, while also strengthening security through enhancement of the military.

Madrigal (Ind.) sees the need to control advertising of junk food, saying that the emphasis should be on food quality. She said she intends to limit the advertising of several companies and implement stringent measures against companies that “misadvertise,” such as milk companies that advertise powdered milk as breast milk substitute.

Eddie Villanueva underscored the importance of social security for the elderly.

De Los Reyes reiterated his stand against the RH bill, but stressed the importance of maternal health and promoting better access to medical services.

Gordon was asked his opinion regarding proposals to...
restore criminal liability to minors. He noted the tendency of some criminals to use minors for their crimes and said that rights must be balanced with responsibilities.

When asked about his opinion on mining investments that will bring improvements to a community but may potentially damage the environment, Perlas (Ind.) stressed that because IP’s regard the environment as a crucial factor for development, all projects must respect their culture, and must see them as part of national development. On a liberalized mining industry, he batted for a new mining law that will respect IP rights. He also advocated for a broader framework that will both address societal needs and the environment.

Villanueva (Bangon Pilipinas) stressed that while women’s rights are primordial and basic, this doesn’t extend to activities “that violate the morality of a family,” such as abortion. He also called for the re-imposition of the death penalty for moneyed criminals.

Aquino stressed the importance of education for employment. Not quite there yet

The content analysis of the platforms of the presidential candidates reveal that human rights included in the platforms mostly pertain to civil and political rights (i.e., references to the Bill of Rights, EJK, democracy, participation). Most of the platforms have programs on the economy, work, health, education, and housing, among others. These, however, were not expressed as human rights, but were discussed as part of the promised programs. Some of these programs and directions they must be conducted fairly consistent with international standards, to be truly free and for the benefit of the people involved; first, because they give voice to the political will of the people involved; and secondly, because, to be truly free and fair consistent with international standards, they must be conducted in an atmosphere which is respectful of basic human rights.”

Challenging the feeble

It is not enough that a full-blown rights-based approach is lacking and even completely missing from the platforms of the candidates; what is more cause for concern are the candidates’ pronouncements that contravene human rights standards. Among these are the plans to re-impose the death penalty (Villanueva) and restore criminal liability to minors (Gordon), as well as the outright rejection of the RH bill (De los Reyes). These are but a few chilling examples that show how feeble human rights principles is the campaign discourse that plays out in the run-up for the 2010 national and local elections.

By experience, the promises of those who are seeking public office are for the most part forgotten after the election season. Civil society organizations should monitor the performance of those who win in the national and local polls and hold them accountable to the programs and directions they promised during the campaign period.

These are the challenges that human rights defenders and the electorate have to respond to, not only during the campaign period, but even more so during the term of office of the next president.

ENDNOTES

1 The materials used for the research were the parties’ campaign platforms, a survey questionnaire sent to all presidential candidates, two (2) TV forums and one (1) radio program.

2 Platforms were assessed using the principles of the human rights-based approach (RBA).

3 Lakas-KabaliKat ng Malayang Pilipino-Christian Muslim Democrats

4 The presidential candidates were asked the following:

1. What is your human rights platform?
2. If elected, what are the top three human rights issues you would prioritize?

Only four of the nine presidential candidates sent back their answers: Ang Kapatiran, Pangmasa, Lakas and Bagumbayan.

In response to the survey questions, NP sent back a copy of its platform. This was not included in the results of the survey as the study had a specific section for GOPOs.

5 Three media forums/discussions were looked into: Inquirer’s Presidential Debate (held February 9, 2010), DZBB’s “Ikwab Na Ba” Series hosted by Mike Enriquez, and the ANC “Harapan” Presidential Forum (which aired on January 29, 2010).

Platforms Reviewed:


Bagumbayan Party. Manifesto for Change.


Jamby Madrigal for President. Reclaim and Regain the Wealth, Sovereignty and Dignity of the Filipino People and Nation: A vision of genuine change for the Filipinos.

Lakas Kampi CMD. The Lakas Kampi CMD Platform: Renewing the Filipino spirit.


Nacionalista Party. In Response to the People’s Concerns

Partido ng Marangal na Samahanan. Platform of the Partido ng Marangal na Samahanan.


Note: For the full version of the study, visit the PhilRights website: http://www.philrights.org.

Electoral contests are human rights events: first, because they give voice to the political will of the people involved; and secondly, because, to be truly free and fair consistent with international standards, they must be conducted in an atmosphere which is respectful of basic human rights.”