

YVONNE PANGSIW

In terms of civic engagement—well I am a nurse and volunteer my time for that purpose too. When it comes to religion and civic engagement, well that is another matter.

I am an indigenous person from the North of the Philippines. In a mountainous place called Kalinga with different tribes, dialects, practices and beliefs, there I was born and raised, in a family wherein my father is a great believer in free religious practices and beliefs. Thus joining the IARF group did not make my parents doubt for me to accept, welcome and be a part of it! I did not only accept this but I tried to invite my family to be a part of it for I believe this will broaden our horizons.

I was raised in a society where my grandparents and my great grand parents, believed in many *anitos*, spirits which ruled our life and even today, everywhere I go, I am being guarded by my *arongans* or angels. They are the ones that give us luck, give us sickness when they are forgotten, in a society that is full of rites and rituals. Though we already call ourselves Christians, we adhere to what our old folks tell us. We respect them so much that we appreciate their advice, whatever problems this may create for our Christianity.

We grew up in a somewhat old-fashioned society where all our actions were being watched, “*You are a daughter of a priest so you should look and talk in a holy way; You are the fruit of an announcer so be expected to know all happenings; You are a Kalinga, you must be brave.*” These were just some of the expectations I had to keep thinking of. Not only that but in Kalinga, tribalism is a practice that I wish I had not grown up with since fear is everywhere because of the misinterpreted *Bodong* (Law of Pagta). This has become so commercialized that if a tribe is weak and commits a mistake, it is punished to the fullest but if the tribe is popular, there is less penalty imposed. This affects the ways we identify with others.

As I went to college, I did not want to let others know what high school I attended, the province where I came from as I experienced a lot of prejudice, but later on I saw the value and beauty of the *Bodong*, the culture I have. I saw that it is really respected just like a fraternity in school with a motto “one for all, all for one.” I began to accept and became proud to be an indigenous member of the Kalinga tribe.

Over the past year, supported by the RFYN, some of us Kalinga young adults have created and run a project with the support of our elders. We learned more about our Kalinga spirituality and our ancient traditions. We wanted to help others to strengthen their own identity and feel more a part of society. Having the responsibility of working with different members of other tribes and other religious groups has allowed me to be more tolerant of their beliefs and practices. It has also helped others, such as Woodrow, to gain a respect and deeper understanding of Indigenous people and discover out true value in society. I am now the vice president of the RFYN- Kalinga. We hope that the discrimination that we have experienced and still experience, will be diminished. Trying to work with people that are not necessarily one’s own religious group is very important.

In my working life, as a nurse, I will try my utmost not to be bound by prejudice and biases. I will try to be compassionate without reservation, no matter to what religion my patients belong.

To summarize, I am still struggling to come out from the shell of conflicting identities that my background has conditioned in me. Yet I know that our interfaith work will help bring me out of that shell.' Thank you and matago takon losan... (Long live the IARF!)

Yvonne Pangsiw is an indigenous young adult from the Kalinga tribe, in Luzon, Philippines. She is a nurse. Her volunteer work includes being the vice president of the RFYN (Religious Freedom Young Adult Network) in Kalinga, Philippines.