

Lozano, Mel Alyssa S.

News Story TALAB

“What does it truly mean to become a vanguard for truth despite the diminishing safe space for journalists?”

This was the central question Filipino veteran journalist Horacio “Howie” Severino delved into during the Ateneo Rizal Library Ambassadors’ (RLA) Talakayang Alay sa Bayan (TALAB) event entitled “Being Journalists for Others: The Continuous Struggle for Truth and Integrity,” held last October 17 at the 5th Floor, Pacific Hall, Rizal Library.

The event started at 2:15 PM with the opening remarks by Dr. Vernon Totanes, the event’s moderator and university librarian at the Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU).

Severino, drawing from his extensive journalistic experience, recounted a memorable experience when he covered the stories of extrajudicial killings (EJK) victims, Christina and Alvin. These tragic incidents occurred on March 3, 2017, at Commonwealth Avenue in Quezon City, during the infamous war on drugs under former President Rodrigo Duterte’s administration. The veteran journalist shared pictures the night they arrived at the crime scene, focusing particularly on a photograph capturing Christina’s last, unfinished meal.

The well-known documentarist shared the challenges faced by journalists during that volatile time of terror and trauma. People were afraid of speaking up. Journalists found themselves at the center of public scrutiny as they reported on these stories. Some of them were “killed, threatened, trolled, sued, hated.”

In the face of these adversities, Severino’s words echoed another prevalent sentiment for some journalists—that their efforts seemed to have minimal impact. Instead of witnessing a decline in the number of killings, the figures escalated over the years, prompting Severino to highlight another looming danger for journalists: irrelevance.

“You trust that [if] you expose the wrongdoings, the rest of society will become conscientious enough, whether the civil society, the government, or the police, to stop the wrongdoing[s]. *Kaso baliktad ang nangyari—lalo pang dumami* (The opposite happened—the numbers increased even more.). *At kami pa ‘yong [nakitang] mali* (And they saw us as the ones who were in the wrong.). *Kami pa ‘yong [nakitang] kumakampi sa kriminal* (We were seen as the ones who side with the criminals.).”

Despite the toll it takes, Severino’s passion for journalism remains unwavering. He emphasized the significance of news reporting for future generations, highlighting the role of journalists in giving voice to the voiceless, humanizing the dehumanized, and pursuing an interesting life committed to truth.

For Severino, who already dedicated more than 30 years of his life to this service, being a vanguard for truth amid the diminishing safe space for journalists requires enduring the challenges and complexities of the profession. He concluded his talk with a quote from Fr. Roque Ferriols, SJ: “*Huwag tanungin kung mahirap. Tanungin kung mahalaga* (Ask not if it is hard. Ask if it is important),” urging the current and future journalists to focus not on the difficulty but on the significance of their service to the public.

Lozano, Mel Alyssa S.

News Story TALAB

Picture:

