



LGUS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Anti-vaccination movement tells local leaders to stop pandemic response

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INFO





Cagayan de Oro Mayor Oscar Moreno and Misamis Oriental Governor Yevgeny Emano are among a number of local leaders sent notices by anti-vaccination advocates

Anti-vaccination supporters took their antagonism towards the government's COVID-19 pandemic response to a new level, as they threatened to sue local officials implementing "unscientific and extreme COVID policies."

Cagayan de Oro Mayor Oscar Moreno said he initially thought that it was a joke when he was informed that he was sent a "cease and desist" letter and "notice of liability" by an unnamed group on Wednesday, November 3.

The Cagayan de Oro group however is not acting alone – it is a part of a larger, growing movement that has taken a battle posture against the scientific consensus on the COVID-19 pandemic and the government response to the health crisis.

Misamis Oriental Governor Yevgeny Vincente Emano on Saturday, November 6, confirmed he was also sent a similar notice by the group on Wednesday.

The notices, delivered to the capitol and city hall by Mary Clair Tan, Jeria Miras, Bob Lagumen, and Joey Nacalaban who signed as "concerned citizens," gave the officials three days to stop taking part in what they called "massive fraud and de facto murders taking place" or face lawsuits.

In it, they called the vaccination campaign worse than extra-judicial killings, and "genocide."

"I haven't read it," said Moreno on Saturday, the third and last day of the group's ultimatum.

After checking it, Moreno said, "It's a mere scrap of paper that has no legal or factual basis. It doesn't deserve to be dignified."

Moreno and Emano turned out to be just among the many local officials who were sent the same demand letters throughout the country since October.

Others sent similar letters were governors Arthur Defensor Jr. of Iloilo and

Rhodora Cadio of Antique, mayors Isko Moreno of Manila, Lino Cayetano of Taguig, Edwin Olivarez of Parañaque, Imelda Aguilar of Las Piñas, Richard Gomez of Ormoc, Benjamin Magalong of Baguio, Celso Regencia of Iligan, Ronnel Rivera of General Santos, and local executives in Batangas, and Samar, among others.

These were hand-carried to the offices of the mayors and governors by volunteers who then reaped praises from fellow anti-vaxxers online for walking the talk.

The notices were delivered to the local chief executives as an offshoot of an 86-page “cease and desist” document sent to Malacanang by environmental activist and 2010 independent presidential candidate Nicanor Perlas, who now heads the group COVID Call to Humanity.

Perlas’ letter to President Rodrigo Duterte in October showed that he was convinced that the policies “were part of the ‘New World Order’ and the ‘Great Reset’ of planetary civilization.”

Governor Emano rejected the demand of the group, saying he would continue to implement what has been required of local governments and follow the policies laid down by the national government.

He advised the anti-vaxxers to go to court.

"While I appreciate their concern for the health and safety of the Filipinos, it is suggested that they avail themselves of judicial remedies so that once and for all, there will be an opportunity for the resolution of their claim. As we are governed by laws, we need to observe a lawful process," Emano told Rappler.

He added, "Providing for the welfare of the general public is a basic goal of government, whether national or local. This includes the formulation and implementation of policies to manage suitably the crisis brought about by COVID-19."

Emano said the government policies were lawful and would remain as such until declared otherwise by the judiciary.

Tan, one of those who signed the letters, said their actions were influenced by Gising Maharlika and Juan Dakila, groups that are a part of a network that has been

meeting and planning a course of actions online.

"There are about 1,000 of us in Cagayan de Oro alone," she told Rappler.

Tan said they wanted to prevent Moreno and Emano from implementing rules seen as discriminatory towards those who refused to be administered with COVID-19 vaccine doses.

"We want our right to choose and our choices to be respected. We don't want COVID rules imposed on us," said Tan.

She said the online-fueled movement is apolitical, non-partisan, and non-religious, and opposes moves to require COVID-19 vaccination cards from citizens.

The social media pages of the groups Tan mentioned showed a movement with an evolving collection of conspiracy theories centering on claims that the government, mainstream media, fascists, and elitists were colluding to suppress the truth about the pandemic.

Despite Tan's assertion that they were non-religious, one of the groups showed strains of non-secularism – its Facebook page is replete with phrases such as "prayer warriors against the wall of the elites," "prayer for humanity, freedom, and safety," and "sound the alarm and blow the horn of prayers."

The group, Gising Maharlika, was behind a recent rally of anti-vaxxers at the Liwasang Bonifacio in Manila where they bannered slogans like "Stop medical martial law" and "Our children are not experiments."

"This will be non-stop until we finally end this. Plan A, B, C, etc. are in place... until we defeat the enemy and win!" read a message on its Facebook wall.

It added, "(It's) time for the ultimate sacrifice. This is not about us. It is to preserve the sanctity of our kids and the dignity of Maharlikans all over the country."

In September, National Police chief General Guillermo Eleazar called out members of the group for not wearing face masks and breaching other public health protocols while taking part in a rally in Manila.

The group called its cause a "patriotic endeavor" as it appealed for donations.

It said, "We are here to put up a united front by strengthening our alliances to help put an end to this deceit that has been tearing up our nation into pieces and most especially to protect our loved ones from such a diabolical assault coming from all sides."

Another group mentioned by Tan has been pushing the cryptic message that "in order to rise from its own ashes, the phoenix first must burn."

It has been encouraging people, especially students, to refuse COVID-19 inoculations, and provided templates of refusal letters and complaints about grave coercion so that they would be exempted from COVID-19 vaccination card requirements.

A lawyer who filed his certificate of candidacy for a Senate seat, Aaron Soguilon, figured prominently on its social media page, discussing laws and rights vis-à-vis the government's pandemic response, and other matters of public concern.

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Soguilon, incidentally, is in the senatorial slate of the Maharlika People's Party, a group that wanted to field **former senator Ferdinand Marcos Jr.** as its standard-bearer and Davao Mayor Sara Duterte as his running mate.

Marcos and Duterte did not sign MPP's certificates of nomination in October, and so the party fielded lawyer **Apolonia Soguilon** as its presidential bet and Elpidio Rosales Jr. as her running mate. – **Rappler.com**



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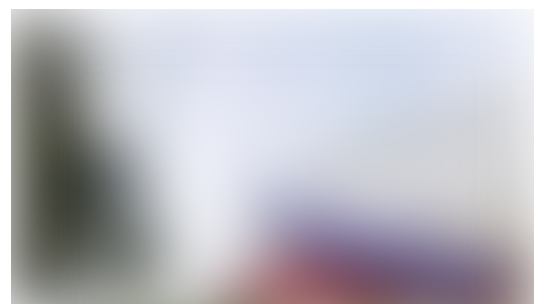
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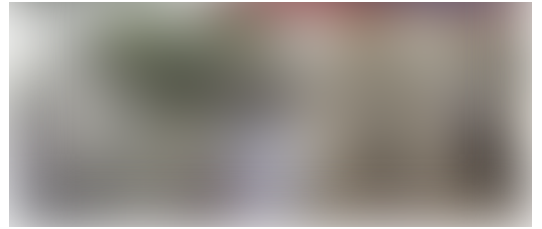
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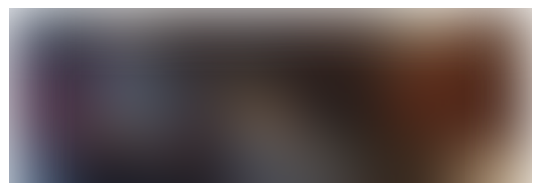
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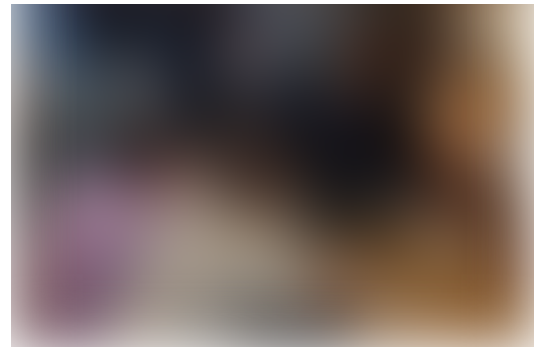
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