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The “Ecozoic Era” is a time of mutually enhancing relationships 
among humans and the larger community of life.  
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In this issue: “The Sixtieth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and The Lord of the Flies,” by Jaime Vergara.

Mr. Vergara is a 6th Grade teacher with the Public School System of the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, a United States territory in the western Pacific (CNMI). A Filipino United Methodist cleric, Vergara spent most of his itinerancy in his Church as an associate in the global network of the Ecumenical Institute and the Institute of Cultural Affairs. Mr. Vergara occasionally writes for the Opinion page of the Saipan Tribune, and the Forum page of the Marianas Variety. This article first appeared in the Saipan Tribune on December 15, 2008.

Thomas Berry states that “all beings have rights.” In his sixth principle of Earth Jurisprudence, he states:

All rights in living forms are species specific and limited. Birds have bird rights. Insects have insect rights. **Humans have human rights.** Difference of rights is qualitative not quantitative. The rights of an insect would be of no value to a tree or a fish. (Emphasis added.)

THE SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE LORD OF THE FLIES

Ruth Tighe castigates herself for failing to commemorate Saipan Constitution Day in light of her annual reminder that the Commonwealth seemed to have forgotten the significance of the day.

I plead ditto for failing to mark the 60th anniversary of the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted on December 10, 1948. See [http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html](http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html). I intended to attend the scheduled mass at the Chalan Kanoa Cathedral if only to lend support to an understanding that the United States fostered and Eleanor Roosevelt so persistently promoted sixty years ago, but priorities shifted by the end of the day.

The eloquent simplicity of the Declaration’s language makes its civilized intent unmistakable, and has made it the most translated document in the world. It begins and lays out a fundamental structure of establishing human relations, and the universal measure to gauge the conduct of the individual and society and vice-versa.
Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts, which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law.

It was meant to be an antidote to the vagaries of war and the periodic emergence of Hitlers in the world. Sixty years later, certain characters have become familiar around the dining table: Pol Pot of Cambodia and Pinochet of Chile, Milosevic of Serbia and Marcos of the Philippines, the Korean father-son duo and the Talibanis of Afghanistan, to name a few. We have become inured to human rights violations; we readily dismiss out of our consciousness the reminders that groups like Falun Dafa (Falun Gong) impose on us, such as during Saipan’s Thursday street market. Tibet and Myanmar are places elsewhere, and we do not see ourselves in Darfur or Rwanda, Palestine and Chechnya. And we pray, in spite of the evidence, that the White House did not countenance the use of torture in its counterterrorism measures, let alone, order the practice from the Oval Office!

It is ironic that in some quarters, the insistence on human rights is viewed as the source of many of the world's current evils (from UK's New Statesman). I would dismiss this as propaganda except that I heard it expressed locally by a prominent long-term Saipan resident, Hong Kong-Guangzhou originating Chinese businessman who decried any insinuation that the garment industry, the CNMI or the People’s Republic of China, violated workers human rights. Besides, he seriously added, “How about the human rights of the industry’s owners and administrators?”

Of course, any attempt to document violations of human rights in these western Pacific islands, is perceived as an intrusion into indigenous rights. Our former lady teacher in Rota who felt compelled to flee the islands due to threats on her family and her person just because she pointed to such violations in the early '90s has since become a persona non grata in some powerful quarters in Saipan. A tandem couple, law practitioners who helped me understand the legal situation of labor and immigration in the Commonwealth early on, left for fear of their family’s safety and well being. The few politicians who are seen in the same room with human rights’ advocates are instantly vilified for betraying the cause of those who elected them into office.

My sixth grade students have been watching scenes of wildlife behavior among animals and plants as part of their Science curriculum, and what is evident in the food chain is the unmistakable vulnerability of the weak against the survival instinct of the strong. That seems to be Mother Nature’s way. But in scientific classification, we are called homo sapiens for our alleged natural capacity to learn from experience, for a faculty of reason. In that sense, our progeny in the mammalian class stand a vertebral head above everyone’s shoulder.

Lead that to the study of Ancient Civilization and one can discern two opposing yet simultaneously operating forces—the law of brute force and Empire, and the rule of law and the civilizing process. One can trace the adherence to the rule of law from Hammurabi, Moses and Cyrus in Mesopotamia, to the English, American and French Bill of Rights of the last two centuries. But the trail on brute force, sanctified in religious sacrifices and divine dictums, polished in the technological innovation of the chariot to today's weapons of mass destruction, rationalized in the defense posture of Mycenea and Sparta to the marching cadence of Caesars and the Roman Empire to the apocalyptic maneuvers of the architects of the War on Terror on Pennsylvania Avenue, and we begin to understanding how the 50-some unanimous infant voices of the United Nations (well, the USSR and South Africa understandably did not oppose but abstained) 60 years ago was but a feeble cry in the din of humankind’s inhumanity to its kind. Vigilance, in this instance, is undeniably a supreme virtue.
British writer Sir William Golding would allegorize such opposing forces in his novel, *The Lord of the Flies*, the title being a direct reference to Mesopotamia's Beelzebub of satanic pedigree. My class got to view the '90s film version of the novel about a group of young American military cadets stranded after a plane crash in one of the Caribbean islands. What stood out was the choice in any given crisis of reverting to our basic animal and survival instincts, or on our consciousness of self-directed limits and possibilities of law and order, manners and etiquette.

Greek Nikos Kazantzakis elevated that telling in his celebrated Homeric *Saviors of God*, where he used the metaphor of a crimson line ascending in the evolutionary trail of human consciousness while an equal force of descent occurs as well. But our sixth graders know that: Luke Skywalker always contends with Darth Vader!

The incidence of bullies and cowed “weaklings” is not foreign to classrooms. Nor is defiance and rebellion, nor simply the impulse to destroy, too advanced for my 11-13 year olds. And hardly are the boys to be excused for their machismotic treatment of girls, just because there is prevailing a cultural inequity in gender treatment. If my class is a microcosm of society, then the battle between the rule of the jungle and the rule of civilization persists as an endless conflict in every social unit, down to each individual on the planet Earth.

As to Ruth Tighe's failure to wave her CNMI flag on Constitution Day, we shall forgive her for us long as she keeps reminding us to check on the *Congressional Record*, and to alert us on provisions of the law pertinent to our social situation.

And in this Christian Christmas season, and vaguely in a season of Hope in Gaia with a possible establishment of a US Department of Peace to oversee State, Defense and Homeland Security, might I be forgiven my failure to pause to beat the drums of the UDHR birthday if I continue to pursue the birthing of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want one sixth grader, one classroom day at a time?

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