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People Power In Iran

SACRAMENTO, CALIF., June 23 (PinoyGlobal) - Twenty three years ago, a new brand of revolution was started in the Philippines. Fueled by the strength of the people's will to regain their freedom from a despotic regime, the "People Power" revolution of 1986 toppled the well-entrenched Marcos dictatorship. It was the beginning of a worldwide movement that dismantled the Soviet evil empire and its client states in eastern Europe in 1989.

Recently, in the aftermath of the controversial Iranian presidential election last June 12, 2009, People Power started to brew over charges of election fraud. Incumbent President Mamoud Ahmadinejad won by 62.63% of the votes cast to his opponent Mir Hossein Mousavi's 33.75%. However, there were allegations of election irregularities which aroused and angered Mousavi's supporters. International uproar further fueled the simmering situation in Iran. And in an unprecedented mass action in one of the most -- if not the most -- Islamic fundamentalist countries on earth, protesters vented their anger on the streets demanding a recount of the election.

At the heart of the issue is the authenticity of the election results. In an appeal lodged with Iran's Guardian Council last June 14, Mousavi claimed rampant vote-rigging. He indicated that 14 million unused ballots were unaccounted for and which could have been used -- or misused -- to manipulate the election results. This is a large number that could have changed the outcome of the election. With Ahmadinejad's 24.5 million votes to Mousavi's 13.2

million votes, the missing 14 million votes could have been manipulated to favor Ahmadinejad. The Guardian Council responded that they will recount the votes. However, that has yet to occur.

On June 13, the day after the election, peaceful protests started in earnest. However, the protests turned violent as word of the vote-rigging spread like wildfire. Civil unrest followed. Within a few days, Mousavi's supporters grew to hundreds of thousands in the streets of the capital, Tehran.

Last June 20, a 27-year old woman -- Neda Agha Soltan -- was murdered while she was protesting. The shot came from a sniper who was positioned from the roof of a house. The bullet hit Neda in the chest. As Neda lay dying from the gunshot wound and blood gushing out of her nose and mouth, a protester took a video as several people -- including her father -- attempted to keep her alive. She died in less than two minutes. Within a hours, the video shot was loaded into the Internet for the whole world to see. Her gory death shook the world.

Instantly, Neda became the name and face of the "green wave" movement as the protesters called themselves. Ironically, the meaning of "Neda" in Persian is "Voice." Appropriately, Neda became the "Voice of Iran" and the "Face of Freedom."

Unlike the 1979 Islamic revolution that deposed

Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi which ended 2,500 years of unbroken monarchy of the Persian Empire founded by Cyrus the Great, today's civil unrest is all about people's freedom. The protesting Iranians saw in Mousavi a symbol for which to express their desire for freedom. But don't get me wrong Mousavi is not going to rid Iran of Islamic fundamentalism, only to reform it and make it more attuned to today's "political correctness" including equality for women. Interestingly, there is a significant number of protesting women.

However, once the thirst for freedom is quenched with some promises of reforms, there is always a tendency that the people would want for more. And that's what the civil unrest could lead into -- a revolution that could secularize the government and democratize the way of life of the Iranian people.

The question is: Is secularization possible in Iran? After 30 years of absolute control, would the Islamic clerics -- the ayatollahs -- willingly turn over power to the reformists?

Looking back at history, the collective strength and will of the people -- people power -- has been proven to be unstoppable. It was unstoppable in the Philippines in 1986 when unarmed civilians and religious nuns holding religious icons blocked tanks and soldiers on Epifanio delos Santos Avenue -- EDSA for short -- on that fateful day of February 25, 1986. The EDSA "People Power" revolution ended more than 20 years of dictatorship.

In 1989, people power was unstoppable in Eastern Europe when communist governments fell one by one like dominoes: Poland in April; Yugoslavia in May; Hungary in October; East Germany in November; Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania in December. On Christmas Day in 1991, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was officially dismantled and all the former republics under the dismembered evil empire were freed from the yoke of communism.

A few days ago, last June 20, Iran's Supreme Ruler

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who spoke before tens of thousands of worshippers at a mosque, banned all protests and warned that those who would disobey him will be held responsible for any bloodshed. And in a show of absolute power, Khamenei upheld Ahmadinejad as the "rightful winner" in the election; thus, invalidating Mousavi's appeal for recount. Case closed.

But Mousavi's supporters defied the Supreme Ruler's edict. And they continue to grow in numbers. With the televised death of Neda, it could hasten the brewing "people power" to reach a critical mass that would make it unstoppable.

With what happened in the Philippines in 1986 and Eastern Europe in 1989, is history going to repeat itself? Would man's endeavor to live in freedom once again become his ultimate weapon to preserve freedom itself?

Nelson Mandela said during his trial in 1964: "I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

On June 5, 1989, a nameless and faceless man was photographed standing in front of a column of tanks on Tiananmen Square in Beijing which prevented their advance against the demonstrators at the square. Was he determined like Mandela to die for freedom? It must have taken him a lot of courage to do that. And so did the Filipino nun who stood in front of a column of tanks during the EDSA "People Power" revolution in 1986.

Freedom is a universal aspiration of man from the beginning of time. It was freedom that brought down a dictator in the Philippines. It was freedom that broke the back of communism in Europe and the Soviet Union. It was freedom that dissolved apartheid in South Africa. And it was freedom that Neda died for in Iran.