

[OPINION]

# Philippines: Time to seek justice, not hand out the Nobel Prize, for economic crimes

'Those who have been responsible for destroying economies cannot be allowed to just walk away from the wreckage'

Sunday 11 June 2023, by [BELLO Walden](#) (Date first published: 10 June 2023).

**The following is the acceptance speech of Amnesty International Philippines' "Most Distinguished Defender of Human Rights" Awardee Walden Bello, read by his stepdaughter, Annette Ferrer, Hotel Luxent, June 10, 2023.**

I would like to thank Amnesty International for this honor of naming me the Most Distinguished Human Rights Defender for 2023. I am indeed very honored to follow in the footsteps of Senator Leila de Lima, the awardee for 2018, and all the past and present recipients of the Ignite awards. And I regret very much not being able to be physically in their company on this wonderful night.

In the few minutes that Amnesty has afforded me to share my thoughts in this understandably tight program, let me say that while I have long been active in the protection of the right to life, the right to be free from persecution, and the right to due process, I would like to believe the panel of judges are also making a statement about my long-time engagement with economic rights.

Most of my life's work has been devoted to intellectually and politically demolishing the ideology and policies of neoliberalism that have wreaked so much havoc not only among our people but in countries throughout world. The destruction of our manufacturing and the devastation of our agriculture has led to so much poverty and inequality and sheer misery, leaving so many of our youth with no other choice but to abandon our ruined country.

To borrow the distinction made by the philosopher Isaiah Berlin, there are negative rights, such as the right not to be tortured, and positive rights, or those that contribute to our full development as human beings. Human rights campaigns have traditionally focused on negative rights, that is, the protection of people from repression and persecution. I believe it is time we also campaign against individuals and institutions that violate the people's positive rights. Neoliberal policies such as those that have been imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, institutionalized in the Philippine political economy, and rationalized by a succession of economic managers and economists, have created massive poverty and inequality that have prevented millions of our fellow Filipinos over the last five decades from their full development as human beings, because they have destroyed, disarticulated, and disintegrated the country's base of physical survival, that is, the economy. That is a crime.

Neoliberal policies are now discredited. The Washington Consensus is in the junk heap. No self-respecting economic manager, except perhaps in the Philippines, any longer invokes the so-called "magic of the market" or the so-called benefits of free trade. Yet in so many countries, and not just in the Philippines, neoliberal policies continue to be the default mode, like the proverbial dead hand

of the engineer on the throttle of a speeding train. They continue to inflict severe damage on the life chances of millions of Filipinos because they have been institutionalized.

Those who have been responsible for destroying economies cannot be allowed to just walk away from the wreckage, just as that monster Duterte cannot be allowed to just get away with spilling the blood of 27,000 Filipinos. The bureaucrats and technocrats of the IMF and World Bank, their local accomplices particularly in the Department of Finance and National Economic Development Authority, as well as the ideologues of neoliberalism that have spread the false gospel from their perches in such institutions as the University of Chicago and the UP School of Economics must also be brought before the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Duterte's hands are bloody, but so are the hands of these white collar criminals very dirty. Like those bombing crews that drop their lethal payloads from 27,000 feet or the remote controller that directs a drone to destroy a wedding party in Pakistan from thousands of miles away in Nevada, USA, these people are not exempted from guilt owing to their distance from the sites of death, destruction, harrowing poverty, and misery.

It is high time we seek justice for economic crimes. It is high time we cease honoring such criminals with Nobel Prizes in Economics but bring them instead to the ICC. If the arraignment of such economic criminals cannot be immediately be done owing to the need to amend the Rome statute, then let us at least establish a "Hall of Infamy" where we can enshrine such dead and living stars of neoliberalism as the Nobel Prize laureate Milton Friedman, the ideological soulmate of the General Augusto Pinochet; Michel Camdessus and Christine Lagarde, the best known faces of IMF-imposed austerity; former World Bank President Robert McNamara, who conspired with the dictator Marcos to make the Philippines one of the guinea pigs of structural adjustment; and Pascal Lamy and Mike Moore, who spearheaded the drive to imprison the global South in the iron cage of free trade, the World Trade Organization.

I would also push for the inclusion in such a Hall of Infamy local luminaries of technocratic neoliberalism, the people who worked with international technocrats to condemn us to permanent debt slavery, destroy our manufacturing, and bring our agriculture to a terminal state. Here I would include the economic managers and economists Jesus Estanislao, Gerry Sicat, Cesar Virata, Bernie Villegas, and Carlos Dominguez.

And, of course, one must not forget Cielito Habito, who as National Economic Development Authority chief almost singlehandedly wiped out Philippine manufacturing with his push to bring down average tariffs to 4-6% simply to prove that Filipinos could take economic pain better than Pinochet's Chicago Boys in Chile, who did not allow tariffs to go below 11%. Nor must we overlook the WTO-USAID mercenary Ramon Clarete, who famously sought to sugarcoat the impending murder of our agricultural sector by claiming that Philippines' joining the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture would result in 500,000 new jobs every year in the countryside!

But some people might object: Habito and Clarete are such mild-mannered individuals to deserve being tagged as economic criminals. So was the Nazi Adolf Eichmann, whom Hannah Arendt famously described as representing "the banality of evil." Others might say, well they were wrong, but were they not well-intentioned? This excuse does not even deserve an answer since Marcos Sr. and Duterte saw themselves as well-intentioned as they went about their grisly business. The road to hell, one must repeat again and again, is paved with good intentions.

Being tried at the ICC or honored with membership at the Hall of Infamy would be a lesson to all that bad ideas and bad policies have consequences, often devastating ones - that you cannot play academic and policy games with the lives of millions of people.

Let me end by demanding the release of my fellow Ignite awardee Senator Leila de Lima, packing off Duterte to the ICC jail in The Hague, an end to impunity, and the dismantling of all those neoliberal policies that have destroyed our economy and brought so much misery to our people. And, again, thank you Amnesty. -

**WALDEN BELLO**

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<https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/opinion-time-see-justice-not-hand-out-nobel-prize-economic-crimes/>
- Former member of Congress Walden Bello is visiting senior researcher at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University and adjunct professor of sociology at the State University of New York at Binghamton. Also the recipient in 2003 of the Right Livelihood Award (aka Alternative Nobel Prize), Bello is the author of 25 books, including the classic *Development Debacle: The World Bank in the Philippines* (1982), *Dark Victory: The United States, Structural Adjustment and Global Poverty* (1994), and *Paper Dragons: China and the Next Crash* (2019).