

QC Mayor Belmonte: I'm a silent worker

BY JAIME R. PILAPIL

QUEZON City Mayor Josefina "Joy" Belmonte refuses to be compared with her counterparts in Manila and Pasig, describing herself as a "silent worker" who prefers to act without cameras documenting her every move.

And what does this "silent worker" have to show for since she assumed office on July 1, 2019 after running virtually unopposed? "I inspected almost all roads, especially those traversing Mabuhay Lane (roads connecting Quezon City to neighboring cities and to nearby provinces, including North and South expressways), for the first week of the 60-day ultimatum to clear the city roads of all types of obstructions," Belmonte told *The Manila Times*. She said 22 areas of concern, most of which involve alternative routes to nearby Marikina, Pasig, Makati, Makiling, and even Calabarzon, had been identified.

'A different approach' to problem with vendors

When asked what her solution was regarding vendors who kept returning to cleared areas, the neophyte mayor said her instruction was to keep on issuing violation receipts. "We deputized village officials to issue tickets. If they keep coming back, issue them tickets. Let them pay for the penalties. I told them not to confiscate their wares so they would not cry," Belmonte said.

She does not want to be "harsh", directing her people "to be compassionate" but at the same time make the vendors "self-reliant," Belmonte stressed. "They are trying to survive, why take away their stuff?" She added that she used a "different approach" in dealing with vendors or small business owners. "They look for a place where they could freely sell or make business like vacant market stalls or night market," Belmonte explained, adding that she prefers to "find a solution rather than confront a bigger problem like loss of income opportunity."

Probe on village fees

Belmonte also said that she had ordered the investigation of villages that collect fees from motorists passing through. Pointing to Jordan Plains in Novaliches, which is popular with taxis and FX vans since it offers a short cut to and from SM Fairview, she declared: "Village roads that have been turned over to the city should not collect passage fees. We will investigate the case of Jordan Plains."

Some of the more drastic moves Belmonte has implemented, meanwhile, include the demolition of an outpost on a sidewalk in *Santitas* (village) 11th. A team also dismantled a makeshift market where 300 vendors sold wet and dry goods and a



beauty parlor under the Luzon flyover. "What shocked me even more is that the vendors pay daily rate of P80 to P150 a day to a private company whose administrator could not show me a contract or an updated business permit. Is something fishy going on?" she said.

No comparisons with 'Isko'/'Vico'

Belmonte said she had a different approach compared to that of Manila Mayor Francisco "Isko Moreno" Domagosa and Pasig Mayor Regis "Vico" Sotto. In all her inspections, Belmonte said no media or television trailed her. What she does have, however, is a Facebook account where she personally updated her constituents of her actions. While she finds "Mayor Isko cute," Belmonte has shunned any comparison. "I am not an actress. I work silently and I want to remain that way," she said.

In her first term as the Quezon City government's top executive, Belmonte also laughed when questioned about the city's fiscal condition. Even before she took her oath, Belmonte had complained of having a corrupt treasury, a claim the previous administration under Herbert Bautista has denied. If financial problems aside, Belmonte has promised to deliver on basic services such as health, justice and order and housing for informal settlers concerned that the city government has identified for the construction of settlement buildings. "We are now doing the needed documentations so we could help them with no hassle," she said.

Her administration will prioritize those living in danger zones like shanties built on creeks. State-run Philippine News Agency has reported that there were 190,000 informal settlers in Quezon City, but Belmonte believes there may be more. Quezon City is the most populated city in Metro Manila with 2.9 million residents as of the 2015 census and the biggest land area at 166.2 square kilometers.