

ANTONIO A. OPOSA JR.

He is one of Asia's leading voices in the global arena of Environmental Law. His work is internationally noted for the cases he fought to protect the Philippines' natural patrimony. In 1990, he initiated a case to protect the country's remaining virgin tropical forests. Losing in the trial court, he took the case to the Philippine Supreme Court which later enforced the principle of inter-generational responsibility. The Court also gave standing to the petitioners-children to take legal action, on their own behalf and on behalf of generations yet unborn (*Minors Oposa v. Factoran, 1993*).



In December 2008, after a ten-year legal battle he waged from the trial court all the way to the Philippine Supreme Court against eleven government agencies, he won the case to clean up Manila Bay. In a continuing mandamus judgment, the Supreme Court ordered all defendant agencies to implement a time-bound action plan to clean up Manila Bay and to report its progress to the Court every 90 days.

As an enforcement operative, he has organized and led some of the most daring enforcement operations against environmental criminal syndicates. Creatively using rules of criminal procedure, he has jailed environmental criminals within hours from arrest. His enforcement work against illegal fishing syndicates has been featured in a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) documentary film entitled *Blast*.¹ He has been the object of death threats and assassination plots.

He founded the SEA Camp (formerly the *School of the SEA* -Sea and Earth Advocates) in the white-sand shores of Bantayan Island, Cebu in the Central Philippines. The Camp features a free-flying bird sanctuary, a demonstration marine protected area, and a model climate change house. This house is powered by renewable energy and has

¹ Aired on BBC in May 2007. His work was also featured in the Summer 2008 issue of the Harvard Law Bulletin <http://www.law.harvard.edu/news/bulletin/2008/summer/feature_3.php> and on CNN's *Eco-Solutions*.

vertical and roof-deck vegetable gardens to illustrate self-reliance and food sufficiency.

The Camp also completely recycles water and solid wastes. Even methane from human wastes is captured and converted into cooking gas. As a physical demonstration of the working principles for sustainable living, it has trained thousands of children, out-of-school youths, government officials, fishermen, law enforcement officers, teachers, lawyers, and laymen.

Together with volunteer fishermen, scuba divers, local officials and ordinary citizens, he helps local fishing communities put up a network of marine sanctuaries and fish condominiums in the Visayan Sea.²



Front yard of the SEA Camp (formerly the School of the SEA (Sea, Earth, & Advocates), Bantayan Island, Cebu, The Philippines.

He received his law degree from the University of the Philippines and his Master of Laws from the Harvard Law School, where he was the commencement speaker of his graduating class. He is the legal adviser and international environmental negotiator of the Federated States of Micronesia to the Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer. He taught Environmental Law at the University of the Philippines College of Law, the Ateneo School of Law and the San Beda School of Law and lectures around the world.

He is the convenor of the revolutionary Share-the-Roads Movement in the Philippines, a group of citizens advocating for the fair sharing of road space, clean air, and walkable and bikable communities. The network of citizens has filed an ongoing case against the Philippine Government to compel the latter to divide the roads by half lengthwise—half for motorized vehicles and the other half for sidewalks and bike lanes <www.sharetheroads.net>.

For his work, he received The Outstanding Young Man (TOYM) of the Philippines award (1993) and the highest United Nations award in

² The Visayan Sea is located in the Central Philippines – the geographic heart and the ‘Center of the Center of Marine Biodiversity on Earth’, a term used by Dr. Kent Carpenter, world-renowned marine biologist.

the field of the Environment -- the UNEP Global Roll of Honor (1997). He is the only Asian to receive the International Environmental Law Award from the Washington DC-based Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL). In July 2013, he was the Distinguished Visiting Scholar for International Environmental Law of the Vermont Law School. In 2014, he was Visiting Lecturer in the University of Hawaii William S. Richardson School of Law.

“For his path-breaking and passionate crusade to engage Filipinos in acts of enlightened citizenship that maximize the power of the Law to protect and nurture the environment, for themselves, their children, and generations yet unborn,” he received the 2009 Ramon Magsaysay Award.³

For recreation, he is an avid cyclist, open-water scuba diver (advanced level), sailor, swimmer, tennis player, gardener, vocal artist, painter, writer, and a storyteller.

³ The Ramon Magsaysay Award is Asia’s highest award for public service, also known as the Nobel Peace Prize of Asia.