



There is great fulfilment to be gained in **helping the public through one's reporting.**

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Chair of the Journalism for Nation Building Foundation and
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Now that Grand Jury meeting of the #NataliPrize is over, what are your overall impressions of the finalists?

The Grand Jury was pretty intense! It was very difficult to choose between the finalists because a number of entries seemed to be of equal weight.

I had a very good discussion with the other members of the jury and I certainly learned a lot from them. I was particularly impressed by the entries in the Best Emerging Journalist category because the entrants were under 30 years old.

Ultimately, I was amazed at how many entries the Natali Prize has attracted, around 800 this year! I believe this is a good sign and I hope that more journalists will join this contest in the future.

You chair the Journalism for Nation Building Foundation which has a fellowship named in honour of the late Rappler reporter and Natali Prize 2008 winner Aries Rufo. Why are fellowships and prizes important to break down barriers to enter journalism?

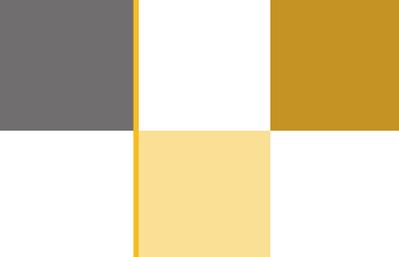
In the Philippines, news organisations do not have enough resources for in-depth and investigative reporting. That is why we at the Journalism for Nation Building Foundation named a fellowship in honour of Aries Rufo, so that we can encourage all journalists and staff members of news organisations to look into issues covered in investigative journalism. Whether they are environmental protection issues or governmental issues such as corruption. It is one way we can contribute to improve journalism in the Philippines.



The strength of the Natali Prize is in the quality of the subject matter.

Environmental defenders are more at risk in the Philippines than they are anywhere else in the world. What role can journalism play to shed light on the dangers activists face?

Journalists have a duty to report on the actions taken by frontline defenders of our environment. The environment beat* in the Philippines does not just cover governmental programmes, but also the work of non-



government organisations and environmental activists. It really is a key part of a journalist's duty, to report on the risks environmental defenders experience and the good that they do. Journalists underline the policies which need to be changed and what governments can do to protect the environment.

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Rappler has a history of speaking truth to power. How do you create and sustain a journalistic culture asking for answers and accountability?

It all begins in the classroom. For those studying journalism at university and those who are studying other courses but are interested in becoming journalists, the values of integrity, excellence and independence should be nurtured.

The 'education' then continues in the newsroom. This is where real-life training begins and editors guide reporters in researching, digging, asking tough questions, connecting the dots, and reporting without fear or favour. Newsrooms should inculcate in their reporters the value of transparency: that governments should be open and share information because the public has a right to know matters that are of interest to the country. With experience and constant guidance from editors, reporters are able to embed these values.

What would you tell journalists who want to give up?

** Editor's note: "beat" is a term used by journalists to refer to assigned areas of coverage.*

Patience is key and courage is something that one does not know is in them--it is just there, ready to be summoned when the situation needs it.

There is great fulfilment in being able to help the public, from a small community to an entire country, by making a difference through one's reporting.

2020 has been eventful, to say the least. What development themes that made the news this year do you think #NataliPrize applicants will cover in the next edition?

It is inevitable that the global pandemic and the ways in which governments and leaders have responded to it, will be a theme for next year's #NataliPrize. Poverty, unemployment, displacements, difficulties of migrant workers: these are some of the socio-economic issues that will resonate with many. Related to this is the issue of how some leaders used the pandemic to strengthen their authoritarian rule, by clamping down on free expression and media, and how citizens, journalists and activists pushed back.

Following your experience with the #NataliPrize, will you encourage journalists to cover development issues more at Rappler?

Yes, although Rappler reporters have already been reporting on development issues such as migration, trafficking, environmental problems and hunger, among others. What is needed is a continuation of their work--and at a more frequent pace. This is one of the key interests of Rappler, to publish this kind of reporting more often.

ABOUT

The Lorenzo Natali Prize was launched in 1992 to recognise and celebrate excellence in reporting on sustainable development issues. The Prize also gives a voice to those whose vital message is often overlooked or ignored. It was created by DG DEVCO, and named after Lorenzo Natali, a precursor of European development policy.

Marites Danguilan Vitug is one of the Philippines' most accomplished journalists and a bestselling author. She is the former editor of Newsbreak and currently is editor at large for Rappler.com. Her latest book, *Rock Solid: How the Philippines won its maritime dispute against China*, won the National Book Award for best book in journalism in 2019.

Marites received the Courage in Journalism Award from the International Women's Media Foundation; the Metrobank Foundation Journalists of the Year award (2015); the Ozanam Award (2011); the University of the Philippines Outstanding Alumni Award (2010) and the Ten Outstanding Young Filipinos award.