

# Elias Laurente Espinoza

I was born from poor parents in Cagwait, Surigao del Sur, a town in the troubled Mindanao (once dubbed the land of promise), Philippines, at the time when electricity was unheard of and computers were not even on the drawing boards of the inventors. I finished my elementary and high school studies in my coastal town that relies on sea produce and agriculture as the inhabitants' source of livelihood.

I went to Cebu City, Philippines to pursue my college studies. However, due to financial constraints I quit college and wasted five years of my productive life doing nothing in my hometown. Later on, I decided to go back to Cebu City to finish my college studies. I applied and was admitted as an academic scholar which forced me to finish my Bachelor of Science degree in Criminology. I took up a Bachelor of Laws and finished it while working as a newspaper reporter for the local news outfits where typewriters were still the tools of the press.

After passing the bar exams and practicing law, I started writing a column for the Sun Star Daily-Cebu. This time we were already using computers. My work with the press led me to learn the use of computer without the need to go to school. I married my college girlfriend, who is now a doctor of medicine and we have a 14-year old boy, who is in his second year of high school now.

A few months ago, I had no idea what Internet governance was about. As a lawyer, I was at first anxious about how to do my work and my part in an online course, because DiploFoundation's Internet Governance Capacity Building Program was my first. My tutors during the introduction and up to the research phase of the programme were all so good that I learned the nitty-gritty of online study easily.





Since I became a registered voter, elections in the Philippines were always marred with accusation of fraud and deception either from the camp of the opposition or the administration candidates. The electoral system in the Philippines is still the old form where voters fill out the ballots of the names of chosen candidates and drop it in the ballot boxes. The counting and canvassing are manually done. Because of this, I took a personal challenge in our advanced phase study to research on e-voting in which I earned an “A” grade.

The advanced phase also had e-commerce and privacy, which was particularly useful to me. One of the projects I did after the IGF Hyderabad experience was to file, together with my law partner, Atty. Edgar F. Gica, a civil suit against the provincial government of Cebu, Philippines, for violation of privacy when the provincial government installed a CCTV camera directed at the building of the IBP (Integrated Bar of the Philippines) without the lawyers’ consent. The case is ongoing.

I am deeply grateful to the ITU and Diplo Foundation for the financial assistance and the opportunity afforded me to attend the Hyderabad forum. The IGF was a huge free market of flowing and refreshing ideas on ICT.

The Philippine government has been supportive of the adoption of the Development Agenda since it was first introduced at the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). However, the implementation of the Development Agenda is an ongoing process that needs the restructuring of some of the institutions in this country. The civil

society in the Philippines has also been following the advancements of this discussion, with attention focused on the Foundation for Media Alternatives.

In the year 2000, needing to streamline the different ICT-related government agencies to provide effective and focused leadership in the implementation of ICT policy, former President Joseph Ejercito Estrada issued Executive Order No. 264 merging the National Information Technology Council (NITC) and the Electronic Commerce Promotion Council (ECPC) to form Information Technology and Electronic Commerce Council (ITECC).

When President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo took over in January of 2001, she transferred the chairmanship of ITECC to the President of the Republic of the Philippines by signing EO 18, amending EO 264. This move allowed her to oversee the direction of ITECC and ICT development in the country. It also expanded, enhanced, and accelerated ITECC's policy-implementation capabilities and decision-making processes. However, the draft bill for the creation of Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) is yet to be finalized and approved by Congress. Convergence legislations are yet to be pursued. Too much politics has caused this delay.

After returning to my home city (Cebu City) from the Hyderabad IGF, I talked with the executives of Smart Communications, a stakeholder in ICT here, to take part, if not the lead, in convening an Internet Governance Forum in the country. As a newspaper columnist, I have discussed in my column the significance of Internet governance in a growing or developing country. I will also urge congress, thru my column, to hasten the approval of the bill creating DICT and other legislations related to ICT. ■



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A row of white classical columns with a red 'EXTRACT' sign. The sign is a red-bordered rectangle with the word 'EXTRACT' in red, italicized, sans-serif capital letters. The background is a grayscale image of the columns, with a semi-transparent dark gray area at the bottom containing the main title and subtitle.

**EXTRACT**

*This extract was originally published as part of the report:  
Capacity Development: How the Internet Governance  
Forum empowered people from developing countries*

# CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT:

How the Internet Governance Forum  
empowered people from developing countries