

SIS Alumni Make Waves in International Disability Policy

Alumni

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SIS alumni **Eloisa “Louie” Zepeda, SIS/MA ’12**, and **John Paul “Pong” Cruz, SIS/MA ’13**, each recently received recognition for their outstanding work in international disability policy. Originally from the Philippines, both Cruz and Zepeda experienced severe visual impairment in their twenties. Rather than let their disability act as a barrier to success, Cruz and Zepeda turned their disabilities into catalysts for change, motivating them to become international disability policy advocates.

Zepeda and Cruz met as part of the inaugural cohort of the Comparative and International Disability Policy program facilitated by the [Institute on Disability and Public Policy \(IDPP\)](#) and supported by [The Nippon Foundation](#).

"We are tremendously proud of Louie and Pong and the rest of our alumni, all of whom are working in the disability policy fields and creating significant impact at local, national, regional and international levels," states [Dr. Derrick L. Cogburn](#), SIS associate professor and executive director of IDPP and [COTELCO: The Collaboration Laboratory](#).

In October 2013, Zepeda was appointed regional representative of the western pacific region for the [Global Coalition of Tuberculosis Activists \(GCTA\)](#). Selected as one of six regional representatives, Zepeda traveled to Paris, France for the GCTA Global Steering Committee’s first meeting in October. In this role, she aims to raise awareness of the need for patient-centered decision making, as well as advocate for inclusive treatment plans.

Zepeda was selected because of her extensive disability advocacy work with tuberculosis and meningitis patient networks in the Philippines. She serves as executive director of the Tropical Disease Foundation’s Patient Association and as a board member of the [Las Piñas Persons with Disabilities Federation](#), both prominent disabled persons’ organizations in the Philippines.

Zepeda's first foray into international disability policy occurred during her SIS studies in summer 2012, when the IDPP supported her seven-week internship on the Disability and Rehabilitation Team of the [World Health Organization](#). While Zepeda actively continues her disability work on a local scale, her role at GCTA will bring a new global dimension to her advocacy work.

Another global dimension was added to Cruz's career in November 2013 when he was selected as a fellow of the prestigious [Salzburg Seminar](#), "People, Peace and Planet 2030: Shaping Inclusive and Sustainable Growth," in Kyoto and Tokyo, Japan.

The opportunity allowed Cruz to engage with thirty other young leaders from around the world on issues in economics, human rights, policy, development, and the environment. Facilitated by an international faculty of experts, the seminar also gave Cruz a second opportunity to interact with former ASEAN Secretary General Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, with whom he shared the stage during Dr. Pitsuwan's keynote address at the [inaugural IDPP convocation ceremony](#).

Currently working as the IDPP regional research coordinator, Cruz spoke on the inclusion of disability rights in the post-2015 international development framework during the seminar.

Zepeda and Cruz continue to serve as shining examples of attaining success as a result of - rather than despite - facing challenges.

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