



# Tony Meloto: A Man with a Purpose and a Plan

From humble beginnings, this man with a vision sees the world from both sides, from the bottom to the top; from housing to farming.

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(left to right) Human Nature products sold at the Enchanted Farm; The white house at the Enchanted Farm

“To help end poverty by 2024, that is my life purpose, says Antonio “Tony” Meloto, founder of Gawad Kalinga, a humanitarian movement that builds communities for the poor in the country, “to get my children to make it their mission; to get as many people to join us. What can be a greater goal than that?”

Meloto would like to see a “change in the way that Filipinos look at their country and themselves,” he says. “To me, the greatest achievement is when we regain our dignity, our self-respect, and our confidence as a people; our conviction that this country is a gift from God, that the Philippines is our home and every Filipino is our family; that together, we can end poverty and corruption in our country.”

It was while he was on a mission in Australia for the Couples for Christ family ministry that he came to the important realization. “What was the point of preaching in rich countries when you have allowed your country to suffer in poverty,” he asked himself. So he returned.

Gawad Kalinga was launched in 2003 with a campaign to build 700,000 homes in 7,000 communities, in 7 years. In 2006 Meloto received the Ramon Magsaysay Award, Asia’s Nobel Prize, in recognition of his work in “inspiring Filipinos to believe with pride that theirs can be a nation without slums.”

The Gawad Kalinga’s 21-year development timeline started in 2003, with the first seven years focused on “social justice, land for the landless, home for the homeless,” Meloto shares. “Now we are talking about the second phase—social artistry, social entrepreneurship, focus on countryside development, developing our agriculture and also creating Filipino brands.”

Gawad Kalinga’s Enchanted Farm in Barangay Encanto in Angat, Bulacan is “the first farm village university in the world,” Meloto says. “We are trying to provide sustainability. So from giving them homes and schools and a good environment, we are now creating opportunities for livelihood and education.” The 14 hectare farm, on what used to be unproductive land, is the first of 24 sites to be set up all over the country.

“Our target is to be able to support 3,000 farmer families in five towns of Bulacan: Angat, Pandi, Dona Remedios, Bustos, and San Rafael,” Meloto explains. “The objective is to bring social entrepreneurs from the elite schools, to use their management, business, and finance skills, to partner with the agricultural schools in the province. We want to create wealth in the countryside. You have to give farmers access to capital, to technology and to markets. And it is by bringing the rich and the poor to become partners.”

“I came from the poor,” says Meloto, who was born on 17 January 1950, in Bacolod, Negros Occidental. “But then, I also had the privilege to get a good education from a top university.” He studied BA in Economics at the Ateneo de Manila University on a scholarship program and graduated in 1971. “So I am able to see both sides of the world.”

“We want Filipinos who will be wealth creators at home and not job seekers abroad,” Meloto says, “Filipinos who will be producers and not just consumers. But most importantly, we want to raise a new generation of Filipinos who are not just professionals or politicians but patriots. The greatest gift given to us by God is this country and the best way to make this country prosperous is to love it first.”

The third phase of the 21-year development timeline, from 2017 to 2024, will focus on social progress. “That is massive wealth creation,” Meloto explains. “We are also going with the tide of change, because this is now the Asian age. The Philippines will be the fastest growing economy in Southeast Asia.”

“Everything has already been planned by God,” Meloto concludes. “I am just doing my part in making it happen.”