

When the news broke out that Cebu City will be back to ECQ after 2 weeks of GCQ, I felt every optimism in my body fly out of the window. My shoulders heavily slugged in sheer disappointment and my deepest sighs were the only form of physical movement I could do to express my utter frustration. It felt like all the strength I mustered to tide me through the months of March to June were drying up, and there is nothing left for me to summon. I just want to go home, safely.

I am just so tired of living in acronyms – ECQ, MECQ, GCQ, and now the heavily discriminated, LSI, which stands for Locally Stranded Individual.

No one really knows the depth of stigma these acronyms bring to people like me, who is in the epicenter of this pandemic. Our LGUs would not accept us in our hometowns since the DILG directive was released, ordering the ban of entry and exit of LSIs coming from and to Cebu City – as if it's not enough that we've been restricted to move in this urban jungle for 3 months now?

I understand that the LGUs are just trying to protect the safety of their respective constituents but where else could a person go to find solace and haven in this worsening crisis? Home! But even our home provinces would hesitate to accept us. Those who were able to return home were watched with the eye of a hawk – with the public labelling you with the words, "*Gikan ra ba na siya ug Cebu*" (S/he came from Cebu). It is as though this statement is intended to scare people and warn them of your existence.

It hurts even more when the people you know back in your hometown are in consonance with the LGU in banning you from going home, albeit silently. These are the friends you thought you had – and they, too, don't want you back there.

I want people to understand the plight of people like me who are here in Cebu, at this very unfortunate moment, who are left with no one with ourselves to depend on. Look, even the barangay we currently reside don't give us priorities when it comes to relief distribution because we are not originally from here.

So, where do we place ourselves now? No barangay to look after us and no LGU to accept us?

I am starting to think that all these circumstances surrounding LSIs like me are actuations of blame – that it is our fault that we are here in this pandemic-stricken city.

I may not speak for everyone but I want myself to be heard. I came here to look for employment which was not available for me back in the province. I came here to pursue dreams that I was willing to work hard for. I came here so I could provide for myself and my family.

I did not come here to be stuck and to be a mere acronym.