

## Subway commute takes its toll

Written by EDMUND M. SILVESTRE  
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**DAILY CHALLENGE:** Coring Eustaquio walking down the steep stairs at a Manhattan subway station. (Filipino Reporter photo)

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For 28 years now, Coring Eustaquio of Hollis, Queens, N.Y., has been diligently working at the Philippine Mission to the United Nations at the Philippine Center on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan — as receptionist, clerk, telephone operator and sometimes secretary to ranking officials there.

At 76, she's thankful she's still employed and continues to be productive.

"I enjoy my job," she tells the **Filipino Reporter**.

"I will work as long as my services are needed."

But commuting to and from work has lately become a hurdle for this hardworking grandmother.

Every day, she has to endure the long walks and long flight of stairs at the Rockefeller subway station (47th-50th Streets), something she shares with a number of physically-challenged, pregnant and those with kids in stroller.

Thank God the barriers are less straining on the 179th Station on Hillside Avenue in Queens, where she boards every morning.

"It may be an overstatement for others, but for me and for the others, it's nothing but torture," Eustaquio told the **Filipino Reporter**.

"I didn't actually notice it until recent years...especially when I got stricken with lower back pain."

"Every day you wish there would be elevators or escalators from the platform all the way to the street for people who need them," she said, "or any access to make it easy for the disabled or elderly or pregnant moms. After all this is the capital of the world and New York is known for

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being disabled-friendly.”

Eustaquio’s sentiments hit the nail right smack in the head.

It’s the heart of a class action lawsuit filed last year in Manhattan federal court against the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) for not spending a federally mandated 20 percent of station rehabilitation budgets on improvements like elevators and ramps to accommodate those who use wheelchairs, the elderly and anyone with a mobility impairment.

The suit claims that the MTA is in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which states that people with disabilities cannot be denied the same services provided to people without disabilities.

The Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination against a protected class by any program that receives federal assistance.

MTA received money in the stimulus package from the government last year.

“Without access to the subway, the MTA makes travel next to impossible for New Yorkers with physical disabilities and prevents them from getting to work or seeking employment,” said James Weismann, senior vice president of the United Spinal Association, which has filed the suit along with Disability Rights Advocates.

Eustaquio was surprised to learn that of the 468 subway stations, only 69 are accessible to the physically-challenged, particularly the wheelchair-bound, according to available MTA data.

Like other unhappy straphangers, she tried taking the bus for a brief period to avoid the unfriendly subway system.

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But she had to shell out \$3.75 for one way — a far cry from the \$1.10 she pays on subway — plus longer walk to the bus stop.

“I had no choice but to go back to subway,” she said, laughing in desperation.

“I just can’t afford the bus fare...and the long walk from 46th Street and Fifth Avenue (where the Philippine Center is situated) to the bus stop on 48th Street and Madison Avenue. The winter only made my situation worse.”

For now, Eustaquio is hopeful that the legal challenge to MTA will result in a better subway system.

“Someday, when you get to my age, you’ll know what I’m talking about when riding the subway,” she said.

“By then, I wish you wouldn’t endure what I’m going through everyday.”