

A THIEF IN A SOLDIER'S TWILIGHT TIME:
AN INJUSTICE TO A RETIRING SOLDIER
(PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF Sen. Alfredo S. Lim)
October 11, 2005

Mr. President, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I stand on a question of personal privilege.

Three weeks ago, the Committee on National Defense and Security convoked a hearing to investigate the infamous Garci-tape scandal and heard the most telling revelation, ever expressed in the halls of this chamber, the election fraud perpetrated in the presidential elections of May 2004 as witnessed by a General and Colonel from the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Yes, Marine Brig. Gen. Francisco Gudani bravely admitted without fear nor favor, that he was the mysterious general, then commander of the 1st Marine Brigade and Joint Task Force Lanao in the Lanao provinces, alluded to in that telephone conversation between a Comelec official and a high government official, who was immediately relieved after the May 10, 2004 election, obviously to insure that he was far distant while the votes were counted, recorded in the election returns and the certificates of canvassing accomplished, as he was the stumbling block to an operation to commit fraud in the elections in the south.

He was replaced by a certain Army Col Perino who flew from Manila. He reported to his Commandant, Lt. Gen. Emmanuel R. Teodosio, AFP who assured that he was not removed for cause, but was summoned by Flag Officer In Command, Vice Admiral Ernesto de Leon who instructed him to "spend one week or 10 days in the city to play golf or go to Boracay", so that he would be thousands of miles away from his post. Albeit this, he preferred to witness the massive cheating, helpless but never despondent.

But Gen. Gudani resented his relief in that critical post election stage and insisted to be reinstated in his command. Yes, he was. But only a week later or on May 20, 2004 after the counting and canvassing of votes were finished, the relief went through.

As if it was not enough to toy with his relief, re assignment and later returning him to his post, Gen. Gudani was obviously watched and marked to be silenced from disclosing whatever he knew about the cheating perpetrated in the 2004 elections because, just as he was about to testify before the committee on September 28, 2005 upon having been summoned to appear thereat, he was verbally ordered to ignore such Senate inquiry in aid of legislation.

Gen. Gudani, however, was repulsive to submit to an ill-infested governance and preferred not to be deaf and dumb, even if he knew his retirement from military service was forthcoming on his birth anniversary last October 4, 2005.

He was prepared to ignite the bombshell dauntlessly, without cringing, devoid of qualms and exploded it to the hilt, beyond the four (4) corners of this session hall, farther than Malacanang and outside our archipelago that was heard and pondered upon by the astonished watchers global-wide who are firm believers in democracy.

Amidst the gag order, Gen. Gudani, in revolting discontent for the sake of truth and justice, broke his silence with convulsive impact, went on and testified on September 28, 2005.

He recounted in forthright manner his protested relief; his dissent to the Provincial Election Supervisor of Lanao del Sur of the abrupt change of assignments of election inspectors days before the polls, on alleged orders of a Comelec Commissioner in-charge of Region 4 and 5 in Southern Luzon; for knowing the delivery in two trenches of carton loads of P 500 million as election funds loaded in a helicopter landing somewhere in Mindanao, one or two (2) weeks prior to the election; his having received an admission from an aide who wanted to remain in anonymity “for fear of his life and family”, who actually counted and tied the cash bills in bundles; his knowledge that the money was distributed and spelled the success for the solicited votes of the preferred national candidates; his certainty that the election in Mindanao was rigged, denominated by contemptible vote-buying bordering to graft and corruption, that snuffed life out of the people’s political will.

It would appear, Mr. President, that the election fraud in the Muslim-dominated areas, where the vote of late opposition bet Fernando Poe, Jr. was decimated to zero in the towns of Wao, Bumbaran and Bonabayao in Lanao del Norte, is no longer fiction nor the product of wild imagination of suspected rumor mongers, nor tales originating from graveyards.

For they are as real as the morally upright Gen. Gudani, whose silence revolted fury for which, he had to suffer the wrath of the powerful.

The retaliation, however, was swift, from the terribly rocked governance because even before he could regain his composure, he was publicly censured for disobeying and defying an order of his Commander-in-Chief, supposedly embodied in a belatedly released Executive Order No. 464, banning executive officials from appearing in all legislative inquiries.

Nevertheless, as a military officer, Gen. Gudani realized that by testifying before us, he could be indicted before a court martial even when he was about to retire from his 36 years, of dedicated service on October 4, 2005 as in fact, he has retired.

It is indeed, ironic that this officer and gentleman, once the Chair of the PMA Center for Character Development of its cadets and a holder of his master’s degree in national security administration from the National Defense College of the Philippines at Camp Aguinaldo in 1999, hailed by his peers as God-fearing and a model even in the

privacy of his life, was depicted as villain because he refused to withhold that facts, revealing the elusive truth safely concealed in the Garci-taped mystery.

Mr. President, it is not seldom that we acclaim heroic deeds; it is not infrequent that we extol soldiers combat; and it is not rare that from our soldiers and policemen sworn to defend our country and people from all forms of threats, we find fearless fighters slain in the performance of their sworn duty, hence, leaving behind bereaving widows and orphaned children bequeath with posthumous mementos of valor.

With all humility, I can say I was once a policeman who rose from the ranks and reached the pinnacle of my career when I became a Police-Major General, a feat I achieved through the cherished episodes in my career, where I clashed with scythe-wielding skeleton in black but with God's enduring guidance, my curtains had not fallen.

I witnessed my comrades from the police and in the military fighting for motherland and succumbing to the treachery of death. We survived the trials and ordeals that we faced and knew that to be in danger, was not that easy.

But to face an enemy that espouses oppression, coercion, despotism and testing one's spirit and moral values, is the worst form because, he is made to yield not just his ideals and thoughts but the core of his principles, morality and conscience.

Yes, Mr. President, Gen. Gudani proved it could be surmounted. Gen. Gudani was relieved as Assistant Superintendent of the Philippine Military Academy along with his deputy Col. Alexander Balutan, because they had one virtue in common – honesty and truthfulness for the sake of motherland and in defense of its honor.

Gen. Gudani and Col. Balutan deserved accolades, for ably repulsing tyranny, for daringly accepting the challenge of a crushed military career, for welcoming his possible fate in the solitary confines of a prison cell just to prove to his countrymen, that he had never divorced himself from his sworn loyalty to his Code of Honor, that instilled in him the impeccable values of dignity, honesty and integrity, commencing from his early years of having been a highly regarded “mistah” in the MAAGAP 1973-CLASS of the Philippine Military Academy.

Gen. Gudani faced sanctions for alleged breach of Executive Order No. 464. I do not want to dwell on the validity or illegality of EO 464, as it is not my purpose to tackle issue, nonetheless, I do not find anything illegal nor inappropriate his actions when he appeared before us.

The Senate of the Philippines is a essential complement of the House of Representatives, comprising the Legislative Department of this Government. As a branch with co-equal authority with the Executive and the Judicial Departments, its power and authority can not be ignored, belittled nor defied. Its processes must be obeyed because any ill-intentioned civilian or military officer or servant of the government, who defies its authority can suffer sanctions just as effective and

preservative as the Courts of justice or the Executive agencies of the Government can impose.

And we are certain Gen. Gudani was right, when he testified before us although he was in a dilemma. He probably realized he faced repercussions, upon dictates of an unseen hand in the military court but had no remorse nor regrets, as he did not care because he knew, that his defiance of the impugned authority would work miracles. His dare to reveal the truth triggered an upheaval in the citizenry, that incensed the outrage of the politically-distressed Filipinos, who are determined to extirpate the roots of lies and deception from our democratic processes.

His commenced revolt against the oppression was not futile. We are sure, with the open support of sympathizing militant groups to his plight such as: the risk of being punished, forfeiture of his retirement benefits and the coercion on him to despair and relent, he would surpass the test because like most freedom-loving Filipinos, we are confident that with the remarkable prowess of this dead-shot marine officer who was named AFP Pistol Shooter in 1988 and the recipient of the prestigious Cavalier Awards from the PMA Alumni Association in 1988, Gen. Gudani will in the end triumph in his crusade.

To Gen. Gudani, I am short of words to convey my admiration for his determined conviction, to face the towering might against him in order to uphold truth, honesty and honor and above all serve God and country.

Mr. President, on the other hand, I feel embittered that a bemedalled officer who valiantly served this country for many decades, would be denied his retirement benefit, the last compensation he would expect to receive that will tide him over for the rest of his life. It seemed that what rightfully belonged to and due him was stolen especially so, that he needed it today more than ever. I consider it a thief in a soldier's twilight time and an injustice to him.

Truth is nowadays ignored and traded for gold and power. Very few are willing to make sacrifices to uphold and fight for the truth even if we know that the only key to national survival, reconciliation, economic recovery and lasting peace and understanding is being truthful to ourselves, neighbors, countrymen and even enemies.

Which is why Mr. President, I have the highest admiration and respect for Gen. Gudani, Col. Balutan and Capt. Mendoza because they gave life and meaning to the PMA Code of honor, that is, to fight the truth. We know that upon entering military service, an officer and a soldier take a vow to uphold the truth even if it will cost their lives.

Mr. President, I believe that the vast majority of Filipinos share my sentiments and prepared to express support and carry on the crusade for the truth that the distinguished military officers had borne upon themselves because they are disgusted with having found out that the presidential elections of 2004 was marred by massive

cheating had destroyed the sanctity of the ballots and installed into office losers rather than victors; and, that the only way to save this republic is to stand up and fight for the truth, for the truth will set us free.

Verily, Mr. President, distinguished colleagues, my countrymen, as worthy gesture of reciprocating the courage, patriotism and gallantry of Gen. Gudani, Col. Balutan and Capt. Mendoza in exposing the evils that had plagued the electoral exercises in May 2004 that had drowned the people's will, and to strongly demonstrate that God-fearing, honest, patriotic and vigilant Filipinos are carrying on the fight for truth, I ask of you to contribute one peso each for the Fund for Truth for Gen. Gudani, because I earnestly believe that with two million Filipinos giving one peso each for the fund, the two million retirement pay of Gen. Gudani will be fully restored for his use and, consequently, the two million contributors can proudly proclaim: SHAME TO THE THIEVES OF THE NATIONAL COFFERS; SHAME TO THE CHAEATERS IN THE LAST ELECTIONSL AND SHAME TO THOSE WHO HAVE NO RESPECT FOR THE VIRTUES OF TRUTH AND HONESTY!!

For whom these dauntless military officer stood to salvage the decaying VALUES of our deteriorating political and social existence... to each of us who is worth their dare-devil fight against the MENACING evils in our midst... to share ONE PESOS to this FUND-DRIVE, until it aggregates to TWO MILLION PESOS... which simply means that TWO MILLION FILIPINOS are ready to emulate their example... TWO MILLION FILIPINOS are incensed to get involved with their cause... TWO MILLION FILIPINOS are imparting to everybody and to the WORLD that somehow... their REINCARNATED TRUTH... despite the RISKS... RESCUCITATES JUSTICE and UNITE the FILIPINOS who are thus... now ready to bequeath to their children... and the children of their children... for posterity... the same adage that you and I have treasured from our ancestors. "THOU SHALL NOT LIE... NOR CHEAT... NOR STEAL... and together... hand in hand, LET US RISE WITH PRIDE... because we love and honor our country and people.

My salute to Gen. Gudani, Col., Balutan and Capt. Marlon Mendoza for a heroic service to motherland, that deserves to be emulated and treasured.

Thank you and good day.