

# 'Take 30' for GMA's 'I am sorry'

Senate witness Rodolfo Lozada Jr. cannot stop crying. President Arroyo is the opposite: tears don't come easy for the Chief Executive.

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Photo taken June 28, 2005 shows President Arroyo apologizing for a 'lapse in judgment' in the 'Hello, Garci' case.

# 'Take 30'

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This is according to Gina de Venecia who said that it took 30 takes for then embattled Mrs. Arroyo to perfect a remorseful facial expression to accompany her televised "I am sorry" speech at the height of the "Hello, Garci" wiretapping scandal that nearly forced her out of office in 2005.

Gina, wife of erstwhile Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr., personally witnessed Mrs. Arroyo's struggle to project a contrite demeanor before television cameras at Malacañang. Gina was in the palace's inner circle until her husband's falling out with the President, which cost him the speakership of the House.

"*Gusto sana siya puyakin* but she could not cry. *Parang hirap na hirap siya umiyak. Inulit-ulit nga eh. Kasi kulang nga siya sa sincerity* (They wanted her to cry. But she found it hard to cry. So it was repeated many times because she really lacked sincerity)," Gina said over the *deB5* news program of anchors Arnold Clavio and Orly Trinidad.

Gina said she was present when the "I am sorry" broadcast was being pre-taped by the Presidential Radio-TV Malacañang.

She recalled the public apology was based on a script prepared by retired Supreme Court associate justice Jose Vitug and vetted by some of Mrs. Arroyo's lawyers, including then chief presidential legal counsel Avelino "Nonong" Cruz.

The President delivered the prepared statement through tele-prompter while being coached and guided by award-winning movie and theater director Lupita Kashiwahara.

Gina said she couldn't get her relatives who are involved in the film industry, particularly her sister Marichu "Manay Icha" Maceda, to help in the preparation of Mrs. Arroyo's televised message because they supported the late Fernando Poe Jr. in the May 2004 presidential elections.

The President made the public apology before Congress started the first impeachment proceedings against her in connection with the "Hello, Garci" scandal.

The name "Garci" mentioned by a woman who sounded like Mrs. Arroyo in the wiretapped conversation was widely believed to be former elections commissioner Virgilio Garcilano.

In the voice recording, Mrs. Arroyo and Garcillano were said to be plotting to manipulate the results of the elections in 2004.

In a telephone interview with *The STAR*, Gina swore she is not making up this story out

of spite after she and her husband severed their political alliance and long years of friendship with Mrs. Arroyo and her family.

It was the damning Senate testimony of the Speaker's son and namesake Joey III on alleged irregularities in the national broadband network (NBN) deal with ZTE Corp. of China that soured their family's relationship with the Arroyos.

The young De Venecia made the expose after his own company, Amsterdam Holdings Inc. lost the NBN project to ZTE.

Gina said Mrs. Arroyo's "I am sorry" speech, despite her poor acting, helped the President hurdle what was then the most serious challenge to her administration.

"But after the 'Hello, Garci,' the President has become compromised with her debts of gratitude to the people who helped her that even when presented with questionable transactions in government, she went along with it," Gina told *The STAR*. She said she herself is ready to say her piece regarding the alleged election fraud in 2004.

"She (President) became bolder and bolder after each crisis and she even became arrogant every time she gets out of crisis with the help of these people," Gina raved.

She said it was the "oligarchs," earlier named by Commission on Higher Education chair Ro-

mulo Neri, who propped up her embattled administration.

But Gina said the NBN scandal might be the proverbial last nail in the administration's coffin, considering the seriousness of the Senate testimony of Lozada.

Gina admitted she is still hurting from the abrupt end of her long friendship with the Arroyo family.

She observed she and the President started to drift apart when the latter ignored her advice and counsel about the growing negative public opinion about her governance.

"I tried to defend her (President) but the people get mad at me," she recalled.

"She (President) should listen to the voice of the people. The people are fed up with corruption in government and there is no more level playing field with these oligarchs who support her," Gina said.

She said she still considers the President, who is turning 61 years old this April, as her younger sister. They were schoolmates at the Assumption College. Their family friendship started with their parents - the late Dr. Jose Vera-Perez, father of Gina, was a classmate of Mrs. Arroyo's late mother, Eva Macaraeg-Macapagal at the University of Sto. Tomas Faculty of Medicine. - Marichu Villanueva