

'If GMA runs, she must resign'

By PERSEUS ECHEMINADA

President Arroyo is deemed resigned once she files her candidacy as a congressional candidate in Pampanga in the 2010 elections, an official of the Commission on Elections (Comelec) said yesterday.

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Comelec commissioner Rene Sarmiento told reporters during the Weekly Friday Balitaan sa Rembrandt Hotel in Quezon City that in his legal opinion the Constitution provides that the President has a sworn duty to serve a fixed term as the country's head of state until June 30, 2010.

He said if Mrs. Arroyo decides to run as a member of the House of Representatives and files her certificate of candidacy, she must resign or face disqualification from the congressional race.

"The constitutional provision is specific that she will serve as President until her term expires but if she seeks lower elective post she could no longer perform her duties as president while campaigning as candidate for a lower position," he said.

Sarmiento said although Republic Act 9006 or the Fair Election Act is silent on the resignation of elected officials, the case of Mrs. Arroyo would be a test case on whether she will comply with the constitutional provision or just ignore it.

"As far as I am concerned the President is morally bound to resign if she intends to run for a congressional seat in the Second District of Pampanga," he said.

Sarmiento admitted that the President could not be legally compelled to resign if she clings to her post because there are gray areas in the constitutional provision.

He however said the President might continue performing her duties even if she files her candidacy and she has the option to stay in her post while campaigning for the congressional seat.

Meanwhile, Sarmiento warned congressmen that if the House of Representatives convenes into a constituent assembly (con-ass) without the Senate it might create chaos and confusion in the coming elections.

He said the propose amendments in the 1987 Constitution

once approved by the con-ass would require ratification by the people through a referendum, which is a separate political exercise.

Sarmiento said the Comelec is not prepared to carry out the referendum and the elections simultaneously during the 2010 polls.

"There will be chaos and confusion if a plebiscite is done simultaneously with the 2010 election, he said.

He said if the proposed amendments will be incorporated into the ballots it will disrupt the time line of the Comelec for the local and national elections.

"Our main focus now is for the 2010 elections and if the proposed constituent assembly will push through we are not prepared for the conduct of a plebiscite for the amendments to the Charter," he said.

Sarmiento said the commission needs at least six months to prepare for a plebiscite, including the information campaign and the actual voting of the people.

He said that any plebiscite should be conducted after the 2010 elections.

"In the worst case scenario, the conduct of plebiscite and election simultaneously would create chaos and derail the 2010 elections," Sarmiento said.

GMA, FVR urged to have a dialogue

Deputy Speaker for Mindanao Simeon Datumanong, urged President Arroyo and former President Fidel Ramos to resolve issues regarding the alleged plan of Mrs. Arroyo to seek a congressional seat in the 2010 polls.

"PGMA (Arroyo) and FVR (Ramos) are the two highest leaders of Lakas-Kampi-CMD and I feel that our dialogue will help resolve this matter of the President's political plan and even the issue of Charter change," said Datumanong.

He said the two leaders should "talk about the matters at hand," referring to Mrs. Ar-

royo's plan to run for Congress and also the alleged efforts to amend the Charter and extend her term.

Camiguin Rep. Pedro Romualdo, chairman of the House committee on good government, said it is the President's right to decide on what she intends to do after her term and when to disclose her plans.

"Let's not take away from one person such freedom by compelling a disclosure of his or her personal plans. Let's not preoccupy ourselves with the personal plans of the President who is so busy working on our economy and the fulfillment of her agenda for the people," he said.

Romualdo explained that it is "unnecessary" to call for a disclosure of the President's plans after her term in June 2010 when she will bare it at the proper time.

"Let's allow her to decide on her own, anyway it's her personal life and plans which are involved here. Eventually, she will announce her plans. The President has a mind of her own," he said.

Romualdo also said the President has 11 more months in office and will remain focused on the fulfillment of her agenda for the people.

Isabela Rep. Rodito Albano said it was lamentable that the public is focusing on personal things in the life of the President instead of her work and accomplishments.

"Our moral right as Filipinos is to judge if her programs and projects as our nation's chief executive are beneficial to us or not. As to her future plans, that's something she has to decide on her own, and nobody, except God, has the right to stop her," said Albano.

Speaker Prospero Nograles earlier gave an unsolicited advice to Mrs. Arroyo not to seek a congressional post in her home province of Pampanga, saying she already reached the pinnacle of her government career.

"If I put myself in her shoes I will not run, it is because I have already reached the epit-

ome (of public service), or the highest position in the land. There's nothing more to prove," he told newsmen in a briefing.

He believes that Mrs. Arroyo will not seek an elective post in her district. "I personally believe that the President will not run. I don't think she will run," Nograles added.

"That rumor alone will confirm that there will be elections in 2010," Nograles said.

Secretary to the Cabinet Silvestre Bello III said Ramos should respect the right of Mrs. Arroyo to remain silent on the issue of her alleged plan to run for Congress.

Bello said that the statements made by Ramos, as chairman emeritus of the administration's Lakas-Kampik-CMD party, are always considered and taken seriously by the President and her administration.

Bello said Mrs. Arroyo has opted to keep her future political plans to herself and to focus on governance instead.

"So I think politics is far from the thoughts of the President and we should just respect her decision not to discuss politics right now," he said.

Bello explained that it would be difficult for the President to talk about her plans for the future because this would only lead to more criticisms and attacks from her critics.

"So what the President is doing right now is looking at all the problems affecting our country and our countrymen and at the same time, together with the members of the Cabinet, are trying to look for solutions for these problems," Bello said.

Deputy president spokesperson Lorelei Fajardo said that the President should not be faulted for her decision to focus on governance instead of politics because this has resulted in positive gains for the country.

Fajardo noted that the President's unwavering focus on the economy has kept the economy afloat amidst the global financial crisis. - With Delon Porcalla, Marvin Sy