

FVR: GMA must transform herself, reveal 2010 plans

By MARVIN SY and RUDY SANTOS

After telling President Arroyo not to delude the nation with "titillations" of a Senate-less constituent assembly, former President Fidel Ramos

exhorted her yesterday to "transform herself" and reveal her plans for 2010.

"I said if she can transform herself and the nation and

there is still time for it, then she might leave an acceptable legacy for succeeding generations and leaders," Ramos said

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at a press briefing shortly before leaving for Mumbai, India to host the Global Meeting of the Emerging Markets Forum.

He also reiterated his call for the President to be clear about her plans for the 2010 elections.

"In general, the President, when it comes to governance, politics, plans for coming big political events like elections, may be private for a while, but once the cat is out of the bag, it is the responsibility of the President both as chief executive, commander-in-chief of the armed services as well as chairman of the ruling political party to disclose or reveal what these plans are because it's not just her, not just her family, not just her party that is involved, it's the nation as a whole, it's the 91 million Filipinos that have to understand what this is all about," Ramos said.

"As we're seeing now, the speculation, which was initiated by certain members of the House of Representatives and muddled by some spokespersons of the President, has be-

come a big controversial issue because of her alleged plan to run in the second district of Pampanga as a member of the House of Representatives, while still concurrently maintaining the Office of the President," Ramos pointed out.

He cited the case of Bangladesh where incumbent officials, including the prime minister, have to resign 90 days before a general or parliamentary election to make way for a caretaker government, usually headed by a retired chief justice of their supreme court.

"That's how it operated in Bangladesh during these last two years, which resulted in the prosecution of some members of the previous cabinet and also relatives of the previous prime minister because they were no longer in a position to apply their clout, influence or position of power to defend themselves for their alleged misdeeds for which they were deemed liable by the people," he said. "That's a very good system in my view."

"And of course, now Bangladesh has a new

government and those that were prosecuted and put in jail are still there, not because of the change in government but because of the system to level the playing field, so to speak, during elections," he said.

"Filipinos have to understand what this is all about," Ramos said.

Asked if he will continue to support her if she continues to cling to power, he said: "You must also understand I am not waging war on anybody. I am in fact waging peace for the nation and our enduring security and stability plus our sustainable development."

Still silent

After hinting at running for congresswoman in Pampanga and drawing flak for it, Mrs. Arroyo and her officials have now declined to discuss her political plans.

"We don't want to talk anymore about it. Let us not talk about the plans of the President anymore. We have not been given authority to talk about her plans and we really don't know anything about it so let's just not talk about it anymore," Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said.

Deputy presidential spokesperson Loriele Fajardo reiterated that the people should respect the privacy of the President and let her decide when she would want to say anything about the issue.

But Mrs. Arroyo's election lawyer maintained that she is unlikely to run for a congressional seat in 2010.

In a radio interview, Romulo Macalintal said he believes Mrs. Arroyo will just opt to stay out of politics and take care of her grandchildren.

"I think she'll not run and just take care of her grandchildren," he said in Filipino.

But he admitted that the President has yet to discuss with him her reported plans to run for congresswoman.

Macalintal also challenged legislators to enact a law that would compel elective officials to resign if they intend to run for a different position.

"Why are you singling out President Arroyo? You should be fair," he said.

Macalintal said the automatic resignation clause in the Omnibus Election Code applies to appointive government officials.

Ethical issues

Even if Mrs. Arroyo is allowed to stay on as President after she decides to run for another position, there are ethical issues that she will have to face, according to the National Movement for Free Elections (Namfrel) and the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV).

"If she is allowed to run without resigning, how can we be sure that she will not use the vast resources of the government in the campaign," Henrietta de Villa, chair of both Namfrel and PPCRV, told THE STAR.

De Villa noted that if, indeed, the President would not use government funds to boost her candidacy, nobody would believe her.

"No matter how good a person is, what will keep the people from thinking that he would take advantage of his position and will not (use) government funds? There will always be doubt," she added.

Earlier, Commission on Elections (Comelec) chairman Jose Melo said the President is not required to vacate her post if she decides to seek an elective post next year under Republic Act 9006 or the Fair Election Act.

Melo claimed that under the Omnibus Election Code, elected officials are deemed resigned once they file their certificates of candidacy with Comelec.

He added that this restriction had been repealed when the law was passed in 2001.

Gloria's 'right'

Former senator Francisco Tatad joined Melo and Macalintal in asserting President Arroyo's right to run for another post next year.

"There is no need to be confused on this issue. Many people, myself included, have long wanted Mrs. Arroyo to resign. They would welcome it if she should resign now," Tatad said.

"Living under a President Noli de Castro should complete their journey in this valley of tears. Unfortunately, this is not what the law says. Unhappily, the law is in Mrs. Arroyo's favor," he said.

Tatad explained that Republic Act 9006, otherwise known as the Fair Election Act of 2001, does not require the President to resign. He said the law allows her to hold on to her present position, like all other elective officials who may be running for different positions in 2010.

"Under Batas Pambansa 881, otherwise known as the Omnibus Election Code of 1985, any elective official, whether national or local, running for any office other than the one which he is holding in a permanent capacity, except for President and Vice President, shall be considered *ipso facto* resigned from his office upon the filing of his certificate of candidacy," the former senator said.

Tatad said that when he was senator, he authored a proposal to require senators running for president or vice president to resign at midterm.

"However, the committee headed by then Sen. Raul Roco of happy memory completely reversed my proposal, and instead allowed all other officials to enjoy the privilege of senators while running for positions other than the ones they are holding. This was enshrined in RA 9006," Tatad said.

Tatad challenged incumbent senators to create a new law that would require the President, Vice President, senators and all other elective officials to resign upon filing of their certificates of candidacy for other positions.

According to Tatad, the new law will give the senators who will be running for president or vice president at midterm the opportunity to show that they are willing to take the risk of losing their Senate seats should they lose their bid for president or vice president.

Tatad's view contradicts Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile who believes that Mrs. Arroyo's decision to run for an elective post would be tantamount to abandoning her seat as president. — With Sheila Crisostomo, Dennis Carcamo, Christina Mendez