

# Arrest Palparan, UNO dares GMA

By MICHAEL PUNONGBAYAN

Makati City Mayor and United Opposition (UNO) president Jejomar Binay yesterday dared President Arroyo to file criminal charges and order the arrest of retired Army general Jovito Palparan for his alleged involvement in the abduction and illegal detention of two farmers in Bulacan more than two years ago.

Palparan, meanwhile, said Binay should let his arrest pass through the proper legal channels instead of challenging the President to order it.

Binay said Malacañang should take action in order to disprove allegations that the present administration sanctioned the wave of unexplained killings and disappearances of activists and government critics through so-called military death squads.

Former Senate president and Liberal Party national chairman Franklin Drilon, on the other hand, said the filing of charges and the arrest of Palparan will lend credibility to the government's campaign before the international community that it is committed to the protection of human rights and the rule of law.

Palparan has been dubbed by various militant and non-government organizations (NGOs) as the military's "berdugo" or executioner.

"The Arroyo administration should file charges and order the arrest of Palparan to show its adherence to the constitutional provisions of protecting human rights and the rule of law," Binay said.

"To keep silent on the matter would only confirm the sentiment of local and international human rights observers that her administration condones such practices," he added.

Binay issued the challenge following a Supreme Court decision upholding the findings of the Court of Appeals last week linking the former general to the abduction of brothers Raymond and Reynaldo Manalo.

The two were allegedly taken into military custody for 18 months on suspicion of being communist rebels until they escaped in August 2007.

The High Tribunal said it found "convincing" one of the victim's accounts of how they were tortured by their military captors.

Raymond revealed that during their captivity in an Army camp in Limay, Bataan, he saw another detainee, farmer Manuel Merino, being "set on fire" by their captors and that he later heard Merino's "screams or moans."

## Blame it on the Reds

In a phone interview, Palparan, who used to head the army's 7th infantry division in Palayan City, Nueva Ecija, told The STAR that any order leading to his arrest should stem from a conviction or an order from the court and not just an

order from the Chief Executive.

"If I were him, I would just let the court decide. I have not been convicted of any charges. Anyway the President is not stupid to make such an order, otherwise my arrest would be illegal," he said.

Palparan, who was tagged in several cases of unexplained killings in his areas of assignment, has also denied meeting and talking with the Manalo brothers to force them to cut their ties with leftist groups.

"There might have been someone who told them to do so, but definitely it was not me. I would not even waste my time to meet them and tell them that," he said.

He said the charges hurled against him are part of an orchestrated effort to discredit and punish him for going against the communist New People's Army in Central Luzon.

"They never recovered from their losses there. They lost a lot of money from extortion activities, particularly in Bulacan," he said.

Aside from the abduction of the Manalo brothers, Palparan was also accused by militant groups as the mastermind behind the disappearance of University of the Philippines students Karen Empeño and Sherlyn Cadapan and Merino in Hagonoy, Bulacan.

UNO spokesperson Adel Tamano believes that Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez should immediately file criminal charges against Palparan, even without the President's directive, unless Malacañang intends to whitewash the case.

He also suggested that a hold-departure order be issued to prevent Palparan from fleeing the country.

"But given the so-called track record of the Arroyo administration in punishing human right violators within its ranks, I am unsure if Malacañang would pick up the UNO suggestion," he said.

UNO National Capital Region (NCR) chairman and San Juan Mayor Joseph Victor Ejercito said the filing of criminal charges should not be limited to Palparan.

"Considering that a majority of the victims of extrajudicial killings and disappearances were taken to military camps, the government should not single out only Palparan and investigate all military officers involved," he stressed.

The Supreme Court upheld the appellate court's findings in 2007 that "Palparan's participation in the abduction was established."

The endorsement of the appellate court's findings formed part of the high tribunal's ruling released last week which upheld the latter's grant of a Writ of Amparo to the Manalos who sought the same to protect themselves from alleged government harassment.

— James Mananghaya