

Opening Statement

Romeo T. Capulong
Head of Lawyer-Presentors' Group
Citizens' Congress for Truth and Accountability

Honorable Convenors and
Members of the Steering Committee
Distinguished Members of the Presidium
And Congress for Truth and Accountability
Ladies and gentlemen

It is an honor to be a participant in this patriotic, pro-people and pro-Filipino undertaking.

I am fully aware of the negative reactions and reservations about this Congress. Some of them come from our own ranks; some from well-meaning observers and most from the partisans of Gloria Macapagal- Arroyo. After a long discussion, the convenors and the Steering Committee as well as the Presidium have already clarified that the Citizens' Congress for Truth and Accountability will not conduct a trial. It will not prosecute, impose punishment or seek the ouster of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. This duty belongs to government and its laws. It also belongs to the conscience of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Above all, it is a sovereign right that belongs to the Filipino people.

And so this morning, I rise not to indict and prosecute Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. I rise to ask her simple questions — questions which she continues to ignore and the answers to which she continues to suppress with all the awesome powers and resources at her command; and simple questions which these proceedings will address by an honest inquiry and a committed quest for truth.

Madam President. The scope of our inquiry covers the same three main charges in the Amended Impeachment Complaint filed against you which your herd in the House of Representatives dismissed on procedural and technical grounds. They are: (1) undermining the independence of the Commission on Elections and directing, knowingly allowing or conniving with the Commission, the military and the police to commit electoral fraud all for the purpose of ensuring your victory in the May 2004 Presidential Elections. Related to this major issue, may we ask you, Madam President: Is it true that you obstructed justice by suppressing evidence, delaying the national canvass, tampering the "Hello Garci" tape, blocking investigations, and fabricating false information to mislead the people and cover-up the electoral fraud?

(2) As commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces and Chief Executive with the power of control and supervision over the Philippine National Police and paramilitary forces she acquiesced in and allowed the commission of summary

executions or extrajudicial killings, abduction and enforced disappearances, torture, illegal arrests and arbitrary detention and other forms of human rights violations in the pursuit of her counter-insurgency campaign and the US global war on terror.

Again, May I ask: Is it true, Madam President Arroyo, that during your less than five years of tenure as President, both national and international human rights organizations have documented a total of 4,692 violations as follows:

Human Rights Violations	Number of Cases
Politically-motivated killings	324
Frustrated killings	101
Enforced disappearances	76
Torture	163
Physical assault or injury	228
Strafing, indiscriminate firing and bombing	157
Illegal arrests	450
Arbitrary and unlawful arrests	282
Illegal search and seizure	263
Harassment and intimidation	1,097
Forcible evacuation	208
Other forms of Violations	1,343
Total No.	4,692

Is it not true, Madam President, that despite having official and personal knowledge of these violations you did not do anything to stop them but instead tolerated and encourage their perpetration with impunity?

(3) As President of the Philippines, sworn to uphold and execute the law and act with utmost honesty and integrity, President Macapagal-Arroyo committed acts of bribery, graft and corruption by approving contracts manifestly and grossly disadvantageous to the government, directly or indirectly accepting payola from jueteng lords and using the money to bankroll her Presidential campaign.

Is it not true, Madam President, that you used and, in some cases, diverted trust funds for electioneering purposes among which are the P728 million Ginintuang Masaganang Ani or GMA fund, the OWWA trust fund and the Road Users Tax fund?

The Citizens' Congress has also decided to include other anomalous or unlawful acts in its inquiry including the Venable Contract, Executive Order 464 and the Calibrated Pre-emptive Response Policy.

The proceedings of the Citizens' Congress are open, transparent and fair. President Macapagal-Arroyo can participate and present her side or counter

evidence at any stage of the proceedings either through her lawyers or representatives.

Upon the conclusion of the proceedings, the Citizens' Congress will furnish President Macapagal-Arroyo with copies of all the testimonial, documentary and object evidence and given 15 days to respond or present evidence. The lawyer-presentors will make sure that all official and public statements of President Macapagal-Arroyo and her supporters and other contrary documentary evidence on the three main issues will be presented to the Citizens' Congress.