

THE LIGHTHOUSE THAT BROUGHT DARKNESS

Privilege Speech of
Senator Panfilo M. Lacson

Mr. President, Distinguished colleagues:

Today, I rise on a matter of personal and collective privilege.

Two years ago, the country was caught in a political maelstrom brought about by revelations arising from voice tapes taken of a man and a woman, the identities of whom have since been laid public.

It all started when on June 6, 2005, no less than Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye, in his office in Malacañang itself, bared two compact disc recordings, one probably real, the other obviously doctored, where a man and a woman's conversations were quite audible.

The resulting uproar reached higher decibels when three days after, a press conference was held in Makati City by the former Deputy Director of the National Bureau of Investigation, Atty. Samuel Ong, who claimed to have the "master tape" of the mysterious voice recordings with highly indecent conversations relative to the 2004 presidential elections.

In that press conference was presented the story of how operatives of the Intelligence Service Armed Forces of the Philippines tapped the cell phone conversations of several people, including some very powerful personages in and out of the current administration. As you will see in the succeeding presentation, it was not just Virgilio Garcillano who became the subject of intense technical surveillance operations by the ISAFP. There were many more from both sides of the political fence. Central to the revelations of Atty. Samuel Ong was the persona of Vidal Doble Jr., the man who was supposed to tell the nation how the cell phone conversations of the high and the mighty were eavesdropped upon, and recorded for posterity.

Unfortunately for the Filipino people, that was not to be. For two years and running, the nation has been kept in the dark about the truth behind "Hello Garci" because the man who knew how conversations were illegally tapped for political and other purposes, could not speak out. His family was kidnapped in Kidapawan, North Cotabato, brought to Manila, detained in the basement of the official residence of the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of

the Philippines inside Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City to which he himself was to be brought later. Thus was his silence on the issue guaranteed by the terror of fear for his family. When he was haled before the House of Representatives as a resource person, Vidal Doble Jr was obviously not a free man.

In an effort, Mr. President, to seek closure to an issue that continues to hound the politics of this nation, with repercussions on the legitimacy of the mandate of the present leadership, I present today the sworn statement of Vidal Doble Jr., who has finally found the courage of his convictions, and will tell the people, through us in this august chamber, freely, the whole unvarnished truth – the what’s, when’s, where’s, who’s and how’s of the “Hello Garci” tapes. With your indulgence, Mr President, distinguished colleagues please allow me to share with you some excerpts from Doble’s testimony.

Mr. President, esteemed members of this Senate of the People of the Philippines:

This is extremely alarming - that elements of the ISAFP could eavesdrop with ease on the conversations of whomsoever they choose, or whomsoever they are ordered to spy upon.

The targets of Project Lighthouse were not terrorists by any stretch of its definition. In any case, Congress had not yet passed any anti-terrorism law at the time of the commission of these crimes.

The intelligence project itself is a paradox. For, it was not the “lighthouse” that we know. It was the “lighthouse” that brought darkness into this benighted land.

But not only had the ISAFP been ordered to do its dastardly deed; no less than the leadership of the Armed Forces of the Philippines became party to covering-up for the crimes they committed by threatening vital witnesses who sought to tell the truth.

Again, with your indulgence, let me present in graphic form how the objects of their spying desire had been eavesdropped upon, how “Project Lighthouse” went about like a Big Brother listening to, and recording, the conversations between Little Sister and an elections commissioner named Virgilio Garcillano. This representation would have wanted to present a live wiretap demonstration before the chamber, but for RA 4200, the Anti Wire-Tapping Act. Besides, I need the assistance of a telecom service provider.

Notice how their technique is as simple as it is fraught with the most fearful of implications. What is frightening, Mr. President is the reality that we

have all remained vulnerable while using any type of telecommunications equipment. It only takes a service provider willing to cooperate and conspire with whoever has knowledge in basic electronic surveillance.

Step 1: A cell phone conversation is coursed through the cell site of the service provider.

Step 2: The service provider splits the signal and relays it to a cell phone unit that can record voice calls (in this case, a Nokia 3600 programmed for the purpose by the service provider).

Step 3: The conversation is recorded as a digital file to the duplicate cell phone's memory card, and is transferred to a computer.

Step 4: The file is then transferred to a cassette, CD or other media; in this case, a cassette tape... and, there we go... we have the infamous and notorious "Hello Garci" tapes.

Now that we all know how simple a cell phone wiretap operation is being undertaken, isang payo lamang ang maibabahagi ko sa inyong lahat – kung may gagawin kayong kalokohan, kausapin na lang ninyo ng personal ang kinalalokohan ninyo.

We are indebted to Mr. Vidal Doble Jr. for finally surfacing to give us the truth, about how "Project Lighthouse" brought the nation into the dark, applying clandestine acts to achieve sinister ends. Although he was prevented by fear for his safety and that of his family who were virtually kidnapped by the Armed Forces of the Philippines, detained at the basement of the quarters of the then Chief of Staff of the AFP, Efren Abu and altogether detained for years in its restrictive custody, he has now come to bare the truth, so that the Senate investigations into the farce that was the elections of 2004 can be put to its closure.

It comes at a time when the institution that has been entrusted by the people and the Constitution to guarantee clean, honest, and orderly elections, indeed to guarantee the fundamental right of people in a democracy to freely choose their leaders, has once again failed miserably in the recently concluded 2007 mid-term elections.

When will they ever learn? Will they ever change?

The characters mentioned in the "Hello Garci" tapes of 2005 have not been subjected to any proper investigation, much less by the COMELEC itself. They have not been prosecuted for crimes against the sovereign electorate. In fact, they have remained in the woodwork of the Commission on Elections.

Not only that, Mr. President, distinguished colleagues. Some of them have been promoted or reshuffled, the better to ensure that elections will remain unclean, dishonest and incredible. Thus we saw the spectacle of Lintang Bedol obfuscating and lying in an attempt to explain away the cheating. We have seen how votes were padded by PES Lilian Radam in South Cotabato, and we have seen how the special elections in Lanao del Sur would have been fabricated shamelessly, had it not been for the alertness of media people. We wondered how a character straight out of "Hello Garci", a Ray Sumalipao of Lanao was promoted from provincial election supervisor to regional director after being implicated in the "Hello Garci" controversy.

If Doble had been allowed to validate the truth behind "Hello Garci" in 2005, would the likes of Maguindanao Provincial Election Supervisor Lintang Bedol still exist in the rolls of the Commission on Elections?

Dahil hindi nabigyan ng pagkakataon noon si Doble na maibunyag ang katotohanan, nakuha pa ring linlangin ni Lintang Bedol at ng kanyang mga kauri sa COMELEC ang sambayanan nitong nakarang halalan.

Makakita pa kaya tayo ng malinis na sistema ng halalan sa loob ng nag-iisang buhay nating ito sa balat ng mundo?

Kailan pa magkakaroon ang sambayanan ng tunay na pag-asa na ang karapatang pumili ng mga mamumuno sa kanila ay hindi dadaanin sa pag-iimbot ng iilang may maitim na budhi at halang ang kaluluwa?

Will we ever see a COMELEC that knows how to count the truth, Mr President?

I am now posing this challenge to Commissioner Rene Sarmiento who, more than a month ago, with all noise and bravado called for the re-opening of the "Hello Garci" controversy.

Mr. Commissioner, I am telling you now - we have "Exhibit A" in the person of Vidal Doble Jr. I challenge you to make good on your promise. Hopefully, with your declared resolve, you could be instrumental in redeeming the COMELEC from its present image as a cheating machinery into a true guardian of democracy.

Something else deeply troubles this humble representation. What ought to be the noble profession of arms to protect the sovereign people has been so debased by the political leadership into becoming an instrument to thwart that sovereign will, and destroy the institutions of that same democracy that the soldiers of the Filipino people are sworn to uphold. Truly, nothing could be darker. Nothing could be more sinister.

It is in quest of this elusive imperative that we in the Senate must vow --- never again --- to allow cheating in future elections.

And, it is in quest of this elusive imperative that we must realize how “Project Lighthouse” brought our politics into abysmal depths of darkness.

With full knowledge, we should then see to it that those who must be charged should get their just desserts. And this abomination of electoral cheating must never again be the lay of the land.

Mr. President, I respectfully move that the Committee on National Defense and Security, which in the previous Congress had been prevented by a conspiracy of silence and double-dealing from ferreting out the truth on this dark episode in our political history, now resume its investigation in this Fourteenth Congress.

Mr. Vidal Doble Jr. has assured me that he would attend if summoned. And I humbly ask the Committee to summon the various other persons who together constituted the cast of characters in this privilege speech, including, but not limited to, Retired General Efren Abu, former Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, Bishop Socrates Villegas, Col. Paul Sumayo, Capt Frederick Rebong, and all the members of the teams that implemented “Project Lighthouse”. I dare Malacañang to invoke the constitutionally infirm EO 464 given the recent Supreme Court ruling. Your MC 108 has no basis in law. I challenge Malacañang to allow the truth to prevail. The Filipino people deserve nothing less.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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