

FINDINGS OF THE AFP FACT FINDING BOARD

The task given to the AFP Fact-finding Board by then AFP Chief of Staff General Efren Abu was this: To examine the alleged participation or involvement of several military officers alluded to in an alleged wiretapped conversation that was brought up in recent congressional investigations.

It must be underscored at the outset that this was the task given to us. Moreover, our mission is – based on our findings – to make recommendations on the future role of the AFP in the electoral exercise. Ours is not to pass judgment on culpability.

In the conduct of our investigation, we invited several individuals to shed light on allegations which surfaced during the congressional inquiries. These were well-meaning individuals who extended their full support and cooperation to our own inquiry. It is therefore incumbent upon us to keep the identities of these individuals who helped our probe confidential in order to safeguard their well being. They are known to our superiors in the Chain of Command. Their support has lent great value, integrity and credibility to the fact-finding effort.

Essentially, instructions from the Chief of Staff were as follows:

- a. To determine the extent of participation of the AFP as COMELEC deputized agency in the conduct of the 2004 National Elections;
- b. To look into the professional conduct of military personnel as COMELEC deputies and recommend conduct of further investigation of certain military personnel in case of adverse findings; and
- c. To recommend policy changes as necessary.

Given the nature, power and limitations inherent to the task, I personally believe that the members of the Board did their level best; hence I wish to extend them my highest commendation.

Let me now enumerate the highlights of our findings:

First, the AFP was deputized to perform elections duties pursuant to COMELEC Resolution Nr 6454 promulgated on December 10, 2003.

Second, as to the four senior officers mentioned in the alleged wiretapped conversations, not one witness testified of any direct knowledge whether or not they participated in any election fraud.

Third, observations expressed by resource persons in the AFP probe revealed that:

1. close to 300 military personnel were trained and utilized by COMELEC as members of the Board of Election Inspectors;

2. for security reasons and due to limited election-related personnel and resources, canvassing of votes were conducted inside two AFP camps and the assistance of the AFP was solicited in the clustering of precincts in some areas; and
3. military personnel served as security officers and escorts of election officials, inspectors and personnel, and safeguarded polling places, ballot boxes and other election paraphernalia.

Finally, the Board has been able to identify certain lapses in procedures in the conduct of COMELEC deputized duties as well as irregularities of some military personnel and thereby recommended corrective actions such as:

1. reassess the utilization of military personnel as members of the Board of Election Inspectors and clustering of precincts;
2. restudy the utilization of military camps for canvassing of votes;
3. deputization by names;
4. formulation of policies regarding AFP participation in future electoral exercises; and
5. conduct of further investigation to determine the specific culpability of some AFP personnel on their alleged unprofessional conduct in the performance of election duties.

In summary, despite certain limitations, the Board carried out its tasks to the best of its ability in accordance with acceptable standards and proper procedures, inviting 70 individuals in the process lending credibility to the fact-finding effort.