

Women's Day: QC cops arrest party-list lawmaker

Thursday 9 March 2006, by [The Philippine Star](#) (Date first published: 9 March 2006).

A woman legislator was arrested yesterday while leading a lightning rally to call for President Arroyo's ouster during International Women's Day in Quezon City.

Akbayan party-list Rep. Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel and at least one other demonstrator were detained at the headquarters of the Quezon City Police District at Camp Karingal for illegal assembly.

Baraquel was later released and only Joshua Mata of the Alliance of Progressive Labor was charged with illegal assembly, according to Akbayan spokesperson Perci Cendana.

Baraquel was the second legislator to be detained by police in less than two weeks. The incident had several lawyers and congressmen rushing to police headquarters to demand her release, citing parliamentary immunity.

Baraquel said she would file charges of physical assault against the policemen who arrested her.

Baraquel's group were rounded up after failing to present a permit to hold an assembly at the Mabuhay Rotunda along the busy thoroughfare of Quezon Avenue at midday.

Baraquel's group, composed of several dozen women protesters, was blocked as they tried to march on Malacañang.

She and Mata were negotiating with the riot police when government agents in civilian clothes apprehended them.

In a telephone interview with ABS-CBN TV from the police camp, Baraquel said anti-riot police gave them a five-minute warning, then started pushing with their shields. No one was reported hurt.

The woman legislator said the protesters had applied for a permit, but city hall ignored this. Baraquel said city hall officials "have made it a habit of ignoring applications for permits." City authorities did not immediately comment on whether the application had been filed.

In the afternoon, Baraquel was in the process of being released after several lawyers and members of Congress went to Camp Karingal, said Akbayan president Ronald Llamas.

"The police, in an apparent afterthought, claimed they merely invited Rep. Hontiveros to Camp Karingal. But she was manhandled," Cendana said. "We have photographs and witnesses to prove that she was indeed arrested."

"They told us they did not arrest us, but that they just invited us. That is a lie," Baraquel told ABS-CBN's dzMM radio.

Police earlier detained left-wing lawmaker Crispin Beltran in a widening government crackdown against the opposition following the discovery of an alleged coup plot on Feb. 24, which prompted

the President to declare a state of national emergency under Proclamation 1017.

Five other left-wing legislators remained holed up inside the House of Representatives, where they sought refuge a week ago from police attempts to arrest them on rebellion charges. They are Representatives Teodoro Casiño, Rafael Mariano, Liza Maza, Satur Ocampo and Joel Virador.

Baraquel said her arrest was “veritable proof” that despite the lifting of Proclamation 1017, “the President is bent on violating civil liberties to silence those who simply wish to have the truth exposed.”

“Under the Revised Penal Code, this arrest was in violation of parliamentary immunity. They are overstepping their boundaries already, and this is precisely why we are saying that the unconstitutional and illegal draconian measures from Malacañang are giving the police a sense of impunity,” Baraquel said.

Senate, House up in arms

Baraquel’s arrest sparked criticisms of the police from both administration and opposition lawmakers in both houses of Congress, calling it illegal.

House Majority Leader Prospero Nograles insisted that illegal assembly is covered by parliamentary immunity.

“We are registering our very strong protest (against the arrest). Her arrest was illegal. That is against the law,” Nograles said.

The Davao City lawmaker said they are “immune from arrest if the offense is not penalized by more than six years” imprisonment.

“The House leadership will assert its rights under the 1987 Constitution,” Nograles maintained.

Pro-administration Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago expressed the same view, noting a representative is immune from arrest while Congress is in session.

“Violators of the Public Assembly (Act) are punished with imprisonment of up to six years only. Hence, representatives should not have been arrested on this ground,” Santiago said.

However, Nograles, also an administration lawmaker, refused to drag President Arroyo into the incident, arguing there were “legal remedies” Baraquel could seek.

“It’s unfair to blame it all the way to the top. Let’s not be too quick to blame anybody, but rather have it investigated,” he said.

Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman said at a news briefing that Baraquel could bring the arresting police officers to court.

At the Senate, Sen. Ralph Recto agreed that law enforcers erred in arresting Baraquel.

In the case of Baraquel’s colleague, Beltran, Sen. Santiago said the immunity granted to congressmen did not cover acts of rebellion.

Maza, Baraquel’s colleague in the minority bloc, said it was ironic for the administration to have a lady legislator arrested on the day the world was observing International Women’s Day.

“It’s a slap on us women,” said Maza of the party-list Gabriela.

Baraquel said her group took to the streets yesterday in support of “freedom from poverty and freedom from violence” for women.

The March 8 rally in commemoration of International Women’s Day was the first major demonstration since the lifting of Proclamation 1017. Thousands of women from different political leaning joined yesterday’s protest action. - Katherine Adraneda, Perseus Echeminada, Delon Porcalla, AFP, AP, Christina Mendez

P.S.

* From The Philippine Star 03/09/2006.