

Lifting of 1017 met with skepticism

Daily Tribune editor, 2 columnists reported charge

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MORE than relief, skepticism marked yesterday's lifting of Presidential Proclamation No. 1017, with various groups warning the people against letting down their guard.

Anticipating that President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo would lift emergency rule, as her security advisers suggested on Friday, around 200 lawyers assembled in front of the headquarters of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) in Pasig City hours before she made the announcement.

"The price of democracy is a vigilant citizenry," said Joel Cadiz, national president of the IBP.

"If we sleep on our rights, this government will continue to trample on us," he said. "If 1017 is lifted, and we are repressed, that's still martial law. This is only paper. We want substance."

Cadiz said that even if PP 1017 were lifted, "there could still be an absence of the freedom of assembly, warrantless arrests, and a threat [to] and intimidation [of] the media."

"We must continue to assert our rights," he declared. After the President lifted PP 1017, charges were filed against the editor-publisher and two columnists of a newspaper for inciting to sedition, an officer of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) Metro Manila unit said.

Charged at the Department of Justice were Niñez Cacho-Olivares, editor-in-chief and publisher of the Daily Tribune, and two of its columnists, Ike Señeres and Herman Tiu-Laurel, the CIDG officer said.

The evidence submitted to the Department of Justice included copies of their columns that allegedly contained seditious remarks, the officer said.

The police's Directorate for Investigation has been reading their columns, and found "seditious statements" on them, the officer said.

"I'm not surprised," said Olivares, who said she had not yet been officially informed of the charges. "They have been talking about this."

'Threats will continue'

Other journalists expressed skepticism at the turn of events.

Carlos Conde, secretary-general of the National Union of Journalists in the Philippines, said attempts to curtail press freedom would continue. "Ms Arroyo will do everything to stay in power even with the lifting of PP 1017," he said.

"We have to strengthen our force because while the Arroyo administration remains questionable, while her stay in Malacañang is being clouded by doubt, threats will continue," Conde said.

Maximo Solis, station manager of Radio Mindanao Network's dxDC, said the lifting was part of

government moves that the public should be vigilant about. "We are in a situation that should prompt us to be on guard always," he said.

The militant labor alliance Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU — May First Movement] also advised "freedom lovers" to "maintain vigilance."

"The revocation [of PP 1017] was done merely in words, not in deeds. The attack on people's rights will continue to intensify," KMU national chair Elmer Labog said in a statement.

Too hot to handle

Labog said emergency rule was lifted because "it was too hot to handle," as "militant groups, the media, lawyers, lawmakers and the public bond together versus the Marcosian tactic."

He said the President's act only served as "a veil to obfuscate the intensifying suppression of the people's democratic, civil and political rights."

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating," Sanlakas president Wilson Fortaleza said, recalling how the dictator Ferdinand Marcos lifted martial law in 1981 although military rule remained well until his ouster in 1986.

Bagong Alyansang Makabayan secretary-general Renato Reyes Jr. said: "The true test of the lifting of emergency rule will be if measures like General Order No. 5, warrantless arrests, guidelines for the media and the dispersal of rallies are also junked."

The lifting should be complete, and not "nominal," Reyes said.

Laban ng Masa chair Francisco Nemenzo Jr. said widespread opposition to PP 1017 and the threats it posed to civil liberties was crucial to Ms Arroyo's decision to lift it.

But "she is not yet off the hook," Nemenzo warned, saying the crisis of legitimacy confronting the administration had actually worsened.

"Even if PP 1017 has been lifted, Ms Arroyo's crimes against the people persist. The crime of plunder, deception and lying continues," said Ronald Llamas, president of the Akbayan party-list group.

He said what the nation needed was not the lifting of the state of emergency but Ms Arroyo's exit.

Senate probe

Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas [KMP — Farmers Movement of the Philippines] leader Danilo Ramos said the lifting was probably intended to preempt an eventual Supreme Court ruling that PP 1017 was unconstitutional.

"The ultimate purpose of PP 1017 was not achieved, which is to frighten anti-Arroyo critics into inaction," he said.

Senate Majority Floor Leader Francis Pangilinan said the Senate would proceed with its investigation of alleged abuses committed during the state of national emergency, including the police raid on the Daily Tribune newspaper and the warrantless arrests.

"We cannot simply gloss over these violations, if established, because to do so would send the signal to the government that it can do as it pleases regardless of what the Constitution says," Pangilinan

said.

The Senate approved early this week Resolution No. 461, which calls for an inquiry into government actions that allegedly violated fundamental freedoms. The resolution was introduced by 17 senators.

"Now more than ever, the Senate must act as a check and balance to the executive. We will not shirk this constitutional duty," Pangilinan said.

Former senator Loren Legarda said the people, particularly members of the media, were still jittery despite the lifting of the proclamation.

She said its after-effects would continue to linger, "like a festering wound that would take a long time to heal."

A state of emergency "should not have been declared, in the first place," Legarda said, adding that the root cause of the issue was the questioned legitimacy of the President's administration as a result of alleged election fraud in 2004.

"The issue is illegitimacy, which cannot be swept under the rug," she said.

Out of the Tribune

Policemen yesterday pulled out of the premises of the Tribune's editorial office in Manila.

Inspector Jonathan Pablito of the Police Community Relations Group-Camp Crame, who was among the policemen assigned to guard the Tribune office, said they received the pullout order from their headquarters at around 1 p.m., about an hour and a half after President Arroyo announced the lifting of PP 1017.

Pablito told the Inquirer that before he and his group left, "we tried to ask for a certification that would show that we did not take anything and did not harass anybody."

Olivares "declined," he said.

He added: "She said she did not have personal grudge against us because she understood that we were merely following orders. She was very civil with us during our stay, even greeting us whenever she came and left the office."

Olivares said that as far as she was concerned, the police pullout was just a formality and did not indicate that the government would stop going after the Tribune.

"I'm very realistic in the sense that I know that they tried to cow us into submission by having us raided," she said. "They saw I was not intimidated. It doesn't mean that they're going to stop. It's just that they're taking out the formal thing, which was the police."

She said she would have the Tribune office swept for listening devices in case bugs were installed during the raid.

Self-censorship

The police raided the Tribune office shortly after the President issued PP 1017 on Feb. 24.

Olivares said the presence of policemen outside the Tribune building did not affect her. "It didn't matter to me whether or not they were here," she said. "It's like they were not going to stop me from

writing what I wanted to write or from publishing what I wanted to publish.”

She said a similar experience during the late Ferdinand Marcos’ rule by martial law had prepared her for the raid, but that it did not seem to be the case for others.

For example, she said, she had noticed that her reporters appeared to be practicing “self-censorship” following the incident.

“But I suppose psychologically, that will also be lifted with the lifting” of PP 1017, she said.

Thanks to the media

Olivares expressed gratitude to her colleagues in the media for condemning the raid on the Tribune. “It would have been a stiffer fight if the media in their entirety did not give me support. It’s fantastic,” she said.

She added that the issue was not about one newspaper but about press freedom: “The Tribune is incidental. I am incidental to the raid. The raid itself was seen by the media as a symbol of the loss of their freedom, and I think that was the reason the media came in full force and full support. For that, I’m really grateful.”

Reports from Alcuin Papa, Jerome Aning, Philip C. Tubeza, DJ Yap, Cynthia D. Balana, Tina G. Santos, Leila B. Salaverria and Luige del Puerto; and Jeoffrey Maitem, Franklin Caliguid, Judy Quiros, Jeffrey M. Tupas, PDI Mindanao Bureau.

P.S.

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