

After the Manila Peninsula Hotel occupation: A leader of Philippine peasant movement detained

Sunday 2 December 2007, by [CARRANZA Danny](#) (Date first published: 1 December 2007).

Vangie Galdula-Mendoza, 37 years old, mother of two children and the National Coordinator of the Pambansang Ugnayan ng mga Lokal na Nagsasariling Organisasyon sa Kanayunan (UNORKA), a national peasant coalition with chapters in 42 provinces, was arrested and detained on Thursday evening, November 29, after taking part in a mass action that supported the walk out from the court hearing of Senator Trillanes and former Brigadier General Danilo Lim and several other military personnel who protested against unfair administration of justice and continuing corruption in the country.

Senator Trillanes (then a Navy LtSG) and General Lim are being tried for mutiny for leading a group of young military personnel who called for the resignation of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in 2003 on charges of widespread and large-scale corruption in the highest office of the land.

The government of President Arroyo has been marred by election irregularities and serious corruption charges since it assumed office in 2001, which include the P650 Million GMA Rice Project, the P641M Fertilizer Scam, dissipation of billions of coconut levy-funded projects, the wastage to various corruption of the recovered P38 Billion Marcos ill-gotten Wealth, among others. In 2004, she was also accused of cheating to win the presidency. The latest scandal involved a multi-million dollar contract with a Chinese government-controlled corporation (ZTE) in a telecommunication project, where Arroyo locked horns with House Speaker de Venecia whose son, Joey, accused the government of rigging the bidding process and attempting to bribe him to give way silently to the ZTE.

UNORKA has been among the most active peasant organizations in pursuing corruption cases against the government. It was the first organization that pursued a senate investigation for the Fertilizer Scam and GMA Rice Project. It also filed numerous pending cases against government officials related to the illegal utilization of the recovered P38 Billion Marcos Wealth. It has therefore identified with the advocacies of the young officers and were in attendance at the hearing to show their support.

The accused military personnel stage the daring walk out at around 10: AM on Thursday, while General Lim was on the witness stand. Civilian personalities who were attending the hearing or were outside of the court room to lend support to the advocacies of the accused, followed the walkout that led to the Manila Peninsula Hotel, an exclusive hotel in the business district of Makati. The marchers then occupied the hotel and from there called for the resignation of President Arroyo. A stand off between the marchers and police and military personnel lasted several hours. At around 4:00 PM, the police stormed the hotel and arrested General Lim and Senator Trillanes along with the civilians that supported them, including members of the media.

Several other Philippine social movement personalities including former University of the Philippines President Francisco Nemenzo, respected Bishop Labayen, running activist-priest Fr.

Robert Reyes, former Vice President Teofisto Guingona, lawyers JV Bautista, Argee Guevarra and several other legal counsels of the accused, among others, joined the mass action and were likewise arrested. They are currently detained at the police headquarters of the Camp Crame in Manila, even while some of the leading civilian personalities, including Bishop Labayen, Vice President Guingona, and former UP president Nemenzo have been released due to old age or sickness.