

GMA hit for release of child rapist Jalosjos

ACTIVISTS criticized the Philippine president for commuting two 40-year jail terms for a former congressman convicted of raping an 11-year-old girl and allowing him to walk free.

Bureau of Corrections Director Oscar Calderon said former Rep. Romeo Jalosjos was freed two years after President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo cut his sentence to 16 years. He served 13 years and received three years' credit for good behavior, Calderon said.

Jalosjos also was convicted of six counts of child molestation and sentenced to eight to 15 years for each. The clemency covered that, too.

The women's rights group Gabriela accused Arroyo of making a mockery of justice, saying she was currying favor with the rich and powerful.

The wealthy Jalosjos family, which operates one of the country's finest beach resorts, supported Arroyo's presidential campaign in 2004. Jalosjos' younger brother and younger sister are representatives of two districts in his home province, Zamboanga del Norte.

"If powerful people commit crime and violence, and these powerful people could give favors to Malacañang (the presidential palace), then they can maneuver anything," Gabriela secretary general Emily de Jesus said.

Arroyo's press secretary, Cerge Remonde, denied the charges, saying "politics had nothing to do" with Jalosjos' release.

He said the Bureau of Pardons and Parole recommended the move, which was approved by the justice secretary.

"It went through the right process," he said.

Unlike most other prisoners, the former congressman lived in relative luxury.

Controversy erupted in 1998 when it was discovered that some jail officials allowed him hotel-like perks in his cell, including a color TV, stereo, treadmill and private kitchen. He also was allowed to build a tennis court and a hamburger store in the prison compound.

Speaking to reporters, Jalosjos denied his clout won him early release.

"If I used my influence, I should have been freed sooner," he said.

Arroyo also has been criticized for pardoning 10 soldiers convicted in the assassination of Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr. when he returned from exile in August 1983 to lead the opposition to then dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

Sen. Benigno Aquino III said his family had been denied justice and suggested Arroyo was retaliating against his mother, former President Corazon Aquino, for joining opposition calls demanding Arroyo step down over vote-rigging allegations. (Philstar.com)

Jalosjos to help prisoners' families

by DINO MARAGAY
Philstar.com

FINALLY able to breathe fresh air outside prison bars, convicted child rapist and former Zamboanga del Norte Rep. Romeo Jalosjos announced he will spearhead a movement that will aid the families of incarcerated people.

Addressing reporters at a press conference held just after his release, Jalosjos said he had witnessed the hardships undergone by the families left behind by inmates, and vowed to do whatever he can to help them.

Jalosjos said he will urge lawmakers to create a law that will benefit the families of prisoners, especially the dependents of inmates who are sentenced to life.

"There should be a law that will inventory these people and take care of them by providing, say, basic needs," he said.

Jalosjos was freed in recognition of the several good deeds he has done while in detention, which includes demonstrating good behavior and helping improve the NBP's facilities.

He was convicted by a Makati City court in 1997 for two counts of statutory rape and acts of lasciviousness committed against a minor. He has been serving his sentence for 16 years, three months and three days.

Colored rice promoted

by HELEN FLORES
Philstar.com



Visitors look at colored rice varieties at the booth of Go Organic! Philippines during the opening of the 5th Eco-Products International Fair at the SMX Convention Center in Pasay City last March 19.

ORGANIC farming advocates are promoting the massive planting of colored rice which is said to be rich in phytochemicals that fight cancer.

The aromatic, cancer-fighting black rice known as "Forbidden Rice" is found in Asia, according to the La Liga Policy Institute (LLPI).

The group said black rice was recently introduced in the local market and because of the growing demand, its organic cultivation is starting to gain ground in Luzon, particularly in the provinces of Bulacan, Nueva Ecija and Mindoro, where advocates have started to adopt organic farming as a strategy in fighting and mitigating the impact of global warming and climate change.

There are five colored rice varieties which are being cultivated in the Philippines—brown, red, pink, violet and black. However, these indigenous rice varieties are rarely sold in the market, as these are usually consumed by the farmers themselves, the LLPI said.

"We are confident that black rice

and other colored rice varieties will eventually be exported by the Philippines to other countries, considering the demand for healthier food that are organically grown, or grown without the use of agrochemicals," Roland Cabigas, managing director of LLPI and a convener of Go Organic! Philippines, said.

He said there is currently an initiative to make black rice and other indigenous rice varieties more visible in the local market, as well as in supermarkets.

The price of colored rice is slightly higher than ordinary well-milled rice. Black rice is sold from P60 to P120 per kilo in some specialty stores, Cabigas said.

In Tarlac, around 20 hectares are planted with black rice, 15 hectares in Bulacan and five hectares in Nueva Ecija. It is also being cultivated in some parts of Baler, Aurora; Isabela; Mindoro and Bataan.

Bureau of Soils and Water Management director Silvino Tejada said organic farming is a continuing effort of the Department of Agriculture to promote environment-friendly agriculture in the country.

CBCP official: No surprise if Jalosjos gets pardon

by DINO MARAGAY
Philstar.com

AN official of the influential Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) said last March 20 that it will not be unusual for freed convicted rapist Romeo Jalosjos to get a presidential pardon and have his political rights restored.

Rudy Diamante, executive secretary of the CBCP Episcopal Mission on Prison Pastoral Care, cited the current state of the country's justice system, which he said favors those who are rich, powerful and have connections.

"He (Jalosjos) is one of those considered to be powerful and connected with the present administration, so I will not also be surprised if the President grants him pardon," Diamante said in an interview over the Church-run Radio Veritas.

The former Zamboanga del Norte congressman was released from prison last March 19 after completing a commuted 16-year sentence. He, however, is barred from seeking public office unless he is given absolute pardon

by President Arroyo.

Asked if Jalosjos still has the credibility to assume a public post, Diamante said it is up to the people—particularly his constituents—to decide. He added that if the people think Jalosjos can still help them, the former congressman's past behavior will not be much of a factor.

Jalosjos was freed in recognition of the several good deeds he has done while in detention, which includes demonstrating good behavior and helping improve the facilities at the New Bilibid Prisons in Muntinlupa City.

He was convicted by a Makati City court in 1997 for two counts of statutory rape and acts of lasciviousness committed against a minor.

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