

# OPINION & FEATURES

## Vigilante rule

**A**T a multi-sector meeting in Davao City last month, Mayor Rodrigo Duterte said: "If you are doing an illegal activity in my city, if you are a criminal or part of a syndicate that preys on the innocent people of the city, for as long as I am the mayor, you are a legitimate target of assassination."

That was a dangerous statement to make. It is an open invitation to lawlessness, a justification for anyone to take the law into his hands.

The laws on due process govern everyone and every part of the Philippine territory, even mayors and cities that claim that they have a low crime rate because of vigilante justice. And even when the state goes the due process route, no criminal is put to death because the death penalty law has been repealed.

It is thus a welcome development that the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) has finally taken cognizance of the unexplained killings of 814 people in Davao City since 1998. The suspicion is that the killings were done by the so-called Davao Death Squad, a shadowy vigilante group.

If the 814 people were suspects in various crimes or were known criminals, they should have been arrested, charged, prosecuted, tried and sentenced. That is the process in a nation that upholds the rule of law, not the rule of the mob or vigilantes. One big danger in vigilante rule is the great possibility that an innocent man may be put to death without being accorded due process.

### GUEST EDITORIAL

Government and civilian forces or groups cannot take shortcuts in enforcing the law. They have to abide by due process, even if such process takes time for justice to be meted out to the guilty. To do otherwise would be to take a backward step and to return to the law of the jungle.

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### Maids and mothers

Rep. Risa Hontiveros of the Akbayan party-list group on Sunday condemned as "disgusting, derogatory and vile" an article written by a Hong Kong columnist and broadcaster calling the Philippines "a nation of servants." Writing about the Philippines' and China's conflicting claims on the Spratly islands, Chip Tsao urged his countrymen not to bow to the Philippines because there are more than 130,000 Filipino maids providing cheap labor in Hong Kong. Hontiveros took offense at Tsao's article and said *HK Magazine*, which carried the story, should apologize immediately for the racial slur.

Tsao and his compatriots should realize that Filipinas are forced to work abroad because of lack of good-paying jobs in the Philippines. Many



Photo courtesy of Inquirer.net

of these maids are teachers and professionals with university degrees who work as maids and earn salaries that are several times what they would earn in their own country.

Tsao and his ilk look down on the Filipino maids who do menial and backbreaking work. But do they realize that without their Filipino maids, they would not be able to work at high-paying jobs and

enterprises? Probably the Filipino servants should make good their threat to go on strike.

The Filipinas may be servants "only," but they are performing a very important role in the economy and society of Hong Kong. If Chip Tsao (real name: To Kit) is a man and a gentleman, he should apologize immediately to the Philippines and the Filipinas. (*Inquirer.net*)

## Still, Panlilio for president

I wrote that column, *Panlilio for president*, recently, I didn't know "Among Ed" (Elder Brother Ed) Panlilio was running for president. I had heard rumors he was, but didn't know whether he would or not.

Well, he seems to be open to the idea, though he says he'd rather just pave the way for the selection of the right presidential candidate.

One who can draw support from the section of the public that has had enough of *trapos*, usurpers, and thieves in *barang Tagalog* or presidential garb. Which is to say most Filipinos.

I'm glad he's considering it. My sentiments haven't changed. I still think he'll make a good run for the presidency, not to speak

of making a good president if he wins.

Since last week, however, I've seen a number of objections to his running, not all of them coming from detractors. Some of them come from friends and allies. I myself do not find the objections formidable.

First is Archbishop Oscar Cruz's lament that Panlilio remains a priest. There is no such thing as a "priest on leave" in Canon Law, says Cruz. You are either a priest or not. Panlilio should never have been allowed to run for governor as a "priest on leave." First, says Cruz, he should leave the priesthood, then he can do anything he wants. Including becoming president.

I agree wholeheartedly with that. True enough, as Cruz argues, and as I cautioned as well alongside expressing elation when Panlilio was elected as governor of Pampanga province, it poses the problem of the priesthood becoming a stepping stone to public office the way show biz once did (and still does to a large extent).

I've got a couple more reasons why I think Panlilio should leave the priesthood if he wants to run for president. One is the obvious fly it sticks in the ointment of the separation of Church and State. You cannot be loyal to both the Pope and Juan de la Cruz. Jesus Christ had a point when he said, "Give unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." As does the Constitution when it proposes that what the law has rent asunder let no man put together. Going against that principle for whatever reason is flirting with suicide.

Two, and less obvious, is the confusion it sows in the mind of the public about the concepts of morality and religion. We need a moral force, not a religious one. The two are not the same. In fact, the two can be antithetical, as witness our current situation of having many religious people, notably bishops, who are perfectly immoral. So long as Panlilio remains a priest, so long will he confuse the voters about whether he is the moral choice or

the religious one.

The other objections, specifically the ones about Panlilio not being the most qualified candidate and not being "winnable," are easily put to rest.

Panlilio is the most qualified candidate because of one thing. Which is that he is the one public official the thugs in Pampanga, goaded by the thugs in Malacañang, have tried to oust. While the thugs in Malacañang, including Ronaldo Puno, did try to oust other duly elected public officials, notably mayors, and succeeded with some, they singled out Panlilio for a nasty campaign of vilification. That took the form of a signature campaign to show he was not fit to govern. The campaign dragged on for months before it halted abruptly.

You get resolutely depicted by gambling lords, racketeers, *trapos* (traditional politicians; literally, dirt rages), thieves, an illegitimate president, and other lowlife as not being fit to govern, you must be eminently fit to govern. Being persecuted by the guilty makes you innocent. Being persecuted by the corrupt makes you honest. Being persecuted by the unfit makes you fit.

In any case, there's his record of tax collections from quarrying to show he kept faith with the people of Pampanga who voted him to power against impossible odds.

As to his not being "winnable," that's an idiotic concept, as I've always said. That is the one thing that calls to mind Cassius' line that it is not in our stars, dear Brutus, but in ourselves that we are underlings. The power to make candidates win does not lie in our stars, it lies in our hands. We vote for a candidate, he wins. We do not vote for a candidate, he loses. The winning chances of candidates is not something "out there," beyond our control. It is a power we wield, it is an outcome we decide.

That is assuming of course our votes get to be counted. Because the last presidential elections also made it clear that in this country, it is not in our votes but in our Garcis that we are underlings. But that is another story.

Quite apart from that, why shouldn't Panlilio have a decent crack at being president? In fact, not just a decent crack but the best crack at it? There are historic situations that turn elections from

more than mere political exercises to moral choices. From more than a choice between the relative merits and demerits of candidates to a choice between the life and death of a nation. We had such a situation in February 1986 when Cory challenged Marcos for the presidency. The Americans had such a situation last year when Barack Obama challenged John McCain for the presidency.

And we have such a situation again today. Today's elections resemble the American one last year in one very vital respect, which is that while Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is not running, she is the one person the candidates are really being pitted against, in the same way that, McCain's protestations notwithstanding, George W. Bush was really the one person Obama was being pitted against. A thing Obama exploited at McCain's expense. Cory Aquino won against Ferdinand Marcos (by People Power at least, if not by election) because she was the opposite of Marcos. Obama won against McCain because he was the opposite of Bush.

Who looms as the opposite of Gloria, or the closest to it today? Among Ed. (*Inquirer.net*)



Theres the Rub  
Conrado de Quiros

## Keep foreigners from trouble spots

A Hong Kong writer has drawn furious protests here after he wrote that the Filipinos' claim to the Spratlys should not be taken seriously as they come from "a nation of servants" thriving on low wages abroad. But in venting his hate-filled piece against the Philippine claim, the writer also revealed many things about himself.

Aside from being a racial bigot, he seems to have a big chip on his shoulder. He must be aware that until recently Chinese women were hired as amahs everywhere in Asia, including the Philippines. Now he feels superior because he has a Filipina maid whom he exploits by making her work 16 hours a day.

What he ignores is that domestic work is honest work, and that Filipino domestics are prized all over the world because they are dependable, educated and trustworthy. Those who are descended from Chinese amahs cannot appreciate this as they still are traumatized by their past.

The government has been under tremendous pressure to rescue three Red Cross workers kidnapped two months ago by the Abu Sayyaf outside Jolo. It has agreed to pull out its troops fully as a concession to the Abu Sayyaf who has threatened to behead one hostage if this isn't done. What's lamentable is that despite this concession, the Abu Sayyaf continues to make more demands.

Much of the pressure comes from the fact that two of the three hostages are foreigners, attracting international attention. Our military must be seething at the terrorist group's arrogance and raring to get them. Sulu Gov. Sakur Tan feels worried about the implications to his province's security of total pullout. With the unstable security condition in Sulu and Basilan, common sense dictates that foreign nationals be kept away from there. The military must get those bandits.

After leaving the post of UK prime minister, Tony Blair formally con-

### POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

verted to Catholicism and founded the Tony Blair Faith Foundation. In a three-year collaboration with Yale University's Divinity School of Management, the foundation seeks to "explore the potential of religious faith to bring the world's people's together, rather than drive them apart."

As Blair put it in his talk at the Ateneo, "Global interdependence is a reality and faith is inextricably linked to that interdependence. As we have seen, faith can be a source of division and destruction, but it can also be a source of reconciliation, not conflict."

He drew a distinction between "two different elements" in Islam: "one that wants to reconcile with us, and the other that doesn't—the moderate and modernizing elements that reject extremism versus the militants." It's the moderates we have to draw to the dialogue table.

Among Blair's avid listeners was former House speaker Jose de Venecia, who first proposed the idea of an inter-faith dialogue at the United Nations when he accompanied President Macapagal Arroyo to New York in 2006 and earlier to President George W. Bush at the White House.

In a speech at the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C. late last year, De Venecia urged President Barack Obama to organize a "Global Inter-Faith Summit" in the US, where all the great religions are present in great numbers. He said this "could contribute to global and regional peace, isolate extremists, strengthen the moderates, avert the clash of civilizations and help regain the moral high ground for America and the West."

De Venecia, who met Blair at the Global Summit in Madrid last July, wrote him even before he arrived in Manila to make the summit a joint British-American initiative "since the British Commonwealth includes almost all the nations that gave birth to the great religions and civilizations in Asia, Africa and the Middle East."



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