

Ermita tells Gonzalez: Shut up on Dacer case

MANILA - Former justice secretary Raul Gonzalez said on Thursday he had been told by Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita to shut up on the Dacer-Corbato double murder case.

"Raul, *huwag ka na magsalita sa kaso na yan, tumahimik ka na lang* (Raul, stop talking about that case, just keep quiet)," Gonzalez, quoting Ermita, told The STAR.

Gonzalez's being booted out of the Department of Justice,

sources said, may have been part of a deal wherein prosecutors would go easy on the principal suspects in the double murder case.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson and former President Joseph Estrada, along with three former ranking police officers, have been linked to the nine-year-old case.

Earlier, Lacson withdrew his plan to run for president in 2010.

"There was reportedly a *quid*

pro quo and this allegedly is the real reason behind Lacson's withdrawal from the race," the source said.

Gonzalez is one of the fiercest defenders of the Arroyo administration and has been disparagingly called the Palace's attack dog by critics.

Gonzalez, named chief presidential legal counsel, said he is worried that The STAR story on the alleged exchange deal between the Palace and Lacson might affect the reinvestigation of the murders of publicist Salvador "Bubby" Dacer and his driver Emmanuel Corbito in November 2000.

"I am worried that if this story is true, it might compromise the reinvestigation of the Dacer case. It will certainly put pressure on prosecutors I have been assigned to go slow in the investigation," he said in a phone interview.

Gonzalez, however, stressed that he has not received any information that would confirm the supposed meeting between Lacson and a ranking Palace official where the ex-deal was made.

He also said he believes that his appointment to the Palace "has nothing to do with the (Dacer) case."

But earlier, Gonzalez said he would believe The STAR story if ordered by the Palace to quit the

reinvestigation of the case.

"I can't comment on the possibility of that story being true unless I will be stopped from taking part in the reinvestigation of the case at DOJ," he said.

"If I will be stopped then that would probably confirm the ex-deal story," he said.

He also stressed that he would consider resigning from the Cabinet and lawyering for suspects former police officers Cesar Mancao II and Glenn Dumlao if the case is mishandled.

"If this case will not be handled well not because of the incompetence of prosecutors but because of some other reasons, I can always resign and offer myself as lawyer for these people," he stressed.

He also vowed to expose "whoever will be trying to monkey around with the case."

Gonzalez also said he is worried that acting DOJ chief Agnes Devanadera "might feel I'm stepping on her power already if I get her role (in the reinvestigation)."

Gonzalez had vigorously worked for the extradition of Mancao from the US. Dumlao is set to return this month also to testify in the case.

Gonzalez had said he was determined to help in the second prosecution of the double murder case even in his capacity as chief legal counsel of President

Arroyo.

Unidentified men snatched Dacer and Corbito in broad daylight on Osmeña Highway at the boundary of Makati and Manila in November 2000. Their charred remains were found in Indang, Cavite days later.

'Disbar Gonzalez'

Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay urged lawyers' groups to initiate the filing of a disbarment case against Gonzalez for allegedly pre-judging the Dacer-Corbato double murder case.

Binay, President of the United Opposition (UNO), said Gonzalez's pronouncement on the case showed that he is not interested in giving justice to the family of Dacer and Corbito, but in harassing the opposition.

"Secretary Gonzalez's statement breaches the norm of ethical conduct. It reaffirms our position that the Department of Justice under the administration of Mrs. Arroyo has been converted into an agency for the selective prosecution of the political opposition," Binay said.

"Their agenda is to harass the opposition in the months leading to the 2010 election," Binay said.

For his part, UNO spokesman and former ambassador Ernesto Maceda slammed Gonzalez for making promises to Mancao "that go beyond what is ethically acceptable for the latter to

tell the truth."

Maceda cited Gonzalez's public statements that he would volunteer his legal services to Mancao to ensure that the case would proceed even after his stint as justice secretary.

"Under the circumstances the incentives promised by the administration through Gonzalez to Mancao to pin down members of the opposition clearly undermine the entire investigation process and is a clear pre-judgment by the justice secretary himself of the case which is still to be heard by the prosecution panel," Maceda said.

Maceda said the DOJ should stop using its resources to persecute the opposition and instead use them for investigating hundreds of unsolved killings and abductions of activists and journalists allegedly committed by government security forces.

"Gonzalez's statements also send a clear signal to the prosecution panel, his subordinates... on what their decision on the case should be even before the investigation is completed," Maceda said.

"This panel's findings will also be subject to review by the justice secretary, a predicament which will ensure the persecution of perceived enemies of the administration by Gonzalez him-

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