


FOURTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE REPUBLIC )  
OF THE PHILIPPINES )  
First Regular Session )

8 JAN 15 2009

SENATE  
P.S.R. No. 269

RECEIVED BY: 

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Introduced by Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago

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RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE PROPER SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE ALLEGED LACK OF PROFESSIONALISM OF THE BUREAU OF FIRE PROTECTION FIREFIGHTERS IN RESPONDING TO THE FIRE THAT GUTTED A MALL IN BACLARAN

WHEREAS, the Constitution, Article 2, Section 4 provides: "The prime duty of the Government is to serve and protect the people. x x x";

WHEREAS, the Constitution, Article 2, Section 5 provides: "The maintenance of peace and order, the protection of life, liberty, property, and the promotion of the general welfare are essential for the enjoyment by all the people of the blessings of democracy";

WHEREAS, the Constitution, Article 2, Section 27 provides: "The State shall maintain honesty and integrity in the public service and take positive and effective measures against graft and corruption";

WHEREAS, the Constitution, Article 11, Section 1 provides: "Public office is a public trust. Public officers and employees must at all times be accountable to the people, serve them with utmost responsibility, integrity, loyalty, and efficiency, act with patriotism and justice, and lead modest lives";

WHEREAS, The Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) was created under the Department of the Interior and Local Government Act of 1990 (Republic Act No. 6975); the Bureau is primarily responsible for the prevention and suppression of all destructive fires, investigation of all causes of fires and, if necessary, the filing of the proper complaints on fire-related cases;

WHEREAS, on 3 January 2008, at around 6 a.m., a fire blazed at Galleria Mall in Baclaran; the fire allegedly originated from a stall on the mall's second floor;

WHEREAS, according to radio reports, firefighters had a hard time putting out the blaze because of poor crowd control; most of the goods sold in the mall were RTW garments, to which damage was estimated at P91 million by fire officials; fortunately, no one was reported hurt;

WHEREAS, according to complaints by stall owners, a few firemen allegedly demanded cash to put out the fire or parts of the fire;

WHEREAS, two female workers at a stall of the gutted mall reportedly came forward during a press conference held at the Federation of Filipino Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Inc. building in Binondo; they reportedly said that a firefighter clad in navy blue had refused to open their stall even though he had been given the key;

WHEREAS, Fire Marshall Johnny Yu reportedly said during the press conference that the unidentified firefighter should have opened the door to the stall because he already had the authority to do so; BFP firefighters allegedly wear blue while volunteer groups wear orange gear;

WHEREAS, the complaint about firefighters demanding cash before they train their hose on a fire is reportedly not new; on many occasions, the BFP had to defend itself from such charges;

WHEREAS, Interior and Local Government Secretary Ronaldo Puno reportedly ordered Chief Superintendent Enrique Linsangan, BFP officer-in-charge, to investigate the alleged extortion, focusing on four areas: allegations that firefighters extorted money from stall owners in exchange for protecting their shops from the fire; cooperation between the BFP and private firefighting groups; access to water supply in the area; and compliance with fire safety regulations by stall owners and the mall's management;

WHEREAS, as the BFP report has yet to be submitted;

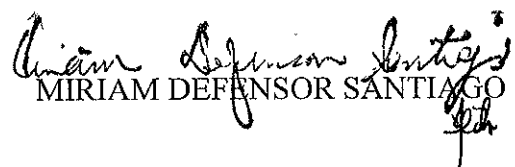
WHEREAS, according to news reports in the 11 January 2008 issue of *The Manila Times*, the postmortem studies show that there was a quiet rivalry between professional firemen and volunteer firefighters; coordination between the two groups was lacking and the rules of engagement was not set;

WHEREAS, the following insights could be gleaned from the Baclaran fire that lasted more than 24 hours:

- The government must support and encourage volunteerism in the fire-fighting effort and foster closer cooperation between professional and volunteer firemen.
- The participation of the Philippine Air Force in firefighting, especially in big fires, and of the private sector is essential.
- A great deal has to be done to improve professionalism in the BFP. Training and retraining is important to upgrade individual skills and collective competence.
- The BFP remains underfunded, undermanned, and underequipped. Many cities and big towns do not have firefighting units. Those that have them make do with substandard equipment and dated technology.
- The Department of the Interior and Local Government should lobby Congress for a bigger budget for the BFP. The House and the Senate should respond by appropriating the funds needed for the modernization of the country's firefighting units.

WHEREFORE, be it hereby resolved by the Philippine Senate, to direct the proper Senate committee to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the alleged lack of professionalism of the Bureau of Fire Protection firefighters in responding to the fire that gutted a mall in Baclaran.

Adopted,

  
MIRIAM DEFENSOR SANTIAGO

/fldp