

COALITION AGAINST CORRUPTION

18 February 2009

THE VERDICT ON OMBUDSMAN MERCEDITAS GUTIERREZ

Last December 1, 2008, the Coalition Against Corruption pointed out that “corruption is the gravest threat to Philippine democracy and society today.” In that statement, we also strongly urged Ombudsman Merceditas Gutierrez to act on pending high-profile corruption cases, to increase the office’s pool of competent field investigators, and, most importantly, to uphold her mandate to serve as protector of the people and not of the powerful.

Two months have passed since that call and we have yet to see any meaningful response. Indeed, a good three years have passed since Ms. Gutierrez was appointed by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to head the Office of the Ombudsman in December 2005, and by any measure, her performance as head of the country’s top graft-busting agency has been dismal. It is a track record of inaction, indifference, bureaucratic bungling, and failure. Whether it is due to incompetence or a deliberate subversion of justice may still be a matter of debate, but what is clear is that Ms. Gutierrez has been a liability in the fight to stamp out corruption.

The country needs an Ombudsman who is a skilled administrator, a committed public defender, a staunch protector of whistleblowers and victims of corruption, a paragon of independence and integrity, and a sentinel of justice. We need a credible public servant who will be able to send a clear message that graft and corruption will not be tolerated and that erring public officials will be punished.

Based on her performance in the last three years, Ms. Gutierrez is not that person. Thus, lest she impose greater damage upon the Office of the Ombudsman and further erode the people’s trust in our public institutions, the Coalition Against Corruption calls on Ms. Gutierrez to relinquish her position as Ombudsman to pave the way for the reinvigoration of our country’s fight against corruption.

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