

Written by

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## ***JGL Eye Column***

By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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C HICAGO (*jGLi*) – Without mentioning his predecessor and patron, the late President Cory Aquino by name, former Philippine President Fidel V. Ramos took exception to this [column](#), for blaming him for not providing legal assistance “to help in the early defense of the case of (Flor) Contemplacion.”

In an email to this columnist, Mr. Ramos’ spokesman, Atty. Nick A. Lagustan, clarified that “FVR assumed the Presidency only on 30 June 1992 . After her arrest on May 4, 1991 , Flor Contemplacion admitted her guilt of the crime as charged – the killing of Delia Maga and her ward, 4-year-old boy Wang Haoren Nicholas.

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“The credibility of these admissions were tested and scrutinized during trial and appeal where Contemplacion was represented by competent counsels. Contemplacion never changed or retracted any of the material allegations in these admissions despite several opportunities to do so. It was concluded that these admissions “were voluntarily given without any inducement, threat or promise.” Mr. Lagustan said,

“Then, Chairman Sedfrey Ordonez of the Commission on Human Rights during the President Corazon Aquino era, who conferred lengthily with Contemplacion’s counsel on the case, including the manner in which the defense was handled, indicated that he had no doubt on the professional competence and credibility of said counsel.”

Despite Contemplacion’s admission, and even prior to Contemplacion’s execution on March 17, 1995, midway to Mr. Ramos presidency, Lagustan said, “FVR sent several letters to Singaporean leaders, seeking clemency for Contemplacion: an appeal for clemency on January 25, 1995 through the Singapore Minister of Foreign Affairs, an appeal for clemency on February 15, 1995 to Singapore President Ong Teng Cheong and another appeal on March 12, 1995 for stay of execution to President Ong Teng Cheong.

At that time, it was deemed that the only way to save her life and her freedom was a direct appeal for executive clemency and/or stay of execution to Singapore’s President, who had the sole authority to grant such clemency.”

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This column based Mr. Ramos's indiscretion from an account in Wikipedia ( [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flor\\_Contemplacion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flor_Contemplacion) ), which says, "Fidel Ramos sent a wreath to Contemplacion's funeral and offered financial assistance to Contemplacion's children who were dependent on their mother's income from her work as a domestic worker.

Many Filipinos believed that Contemplacion was innocent, or at least suffering from insanity if she did commit the murders. They blamed the Singaporean government for not being merciful and were resentful with belief that their own government did not do enough to stop the execution. The Philippine embassy in Singapore in particular came in for strong criticism since it did not even have a consular representative present in court as an observer throughout the trial."

### **SARAH BALABAGAN WAS SAVED FROM DEATH ROW**

But Mr. Lagustan redeemed Mr. Ramos's image by detailing how Sarah Balabagan was saved from the death row while under FVR's watch. He said for Ms. Balabagan, "FVR created a crisis Task Force (which included Former Supreme Court Justice and Special Envoy Abduwahid Bidin, Shariah Lawyer Kassan Teboron and Ambassador Roy Seneres) to ensure full support for her, in addition to which he appealed Balabagan's case to UAE President Sheik Zayed Bin sultan Al Nahyan on March 24, 1995.

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“FVR also obtained the support of the European Parliament through its President H.E. Klaus Haensch, the Malaysian Government through Minister Mahathir Mohamad and the Spanish Government through Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and the Spanish Government through His Majesty King Juan Carlos I. Their concerted efforts resulted in the grant of executive clemency to Sarah Balabagan, (and her release from death row), who finally returned to Manila on August 01, 1996.”

Lagustan stressed, “It was during FVR’s administration where major foreign policy reforms such as the protection and assistance to Filipino nationals overseas were developed and actually realized, notably the enactment of the Magna Carta for Filipino Migrant Workers (R.A. 8042), the creation of the position of DFA Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs plus the conclusion of official labor agreements with principal OFW country-destinations in the Middle East, and social security agreements with many European nations, the U.S. and Australia.”

My column, which advocated for President Noynoy Aquino to help secure the release of overseas Filipino worker Rodelio “Dondon” Celestino Lanuza, who could be executed anytime from now, never got any response from Malacañang, except to add P500,000 to raise the amount of Philippine government contribution to Lanuza to the normal contribution of P5-M to death row inmate’s blood money.

Lanuza, who is accused of killing a Saudi Arabian in self-defense and is imprisoned in Damman, in eastern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the last 12 years, could be released if his family could raise 3-million Riyal (35-million pesos or US\$800,000). As of Feb. 14, 2012, Lanuza’s website,

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<http://www.helpdondon.com/>

has only raised \$150,000, leaving a balance of \$650,000 needed to be raised. Because there is a donor, who could match any donor raised by Filipinos or OFWs, the balance that should be raised is \$325,000 or P13,650,000.

### WHAT TO DO WITH LEGAL FUND? WHERE ARE OFW REPS?

Under the Magna Carta for Filipino Migrant Workers (R. A. 8042), there is P100-M legal assistance fund for migrant workers that will be sourced from the Contingency Fund of the President (P50-M), from the Presidential Social Fund (P50-M) and from the Welfare Fund for Overseas Workers (P20-M). Why can't the government of President Aquino draw an additional P13,650,000 from this legal assistance fund?

Must President Aquino act only after Lanuza is executed like Reynaldo Cortez, who was executed in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in 2007 under the term of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo for murder after the victim's family rejected the 100,000 Saudi riyals (\$26,666)?

In the case of Sara Balabagan, aside from the aggressive lobbying of the Ramos administration (I don't see a similar effort from Mr. Aquino's government) to the UAE President Sheik Zayed Bin sultan Al Nahyan, the European Parliament through its President H.E. Klaus Haensch, the Malaysian Government through Minister Mahathir Mohamad and the Spanish Government through Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and the Spanish Government through His Majesty

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King Juan Carlos I, the blood money was lowered to \$13,000 when Balabagan was ordered to pay \$40,000 for manslaughter while she was awarded \$27,000 for being a rape victim. Filipino businessman William Gatchalian paid a blood money for Balabagan for one million pesos (\$23,809).

The Magna Carta also provides that “fees for the foreign lawyers” to assist the OFW shall be sourced from the Legal Assistance Fund and “Representatives shall be appointed by the President from the ranks of migrant workers: Provided, that at least one (1) of the two (2) sectoral representatives shall come from the women migrant workers sector: Provided, further, that all nominees must have at least two (2) years experience as a migrant worker.” I am still checking with Dondon Lanuza if he has been provided a lawyer by the Philippine government. I am also checking if President Aquino has appointed two sectoral representatives from the ranks of OFWs.

If the Philippine government cannot help bail out Lanuza from the death row, I suggest, the Philippines should stop sending OFWs to countries that impose death penalty. Any OFW, who would violate this ban, would be taking a risk that the Philippine government will not be there to help him if he is condemned to death.

Meanwhile, donors to Lanuza's fund-raising may send in their donations to Metro Bank in Malolos, Bulacan, with Savings Account Number: 575-3-575-01112-9 in what is called 'BARYA NG BUHAY KO' fund raising. Other donors may accept the “One-Million Peso (US\$23,809) Challenge Grant,” where an anonymous donor would match their donations, or log on at <http://www.helpdondon.com/>

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