

16 February 2017

CA confirms the *ad interim* appointment of DOJ chief

Department of Justice (DOJ) **Secretary Vitaliano N. Aguirre II's** *ad interim* appointment passed the scrutiny of the members of the Commission on Appointments (CA) yesterday during its plenary session presided by Vice Chairman of the Commission Ronaldo B. Zamora. President of the Senate/Chairman of the Commission Aquilino "Koko" L. Pimentel III is out of the country to participate in the 2017 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Parliamentary Hearing held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, USA.

The justice chief, on the continuation of the deliberation on his *ad interim* appointment after his confirmation was deferred last February 1, finally secured the nod of the Commission after thorough deliberations by the committee members.

It can be recalled that the *ad interim* appointment of Aguirre was taken up two weeks ago and would have been confirmed if not for the manifestation of CA Minority Floor Leader Sen. Ralph G. Recto to allow Sen. Antonio "Sonny" F. Trillanes IV to personally raise his opposition to the justice secretary when he becomes available on the next scheduled hearing, February 15, which the justice committee approved. Trillanes opposed the confirmation of Aguirre over his supposed "lack of required demeanor befitting the position of the secretary of justice" and for having demonstrated that he is "vindictive, vengeful and completely lacks the required equanimity for him to be entrusted with the power and authority of the government as secretary of justice."

In yesterday's committee hearing, Trillanes reiterated his opposition to the appointment of Aguirre specifically on how Aguirre called him names (such as "son of a bitch," "stupid senator," coward and "*sundalong kanin*") as well as raising the recent report that the justice secretary had allegedly used his position to give "unwarranted benefits" to convicted prisoners who testified against Sen. Leila Delima during the hearings of the House Representatives, among other issues. When asked by the committee chair to respond, Aguirre apologized to Trillanes for his insulting remarks against him. "Due to the pressure and volume of my work, I might have hurt people in my choice of words and for that I profusely apologize specifically to Senator Trillanes," the justice secretary said. Trillanes accepted the apology but manifested that Aguirre still has other issues that need to be addressed, hence, asking the panel to suspend consideration of Aguirre's confirmation pending resolution of various issues against him. After holding an executive session to deliberate on the matter, Sen. Loren Legarda, chairperson of the Commission's Committee on Justice and Judicial and Bar Council, recommended the confirmation of Aguirre's *ad interim* appointment as justice secretary to the plenary.

Aguirre, 70, is a native of Quezon. A brilliant lawyer, he distinguished himself as an in-demand litigator having his fair share of high profile cases and clients to name a few: SAF Chief Gen. Getulio P. Napeñas; Hubert Webb; Sulu Gov. Sakur Tan; CA Justice Bienvenido L. Reyes; Sen. Panfilo M. Lacson; Mr. Ramon Tulfo; and then Davao Mayor Rodrigo R. Duterte.

Prior to his justice portfolio, Aguirre was the Vice President for Legal Affairs and General Counsel of Clark Development Corporation and a Managing Partner of several law firms. He also served as the Deputy Counsel to the Feliciano Commission's First Fact Finding Investigation on the Oakwood Mutiny, Officer in Charge (Board Member) of the Provincial Board of Quezon Province and a Technical Assistant in the 1971 Constitutional Convention.

A consistent honor student since elementary, Aguirre was a full scholar at the San Beda College, Mendiola, Manila. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy *Magna Cum Laude* / Class Salutatorian and his Bachelor of Laws degree from the San Beda College of Law, *Cum Laude* / Class Valedictorian. After passing the bar in 1971, he began his exceptional track record in the government service, occupied various positions in the private sector and served in a number of notable socio-economic engagements.

Being outstanding in his field of profession, he was a recipient of awards such as the *Quezon Medalya ng Karangalan*, the highest award given by the Province of Quezon (Field of Law); Outstanding Litigator, by the Lex Talionis Fraternitas, Inc.; Distinguished Bedan Award in the field of Law (Private Practice) by the San Beda College Alumni Association, Inc. (SBCAAI) ; and the Bedan Recognition Award for Private Practice of Law (Litigation) also by the SBCAAI.

Legarda, in her sponsorship speech on Aguirre's appointment, described the justice secretary as a "highly intelligent man, with a sense of probity and integrity - qualities that are important in the performance of his duties in assuring the effective, efficient and equitable administration of justice." In his seconding speech, Rep. Antonio R. Floirendo, Jr. expressed his belief that Aguirre has the "strength and the stamina, the intelligence and the industry, the dedication and the discipline, to do the tasks required of him as justice secretary."