Gazmin Orders Implementation of Reforms in the VFP

To pursue reforms in the Veterans Federation of the Philippines (VFP) and address its systemic problems, Defense Secretary Voltaire T. Gazmin ordered the continued implementation of the newly approved Constitution and By-Laws (CBL).

Contrary to disinformation and wrong speculations that the CBL would diminish the core function of the current set up of officers, and downgrade the roles of the veterans’ widows and children, Sec. Gazmin said that the CBL shall advance the interest of ALL Filipino veterans and consequently, their families, and not just the interest of a few.

"The new constitution and by-laws of the VF is the backbone of the various reforms that will further strengthen the VFP," Gazmin said.

The approved CBL was a product of consultation with ALL veterans organizations, primarily the VFP, for over two years, starting in 2010.

"We believe that the all veteran organizations, most especially the VFP, have been adequately and fairly represented in the series of consultations we did. I even directed all veterans’ organizations to submit their proposed CBL,” Gazmin added.

Among those who complied were the Cavalier Association of Veterans, Inc.; KAMPILAN Peace-keepers Association, Inc.; Alliance for the Amelioration of Veterans and Former Policemen and Reservists, Inc.; and the Veterans Federation of the Philippines. Other veterans organizations also submitted their comments and inputs during the deliberations.

The move to promulgate a CBL for VFP was initiated by the House Committee on Veterans Affairs and Welfare through a Committee Resolution directing the Secretary of National Defense through its bureau, the Philippine Veterans Affairs Office (PVAO) to implement a “To Do List.” Headed by Bataan Rep. Herminia B. Roman, the Committee conducted a series of hearings and consultations with various veterans organizations following complaints pertaining to alleged abuses and mismanagement of VFP funds as stated in the audit reports of the Commission on Audit (COA).

The consolidated output was again presented in a number of public hearings of the Committee where veterans organizations were again represented, including the VFP, before elevating it to the Office of Legal Services – DND and, finally, to Secretary Gazmin who approved it on 25 June 2013.

However, since the VFP has been left alone to manage its own affairs for many years, the promulgation of a new constitution that constrains it to strictly follow its charter has not been welcomed by a few people in the current management, who are threatened in their present positions.

“Resistance to reforms is but normal in the case of these people, especially so because they are the same people who have been implicated in the adverse management audit findings of the Commission on Audit and the DND Special Management Audit Team,” Sec. Gazmin stated.

This group, Gazmin added, is doing everything to counter or delay reforms through disinformation and court battles. Part of the disinformation is the latest claim that the approved Constitution and By-Laws
was allegedly rejected by delegates in the first-ever National President’s Convention held in Taguig City last May 17-18, 2014.

“I was the one who approved that convention to educate the members about their new Constitution and By-Laws, and I was informed that most of the attendees were AFP retirees, not war veterans because these veterans are very old and they cannot travel anymore, so the statement of VFP that 182 war veterans rejected the CBL is definitely a patent lie, and I will make sure that the source of that lie will be held accountable,” Gazmin said.

The Defense Chief said that the VFP right now has become so unpopular to the veterans that less than 30% of the total number of PVAO pensioners nationwide are members of the federation. “We are exerting efforts to encourage more veterans, especially the retirees, to participate in the affairs of VFP because the federation is the “umbrella” of all veterans organization,” Gazmin further said.

He admits, however, that convincing veterans to join VFP is a tough task because it is difficult to convince them that they would stand to gain anything if they would join the organization.

Meanwhile, the Department has come up with a primer to make the greater majority of veterans understand and appreciate the reforms in VFP. “We hope that veterans would actively help bring back the relevance of the VFP as an organization that would harness in their old age their talents, skills, leadership, business and influence, and raise their capacity to contribute to nation-building and to continue serving as inspiration and as models to the citizenry, especially to the youth in loving and serving our country,” Gazmin narrated.

DND has ordered a massive information campaign to educate the veterans about these latest developments and inform them of their Constitutionally-guaranteed rights to transform them from being members of the silent majority into active members who are empowered not only to participate but also to manage their own affairs as veterans and as leaders. The primer is hoped to dispel speculations about the disenfranchisement of widows, sons and daughters, and the like, which are merely contrived by the few who resist the reforms.

On the part of veterans’ sons and daughters, Sec. Gazmin explained that their role as descendants of veterans is primarily to provide support and other necessary services to their parents, as part of their moral obligation and patriotic duty. They should ensure that the heroic deeds of their parents are never forgotten.

Sec. Gazmin also said that sons and daughters of veterans must acknowledge the fact that VETERANS are FOREVER. “For as long as our country remains a sovereign and independent state, we will always have veterans from the ranks of our defenders from the Armed Forces of the Philippines,” he added.

He also underscored that the present VFP Constitution and By-Laws is not carved in stone. “In case there are provisions the veterans want to amend, Article XII of the CBL provides procedures for the amendment or repeal, in whole or in part, of its provisions. Any member may raise the proposed amendment to the Governance Committee who will evaluate its soundness before submitting it to the Committee on Governance,” Gazmin said.

VFP shall then submit to the Supreme Council the proposal for such amendments or repeal for review and appropriate recommendation to the Secretary of National Defense. Any amendment or repeal under this provision shall be ratified by the members in the annual regular general assembly.

“Within the transition period of two years, we shall be able to transform the VFP into a dynamic and vibrant organization that is truly representative of the Filipino Veterans Community and a vital partner of the State in nation-building,” Gazmin said.

The approved CBL is pursuant to the provisions of Republic Act No. 2640 or the VFP Charter.

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