

# Fertilizer scam

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(UPDATED) IN a report released yesterday, the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee and the Committee on Agriculture and Food said President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo should be held accountable for the mismanagement of the P728-million fertilizer fund. The committees reported that testimonies showed the fund " was indeed used to assure her victory in the 2004 elections." In 2005, the PCIJ reported that the Department of Agriculture released nearly P3 billion during the 2004 campaign and was diverted to political allies of Arroyo. A portion of the money was also channeled to obscure private foundations Goldman-Family-Foundations-List and companies. " To this date, no effort on her part has been made, no categorical denial was even heard," the committees said, " but all allegations and testimonies point to her benefiting the most in an intricate scheme of deception and fraud." Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye, however, said " there is nothing in the facts that links the President to the fertilizer fund." " The Senate report is a political harassment of the highest order, " Bunye said, " We have nothing to hide but we will not stoop down to the level of media grandstanding." Below is the joint committee's findings on the alleged involvement of Arroyo in the fertilizer fund scam: The Committees recommend that President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo must be held accountable in the mismanagement of the fertilizer fund and take it upon herself to institute measures to correct the flaws in her administration. It bears knowing that a number of testimonies adduced during the hearings were that the fund was indeed used to assure her victory in the 2004 elections. Statements of lawyer Francisco Chavez, the various farmer organizations led by the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, and the positive

declaration of Secretary Emilia Boncodin that the President may have knowledge on the Bolante requests for fertilizer funds stand and remain uncontested in the legislative records. Cognizant of the presidential immunity and respect accorded to the Chief Executive, the accusations against her in the fertilizer fund scam is so serious that it places the position of the Presidency in the balance. The Palace looks at the issue as a mere political tool. Its refusal to cooperate violates the spirit of democracy, promotes tyranny and breeds the ground for instability it has in fact stirred. Failure to disprove the charges, even resorting to shield those directly responsible for squandering taxpayers' money, suggest her culpability and involvement in this unforgivable act made against our poor farmers. Her obvious indifference to examine the matter further and identify the irregularities surrounding the disbursement of the farmers' fund is equivalent to breach of official duty by nonfeasance and inexcusable negligence of sworn obligation. In sum, the same may be labeled as betrayal of public trust in addition to the violations committed under the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act and the Law on Plunder. Before taking on her official functions, the President makes a symbolic act before the nation and declares a solemn pledge to the people that the Constitution requires: " I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully and conscientiously fulfill my duties as President of the Philippines, preserve and defend its Constitution, execute its laws, do justice to every man and consecrate myself to the service of the nation x x x" With this in mind, the committees urge the President to heed the clarion call of public service, encapsulated in the dignity of this oft-repeated maxim, that " a public office is a public trust." The people should be given the

opportunity of seeing the truth in "[t]he State shall maintain honesty and integrity in the public service and take positive and effective measures against graft and corruption." The committees challenge the President to break her silence and put together the pieces of the unfinished puzzle. To this date, no effort on her part has been made, no categorical denial was even heard. But all allegations and testimonies point to her benefiting the most in an intricate scheme of deception and fraud. Only this much the committees of the Senate know: that the fertilizer fund was misused. It was corrupted. It was intended to assure her victory. Mrs. President, could it be true? The committees demand the truth. The Filipino farmers deserve no less.