Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 1143

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Introduced by Representative MICAELA S. VIOLAGO

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RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE SUDDEN DEATHS OF SEVERAL HIGH-VALUE INMATES AT THE NEW BILIBID PRISON (NBP) IN MUNTINLUPA CITY ALLEGEDLY DUE TO COVID-19

WHEREAS, the Department of Justice (DOJ) confirmed on July 20, 2020 that nine high-value inmates, including Jaybee Sebastian, a convicted kidnapper and car thief who served as a witness and co-accused in one of the drug cases against Senator Leila de Lima, had died of Covid-19;

WHEREAS, two days before the DOJ confirmation, a list of Bilibid prisoners who reportedly succumbed to the novel coronavirus was "mysteriously circulated to journalists";

WHEREAS, Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) Director General Gerald Bantag had initially refused to reveal the identities of high-value inmates who died of Covid-19, stressing that the Data Privacy law prevents him from naming them in public;

WHEREAS, National Privacy Commission Commissioner Mon Liboro subsequently declared that information about the inmates could be released since the convicts "had become public figures on account of their previous association with particular national issues in the past";

WHEREAS, Justice Undersecretary and spokesman Mark Perete confirmed that among those in the list are high-value persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) namely Jaybee Sebastian, Francis Go, Willy Yang, Benjamin Marcelo, Shu Zhang, Jimmy Kinsing Hung, Eugene Ho Chua, Sherwin Sanchez, and Amin Imam Boratong;

WHEREAS, they were the ones found to be living comfortably inside so-called kubols that were equipped with several amenities during a raid led by Senator Leila de Lima when she was Justice Secretary in 2014;
WHEREAS, Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra previously said that close to 480 deaths among inmates were recorded in BuCor facilities, 21 of which were due to coronavirus-related complications;

WHEREAS, according to an Inquirer report, Jaybee Sebastian died of COVID-19 on Saturday, July 18, and his body was supposedly cremated without an autopsy the same evening;

WHEREAS, the log of the Panteon de Dasmariñas Public Cemetery in Dasmariñas, Cavite, states that Sebastian’s body was cremated on July 18, along with others named Marcelo, Zhang, and Hung, citing media reports;

WHEREAS, Cavite 4th District Representative Elpidio Barzaga Jr said no autopsies were done on the bodies cremated at the Panteon de Dasmariñas, and crematorium workers did not open body bags sent by the BuCor if they came with death certificates and other documents;

WHEREAS, bodies were cremated without autopsies, fuelling rumours the dead men may have been "resurrected" in the outside world as free men with new identities;

WHEREAS, the prison has been hit by numerous scandals in which powerful prisoners, with the help of corrupt officials, continue to run crime syndicates from jail;

WHEREAS, Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon and Senator Richard Gordon, Chairman of the Senate’s Blue Ribbon and Justice Committees, called for the removal of BuCor Director General Gerald Bantag for withholding information about the alleged Covid-19 deaths inside the NBP;

WHEREAS, due to inaccurate and unverified reports, the House of Representatives should investigate as to whether the reported COVID-19 deaths of several high-value inmates are true or replacements of bodies of other inmates were done as fingerprints of the dead inmates were not also taken coupled with subsequent declarations of deaths of high-value inmates made, to let the prisoners escape;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, to direct the Committee on Justice to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the sudden deaths of several high-value inmates at the New Bilibid Prison (NBP) allegedly due to COVID-19.

ADOPTED.

MICAELA S. VIOLAGO
Representative, 2nd District of Nueva Ecija