

Project Vinta - On November 14, 1984, Zamboanga...

Project Vinta

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On November 14, 1984, Zamboanga City mayor Cesar C. Climaco was assassinated by a still unknown gunman. He was famous for his tough leadership and often harsh measures against crime and corruption.

Born in 1916, Climaco earned his law degree from the University of the Philippines. He began his public career as a prosecutor in Jolo, and then as executive assistant to the city mayors of Davao and Zamboanga. In 1953, he won a seat in the Zamboanga City Council, and was later elected as city mayor in 1956. As mayor, he was known for roaming around the city with his motorcycle, talking to local residents, and personally responding to emergencies. He was also well-loved by all of his constituents. He later tried running for the Senate (1961, 1963, and 1965) but lost. Instead, President Diosdado Macapagal appointed him as a customs commissioner and later as Presidential Assistant on Community Development.

Climaco was critical of the imposition of Martial Law by President Ferdinand Marcos. He then left for the U.S., and made a public vow that he would not cut his hair until democracy was restored. He returned to the Philippines in 1976 and in 1978, ran for a seat at the Batasan Pambansa but lost. He was re-elected mayor of Zamboanga City in 1980 despite being an opposition candidate. He sent telegrams to President Marcos accusing the latter of electoral fraud and human rights violations. After the assassination of opposition leader Ninoy Aquino, Climaco demanded that the government set up an independent inquiry on the case. He also gained fame for displaying a large board in front of the city hall, "tallying" the murders, robberies, and other crimes which he believed were done by the military.

On the morning of November 14, 1984, Climaco was about to ride on his motorcycle, heading to the City Hall, unescorted, after personally leading the emergency response in a fire incident, when he was approached by a man from behind, and was shot in the nape at point-blank range. He was declared dead on arrival at the hospital. President Marcos immediately condemned the killing and sent Gen. Fidel Ramos to personally facilitate

an investigation. Critics of President Marcos denounced the killing of Climaco as an obvious pattern to eliminate the opposition (e.g., Ninoy, former Pampanga Governor Jose B. Lingad). An estimated 200,000 people paid their respects and joined the funeral procession of Climaco. The murder case remains unsolved to this day with various and conflicting testimonies pointing to different personalities as masterminds, the most recent allegations surfaced in 2012. Several personalities had been indicted, but none of them was convicted.

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