

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

PGMA's birthday wish: A united Filipino people

LUBAO, Pampanga—President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has one defining wish as she celebrated her 62nd birthday last April 5: for the Filipino people to stay united in the midst of the challenges posed by the global economic crisis.



Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo

In her short message after the Thanksgiving Mass at the St. Augustine Parish Church in Barangay San Nicolas here, the President called on all Filipinos to unite and focus their attention on family and the community.

"Ito ang panahon para magkaisa na harapin ng lubusan ang ating pamilya at pamayanan," the Chief Executive said as she underscored the need "to begin a new age of volunteerism and in the spirit of cooperation and unity" to weather the global financial crisis.

She cited the importance of the government, church and the civic groups coming together, and en-

couraged all Filipinos to participate in civic-related works.

The President said initiatives should be focused on civic activities like cleaning the environment, putting up parks, planting trees and most especially in helping the government to uplift the lives of the most vulnerable sectors of society.

She said that in times like this where the world is facing grave challenges, the Filipino traits of caring and loving are of para-

mount importance. "Gamitin natin ito upang magpasalamat sa mga biyayang tinatamasa natin upang mamahagi sa mga kapus-palad," she said.

Filipinos, she said, should work together towards responding to challenges of the times by offering time, efforts and resources in a noble cause.

"Our country needs all of us pulling in the same direction so we should volunteer our time, our skills, our resources to noble undertakings that we should all take seriously," she said.

The President likewise thanked her Cabalens for their support.

The Chief Executive arrived in her hometown to hear mass, a birthday tradition she has followed religiously over the years.

The co-celebrated birthday mass was officiated by Pampanga Archbishop Paciano Aniceto.

She was accompanied by First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo,

daughter Luli, sons Dato and Mikey and daughters-in-law Angela Montenegro and Victoria Manotoc.

Dato said he gave his mother pictures of their children as a birthday gift, as he expressed the wish that Filipinos set aside politics and instead help the President achieve her goals for the country during the remainder of her term of office.

"Sama-sama at magtutungan na tayo so that the President can focus on her visions during the remainder of her term," Dato said.

The First Gentleman, on the other hand, said he has no material gift for the President, except for his traditional bouquet of 12 roses—11 red ones for love and one white rose for purity.

After the mass, the birthday celebrator joined thousands of her Cabalens at lunch served at the churchyard.

A wide array of activities highlighted the Chief Executive's birthday including the mass oath-taking of 120 new members of the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGUs) and the

showcasing of Pampanga's best products through the "One Town, One Product" (OTOP) Bazaar.

A dental and medical mission and other government action desks and booths of the Technical Education and Skills De-

velopment Authority (TESDA), Department of Social Welfare Development (DSWD), Department of Agriculture (DA), Philhealth, and other participating agencies were also set up at the churchyard. (www.gov.ph)

Set aside politics, Palace tells critics

Palace mum on Sen. Gordon's statement

by CHRISTINE AVENDAÑO
Inquirer.net

MANILA—Malacañang refused to comment on Sen. Richard Gordon's statement that President Macapagal-Arroyo was to blame for the fate of two foreign hostages still being held captive by the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu.

Interviewed over government radio last April 5, Press Secretary Cerge Remonde repeatedly conveyed the Palace refusal to comment on Gordon's statements against the President.

"We don't want to add any statement...What's important is for us to unite and help each other in securing the safe release of the hostages," Remonde, speaking in English and Filipino, said.

Remonde stressed that President Arroyo's directive to the local crisis committee on top of the kidnapping of two remaining International Committee of the Red Cross hostages was clear and that was "to do everything possible to secure the release of the hostages without compromising the sovereignty of our country."

Remonde underscored the need to leave it to the local crisis committee in handling the hostage problem "because after all, they are the ones who know the situation on the ground and they know the personalities involved in this problem."

And being the season of the Lent, Remonde also appealed for everyone to set aside politics.

Coming to the defense of

the President, Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro said Gordon's statement was not true because he stressed that on the contrary, the fate of the hostages were in the hands of the Abu Sayyaf.

"Ang pagdamay o tangkang pagdawit sa ating Pangulo ay walang tutulungan o naayudaan kundi ang Abu Sayyaf (Any effort to drag the President into the problem will not get anywhere or will not help anybody but the Abu Sayyaf)," Teodoro told dzBB radio.

"Pinalalakas lamang ni Sen. Gordon ang kamay nila (Senator Gordon would only end up strengthening the Abu Sayyaf)," he added.

He said it was clear Gordon was "negotiating" with the Abu Sayyaf. (Inquirer.net)

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