

GMA flies to Davos to advance RP interest

President Arroyo's trip to Switzerland and Dubai, her first abroad this year, aims to advance the strategic interests of the country and "press the need for closer economic, political and social relations between the Philippines and the world," Malacañang said.

Mrs. Arroyo is scheduled to arrive in Zurich, Switzerland this morning to kick off a four-day trip that would include meetings with world and business leaders, including Netherlands Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende and

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former US Secretary of State Dr. Henry Kissinger.

From Zurich and Davos in Switzerland, she will proceed to Dubai for an investment promotion campaign.

In her departure statement, Mrs. Arroyo said, "global engagement and a robust foreign policy are central pillars of our plan for a safe and strong Philippines."

"These visits are part of the commitment of our administration to global engagement that broadens and deepens our ties, strengthens our security alliances, encourages trade and investment agreements, and protects our overseas Filipino workers," Mrs. Arroyo said.

"We will continue this engagement in 2008 as we have done throughout my presidency. We need the world and we like to think the world needs us — our hard-working people, our ideal geographic location, and our reliability as a friend and ally," she said.

Her visit to Switzerland will be highlighted by her attendance at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in the ski resort city of Davos, which gathers more than 2,500 participants from 88 countries, including 27 heads of state or government, 113 Cabinet members, along with religious and

media leaders, and heads of non-governmental organizations.

The world leaders, top business officials and other guests would be officially welcomed to the 2008 WEF annual meeting during a reception Wednesday in Davos, some three hours by land travel from Zurich.

Mrs. Arroyo said at the WEF, she would be meeting a number of world leaders "who are partners with the Philippines in bringing peace to Mindanao, aid assistance to our poor, and greater security in the fight against terrorism."

"Another central goal of our trip is to continue the relentless promotion of the Philippines as a great place to invest and do business. Foreign investment is central to that progress. We are proud of the results of our ability to attract more and more business to the Philippines in the last seven years," she said.

The President is scheduled to meet with top Swiss businessmen when she addresses the Swiss Chamber of Commerce today at the Savoy Hotel in Zurich, the largest and the main commercial and cultural center of Switzerland.

This would be followed by a series of business and courtesy calls led by Zuellig Pharmaceuticals chairman Dr. Stephen Zuellig, and

the luncheon with the International Board of Advisors before departing in the afternoon for Davos.

On Thursday, she is scheduled to hold a series of meetings with business leaders in Davos, highlighted by the bilateral meetings with Swiss Confederation President Pascal Couchepin and Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi.

She is also scheduled to hold meetings with World Trade Organization (WTO) Director General Pascal Lamy, and Kissinger who is one of the co-chairmen of the 2008 WEF annual meet.

On Friday morning, Mrs. Arroyo would have a 10-minute live interview by Reuters senior journalist Steve Clark in the official breakfast program of WEF, "Davos Today."

Afterwards, she would have a series of courtesy calls and meetings led by Balenende, WEF Executive Chairman and Founder Prof. Klaus Schwab, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) President Sadako Ogata, and International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Khan.

She would then address the high-level plenary session of the Swiss Congress on the "Emerg-

ing Role of the ASEAN in the Asian Community."

Mrs. Arroyo's working visit will be highlighted by her address at the WEF on "Gender Parity Group: Agenda for the Future" at the Congress Centre, Parsenn Workspace in Davos, on Friday evening.

She will leave for Dubai on Saturday morning.

The President said that Dubai is "playing an important role in global flows of investment capital and energy resources."

"This is also a country that employs hundreds of thousands of our countrymen and women. We will work to ensure that they continue to enjoy the positive working conditions that they deserve," she said. — Paolo Romero