

Arroyo: We'll remove all obstacles to peace

By PAOLO ROMERO

CLARK FREEPORT – President Arroyo maintained yesterday that the government is determined to remove “all obstacles to peace” even as she sought the continued support of the international community and the Filipino people for

the government’s military operations against members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

In her speech at the groundbreaking ceremonies for the Kuwaiti-owned Global Gate-

way Logistics City, Mrs. Arroyo said her administration will not abandon the peace process and the military is not waging an all-out war in Mindanao.

She said support from the

local stakeholders as well as the international community is vital for the success of the peace process in Mindanao.

She specifically mentioned Kuwait, the United States and the Organization of Islamic

Conference (OIC) as having continued to support development in Mindanao.

“We have never deviated from the objectives of the peace process,” Mrs. Arroyo said. “There is no all-out war.

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We are doing this (military operations) to have all-out peace in Mindanao."

"We wish for all insurgents to turn their swords into plowshares, their arms to farms," she said. "We ask all sectors to be with us, including our brothers in the OIC."

Mrs. Arroyo issued the statement as fighting between government troops and MILF rebels continue to rage in some parts of Mindanao.

The rampage of lawless MILF groups in Mindanao, the President said, called for resolute military and police action.

The P10-million reward for MILF Commanders Ameril Umbra Kato and Abdurahman Macapaar alias Commander Bravo "manifests the government's firm resolve to hasten the neutralization of these criminals so that justice can be achieved," Mrs. Arroyo said.

She said the notorious MILF commanders created trouble before and during the peace negotiations and are likely to cause problems even after a final peace agreement will be signed between the government and the Muslim rebel

group.

"The campaign against them (Macapaar and Kato) is intended to remove the obstacles to the peace process," Mrs. Arroyo said.

She said Kuwaiti government projects and investments in the Philippines inspire efforts to achieve lasting peace in Mindanao.

She pointed out that Kuwait was the first Arab country to extend a developmental loan to the Philippines. She said Kuwait's biggest development project is the 115-kilometer road project in Pagadian City in Zamboanga del Sur through Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao to Cotabato City.

"Now they (Kuwait) have offered to help upgrade the Davao Regional Hospital into a national cancer center, the Cotabato Regional Medical Center into a regional cancer center, and modernize the Zamboanga Medical Center surgery block," Mrs. Arroyo said.

Meanwhile, Mindanao bishops, in a recent meeting with President Arroyo in Malacañang, agreed that criminal

charges should be filed against Kato and Bravo for terrorizing the residents of Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato.

In an interview over *Radio Veritas*, Cotabato Auxiliary Bishop Jose Colin Bagaforo said 13 bishops - including Iligan Bishop Elenito Galido, Surigao del Sur Bishop Nereo Odchimar, Tuguegarao, Cagayan Archbishop Diosdado Talamayan and Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya Bishop Ramon Villena - met the President last Friday in Malacañang.

During the four-hour meeting, the bishops "raised two

points. The first was that Commanders Umbra Kato and Bravo have to be brought to justice. "On this point we agreed," said Bishop Bagaforo.

The second point was an appeal to the President to allow the residents of Mindanao and the *lumads* to participate in the peace process.

They reiterated the call for the government to review and revise the memorandum of agreement on ancestral domain with the MILF, and to change the composition of the government's peace panel.

- With Evelyn Macairan