

# GMA to Verzosa: Bring peace, stability to Mindanao

President Arroyo installed Director General Jesus Verzosa as the new chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP) with marching orders to bring peace and stability in Mindanao.

In her speech at the PNP leadership turnover ceremony at Camp Crame yesterday, Mrs. Arroyo said Verzosa

would lead the national police in its role to maintain peace and order in the country's southern region.

Mrs. Arroyo highlighted the achievements of Verzosa by saying the new police chief has the experience and expertise to bring lasting peace in the region.

The President noted Verzosa has

By MARVIN SY

been assigned to practically every hotspot in the country, which includes Basilan and Maguindanao in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

"I specifically point this one out because his experience is valuable to what we are seeking to do today; that

is we are committed to do everything possible to bring lasting peace to Mindanao and end 40 years of fighting that has killed more than 120,000 people," Mrs. Arroyo told the gathering that was also attended by members of the diplomatic corps and former PNP chiefs.

With just a few hours of sleep after her arrival from a speaking engagement before the United Nations General Assembly, Mrs. Arroyo proceeded to Camp Crame to witness retiring national police chief Avelino Razon Jr. turn over command to Verzosa.

Mrs. Arroyo did not issue an arrival statement but stressed Verzosa's role as the new chief PNP is vital to the peace process.

Mrs. Arroyo stressed the ongoing offensive against the renegade leaders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Central Mindanao is not an all out war against the Muslim rebel group but only to capture the renegade forces behind last month's atrocious attacks.

"We must end the armed rebellion through disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation and a very strong role of the PNP is expected in making sure that Mindanao remains peaceful.

After all, what is happening there in Mindanao is a law enforcement exercise, it is not an all-out war," she said.

Mrs. Arroyo said she spoke before the UN General Assembly that the government would pursue the peace process not only with armed groups but also with the communities concerned.

"With these new directions in the police, in the peace process... we remain bullish on our country and its continually transforming police under the leadership of our new Director General Verzosa, we are optimistic about our future," she said.

Mrs. Arroyo also commended Razon for his accomplishments in the police force, including the significant decrease in street crimes and improvement of the overall approval ratings of the PNP, during his term.

She said the high approval ratings are an indication the PNP is now closer to the community.

## 'Enormous weight'

Verzosa, for his part, vowed to do his best in leading the PNP to make the country more safe and peaceful.

In his speech at the turnover ceremonies, Verzosa said he feels the "enormous weight" of responsibility assigned to him by the President, which is also a "golden opportunity" to start something new in the PNP.

"Today, I feel the enormous weight of responsibility as I am bestowed with the singular honor and privilege of leading the PNP. But I look to this new day as another special gift from our Creator; another golden opportunity to start something new or complete what has been left unfinished," he said.

Verzosa also took the opportunity to thank Razon, whom he called "my esteemed predecessor whose shoes I will now try to fill."

Verzosa said he would start focus-

ing on essential work in police force "from being national headquarters-centric onto the field and the communities."

"We shall hit the ground running by enhancing police services where they matter most," he said.

"Effective leadership not only implements but makes it a priority to multiply effective leadership within the organization. And this is where my administration will strive to make its mark."

Verzosa also revealed plans to pour in more logistics and policemen in Mindanao by creating an interim force in military style setup to enhance police operational capability in the region.

"This readjustment will give regional commanders to focus more on their functions and duties without having to attend to the welfare of our outside police members now in Mindanao," he said.

The PNP has deployed at least five police battalions in Mindanao last month - to defend villages from the attacking MILF rebels - two from Special Action Forces, three from the regional and provincial mobile groups from the Visayas and additional 1,000 police rookies.

He said the creation of an interim police force in Mindanao is also expected to hasten the PNP and military campaign against the renegade MILF groups of Ameril Umbrá Kato and Abdurahman Macapaar, alias Commander Bravo.

Verzosa said the police interim force in the region would work closely with the military and the territorial police forces.

Verzosa clarified the interim force will only be involved in tactical defense of communities and government infrastructures and installations. - With Cecilie Suerte Felipe, Jaime Laude, Miriam Desacada, Lino dela Cruz