

GMA off to China for ASEM meet

By PAOLO ROMERO

Press Secretary Jesus Dureza reported yesterday that President Arroyo and other heads of state will discuss the global financial crisis during a summit of world leaders in Beijing, China later this week.

Dureza said Mrs. Arroyo will attend the 7th

Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Beijing from Oct. 24 to 25 and would likely hold bilateral talks with other world leaders to push the country's interests.

He said she would push for a common action to avoid the US financial crisis from recurring.

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Dureza likened the crisis to a fire that has already been put out. The next stage is to find out what caused it and stop the financial bleeding and take immediate steps to bring the patient back to good health.

"This would also be a good opportunity for the President to highlight what the Philippines is doing to sustain the growth despite the global economic slowdown," he said in an interview with radio station *dzRB*.

He said Mrs. Arroyo would also hold one-on-one meetings with other heads of state to push for more investments.

He could not say whether she would raise with Chinese leaders the issue of contaminated products from China, such as the melamine-tainted milk products.

Palace officials earlier said it was seeking to expand trade and economic relations with China to diversify the economy and make it less vulnerable to the global economic slowdown that was triggered by the financial crisis in the US.

ASEM is composed of Asian

countries, including the Philippines and the other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the 27 members of the European Union.

The ASEM is held every two years among Asian and European heads of state. The first ASEM summit was held in London in 1998; Seoul, South Korea in 2000; Copenhagen, Denmark in 2002; Hanoi, Vietnam in 2004; and Helsinki, Finland in 2006.

India, Mongolia and Pakistan, the newest members of the Asian-European group, are attending the ASEM summit this year.

"ASEM is an informal process of dialogue and co-operation addressing political, economic and cultural issues," according to the Asia-Europe Foundation website.

The ASEM dialogue addresses political, economic and cultural issues, with the objective of strengthening the relationship between our two regions, in a spirit of mutual respect and equal partnership, it said.