

✓ *GMA, Blair to discuss peace*

President Arroyo and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair are expected to hold talks today in Malacañang regarding efforts to forge peace in Mindanao.

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said the peace process in Mindanao is one of

the issues that would likely be taken up during the meeting.

Remonde said Blair had already offered Mrs. Arroyo his assistance in forging peace in the country, in previous gatherings of world

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leaders, during his stint as prime minister.

"So these talks about his possible involvement in the

peace efforts in the country already began before," Remonde said.

The meeting is expected to

be held at noon at the Bahay Pangarap in Malacañang.

Remonde cited Blair's extensive experience in dealing with Britain's secessionist movement in Northern Ireland.

residential Adviser on the Peace Process Avelino Razon earlier said the government is considering asking Blair to be the "eminent person" or adviser to help spur the stalled talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Razon said the government is ready to resume renegotiations with the MILF next month.

Meanwhile, Pangasinan Rep. Jose de Venecia Jr. wrote British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and his predecessor Tony Blair seeking the British government's active participation to lead the campaign for debt assistance to poor nations in next month's meeting of leaders and rich nations in London.

De Venecia said British support is important in convincing world leaders in next month's London meeting to help poor nations with their debt burden.

He said debt

conversions and debt swaps could be the "only workable global stimulus package for poor countries and heavily indebted economies caught in the global financial crisis."

"There will be no need for new appropriations by the British, European, US, Japanese, Chinese, and the other parliaments of creditor-nations. Our plan is voluntary and does not ask foreign creditor to forgive a single dollar or euro of debt," he said.

He said debt assistance would help borrowers achieve the United Nations' millennium development goals (MDGs), which aims to halve poverty around the world by 2015.

He added that global financial crisis could wipe out poor nations' gains in reducing poverty.

The former speaker also yesterday announced that Germany has offered to write off 25 million euros (more than P1.6 billion) in Philippine debt.

De Venecia said Germany made the offer on condition that the government spend P1.5 billion in campaigns against HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

De Venecia said the gesture

was in response to his incessant calls for developed and rich nations to help poor countries by way of debt-to-equity conversion or a debt-swap like the proposed German-Philippine arrangement.

"This month, after years of trying, we had a breakthrough," he added.

De Venecia launched his campaign for debt conversion in 2005 when he was still speaker. That year, President Arroyo spoke before the United Nations and endorsed his proposals. The two were still allies then.

The former speaker said aside from Germany, Norway has responded to his campaign by doing a \$20-million debt-swap with Pakistan, which allowed the Pakistani government to use the rupee equivalent of \$20 million for earthquake rehabilitation.

He said other developed nations have endorsed his proposals but have not moved forward in helping poor countries with their debt burden.

For instance, he said just last year, Spain and Italy "gave their endorsements to our request for debt-swaps, but to our knowledge have not yet approved specific cases."

- Paolo Romero, Jess Diaz