

# GMA: Divided we fail, together we prevail

By MARVIN SY

President Arroyo reminded the people yesterday that unity, not division, would keep the country strong in the face of mass protests against Charter change (Cha-cha) efforts by allies of the administration.

Mrs. Arroyo made the call as the protest marches against Cha-cha were launched in Metro Manila and other parts of the coun-

try.

Speaking before members of the Filipino-Chinese community during the celebration of the 8th Filipino-Chinese Friendship Day, the President quoted from a Chinese saying: Divided we fail, together we prevail.

"And the Filipino-Chinese community is a very good testament

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of that because the Filipino-Chinese community is such an advocate for unity, for being together so that we can prevail," the President said.

"And that reminds me of another saying: when people are of one mind and heart they can move mountains," she added.

The Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry Inc. (FFCCCII), which hosted yesterday's event at the Sofitel Philippine Plaza Hotel, expressed support for Charter change.

FFCCCII president Alfonso Uy, in a message, said that the "Filipino-Chinese community supports the move to amend the Constitution to ensure progress of our community."

Members of the opposition have planned a series of demonstrations against the efforts of the House of Representatives to amend the Constitution.

The protest actions were in response to the decision of the allies of the President in the House to pass Resolution 1109, which would convene Congress into a constituent assembly (con-ass) to amend the Constitution.

Malacañang has kept its distance from the moves of the House, although the administration has not rejected the idea of amending the Constitution, particularly the economic provisions as proposed by Speaker Prospero Nograles.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said the President, in her previous State of the Nation Addresses, aired her support for Charter amendments.

Ermita said that there are provisions in the Constitution that have to be amended, such as the economic provisions, in order to ensure sustainable development in the country.

"The protests came about with Resolution 1109. I wish that the people would understand that with all the methods of amending the Constitution, in the end, all of these would still have to be approved by the people through a plebiscite," Ermita said in Filipino.

"We are talking about things that are not yet final," he added.

A number of business organizations have denounced the moves of the House as a "blatant disregard of the Filipino people's will."

The Action for Economic Reforms (AER), Financial Executives Institute of the Philippines (FINEX), Foundation for Economic Freedom (FEF), Makati Business Club (MBC) and the Management Association of the Philippines (MAP) have issued a statement saying that "by this action of pro-administration congresspersons, any remaining doubts about the determination of the Arroyo administration and its allies in the House to manipulate our democratic processes and institutions to prolong their hold on power have been erased."

Mrs. Arroyo herself has not given any clear indication since her State of the Nation Address that she supports the moves of her allies in the House.

On the other hand, she has not opposed or rejected these efforts.

Nograles has admitted that the President was aware of the plan of her allies to pass House Resolution 1109 during the recent event that merged the administration's two major political parties - Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats and the Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi).

He said that the President heard everything and said nothing, just like she did yesterday before the Filipino-Chinese community.

Ermita emphasized that the Palace is in no way supporting any of the purported moves to postpone

or cancel the 2010 elections through an amendment of the Constitution.

He said that the stand of the Palace is clear that elections would take place as scheduled and that the merger of Lakas-CMD and Kampi is proof that the administration is focused on preparations for the 2010 polls.

"I can say that we are now in an election mode also as majority party and of course our objective is victory in 2010," Ermita said.