

GMA: Heroes needed amid crisis

The country is badly in need of heroes in this time of global economic crisis, President Arroyo said yesterday.

Speaking at the 111th Independence Day rites in Koronadal City, South Cotabato, Mrs. Arroyo said the celebration's theme was on Mindanao and jobs.

"Heroism is not obsolete. It comes in many forms in different times," the President said. "When the nation needs us, it is an opportunity to become

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heroes today.”

She said if the country's heroes in the past fought and died for independence and political freedom, Filipinos should be inspired to unite and help combat the effects of the global economic crisis.

The rites signaled the simultaneous nationwide flag-raising ceremony to mark the country's Freedom Day observance.

Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro, Armed Forces Gen. Victor Ibrado, South Cotabato Gov. Daisy Avance Fuentes, Labor Secretary Marianito Roque and Koronadal City Mayor Fernando Miguel assisted the President in raising the Philippine flag.

After the flag-raising rites, the Chief Executive shook hands with representatives of tribal communities as she walked towards the monument of national hero Dr. Jose Rizal where she laid a wreath.

During the wreath-laying ceremonies, a military brass band played "Pilipinas Kong Mahal," and an Air Force helicopter dropped fresh flower petals on the crowd.

Towards the end of the program, the President led the awarding of employment certificates, livelihood packages and scholarship checks or training vouchers provided by 15 government agencies.

She also led the launching of the "Mega Job and Livelihood Fair" that was replicated in oth-

er parts of the country that would run for three days.

Despite slowing growth, the Philippines fared better compared to developed neighboring countries that saw their economies contracting, Mrs. Arroyo said.

The President also reiterated her commitment to resume talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a Muslim separatist group fighting for the establishment of an independent Islamic state in Mindanao.

She said the government has already started assembling the pieces for the possible resumption of peace negotiations with the MILF through the support of the Malaysian government.

Mrs. Arroyo returned to Manila in the afternoon and hosted the traditional reception for members of the diplomatic corps and the "rigodon de honor" at the Palace Ceremonial Hall in the evening.

In her speech at the reception the President said the Philippines was "blessed to be among the resilient ones" amid the global economic crisis.

First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo was conspicuously absent during the reception. But catching the eye of journalists and other Palace officials and guests was cosmetic surgeon Dr. Vicki Belo, who is involved in a sex video scandal. — Paolo Romero, Aurea Calica, Roel Pareño, AFP