

# Noynoy receives GMA at wake

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and MARVIN SY

There was none of the expected heckling or cold shoulder treatment for President Arroyo when she visited the wake of former President Corazon Aquino at the Manila Cathedral after arriving from her shortened trip to the United States before dawn yesterday.

Immediately after arriving at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport Centennial

Turn to Page 6



President Arroyo expresses her condolences to Sen. Benigno 'Noynoy' Aquino III as she visits the wake of former President Corazon Aquino at the Manila Cathedral yesterday.

AP

Terminal just before 3 a.m. from San Francisco, Mrs. Arroyo boarded a coaster with some Cabinet officials which immediately left at the head of a convoy.

Palace reporters tried to follow the presidential convoy but their vehicles were stopped by policemen at the airport who said instructions "radioed in" barred them from covering the event.

The journalists, however, still managed to follow and enter the palace a few minutes ahead of the President, whose convoy had been slowed down by the heavy downpour.

When she arrived at the crowded Manila Cathedral, she was met by her former finance chief Cesar Purisima and was brought to a small room while members of her party — including Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita, Press Secretary Cory Remonde and Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo — proceeded straight to the pews near the casket.

Purisima is one of the so-called "Hyatt 10" Cabinet officials who resigned and demanded that Mrs. Arroyo step down from office in 2005.

Also inside the holding room were Mrs. Aquino's nephews Rafael Laga and Public Works Secretary Hermogenes Ebdane.

Several Cabinet members were already at the Manila Cathedral before the President arrived. They included Presidential Management Staff director general Hermogenes Esperon, Ebdane and Presidential Adviser for Political Affairs Gabriel Claudio.

At around 3:40 a.m., Mrs. Arroyo, wearing a cream pantsuit, emerged from the left-side entrance of the Manila Cathedral and was greeted by Mrs. Aquino's son Sen. Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III. Other members of the Aquino family were not in the cathedral.

Also with Mrs. Arroyo were her son Camarines Sur Rep.

Diosdado "Dato" Arroyo, Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago, Justice Secretary Agnes Devadara, Metropolitan Manila Development Authority Chairman Bayan Fernando and his wife Marikina City Mayor Marides Fernando, and Transportation Secretary Leandro Mendoza.

The slow-moving line of people who wanted to catch a last glimpse of the former president had to be stopped momentarily to allow Mrs. Arroyo to pay her last respects, she then sat at the front row with Noynoy to her left and her image consultant and Mrs. Aquino's sister-in-law Lupita Aquino-Kashiwaha to her right.

Mrs. Arroyo, Noynoy and Kashiwaha were seen talking to one another while most of the people inside the cathedral looked on.

After a few minutes, the President stood up and briefly prayed over the casket for the second time and left along with her Cabinet officials. The visit lasted less than 10 minutes.

## Statesmanship

The President had been warned by both critics and supporters that she might be booed and heckled, especially after Noynoy's statements that he and his siblings were not looking forward to seeing her at the work.

Mrs. Arroyo cut short her US trip to be able to pay her last respects to Mrs. Aquino before she is laid to rest.

Remonde later told reporters the President was "very happy she was able to pay her personal respects" and felt that she was well-received.

"We really appreciate the civility (of Noynoy)," he said. Remonde described Noynoy's treatment of the President as "a gesture of statesmanship of the highest order."

He said Mrs. Arroyo had intended to stay for at least 30 minutes but when she saw the long line of people waiting for

their turn to view Mrs. Aquino's remains "she told Noynoy that she does not want to cause delay."

Remonde said some members of the official family had served under Mrs. Aquino while some of her relatives hold posts in the Arroyo administration.

## 'Hawks versus doves'

Remonde disclosed that while the President was determined to visit the wake, "hawks and doves" in the Cabinet debated over the wisdom of a gesture while they were still in the US.

He said some Cabinet officials, whom he declined to identify, did not want Mrs. Arroyo to go to the wake as she might be ridiculed. "Some of the Cabinet members were apprehensive that it is not the person but the office of presidency that could be hit."

She said she has made a lot of sacrifices in her career as public servant so she was willing to endure one more for the sake of political civility and at the same time propriety, Remonde said.

"Statements have been made about certain things but in the end the President was willing to take the risk," he said.

What the President did was proper and she felt it was the right thing to do," he said.

Mrs. Arroyo also had a Mass at 8 a.m. at the Heroes' Hall in the Palace for Mrs. Aquino that was attended by Cabinet officials and employees.

After the Mass, the President led a novena prayer for the former leader. She later decided to cancel her official activities for the day — including a breast-feeding promotion program — in deference to Mrs. Aquino's funeral.

"We pray for the healing of unhappy feelings President Corazon Aquino's death now leaves in our hearts. Be with us Lord, during our moment of sorrow and loneliness. You are our Rock, our fortress and our strength," Mrs. Arroyo prayed.

"We trust in You and hope in Your glorious resurrection, we lift up our grief and sorrow confident that You will change mourning to rejoicing that our beloved President Corazon Aquino now rests in peace," she said.

## 'Politicization' of funeral hit

Malacananj also hit alleged effort of Makati City Mayor Jejomar Binay to politicize the death of Mrs. Aquino and turn the nation's grief against President Arroyo.

Political Adviser for Political Affairs Gabriel Claudio Binay was responding to a warning from Mrs. Arroyo's aides upheaval because of the Filipinos' "awakening."

"It would do greater justice to the solemnity and dignity of President Cory's burial to refrain from using it for partisan ends," Claudio told *The STAR* in a text message.

He said such a statement was a cry from the gutture of Noynoy who courteously received the President when she visited his mother's wake.

"The passing of a great leader, a national treasure could be an occasion for all of us freedom-loving Filipinos to unite and reconcile. Let us use this occasion as a moment of reconciliation of the entire nation so we shall not take notice of this. This is an appeal to our countrymen not to politicize the death of our dear former President Cory Aquino," Cabinet Secretary Silvestre Bello III said.

## Cause for sainthood

In San Fernando, Pampanga, Mrs. Arroyo's half sister Cielo Macapagal-Salgado said she would support a move to petition Pope Benedict XVI to consider Mrs. Aquino for beatification and eventually sainthood.

"She was a living saint, after all," Salgado, 68, told *The STAR* in a telephone interview after she attended the funeral services for Mrs. Aquino at the Manila Cathedral yesterday morning.

Close to 4,000 people have joined an online campaign in Facebook calling for "the promotion of the sainthood of the Philippine's former president, Corazon Cojuangco-Aquino and to petition the Roman Catholic Church to begin the investigation for the canonization process. The Facebook drive was launched on Aug. 2.

Salgado, whose mother was the first wife of the late President Diosdado Macapagal, said Mrs. Aquino is already in heaven and "therefore, we should be the ones to ask her to be canonized."

"We should pray to her to help us remove selfishness in our midst once and for all and for the unity of all Filipinos," said Salgado who was Pampanga vice governor during the Aquino administration.

Salgado is known to her provincemates as very religious and, like Mrs. Aquino, a devotee of Our Lady of Fatima.

"She (Cory) offered her sufferings for the country; she offered her pains to Jesus Christ for the intentions of the country. She modeled her life after that of Jesus," Salgado said.

"It will of course be a long process that will eventually require a miracle from Cory herself," Salgado said of a beatification process.

"We pray that God can pray for the transformation of our country," she said.

Salgado recalled that she first met Mrs. Aquino even before former President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972.

"It was at a party that I met her in 1971 and I was impressed with her. I decided she would be *niyung* (godmother) for my youngest daughter Ma Victoria," she recalled.

In 1987 when Mrs. Aquino was already president, then newly appointed Pampanga officer-in-charge Bren Guiao asked Salgado's brother Arthur to be his running mate in the coming gubernatorial elections.

"My brother declined the offer but he suggested me. I was also hesitant, but I prayed

for a sign and thought that if Cory herself would ask me, then I would," Salgado said.

She recalled that days later, "there was a road inauguration in Magalang (Pampanga) and I was at the end of the long line of personalities. All of a sudden, she (Mrs. Aquino) called for me and told me to run for vice governor." She did and won the elections. Guiao was elected governor.

## Servant of God

The Facebook cause described Mrs. Aquino as "not only an icon of democracy but also a Servant of God who valued and promoted prayer."

The Facebook sainthood drive noted that Mrs. Aquino "exhibited heroically the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity and the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance."

"She lived a simple, modest and practical life and remained vigilant and active in the promotion of life, truth, and social justice," it added.

## Treasured rosary

Testimonies from Mrs. Aquino's personal confessor Fr. Catalino Arevalo SJ have pointed to the late president's saintly qualities.

Arevalo delivered the homily at the last Mass for Mrs. Aquino.

Arevalo had written, long before Mrs. Aquino discovered her illness, that a rosary given to her by Sister Lucia dos Santos, one of the three visionaries of Fatima, had been touched by the Blessed Virgin Mary herself.

"Some of the Sisters (in Sister Lucia's convent) believe that Our Lady, during one of her visits, held the rosary in her own hands and blessed it for Mrs. Aquino, promising her presence and strength to her in times specially of suffering and need," the Jesuit priest said.

"That is why Sr. Lucia reminded *Tita Cory* to take good care of the rosary. Our Lady had held it in her own hands," Arevalo said.

—With Ding Cervantes