

'GMA may linger beyond 2010'

Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago said yesterday she believed that the pronouncement of President Arroyo to US President Barack Obama that she would be out of office by June 30, 2010 could not be taken as an assurance.

Santiago, chair of the Senate
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committee on foreign relations who was with Mrs. Arroyo during the meeting with Obama at the White House, said her impression was that the country's president received a cold shoulder treatment from the American leader.

This, she said, was because Mrs. Arroyo's statement about her stepping down in 2010 was like a trial balloon.

"She said it because the US President was talking about the global war on terror. And she was saying, in effect, I will help as long as I can, and that is the context (in which) she added the statement: I'll be out of office by July 2010. But President Obama did not have any particular response at that point," Santiago told reporters.

She described it as a trial balloon because it was said like she was out to elicit a reaction from the American president.

"I (referring to Mrs. Arroyo) think I am going to run, what do you have to say about it and he (Obama) did not address it at all," Santiago said.

Asked if it was an assurance that Mrs. Arroyo would indeed step down in 2010, Santiago said: "No, she did not say it categorically."

"It was part of a sentence. It's like saying I will help in your global war on terror as long as I can do so and then she added in effect but only until July so maybe she was, for example, waiting for President Obama to say, well if you can help us farther than that," Santiago said.

But Obama had no response to that, she said, noting "in effect he (Obama) was non-committal."

Santiago said Mrs. Arroyo was not bound by her statement and she will insist that it be interpreted in its context.

The senator said she was not sure if that meant the Philippines was no longer important to the US or that America would not interfere in the country's elections.

"Well, you know, I think she wanted to preempt President Obama in some indirect way. Do you have any plans? In my view I'm supposed to step down but she did not say I am supposed to leave public office," Santiago said.

"So she can step down as president (but) she can still run for congresswoman and then run maybe for prime minister," Santiago said. — Aurea Calica