

# GMA off to Libya with 'very lean' delegation

By PIA LEE-BRAGO

President Arroyo will leave this afternoon with "a very lean" delegation to attend the African Union (AU) summit in Tripoli, Libya that will also be an opportunity for her to meet with the heads of African

states.

Diplomatic sources said yesterday the President was supposed to attend only the 40th anniversary of the Great Al Fateh Revolution on Sept.

1 upon the invitation of Libyan leader Col. Muammar Qaddafi.

But the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) announced on Friday that the President

would also attend the AU special summit to allow her to meet with officials of African states which are also members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

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Palace officials refused to issue any statement on the visit of the President to Libya or to any other country this month.

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said announcements and details on the President's foreign visits would come from the DFA.

The Palace has been tight-lipped on matters relating to the President's foreign visits after controversies regarding excessively large delegations and lavish spending were reported in the media.

The President is also set to attend the first Special NAM Ministerial Meeting on Inter-faith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and Development, which the Philippines will host from Dec. 1 to 3.

"Initially, it was being planned for her to attend the AU summit but her availability could only be confirmed much later," a DFA official, who asked not to be named, told **The STAR**.

DFA sources said the President would "go straight to Manila from Libya" after she attends the summit and the 40th anniversary of the Great Al Fateh Revolution.

Mrs. Arroyo was invited by Libya, which current chairs the AU, to attend the two-day special summit on the settlement of conflicts in Africa aimed at addressing peace and security issues in the continent.

DFA officials said the President's "very lean" delegation is composed of Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo, Labor Secretary Marianito Roque, and Foreign Affairs Undersecretary for Special Concerns Rafael Seguis.

Another official said, "It is

imperative for the President to attend trips of this type so she can engage more dynamically with the countries of Africa who would be there for the AU summit."

"Meetings of this type are rather rare opportunities. These are like obligations," the official said.

Qaddafi also invited Mrs. Arroyo to attend the AU Special Summit on Aug. 31.

The DFA said the Libyan government has invited leaders and dignitaries from several countries to attend the anniversary celebration.

The visit from Sept. 1 to 2, the DFA said, would sustain the ties between the Philippines and Libya since 1976 when diplomatic relations were established.

Libya played a significant role in bringing peace and development in Mindanao and was instrumental to the conclusion of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement and in the 1996 final peace agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front.

Since the 70s, high-level official visits have been frequent, capped by the state visit to Libya of the President in July 2006.

Delegates will participate in three workshops on specific peace and security issues, an Executive Council meeting, and an assembly of heads of state and government.

During her visit to Libya, the President intends to meet with the heads of state of Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea in connection with the Philippines' bid for observer status in the Organization of Islamic Conference.

- With Marvin Sy