PRESIDENT Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo links arms with members of the Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats and Nationalist People's Coalition following the signing of the Lakas-CMD-NPC coalition agreement in Malacanang's Rizal Room last December 17. Also in photo are (from left) former Justice Secretary Hernando Perez, Speaker Jose de Venecia, Jr., Rep. Alfredo Maranon of Negros Occidental and other coalition members.

Historic alliance backs reconciliation, reform program

TWENTY-FIVE congressmen and 13 governors belonging to the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC) have joined hands with the ruling Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats (Lakas-CMD) in what was described as a historic alliance to support President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's program of reform and reconciliation.

Speaker Jose de Venecia, Jr. president of Lakas-CMD and Congressman Alfredo Maranon of the second district of Negros Occidental, head of the NPC contingent in the House of Representatives, led the initial list of signatories to the National Coalition Agreement which aims to forge a common stand in support of the President in her vision beyond 2004.

"This is historic in the sense that for the first time we have decided to transform this Lakas-CMD-NPC coalition in Congress to a nationwide coalition in response to the President's call for reform and reconciliation," De Venecia said.

"This will be a chapter by chapter series of agreements intended to solidify, enlarge and dramatize the importance of this coalition," he added.

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The Speaker noted that since the inception of the Rainbow Coalition that included the country's two major parties in 1992, a total of 228 vital economic and social reform laws have been passed.

The ensuing Sunshine Coalition of 2001 also involving the two major parties, he stressed, was able to push 911 bills, 17 of which had already passed the House.

De Venecia stressed that today's event, held at Malacanang's Rizal Hall, was only the start of a series of alliances meant to rally forces behind President Macapagal-Arroyo.

He said that in the next few days, it would be the turn of the Liberal and Nacionalista parties as well as some 3,000 Ulamas comprising the largest Muslim group to forge a coalition with Lakas-CMD.

The national coalition agreement signed by members of Lakas and NPC in certain party chapters in specific provinces, congressional districts and cities, will field a common senatorial ticket in support of the President and her running mate as well as the Sunshine coalition advocating for constitutional changes and a shift to a parliamentary system of government.

The coalition's selection process will respect the equity of the incumbent of congressmen, governors and city mayors and other incumbent provincial and municipal officials.

Signing the agreement for NPC, among others, were chairman Faustino Dy Jr. of Isabela, president Frisco San Juan, and secretary general Joseph Felix Durano. Signing for Lakas-CMD were Secretary General Hernando Perez and Sr. Deputy Secretary General Gabriel Claudio.

The signatories representing certain party chapters in specific provinces, congressional district and cities were Governors Tomas N. Joson of Nueva Ecija, Jose Villa Agustin Yap of Tarlac, Vicente Valera of Abra, Isidro Zayco of Negros Occidental, Victor Agbayani of Pangasinan, Victor Francisco Ortega of La Union, Ramoncito Ong of Aurora, Vicente Magsaysay of Zambales, Florencio Miraflores of Aklan, Enrico Aumentado of Bohol, Rogelio Espina of Biliran and Isagani Amatong of Zamboanga del Norte.

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