

# 'More work, less politics'

By PAOLO ROMERO

President Arroyo marked her first year in office yesterday with a pledge to work more and engage in politics less.

"I will dedicate the second year of my term to the workers," Mrs. Arroyo told reporters after a Mass at the Mary Queen of Peace Shrine on E. de los Santos Avenue (EDSA) in Mandaluyong City which had also served as stage center for people power II. "They will serve as my inspiration."

Yesterday's simple rites marking the culmination of the four-day people power II were almost eclipsed by protest actions from militant people's organizations and Church-based groups denouncing a worsening national economy and the President's decision to allow US military involvement in efforts to crush the Abu Sayyaf in Western Mindanao.

main avenue leading to Malacañang as riot police monitored the protest marches and rallies.

Last year's popular uprising, backed by the Church and the military, was triggered by a failed impeachment trial of then President Joseph Estrada who was eventually unseated and replaced by Mrs. Arroyo as the constitutional successor.

In yesterday's commemorative rites, the President heard Mass officiated by Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin. In his homily, Sin told politicians to stop treating the poor as objects of charity.

The President has vowed to reduce poverty by pursuing open-market economic

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President Arroyo makes the traditional 'mano' on Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin after a Mass commemorating EDSA II at the EDSA Shrine in Mandaluyong City yesterday.

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policies that she said would create more job opportunities.

Critics charged that her meetings with the urban poor over the past few days were mere publicity gimmicks meant to gather wider support for her bid for a six-year term in 2004.

"I will heed the advice of Cardinal Sin. It would be better if my meetings with the poor are not disturbed by photographers and the media," Mrs. Arroyo said.

After the Mass, Mrs. Arroyo made the rounds of a number of blighted communities in Metro Manila where she said attempts to oust her failed because of the people's support.

"I thank all of you. I thank God that we survived a year despite the hardships around us, all over the world, and politicking. This is because of the triumph of people power... prayers to God who we also call in the Koran as Allah," the President told a predominantly Muslim crowd in Culliat, Quezon City.

In her address, the President cited Public Works and Highways Secretary Simeon Datumanong as the first Muslim Cabinet member since the watch of her father, the late President Diosdado Macapagal.

She said hardcore supporters of her successor should stop their attempts to destabilize her administration because they would never

succeed.

She shrugged predictions by communist rebel leader Jose Ma. Sison that she would be unseated because of four reasons: corruption, US military intervention, security operations against "rising mass movements," and economic slump.

Defense Secretary Angelo Reyes said Sison was a propagandist and should not be taken seriously.

Mrs. Arroyo also held dialogues organized by the Catholic Archdiocese of Manila in other depressed areas - Barangay Payatas, Kristong Hari and Freedom Park in Quezon City, Smokey Mountain in Tondo, Napocor Compound in Muntinlupa City and Welfareville in Mandaluyong City.

Leftist and militant groups who were Mrs. Arroyo's allies in toppling the Estrada administration asserted that her leadership has been a failure.

The militant groups were joined by party-list Representatives Satur Ocampo and Liza Maza who assailed Mrs. Arroyo

for alleged failure to address the country's

pressing problems on poverty and corruption.

Former President Corazon Aquino, who also captured the presidency in an almost bloodless people power in February 1986, indicated she fully supports the Arroyo administration.

"I am a fan of President Arroyo. We have many problems, but she is doing her best to address them," Aquino told reporters after the Mass at the shrine.

"She has many critics, but she's certainly doing her best," Aquino added.

For his part, former President Fidel Ramos said there should be a two-year moratorium on criticisms "so that we could get on the economic recovery platform by about early 2003, and from thereon, we would get on a path of high growth at maybe six to eight percent GDP (gross domestic product) growth rate."

Ramos said the country must eliminate poverty in about 10 years.

The leftist Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan) branded Mrs. Arroyo as a "hypocrite just like Estrada."

Bayan said the Arroyo administration was a "hopelessly corrupt, rabidly pro-American, militarist regime."

"If (Arroyo) insists on being Washington's little drummer girl in

Asia, she better watch out. We will fight her all the way on this," Bayan said.

Bayan spokesman Renato Reyes charged that Mrs. Arroyo has not fulfilled her promises. "She has betrayed the people's trust. She has taken economic and political policies that are anti-people." — With reports from Sheila Crisostomo, Sandy Araneta, Cecille Suerte Felipe, wire services