

# GMA issues directives to mitigate impact of rising oil prices

By MARVIN SY

President Arroyo has lined up a number of directives aimed at providing relief to the masses from the rising cost of oil in the world market.

Speaking to Palace reporters during a briefing held after a Cabinet meeting, the President announced that apart from the reduction in the tariff rate for imported oil, six other measures would be implemented to mitigate the impact of rising oil prices.

Mrs. Arroyo disclosed that the government would file a petition before the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) to "expand the discount" given to low-income end users of electricity under the lifeline rate program.

No details were provided by the

Chief Executive about the petition apart from saying that she wants the poorest families to enjoy bigger discounts on electricity.

The lifeline rate is being implemented by the ERC to help low-income users who cannot afford to pay electricity at full cost.

This applies only to households consuming up to 100 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity a month.

Currently, households consuming zero to 50-kWh a month are enjoying a 50 percent discount, the 51 to 70-kWh consumers get a 35 percent discount, while those using an average of 71 to 100-kWh receive a 20 percent discount.

The idea of the lifeline rate system is that the bigger consumers or those who average over 100-kWh a month subsidize the low-income consumers.

Mrs. Arroyo also ordered an increase in the production of food and to improve its delivery to the people.

The President said the government would fast-track the development and improvement of irrigation, farm-to-market roads and post-harvest facilities for the agriculture sector.

In order to improve the delivery of food from the farms to the urban areas, the President also ordered that more *Tindahan Natin* outlets be estab-

lished.

The *Tindahan Natin* stores of the government offer cheaper rice, vegetables, meat and other basic goods to the masses.

To provide employment to out-of-school youth in the rural areas, the President directed the Department of Public Works and Highways to hire more "pulis oysters" to maintain the cleanliness of the roads.

"We will expand this particularly in the urban areas where we would hit a bigger part of our population," the President said in Filipino.

The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) was also directed to provide

more technical vocation courses, particularly those where the demand for employment is high.

According to the President, carpentry skills are in demand now since the construction industry has started to grow again.

She also noted that the Middle East could offer more job opportunities now as its economy is expected to grow even faster because of the rising price of oil.

"So they will hire more workers and they favor Filipinos," Mrs. Arroyo said.

"We will also expand employment in call centers and business process outsourcing," she added.