

GMA orders recall of 20 political appointees

'More than half of 3,500 appointees lack eligibility'

By PAOLO ROMERO

President Arroyo ordered yesterday the removal or transfer of some 20 officials from her office even as Malacañang officials defended her prerogative to make appointments.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said Mrs. Arroyo's order covers presidential assistants, undersecretaries and directors.

The directive came in the wake of remarks by outgoing Civil Service Commission (CSC) chair Karina Constantino David regarding the huge number of political appointees under the Arroyo administration and how such a situation undermined the professionalism of the bureaucracy.

Ermita said he submitted the draft memorandum for the removal or transfer of the officials under the Office of the President (OP) for Mrs. Arroyo's signature on Monday. He said she brought the memo with her to Switzerland.

"This is not the first time that the matter of whether we have so many presidential advisers or assistants are coming out, but the President had it reviewed and many of them, about 15 to 20, will be terminated or will be funneled back to the agencies where they came from," Ermita said.

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He said the Palace is not afraid of any probe on the issue despite David's announcement of her readiness to testify in case the matter is investigated.

"If they want a probe, why not? And we will respond to the requirements to address this matter," he said.

Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye, who is with Mrs. Arroyo

in her trip, hit back at David for her statement.

"Her sweeping generalizations in a luncheon speech do a disservice to the over one million civil servants, both career and appointed, who work diligently each and every day to serve the people of the Philippines," Bunye said.

"Be that as it may, all presidential appointees must perform. If they don't, they have to go, whatever their credentials may be," he said.

'No check and balance'

David said the large number of presidential appointees holding managerial positions is messing up the government organizational structure.

David said that of the 3,500 career people that hold managerial positions in government, less than half have managerial capabilities.

"These appointees of the President do not pass through the approval process of the CSC. There is no check and bal-

ance," David told *The STAR* in an interview yesterday.

David said Presidential Decree No. 1 issued by former President Ferdinand Marcos allows such appointments but only in "exceptional situations."

"So it should be that career people are to be appointed or if not, those appointed have to be qualified within a year," she said.

David noted that non-eligible presidential appointees include retired military and police personnel.

"Aside from the presidential appointees, the laws also define the number of undersecretaries and assistant secretaries per department," she said.

"Under the administration, there are so many excess undersecretaries and assistant secretaries. There are no plantilla positions but they have the approval of the President," she stressed.

David said the agencies that have excessive number of

such officials are the Department of Agrarian Reform, Department of National Defense, Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Department of the Interior and Local Government.

"With every single excess in position, there is also an excess in staff members. The excess is huge," she said.

Asked how this affects the bureaucracy, David said: "The organizational structure gets messed up."

But two groups of government workers criticized David for her "highly political" statement.

Mandy Grata, chairman of the Convergence and Vigilant, Empowered and Responsibility Government Employees, said David "failed to professionalize the bureaucracy after serving almost as long as President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo." She said David's criticism was "very unprofessional and uncalled for."

David also drew criticism

from Babae para sa Kauran.

"We've had several women Cabinet officials appointed by President Arroyo. I fortunately some of them betrayed her. We also have numerous women undersecretaries, assistant secretaries and directors appointed by the President," the group president Ruth Vasquez said.

Meanwhile, Senators Francis Escudero and Francis Pangilinan called for a review of the appointing powers of chief executive.

"I think there is a need to review the appointment powers of the President, be it President Arroyo or any other president because he/she allowed to appoint 6,000 people in government," Escudero said.

Pangilinan also backed David's call for the immediate passage of the "Career Executive Service System II." - With Christina Menez and Reinir Padua