

# GMA orders Cabinet men to disperse to provinces

By PAOLO ROMERO

Upon orders of President Arroyo, Cabinet officials will disperse to the provinces this week to personally check on the local food situation and immediately and directly intervene to address shortages or price surges.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said the President will formally issue the directive during tomorrow's Cabinet meeting at the Palace that would tackle the alarming rise in prices of food and fuel.

"There is a need to closely check the situation on the ground and the President is not content only with the numbers but also actual accounts and descriptions for us to have a clearer picture on the food situation and we can act decisively," Ermita said in a telephone interview while en route to Manila from Dipolog City yesterday.

He said details and specific actions are as important as broad policies addressing a critical issue such as food in the country. He pointed out that hunger incidents in

impoverished areas were reduced not just through policy issuances but also through direct "on-the-ground" interventions in affected communities.

Ermita, who is also Cabinet officer for Regional Development (CORD) for Region 9, already started to comply with Mrs. Arroyo's order and visited various parts of Zamboanga del Norte over the weekend.

"What we will find out is whether there is a supply problem and why, and deal with it decisively and within the law," he said.

He said in Zamboanga del Norte, prices of rice are beginning to stabilize with commercial rice ranging from P38 to P43.

He said he has already requested the National Food Authority (NFA) to increase its allocation for government subsidized rice from the present 1,200 bags per week to cope with the increased demand for cheaper rice.