

GMA dissolves gov't peace panel

By EDITH REGALADO

President Arroyo has disbanded the government panel negotiating with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) following the controversy over the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) that was supposed to be forged with the separatist rebels.

Executive Secretary Erlinda Ermita said that henceforth, any negotiation with rebel groups would only proceed if the rebels disarmed and moved out of their camps.

He said the decision to dissolve the peace panel, led by retired Lt. Gen. Rodolfo Garcia, was reached during the meeting of the Cabinet security cluster in Palayan City, Nueva Ecija last Tuesday.

"Consequently, the President has ordered that the government panel for talks with the MILF be dissolved to align all the peace initiatives in accordance with this directive," Ermita told reporters.

Ermita said a new negotiating panel will be appointed but he did not say when.

"We have not totally scrapped negotiations with the MILF. We just dissolved the panel and will wait for positive developments in the future," Ermita said.

He said Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Hermogenes Esguerra Jr. will continue to maintain communication with the International Monitoring Team, the Malaysian government group that

[Return to Page 4](#)

GMA dissolves

From Page 1

facilitates the peace talks, and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).

Ermita had also met with ambassadors of the OIC, led by Sayed Al-Masry, in Malacañang and explained the government position.

In a separate statement, Mrs. Arroyo said her government would no longer sign the controversial draft agreement that would have given the MILF authority over their own Muslim homeland.

"In the light of the recent violent incidents committed by lawless violent groups, the government will no longer sign the agreement," she said.

"There will be no peace gained through violence, no peace agreement can and will be reached through intimidation or the barrel of a gun," she said.

The MOA-AD was supposed to give the MILF more territory to be called the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity, but the signing of the agreement scheduled last Aug. 5 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, was stopped after the Supreme Court issued a temporary restraining order in favor of sev-

eral local officials who petitioned the Court to stop the signing.

Protesting local officials complained that government negotiators did not consult the residents who would be affected by the creation of the Bangsamoro homeland.

Angered by the court freeze, two MILF commanders Ameril Umbra Kato and Abdurahman Macapaar launched deadly raids in Lanao del Norte, Sarangani and North Cotabato.

The raids left more than 50 civilians and soldiers dead, while subsequent military offensives have so far killed more than 100 MILF rebels and led to the capture of more than a dozen rebel camps.