

# GMA says she's fully committed to peace process

By JOHN UNSON

CAMP SIONGCO, Shariff Kabunsuan - President Arroyo reiterated her commitment to the southern peace process yesterday but ordered the military to continue isolating commanders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to restore normalcy in Central Mindanao.

Mrs. Arroyo, who visited the Army's 6th Infantry Division headquarters yesterday, also pinned medals on more than 30 military officers and enlisted soldiers for their gallantry in recent encounters with the recalcitrant group of Ameril Ombra Kato, chief of the MILF's 105th Base Command.

Among those the President awarded with a Bronze Cross Medal was the former chief secretary of the government's ceasefire committee, Lt. Col. Dickson Hermoso, commander of the Army's 7th Infantry Battalion, who played a key role in the liberation last August of more than a dozen villages in North Cotabato from occupation by Kato and his men.

The President described as "morale boosting" the bravery of soldiers in fighting lawless MILF groups.

Mrs. Arroyo lamented the attacks perpetrated during the observance of the Ramadan.

Also present at the awarding were officials of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) led by Gov. Datu Zaldy Ampatuan, chairman of the region's inter-agency regional peace and order council, and the auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Cotabato, Msgr. Jose Colin Bagaforo, a staunch advocate of inter-faith dialogue among Central Mindanao's Muslim and Christian residents.

"We remain committed to the peace process. There is no alternative to peace," Mrs. Arroyo said.

The President emphasized that the military would have to continue isolating renegade guerrilla forces to maintain peace and order in areas vulnerable to their attacks.

The President, who was accompanied by Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro and Social Welfare and Development Secretary Esperanza Cabral, also handed over cash assistance to families of soldiers killed in encounters with MILF forces and to uniformed men who sustained injuries in recent clashes in the provinces of Maguindanao, Shariff Kabunsuan and North Cotabato.

Mrs. Arroyo also brought 7,000 sleeping bags for

soldiers and promised to give each soldier P300 worth of mobile phone cards they can use to communicate with their families.