

Palace: GMA won't stay beyond 2010

Malacañang officials maintained yesterday that President Arroyo has no intention of staying in office beyond 2010 amid threats from the opposition of mass protest rallies to oppose any move to lift term limits of incumbent officials.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita and Press Secretary Jesus Dureza, in separate statements, also reiterated that the latest attempts to amend the Constitution came from the House of Representatives and the Palace had nothing to do with it.

"The President has no intention to stay in office beyond the constitutional term which is 2010," Dureza said. "She has said that so many times and she is now focused on taking care of our concerns as a nation."

He said Mrs. Arroyo was concerned on "governance to prepare our nation

By PAOLO ROMERO

in case the global economic crisis reaches us."

"When she turns over the presidency to her successor in 2010, the country would be stronger," he said.

Ermita described the growing votes in favor of the Charter change resolution in the House as "an improvement" but said the Palace cannot interfere in the work of Congress.

He pointed out the country remains a democracy and there are several modes of amending the Constitution. He said in the end, the amendments would still be subject to a plebiscite.

Meanwhile, security at the Palace was tightened amid reports that a series anti-Arroyo protest actions would be launched yesterday.

Truckloads of anti-riot policemen and soldiers were seen deployed in the gates

near Nagtahan Bridge and Ayala Bridge. Mendiola Bridge was likewise closed to traffic.

Mrs. Arroyo continued with her public engagements that included a one-on-one interview with The STAR before noon followed by an early Christmas party for journalists covering her and their families.

In the afternoon, she met with some Filipino inventors and received a courtesy call from a group of visiting US lawmakers headed by Rep. David Price.

She left for Hong Kong at 6:30 p.m. via a commercial flight to attend as a speaker of the Clinton Global Initiative.

"You can always expect that there are people who will be against it (Charter change)," Ermita said referring to the protest rallies. "That is the essence of democracy, you can't expect everybody to just agree."