

GMA lauds Pacquiao, says feat testament to Filipino spirit

By PAOLO ROMERO

President Arroyo lauded yesterday boxing champion Manny Pacquiao for winning that vaunted bout with Oscar de la Hoya.

In a statement, Deputy Presidential Spokesperson Lorelei Fajardo said Mrs. Arroyo would like to extend her profound congratulations to Pacquiao on his victory.

"His boxing feat is testament to the spirit of the Filipino, (which is) our resiliency and strength to face the challenges that come our way," read the statement.

Fajardo said Mrs. Arroyo also congratulated Pacquiao's team that helped him win the fight. "Pacquiao has proven once again (that) *magaling ang Pinoy at bayani ang Pinoy* (the Filipino is great, the Filipino is a hero)," read the statement.

"We must as a nation work together as Team Philippines to face the challenges of the world economic downturn."

Mrs. Arroyo and the First Family watched the fight at Mikey's Grill, a restaurant owned by Pampanga Rep. Juan Miguel Arroyo along Diosdado Macapagal Boulevard in Pasay City, according to Press Secretary Jesus Dureza.

Dureza said Pacquiao was already a winner to Filipinos, although he was an underdog to bookies and matchmakers abroad.

"As the whole world watched in awe, once again

Manny prevailed convincingly and in style, showing true Filipino grit and grace with pre-match odds against him," he said.

"We are all truly proud of him. His triumph is again a great unifier of Filipinos here and all over the world. Manny indeed is making boxing history. This is a shining moment for all Filipinos."

In a telephone interview, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita, who monitored the fight on radio, said Pacquiao's victory came as a boost to the morale of Filipinos at a time when the economy appears gloomy.

"We are trying to weather this global economic crisis and the Arroyo administration is trying to ward off new destabilization attempts again," he said.

Trade Secretary Peter Favila said Pacquiao's victory could spur consumer confidence and inspire a little commerce.

"We might see some enterprising Filipinos making a business out of Pacquiao items," he told THE STAR in a telephone interview.

On the other hand Sen. Juan Miguel Zubiri wants to bestow on Pacquiao—a fellow Mindanaoan—the title of "Mindanao Ambassador of Peace."

"Manny Pacquiao has once again shown the world the Filipino fighting spirit," he said.

"The thirst for excellence and the hunger for the victory. He has shown the world that we are never the underdog and that we will never be scared of a bigger opponent."

"We in Mindanao are proud of him and we in Mindanao should endorse him as the ambassador of peace. He is the only one that could convince the people of Mindanao to unite for peace."

"That could be his lasting legacy for our country. *Mabuhay Manny*, the son of Mindanao and the ambassador of peace."

In Fort Bonifacio, Armed Forces chief Gen. Alexander Yano canceled his appointments for the day and together with Army commander Lt. Gen. Victor Ibrado and Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. watched the fight at the Army gym.

"We are one with the nation in celebrating the victory of People's Champ Manny Pacquiao," he said.

"His triumph is a triumph for the whole Filipino people, whom we have witnessed to have stood together as one nation to support, cheer and pray for Manny during his fight."

Lt. Col. Romeo Brawner, Army spokesman, said soldiers from ASEAN member countries currently participating in the 18th ASEAN Armies Rifle Meet in Capas, Tarlac took a respite to watch the "Dream Match" and cheered for Pacquiao.

The Army master sergeant showed Filipino soldiers that will power could help them perform their mission successfully to defeat threats to national security, Brawner said.

Catholic bishops joined the nation in rejoicing over the victory of Pacquiao.

"Of course, we rejoice with the rest of Filipinos," said Calococan Bishop Deogracias Iniguez, public affairs chairman of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

"We hope this will inspire us to fight the present evils we face as a nation."

In General Santos City, Pacquiao's mother, Dionisia Pacquiao, said her son proved now that he did not fight De la Hoya for money, but for honor and for his country.

"I was thankful that nothing worse had happened to my son in his fight there in the United States," she said.

Mrs. Pacquiao was fearful as the fight progressed but when the referee declared her son the winner by TKO, she shouted

with pride, "That's my son!"

General Santos Mayor Pedro Acharon Jr. said the city government will prepare a grand hero's welcome for Pacquiao upon his return.

"Manny once again honored the city," he said. "He deserves to be honored."

In Koronadal City, capital of South Cotabato province, the fight turned the city into a virtual "ghost town" for at least three hours.

Only few tricycles and cars were seen on the streets as most of the people stayed home to watch the fight on television.

In Mang Gorio and McGregor, a famous restaurant and coffee shop here, the owner set up a wide screen inside to give customers a "ringside" view of the fight.

Koronadal City Mayor Fernando Miguel and other local officials lauded Pacquiao for giving honor again to the country.

Residents without television at home got a blow-by-blow account of the fight in Ilonggo via Bombo Radyo Marbel.

In Tacurong City, tricycle drivers and street vendors rushed to their favorites eateries to watch the fight on TV.

"People across SOCCSKSARGEN area and the entire central Mindanao region were preoccupied watching the bout on their TV sets," SOCCSKSARGEN police director Chief Superintendent Fidel Cimatu told THE STAR in a long distance interview. — With Christina Mendez, James Mananghaya, Helen Flores, Ramil Bajo