

# GMA to let CARP extension lapse into law

President Arroyo is not likely to sign the controversial congressional resolution extending the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) but will instead let it lapse into law, Palace officials said yesterday.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita, however, said the move should not alarm farmers protesting the joint resolution because the Palace intends to use the six-month extension to push for a better CARP law.

Ermita pointed out the joint resolution approved by the Senate and the House of Representatives was not the version Mrs. Arroyo certified as urgent.

Ermita said the act of vetoing a measure approved by both the Senate

and the House is no light matter and the Palace wants to use the six-month extension to push for the original version as well as funding.

"The President wants to have a measure that would accomplish the objectives of the CARP. We hope to have a measure that would be agreeable to the farmers that would also protect them from unscrupulous financiers," he said.

Presidential Adviser for Political Affairs Gabriel Claudio said the Office of the President received the official copy of the resolution on Dec. 23 and would allow it to lapse into law on Jan. 23. An approved bill that is left unsigned lapses into law after 30 days.

"The enrolled copy of the joint resolution was received by the Office of the President last Dec. 23 and the President will likely let it lapse into law," Claudio said in a text message to reporters.

Last month Congress adopted a joint resolution extending the coverage of the CARP for six months or until June 30, 2009 for lands offered under

the Voluntary Offer to Sell and the Voluntary Land Transfer but it excluded the compulsory land acquisition scheme.

Agrarian Reform Secretary Nasser Pangandaman earlier recommended to the President not to sign the resolution, which farmers and other groups said was a watered-down version because it excluded the compulsory land acquisition provision.

In his memo last month, Pangandaman said if Mrs. Arroyo signs the resolution, it would "appear that she is concurring with the act of Congress, contrary to the Resolution which she certified."

He said the signing would not sit well with some NGOs, bishops and farmers who are advocating the extension of CARP, including land acquisition.

Pangandaman pointed out that the CARP would continue to be in effect and what was terminated was only its funding source.

- Paolo Romero