

GMA to push for reformed CARP law in Congress

President Arroyo would strongly push for a "reformed" Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) law in Congress despite criticisms that she has not decisively acted on it to help farmers.

Lawmakers passed what is described as a watered-down resolution that extended CARP for another six months.

Press Secretary Jesus Dureza issued the statement as some lawmakers differed in their interpretations on the move by Mrs. Arroyo not to sign the joint resolution approved by the Senate and the House of Representatives last month, extending the CARP, and let it lapse into law.

Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman, author of a bill lengthening the CARP, said Mrs. Arroyo's decision not to sign the resolution was tantamount to a veto because an expired program cannot be extended.

"The President's position is clear. She has certified as urgent the Lagman bill extending CARP and now we have that. Within the six-month period, Congress will craft a reformed agrarian reform law," Dureza told *dzRB*.

Last week, Palace declared that Mrs. Arroyo would let the congressional resolution lapse into law but gave assurances that the move should not alarm farmers as the administration wants to use the extension to push for a better law.

Presidential Adviser for

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

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

Last Dec. 17, Congress adopted the joint resolution extending the coverage of the CARP for six months or until June 30 for lands offered under the Voluntary Offer to Sell and the Voluntary Land Transfer, but 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 branded as watered-down because it excluded the compulsory land acquisition provision.

"This (signing) may not sit well with some bishops, farmers, and non-government organizations (NGOs) advocating the extension of CARP in its present status, i.e., including compulsory land acquisition," Pangandaman said.

Lagman, however, said since the program itself was not extended at the end of 2008, the joint resolution was used

"Even if the President al-

lows the joint resolution to 'lapse into law' by Jan. 22, 2009 or 30 days after the enrolled copy of the joint resolution was officially received by the Office of the President on Dec. 23, 2008, there is no more LAD (land acquisition and distribution) to extend because it had already expired. Once the deadline sought to be extended has expired, no belated extension could be effected," Lagman said in a statement.

He explained that the joint resolution could only lapse into law if it would take place before the program's deadline.

Meanwhile, a ranking official of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) called on the faithful to help remove the "evils of lies, selfishness and greed" in the society for the sake of the country's future.

"All of us, in the Church, in government, in all institutions, all of us must have to be warned against the evil of greed, against the evil of selfishness, against the evil of lies and cheating," CBCP president and Jaro, Iloilo Archbishop Angel Lagdameo told Catholic-run *Radio Veritas* in an interview.

"Everyone, every Filipino must try to control these, to diminish these and to remove these from our lives," the 68-year-old prelate said.

"I think that will make our future more fruitful and hopeful not only for ourselves, but also for many other people," Lagdameo said. — Paolo Romero, Helen Flores