

GMA to donate P35 M for school building projects

By PAOLO ROMERO

President Arroyo said yesterday she will donate P35 million from the Presidential Social Fund (PSF) to the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry Inc. (FFCCCII) for its school building projects, specifically for elementary schools.

"You have to put the money into building more elementary classrooms to reduce the current student to classroom ratio of 100-to-1 in one shift to 50-to-1 in two shifts," the President told the FFCCCII during its 27th biennial convention at the SMX Convention Center at the Mall of Asia.

She said the federation has been a generous partner of the government in its classrooms and buildings projects as well as in volunteer efforts, maintaining peace and order and medical missions.

"The people especially thank the Federation for championing the cause of quality education. You have been generous with your two-classroom school building donations through Operation Barrio Schools," she said.

She said the FFCCCII has shown that classrooms can be built at half the cost estimated. The federation has also linked up with the Department of Education (DepEd) to build 575 units of two-classroom buildings.

In signing Executive Order No. 284, the President authorized the FFCCCII to conduct fund-raising programs to fund its Operation Barrio Schools project. The EO exempts donors from taxes. She likewise urged the Chinese-Filipino community "to keep being generous in donating to these undertakings."

Outgoing FFCCCII president John Tan reported that since 1960, the federation has helped construct 4,000 school buildings (of two classrooms each) and 8,000 classrooms.

The PGMA school building program funded from the PSF has been used for 396 classrooms; from the contributions of congressmen and senators, 1,740 classrooms; from the donations of overseas-based Filipinos, another 500 classrooms; from the DepEd and Department of Public Works funds, 450 classrooms; and from the FFCCCII 116 classrooms.

"We hope to build 11,000 classrooms to help improve the learning conditions of the schoolchildren," Tan said.

Tan said the federation has donated fire trucks, mobile police cars and closed circuit TV systems in strategic areas of Manila, to help in the government's crime prevention efforts.

Meanwhile, Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said the administration is also expanding its social protection programs under its Economic Resiliency Program.

He said a number of beneficiaries of the Pantawid Familyang Pilipino Program, which involves conditional cash transfers, received P9,000 a year.

The coverage of the Philippine health insurance program would be increased, with five million new members for a total of P6 billion while the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority would train an additional 566,000 unemployed people, he said.

Remonde said the government would also pursue the upgrading of public hospitals and increase student loans.