

GMA to remain active in public affairs after end of term

By PAOLO ROMERO

President Arroyo will remain involved in public affairs or may even pursue a life of "active statesmanship" after she returns to being a private citizen in June next year, a Malacañang spokesman said yesterday.

Deputy Presidential Spokesman for Economic Affairs Gary Olivar maintained the President would step down from office when her term ends in 2010.

Olivar gave the assurance amid lingering suspicions that Mrs. Arroyo was planning to prolong her stay in power.

Olivar noted the recent Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey that showed 43 percent of Filipinos do not believe Mrs. Arroyo would step down in 2010.

Olivar said the SWS survey was affected by the "political noise" generated against the Arroyo administration in the

last several months.

"There is no reason to expect otherwise," Olivar said. "This (leaving office) is something she repeatedly said directly and through the people who speak for her."

During a news briefing in Malacañang, Olivar was asked to comment on the advice from an ally that Mrs. Arroyo should take a rest after June 2010.

"The advice is well taken and duly considered. I should remind everyone that once the President steps down she will no longer be President Gloria with all of the powers attached to her office, she would be plain and simple citizen Gloria," he said.

Olivar said former presidents "have maintained some degree of active participation in political life."

He pointed out that former

President Corazon Aquino sometimes take to the streets on issues close to her heart, while former President Fidel Ramos is the chairman emeritus of the ruling Lakas-Kampi-CMD.

"President Erap (Joseph Estrada) is even threatening to run for (public) office again," Olivar pointed out.

"If the President decides to pursue a life of active statesmanship whether here or abroad, I think this is something she is certainly entitled to and something that the rest of the world, if it comes to that, would welcome from her," he said.

Olivar said Mrs. Arroyo had "earned her right to a bigger voice in the global stage, even in private life."

Asked what could be Mrs. Arroyo's advocacies in private life, Olivar said he would be speculating.

"(But) if we go by the basis of what she's good at, surely economic policy discussions would continue to interest her," he added.

Olivar said the way Mrs. Arroyo managed the country's economy in the last eight years "would certainly be a great source of good policy ideas."

He said Mrs. Arroyo was also very interested in environmental issues and climate change as she has been setting aside Fridays for activities to protect the environment.

"Volunteerism is a third thing that is close to her heart. The need for people to practice their civic duty by going out and actually helping the neighbors and the community," he said.

Olivar said Mrs. Arroyo is also unfazed by threats of cases poised against her once she becomes a private citizen.