

GMA BRINGS CHEERS TO SMOKEY MOUNTAIN

"WOW! Ang yaman na natin."

"Salamat sa Diyos, at kay Gloria, may bahay na rin tayo."

Hundreds of poor and homeless families in Smokey Mountain, Tondo, found Christmas cheers as President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo personally handed to them their housing ownership certificates, fulfilling her promise to provide them with decent homes after they were displaced from the former garbage dump.

The President, along with Manila Mayor Lito Atienza and National Housing Authority (NHA) General Manager Edgardo Pamintuan, led in the awarding of the certificates after she attended the second day of the *Misa de Gallo* or *Simbang Gabi* at the Smokey Mountain with hundreds of residents in the area.

"Matagal na matagal na, ilang taon nang hinahangad ng mga taga-Smokey Mountain na magkaroon sila ng tahanan. At sa wakas, ngayong araw na ito, nakipagmisa de gallo ako sa 800 pamilyang nakalipat dito sa kanilang mga apartments dito sa Smokey Mountain (Smokey Mountain residents have long been wanting to have their own houses here. Now, after I attended the *Misa de Gallo* with them, they have transferred to their apartments in Smokey Mountain)," the President later said in a radio interview.

The President did not give a speech at the awarding ceremonies because she believed that what was important was that the displaced residents could now move to their new homes minus

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the stench of old, and with amenities such as septic tanks, electricity and water.

The Smokey Mountain Development Project started in 1995. In 1998, during the last year of former President Fidel V. Ramos, 21 buildings were finished.

During the entire two years of the administration of deposed President Joseph Estrada, the project was practically frozen.

When the President took over in early 2001, however, she ordered the NHA to cut all red tape, solve all legal problems, and provide the necessary funds so that the project could be speeded up and the hundreds of former residents of Smokey Mountain could be provided with decent homes.

An initial batch of 764 families who received their housing certificates could now immediately move to their permanent housing units at the Smokey Mountain Development Reclamation Project.

That is only for starters. Some 1,560 families now at the temporary housing site are also scheduled to transfer to permanent housing next year.

"Talagang nakakataba ng puso na sa wakas ay natupad din iyong kanilang minimithi (It warms the heart that finally they have realized their wish)," the President said after hearing some children say, **"Wow! Ang yaman na natin (Now we are rich)"**

Pamintuan said that the Presi-

dent has fulfilled her promise to the former residents that they would be transferred to their new homes which they can now call their own and where they can live decently.

"We are doubling our efforts to move these families as soon as possible. In fact, the project developer RII Builders has been working double time to speed up the development and repair works at other buildings for the immediate transfer of Smokey Mountain families, as well as other intended beneficiaries," Pamintuan said of the remaining 1,560 families.

Seven medium rise buildings have been allocated for the transfer of some 800 families.

Each building can accommodate 120 families.

RII Builders is now completing housing related works at other 14 buildings for immediate occupancy, complete with basic amenities and services such as water, electricity, drainage and sewer lines, according to Pamintuan.

Also present during the symbolic awarding of certificates were First Gentleman Atty. Jose Miguel Arroyo, Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC) Secretary General Armando de Castro, Social Welfare and Development Secretary Corazon Juliano-Soliman, Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) Chairman Bayani Fernando and RII Builders board chairman Reghis Romero II.



PRESIDENT Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo acknowledges the enthusiastic greetings of the residents of Smokey Mountain shortly after her arrival in Balut, Tondo, on December 17 to attend the traditional *Misa de Gallo* and to lead the distribution of housing unit certificates to displaced residents of the former garbage dump.