

Masses, protests held in towns and cities nationwide

Saturday 1 March 2008, by [Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) (Date first published: 1 March 2008).

MANILA, Philippines — Although smaller in number compared to the interfaith rally in Makati City, masses and protest actions were held Friday in towns and cities nationwide.

But in Lucena, Quezon, a “mass for peace and rule of law” in support of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was celebrated at the Saint Ferdinand Cathedral with 3,500 to 4,000 people in attendance.

Lucena Mayor Ramon Talaga Jr. (Lakas) was present at the mass celebrated by Quezon Bishop Emilio Marquez, a known Arroyo supporter.

Marquez challenged Senate star witness Rodolfo Lozada Jr. to back his claims of rampant corruption with concrete evidence.

He said the sentiment of the majority of the people in Quezon was different from that in “imperial Manila,” but he recognized the people’s right to speak out.

In Maasin City, Southern Leyte Gov. Damian Mercado appealed to his constituents to support Ms Arroyo and called for a mass for unity, peace and sobriety.

Mercado said Ms Arroyo has done much for the province. “We will be all affected if we heed the resignation call of the minority,” he said.

Pampanga

In Pampanga, Gov. Ed Panlilio and Bishop Roberto Mallari led some 500 students in a “unity walk for truth” at the provincial capitol at 5:30 p.m.

“We are fighting for the truth that must prevail in our country,” said Aizelene David, a senior mass communication student at the University of the Assumption.

In Lubao town, police claimed to have dispersed about 60 activists picketing Ms Arroyo’s ancestral home.

But Aurora Broquil, chair of the Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya in Central Luzon, denied this. She said she and other KPD members had concluded their 20-minute picket at the reconstructed nipa hut of the late President Diosdado Macapagal, Ms Arroyo’s father, in Barangay San Nicolas II, when the cops arrived.

Broquil also said police blocked 40 KPD members coming from Bataan in two jeeps at the Barangay Pasbul (Lubao) section of the Gapan-San Fernando-Olongapo Road at around 10 a.m.

Dagupan, Pangasinan

In Dagupan, Pangasinan, some 5,000 students, church leaders and residents attended a mass at the

St. John the Evangelist Cathedral and marched around the city to call for Ms Arroyo's resignation.

Joselino Viray, president of the local chapter of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines, said it was high time Pangasinan folk united and demanded Ms Arroyo's resignation.

Ermin Garcia Jr., publisher of the local weekly Sunday Punch, said Pangasinan was finally rising to the occasion.

"We've been very tolerant. But there's a limit to the people's patience. I think it's evident now," Garcia said.

In Baguio City, about 100 students joined members of militant groups at the Igorot Park to demand Ms Arroyo's resignation.

In Subic, Zambales, some 1,000 residents held a rally to denounce the Arroyo administration's alleged excesses, particularly the scandal-ridden National Broadband Network deal.

San Pablo, Laguna

In San Pablo City, Laguna, about 1,000 students, seminarians and members of various parishes took part in a prayer vigil and a concelebrated mass presided over by Fr. Rene B. Eriga at the Liwasang Ermitanyo plaza outside the San Pablo Cathedral.

Fr. Rayben Brosas, assistant parish priest, said church bells were to be rung continuously starting at 6 p.m., together with the lighting of candles.

The schools that sent delegates were the Liceo de San Pablo, Canossa College, St. Joseph Elementary School, Montessori High School and St. Peter College Seminary.

Among the parishes that participated were the St. Francis of Assisi in Calihan/San Francisco, San Gabriel the Archangel, San Roque, Immaculate Heart of Mary, Nuestra Señora del Remedio, and Nuestra Señora del Pilar in Alaminos, Laguna.

In a letter sent from Rome to all parish priests and religious in Laguna on Feb. 27, San Pablo Bishop Leo M. Drona encouraged the faithful to attend the concelebrated mass and prayer vigil, or to take part in the Makati rally.

CBCP president in Iloilo

In Iloilo City, Jaro Archbishop Angel Lagdameo, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, joined around 1,000 protesters, mostly from religious and militant groups and professionals, in a one-kilometer "Walk for Truth and Justice."

"I view [the protest actions] as a sign that civil society, our young people, are waking up to the demands of truth and justice in our government," Lagdameo told the Inquirer.

He said that when the people were "fully awake, there will be greater demands on [the government]."

The walk took off from the grounds of the St. Clement's Church in La Paz District.

This was the first time Lagdameo joined a protest march since he became archbishop of Jaro in May 2000.

“My walking with the people in solidarity with them is already a statement that I have in my heart their own sentiments,” the archbishop said when asked why he joined the march.

The groups that joined the protest action included the Philippine Independent Church, United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Jesus Is Lord Movement (JIL), Brotherhood of Christian Businessmen and Professionals, and the militant Bagong Alyansang Makabayan and Gabriela.

Bacolod, Cebu

In Bacolod City, Pastor Emilio Henares of the River of Life Church called on God to cast out the purported evil in Malacañang at the interfaith rally for truth, justice and righteousness held at the public plaza.

About 3,000 persons, mostly students, were present, but the crowd failed to surpass the 10,000 at a Bacolod rally on Monday.

“GMA [Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo] and her men have remained in power because we have tolerated them. Allowing evil to persist is placing the future on a tightrope,” a statement issued by the Negros Ecumenical Movement—composed of Catholic priests and nuns and leaders of the Protestant and Philippine Independent Churches—read in part.

In Cebu City, about 500 students and activists held a rally at the Fuente Osmeña Circle.

In Tacloban City, Bayan Muna Rep. Satur Ocampo expressed elation over the students’ participation in the call for Ms Arroyo’s resignation.

Along with students and the urban poor, Ocampo attended a forum on the political situation held at the University of the Philippines-Tacloban campus.

Cagayan de Oro

In Cagayan de Oro City, militants held a scheduled interfaith rally at Plaza Divisoria despite the apparent buckling of the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro, apparently as a consequence of the CBCP pastoral letter that stopped short of calling on Ms Arroyo to step down.

The archdiocese had announced that it would lead the rally after issuing on Monday its own pastoral letter, which openly urged Ms Arroyo to resign.

Instead of joining Friday’s protest rally, the archdiocese chose to hold a mass at Xavier University.

The rally was attended by around 700 protesters, including nuns and priests belonging to the broad interfaith and ecumenical movement Kamatuoran (Truth)!

In a statement, Kamatuoran! urged the CBCP to heed the people’s clamor for Ms Arroyo’s resignation.

Cotabato, Davao, Iligan, GenSan

In Cotabato City, about 200 persons representing various groups held a “candle-lighting for truth and justice program” at the city plaza.

Led by Suara Bangsamoro and the JIL, they called for all Cabinet members to step down and allow people with a clear conscience to lead the government.

“The Moro people join the rest of the Filipino people in the nationwide interfaith rally because we cannot stomach anymore the list of human rights violations committed by the police and military because of the anti-Moro policies [laid down] during Ms Arroyo’s term,” said Amira Lidasan, national president of Suara Bangsamoro.

Other protest gatherings were held in the cities of Davao, Digos, Iligan and General Santos.

P.S.

* From the Philippine Daily Inquirer:

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