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MEDIA RELEASE

Rural Electrification Shines in PGMA's Pulong Bayan in Bohol

Rural electrification is the highlight of yesterday's visit of Her Excellency President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to Brgy. Tawala, Panglao in Bohol for the conduct of the President's "*Pulong Bayan*". Electricity for all is one of the President's top priority programs, which she vowed to bestow, among others, as a legacy to the Filipino people when she finishes her term in 2010. President Arroyo led a ceremonial switch-on in the household of a Boholano farmer, Emeriano Loretero, witnessed by both national and local officials.

"What we did was just a ceremonial switch-on because the BOHECOs have already attained 100% barangay energization since 2004. But this is what we commit to do that by 2009 the government will finally conquer darkness with the attainment of a 100% barangay electrification rate, just like what the BOHECOs did for Bohol," said President Arroyo to the eager crowd of Boholanos.

She congratulated BOHECO General Manager Carlos Itable for the consistent and most outstanding performance of the two power coops under his watch. She also stressed the National Electrification Administration's (NEA) indispensable role in the implementation of the electrification program. For her part, NEA Administrator Edita Bueno reported to the President BOHECO I's single digit systems loss and its 100% status for sitio energization.

In the same breath, she also reported to the President and the people of Panglao, Bohol the nation's 95% status of barangay electrification, emphasizing that much has been done for energizing the countryside since President Arroyo assumed office in 2001 when the status was only 81% then.

The President commended NEA and its implementing arms, the Electric Cooperatives (ECs), for an effective impact of the Rural Electrification (RE) Program in the countryside. The economic uplift, industrial dispersal, increased employment and livelihood opportunities, better education, improved health services, improved peace and order condition, improved communication facilities, technology innovation, and enhanced tourism industry are but a few benefits of electrification in the rural areas.

The President also talked about the budget allocation of P1.452 billion to fund the fast tracking of barangay energization around the country. For 2008 the Department of Energy (DOE) has been allotted P200 million while NEA will get some additional P300 million budget for the ECs.

President Arroyo also informed the people and public officials present that she is to issue an Administrative Order declaring 13 areas where geothermal power is sourced as special economic zones. She said that this move would entice more power producers to invest in the country, which will eventually lead to lower power rates for the consumers. The President stressed out that economic development is the government's weapon not only to eradicate poverty but also to counter terrorism, in reference to the Local Peace and Security Assembly being held also there yesterday and today.

“We will continue to fight terrorism while working for peace and progress in the country,” President Arroyo said.

A resident also took the opportunity to thank the President for her electrification program saying that in the 36 years of her life she only witnessed having electricity in their barangay five years ago. Brgy. Tawala Chairman also spoke of gratefulness for the President's efforts in rural electrification and at the same time made an appeal that they may have light in their homes but their streets are still covered in darkness due to the absence of streetlights. In reply, President Arroyo tasked Tourism Secretary Durano to sponsor the street lighting for the barangay on the ground that the province's tourism is booming, which received a warm applause from the crowd.

With the President were some of her Cabinet Secretaries like Cerge Remonde, Ignacio Bunye, Ace Durano and Norberto Gonzales. AFP Chief of Staff Hermogenes Esperon and PNP Chief Oscar Calderon were also present as they were attending the peace assembly with other LGU officials from around the country led by no less than Bohol Governor and Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines (ULAP) national president Erico Aumentado. The three representatives of Bohol were also with the President in the said activity. ###