

Peace Month '09 begins

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Monday, 31 August 2009
Last Updated Sunday, 04 October 2009

OVER 2,000 PEACE advocates from various sectors joined the launching of the 2009 National Peace Consciousness Month celebration at the Quezon City Memorial Circle on September 1.

Contingents from government agencies, academic institutions, civil society organizations, and religious groups participated in the half-day program that signaled the start of the month-long celebration.

Spearheaded by the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP), the affair was highlighted by the traditional ringing of the peace bell and symbolic releasing of white doves led by Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Avelino I. Razon Jr., Executive Secretary Eduardo R. Ermita, Quezon City Mayor Feliciano Belmonte, and Presidential Management Staff (PMS) chief and former peace adviser Hermogenes C. Esperon Jr.

They were also joined by Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Secretary Esperanza Cabral, Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Victor Ibrado, OPAPP Undersecretary Pedro Cesar Ramboanga, Councilor Ariel Inton, Vice Mayor Herbert Bautista.

Also joining were Dr. Loreta Castro, Miriam College – Center for Peace Education Executive Director; Dulce Coyukiat, Rotary District 3780 Governor; Jacqueline Badcock, United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator; Vanessa Tobin, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Country Representative; and Annie Torres, Red Cross – Quezon City Chapter Administrator.

“Mr. Pure Energy” Gary Valenciano, who is UNICEF’s Ambassador of Goodwill, delivered a short peace message and rendered three songs to the delight of the crowd.

With the theme, “Una sa Lahat, Kapayapaan: Putting the Peace Agenda at the Forefront,” this year’s celebration stresses the collective affirmation of the primacy of peace.

The celebration comes at a time amid calls from all sectors of society to restart the peace talks with rebel groups such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the National Democratic Front (NDF), the political arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People’s Army (CPP/NPA).

In this light, peace advocates expressed their sentiments and manifestations of commitment to the peace agenda through printed messages in big letters set up in different corners of the venue. Bike for peace

Earlier, 450 bikers pedaled across five cities in Metro Manila to demonstrate their support to the peace agenda.

They converged in Ortigas Center in Pasig and passed by Marikina, Mandaluyong, and San Juan before heading to the historic Edsa Shrine to offer flowers and release white doves.

OPAPP Assistant Secretary Consuelo Cascolan, Executive Director Romulo Halabaso, Lt. Gen. Ricardo David, and Brig. Gen. Nick Ojeda led the simple ceremony at the Shrine.

The bikers later parked at the Quezon City Memorial Circle to join in the ceremonial activities. Calendar of activities

The National Peace Consciousness Month aims to instill greater consciousness and understanding among the Filipino people on the comprehensive peace process.

It also endeavors to promote a culture of peace based on nonviolence, respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, tolerance, understanding and solidarity.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in 2004 issued Proclamation No. 675 declaring September as National Peace Consciousness Month.

The OPAPP is tasked to coordinate and monitor the activities for the month-long celebration.