

CDI LEADERS MEET IN MANILA

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Leaders of 10 major political parties from eight nations in Asia converge in Manila this week for the formal launching on Jan. 27 of the **Centrist Democrat International (CDI) Asia-Pacific**, the first regional political organization in Asia envisioned to match the influence and prestige of CDI's **European People's Party (EPP)**.

The CDI Asia-Pacific launching and the Global Interfaith Dialogue scheduled on the same day are highlights of the event organized by the CDI International and the Philippines' ruling party, Lakas Christian-Muslim Democrats (Lakas-CMD), upon the initiative of its three senior leaders - President **Arroyo**, Speaker **Jose de Venecia** and former President **Fidel V. Ramos**.

Arroyo is Lakas Chairman and Ramos is CDI Honorary President while de Venecia is Lakas President and also international Vice President of CDI.

The top leaders of CDI and senior parliamentarians from Europe are arriving in Manila to witness the launching and to hold the regular CDI Executive Committee meeting, which will be convened by former Spanish Prime Minister **Jose Maria Aznar**, the CDI President.

The organizing committee headed by **Francis Manglapus**, Lakas Deputy Secretary General, named the 10 political parties that will sign the founding document for CDI Asia-Pacific as: Lakas CMD, Indian National Congress, Thai Rak Thai Party of Thailand, Uri Party of South Korea, Pakistan Muslim League, United Malay National Organization (UMNO) of Malaysia, Funcinpec Party and Cambodia's People's Party, Indonesia's Golkar and Democratic Party of Indonesia.

"The key element in putting this political organization together is its centrist ideology. We are a party of the center, we are the middle forces," said de Venecia, who co-founded Lakas in 1992 with Ramos and the late Sen. Raul Manglapus.

Manglapus released the names of the original founding members of CDI Asia-Pacific, and among those in the registry are: President Arroyo, Ramos and de Venecia of Lakas CMD; Thailand Deputy Prime Minister **Surakiart Sathirathai** of Thai Rak Thai; **Shri Murli Deora**, Member of Parliament of chief of the Mumbai region, of the Indian National Congress; **Prince Norodom Ranariddh** (Funcinpec) and Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister **Sok An**; Sen. **Mushahid Hussain Sayed** of Pakistan, and **Theo Sambuaga**, Deputy Chairman of Golkar. Manglapus said the complete list of those attending the formal launching will be finalized Wednesday.

The CDI's Executive Committee members are also attending the Global Interfaith Dialogue, one of Lakas CMD's major advocacies to help mediate ethnic and politico-religious rifts in conflict regions in the world.

Mrs. Arroyo and de Venecia relentlessly pursued the Global Interfaith Dialogue until its formal adoption by the United Nations General Assembly in November 2004. Months before that, Mrs. Arroyo and de Venecia presented the proposal to US President **George W. Bush** at the White House during the Philippine leader's state visit to Washington.

Aside from Aznar, the European parliamentary leaders who are flying to Manila include **Pier Ferdinando Casini**, President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, CDI Vice President and President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union; **Wilfried Martens**, President of the EPP and former Prime Minister of Belgium; former Prime Minister of Norway **Kjell Magne Bondevik**, and **Antonio Lopez-Isturiz**, MEP, CDI Executive Secretary and EPP Secretary General.

De Venecia is attending the executive committee meeting of the CDI, which also invited the former Health Minister of Spain Ana Pastor.

Two conferences, one on economic development and the other on women and human rights, are among the CDI activities lined up together with the Global Interfaith Dialogue, which will be attended by representatives of major religions all over the world.

Founded in 1961, the CDI has currently 110 member parties worldwide which are adherents of the CDI's values of integral humanism and cooperation and the building of societies based on the synthesis of freedom, social justice, personal responsibility and community solidarity at both the national and international levels.

Manglapus said the CDI Asia-Pacific will strive to follow the values of CDI after the experience of the CDI's European People's Party, which is the majority party in the European Parliament and the European Union.

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