

Office of Sen. Manny Villar

Sagip-OFW Helpline

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Villar asks DFA, DOLE to ensure safety of OFWs in Syria

Sen. Manny Villar assured the families of overseas Filipino workers caught in the middle of escalating political tension in Syria that he will continue to push authorities to ensure the safety of their kins.

In the dialogue between Villar and 17 relatives of OFWs in Syria, Villar said he is urging the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) to help OFWs who want to evade the hostilities, especially those who are not permitted by employers.

"Kasama ninyo ako sa pagtutok sa sitwasyon sa Syria at pagsubaybay sa mga hakbangin ng gobyerno para masigurong ligtas ang inyong mga mahal sa buhay doon," Villar said.

The dialogue initiated by the Blas F. Ople Center and the Sagip-OFW program of Villar was held at the office of Ople Center at Wycliff Townhomes, Robert St. Pasay City.

"Sa pagdinig ng Senado sa budget ng DFA, isa iyan sa mga puntong gusto nating ipaliwanag ng mga opisyal nila para makita natin kung sapat at tunay na natutulungan ng DFA ang mga kababayan nating naiipit sa kaguluhan," Villar added.

The families and relatives of OFWs in Syria also met with DFA officials headed by Usec. Esteban Conejos.

Villar was alarmed by reports saying OFWs who want to leave Syria were asked to pay their employers \$3,000 to \$4,000 in exchange for exit clearance.

Villar noted that during the budget hearing in the Senate, it was revealed that about 258 household helpers volunteered to go home but lacked the needed exit clearance.

"Kung babayaran ng gobyerno ang \$ 4,000 na hinihingi ng mga employer, aabot sa P 43 milyon ang gagastusin ng gobyerno sa 258 domestic helper lamang kung kayat mahalaga na magkaroon ng negosasyon sa mga employer upang hindi na sila singilin," he said.

About 17,000 OFWs are working in Syria and 90 percent are undocumented or non-members of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, one of the reasons why government authorities are having problems coordinating their evacuation.

Villar also said hostilities in the Middle East and the increasing number of OFWs affected should be considered in increasing the budgets of DFA and DOLE.

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