

# Office of Sen. Manny Villar

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**NEWS RELEASE**  
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## **Crisis in Syria raises need for a department for OFWs, Villar says**

Sen. Manny Villar today reiterated his proposal for the creation of a separate department for migrant Filipinos to adequately address the needs of overseas Filipino workers around the globe, especially during critical periods.

“The worsening situation in Syria has prompted me to again call for the designation of a Cabinet-level agency exclusively for OFWs and their families,” Villar said.

Villar emphasized that the numbers alone—about 50 million (ten million OFWs with an average of five family members each)—make them a large enough constituency for an executive department.

“If this cannot be done immediately, then the government should form an agency, initially with a skeleton staff, but with authority to draw from the resources of other agencies to finance, for instance the repatriation of OFWs in conflict areas, beginning with Syria, now the focus of international attention,” Villar, president of the Nacionalista Party, said.

He further stressed that the establishment of a Department of Migrant Filipinos would end the traditional finger-pointing among concerned agencies on repatriation and evacuation requirements of embattled OFWs.

With help from the Geneva-Based International Organization for Migration, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said it had repatriated a total of 771 OFWs out of the 10,000 OFWs in Syria.

“I appreciate the efforts being taken by the DFA, which in the absence of an OFW-dedicated department, is leading the repatriation of OFWs from conflict areas,” Villar said.

“However, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the DFA has other mandates, principally to establish, develop and promote diplomatic and economic ties between the Philippines and other countries,” he added.

The chairman of the Villar Foundation also noted that the establishment of a department solely dedicated to overseas Filipinos would simplify and harmonize efforts to look after them when there’s a crisis and secure their welfare and rights during peace time.

Villar said a department for overseas Filipinos becomes imperative and practical as the country grapples left and right with problems and issues involving OFWs around the globe especially due to the Arab Spring causing unrest in the Middle East region and North Africa.

“We have to be ready. While we try to take OFWs out of Syria, we should be preparing for the next emergency that will require immediate repatriation, for the sake of our OFWs and their loved ones and also for the sake of our economy, which draws a lifeline from OFW remittances,” Villar said.