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NEWS RELEASE

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Villar wants OFW voice in new crisis team

Sen. Manny Villar today said the newly created crisis team for overseas Filipino workers should also include consultation with the OFW sector to make sure all bases are covered in the quest to handle situations affecting Filipinos abroad more effectively.

"To make this team more effective in the handling of future crisis situation, it would be ideal for the body to consult respected migrant workers group like Migrante International, Blas Ople Foundation and others," Villar said.

Executive Order 34 sets up the Overseas Preparedness and Response Team (OPRT) under the Office of the President. This will replace the Middle East Preparedness Team that was formed to deal with the evacuation of Filipino workers in the Middle East during the 2002 Iraq crisis.

"The familiarity of OFW organizations with the problems, needs and requirements of OFWs will be an advantage and will contribute largely to the success of the crisis team," he said.

Villar has been pushing for the creation of a team that has the expertise and competence to immediately act when conflict, war and disaster occur abroad especially because these put Filipino workers in danger.

This quick-response team should be fully-funded and prepared to be immediately deployed in areas where OFWs need help, he added.

The OPRT will be composed of the executive secretary as chairperson and

the presidential adviser on overseas Filipino workers' concerns and the secretaries of the Departments of Foreign Affairs, Labor and Employment, National Defense, Justice, the Interior and Local Government, and Budget and Management as members.

"It is our hope that this high-level team will be competent and equipped with necessary tools in order to prevent repetition of the Libya experience where evacuation of Filipinos from conflict zones suffered glitches," Villar said.

He also referred to the government's lacklustre performance in the rescue and recovery mission for Filipino victims of the New Zealand earthquake.

Villar said it is only proper that matters as important as the welfare of OFWs are placed directly under the supervision of the President.

The founder of Sagip OFW also said the group should now start working and study the situation in restive states where Filipinos work for a living.

"Alamin na natin kung anong bansa ang maaaring sumunod na magkagulo. Isipin na natin na kahit anong oras maaaring magkaroon ng sakuna. Dapat ilatag na ang procedure at ihanda na ang pondo nang sa ganoon hindi na tayo mangangapa at malagay sa peligro ang mga kababayan natin," he said.