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Villar eyes strategy to address social, economic concerns of repatriated OFWs

Sen. Manny Villar today urged the government to devise a comprehensive strategy to address the concerns of repatriated overseas Filipino workers from restive states in the Middle East and North Africa.

He said aside from the P10,000 financial aid, the government should also consider giving economic and social assistance in the form of livelihood and technical skills training, preference in redeployment, free hospitalization and Philhealth membership, educational help and other benefits.

“Pag-aralan na natin kung paano pa tayo makakatulong sa mga OFW lalo na at walang kasiguruhan kung hanggang kailan ang kaguluhan sa Middle East at mukhang matatagalan pa ang pagbabalik nila sa kanilang mga trabaho,” Villar said.

Villar filed Proposed Senate Resolution No. 412 urging the Department of Foreign Affairs, Overseas Workers Welfare Administration and the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration as well as other concerned executive agencies to devise a strategy that will address the concerns of repatriated OFWs who now lack sources of income.

A copy of the resolution was presented to more than 60 OFWs repatriated from Libya who gathered at the Dynasty Restaurant for a welcome lunch hosted by Lito Soriano, CEO of LBS Recruitment Solutions Corp. Susan Ople of the Ople Center presented the resolution on behalf of Villar. Villar’s Sagip OFW and the Ople Center started the “Skills-Up” program, a vocational skills scholarship program for repatriated OFWs who are victims of abuse and illegal recruitment.

Villar noted that unrest in the region has placed the livelihood and safety of OFWs at risk. In Libya alone, an estimated number of 30,000 Filipinos are affected by the conflict and are now in the process of repatriation. The Department of Labor and Employment announced that at least 14,000 Filipinos are waiting to be evacuated from Libya.

“With a significant number of Filipinos who will be repatriated and rendered without employment, it now becomes necessary for the government to act and lay down measures to ensure that these Filipinos are given adequate economic assistance so that they may be able to start again either here in the Philippines or abroad,” he added.

Villar said workers who were repatriated with their families must be assisted in relocation, housing and education of their children as well as healthcare.

Recognizing that armed conflict sometimes has a psychological impact on a person, Villar said free counseling and other similar services must be made available so that the workers may be aided in coping up with the experiences that they suffered while they were in conflict zones.

Villar also commended the emergency repatriation being carried out by employers in Libya, specifically the efforts of French company Vinci Construction Grand Project for airlifting 97 Filipino workers out of the war-torn nation.