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Villar calls on DTI, DOLE to formulate joint contingency plans for companies and workers affected by Japan crisis

Sen. Manny Villar called on the Department of Trade and Industry and Department of Labor and Employment to come up with a joint contingency plan to help companies and employees that would be affected by the slowdown in Japan trade and investments for the coming months.

Villar, chair of the Senate trade committee, noted that Japanese firms top the list of investors at the Clark Field in Pampanga. Based on the January 2008 report of the Clark Development Corporation, of the foreign investors doing business at the Clark Freeport, 35 companies or 26.75% are run by Japanese nationals.

He also pointed out that based on last year's data from the Philippine Economic Zone Authority, there are at least 580 firms with Japanese equity availing of incentives in various economic zones across the country. "While we continue to hope for the best, we must also be realistic about the consequences attached to the sad and tragic turn of events in Japan," the senator said.

"Last January, labor statistics showed that unemployment rose to 7.4% with an estimated 2.9 million Filipinos without work compared to 2.8 million the previous year. This number excludes workers affected by the effects of multiple crisis situations abroad on our own economy," he added.

The OFW advocate stressed that the Middle East has always been the traditional source of overseas employment for jobless Filipinos. "Today, we are witnessing the signs of reverse migration from different points in the Middle East and Asia due to external factors and not because of a fast-growing national economy. We need a concrete plan to boost domestic investments and create alternative jobs for displaced and repatriated workers," Villar added.

The leader of the Nacionalista Party also noted that the 2011 budget was approved at a time when most of these exigencies did not exist. "Right now, the government is able to undertake rescue and repatriation missions using OWWA funds. However, these funds rightfully belong to the OFWs and must be reimbursed at the appropriate time," he said.

The senator said that the agriculture and trade departments could work together on a joint program to push agri-business as alternatives to scarce employment opportunities.

“With proper training and incentives, our returning OFWs and thousands of jobless Filipinos can grow backyard or homegrown micro enterprises with the DTI and DA pitching in to provide access to markets and well-known supply chains,” Villar said.

Without a clear emergency employment plan backed up by inter-agency support and proper guidelines, the number of Filipinos desperate for work will continue to rise, the senator lamented.