

Office of Sen. Manny Villar

Sagip-OFW Helpline

Ground Floor, Worldwide Corporate Center Bldg., Shaw Blvd., Mandaluyong City

☎09174226800 and 09175050639 • mannyvillar_sagipofw@yahoo.com

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Countless OFWs also need help, says Villar

In the middle of efforts to evacuate Filipinos from unrest in Libya, Sen. Manny Villar today reminded government that countless others in different parts of the world are in need of help, including overseas Filipino workers in Saudi Arabia.

Villar made the call as the number of distressed OFWs awaiting to be repatriated from Saudi continues to grow.

Hundreds of OFWs stay under the Khandara Bridge near the Philippine Consulate in Jeddah and at the Hajj Seaport Terminal.

“Bagaman batid natin na kailangan naman talagang bigyan ng prayoridad ang mga kababayan natin na nasa panganib sa Libya, sana lang asikasuhin din natin ang iba pang kababayan natin naghihirap sa ibang bansa at nais umuwi na sa Pilipinas,” Villar said.

Last week, 18 OFWs from Jeddah with four children sought the help of Villar for their travel to their respective provinces in Mindanao. They were repatriated by the Department of Foreign Affairs last month. Through the help desk set up by Villar for distressed OFWs, the Sagip OFW, they were provided with transportation allowance and milk, toys, diapers and vitamins for the children.

The repatriated OFWs were among the Filipinos who live under the Khandara Bridge, one of the places submerged by flooding in Jeddah last January.

Filipinos and other nationalities chose to live under the bridge so they can be arrested by the Saudi police and taken to the deportation center.

Last month, Saudi authorities drove away inhabitants under the bridge and forced OFWs to set up tents near the consulate in Jeddah.

To date, more than 500 OFWs are waiting for their repatriation in the deportation area at Hajj Seaport Terminal.

Villar said government preparedness to immediately act on problems affecting OFWs is the best way to show that we care for the workers who remit the dollars that keep the economy afloat.

Aside from the evacuation of Filipinos from Libya and distressed OFWs in the Middle East, trouble is also brewing for Filipinos in Taiwan, Filipinos continue to be used as illegal drug mules and Filipinos suffer after the deadly quake in New Zealand.

“Marami tayong kababayan na nakakalat sa buong mundo, kaya dapat talaga may master plan ang gobyerno sa mabilis na pagkilos kapag may problema sa bansang kinaroroonan nila. It is frustrating kapag naririnig natin ang reklamo ng mga kamag-anak ng mga OFW na nagsasabing mabagal ang pagkilos ng gobyerno para tulungan sila,” Villar said.

After the evacuation in Libya, Villar said an investigation is in order to check government preparedness in dealing with problems faced by Filipino workers all over the world.

It can be recalled that Villar pointed to the cut in the budget of the Department of Foreign Affairs allocated for Assistance to Nationals as one of the reasons for the slow evacuation in Libya.

It was reported that DFA personnel had difficulty availing the services of ships and buses to carry Filipino workers out of conflict zones in Libya because other countries are paying bigger money for it.

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