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## ***Villar seeks "stringent oversight" over P10B OWWA fund***

MANILA, Jan. 7 (PGON) -- The P10-billion fund of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) must be subjected to "stringent oversight" to avoid, among others, the previous overcharging of the \$25 fee collected from departing overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), Senate President Manuel Villar said Monday. He pointed out that as the agency managing the fees, the OWWA is classified as a government corporation with a budget outside congressional budget review.

"We have to make sure that the fund for overseas workers really works for the improvement of the condition of our OFWs. A system where we can check its performance should be in place," Villar said in a statement. "The President [Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo], for all her powers, has to go to Congress for money; but OWWA, with all membership contributions coming from OFWs, is exempt. It can allocate and spend its own money without congressional authorization," he noted.

Villar proposed that the OWWA fund undergo congressional scrutiny similar to the one for the National Power Corporation, whose budget, although submitted to Congress, does not require congressional approval.

"This way we will have an idea, and it becomes part of public record how much of every peso OWWA earns goes to direct services to OFWs and how much is overhead," he said.

Starting out as a "welfare and training fund for overseas workers" created by the late President Ferdinand Marcos in the late 1970s, OWWA has grown into an agency with audited total assets of P9.95 billion as of end 2006.

Villar said that in 2005, OWWA collected P1.258 billion from 994,191 about-to-be-deployed workers, on the promise that for a \$25 fee, a member will receive up to P100,000 in disability benefits and P200,000 in accidental death benefits.

But that year, he said, total payouts in insurance benefits reached only P163 million, an amount dwarfed by OWWA's payroll and operating expenses. #

**SOURCE:** By Veronica Uy • INQUIRER.net

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