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Killing and not saving lives is the government's top priority with OFW money **HK OFWs score Arroyo's "pathetic" assistance to Filipinos in** **Lebanon; "intensified extortion" of OFWs for war**

There's money to kill but not enough to save lives. There's quickness in collection but not in protection.

This was declared today by the United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-MIGRANTE-HK) in a picket protest at the Philippine Consulate General (PCG) to criticize the Philippine government's "slow and pathetic" response to the need for evacuation, protection and assistance to Overseas Filipino Workers in Lebanon.

"With a snap of her fingers, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo gave P1 billion to the military to continue butchering civilians and activists. But for the evacuation and protection of 30,000 Filipinos in Lebanon, a measly P150 million was allotted which according to Sen. Aquilino Pimentel can only repatriate 1,500 OFWs," reported Eman Villanueva, UNIFIL Secretary General.

"Clearly this government values death and human rights violations more than the lives and safety of its citizens."

According to him, the government *"dragged its feet"* with regards to its evacuation program for OFWs in Lebanon.

"It was only after four days of ceaseless Israeli attacks that the Arroyo government started to prepare for the repatriation of Filipinos. Indonesia, a country that has faced the most severe of calamities recently, has already evacuated some of its nationals way before the Philippine government scrambled to arrange various means for evacuation," Villanueva added.

"They even denied at first that there are Filipinos in Southern Lebanon where the attacks happened."

Even before the evacuation, Villanueva said, the Philippine government is already *"making excuses for its inutility"* by saying that they cannot repatriate those who choose to stay.

Villanueva also reported that the Philippine government only plans to evacuate the estimated 2,200 Filipinos in Southern Lebanon, *"while the rest, like those left alone by their employers, are left to fend for themselves or find their own way to church-run shelters which are reportedly packed like sardines already."*

"When it comes to our remittances and bleeding us dry for various government fees, the Arroyo administration is so efficient and quick. But when we are the ones in need, we are always severely shortchanged," Villanueva remarked.

Villanueva said that remittances alone of overseas Filipinos reached US\$11.5 billion last year. Government fees for passport, authentication and other services rake in billions more. Currently, he added, more proceeds from OFWs are being expected with the proposal to make membership of OFWs to the Social Security System (SSS) mandatory.

"This proposal again shows what we are to the Philippine government: mere exports and milking cows to generate revenues that are not used for the people's needs but for corruption and all-out war that kills the Filipino people," he declared.

The protesters said that they will continue to oppose the proposal for SSS mandatory membership as well as continue to monitor the government's response and assistance to thousands more Filipinos in Lebanon.

"For once, this government must think of what it should do to OFWs and not how they can collect more from OFWs to fatten its coffers," Villanueva concluded.#