

Written by Senator Pimentel's Press Office

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Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Q. Senator Pimentel, Jr. (PDP-Laban) today asked congressional leaders to put back the proposed Human Rights Compensation Act in the list of priority legislative measures to be approved by the 14th Congress.

Senator Pimentel deplored that the proposal, which allocates P10-billion to indemnify victims of martial law atrocities, has been in limbo since it was stricken out of the priority measures of the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) despite its being certified as urgent by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

The bill was already approved by the Senate and House of Representatives under the 13th Congress. But it was shelved just as it was about to be finalized at the bicameral conference committee level in June, 2007.

In November, 2007 the Senate again approved the Human-Rights Compensation Act but the House has sat upon it. Senator Pimentel, sponsor of the Senate version of the proposal, expressed dismay over the report that the House leadership foiled a renewed bid to have the bill taken up on the floor without any justifiable reason.

Senator Pimentel said the refusal of the House leadership to calendar the bill for floor debate could not have happened without the say or intervention of Malacañang.

He challenged the President to re-certify the bill for immediate passage, reminding her of her

commitment to compensate the victims of human right violations during the martial law regime out of the Marcos' ill-gotten wealth recovered from Swiss banks.

Senator Pimentel recalled that Mrs. Arroyo had promised that out of the P38-billion Marcos bank accounts turned over by the Swiss banks, P10-billion would go to the victims of martial law atrocities and P28-billion would go to the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program.

Unless the funds are released to compensate the legitimate claimants, he said this will only lend credence to the allegation that the P10-billion had been diverted to the campaign expenses of the Arroyo administration in the 2004 and 2007 elections or to other unauthorized purposes.

“Maybe the money is gone. That is what I am worried about. The money set aside for the purpose could no longer be accounted for,” Senator Pimentel said.

“Promises made by Mrs. Arroyo have never been a cause for comfort for the beneficiaries because she usually says one thing and does another.”

He said the P10-billion compensation fund should not be touched except for its intended purpose because it is supposedly deposited in a trust account of the Bureau of Treasury in a government bank.

Senator Pimentel warned that public officials to whom the fund was entrusted could be held criminally liable if it is illegally disbursed.

“All Malacañang, budget, treasury and other officials involved will have to account for that. Of course, the principal person who must account for that is the President because she is the one on the saddle,” he said.

Senator Pimentel said the longer the compensation is withheld from the human-rights victims, the greater the injustice to them since many of them are in the twilight of their years.

“The bill acknowledges that the payment of compensation to the victims of human-rights violations is an obligation of the State. After all, it is the State that guarantees the civil and political rights of its citizens,” he said. # # #