

Gloria spent Marcos billions, now gone

Tuesday 24 January 2006, by [ROSALES Angie M.](#) (Date first published: 24 January 2006).

Palace officials yesterday admitted before a panel of senators that the \$718.9 million or P35 billion of the Marcos money allotted for human rights victims will dry up this year, two years after it had been transferred to the national government.

Of the amount, only P13 billion is left, prompting senators to pursue an investigation on the matter, alleging that most of it had been used in the fertilizer fund scam as they found highly suspect the timing of the fund releases during the election period.

Sen. Joker Arroyo accused the administration of having juggled the Marcos money called Fund 158 which is intended for the acquisition of the land to be distributed to Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) beneficiaries. It was discovered that the funds were claimed by the Palace to have been spent on salaries and on farm-to-market roads.

Sen. Arroyo's assertion came after the Senate Committee of the Whole, in tackling the proposed appropriations this year of

the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), inquired into the status of the fund as there had been testimonies during the fertilizer scam hearing that part of the Marcos money was used in funding farmers' farm inputs in 2004.

Senate President Franklin Drilon initiated the inquiry where he was told that the remaining P5 billion for victims of atrocities of the Marcos regime is "practically gone."

Drilon was informed that for this year, the required financing to complete the CARP would be P16 billion and much of it would be sourced from the general fund and the so-called Marcos wealth with the remaining P5 billion.

"Because you need P16 billion this year and you have only theoretically P5 billion left, so it's all

finished. The P35 billion is all spent," Drilon said.

"Yes your honor...Practically gone, your honor...", an official from DBM responded.

The Senate chief was told by Budget Secretary Romulo Neri that in the beginning balance of Jan. 30, 2004, a total of \$718.7 million or P35 billion was turned over to the national government.

"What was the total release in 2004 from this (Fund) 158?" asked Drilon to which Neri replied: P17.8 billion.

Drilon questioned the timing of the release from the supposed trust fund intended for CARP on April 24, 2004, less than a month before the presidential elections.

Neri said that from April 26, 2004 to October last year, a total of P8.8 billion was transferred to the national government's fund or the general fund.

While there was a total allotment for the purpose of being used for the Fund 158, there were no actual releases in 2004, only cash releases for Special Allotment Release Order (SARO).

Palace officials explained that in actual mechanism, when they release actual cash, they use the general fund first and then have this replenished by the Marcos money.

"Can we set aside technicalities first...We just want to know because we're jammed, if you have P13.1 billion in SARO, that means it's committed?" Drilon asked.

"It is committed your honor," the DBM official said.

"So for the purpose of accounting, just for purposes of our discussion, out of the P35 billion in 2004, P13.2 billion was committed," noted Drilon.

The Senate chief was later informed that in 2005, there was another set of allotments released and yet no additional funding came in for the said Fund 158.

"So under 158 account, we can say that for the whole year of 2005, the total balance is P22 billion," Drilon said.

The Senate chief was then told that total allotment releases in 2005 under Fund 158 totaled P8.9 billion

in the form of SARO to finance programs other than the Marcos wealth beneficiaries.

With the remaining P13 billion, Drilon was told by Neri that P8 billion is being set aside for the human rights violations victims while P5 billion is intended to be used this year for the CARP program.

Both Drilon and Sen. Arroyo commented P10 billion would be given to the human rights victims, under a proposed legislation.

“The government, DBM and the finance officials cannot make a categorical statement that the P10 billion earmarked for human rights victims is really intact and it won’t be touched in case of emergency. They just say it’s a special fund but they don’t give us the assurance that just in case the government needs money, they won’t get it. No definite answer.

“Before it was P10 billion. Now it’s P8 billion. We want them to create a trust fund than say it’s a special fund. They say they have it but we’re not comfortable with the statement that the amount is really secure,” the senators said.

P.S.

* Circulated by T’bak.