

# City mayors seek GMA's help on cut in IRA share

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The League of Cities of the Philippines (LCP) will seek the help of President Arroyo to fund the decrease in each city's share of the internal revenue allotment (IRA).

Mayors from 120 cities nationwide will wear armbands and display flags at their city halls at half-mast today to protest the "unconstitutional manner" of converting a municipality into a city.

"I am very hopeful that the President will be able to help the current plight of cities to cushion the impact of the decrease in their IRA share," said Mandaluyong City Mayor Benhur Abalos, LCP president.

"We need to do something fast because time is not on our side. We have a public to serve and their welfare is our top priority. All cities are adversely affected by this and we can't just let this happen. Millions of lives are at stake."

During their traditional flag-raising ceremony today, the city mayors would read a manifesto calling on lawmakers to follow the laws that they themselves passed.

"We will show that we are united in this issue," he said.

"We here in the city, together with the rest of the 119 cities in the country are fighting for the right process and for the rule of law." Abalos enjoined city employees and his constituents in Mandaluyong to wear black armbands.

"This will be a symbol of our mourning for the effects of the unjust action of our lawmakers," he said.

"This also means that we lament the blatant disregard of our plight as legitimate cities. The IRA issue is not just our issue. It is the issue of the people.

"Every citizen, rich or poor, young and old, should be involved. We should take a stand and fight for our right."

The city mayors are protesting the conversion of the 16 municipalities into cities even if they did not meet the income and population requirements as mandated by the Local Government Code.

"We echo our dismay on the railroaded process of converting these 16 cities without due consideration of what is required by law," read the city mayors' manifesto.

"We are appalled by the inconsiderate and hasty move of Congress for the conversion of the cities without thinking of the dire consequences it will bring to the existing cities and more importantly, to our constituents."

The consequence of the action is the minimal increase in the 2008 IRA of cities.

The LCP has brought to the Supreme Court the case of the 16 newly converted cities.

Under the Local Government Code, 40 percent of the national collection on taxes should be given to local government units as IRA.

Then 23 percent of this should be given to the 120 cities in the country. This means that for every peso tax collected,

40 centavos should go to the local government units to be shared by provinces, municipalities and cities.

And 23 percent or nine centavos of which should go to cities.

For the year 2008, the Department of Budget and Management released P210.7 billion as IRA share of all local government units, with P47.9 billion going to cities.

But because of the questionable conversion of the 16 cities, the increase in the IRA of the 120 cities has been reduced by P4 billion.

This means that the cities get a measly increase in IRA despite their growing needs.

This deplorable effect of the reduced increase of IRA for cities is deeply felt by Puerto Princesa City in Palawan.

Instead of receiving P146 million as IRA, it will only receive P1.7 million, a significant loss of P144 million.

The same is felt by other cities in the country.

Yet, another blow to the cities is the use of the 2000 population data in the computation of the IRA.

"We all know that our population has continually increased in the past eight years especially with high urban migration," read the manifesto.

"If we look closely, the IRA per capita of cities are actually far lower than that of provinces and municipalities."

Based on a 2005 statistics, each city resident has an IRA share of P1,680 compared to the allocation to provinces and municipalities which is P2,153.

This is because there are more people living in the cities.

In the Philippines, 55 percent of the population are found in urban centers.

Another burden for the cities is the thousands of transients who come in and out of cities as workers, students, tourists and businessmen on a daily basis.

These transients also need services from the city. With the reduced IRA share, the city budget hardly sufficient before is now even more strained.

The IRA is the fund used by the city government to fulfill its responsibility to promote the general welfare of constituents.

A majority of cities depend on IRA in extending basic services. These basic services include services on health, education, and housing.

A decrease in the IRA share therefore adversely affects the services that the city government could give to its constituents.

"The measly increase in the IRA is not enough to support the needs of our children for additional schools and educational facilities," read the manifesto.