

GMA wants study on possible increased social protection

President Arroyo has ordered economic managers to study the possibility of increasing social safety nets for the poor.

Socioeconomic Secretary Ralph Recto said the President issued the order after noting that the country's economy remains volatile amid signs of recovery in developed countries.

Recto said Cabinet members also noted oil prices remain unstable, which could threaten inflation projections of the government.

Recto told a news briefing in Malacañang that the government is making efforts to press oil companies to be more transparent in their pricing since this affects inflation and consumption.

"There should be transparency as this (oil prices) affects food prices, you can have food, fuel and financial crises at same time," Recto said.

"Part of our recommendation is to improve social protection programs. There could be a need to scale up this year and next year if oil prices go higher," he said.

Recto said Mrs. Arroyo gave instructions to economic managers to determine benchmarks that would prompt the government to increase funding for social protection projects.

"Inflation will be a benchmark," Recto said.

"If inflation is very high those without jobs will have difficulty buying food, at least the poor families. You may have to scale up social protection programs so they can buy food to eat," he said.

The Arroyo administration has implemented some social projects that included emergency employment programs and the P5-billion conditional cash transfers for poor families.

- Paolo Romero