

'GMA's 2007 travel expenses enough to fund PUP'

By CHRISTINA MENDEZ

Malacañang's travel expenses in 2007 are more than enough to fund the operations of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines and is double the budget of the Solicitor General's Office, according to Sen. Francis Escudero.

Quoting a Commission on Audit report, Escudero said the travel expenses of the Office of the President in 2007 amounted to P693 million.

A total of P96 million was used for local travel and P594 million for foreign trips, he added.

By comparison, Escudero said the PUP only has a budget of P665 million for this year.

The travel expenses were also higher than this year's budgetary allocation for the National Labor Relations Commission (P455 million); the Office of the Solicitor General (P296 million) and the Land Registration Authority (P460 million), he added.

Escudero said the total travel expenses of the national government amounted to P5.91 billion in 2007.

Malacañang accounted for more than 11 percent, he added.

"President Arroyo's ongoing Manila-Tokyo-Los Angeles-Cartagena-Recife-Rio-Dubai-Hong Kong-Manila voyage is practically a circumnavigation of the globe,"

he said of her latest trip. "And she will be doing all of this in just eight days."

Escudero said from 2002 to 2007, the total travel expenses of the Office of the President exceeded P2 billion.

"We will have to ask for an accounting of the benefits gained from all these trips," he said.

Escudero said it is dismaying that all this foreign travel is taking place during these difficult times.

"The money could have been spent for programs that will help create jobs, jobs, and more jobs," he said.