

GMA did not overshoot travel budget, says Palace official

President Arroyo did not overshoot the travel budget allocated to her office and the benefits derived from her foreign and local trips far outweigh their costs in terms of investments and saving overseas Filipino workers from execution, a Palace official said yesterday.

Presidential economic af-

fairs spokesman Gary Olivar said a report from the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) showed that under the 2008 General Appropriations Act (GAA), the amount allocated for local and foreign visits of the President is P244.6 million.

"The actual amount obligated by the Office of the Presi-

dent (OP) is only P233.8 million," Olivar said.

He said if ever the OP will exceed its budget for foreign travels, "this is allowable as stated in Section 62 of the 2008 GAA."

Section 62 of the 2008 GAA states that agencies may augment any item of expenditure within the Maintenance and

Other Operating Expenses (MOOE), except confidential and intelligence funds, from savings in other items in the MOOE, without prior approval of the DBM, he said.

He also said the DBM has not released any funds from the contingent outlay for travels.

"Even if she overspends,

consider the benefits (of such trips). We can certainly go by the numbers mentioned in her SONA," Olivar told a news briefing. "We can go by the record of her anti-hunger and pro-poor programs implemented under her presidency in the last eight years."

He likened the trips to those of a traveling salesperson that

bring huge sales to the company.

"If she had not gone to Korea (earlier), we won't have \$2.2 billion in investments. If she did not go to the Middle East to plead the case of our OFWs, we would not have been able to save Filipinas from execution," he said.

- Paolo Romero