

Arroyo's spending spree: Travel, 'donations' top Palace expenses

In 2007, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's presidency spent a total of P249.5 million to pay the salaries and wages of its regular employees, and P10.7 million to pay casual and contractual employees.

Combined, that means P260.2 million to pay the rank and file of the Office of the President

and 58 other executive offices, agencies, commissions, and committees under Mrs. Arroyo.

But in the same year, Mrs. Arroyo spent more than double that amount for her foreign and domestic travels, which totaled P588.5 million and P34.1 million, respectively, according to the

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Commission on Audit's report on the 2007 financial transactions of Malacañang.

In fact, she spent much more - P618.6 million - in "donations" to yet unknown beneficiaries, the COA report revealed.

Malacañang, the COA report showed, spent similarly big amounts for broad, discretionary, and seemingly identical accounts, including:

- "Confidential expenses," P149 million;
- "Consultancy services," P59.6 million;
- "Representation expenses," P56.8 million;
- "Representation allowance," P14.5 million;
- "Other bonuses and allowance," P28.8 million;
- "Transportation allowance," P10.3 million;
- "Advertising expenses," P6.9 million;
- "Additional compensation (AD-COM)," P24.8 million;
- "Extraordinary expenses," P6.64 million;
- "Miscellaneous expenses," P5.4 million;
- "Other personnel benefits," P119.8 million; and
- "Subsidy to Regional Offices/Staff Bureaus/Branch Offices," P46.6 million.

The COA report showed that apart from these amounts, the Office of the President had paid out in 2007 P21 million in "yearend bonus," P7.1 million in "cash gift," and P651,000 in "honoraria."

The President was also revealed to have kept a high-maintenance household, which may be in keeping with her role as chief executive and fount of power in the land. Yet the COA report showed that what Malacañang spends on the usual costs like food, communication, utilities, office and other supplies, gasoline, security, among others, could cause taxpayers sleepless nights.

For her 2007 foreign travel alone, Mrs. Arroyo spent an average of P49.04 million per month. In addition, she spent P2.84 million on local travel per month. Combined, that means a monthly bill of P51.8 million for the peripatetic president.

By most expense entries enrolled in the COA report Mrs. Arroyo's official household is hardly a pauper's palace. Malacañang spends like it is a real profligate's paradise. In 2007, the presidency billed the following expenses to taxpayers:

- Food supplies expenses, P55.7 million or P4.6 million a month;
- Electricity, P54.5 million or an average of P4.5 million a month;
- Gasoline, oil and lubricants, P27.9 million or P2.3 million a month;
- Water, P25.4 million or P2.1 million a month;
- Security services, P13 million or P1.08 million a month;
- Janitorial services, P4.8 million or P400,000 a month;
- Telephone, landline, P13.5 million or P1.1 million a month;
- Telephone, mobile, P9.07 million or P755,000 a month;
- Office supplies, P13.5 million or P1.1 million a month;
- "Other supplies," P19.4 million or P1.6 million a month;
- Subscription expenses, P1.04 million or P86,000 a month;
- Cooking gas, P892,000 or P74,000 a month;
- Internet, P332,597 or P27,716 a month; and
- Cable, satellite, telegraph and radio, P300,955 or P25,079 a month.

Mrs. Arroyo's household disbursed more millions for "repair and maintenance" expenses, including P94.89 million for aircraft and aircraft ground equipment; P7.1 million for motor vehicles; P4.2 million for furniture and fixtures; P1.02 million for office equipment; and P1.09 million for other machinery and equipment.

In contrast to the millions splurged on these expenses, the presidency scrimped on other seemingly important expense items.

For instance, it disbursed only P433,915 for the whole of 2007 in "training expenses," and reported zero spending on "textbooks and instructional materials," "storage expenses," "military and police supplies," "medical, dental and laboratory supplies," "awards and indemnities," and "hazard pay." - Malou Mangahas, *Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism*