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Social watch: 2011 budget 'problematic'

Posted on 28 Dec 2010 at 12:24pm

MANILA, Philippines — Budget activists on Tuesday expressed disappointment over the P1.645-trillion 2011 national budget, saying it is "problematic in many ways" and does not address the real needs of the people.

Leonor Magtolis-Briones, convenor of Social Watch Philippine, said signing the budget on time was not enough. It has to be a budget whose substance will answer the needs of the poor, she added in a statement.

"They put more emphasis on the time in signing into law the budget measure but not its content and substance," Briones, former national treasurer, said.

President Benigno Aquino III signed the so-called Reform Budget on Monday. The budget hues closely to the proposal submitted by Malacañang to Congress.

The 2011 budget is 6.8 per cent bigger than this year's P1.54-trillion national budget.

However, even with the increase, however, Social Watch was skeptical the 2011 budget will be able to finance government operations and fund anti-poverty programs that will benefit the poorest of the poor.

Social Watch, through the Alternative Budget Initiative, submitted an alternative budget to Congress during its deliberations.

While having a new budget on time is commendable, Briones said Malacañang failed to explain the billions of pesos in lump sum appropriations. This shows the lack of transparency and people's participation in the budget process, she said.

The lump sum items identified by Social Watch include the P21-billion Conditional Cash Transfer Program under the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the P30.5-billion Unprogrammed Funds – Support for Infrastructure Projects and Social Programs, the P1-billion subsidy for contingencies, and the Public-Private Partnership Support Fund.

Briones said Social Watch and the network of non-government organizations and people's groups under the Alternative Budget Initiative will continue to engage the executive and legislative in the budget process and demand for broader citizens' participation.

She said the public should be vigilant in seeing how these lump sum funds are spent, especially those at the disposal of the President.

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