

Senator Chiz Escudero is pushing for more deployments of police and military troops into various United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions to explore the potential of modernizing the country's defense forces.

Escudero, chairman of the Senate committee on national defense, said he wanted to find ways to institutionalize the deployment of Philippine troops to peacekeeping missions abroad to maximize individual and national benefits from such operations.

The senator is now closely coordinating with the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of National Defense, the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Philippine National Police, the National Economic Development Authority and the Government Procurement and Policy Board to move forward in this direction.

"We want to actively pursue our international commitments and at the same time accrue benefits for the country and our soldiers and police. The UN peacekeeping could become a viable source of modernizing our defense system if we are able to put in place proper funding and operational mechanisms into our participation to these missions," Escudero said.

As a founding member of the UN, the Philippines has been contributing its share of maintaining international peace and security as called for in the UN Charter. The Philippines first sent its troops and humanitarian personnel to the UN action in Korea in 1950-1953.

DFA records show that currently the country has a total of 1,025 peacekeepers posted in at least seven UN missions overseas and has deployed two Force Headquarters Security Units.

Since the UN does not deploy its own army and military personnel as well as provide its own logistical and technical requirements, member states voluntarily extend the manpower and technical needs, the senator said.

"We want the optimal force and equipment deployment. The country will stand to earn more if it deploys equipment-heavy units instead of infantry battalions to allow it to receive more reimbursements from the UN," Escudero pointed out.

The UN reimbursements and lease payments for particular pieces of equipment, Escudero said, could self-liquidate to recover the investment made to purchase such technical requirements "and at the same time stand to own the equipment to add to our arsenal."

"We recognize our own constraints at the home front that we do not have sufficient equipment for our own internal forces. How do we meet the requirements stipulated by the UN?" he said.

Escudero proposed a separate peacekeeping operation fund for own-use provision.

"This funding should serve as seed money and should not and could not be realigned for other purposes. We are currently making multi-agency projections so we can include this in the

budget proposal for 2011,” he explained.

According to Escudero, the proposal is timely with the lapse of Republic Act No. 7898 or the AFP Modernization Act—the 15-year modernization program that was enacted in 1995.

Under its funding provision, only around 10 percent had been released out of the total initial appropriation of P331 billion over the 15-year implementation period due to lack of money.