

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OPERATIONS OFFICE
News and Information Bureau

INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON SALVADOR PANELO
BY CHRISTIAN ESGUERRA/HEADSTART/ANC
October 14, 2019/8:11-8:31 A.M.

ESGUERRA: Did this surprise you? Was Malacañang expecting this, this decision by PNP Chief Oscar Albayalde?

SEC. PANELO: I don't know whether the Office of the President expected that. But I can only speculate – 'cause I cannot read his mind - perhaps he has had enough if the accusations, the innuendos about his involvement in the drug case, that is why he decided. Given the fact - according to him - that even his family is suffering from this unfair and false, according to him, accusations.

ESGUERRA: But do you think this was the right decision by the PNP Chief?

SEC. PANELO: I don't know. It's for him, that's his call.

ESGUERRA: But if you look at the organizations as a whole and how it has been affected by the allegation—

SEC. PANELO: I don't think it will affect, as I said earlier, it will not affect the entire organization because you exposed these scoundrels, the scalawags in the police force.

ESGUERRA: I mean, this decision by the PNP Chief to step down ahead of his compulsory retirement, do you think this would somehow help regain whatever credibility was lost in light of the controversy.

SEC. PANELO: I think so, because he wants to spare the entire organization from whatever speculations bad or false about him and the organization.

ESGUERRA: Was he pressured, let say by Malacañang to step down, no?

SEC. PANELO: I don't think so. I have not heard of anything as leading to that or leaning to that.

ESGUERRA: Has President Duterte made up his mind on who would replace General Albayalde?

SEC. PANELO: That I do not know. He has not made mention... in fact during the Cabinet meeting, we didn't even talk about it.

ESGUERRA: But there was a statement coming from him last week after you guys returned from Russia that he said na... something to the effect na mahirap na iyong madapa.

SEC. PANELO: I don't know what he was referring to, wala naman siyang binanggit kung sino.

ESGUERRA: Oo, but it was in the context of the choice for the next PNP Chief.

SEC. PANELO: Hindi ko rin alam iyon. Again, I'll be speculating.

ESGUERRA: Is there a position waiting for General Albayalde in this administration post-retirement?

SEC. PANELO: That I do not know also. That's the President's call.

ESGUERRA: And how about the statement by the President when he arrived from Russia saying that he would need solid or complete evidence against Albayalde before he decides on anything?

SEC. PANELO: Yes. Because he is a lawyer, he—

ESGUERRA: But did he find that in the subsequent Senate investigation, there was this testimony coming from one retired general, General Rudy Lacadin saying that he got a phone call from General Albayalde saying 'maliit lang naman iyong napunta sa akin eh.'

SEC. PANELO: You know, the problem with that statement is he himself, he said that I don't know whether he is joking or not; papano kung ikaw ang judge hindi mo pala alam kung totoo o hindi.

ESGUERRA: But how do you think that affected the credibility or was that a serious allegation?

SEC. PANELO: Well, if I were the judge, it will not affect. But you know depende kasi sa ano eh... and the senators believe na malaking bagay iyon.

ESGUERRA: What do you think?

SEC. PANELO: Sa akin, as a lawyer? Wala! Kasi sinabi niya, 'I don't even know whether he is telling the truth or not; or if he is joking or not.'

ESGUERRA: Because of the qualifier that he made.

SEC. PANELO: Yeah. Dapat iyon, 'Sir, sinabi niya ganito, ganyan-ganyan at seryoso siya nung sinabi niya iyon.' Pero sasabihin mo, 'hindi ko po alam kung nagbibiro siya o hindi.' And then, General Albayalde disputed that.

ESGUERRA: But based on what you know so far, based on the Senate investigations, do you think they have enough goods actually nailed Albayalde?

SEC. PANELO: Again as a lawyer?

ESGUERRA: Yeah.

SEC. PANELO: Kasi ang naririnig ko doon puro, according to this, according to that; kumbaga hearsay eh. Kailangan kasi—that's why the President was saying give me clear proof that there is a linkage that he profited from this and that - abogado itong nagsasalita eh. The presumption of innocence always apply to everyone.

ESGUERRA: So far, the testimonies coming from Generals Aquino, let say Magalong and Lacadin, they were not enough?

SEC. PANELO: Tingnan mo iyong kay General Aquino, parang nagbago-bago din siya. Tapos si General Magalong naman parang hearsay - sabi ni ganito, sabi ni ganyan - hindi naman pupuwede sa court of law iyon. Pero siguro sa perception ng tao, medyo alam mo na, alam mo naman ang tao madaling...

ESGUERRA: But do you think there is something in those allegations that at the very least requires deeper inquiry?

SEC. PANELO: Oh they are doing the inquiry already. Di tingnan natin kung ano ang kalalabasan.

ESGUERRA: But on the part of Malacañang, what would you like to know?

SEC. PANELO: Oh di ba sinabi na nga ni Presidente hahayaan niya si DILG Secretary to investigate and then kung ano ang rekomendasyon niya.

ESGUERRA: When are you expecting the findings to come out?

SEC. PANELO: This is the call of the DILG Secretary kung kelan niya tatapusin iyong imbestigasyon niya.

ESGUERRA: So, in the choice of the next PNP Chief, what exactly will the President be looking for?

SEC. PANELO: Honest and competent. Palagi naman ganyan siya sa lahat ng appointees niya eh - he wants an honest man and he wants a competent person.

ESGUERRA: How about the resolve to continue with this drug war, his centerpiece project.

SEC. PANELO: On the part of the President? It has not changed, the resolve is there, the focus is there until the end of his term.

ESGUERRA: Yeah, as far as he is concerned. But would that be a major factor in choosing the next PNP Chief?

SEC. PANELO: Ay siguro kasama iyon, kailangan iyong matapang iyong mag-i-enforce ng batas.

ESGUERRA: Somehow ano ba—with the revelations that came out against General Albayalde, was there a time when the President somehow had second thoughts na nagkamali yata ako ng desisyon.

SEC. PANELO: Wala siyang sinabi, I never heard him say anything about that. Ang narinig ko lang iyong kung ano iyong sinabi niya sa presscon.

ESGUERRA: And how does the President somehow balance these things, because you have different levels of credibility as far his lieutenant are concerned, so mataas din ang credibility ng accusers ni Albayalde; to be fair to him, mataas din naman ang credibility niya.

SEC. PANELO: Eh, ine-evaluate siguro ni Presidente iyon.

ESGUERRA: Okay, let's more to the other controversy. You took the challenge last week, the commute challenge. How was experience?

SEC. PANELO: Well, gaya ng sinabi ko, Christian, nothing has changed. Kasi I grew into riding buses, jeepneys and tricycles. Nung nasa Diliman pa ako, hindi lang noong nasa Diliman, elementary pa lang ako iyan na ang sinasakyan ko eh, ordinary eh, kaya nga sabi ko nagkamali kayo ng hinamon. Ordinaryo sa akin iyon.

ESGUERRA: Sir, how was the experience compared to how you commuted way back in college?

SEC. PANELO: Pareho din eh, kasi noon nakikipagbunuan din kami sa pagsakay ng sasakyan, kami ni Doktora Panelo nung girlfriend ko pa siya, naghahabol din kami ng jeepney, nakikipag unahan kang sumakay, maiiwan ka; sa tricycle ganundin, nag-aantay ka, nakapila ka din.

ESGUERRA: Did it improve the situation, no?

SEC. PANELO: Alam mo, mag-a-aggreivate kasi nga mas dumami ang tao, dumami rin ang sasakyan, siyempre kung mas maraming tao, mas kakaunti ang sasakyan mo.

ESGUERRA: But somehow, wasn't that somehow a realization in your part na compared to how you were commuting back in college and the way commuted last Friday nothing much had changed or in fact nag-worsen because of the bigger population speaks something about the way we handle now our traffic.

SEC. PANELO: Ganun pa rin eh. In fact, kaya ko lang naman—I accepted the challenge, kasi parang pinapakita nila sa tao na hindi namin kayang gawin iyon. Eh nagkamali nga sila, kasi kami sa Cabinet, I think lahat with exception on one or two, eh—siguro si Teddy Boy, sabi ko kay Teddy Boy, mukhang hindi siya during his time. Pero even si Secretary Sonny Dominguez sabi niya ako rin nagbu-bus ako 'no, meron akong pinupuntahan sa UP noon. Lahat kami dumaan diyan eh. Alam mo—isa pa nga pala, I have to correct, it took me daw four hours to reach Malacañang. Hindi totoo iyon na galing ako sa bahay. My main house is in Marikina, our main house. Pero nga dahil nga sa malayo ang eskwela, we had to buy a small townhouse para doon ko ititira iyong mga bata, iyong abogado ko ngayon at doctor, para malapit. Talagang gigising ka ng alas-kuwatro para makarating ka ng Xavier, makarating ka ng St. Paul.

Kaya ko ginawa iyong matagal, kasi nga the challenge was for me to suffer or to share with the experience of suffering. Sabi ko nga, I don't have to do that, nakikita ko naman ang suffering, isa pa dati ko nang dinaanan iyan. Pero kung sasakay ako sa kanto ng N. Domingo saka Hemady it will take me only 15 minutes nasa opisina na ako.

ESGUERRA: That would have been more convenient.

SEC. PANELO: Napaka-convenient noon. Saka parang useless iyong pag—kasi the very purpose of the challenge is kailangan maranasan mo, o di dinanas natin. Kaya sumakay ako sa kanto ng Hemady, N. Domingo, Aurora Boulevard papuntang Cubao. Bumaba ako ng Cubao and then I took a ride again going to Concepcion, Marikina and from there, sakay na naman ako ng Cubao until iyong mga kasama natin eh nahuli ako doon sa Cubao, because I understand from them that iyong mga kapasahero tweeted and posted pictures of me kung nasaan sila kaya nahuli nila ako. Kaya I didn't ride the LRT, kasi hindi ba I declined coverage. Ayoko ngang maging spectacle, kasi gusto nung mga nanghamon, gusto nila may spectacle eh, magkita raw kami sa Cubao. Can you imagine ia-announce kung saan kami magkikita di nandoon lahat ang media. Kaya purposely I did not tell anyone, pati nga pamilya ko hindi nila alam kung saan ako pupunta eh.

ESGUERRA: But was your objective met? Did you suffer? Did you feel, experience a suffering?

SEC. PANELO: Pareho rin noong dati eh. Kasi kapag sumakay ka, siyempre masikip, mainit, pagpapawisan ka. Kaya nga iyong... alam mo pati iyong suot ko, sabi nila bakit daw ang

porma ng suot. Unang-una, iyong sombrero at saka iyong shades, para nga hindi masyadong makilala. Para... kumbaga, kasama ka ng crowd.

ESGUERRA: Pero did you achieve your purpose when you took that challenge?

SEC. PANELO: The purpose of the challenge, to show to these people hurling the challenge that we in the government, doon sa mga matataas na puwesto, kayang gawin iyon. Iyon lang naman ang purpose doon. Pero iyong sinasabi nila, 'that did not solve the problem on traffic.' Oh sino bang nagsabing kaya ko ito ginawa ay para ma-solve, eh sila nga ang naghahamon eh.

ESGUERRA: I think the other argument was that was a onetime thing. But if you do that regularly like most of the commuters do—would you do that?

SEC. PANELO: You know, but you don't have to do that, Christian. As I was explaining, when you ride in a car, whether air-conditioned or hindi, kapag dinaanan mo iyan makikita mo iyong suffering ng tao kasi makikita mo nakapila, nag-uunahan. Nadadaan mo iyan eh.

ESGUERRA: Hindi, but sometimes iba iyong... iyong appreciation doon sa problem kapag nasa air-conditioned car ka and when you're actually in line, waiting for the next coach of the MRT.

SEC. PANELO: Hindi, kasi makikita mo eh. You don't even have to feel physically. Eh kapag nakita mo na nagsa-suffer, siyempre mai-empathy ka sa kanila. At saka lalo pa na nadaanan namin lahat iyan noong mga panahon.

ESGUERRA: Do you think this was also your on doing because of the statement which your critics said was insensitive?

SEC. PANELO: Not really, kasi in-explain ko eh. Sabi ko, walang transport crisis because when you say transport crisis, ang nasa isip ko ay may paralysis, iyong wala ka nang masakyan. Eh mayroon pa naman kakong nasasakyan.

And when I said—kaya nga I was reacting to the statement na ininsulto ko raw iyong commuters by saying na gumising nang maaga --- No. Precisely, sinasabi ko na we people, as a people, as a nation, we are very creative people. When we are confronted with a hostile situation, gumagawa tayo ng paraan. Like since hindi tayo makakarating sa pupuntahan natin nang maaga because of the traffic, eh di ang ginagawa natin ay gumigising tayo nang maaga.

ESGUERRA: But given the backlash with that statement that you issued last week, do you think we should have issued a more sympathetic, empathetic statement regarding the traffic problem?

SEC. PANELO: Pinaliwanag ko na nga eh kasi nga iba ang dating doon sa mga—actually iyong mga kumentarista ang nag-ano diyan, kumbaga sila ang nagsulsol na ganito ang ibig—of course, it was not an offensive statement. It was in fact, praising the creativity of Filipinos.

ESGUERRA: But the fact remains that there is a big problem when it comes to mass transport?

SEC. PANELO: Definitely mayroong problema tayo. Hindi ba as I have explained before and even Engineer Palafox, ang problema kasi, we're 20/30 years behind sa infrastructure. Doon nag-umpisa iyan eh. Kulang tayo ng mga bridges, wala tayong Skyway, maliliit ang mga kalsada natin. Kung sinunod nila si Engineer Palafox noon pa eh di tapos na iyan.

ESGUERRA: Somehow the challenge that was hurled against you last week, did you feel that that was a trap?

SEC. PANELO: Hindi rin.

ESGUERRA: Ano siya eh, no win situation.

SEC. PANELO: Hindi kasi, unang-una, they—I don't think na they expected na tatanggapin ko. Kaya kita mo nung ... hindi ba naghamon iyong isa na sabi niya magkita tayo sa Cubao, kuha tayo ng LRT. Tapos nung ininterview siya, sabi niya, 'O hindi naman sisipot iyon, kanina pa ako dito.' So kinorek siya noong... ng commentator, sabi niya, "Kanina pa ho nakasakay sa dyip, alas singko pa." Eh alas sais pa siya nandoon.

ESGUERRA: So iyon nga—

SEC. PANELO: Nagkamali sila nang hinamon, Christian. Kasi nga kami—

ESGUERRA: Would you do that again?

SEC. PANELO: Walang problema iyon. But ayaw ko nga ng media. I don't want to have a spectacle of it.

ESGUERRA: Now, prior to Friday, when was the last time that you actually commuted?

SEC. PANELO: Sabi ko nga two months ago—

ESGUERRA: Jeepney ha.

SEC. PANELO: Oo nga. Two months ago kasi nag—alam mo kung minsan ang drayber nakakatulog eh. So kapag nakakatulog iyan, hindi mo na makontak so mapupuwersa ka either mag-taxi ka, mag-dyip ka, pumunta ka sa isang lugar na may taxi. Ganoon ang ginawa namin.

ESGUERRA: So two months before Friday, you actually commuted from where?

SEC. PANELO: Sa Makati, kasi nga nakatulog iyong driver namin eh. Kahit anong gawin namin, isang oras, dalawang oras na kaming naghihintay—

ESGUERRA: From the Gilmore area, you went to Makati via jeepney?

SEC. PANELO: Hindi, andoon kami sa Makati ng dati, nasa isa kaming event. Eh hindi nga dumating iyong sasakyan so we had to take a cab.

ESGUERRA: But somehow if you look at the fact that government officials need to be challenged in the first place for them to take public transport says something about our mass transport system, na parang it's more of a challenge if a government official decides to take public transport—

SEC. PANELO: Hindi. Ang tingin ko kaya—the challenge was, ang purpose doon ay parang sinasabi nila eh palibhasa kasi kayo magaganda ang mga ... kumportable kayo sa inyong mga sasakyan kaya parang hindi ninyo napi-feel ang problema ng mga tao. That's not true. You don't even have to ride in jeepneys to know and to feel that; nakikita mo araw-araw eh.

ESGUERRA: Incidentally, there was a statement coming from the Vice President saying that why don't you just accept that there's a crisis because that's very important to provide solutions—

SEC. PANELO: Hindi ba nga sinabi ko there is a traffic crisis pero walang transport. Kasi kapag sinabi mong transport, the entire system wala na sana... paralisado na sana. In fact, hindi ba sinabi ni Teddy Boy Locsin, the fact alone na nakasakay siya ng apat ng dyip ibig sabihin mayroong transport.

ESGUERRA: But the question is the convenience, the lack of connectivity, iyan ang isyu roon that's why they described it as a traffic crisis—

SEC. PANELO: Hindi. Alam mo ang problema talaga is hindi ka makakarating sa pupuntahan mo nang tamang oras, and at the same time mahihirapan kang kumuha ng sasakyan. Why? Because marami eh - maraming taong pasahero, kukonti ang sasakyan. Wala tayong—tapos may problema pa sa LRT; MRT bogging down pa. Maraming problema eh. Tapos marami pang nagba-violate ng traffic, tapos mayroon pang sumisira ng kalsada natin. Those are factors that contribute to the traffic crisis.

ESGUERRA: But now, the more important question is: The projects in the pipeline, are they enough to alleviate this traffic problem that you mentioned?

SEC. PANELO: Hindi ba sabi ni ano, 15- 20 years bago ma-solve mo iyang problem sa traffic. Sabi nga ni Senator Go, “You need a Superman to do it.” But what is important is, the government is doing something about it.

ESGUERRA: But will that be enough?

SEC. PANELO: Well, whether it will be enough or not, the government is trying to do its level best.

ESGUERRA: Now looking back at your experience last Friday, almost four hours—

SEC. PANELO: Four hours kasi sinadya ko iyon.

ESGUERRA: Yeah, I know.

SEC. PANELO: Kasi I want to show to them na I can do that. Kahit na ilang oras ay puwede akong magtiyaga doon at magpakahirap din kagaya nila.

ESGUERRA: Yun nga, so what was your realization? Did you feel that somehow you understood more the plight of the people?

SEC. PANELO: Dati ko na ngang naiintindihan iyon, ever since. Palagi iyon ang sinasabi ko sa press briefing eh.

ESGUERRA: It didn’t come out that way during that interview?

SEC. PANELO: Siguro iyong—alam mo kasi, tayong mga ... mga kagaya mo, iyong ibang mga komentarista, medyo binabago eh. Nilalagyan ng kulay, kung minsan tini-twist iyong mga sinabi ko, alam naman nila iyong intensyon ko. Pero siyempre, kapag anti-administration ka, medyo gamitin mo iyon; hahanap ka ng butas.

ESGUERRA: But don’t you think you should have communicated more clearly?

SEC. PANELO: Clear as—

ESGUERRA: And not to sound too high up in your... ivory tower.

SEC. PANELO: Hindi nga eh, clear as the rising sun. Because sabi ko, eh para ho tayo makarating, kailangan magising tayo nang mas maaga. Which is true, that is what in fact we’re all doing.

ESGUERRA: Kasi kanina when you mentioned that your main house in Marikina but you decided to buy a house near the Gilmore area, not many Filipinos have that privilege to be able to buy a half-way house or another house like you did.

SEC. PANELO: Iyon ano iyon ha, hulugan iyon.

ESGUERRA: Iyon nga. Pero ang ibig sabihin, the fact is that, not many Filipinos have the opportunity—

SEC. PANELO: Hindi, that is a recognition na mayroon kang problema sa... unang-una, sa distance. Kahit na walang traffic, iyong distance mo, kailangan pa rin magising ka nang maaga.

ESGUERRA: Iyon nga. So that's why, I think, the better solution is to provide—

SEC. PANELO: But it doesn't mean na... like for instance, noong kami ay bumili noon, wala pang ganoong katinding traffic; kasi ang problema namin iyong distance eh.

ESGUERRA: Eh kasi now, people also would have wanted to buy a half-way house. Let's say, if you're working in Makati, you live in Quezon City; but of course, they don't have that privilege. They don't even have the privilege to take Grab everyday 'di ba. So I think that's where the criticism is coming from, without necessarily twisting what you said last week. Parang you should have been more affective. Affective ha, hindi effective.

SEC. PANELO: Well, anyway, basta ganoon pa rin ang... I have not changed my position on the matter: Mayroon tayong traffic crisis. In fact, during the entire briefing, I think I consumed 15 minutes criticizing LRT and MRT. Isang kapinggot lang iyong sinabi ko na, "Gising tayo nang maaga para ano ..." eh dati naman nating ginagawa.

ESGUERRA: Okay. Secretary Panelo, thank you very much for joining us.

SEC. PANELO: Thank you.

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