

**Presidential Communications Operations Office
News and Information Bureau**

**INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON SALVADOR PANELO
BY CHRISTIAN ESGUERRA – EARLY EDITION/ANC
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ESGUERRA: Good morning Secretary, and thank you for joining us.

SEC. PANELO: Good morning Christian.

ESGUERRA: Okay. How concerned is Malacañang regarding the initial reports that it might be seen as a messy organization or hosting by the Philippines of the SEA Games? You mentioned that the President wants an investigation, right?

SEC. PANELO: Yes. As I've said, the President was displeased of what he has been hearing about certain snafus - the delays in the transport, the delays in checking in, the food served, these are the things that do not sit well with the President. And there was even certain allegation of fraud, and he wants this probed; but after the SEA Games.

Meanwhile, we have to help each other, cooperate and hopefully we will finish with the SEA Games with flying colors.

ESGUERRA: Okay. But the organizers were saying... were somehow playing down these reports, saying that they are just normal in any sporting event; that if you observe what happened in previous SEA Games, these things were not actually uncommon.

SEC. PANELO: Which I agree. As I said, things like these happen given the fact that there are so many countries involved. And even daily, that happens. As travelers, it happens – of delayed flights, it happens in—but you know, these things can be avoided or prevented. Like for instance, when a hotel room could not be used at 2 P.M., then you could have just checked in the athletes in another hotel if you cannot bring them to the hotel that you are supposed to bring them in. Puwede naman lahat iyan eh. Creativity lang iyan, Christian – nagkulang sila roon.

ESGUERRA: How about the ill-preparedness, because that's one of the observations that somehow these organizers were not that prepared to host such a big event?

SEC. PANELO: Eh baka naman ang—mayroon nag-comment, baka naman ang ... sabi nila, sa dami ng mga nagluluto diyan sa kusina eh nagkagulo sila.

ESGUERRA: That's former POC President Monico Fuentebella.

SEC. PANELO: Puwede rin iyon ha. Kasi kung marami nga naman kayong cook, wala kayong coordination, magkakagulo kayo.

ESGUERRA: But do you buy the reason that they are saying that all these can be traced to the delay in the passage of the 2019 budget?

SEC. PANELO: With respect to the money, baka naman... eh napasa naman iyon 'di ba at iyong pera naman nandiyan.

ESGUERRA: They have six billion pesos.

SEC. PANELO: Kaya nga, if the money was there or is there, eh ano naman ang koneksyon kung ma-delay.

ESGUERRA: Yeah, they're claiming that somehow they were not able to go full blast, so to speak, in preparation because they had to wait for the budget.

SEC. PANELO: Puwede rin siguro. All these things can be factored in, and lahat ng mga nangyayari diyan can be explained.

ESGUERRA: Do you think this is also an issue of competence on the part of the organizers?

SEC. PANELO: Alam mo, even if you are competent kung wala ka ring gamit, wala kang tools, magkakaproblema ka din. But I think the best thing to do here is, nandiyan na iyan so punuan natin ang pagkukulang. Whatever is lacking, then fill it up. The country's image and pride are at stake so let's pool our resources together.

ESGUERRA: Do you think somehow with the initial reports or complaints regarding the so-called poor accommodation for some athletes, at least at the beginning of the hosting, that somehow this has affected already the image of the of the Philippines as host?

SEC. PANELO: Not really naman. Sabi nga nung BBC kahapon, ininterbyu ako, sabi ko, "It's not as bad as you pictured it to be." Hindi naman eh. Like there are many complaints na hindi naman pala totoo, hindi ba? Like iyong sa breakfast, hindi naman pala totoo iyon. Chicken naman pala iyong pinakain, mukha lang kikiyam but it's really chicken sausage something.

ESGUERRA: But it didn't look like a chicken sausage actually.

SEC. PANELO: Even then—

ESGUERRA: Even to the ordinary—

SEC. PANELO: But the fact, hindi naman pala totoo iyon.

ESGUERRA: That's according to the hotel.

SEC. PANELO: Hindi, even iyong mga kumain na ibang atleta, hindi naman ... they disputed that also. Mayroon isa lang nagsalita yata doon.

ESGUERRA: So?

SEC. PANELO: So ... eh nandiyan na iyan eh. Meanwhile, sabi nga ni Presidente, ituloy na natin iyan. Iimbestigahan ko iyan after.

ESGUERRA: But if they proceed with the investigation—what kind of investigation in the first place is the President expecting? This one initiated by Congress or Malacañang itself?

SEC. PANELO: According to Senator Bong Go, kapag mayroong iregularidad ... 'di ba siya ang chairman ng sports committee?

ESGUERRA: Yeah.

SEC. PANELO: He will investigate. He will call for an investigation. The Executive will also have its own investigation. Tingnan natin. We will have to go to the root of all this.

ESGUERRA: But how credible will that investigation be considering the fact that the private foundation organizing the event is chaired by House Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano?

SEC. PANELO: Wala naman iyon—

ESGUERRA: A close ally of the President, running mate also.

SEC. PANELO: Given the character of this President, wala naman ditong kai-kaibigan eh. You see how he fires people who are close to him. Kapag may irregularity, graft, corruption, he will be accountable.

ESGUERRA: But I think as early as July, the President raised concerns about PHISGOC, the private foundation which was, of course, incorporated. He raised concerns about the possibility of corruption. Whatever happened to that concern raised by the President? Because—of course, now it's PHISGOC running the show still.

SEC. PANELO: Eh apparently naayos nila iyon. Hindi ba supposed to be the money was in the hands of ... parang na-transfer iyon, 'di ba? According to Secretary Teddy Boy Locsin, binigay sa DFA. Kasi original is DFA eh. Then he asked that it'd be transferred to Treasury, and then somehow napunta yata kung saan. Hindi ko na maintindihan kung anong nangyari doon.

ESGUERRA: Actually, they started with an allocation of 7.5 billion, and then it was decreased, and then it ended up with six billion pesos as a budget. But in terms of the structure of the

organizing committee, you were quoted as saying that somehow perhaps in the future, it would be better for the government to take—

SEC. PANELO: Siguro—hindi, ganito iyon: We have to learn from mistakes. Whatever mistakes we have, we have to learn from them and then go forward. Eh hindi naman pupuwedeng basta na lang tayo reklamo nang reklamo, wala tayong gagawin.

ESGUERRA: So that investigation that you mentioned is expected to happen, when? As soon as the SEA Games is completed?

SEC. PANELO: Yes. Eh ilang araw lang naman iyon eh.

ESGUERRA: And then—so who else are expected to be covered by that planned investigation of the President?

SEC. PANELO: Lahat. Kasi if there are complaints of irregularities, eh di lahat iyan covered.

ESGUERRA: Now, were you concerned that they had this much budget, yet there were reports at least of certain possible mismanagement, at least at the beginning when it came to the accommodation and unfinished structures? I think that's one thing which dismayed some athletes - certain facilities that were supposed to be used for sporting events were not yet finished.

SEC. PANELO: Parang hindi rin naman totoo iyon, 'di ba? Mukhang hindi rin totoo iyan eh. Sinasabi nila hindi pa gawa iyong isang facilities, iyon pala iba naman pala iyon.

ESGUERRA: Some of them.

SEC. PANELO: Kung minsan maraming exaggeration din eh.

ESGUERRA: Oo, but if you look at the Rizal Memorial Complex, there were still construction ongoing days before the official opening of the SEA Games. So ibig sabihin, talagang may mga minamadali. Now to be fair, many of the facilities had been completed and many were first class.

SEC. PANELO: But these things will be looked into, definitely, para ma-trace natin kung saan nanggaling. Sabi nga ni Presidente, kapag incompetence iyan, ibig sabihin may corruption diyan. Mayroon pa ring corruption iyan kasi... kasama iyan eh.

Ang problema mo lang, sabi ni Presidente, kung voluntary iyong work. Kasi it's a private organization, baka may mga nag-volunteer na mga trabaho nila. So kung... like, he gave me an example, like kung halimbawa duty iyan to transport certain athletes pagkatapos off na pala siya, at hindi naman siya binabayaran, hindi naman siya gobyerno.

ESGUERRA: Pero iba iyon kasi that's volunteer work eh. But you're talking of a private foundation which was incorporated, headed by a politician. Now that foundation was created by the POC, by private NGO which happens to be headed by a politician.

SEC. PANELO: Kahit naman private organization, mayroon din namang nagbu-volunteer sa private organization na iyan. Like ngayon 'di ba, may nag-volunteer, iyong Ceres Bus Company. Mayroon pang iba.

ESGUERRA: But I think that's more of out of the goodness of their heart because they saw that there were problems—

SEC. PANELO: There are problems.

ESGUERRA: Okay. Now, let's go to the other issue. Before the SEA Games controversy, there was the other issue regarding the appointment of the Vice President to the ICAD as co-chairman of that inter-agency committee.

Now after I think 19 days, the President decided to fire her. Now, the Vice President warned that she would come out with the report of what she discovered during her brief stint. Now, is this something that somehow which concerns Malacañang?

SEC. PANELO: First, my question to her is: If it is true that you have discovered certain irregularities—

ESGUERRA: No, she didn't mention any irregularities.

SEC. PANELO: Whatever.

ESGUERRA: Discovered something.

SEC. PANELO: No, because she was threatening 'Ano ang kinatatakot ninyo? Natakot ba kayo na may matuklasan ako? Ako'y magrereport sa bayan.' So the assumption there is mayroon kang mga natuklasan na masama. So if that is true, if that is the case, then these irregularities or whatever, whether it's illegal or not, then it was her duty to reveal the same on the very day that she discovered it, otherwise, may problema ka doon. Kasi parang ang lumalabas, porke ba nasa administrasyon ka and then you found out na there are some illegal things being done in relation to the drug war you will have your lips sealed just because you are with the administration, and now that you are out saka mo ibubulgar – that does not speak well with her character.

ESGUERRA: Bakit naman?

SEC. PANELO: Bakit, gusto mong sabihin porke kakampi kita ngayon hindi ko na sasabihin na mayroon kang masamang ginagawa?

ESGUERRA: But it could also be—

SEC. PANELO: It's her duty to reveal whatever irregularities or anything that bad on the very day that she discovers it.

ESGUERRA: But it can also be argued that she was still collecting information at that time, which in the first place many of the information na had been restricted to her, 'di ba?

SEC. PANELO: Pangalawa, Christian, alam mo iyong sinasabi niya na mayroon siyang natuklasan. Kaya mo natuklasan iyan, whatever that is, eh kasi may access ka na nga sa loob. Precisely kaya ka inimitahan eh kasi marami kang sinasabi then - criticizing the program – eh ang viewpoint po ay nasa labas eh. So kaya ka nga pinapasok eh para makita mo na walang tinatago sa'yo.

ESGUERRA: Was that really the intention of the President for appointing her?

SEC. PANELO: That's one of them. Because sabi 'di ba ni Presidente, 'Mabuti naman nandito ka na baka mabago iyong outlook mo kapag nasa ground ka na, makita mo na mali iyong mga pinagsasabi mo.'

ESGUERRA: But it didn't sound or appear that way at the start because the impression was that it started as a taunt, even a juvenile challenge coming from the President saying na 'tingin mo mas magaling ka eh di ikaw na.' Parang that's how it sounded.

SEC. PANELO: Hindi kasi ang sinasabi ni VP at that time, sinasabi niya na... first, 'di ba sabi niya 'it's a failure'; tapos sinabi niya, 'no, ineffective; let's try other tacts,' try other measure.' But she never presented any kind of approach or a scheme or a program; wala naman siyang inilabas eh.

I've been suggesting to her day one pa lang, sabi ko, 'Why don't you go to the President, seek audience,' because she wanted to ask 'what's the scope of my authority,' 'di ba.

ESGUERRA: To clarify.

SEC. PANELO: Clarify. Sabi ko, 'Eh di tanungin mo.' Pero alam mo ang sagot ni Presidente roon, 'kung scope of authority ang pag-uusapan, it's already outlined in the Executive Order #15 creating the ICAD.' Kaya nga because of that, ang sabi ko, 'if you need some more powers that you would want then go to the President.' Anong sagot niya roon? 'I will not go there unless invited.' Eh appointee ka na nga, in-appoint ka na nga ng Presidente.

ESGUERRA: So that was the misstep that you were talking about?

SEC. PANELO: That's one of them.

ESGUERRA: How about the others?

SEC. PANELO: The others is talking with officials, UN officials. You know, UN has already pre-judged the war on drugs.

ESGUERRA: But I think you have to make a distinction among the agencies or officials identified with the UN? Because on record, she spoke only with members of the UN Office for Drugs and Crime, not the prosecutors that you mentioned before.

SEC. PANELO: Yeah, but ang problema iyong Mr. Kine nagti-tweet doon sa kaniyang Twitter.

ESGUERRA: Si Phelim Kine is not part of the UN ODC.

SEC. PANELO: Even then, the fact is... ang ano mo kasi, ang announcement mo sa public ay marami kang kakausapin. Bakit mga foreigners ang kakausapin mo? Sana pinuntahan mo na lang iyong mga lugar. Day one pa lang nagpunta ka na sa mga lugar, ganiyan, talk with the victims, talk with the families, talk with the people there.

ESGUERRA: What's wrong with that?

SEC. PANELO: Hindi, dapat nga iyon ang ginawa niya.

ESGUERRA: She actually did that.

SEC. PANELO: She did that two weeks after or several days after, noong bumanat na si Presidente. Iyong mga ginawa niya, iyong sinabi niyang sumulat siya, she wrote mga three reports na, that came subsequent after the President made remarks negatively against certain missteps that she has done.

ESGUERRA: Hindi, pero going back doon sa UN ODC. So why are you lumping that with the comment on Twitter by Phelim Kine?

SEC. PANELO: Kasama lahat iyon kasi parang—

ESGUERRA: I mean, why do you lumped them together na—

SEC. PANELO: No, kasi parang lumalabas noon, Christian, na kasama doon sa inimitahan niya iyon.

ESGUERRA: And she didn't.

SEC. PANELO: Iyon ang sabi niya. Eh hindi naman natin alam iyon. Eh bakit naman magsasalita, 'I'm ready ... will go there.'

ESGUERRA: So you have information that she actually invited—

SEC. PANELO: Hindi, I'm not saying that because she is saying na hindi. Kasi when a certain Mr. Kine came out with that kind of tweet, bakit ka magsasalita nang ganiyan kung hindi ka naimbitahan, kung walang nagsabi sa'yo na you're welcome there. Eh dati ka na ngang hindi welcome doon eh.

ESGUERRA: But you know for a fact that that can also happen to you? I don't know whether you have a Twitter account but—

SEC. PANELO: Wala, wala akong Twitter.

ESGUERRA: People can also tweet you and say, 'Secretary Panelo, we will like to come over to the Philippines and throw our support behind your drug war,' the President's drug war. I mean, that's beyond your control.

SEC. PANELO: Yeah, but that's just one of the missteps that she has committed. Pero alam mo, ang naging problema pa kasi kay VP, after that - noong sinabi ni Presidente I cannot trust her with classified information - I think—excuse me, Christian, siguro kung ako iyon, I would have resigned already, automatically. Kasi when there is mistrust to you as an appointee, delicadeza requires you to submit resignation. Pero ang ginawa niya, 'Kung ayaw mo sa akin eh di sabihin mo.' That's very rude. Tapos pati iyong presidente ng Partido Liberal, 'Fire her.' 'Di ba? O sige, if you were the President, what will you do?

ESGUERRA: Actually, it didn't sound that way. It appeared na... I think the message was, if he doesn't trust the Vice President, why appoint her in the first place? Now, she just go ... he should just go straight to the point.

SEC. PANELO: Ganito iyan, when she was appointed, the trust was there. When she committed missteps, oh di siyempre ... like, hahanapan mo ng classified information, nagdi-demand ka, siyempre kung ako rin si Presidente, 'Bakit, ano bang gagawin mo—

ESGUERRA: Wait, let me get this straight: When the President appointed her to the ICAD, he trusted her?

SEC. PANELO: I think so. The trust was removed when you started committing steps na sa tingin ng appointing power something is wrong. Hindi ba?

ESGUERRA: Wasn't that a mere spin on the part of Malacañang because in the first place, there must have been a miscalculation or at least a miscalculation was seen on the part of the President that when he issued the challenge, you guys formalized it, and you didn't expect that she would accept it?

SEC. PANELO: Oh no, I beg to disagree. You must remember that from the time the President offered it to her, I as the Spokesman of the President have been egging her to accept it

because it's a rare opportunity for an opposition leader to be invited in the administration and help—

ESGUERRA: But you sounded sarcastic then.

SEC. PANELO: No, of course not. Look at my statement. I even said, this is a ladder to the presidency. This your chance—

ESGUERRA: That also sounded sarcastic, especially the fact during the time when you gathered reporters around you and you called the Vice President in your cellular phone, right?

SEC. PANELO: No, I didn't call her.

ESGUERRA: You did that. You were calling the Vice President.

SEC. PANELO: Actually, they wanted me to ring her up and see if she would respond.

ESGUERRA: I mean, was that something that a Cabinet official like you was supposed to do, when in fact you should have gone through official channels? I mean, the way all these things started, almost quite questionable.

SEC. PANELO: Wait a minute, when the President made the announcement, as a friend of the Vice President—because we're friends. We're supposed to be, according to her anyway, I'm the only friend in the Cabinet after she left. And we're in the same city.

As a friend, I gave her an advanced info, I said, 'O may appointment si President, tanggapin mo ba?' That was my question eh. Kumbaga ano lang iyon... headstart. Kaya lang ang sagot niya kaagad, 'nabastos yata ako.' Excuse me, ikaw na nga, dapat nga pasalamatan mo ako at binibigyan kita ng advanced info bago makarating kay diyaryo.

ESGUERRA: Now as a final point, there are those who are saying that somehow this entire episode with the Vice President - getting appointed to ICAD - ended up as an embarrassment for the President because there was again a supposed miscalculation. But of course, there are also those who are saying that somehow this embarrassed the Vice President.

SEC. PANELO: No, it was not a miscalculation. You must remember that this President is a master tactician. He would not have been President, he would have not won all the elections that he ran into, if he is not that good.

ESGUERRA: So what was the tactic of the President behind this?

SEC. PANELO: The tactic is, 'Oh sige, as you said, you sound na magaling ka and you've been saying na marami kang ideas—kasi, Christian, when you criticize something na that's bad, I'm sure mayroon ka ng idea na ito ang gawin mo; ito ang good, mali iyang ginagawa mo eh. Pero she never did that. She never presented any scheme.

ESGUERRA: I think that was presented during the 19-day stint. She talked about community-based drug rehabilitation.

SEC. PANELO: That was after nga the scolding in public, mayroon ng mga sinabi si Presidente kaya mo lang ginawa. Dapat day one pa lang, kung mayroon kang ideas in your mind, day one, 'Mr. President, I have this program.' Tapos kung may problema ako sa powers, 'Mr. President, what can I do? Can I do this? Can I do that?'

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

SEC. PANELO: Thank you also.

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