

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OPERATIONS OFFICE
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PRESS BRIEFING WITH PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON SALVADOR PANELO
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USEC. IGNACIO: Happy Monday. Let's now have Presidential Spokesperson and Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo.

SEC. PANELO: Good morning MPC; Merry Christmas.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Comment sir doon sa in-approve sa US na December 20 that imposes—that denies entry to officials of the Philippines who are responsible for the detention of Senator De Lima?

SEC. PANELO: Well, we cannot interfere on the process of the US legislature. But I notice that in that provision that has been approved there is such a colatilla, 'if' the... - what does it say here? - When the US Secretary of State receives 'credible information' in the so-called wrongful imprisonment. In the first place, it's not a wrongful imprisonment, as we have repeatedly explained that. So, I suppose the Secretary of State, unlike the two senators who introduced that amendment, is better informed and educated on the internal judicial process of this country and would necessarily follow his informed judgment.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Meaning, you don't believe that this will imposed on officials of the Philippines?

SEC. PANELO: It cannot just be imposed, because there is a colatilla there, there must be a credible information; if the information is not credible, then the US Secretary of State will not impose such sanction.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Just for sound bite purposes, sir. When you say it's not a wrongful detention, what do we mean by that?

SEC. PANELO: As we have repeatedly explained, it cannot be a wrongful detention because the senator went through two processes – one, administrative when the investigating prosecutor conducted a proceeding to determine whether there exists a probable cause for the filing of an information and prosecutor found the existence of one. And then the another process is judicial - the Constitution requires the judge before issuing a warrant for the arrest of an accused to determine, personally examine the evidence before him and if he finds probable cause then he issues a warrant of arrest. So, how can that be a wrongful detention?

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Maybe trumped up charges?

SEC. PANELO: If that is trumped up charge, then the prosecutor could have seen it as well as the judicial officer who issued the warrant.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Sir, will you be making any communication to the US with regard to the circumstances of the arrest of the senator to correct - if I can use that word—

SEC. PANELO: I will leave that to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: So Secretary, you are confident that no official would be affected by the ban, because you are claiming that the detention of Senator De Lima is not wrongful. So, are you confident that no official would be barred from entering the US?

SEC. PANELO: It depends on the US Secretary of State. It's their call. But we are not bothered by it, if that is what you want me to say.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: You are not bothered by signing of the spending bill?

SEC. PANELO: We are not bothered by it. First, it's their process; we cannot intrude, in the same way that we react when they intrude into our processes. Number two, the very provision says there must be credible information before they ban any official in the Philippines.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: And you think there would be credible information?

SEC. PANELO: That's precisely what I am saying, there is none.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: Okay, so you are saying parang walang bearing kumbaga iyong mangyayaring provision na ito, kasi naging controversial siya eh.

SEC. PANELO: Yeah kasi may colatilla, hindi naman just 'those who are involved in the detention,' hindi naman sinabing ganoon eh. In the wrongful detention, you have to determine whether it's wrong or not.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, si Senator Leila De Lima has named President Duterte and even you as one of those behind her political prosecution. How would that affect your personal plans, you have plans to go to the United States?

SEC. PANELO: In the first I have no plans in going there. Number two, you know the statements of De Lima has been completely repudiated by surveys after surveys conducted by credible organizations. The trust rating of the President has surged as well as the approval rating of the President. The 5% disapproval rating is constituted by these people - the opposition, the detractors, the haters, the critics. So, they are not credible in other words.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Do you have maybe plans to clear your name, sir, before US authorities if there is such a platform, sir?

SEC. PANELO: No, none.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Sir, sound bite ceasefire sa NPA?

SEC. PANELO: Well, the President has approved the recommendation of the NDF as well as the government panel for a ceasefire beginning 23 of this month, midnight up to January 7 11:59. This grant is precisely to generate an atmosphere that will lead to preliminary talks and then formal talks for a peaceful negotiation on the present conflict between the two sides. And we hope that this will pave the way for a lasting peace in this country, vis-a-vis the communist rebellion.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Sir, you said preliminary talks, may mga schedule na ba?

SEC. PANELO: Wala pa.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Kahit informal?

SEC. PANELO: Wala pa.

INA ANDOLONG/CNN PHILS: Sir, what prompted the President to include ES Medialdea in the negotiating panel?

SEC. PANELO: I do not know, hindi ko alam.

INA ANDOLONG/CNN PHILS: Pero, sir ano ang---

SEC. PANELO: Baka kulang pa kasi iyong panel. Ang alam ko dadalawa lang sila eh.

INA ANDOLONG/CNN PHILS: Okay. But who will lead it, is it going to be ES or Secretary Bello?

SEC. PANELO: I don't know about that.

INA ANDOLONG/CNN PHILS: Sir, in March this year, the President issued a letter, basically terminating nga po iyong peace talks as well as the panel. Is there going to be another letter to revive it formally?

SEC. PANELO: I will ask the President.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Sir, good morning. Considering iyong mga previous reports na kasama si Presidente doon sa hit list ng NPA, what convinced the President to implement the ceasefire despite the reports?

SEC. PANELO: First, that report is a false news; that's been denied by Jose Ma. Sison himself. So how can we respond to a false news.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: But it was Secretary Esperon, who actually informed the media about the hit list?

SEC. PANELO: Because precisely he was fed by a false information; Jose Ma. Sison denied it already.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: So, you don't believe that NPA is threatening the President right now? You believe in the statement of Joma Sison.

SEC. PANELO: Let me put it this way: The communist rebels will always want this government to fall; that is precisely the purpose by which this organization has been conceived from the very beginning. So it is not farfetched that they want to eliminate all the officials running this government. But we are prepared for that.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: So, do you trust that the NPA will... panghahawakan nila iyong words—

SEC. PANELO: As I said it doesn't matter to us, because the very essence of a rebellion is to put the government down. So necessarily kasama doon iyong pag-assassinate ng lahat ng mga taong running the government, kasama lahat iyon sa plano nila eh. But we are ready for that, they have been trying to do that for the last 50 years and they have failed.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, will the President push through with his schedule today in Cotabato?

SEC. PANELO: Yes.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Despite what happened, sir, iyong bombing doon?

SEC. PANELO: Yes. He will distribute land certificates and then visit the venues where the bombing took place.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: He will also include iyong venue, sir, ng bombing.

SEC. PANELO: Yes, he will [signal cut] one of them.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, may information ba na-receive ang government na iyong bombing was connected to the visit of the President?

SEC. PANELO: Oh no, definitely not. Para ngang teenager ang nabasa ko doon sa isang report eh, teenager ang nagpasabog, grupo ng mga teenagers.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: So, it was not perhaps to deter the President to push through with the schedule.

SEC. PANELO: Hindi naman nila alam na pupunta si Presidente roon eh, in the first place. Baka more—parang ang tingin ko baka more on the reaction sa BARMM, di ba kasi may dating grupo, tapos mawawalan ng mga trabaho iyong previous entity that will be replaced by BARMM baka kasama iyon, we don't know. Actually ngayon nag-i-speculate lang.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: Secretary, previously the military and the defense department said they were not keen in recommending the ceasefire because the NPAs daw are using the ceasefire to celebrate their anniversary and to launch atrocities. Did the President consider these concerns by the security forces?

SEC. PANELO: Definitely, since it was given to him and he has decided.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: And why did he decide against that recommendation?

SEC. PANELO: As I said earlier, to create the condition conducive to a good atmosphere by which two sides can negotiate.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: But is Malacañang concerned about those issues raised by the military that the NPA might launch attacks during the—

SEC. PANELO: We are ready for that. We are always ready.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: But you believe the NPA will do that during the ceasefire period?

SEC. PANELO: As I said, any attack on their part will destroy the presumption of sincerity on this particular group.

USEC. ROCKY: Joseph.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Sir, you said kanina na 'yung kay—information ni Secretary Esperon na nasa hit list is false news 'no but, si—

SEC. PANELO: It could be because it was denied by that top honcho of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: And you believe, Joma?

SEC. PANELO: Well... Deny—and as I've said even if it's true, we're ready for that.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Okay. But sir, si Secretary Año said that... I think there was a... two na napatay? Napatay ba 'yun?

MPC: [UNCLEAR]

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Oo, dalawang NPA official daw po ang napatay sa recent encounter in Quezon City and Secretary Año said that those were sent to kill the President.

SEC. PANELO: Oh, eh napatay na pala eh 'di wala—that's what I've said—

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: No, but still this—

SEC. PANELO: —kahit anong gawin nila, wala... mahihirapan sila.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: But the threat is there, but the plan is there.

SEC. PANELO: Precisely as I said, the very organization itself is a threat to national security for fifty years. They have tried but they have failed.

USEC. ROCKY: Okay. Other issue o follow-up? Maricel.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: But meaning sir, you're willing to take the risk to push through with the peace talk?

SEC. PANELO: Yes. Because we don't want the—the President doesn't want more bloodshed of our own fellow Filipinos. We want it stopped; it's about time they return to the fold of the law.

USEC. ROCKY: Okay. Pia and then Francis.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, ano nang mangyayari sa mga localized peace talks if ever na-push through 'yung resumption of talks?

SEC. PANELO: Eh, siguro depende 'yun kung anong pag-uusapan nila. Kasi right now, mayroong localized talks. They can always discuss whether itutuloy o hindi. Depende kung anong pag-uusapan nila.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Pero ito ang desisyon ni President Duterte? Is it a sign that or parang nakikita po ba ni President Duterte that localized peace talks are not working?

SEC. PANELO: No. Ang—kaya si—Alam n’yo si Presidente ever since sinasabi niya, I always leave a space for negotiation, for peace talks; palaging ‘yun ‘di ba ang sinasabi niya? It’s always ajar; so any opportunity na ang feeling niya puwede, ibinibigay niya.

USEC. ROCKY: Francis.

FRANCIS: Sir, paulit-ulit na questions pero I think, three times na na-cancel ‘yung peace talks, so, what if nga after ng... ng suspension ng ceasefire next year tapos nagkaroon na naman ng mga attacks, anong gagawin ng gobyerno? So, titigil na naman po ba tayo or will the President choose na sige, pagbigyan na lang natin... ‘yung sinasabi nga n’yo na matuloy na nga ‘tong peace talks na ‘to?

SEC. PANELO: Regardless of the success of the peace talks, ano man ang mangyari, palagi tayong ready whatever eventuality. Nagbibigay lang si Presidente ng puwang para magkaroon ng katahimikan ang ating bayan. Sabi nga sa—May kasabihan tayo, kung hindi makuha sa santong dasalan, eh sa santong paspasan na mangyayari sa kanilang dalawang panig. Pero subukan natin, baka naman magkasundo.

USEC. ROCKY: MPC, questions? Follow-up other issues? Follow-up? Other issue, Pia and then Joseph.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, patanong lang ng office. What is—Ano po ‘yung stand ng Malacañang on POGO, sir, amid ‘yung crimes na nangyayari and other social issues linked to their mostly Chinese workers? Kasi si Senator Joel Villanueva said in a statement that the negative effects of POGOs outweigh the benefits amid all these issues, sir.

SEC. PANELO: We have laws that will cover all imaginable situations or events occurring in relation to POGOs. So, all we have to do is enforce them; and they’re being enforced in fact.

USEC. ROCKY: May follow-up doon?

SEC. PANELO: Maybe he’s referring to that particular kidnapping incident. But I understand, the victim is—went back to her house and wouldn’t say anything. Perhaps, it was more of an internal conflict between the so-called kidnappers kasi mukhang magkakaibigan naman sila, magkakasama silang pumasok sa van then nagkaroon lang siguro ng heated discussion.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: So, sir ano ‘yung sinasabi ninyo na strictly being implemented sir to prevent all these crimes on happening again?

SEC. PANELO: Yeah! If there is violation like for instance, if there are overstaying here, they have to be removed in accordance with law.

USEC. ROCKY: Okay. Ace? Okay na? May follow-up dun? Other issue. Mag-last question na batayo kay Joseph? Okay, Joseph.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: [OFF MIC] (UNCLEAR)

SEC. PANELO: Last three.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: [OFF MIC] (UNCLEAR) Sir, any update on the budget? Natanggap na ba ng Palace and when is the President going to sign it?

SEC. PANELO: Wala pa akong info diyan.

MPC: [OFF MIC] (UNCLEAR)

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Ano?

MPC: [OFF MIC] (UNCLEAR)

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Pang-next year na. Sir, 'yung Cubao – Makati na five minutes, December na?

SEC. PANELO: Nung sinabi niya 'yun 'di ba—

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Give up na ba dun, sir?

SEC. PANELO: Nung sinabi niya, on the condition na—Gaya ng sinabi ko kay Chona sa kaniyang programa, on the condition na obtained 'yung mga dapat eh, pero kung hindi pa, oh eh 'di—hindi pa naman tapos ang term niya eh.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: So, give up na tayo this December, sir? Wala na 'yan?

SEC. PANELO: Eh, siguro dahil ilang araw na lang eh.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: So, papaano sir, wala? Kalimutan na 'yung five minutes... at least for December?

SEC. PANELO: For December, kalimutan na muna natin; unless you want to ride on a chopper?

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Speaking of choppers—

SEC. PANELO: Oh, yes!

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Any comment on the charges against Pastor Quiboloy?

SEC. PANELO: Ano ba? Bakit, may bago ba?

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Mayroon pong rape charges.

SEC. PANELO: About?

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Against Pastor Quiboloy.

SEC. PANELO: Na ano raw?

MPC: Rape.

SEC. PANELO: Rape?

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Uhm.

SEC. PANELO: Eh... First, I do not know about it. Second, that should be a private matter involving the Pastor. We will not intrude into that private domain.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: So, hands off po ‘yung Palace?

SEC. PANELO: Hmm?

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Hands off ‘yung Palace?

SEC. PANELO: O, eh... hindi natin—kasi ano ‘yun, private matter ‘yun eh.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: You don’t think the closeness of the President and Pastor would affect the case?

SEC. PANELO: No.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: It shouldn’t?

SEC. PANELO: The rule of law in this country always prevail regardless of who are involved.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Sir, just in case gamit—hanapin ng office—

SEC. PANELO: Ano raw?

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Alam mo na, you have to prepare. So, Presidente – magpa-Pasko. Any activities in the—

SEC. PANELO: Sabi niya sa bahay lang daw siya?

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: No activities? No gift-giving stuff?

SEC. PANELO: Sabi niya sa bahay lang ang kaniyang ano eh... 'Yung gift-giving hindi ko alam kung—Tapos na yata 'yun 'di ba?

MPC: [OFF MIC] (UNCLEAR)

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: 'Yung mga kids? Okay na ba 'yun?

SEC. PANELO: Ah... Hindi ko alam, I will ask. Dati-dati mayroon.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: So, doon po siya Christmas and New Year?

SEC. PANELO: Hindi ko nga alam. I'll ask.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Christmas at least?

SEC. PANELO: I'll ask the Protocol. Sila nakakaalam ng schedule ni Presidente.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: But Christmas nasa Davao lang siya?

SEC. PANELO: Nasa Davao lang siya with the apos.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Okay, sir. Thank you, Merry Christmas!

USEC. ROCKY: Pia, may question?

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, reaction lang. Kasi the people in Sagada, Mountain Province are opposing plans of the Ayala Group to develop certain portions of their municipality for tourism purposes—

SEC. PANELO: Anong lugar 'to?

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sa Sagada, sir. Sagada, Mountain Province. Kasi parang it goes against their unwritten rule daw na dapat walang outsider na makakabili ng lupa and also they want to protect their environment. So, may stand na po ba ang Malacanang on this?

SEC. PANELO: Wala...wala akong alam na may stand. I think we have to ask first the Tourism Secretary, domain niya 'yan eh.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Thank you, sir.

USEC. ROCKY: Okay. Maricel.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Sir, kailangan lang ng office. Sir, soundbite lang, soundbite lang doon sa Pulse Asia Trust and Approval Rating.

SEC. PANELO: What about Pulse Asia?

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Sir, 'yung Trust and Approval Rating, soundbite lang.

SEC. PANELO: It's a complete repudiation of the rambunctious politician and the cantankerous critics and detractors. It's about time they accept their fate. It is about time they accept the fact that this President is loved by an overwhelming majority of the Filipino people, that this President is trusted by them. In fact, they are inspired by this President as the President is inspired by them. There is no President in the history of this country during his midterm that the rating went up, except for this President. The trajectory is always downtrend, it's unprecedented, it's a record-breaking rating.

MPC: [OFF MIC] Thank you, sir.

USEC. ROCKY: Okay, thank you. Thank you, Secretary Panelo.

SEC. PANELO: Thank you!

USEC. ROCKY: Thank you, MPC. Sir, ito po ba daw 'yung last n'yong briefing for 2019?

SEC. PANELO: Hindi, mayroon tayong pasok 26. 26, 27, mayroon pa tayong pasok 'di ba? Unless you don't want it, I'll just issue statements.

MPC: [OFF MIC] (UNCLEAR)

USEC. ROCKY: Okay.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: [OFF MIC] So, Merry Christmas!

USEC. ROCKY: Merry Christmas!

SEC. PANELO: Happy New Year! Happy Valentine!

USEC. ROCKY: Okay. Thank you, Secretary Panelo. Thank you, MPC.

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