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INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON SALVADOR PANELO
By JOYCE ILAS – CNN PHILIPPINES
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JOYCE: Sir, what is the government doing regarding this latest development?

SEC. PANELO: Well as the President directed in the Cabinet meeting, we are preparing to evacuate/repatriate the Filipinos there out of harm's way.

JOYCE: Usually, whenever we experience—whenever Filipinos get in the middle of conflicts in the Middle East, ang laging sinasabi ng mga Pilipino doon, sir, iyong iba hindi nila gustong umuwi kasi ayaw nilang iwan iyong mga trabaho nila; iyong iba sinasabi iyong lugar daw nila safe naman. How do we encourage Filipinos, OFWs to come back home?

SEC. PANELO: Unang-una, kung meron na talagang open hostilities repatriation is out of the question, kasi kung shooting war na eh. Ang primary concern natin i-evacuate natin to a safe place. Kagaya nga ng sinabi ni Secretary Esperon, i-evacuate natin sila para hindi sila malagay sa panganib.

Now, with respect doon sa mga ayaw, eh papaano natin pipilitin iyon kung ayaw; we cannot forcibly drag them to a ship or to whatever to bring them out.

JOYCE: So sir, ibig sabihin kung tatanggi sila wala tayong magagawa, maiiwan sila sa Iraq.

SEC. PANELO: Ano ang magagawa natin kung ayaw nila.

JOYCE: Sir, ang isa pong kinakatakot nila, baka daw wala—ayaw nilang iwan iyong trabaho nila dahil baka wala silang datnan dito sa Pilipinas, sir. What can OFWs expect from the government, in case they do decide to come back in the Philippines?

SEC. PANELO: Joyce, as I said earlier, repatriation is out of the question when there is a shooting war. We have to place them in the safe place. Hindi naman sila kailangang umuwi, habang nagkakaroon ng giyera doon o digmaan. Siyempre hindi mo naman maii-uwi iyon talaga eh, hahanapan mo ng lugar na ligtas, malapit doon sa Iraq ba iyon, like sa Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, naka-ready tayo, merong bakro na doon na malapit na naghihintay at a moment's notice, meron ding pinadalang mga frigates, mga security for them. Marami tayong naka-ready na at anytime.

JOYCE: Sir, just to clarify, it's going to be an evacuation, not repatriation back here to the Philippines?

SEC. PANELO: Iyong Iraq and Iran dahil nagkakaroon na ng gulo doon eh kinakailangan talaga i-evacuate na natin sila sa safe place. But the repatriation, iyon ang pinaka-goal doon.

JOYCE: So, sir initially, i-evacuate muna natin sila and then kung sino man iyong gustong umuwi sa Pilipinas, sila na lang iyong mag-a-avail nung repatriation—

SEC. PANELO: Palagay ko, Joyce. If you will give them a choice between being placed in a safe place and coming home eh pipiliin nila iyong doon muna sa safe place.

JOYCE: But for those, sir, who would avail of their repatriation, what can they expect when they come home, sir?

SEC. PANELO: Di ba sinabi na nga ni Presidente, inalert na niya na iyong mga ahensiya ng gobyerno, iyong mga ongoing projects natin, bigyan sila ng preference na magkaroon ng trabaho, kasi madi-dislocate sila kung sila ay uuwi rito. Marami naman tayong mga ongoing like iyong build, build, build projects natin, bibigyan sila ng preference.

JOYCE: Sir, in terms of military, when will security forces be deployed to ensure the safety of Filipinos in Iraq and Iran, sir?

SEC. PANELO: Eh nandoon na nga iyong ating mga frigates di ba, papunta na roon para nga to secure iyong mga ililipat natin.

JOYCE: And then, sir, in terms of Mutual Defense Treaty. In case sir, worst case scenario this escalates into war, how prepared are we to support the United States? Kasi may sinabi po si Pangulo, di ba sir, na if ever magka-giyera, ang suporta ang mapupunta sa United States. So, how prepared are we to support the United States?

SEC. PANELO: Ang ating bansa palagi namang prepared pagdating diyan sa seguridad.

JOYCE: Sir, what kind of help can we give the United States or what kind of support can we give them?

SEC. PANELO: Eh kung ano ang kailangan nila, kung kailangan nila ng tropa magpapadala tayo.

JOYCE: Okay. Thank you very much Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo. Thank you, sir. Good morning.

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