

Presidential Communications Operations Office  
News and Information Bureau

**CABINET REPORT SA TELERADYO WITH PCOO SECRETARY MARTIN  
ANDANAR  
AND DR. RABINDRA ABEYASINGHE, OIC-WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION  
BY PCOO ASSISTANT SECRETARY KRIS ABLAN  
RADYO PILIPINAS  
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**ASEC. ABLAN:** I'd like to welcome on the show, Secretary Martin Andanar. Secretary Andanar, good evening and welcome to Cabinet Report sa Teleradyo.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Hello, good evening to you Asec. Kris. Good evening to Dr. Rabi of the WHO and good evening to everyone, every Filipino in the country listening to this program because it is very important that we tackle the issues of COVID-19 that has become a global pandemic. Dr. Rabi, I would also like to thank you for being always present everytime we call you to be present at the Malacañang Press Briefing Room.

**DR. ABEYASINGHE:** Thank you, Secretary.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** I guess the question that I have for Dr. Rabi is that the same questions that are being asked during engagements that we have in barangays: What is the effect of the global pandemic especially in areas, in towns, in barangays that have really zero COVID-19 infection?

**DR. ABEYASINGHE:** We are still in the middle of a beginning outbreak in this country. Many of the actions that have been recommended by the Inter Agency Task Force and endorse by President Duterte are aimed at protecting those barangays, municipalities and provinces that have not reported cases yet. The efforts as WHO have been advocating is to strengthen our efforts to try and contain the spread of this virus within the places that it's already being transmitted. And so, the message to those barangays that have no cases is that you need to use this opportunity to prepare and to protect your people from possible introduction of the virus by using the opportunity that this community quarantine that is being implemented is providing for you.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** All right. So this community quarantine is applicable especially in communities that already have local transmission of COVID-19. As a matter of fact, it says that a barangay can declare a community quarantine once it has two cases; a municipality also when it has two cases; a province when it has two cases in the different municipalities.

The question now is that in Metro Manila, there are areas that have community quarantine and as a matter of fact, those who are working in Metro Manila and outside of Metro Manila have this special rule that they must show an ID to police personnel and the DND or whoever are manning the checkpoints. The question is, what about for the media Dr. Rabi, you know the crucial role of the media. What if the time comes when the entire Metro Manila is in community quarantine? Of course we cannot afford not to have the media. What are the solutions that the WHO sees for the

media to continue reporting the correct information? Because if we do not allow them to move around, if there is no movement protocol, then that would be a big problem for everybody.

**DR. ABEYASINGHE:** Yeah. So that's a problem that will need to be proactively addressed. Increasingly even WHO is facilitating many media conferences like a daily press briefings do be done via the internet. So we are using internet platforms so that media can connect, ask questions and get the answers to those very important questions that media want to understand and convey to the public through internet-based platforms. So we are living in an era where many things can be done using those channels. We are not saying that that is the best, but there are ways that we can reach the media and the media can reach the public even if we have to face such an extreme eventuality, travel becomes impossible for the safety of the people involved.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** It's just good that you mentioned that Dr. Rabi because we at the Presidential Communications Operations Office together with Asec. JV Arcena and even Assistant Secretary Kris Ablan, we have what we call the Virtual Presser and we will be implementing this Virtual Presser when it is needed, when the time comes. Secondly, what can you say about this suggestion that every department that has a media—a press corps, that every department should provide a safehouse for reporters so that at least we know that, number one, they're safe from COVID-19; and number two, they can continue covering the departments, say for example, the Department of Health or the Department of Interior and Local Government?

**DR. ABEYASINGHE:** I think that's a very good suggestion because in this way, you minimize the opportunities for possibly infected but very mild symptomatic people to transmit the disease to other people. So the social distancing that is being advocated as part of the community quarantine, we need to ensure that that's followed if we really want to break this outbreak and stop the transmission of the virus: So we have to look at a new reality of how we reach the people, how the media reaches them, how we facilitate access to the media.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Okay. So it goes without saying also Dr. Rabi that if we are giving safe houses to the media who are covering different government departments, then maybe the network companies can also provide safe houses for their employees who live outside Metro Manila.

**DR. ABEYASINGHE:** Exactly. And actually even looking at the experience of other countries like China and Singapore, in fact they have looked at ways and means of providing for people to have better access via the internet by reducing cost and increasing bandwidth, so that people can have uninterrupted access to media and get the necessary updates. These are critical things that we need to consider. Many governments are giving incentives to facilitate these processes and I believe that the government of the Philippines is also thinking on those lines.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Okay, thank you Dr. Rabi. Maybe Asec. Kris Ablan has other questions. Kris...

**DR. ABEYASINGHE:** Thank you Secretary Andanar. Good to talk to you.

**ASEC. ABLAN:** Yes, Sec. I just wanted to ask Dr. Rabi. A while ago, earlier he gave us the updates on the number of those with the COVID-19 all over the world – Italy, South Korea, China of course. And I'd like to ask him now, how about our—the world's recovery rate, how are we faring in terms of recovery? Are we recovering fast and who are recovering, Dr. Rabi?

**DR. ABEYASINGHE:** So, we need to remember that COVID-19 is largely a mild disease. Almost 80% of people do not require hospital management. In many cases, in young people they recover spontaneously. All they need to do is to rest and rehydrate and if they do that, the outcome is generally good.

The question comes that about 15% of patients develop severe respiratory signs. They find it difficult to breathe and about 5% actually going to what we call acute respiratory distress or respiratory failure. Those are the people who will need intensive care management or critical care management for them to be saved.

What we know is that a portion of the people who develop severe signs progress to become critical and we know that of the critical patients, about 50% of them actually die eventually. So the strategy now should be to protect people and prevent them from becoming severe and critical.

Let me explain to you who become severe and critical. What we are seeing globally is that, largely the elderly people above 60 years of age, people who have preexisting health conditions like diabetes, hypertension, asthma or cancer tend to develop the severe forms of the disease and the outcomes are not very good. So part of the reason why the WHO is advocating for social distancing is, so that we can protect those most vulnerable groups – our grandparents, our elderly parents who we need to protect from acquiring this infection.

There are many things we can do and I can talk about them a little later. But the efforts should be 3-fold actually: What WHO is recommending now is in the first instance that we take measures to protect our health workers, the workers who have to manage the patients. We need to be able to protect them so that they can protect, they can for the sick people and save their lives;

Second is we need to protect the most vulnerable people. So we need to protect those elderly people so that they don't come into contact with this disease, so, if we can do that not just through social distancing, but it's a responsibility of each of us. How we act within our families, within our houses to protect these people. And if we can do that, we can then limit the opportunities for those people to get infected and we can then hopefully reduce the number of people who will get severe and critical condition and reduce the deaths.

So what we are saying is, we need to protect the health workers, we need to protect the vulnerable and we need to work to reduce the deaths.

**ASEC. ABLAN:** Right. I have a question, just off that Dr. Rabi and it's on protecting the vulnerable, specifically our seniors. The Filipino family, they usually live together – the grandchild, the daughter or the child and the grandparents all live in one house. And now since Metro Manila is under the state of community quarantine, how do you suggest to families, large

Filipino families deal with this? Do you suggest that the seniors, the most vulnerable live separately within the house and they don't come in contact?

**DR. ABEYASINGHE:** That's the kind of thing we are recommending, what we are recommending. We do appreciate the Filipino lifestyle and the fact that you have the nuclear families like that. That is a very good thing because it supports and provides the support to the elderly. But this is the time now that we need to take that extra effort to protect those people within the family. So that's why I was talking about measures: we have to take at an individual, at a family level beyond the social distancing and the community quarantine, because that will only succeed if we, as individuals, as families take measures to protect our most vulnerable elderly people.

So what we are saying is that, depending on your space; try to keep a separate space for them as a priority. If that is not working, try to maintain distance, especially if you as a younger person in the family is having signs of a respiratory infection or a fever which could possibly be pointing to a COVID-19 infection. You need to isolate yourself, separate your utensils, your plates, cups so that they don't come into contact with those and possibly get infected. You need to discourage those elderly people from going to crowded places. So what we are talking about is trying to protect them as much as possible by keeping them safe and away from crowds where possible infection is, and minimizing the need for them to go, for example, to hospital to pick their drugs. All of those things, if somebody else in the family can do and facilitate for them, this is the time to do that because you probably will protect them not only from the infection but also protect their lives by doing these things.

**ASEC. ABLAN:** So, speaking the vernacular, Dr. Rabi, so mga kababayan narinig niyo naman po si Dr. Rabi ng WHO, marami na po tayong narinig tungkol sa social distancing sa opisina at sa eskuwela at nagtanong po tayo sa kanya tungkol sa anong puwedeng gawin natin sa pamilya. At sinabi po niya na napakaimportante na ihiwalay po natin ang ating mga nakakatanda, mga lolo at lola po natin. Hindi naman po air borne ang Covid, so hindi naman po kailangan talaga na selyado po. Ang importante po ay hiwalay ang kanilang mga utensils – hiwalay po iyong plato, iyong baso. Mayroon po silang partikular na lugar sa bahay kung saan puwede sila at huwag na po kayong mag halubilo sa labas, huwag na po kayong mag mahjong, lola/lolo, huwag na po kayong mag mahjong, huwag na po kayong uminom kasama ng mga barkada niyo diyan sa barangay. At gaya po ng sinabi ni Dr. Rabi, kapag mayroon po kayong kukunin na mga medicines o mga gamot mula po sa botika o mula sa ospital, ipagawa niyo na lang po sa iba, kasi nga mahirap na po baka mahawa po if we're in a crowded spaces.

And earlier than that, sinabihan po tayo ni Dr. Rabi na Covid-19 is classified as a mild disease and 80 percent of those who catch it are actually able to outlive it and survive it. And we have 15 percent who might catch it and 5 percent, if I'm not mistaken, are really, really deadly. But by and large, 80 are able to survive it, so kayang kaya po natin ito mga kababayan.

Ang kailangan lang, ang sabi po ni Dr. Rabi, ay magpahinga po tayo – kaya nga po mayroon tayong community quarantine at mag rehydrate, uminom po nang uminom ng tubig, hindi po ng alcohol. Ang alcohol po ay nira-rub po sa ating kamay, hindi po iyan iniinom. So, alcohol, maintain cleanliness and rest.

Okay. So nandiyan pa rin po si Secretary Martin and I think we can get back to him. Yes Sec. Mart, mayroon po kayong follow up kay Dr. Rabi?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Iyon lang, iyong sa akin Kris, round vernacular ‘no. Kasi ganito ‘yun eh, medyo mayroon din tayong malaking challenge pagdating doon sa 1 meter na distance especially marami tayong mga kababayan na maliliit lang iyong bahay dito sa Metro Manila. Siguro importante rin na lahat ng mga barangay officials ay mabigyan sila nang tamang tip tungkol dito, because it’s going to be really a big challenge especially for poor families who live in small houses; there are families who live in one room for example ‘no. So it is incumbent upon the barangay officials to find the solution for this. Siguro kung mayroon tayong chance mamaya, kausapin natin ang DILG tungkol dito sa challenge na ito because is no joke ano. Kapag wala kang espasyo, papaano iyong social distancing now kung walang espasyo.

And another thing Kris is that, I would like to just specifically thank the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas, more than 50 KBP channels, KBP members who—these are big network companies na talagang nagsama-sama sila at nakipag-partner sa PCOO para ang mga impormasyon na ito against—o paano iwasan ang COVID-19 ay ma-disseminate, ay maibalita nang wasto sa mga kababayan natin, hindi lang sa Metro Manila kundi sa buong Pilipinas.

**ASEC. ABLAN:** Yes, sir. So saludo po tayo sa KBP. Congratulations po Sec. Mart for getting that collaboration with them.

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