

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OPERATIONS OFFICE
News and Information Bureau

INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON HARRY ROQUE
BY KAREN DAVILA – COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE ABS-CBN SPECIAL COVERAGE
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DAVILA: We have with us Spokesperson Harry Roque. Secretary Roque is with us. There is no press conference in Malacañang this morning and before I ask the questions, I'd like to acknowledge, we have some members of the Malacañang Press Corps who are watching this interview right now and they sent in some questions as well.

Secretary Roque, good morning to you, sir.

SEC. ROQUE: Good morning, Karen. And good morning, Philippines.

DAVILA: All right. The big story, I'll ask straight. There is an IATF meeting again today, what will be tackled? And can you please issue some clarifications on ECQ areas that supposedly have been removed, like Capiz, Aklan, Davao Del Norte, Davao De Oro, can you clarify these?

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, I confirmed that these areas will be on GCQ effective May 1 including Iloilo City. So I reiterate that, Iloilo City will also be under GCQ effective May 1 – in addition to the areas that you mentioned.

DAVILA: Okay. So Iloilo, Capiz, Aklan, Davao De Oro. Davao De Oro is gonna be on GCQ?

SEC. ROQUE: And Davao Del Norte as well.

DAVILA: Okay. So tama po ba, limang lugar ito, sir?

SEC. ROQUE: Including Aurora which is the only province in Region III that will be in GCQ.

DAVILA: Okay. So six areas will be in GCQ by May 1?

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, ma'am. But of course, all other areas not in that list will be on GCQ as well.

DAVILA: Okay. So what will be the IATF discussing today, sir?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, they will finalize the list of industries that can open in GCQ areas, number one, and I hope they will also discuss exceptions to the rule that 60 years old and above will have to stay home 'no. Actually, I've been hounded by senior citizens since that announcement came out because apparently the 60 plus seniors are the decision makers in

different companies, including government 'no, I mean, I think 80% of the Cabinet (Secretaries), are senior citizens as well. So, I hope they come up with exceptions to the rule that says that senior citizens together with the youth will have to stay indoors.

DAVILA: Uhum. Okay. Now, you've also detailed in terms of preparing for ECQ and GCQ; there's the DTI proposal and you've said it in detail. Are there other industries that you will be including, that can operate in GCQ that may not necessarily be, for example, essential industries, but are industries that spurred the economy?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, actually if you look at the list, substantially all kinds of industries will open except those that entail mass gathering. That's why the entertainment industry is still shut, leisure is still shut. In other words, the non-essentials will remain shut but all the industries that would propel the economy will be allowed to open, although some of them between 50 to 100 percent capacity only.

DAVILA: Uhum, okay. So just to clarify - because I'm reading this note from your announcement - you are already allowing malls, commercial centers; this is after May 15th, is that correct?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, in GCQ areas, the malls will open but they will have limited operations, not all the stores would be allowed to open. But in addition to banks, in addition to a restaurant for takeout and hardware 'no, they would now be allowing retail stores selling clothes to open. But the general rule is, unlike in the past where we go to the malls for recreation and leisure 'no, they will keep the temperature rather warm - at 26, so the people will not be loitering in the malls and it will be subject to very strict hygiene standards including temperature check and the availability of alcohol 'no, and the mandatory wearing of course of face masks.

DAVILA: Okay, all right. Some questions for you coming from our colleagues. Has Malacañang already decided on what to do essentially when it comes to releasing minimum offenders, so to speak, in prison? The Bureau of Jail Management and Penology already revealed that you have 233 prisoners and jail personnel that have coronavirus, that's 3 jails already in the country. What is the directive of the President when dealing with the situation in our jail?

SEC. ROQUE: We have to distinguish between those who have already been convicted and therefore under the DOJ and those that are still awaiting trial and under the DILG. For those under DOJ, the convicted felons, we have a law which provides for probation and parole. And I heard from the mouth of Secretary Guevarra himself that they are expediting already the processing of individuals who may qualify for probation and parole to decongest our detention facilities.

As far as those awaiting trial or undergoing trial are concerned, the DILG has setup isolation places for those afflicted with COVID-19. But their options are very limited because these individuals are under the jurisdiction of the courts.

DAVILA: Okay. So, isn't this possible Secretary Harry to just release, frankly speaking. I mean, you know, offenders not of heinous crimes for example but just minimum offenders? Why isn't there a directive to simplify that? Yeah...

SEC. ROQUE: Because it's governed by law. The probation and parole is governed by law, there are requirements but the order has been given to expedite the processing of those who may qualify for probation and parole.

DAVILA: Okay, all right. Now I need you to react to the vendor essentially that was assaulted by a barangay peacekeeping officer in Quezon City. Have you seen the video, Secretary?

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, and I was assured already by Mayor Joy Belmonte that an investigation is being undertaken. It will be impartial, it will be fair and the proper penalty will be meted in case there's a violation on the part of the barangay officials.

DAVILA: Okay. Now, has the President been informed of the Dasmariñas Village Makati incident? There are senators that are calling for the deportation of the foreigner. Has the President commented about this?

SEC. ROQUE: He knows about the incident because he is glued to the television all day long as well like everyone, and we will allow the process to proceed. What we saw initially was only the second half of the video, there was also a first half which the PNP released and it turns out that the conduct of the Spaniard was far from being ideal. And as the policeman said, he only reacted after he was cursed with the 'F' word, and well the rest we saw what happened in the video.

But number one, the President of course is a former prosecutor. He will allow the process to proceed. We have the presumption of regularity in the discharge of functions as far as the policemen are concerned which can however be overcome. Now, I refuse to comment now any further, because depending on which part of the video you've seen, then you would side with the police or the Spaniard.

So as for now, I think it is the role of the Executive Branch to investigate which we are doing now. And if charges should be filed, it will be filed.

DAVILA: Okay. Now, when it comes to the Filipino caregiver in Taiwan, ANC just interviewed Lito Banayo of MECO and he said that there was no request from the Philippine government to deport the Filipino caregiver and he said deportation is the sovereign privilege of the host country. He said the labor attaché unilaterally took action. Does this mean Secretary Roque that the Philippine government essentially will be leaving the Filipino caregiver alone?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, we leave the Filipino caregiver to the jurisdiction of Taiwanese authorities, because deportation is really a decision to be made by Taiwanese authorities – which forms part of China.

DAVILA: Okay. Now do you consider this also a slap at the Philippine government given that Taiwan issued a statement saying they won't deport the Filipino caregiver, and this is the quote: *“Our country protects freedom of speech, other countries should respect that too.”*

SEC. ROQUE: We leave that wholly to the jurisdiction of Taiwan and China. Taiwan is part of China, we respect that decision and of course in the same way that we will enforce our law on all foreigner while they are under our jurisdiction.

DAVILA: Okay, all right. Now overall, I think there's a question here from one of the papers. The question is essentially the President, Monday night met with members of the Cabinet. What is the President's general feeling in terms of government performance in handling COVID? Itong eksakto nilang tanong 'no: *“Nakukulangan pa po ba ang Pangulo despite the high confidence rating? Mayroon pa po ba siyang ibang direktiba sa IATF o Cabinet members para mas mapabilis na masolusyunan ang COVID?”* This is about the President's satisfaction with the government's performance.

SEC. ROQUE: Well, siyempre po ano, naintindihan ng ating Presidente na napakahirap talaga ng buhay habang tayo ay nasa ECQ. Kaya nga po nagagalak naman po ang Presidente na nagbigay na po ng taning itong si Secretary Año na within 3 days, all LGUs must disburse to the intended beneficiaries iyong ating SAP. Otherwise, they will be issued a show cause letter and subject to disciplinary action. I think that reflects the President's general predicament – money is there to be given to those in need, it should have been given yesterday and not today.

DAVILA: Uhum, okay. Another question here is Senator Bong Go's Balik-Probinsiya Program. People are asking, how is that implemented and who can take advantage of that particular program, Secretary?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, I read in my press conference a text from Senator Bong Go that this is intended to be a long term project. But I can assure the public that all departments of government are meeting right now because naintindihan po namin na sa panahon ng napakahirap na nasa Metro Manila at sa siyudad ng Cebu at ng Davao, maraming nais bumalik na sa kanilang mga probinsiya at doon na manirahan.

So iyong mga gusto po na bumalik na ngayon, we're finding ways and means subject to the quarantine requirements. But the long term program will be threshed out, but that's now become a top priority. So huwag po kayong mag-alala, it is forthcoming.

DAVILA: Okay. Now Secretary in your last press conference, you detailed every single sector in terms of preparing for what we call the 'new normal', also the workplace and Public Spaces

Act of 2020. Are there gonna be revisions to these workplace and public spaces act of 2020, sir?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, that's why it's important to monitor what will happen in these areas under GCQ now, because they will be the frontrunner of what could be implemented on a nationwide basis, assuming Metro Manila and the rest of Cebu and Davao are also placed under GCQ. I'd like to highlight that until we find a vaccine or a cure to COVID-19, we will have to follow this 'new normal' – social distancing together with proper hygiene is now the new normal.

DAVILA: Okay. What is the possibility Secretary that classes in public schools can start in September? Because I know the President said he is considering this—yeah..?

SEC. ROQUE: Yes. Well you know, the recommendation of the IATF is that at the earliest - it is September, but DepEd was given the final say on the matter because there's a prevailing law now which says that classes must start at the latest, last week of August. But I don't think there's much of a difference between the recommendation of IATF and the law because we're only talking of one week, so I think that can be threshed out. But I can definitely announce that there will be no classes this June.

DAVILA: No classes this June, okay. Well, ang tanong ko lang sir, iba kasi iyong mga—

SEC. ROQUE: Well, for grade school 'no, but for a higher education institutes, they can have skeleton forces but only to finish the academic year and to consider alternative learning.

DAVILA: All right. I'm curious because, well the government has jurisdiction over public schools. Have you also considered the problem of a private school in terms of tuition, expenses, given that across the board, there will be no regular classes to speak of?

SEC. ROQUE: Well I think the primary consideration now is the health of the nation. The UP study indicates that actually, the young people, the school-going age, the young people have the most contact with vulnerable population, including the elderly. And that's why there's unanimity amongst all experts that classes should be suspended for as long we could... considering also the plight of the private school owners 'no, because we know that like the rest of the economy, we have to eventually open them. But as far as epidemiology is concerned, the "worst carriers" are actually the school-going age of young people.

DAVILA: All right. A question came in just now, Secretary. Does this mean that come May 15, the MRT and the LRT will already be opened?

SEC. ROQUE: It depends, if Metro Manila is already under GCQ. So it's premature to contemplate that now because as of May 1, Metro Manila which is the only city with an MRT is still under ECQ.

DAVILA: All right. Last words Secretary Roque, anything else you'd like to add before we go?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, doon po sa mga talagang naghihintay pa ng ayuda, humihingi na po ng inyong pang-unawa ang ating Presidente. Pero binigyan na po natin ng order ang mga lokal na opisyal, kinakailangan gumalaw sila, ipamigay ang ayuda dahil alam po natin kinakailangan iyong ayudang iyan kahapon pa. Paumanhin po, but we will enforce the law and we will enforce discipline amongst those who should have acted faster.

DAVILA: All right. Well on that note Secretary Harry Roque, thank you so much for your time this morning sir. God bless you.

SEC. ROQUE: Thank you Karen and thank you to the Malacañang Press Corps as well.

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