

**PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OPERATIONS OFFICE**  
**News and Information Bureau**

**INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON HARRY ROQUE**  
**BY PINKY WEBB – THE SOURCE, CNN PHILIPPINES**  
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**WEBB:** Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque. Secretary Roque, hi! Welcome to the show, sir.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Good morning, Pinky. It's always a privilege. Good morning, Philippines.

**WEBB:** All right. Maraming salamat, Secretary. I know you're very tired from last night. So let's start with this, obviously the President said, really the two big things is that Cebu City still under Enhanced Community Quarantine and Metro Manila or NCR still under General Community Quarantine. Just tell us the thought process Secretary Roque why he decided to keep Cebu under ECQ and Metro Manila under GCQ, sir?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, it's always science and data-driven 'no. For you to be able to be on GCQ, your case doubling rate must at least be seven days and that's where Metro Manila is. We are still on seven days case doubling rate. Two weeks ago, we barely made it to seven and that's why I said we were '*pasang awa*' to GCQ 'no. But now, we're now at seven so you know, we can't go any further than GCQ but we remain at GCQ. For us to be MGCQ, the case doubling rate must be around 10 'no or thereabouts 'no, 10 days doubling rate 'no.

But Cebu City, well, to begin with, they have a case positivity rate of 30%. That means 3 out of 10 being tested for the coronavirus has tested positive 'no. And in addition to that, the death rate is almost the same as the national death rate for coronavirus. Now we are more or less around 10 or less on a national basis, but Cebu recorded yesterday if I'm not mistaken 13 deaths 'no which is equivalent to the national average'no.

And that is why the President heeded also the recommendation not only of the IATF but of Gen. Cimat. Secretary Cimat whom he sent there to be his personal envoy 'no to exercise what he said was critical thinking on what should be done with Cebu City.

So I would like to assure the residents of Cebu para po sa kapakanan ninyo iyan at iyan po ay dahil po sa datos na napakabilis pa ang pagkalat ng sakit po diyan sa Cebu City at napakataas po noong porsiyento ng populasyon na mayroon pong coronavirus – 3 out of 10 testing positive.

**WEBB:** Sabi po ni Pangulo, Secretary Roque, kung gusto ninyo akong maging honest, ang sabi po niya matitigas daw kasi iyong ulo at he is saddened by this sabi niya.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, there was even a report that even as Cebu City is on ECQ, eh may isang barangay na nag-Sinulog ‘no. So of course the barangay captain will be given due process pero iyan po iyong isang example siguro ng sinasabi ni Presidente na matigas ang ulo ‘no. And he also had access to intelligence report ‘no in a place like Talisay na parang, as the President described, even if they were on MECQ eh parang palengke daw iyong streets of Talisay ‘no.

So—pero alam ninyo naman si President did not mince words because he feels that he can do so since he’s also from Cebu City. And from my personal point of view, Cebu—I consider myself also a Cebuano. Alam mo kasi ang mga Cebuano talaga fun-loving eh, the moment you step out of the plane in Cebu, there’s this party spirit ‘no, you can feel it right away in Cebu ‘no. Pero siguro sa mga panahon na may pandemya, medyo we should tame our party spirit and medyo stay home, be homeliners and observe social distancing, wearing mask dahil para naman po sa kapakanan din nila iyan.

**WEBB:** Yeah. And I think it was also Secretary Cimat, Sec. Roque, who said last night that maybe there will be a couple of barangays; if I’m not mistaken, siguro labindalawa daw out of 80 barangays that might have to go on a more strict lockdown?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes. Well, actually, we debated on whether or not to broadcast the 12 barangays and we did not really want to unduly panic the rest of Cebu City ‘no. But there is one barangay where they have more than a 130 cases, Pinky ‘no, and this is something that we have not really seen—

**WEBB:** Ang dami noon, sir.

**SEC. ROQUE:** —here in Metro Manila ‘no. But one barangay with an excess of 130 cases ‘no. So obviously in addition to ECQ, we will have to rely on granular lockouts and again I reiterate, we really would require the full cooperation of the Cebuanos.

**WEBB:** And of course, this is for the next two weeks, up for reevaluation again. Secretary Roque, nagkaroon ho ba ng some considerations for NCR because, you know, of course there is talk – either we stay as ... status quo po tayo, maghigpit po tayo o kaya maging mas relax from GCQ to MGCQ?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, as I said nga po, iyong case doubling rate kasi natin, we’re just at seven and two weeks ago we were barely at seven ‘no. So again, I’d like to appeal to our fellow residents of Metro Manila, we’re not exactly powerless against the virus ‘no. It has been said by the DOH that the wearing of mask will reduce the probability of getting the virus by as much as 85%; social distancing can reduce the probability by as much as 80%; coupled with constant handwashing, the use of disinfectants, we can prevent the further spread of this disease ‘no. So we need to have behavioral changes to win this war against COVID-19.

**WEBB:** Right. I remember you kept saying that yesterday in your press briefing at 12:30, sir. But was there a move from any members of the Cabinet to actually relax Metro Manila, sir?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, not specifically on Metro Manila but there was a presentation made by Secretary Dominguez arguing that we need to now to shift from priority on health, to opening the economy because unless we do so, people will simply die because of lack of livelihood ‘no.

And that is why the new world view should be we should still be wary of the disease but with testing, tracing and treatment coupled with minimum hygiene requirements, we can proceed and open the economy because we cannot afford to keep it closed anymore, otherwise people will simply go bankrupt ‘no.

And I think that was approved in principle and that is why for as long as the data would allow it, even if it’s not fully compliant, perhaps for as long as there is substantial compliance with the data, we will allow the further downgrading to MGCQ to further open up the economy.

Now in the study presented by Secretary Dominguez ‘no, it appeared that even in MGCQ, the economy is not open at a 100% and with transport restrictions on MGCQ would actually open around 50 to 60 percent of the economy only ‘no and that is why the fourth strategy recommended and approved in principle by the IATF is that we need to further open up the transport sector because unless the transport sector is fully opened up, then people simply can’t get to work ‘no.

And in line with this, the economic team also urged government to use scientific evidence to evaluate whether or not jeepneys really pose a threat to health ‘no and there is now a technical working group looking into this ‘no.

So we are entering a new phase now, it’s a realization that we need to proceed with opening up of the economy for people to literally survive and not just die from the disease. And in order to do that, we need to improve testing capacity to bolster the confidence of workers to go back to work. We need to trace, we need to treat, we need to have behavioral changes and of course transport sector should be opened.

**WEBB:** Very quickly, Sec. Roque, before we go on a break. Does this mean that possibly in the next two weeks there could be—within ha, sir, the next two weeks, there could be a reevaluation of NCR?

**SEC. ROQUE:** There will always be reevaluations every two weeks. The question is whether or not Metro Manila will have sufficient behavioral change to warrant MGCQ. Now it has been done by other provinces, it used to be that Metro Manila and the entire of CALABARZON were on GCQ. And together, Metro Manila and CALABARZON constitutes 64% of the Gross Domestic Product ‘no, the GDP. But lately, Batangas and Laguna as well as Quezon are now on MGCQ and only Rizal and Cavite in CALABARZON were left in GCQ.

So it can be done 'no in the same way that perhaps in Metro Manila, people should just be more conscious of the need for social distancing and wearing of mask. And I think there will be substantial—the government will recognize substantial compliance because in view of stricter quarantine, we would go in favor of granular lockdowns which is happening now in many parts of Metro Manila.

**WEBB:** Okay. Are we really winning the fight against the coronavirus pandemic? Netizens also react on Secretary Roque's "Congratulations Philippines" remark. I'm sure alam na po iyan ni Secretary Roque. We'll be taking a short break. We'll be right back. [COMMERCIAL BREAK]

Welcome back to The Source, our guest today Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque. So, sir, I'm sure you've seen some reactions on social media about you basically congratulating the Philippines. You said, "*Wala na po, panalo na tayo. We beat the UP prediction. We beat it, so congratulations, Philippines. Let's do it again in July.*" You might want to further explain this, sir.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, I think the context is very clear 'no, the context is UP forecasted that we would have 40,000 cases and as of yesterday, the last day of June, the final figure reported by the Department of Health was 37,000. It was small victory but I think it's the first time that we actually did not realize the forecast of UP. They have been perfectly accurate in their forecasting of how many cases we would have at the end of the month 'no.

And as far as I know, this was the first time that we missed it not by much, but we still missed it. In my point being, as I said earlier, we are not powerless; we have the armaments to do, to win this war against COVID - social distancing, wearing of mask. And I think the people should be congratulated because even if it's a margin of only about under 3,000, we still did not reach what the forecast of UP was, that we would have 40,000 cases.

And I think every month now, I'm going to keep on doing it and I really don't care about the critics because, I think, people should be reminded that although there are mathematical models, we could still control what happens in our lives. And it's as simple as observing minimum health standards and still be avoiding what happened in CCP where people congregated and avoiding what happened in Cebu where people had held the Sinulog, despite the fact that there was an ongoing ECQ in the City 'no. So, I will keep on doing it because it's the only way we could encourage people to beat the disease.

**WEBB:** You will.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, I will. I will keep on exhorting people to observe social distancing.

**WEBB:** So, pagdating po ng July, Sec. Roque?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Pagdating ng July, as early as now, I think we should do it together.

**WEBB:** 60,000.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Huwag na tayong magpaabot ng 60,000. If at all, we should aim that the number should not reach even 50,000. And we can do it even if we reopen the economy by number one, employers allowing 50% work from home and then everyone else observing minimum health standard. We can do it, let's aim in fact not to reach 50,000.

**WEBB:** Bumaba ka pa, sir, sa 60,000.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Oo, bumaba pa ako. I am being very [indistinct] but I think we can do it, and with a vision: Let's do it people, let's do it.

**WEBB:** Okay, some of the tweets, sir. I just want to bring the scene. You have Luis Manzano, "Akala ko the whole time, COVID ang kalaban, UP pala. Congratulations."

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, mali po ang pagkaintindi ni Luis Manzano. Ang kalaban talaga ay COVID, siguro parang ringside commentator itong UP na sinasabi nila ang magiging score ay 40,000. So, iyon lang po, kaunting intindi lang po.

**WEBB:** Okay, something we need to discuss though, Secretary Roque, because I know that there are data that you have repeated over time and time again – case doubling rate, mortality rate, critical care capacity, sir. But when we look at the numbers, okay we are over 37,000. But I believe yesterday, sir, we have had 858 fresh cases. That's the highest, sir, in a single day. So, if we were to look at 858 cases, the highest in the single day, does that still mean, are we still top believe or are you still to tell us that we are winning the fight against COVID, sir?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, but you need to look at other figures, including positivity rate. You know, the fact that we will continue to have more cases is because we also having more testing now. We are not hitting 16-17,000 tests a day 'no. And we are aiming to hit 32,000 and when we do hit 32,000, there will be more cases. But what is important is the positivity rate. Positivity is how many of those tested actually test positive and the lower the number the better. Although the benchmark is around 12 'no meaning that the WHO still feels that it is acceptable for 12 out of 100 who test positive, that has been possible. (garbled)

**WEBB:** Sir, pasensiya na nawala kayo kanina ano.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Again, let me repeat. So, what's important is the positivity rate, how many actually test positive out of a hundred and the death rates 'no. I think we are still okay 'no and that is why the numbers in fact will grow bigger as we test more and for as long as there is no active cure and no vaccine, yes.

**WEBB:** But there was something I read, sir. This needs to be clarified further, when you talked about positivity rate. I think, sir in June 28, we were at 9.9% and you are saying, there is probably as not as standard but we are still good, you said at 12 or 13%.

The day before that, it was at 9.6%. In other words, in June 27, the positivity rate was 9.6, the day after June 28, it was 9.9. What that means to me, sir is obviously tumataas po iyong positivity rate. But, it's still below what you are saying, which should be 12 or 13?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, and in fact, you look at the average too, not just the daily rates. So you look at the moving 7 day average and that is where we are scoring 6 to 7 for 100.

**WEBB:** On a weekly basis, sir?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, over a period of time.

**WEBB:** Also, just very quickly, Sec. Roque, just a reaction from Senator Riza Hontiveros: Hindi natin matatalo ang pandemya kung hindi tayo magiging honest sa mga sarili natin. Paano tayo winning kung may 36,000' – iyon po iyong kanyang text, kaniyang sinabi po kahapon – kaso na COVID-19, may 7.3 million Pilipino walang trabaho at kulang pa tayo sa proteksiyon at suporta ng mga doctors at health workers, sir?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, unang-una mali po iyong ating basehan. Kasi unang-una wala naman talagang—did not expect na magkakaroon tayo ng ganitong pandemya. Pero siguro, ikumpara rin natin iyong mga ginagawa natin dito, kung ano ang nangyayari sa rest of the world. Nag-correct naman po ang WHO and they have apologized for their statement that we have the fastest growing number of COVID cases in the Western Pacific that's not true and I showed it in my press conference na the analysis should be based on the proportion of individuals per million and clearly we are not on top, if it is on a 4 million bases. Ikumpara po natin iyong ating 1,300 something na deaths sa mga hundreds of thousands of deaths reported in places like America, in places like Spain, in places like Italy.

So, unless you compare how we perform with the rest of the world you compare iyong iba pang mga indicators, there would be no way, we could conclude na panalo tayo kung ang gagamitin natin iyong basehan lamang, ay iyong number of cases. Pagdating po sa nawalan ng trabaho, talaga naman pong this is a worldwide phenomena. Wala po talagang nanalo laban sa COVID-19 pagdating sa ekonomiya, talaga pong walang bansa na hindi naapektuhan, marami po talagang nawalan ng trabaho. Kaya nga po ang panawagan natin, isantabi muna iyong pulitika at tayo po ay we should act as one. Because in the end, we are confident that we will heal as one and we will recover as one.

**WEBB:** Secretary Roque, moving on to another subject. The UN Rights chief yesterday presented her report on the situation in the Philippines. And I quote she said “the findings of the report were very serious, law and policies to counter national security threats and illegal drugs have been crafted and implemented in ways that severely impact human rights. They have resulted in thousands of killings, arbitrary detention and the vilification of individuals who challenged these severe human rights violations”. Let me just add, sir before you

react. She even said that, human rights defenders are routinely smeared as terrorists and enemies of this state – just a reaction on that, Secretary Roque?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, I think we have adequately responded to that. No country can claim a perfect record as far as human rights is concerned. Again, benchmark should be the United States, I'm sure the Special Rapporteur is on equality, have equally bad things to say about the United States. The Rapporteurs on the rights of refugees have equally bad things to say about Australia and don't even mention countries like Israel 'no. And of course Europe now faces challenges as far as refugees coming from Africa are concerned.

So, it's not a perfect word for human rights. What is important is where there are atrocities or acclaimed violations of human rights that the burden of the state to investigate and punish the perpetrators thereof, are in fact complied with.

And as far as the Philippines is concerned, Secretary Menard Guevarra has said that in an effort to improve our capacity to investigate and punish the perpetrators of human rights violators, we have created an inter-agency body headed by the DOJ 'no.

**WEBB:** Inter-agency panel.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, to look into each and every case of alleged killing 'no. Now, having said that as part of the police manuals of the PNP, they are duty-bound, in fact they investigate when there is a loss in life.

**WEBB:** Motu proprio.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, a police investigation. And I am confident having worked with the PNP Chief Gamboa 'no, that these are in fact being done by the PNP. But nonetheless, the inter-agency response is necessary to assure the country and the international community, of the impartiality of the investigation of these deaths arising from police operations.

**WEBB:** And here comes the issue, sir, on the Anti-Terrorism Bill. She further said this heightens concern about the blurring distinction between criticism, criminality and terrorism. In fact, urging the President not to sign this. My question, Secretary Roque is, would this be considered, would this statement be considered by President Rodrigo Duterte?

**SEC. ROQUE:** ... Authorized in Singapore and three-month detention is authorized in other jurisdictions. And as I reiterate, I was part of a Cambridge study on Anti-Terror Laws and it would seem that it is the developed countries that have more to [unclear] and also US has [unclear], the UK has also an Anti-Terror Law that will approximate more or less the terms and provisions of the new Anti-Terror Law. And I understand that the framers of the law, the authors of the law in fact looked at the European legislation as model in drafting this law.

So, I think, it's a view of the High Commission of the Human Rights has to be taken in the context of other existing Anti-Terror legislation and I'm sure that the studies will confirm that we are at par as with the rest of the developed world in fact and not just with the developing countries. [audio connection stopped]

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Source: PCOO-NIB (News and Information Bureau-Data Processing Center)