

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

**INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON HARRY ROQUE**  
**BY KAREN DAVILA – HEADSTART/ANC**  
**July 15, 2020 (8:05 A.M. - 8:35 A.M.)**

**DAVILA:** All right, joining us via zoom, we have Presidential Spokesperson Atty. Harry Roque. Secretary Harry Roque, good morning to you, sir.

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

**DAVILA:** All right, let's start first with today is July 15. This is the deadline of the extension to the announcement of President Duterte declaring Metro Manila under GCQ. What happens tomorrow, Secretary Roque? Will there be announcement today that Metro Manila will move to MGCQ or will we stay to GCQ or God forbid, we will go back to ECQ?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, as usual, I can't preempt the announcement of the President. But I can definitely say that the *[unclear]* restriction is out of the question, it was never considered, it was never agreed upon with the Metro Manila mayors; it was the data. The data does not lie. The case doubling rate is between seven to nine days which is not bad. But it only warrants the existing GCQ 'no. The clinical care capacity has actually gone lower because we have hit 70%, whereas during the meeting it was still around 35%. So, in a week's time, that ICU beds were filled up.

However, I think it's because Undersecretary Vega is only implementing his One Hospital Coordinating Center where he acts as a liaison between the different public and private hospitals. Meaning, if a private hospitals' ICU beds for COVID patients have filled up, then he will simply refer the patient to other hospitals that have openings in their ICU. That is being the role of our Treatment Czar, Usec. Vega.

**DAVILA:** Secretary, so it is fair to say that we can expect NCR, not just Metro Manila, the whole of NCR to remain at GCQ after today?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, it's only a matter of hours, we will let the President make the pronouncement.

**DAVILA:** Okay, but how does this affect the economy? We are technically right now, the longest lockdown in the world. At a webinar that I attended, of Project ARK, Congressman Joey Salceda described the lockdown as OA, that those were his words, OA na ang lockdown. Why aren't we doing right, Secretary? If other countries can already open their economy, records zero deaths, what aren't we doing that they are doing?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, Karen, let me make it clear 'no, although we have restrictions of movements, we will actually open up the economy to the full extent that we can. Of course, it's not fully opened up because we have not allowed public gatherings. But all the industries are open, even the restaurants will soon be allowed to have 50% capacity; transportation is almost back to normal. And the only thing that we have not allowed back is the restriction on unnecessary movement of people and on public gatherings. So, I think the concern of the private sector is very well taken.

In fact, if you look at the second national action plan of the National Task force, we have recognized that although we have succeeded in protecting lives, instead of 3.6 billion people being afflicted with the disease, we have the current numbers. We still have to open up the economy, and that is why we have approved to

the second and—National Action Plan, opening up the economy provided that we resort to granular localized lockdowns. We intensify our T3 – testing, tracing and treatment – as well as, this is very important, Karen, protecting the vulnerables.

So no more arguments: Seniors, unless you have to go out for necessities and for work, you have to stay home because that is the strategy that we have adopted to minimize deaths. And so far, in the past, where the seniors were staying home, our critical care capacity was okay. But now, I have anecdotal reports that the ICUs are filling up almost all of them with senior citizens.

**DAVILA:** Okay. I'm curious, Secretary Harry Roque, does the IATF discussed preemptive protocols so to speak? At a Project ARK webinar I attended, you have former Health Secretary Garin who's the private sector Implementer for Project ARK. Ito iyong testing 'no. I'm sure, Secretary, familiar kayo dito. She was advising that individuals to take anti-flu vaccine, anti-pneumonia vaccine to lessen complications with coronavirus. I'm curious, if this is already suggested as a matter of policy by the DOH?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, what we have as a matter of policy – and this is found in the law that I authored in the lower House in the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress – is still health promotion. Key to the success of universal healthcare is staying healthy for the people, and that is why we encourage health promotions. And part of health promotion now is the holy trinity – the wearing of mask, the washing of hands, as well as social distancing.

**DAVILA:** Okay. The World Health Organization recently said that the Philippines in terms of contact tracing and management wasn't doing too well. We will get the exact quote, but can you react?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Let's complete the statement of the WHO. They did attribute success in our testing program, the fact that we have actually expanded the targeted testing. We have reached the one million mark of PCR testing and we were aiming to do 10 million more, and this is in addition to rapid test kits being administered by both the local government units as bought by government and also by our private sector partner, Project ARK.

I'm a very strong supporter of Project ARK. Once a week, I feature the weekly report of the accomplishments of Project ARK.

So they noted, they intensified testing rate. But they have also noted weaknesses in tracing and perhaps that's something that we have it best now with the appointment of Baguio Mayor Benjie Magalong as Tracing Czar, which is important to really have a tracing Czar, because the tracing right now is, I think, taken really by local government units. They have about 60,000 individuals, all employees of the local governments working as tracers. But, I think they are following different protocols. But this time, with the Tracing Czar, they are not following single protocol and of course Mayor Magalong has adopted techniques in investigative investigation as far as tracing is concerned.

**DAVILA:** Okay, but has the government actually released money for contact tracing, hiring contact tracers? Has the government done it?

**SEC. ROQUE:** We have 60,000 tracers that have already being employed. We are adding 50,000 more and that will be in the Bayanihan II Package.

**DAVILA:** Okay. The WHO, the exact quote is, what is worrying is that the proportion of positive cases is very slowly increasing. So he said, this is worrying, this is a positivity rate of 6.5% two weeks ago, it is now 7.7% or 7.8%. He says it's worrying as this shows there is continuing transmission?

**SEC. ROQUE:** And that is why, I would like to segue already to Oplan Kalinga 'no. The WHO is correct, we have to intensify our tracing efforts. It's not something that we have actually acquired a specialization, but I think we are catching up and part of the means now by which we can control the further spread of the disease is by transferring the asymptomatics and the mild to isolation centers.

We will clarify that this policy has been in existence since April; it's not a new policy. And we clarified that those who have their own bedrooms, with their own bathrooms can actually remain home provided that there are no persons with comorbidities, seniors or pregnant in the same households. If you don't qualify under any of these criteria, then you have to go in a government operated isolation center.

There are two types, there are centers controlled by local government units and there are centers controlled by the national government referred to as We Heal as One Centers. But we also have the LIGTAS centers maintained by the local government units. It's imperative that those who are positive, if they don't have their own isolation capacity in their homes, move to an isolation center, because that's the only way we can contain community transmission of the virus.

**DAVILA:** But can you expound and clarify how it will be implemented? Because there are already fears right now with that, when you say, we will go house to house. Do you go house to house voluntarily? How is that implemented? If I don't want anyone in my house, who coordinates, who goes house to house? How does it work, Secretary?

**SEC. ROQUE:** We don't have a provision for house to house. It's only political critics of the government again, weaponizing this very important task of tracing.

**DAVILA:** But that's what Secretary Año said, they will do house to house, the positive cases will be picked up and brought to the centers.

**SEC. ROQUE:** You know, they will not go house to house, they will have to be reported. They will have to be reported by the persons themselves, their family or the barangay. There is a law, which is RA11332, which says that they have to report communicable diseases.

Now, we prefer that the asymptomatics and the mild cases voluntarily surrender and confined themselves in isolation centers. We are enticing them with the fact that these are airconditioned centers, free lodging, free meals at three times a day and with free WiFi 'no and with a graduation ceremony to prove, after the 14-day quarantine period. There will be doctors and nurses also assigned in isolation facilities. Do not have the misimpression that these are not medical facilities; these are medical facilities, visited by [unclear] and specialist, respiratory doctors.

**DAVILA:** Okay. So what are you saying is, essentially, when the house to house was mentioned is, let say the barangay captain or the owner of the house will actually contact and say, I want to be picked up to move to quarantine facility.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes.

**DAVILA:** But what if ... what if the person wants to stay home, let's say, doesn't want to be moved to a quarantine facility and the barangay chairman says, "Ito po, asymptomatic iyong nakatira doon, tinst na namin iyon pero ayaw po niyang umalis," tanong ko lang, Secretary, paano po iyon?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Sentido-kumon, Karen. It's a very communicable disease, and if they refuse to be isolated, the state, of course, can isolate them. I don't think it will go to that extent because we are trying precisely

to entice them with excellent facility, it's a paid for vacation in an airconditioned facility' no. So, it's not as if they are going to be brought to the gulag and to the jails.

In my press briefing, we will soon show to the nation, how these We Heal as One and LIGTAS centers look like. They look like hotels so it's not as if, they will be sent to the gulag and sent to solitary confinement.

But there is no other way, and let me make this very clear: The legal basis to bring them, to have the asymptomatics and the mild cases without any isolation facilities or with vulnerable living with them is still inherent police power of the state. This is still promotion of public health. So make no mistake about it, anywhere in the world, kapag mayroong quarantine, mayroon dapat i-quarantine, puwedeng kunin iyan ng gobyerno. So, let's not make a big issue out of it, especially when we know that past studies already indicate that this virus may have already mutated and it's even more contagious so I think that is where the WHO is correct. The fact that we have not filled up our isolation facilities. We have only filled up to 40 to 50% of our isolation facilities because we have actually been tolerant of individuals staying home in quarantine, even if we are not sure that they have the proper isolation facilities.

**DAVILA:** And you don't think, Secretary Roque, you have lawyers already mouthing off, Article 3, Section 2 of the Constitution: "The right of the people to be secure in their person, houses, papers against unreasonable searches..." I've seen already lawyers bringing this up, you don't think this is a violation in anyway?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I don't think so. There is inherent police power, that's a very essential in establishment of the state and if it is to protect public health, I think the isolation can be justified.

**DAVILA:** Okay. When it comes to Bayanihan II, exactly, what are we expecting? What's in Bayanihan II, Secretary?

**SEC. ROQUE:** So far, I know there is added 140 billion stimulus package, I know there is a budget given to tracing and budget given to health workers as well. But that's all that I know. Of course, I will inform the nation in due course.

Now, I don't think we will be calling for special session because Congress will be reopening in a matter of two weeks anyway. So, it will be discussed already in the second regular session of the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress.

**DAVILA:** Okay, now moving on to another issue. The President just came out, well, essentially, the Inquirer just printed out today the full speech of President Duterte in Jolo, wherein the full speech which turns out to be edited was, and I quote, "Iyon namang ABS-CBN, binaboy ako pero sinabi ko kapag ako nanalo, bubuwagin ko ang oligarchy ng Pilipinas."

So what was edited was, "Iyon namang ABS-CBN, binaboy ako, ginawa ko without declaring martial law, sinara ko iyong mga tao na humahawak sa ekonomiya," etc., etc. And you were quoted yesterday as saying, that the President wasn't referring to ABS-CBN but the other companies, like the Ayala's and the MVP. But it's quite clear they still have their businesses –

and you also mentioned Lucio Tan. You are being called now the master of spin.

**SEC. ROQUE:** I don't know why 'no. Because, number one, I will not comment on an alleged transcript that I didn't have any personal knowledge of. I waived the options of going with the President to Jolo on that day with my duties as a Spokesperson to conduct my regular press briefings and I could not do both. This is the reason why my job stops because even if I don't have to, I really have to hear the President when he addresses the crowd, to make sure I understand the context and to hear for myself what he said.

Unfortunately, I was not in Jolo, because I only conduct my press briefing, where I presented the new Czars of testing, tracing, isolation and treatment. So, I am not able to comment on whether or not what the Inquirer reported is correct. I have read what Senator Bong Go has said that he was referring to his campaign against corruption as well as his usual spin, his usual tirades against oligarchs and in so far as he has actually gone against oligarchs referring to the water concessionaires and Lucio Tan, I stand by that 'no. Because the President has in fact, instructed me, remember when I was out of government briefly, he instructed me, you will be the one to file against these oligarchs, the water concessionaires. And actually, I take it that order has been suspended for the time being because they are preparing to enter into an amended concession agreement.

So I am not spinning. I am repeating what the President has said, and it takes pride in the fact that he was able to somehow promote the public interest by compelling to change (indistinct).

**DAVILA:** But who has he dismantled? I'm curious Secretary, when you said that he was referring to Lucio Tan and the water concessionaires, none of them are dismantled. Who was he dismantled, who?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, he was able to protect the public interest against this disadvantageous water concession agreement. Now, the Lopez's have not been dismantled; they have other businesses. They have FirstGen, they are still a major player and the only player as far as LNG is concerned. They are still active in real state, they still have Rockwell. What their loss is, their ABS-CBN and it's because they have no franchise.

**DAVILA:** So, Secretary, with this particular quote that now it is in full, that the Inquirer has released, and I quote, "Iyon namang ABS-CBN binaboy ako, pero sinabi ko kapag nanalo, bubuwagin ko ang oligarchy ng Pilipinas." I am just curious, Secretary, could you have been wrong? Could he have been referring to ABS-CBN because he named it?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I don't think so.

**DAVILA:** He named ABS in the quote.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Alam mo kasi, si Presidente, he is not going to mean his words eh. When he challenged the water concessionaires, the Ayala's and the MVP although I keep on telling the President: Mayor, MVP, hindi po oligarch, Indonesia. But anyway, there is on our side. He said so publicly, minura niya, sinabi niya ipakukulong ko kayo. That's his words. He doesn't have to hide under, you know, under any cloak of anonymity when he wants to say something against a particular interest and he doesn't care. He actually cursed the Ayala and they owned half of this country.

**DAVILA:** Secretary, I hear you, but that's exactly my point. When the Inquirer released the full quote, he really didn't mean his words. So in other words, what was released in the beginning was edited. That is what I am saying.

**SEC. ROQUE:** I do not know for that.

**DAVILA:** He didn't mean his words. He said, "ABS-CBN binaboy ako." So I'm asking you nga, could you have been wrong in your—

**SEC. ROQUE:** I cannot be wrong. Okay, number one, the documentary evidence shows that it was Congress that actually threw out the franchise application of ABS-CBN. Now, the testimonial evidence also shows, it is the House of Representatives speaking through the chairman of the committee. as well as the speakers said that they are ones that decided that ABS-CBN should not be given a franchise. So why should be this be attributed to the President and meanwhile.

**DAVILA:** Because it's a direct quote. [overlapping voices] No, Sec., it's a direct quote.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, no, no, no. But we have to go by what the Constitution says. The constitution says it is only Congress that grants a franchise, not President. Now the difference is, when he threatened to throw the Ayalas and MVP behind bars, he did so because he can order the prosecution for failure to comply with the concession agreement itself, they failed to build water treatment facilities despite the fact that they were collecting environmental fees which were intended to build waste water facilities.

**DAVILA:** Okay. Secretary, in phone call you had with President Duterte a few months ago which actually you said on Headstart as well, is you said the President told you "I'm completely neutral with ABS-CBN."

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes.

**DAVILA:** So, when the President said I'm completely neutral and you stood by that and then a quote comes out and says, "*Iyong ABS-CBN binaboy ako. Kapag ako nanalo, bubuwagin ko ang oligarchy sa Pilipinas.*" Do you still believe today that the President was neutral?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, of course he's neutral, because the Lopez's are still up and above. They have FirstGen, they have Rockwell, they have other businesses and obviously iyong sinabi niya sa oligarchs did not actually happen to the Lopez's 'no. Now, ang problema kasi is, you know, as far as the oligarchs that he absolutely detested for keeping the people, for not building the waste water facilities, the difference is they delivered at the time of crisis.

Now, hindi ko naman maintindihan kasi why ABS-CBN did not do that. I know you donated 200 million of [garbled] body but the rest, you raised from your TV programs 'no, through your cause for donation 'no. But these two companies did it on their own, I do not know why ABS-CBN could not have done more 'no like what the Ayalas and the MVPs did 'no. I guess that's the difference 'no, but as I said is perhaps—

**DAVILA:** But did the President express this, Secretary? I'm curious, did he say this?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, the President on the contrary expressed the fact that as far as the Lopezes are concerned he was moved by the apology of Carlo. He was moved 'no because it's unusual that someone of the stature from his family will actually publicly apologize to the President and that's why he accepted that apology. Now the MVPs and the Ayalas, as I was explaining, he had to forgive them because their actions at the time of pandemic softened I guess the position of the President. But unlike the Ayalas and the MVPs whom he threatened with jail time, I don't think the President ever threatened the Lopezes with jail time.

**DAVILA:** Okay. So, I think the point is you are standing by that he didn't mean the Lopezes when he said "I dismantled the oligarchies" and you still stand by the fact that the President was neutral, that's the point here.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, I stand by that. Yes.

**DAVILA:** Okay. And of course, there is the Inquirer transcript that's now on Twitter, so I'm curious if are you saying that Inquirer is wrong?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I do not know. I'm saying I do not have personal knowledge. I was not there.

**DAVILA:** Okay. Now, in the same speech in the transcript, the President also said while he's in the warpath against elites and oligarchs, he said he won't hesitate to help his own friends get rich. Ito iyong quote po: *"Iyong kaibigan kong tumutulong kapag yumaman ka nang yumaman, mas maligaya ako. Tatal ako, happy na ako sa buhay ko. I'm happy with my life but I want you to get rich but we have to talk because there is so much that we can do for business."*

**SEC. ROQUE:** I think he's referring to the same concessionaires eh, he's referring again to MVP and Ayalas because—

**DAVILA:** No, he said—no, he was talking to the crowd addressing in particular Sulu Governor Sakur Tan who was seated in front and the sentence is, "To my friends," okay, "I want you to get rich," addressing his friends, "But we have to talk because there is so much that we can do in business." So you already have critics coming out that this smacks of cronyism.

**SEC. ROQUE:** No, no, I don't think so. I think he's referring to the business community in general because many of them are his friends and he's encouraged them to do more because if they get rich, the country will benefit as well 'no. I think that's clear from the literal words used by the President, that it is not his intention to make the rich poor, he wants them to get even richer because there would be benefits for everyone if they get even richer.

**DAVILA:** Okay. All right. Now on another note before we go, you have stars and also employees that were very hurt when right after, Secretary, ABS-CBN was not granted a franchise or over the weekend, I think this was your quote last Monday. You just said move on and you also said that—

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, among others.

**DAVILA:** Go ahead, sir. I mean, you do have Enchong Dee I think—

**SEC. ROQUE:** Among others, I did say I'm also personally—well, you know, I did say move on but I did say also that I feel for ABS-CBN because I'm one of you, I'm 'kapamilya'. I was a regular in the Campanilla. I had an old program in DZMM, Konektodo, so I am kapamilya. And I think I will not be who I am without ANC in particular. I was a senior lecturer at the UP College of Law when I had my first media exposure with Gene Magsaysay at ANC, followed by Korina Sanchez and followed by you, Karen 'no.

So I owe who I am to ABS-CBN. It pains me that you don't have a franchise and I said I owe these to them and I said, "But we have gone through the process, only Congress can grant your franchise. The process has concluded and you did not get the franchise," and that's the context of which I said move on. So I think you cannot isolate that I said in the end, I recognized that I will not be 'pambansang laway' now if not because of ABS-CBN. And I thank ABS-CBN for that.

**DAVILA:** Okay. Now, Secretary, just recently you have Jerry Gracio who filed his resignation from his post as Commissioner of the Samar-Leyte Languages at the Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino and he said on ANC

that—I think the government has accepted his resignation or the President has. But in his statement, he said, he could no longer serve—

**SEC. ROQUE:** You're gone, Karen.

**DAVILA:** Can you hear me, Secretary?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, you're on and off now.

**DAVILA:** Okay. Jerry Gracio says he can no longer serve a fascist government even on a holdover capacity. Your reaction to that Secretary, I know, he said the President has accepted his resignation.

**SEC. ROQUE:** In the first place, he should never have agreed to serve if he thought it was a fascist government. Bad decision to work for government.

**DAVILA:** Okay. All right. So I guess on that note, Secretary, we can move on to what can we expect today for the announcement. There will be—is the IATF meeting today going to be televised?

**SEC. ROQUE:** You know, it's not an IATF meeting. It's an 'Ulat sa Bayan' 'no, attended by about six members of the IATF 'no and it's usually the Chief Implementer, the Secretary of Health, the Secretary of National Defense, the Secretary of Interior and Local Government; sometimes, the Secretary of Finance, sometimes the Secretary of Social Welfare and Development and myself 'no. So it's really a discussion. The President wants the NTF to report what has happened since the past week. He wants key members of the Cabinet giving updates and of course it's not just report to the President; it's a report to the nation. So, we broadcast also the individual reports of the Secretaries.

So of course, while we are expecting tonight will be the announcement on the classification, I can confirm that five cities—not cities, town—well, four cities and one province actually appealed their classification so it was acted upon by the IATF and the recommendation has been given to the President. I can confirm that some areas, they will go back to GCQ from MGCQ and some areas—

**DAVILA:** Really? What areas?

**SEC. ROQUE:** You'll find out later [laughs].

**DAVILA:** May areas, sir, na MGCQ babalik ninyo pa sa GCQ?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, yes, yes—

**DAVILA:** Pero, sir, I mean... I know the announcement is later but ang Metro Manila, will it be back to ECQ or most likely to expect that it will retain on GCQ?

**SEC. ROQUE:** [Laughs] Ikaw talaga, Karen. [Laughs]

**DAVILA:** I'm really curious.



**SEC. ROQUE:** I'm still going to preempt the President. We will have to wait for the President.

**DAVILA:** Okay. So you have areas that will go back to GCQ?

**SEC. ROQUE:** There are areas that will go back to stricter quarantine measures but by and large, the Philippines will be under MGCQ overwhelming. So I guess you can say that we have reigned in the COVID threat to the extent that we can open-up up to 75% of the economy and I think in the coming few days we might even consider 'no declaring some areas under the new normal. Although we hesitate to do so because we want the whole country to still be under some form of quarantine 'no, just in case there are local outbreaks.

**DAVILA:** All right. Well, on that note, Secretary Harry Roque, I want to thank you as always for just giving your time to Headstart. I appreciate it, sir. Thank you very much.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Thank you very much, Karen, and good morning.

**DAVILA:** All right. Stay safe.

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