

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

**PRE-SONA 2020 VIRTUAL PRESSER**  
**HOSTED BY PCOO UNDERSECRETARY ROCKY IGNACIO**  
**JULY 22, 2020 (1:04 – 2:12 P.M.)**

**USEC. IGNACIO:** It's four minutes after 1 in the afternoon, Philippine standard time. I am Undersecretary Rocky Ignacio of the Presidential Communications Operations Office and this is the Pre-SONA Virtual Presser. The Virtual Presser is an interactive online video platform of PCOO launched last year to engage with the local and national media. In this Virtual Presser, we are providing a platform for the media to clarify pressing issues ahead of the President's State of the Nation Address.

Earlier, the Security, Justice and Peace Cluster and the Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation, Disaster and Risk Reduction Cluster presented the government's plans for recovery and resilience in the phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Joining us today, we have Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles; from the Security, Justice and Peace Cluster we have Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana; Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin, Jr.; National Security Council Secretary Hermogenes Esperon Jr.; Department of Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año; Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra; Presidential Adviser on Peace Reconciliation and Unity Secretary Carlito Galvez, Jr.; and from the Climate Change Adaptation, Mitigation and Disaster Risk Reduction Cluster, we have Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Roy Cimatu; Department of Agriculture Secretary William Dar; Department of Science and Technology Secretary Fortunato dela Peña; Climate Change Commission Secretary Emmanuel De Guzman.

We also have the cluster members of Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation and Disaster Risk Reduction Cluster: We have Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development Secretary Eduardo del Rosario; Agrarian Reform Secretary John Castriciones; Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration, we have Administrator Vicente B. Malano; Agrarian Reform Undersecretary Emily Padilla; Department of Science and Technology Undersecretary Renato Solidum, Jr.; Department of Energy Undersecretary Jesus Cristino Posadas; National Economic and Development Authority OIC-Undersecretary Mercedita Sombilla; Department of Public Works and Highways Undersecretary Maria Catalina Cabral; Finance Assistant Secretary Paola Alvarez; Presidential Legislative and Liaison Office Assistant Secretary Maria Rowena Flores-Sabban; and Metro Manila Development Authority Atty. Victor Pablo C. Trinidad.

And before we start, a couple of mechanics for the media to facilitate the Q&A portion, please listen. Make sure that you join the Zoom meeting rule with your name and the name of your media outlet. If you ask a question live, you may notify the moderator through the Zoom Q&A chat box, the moderator will then call your attention when it's your turn to speak. Reporters

should tell to whom their questions are directed to. To make way for other participants, the media participant may initially ask 1 to 2 questions. You will be allowed to ask more questions later on if time permits.

For those who will ask questions live, please turn on your video and stay muted. Only turn your audio on when it's your turn to ask questions live. For those who will not ask questions live, please turn off your video and stay muted. Make sure that you are in quiet rooms with the headphones on. Thank you.

And now, the floor is now open for the question and answer session. Can we have Melo Acuña from Asia Pacific Daily. Melo...

**MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC:** Good afternoon, Madam Undersecretary. My question is for Secretary Eduardo del Rosario. I'm just as interested as anybody else, Father Chito Suganob passed away at age 59, he was the priest held hostage by the Maute Group for some time and I'd like to find out from the good Secretary del Rosario of the problems being met by his department to realize the goals of Bangon Marawi. Marami pong naniniwala na kung makakabangon ang Marawi at ang mga mamamayan nito ay hindi na makakapangalap pa ang mga terorista ng kanilang mga kakampi sa Marawi at mga kalapit lugar. Secretary del Rosario, please?

**SEC. DEL ROSARIO:** Well, there are two general interventions na ginagawa natin sa Marawi City: Iyong infrastructure interventions and non-infra.

With regards to the infrastructure interventions, we have received the funds already last April and May and this month. I was there last week at nag-start na iyong construction ng vertical infrastructures in the most affected area. Iyong most affected area, basically 95% devastated at ginagawa natin ngayon iyong mga vertical infrastructures and these facilities will pave the way for the rising up of the most affected areas, the business center of the city.

Iyong non-infra naman, it calls for numerous interventions on social services so that at the end of the day, we will have a situation in Marawi where we have provided the facilities for their economic stability and development while at the same time addressing the problems on peace and order. So iyan ang ginagawa natin and we are certain that we will be able to achieve this because in accordance with our timeline of completing the rehabilitation by December of 2021, we are on the right track.

**MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC:** Madam Undersecretary, para po kay Secretary Lorenzana, sana kung pupuwede?

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Opo. Can we have Secretary Lorenzana, please.

**SEC. LORENZANA:** Yes.

**MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC:** Magandang araw po, Secretary. Pakibigyan lamang po kami ng impormasyon tungkol sa mga teroristang nag-o-operate sa Pilipinas at kung mayroong mga banyagang terorista, saan po kaya sila nagmumula at saan sila nagkukuta ngayon?

**SEC. LORENZANA:** Thank you very much for that question. Iyong mga teroristang nasa Pilipinas, karamihan diyan nasa Mindanao – sa Central Mindanao iyong iba, iyong iba nasa Basilan at saka sa Jolo. Dati-rati mayroon mga banyagang terorista diyan na galing sa labas, kasi alam naman natin na iyong ating border with Malaysia and Indonesia ay malapit at nakakalipat sila. Pero ngayong panahong ito ay wala na kaming makita o maramdamang mga banyagang terorista dito sa atin. So ang ating pinagtutuunan ng pansin ay iyong mga lokal na teroristang katulad ng Abu Sayyaf, iyong BIFF at saka iyong Dawlah Islamiyah. Thank you.

**MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC:** Maraming salamat po. thank you very much for the update. Thank you, Madam Undersecretary. Thank you.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Thank you, Melo Acuña. Question from Recto Mercene of Business Mirror for Secretary Locsin. Ito po iyong tanong niya: “The tribunal agreed to classify the contested features in the West Philippine Sea as rocks instead of islands. Apparently our strategy to deprive the Taiwanese the 200 nautical miles Exclusive Economic Zone on Itu Aba. Following that logic now, we’re on the same boat as the Taiwanese deprived of the 200 nautical miles EEZ on our islands. So, how can we claim the arbitral award as a victory on our part when that gives the other claimants the excuse to encroach on our territorial waters since Pag-asa and the rest are no longer islands but rocks, devoid of the 200 nautical miles EEZ? For Secretary Locsin.

**SEC. LOCSIN:** I think when we measured out our 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone, we have certain coordinates along the coast and we measure it from that. We do not measure it from these features, these are not islands, these are features. Now, therefore, one of our victories was this, that assuming a country takes over one of our features because it’s out there and then they start to reclaim it using sand from Cebu pa, it made me argue once a—if that was reclaimed by China using Cebu sand, I guess it’s ours again.

But anyway, they can reclaim all they want but because they are just features, they are not entitled to an Exclusive Economic Zone of their own. Otherwise, the Exclusive Economic Zone of the guys who took the reclaimed reefs would already be in Manila Bay, whatever. So that was a victory clearly out and out, it’s ours and we don’t need to extend it further by dangerously asserting that those features can generate their own Exclusive Economic Zone. Because how long do you think we can hold on to it?

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Okay. Secretary, ito po iyong second question ni Recto Mercene para sa inyo: *“The Philippines’ victory is to have the nine-dash line declared illegal but China refused to abide by the tribunal ruling. Is not logical and peaceful to agree for joint development which we’re*

*doing now while allowing the next generation to solve this vexing issue as suggested before instead of letting the USA \_\_\_\_ the South China Sea waters with threats of confrontation?”*

**SEC. LOCSIN:** Well, the presence of the United States Navy has always been consistently with maritime law which is the Freedom of Navigation which requires you to display your military hardware in a straight line. You just row up and down very fast, there is no lingering around, no military exercises, you know, staying around the area. In that respect, it was really a great victory. Now it's clear.

Now this is what I want to always emphasize, sometimes people say *“Oh why does China say no, we don't recognize it. No, we have our own view. Hey, it's a free world.”* You want me to get angry at China because they express their own opinion? Come on, the point is we won it. They are not—you know, if they don't wanna recognize it, okay they can say that but we know we have the law on our side. We have The Hague on our side.

So, the one thing I never respond to is when people say, *“Yeah, pero sinabi ng China they don't agree with us.”* Well it's a free world, they don't have to agree with us.

So that way—and that is why our President very wisely - when he met with President Xi Jinping said okay, so now, we agree to disagree. And as I also told the People's Liberation Army Publication Editor, I said you know, those little features out there, there is a whole avenue of cooperation between China and the Philippines; an avenue leading to mutually beneficial economic progress. But in that road there is a little pebble called our feature and it's ours. And on that pebble, we might one day stumble and if we stumble, it will really be bad.

But in the meantime, we can go around it and there are other areas of cooperation and then we can both mutually benefit from that. That's why when Wang Yi came here, I came up with the memorandum of understanding on the development of oil and gas. And you know, I also have to reciprocate, out of pure trust when I come up and I produced the memorandum. Just like that and say, *“State Councilor Wang Yi this is my memorandum.”* It looks that he read it once and then he signs it – that's a sign of good faith and I appreciate that.

And that's why when he brought up the second one he said, *“Now would you consider a memorandum of understanding on Belt and Road?”* And I said 'cause I had also written another one and I said, *“Will I consider a memorandum of understanding on Belt and Road?”* I said, *“No sir, I will not consider it. Instead I will sign it right here and now because that expression of trust you had in me must be reciprocated,”* and I signed it. And that's how we ended up in the Belt and Road, and that's how we proceed forward. We don't always have to be, you know, angry all the time. What's wrong with that?

Countries have disagreements... we have disagreements already with United States but that doesn't mean we can't be friends, that we can't work together. That's it.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Okay. Thank you, Secretary Locsin. Can we have now [foreign name] of Phoenix TV Hong Kong.

**PHOENIX TV HONG KONG:** Good morning, everyone. I would like to address my question also to Secretary Locsin. Given the recent development in the region and the ever changing geopolitical landscape, how does the Philippines maneuver itself and maintain its balance in line with their independent foreign policy at least for the next 2 years amid the 2 major powers, meaning China and the US?

**SEC. LOCSIN:** Well as you can see—how do we do it? Well I think we have done it brilliantly, we have maneuvered and always in good faith. We have never done anything in a sneaky fashion, we have been very forthright with our claims and we have stood by our claims and we have done it with openness and in the spirit of friendship but also with every indication of firmness. And I think that's how you proceed in the world, you have to act as what you want to be taken out. You want to be taken seriously and you want to be taken as a truthful power - which we are.

We are a power. Remember, the Philippine archipelago by itself just geographically has been called the biggest, unsinkable aircraft carrier group in all the waters of the world. There isn't anything like it, we are even bigger than Britain. And where there, we are both—behind us is the Pacific; in front of us is the South China Sea. You can look the other way – in front of us the Pacific and behind is the South China Sea. We are the rampart the rampart of stability, of peace and freedom in this part of the world.

We don't have to be belligerent about that. Geography has decided our faith and our faith is to be a balanced and independent power in this part of the world.

**YANFANG ZHU/PHOENIX TV HONG KONG:** Just a follow up question, sir. How do we look at the suspension on the termination of the VFA?

**SEC. LOCSIN:** Well, the President, in the light of the COVID crisis, it was very clear that we need the cooperation of the whole world. We need everyone working for a cure, for a vaccine and for measures to help each other. And then he is the one who instructed me, and he said, 'Suspend the abrogation of the VFA because we will need everyone's cooperation.' And let me also tell you that when I did obeyed his order, then I suspended it and I explained. People may have wondered by one statement I made, one sentence I had. "Believe you me," I said. No one is upset. No one is alarmed. No one feels in anyway threatened. But in every way, they feel reassured by the suspension of the abrogation of the Visiting Force of Agreement because it restores things to the way they are so that the great powers in our part of the world need not to fear.

Suddenly, you know, all the things we were depending on for our mutual or forward defense were all back again. Back to the way it was before the Visiting Forces Agreement was abrogated. But it's a temporary suspension.

We will see now what happens after finally the world settles down, when we have contained the COVID contagion. When we have hopefully found a vaccine, a cure, then we can start rebuilding again. And when we rebuild – I never stop emphasizing this – of all the economies in the world that will help Southeast Asia, that will help Asian, and in the end that will help the world is the second biggest market on the planet – and that's China. And that's why we look forward and we have every wish for the success of a post COVID recovery by China because in that recovery, that recovery will be the tide, the rising tide that will lift all the boats in Southeast Asia including the Philippines.

That's how it is. We all go up together. Those who wish to pull others down, well, I don't think they belong to this world.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Thank you, Secretary Locsin. Thank you, Ms. Yan. Can we have now Joseph Morong of GMA-7. Joseph?

**JOSEPH MORONG/GMA-7:** Good morning, Usec. Rocky. Can I have Secretary Año, please?

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Can we have Secretary Año, please?

**SEC. AÑO:** Yes, Joseph.

**JOSEPH MORONG/GMA-7:** Sir, okay, I know that you're going to say that probably we have one more week bago tayo magbago ng community quarantine but I guess, when the people know and can anticipate iyong [garbled] problems of LSI. Now my question, sir, is: These are the data of the DOH, iyong atin pong mga critical care facilities are occupied by more than 50%, even 60%; iyong ICU beds natin, sir, 65.38%; iyong isolation beds, 79.25%. Hospitals are reporting na nag-start na silang mapuno. Iyong Quezon City yesterday [audio out] average of 1,500 cases to 2,000 cases. What does this factor say or indicate in terms of iyon pong ating magiging CQ after July 31, or August one, starting August 1?

**SEC. AÑO:** Thank you, Joseph. As always, there is always what you call evaluation, analysis, and we always base it on science. So unang-una, talagang pakikitingan muna natin iyong data analysis ng ating mga experts and then secondly, iku-compare natin ito sa iba't ibang risk factors katulad ng social, economic, security.

And from there, magkakaroon uli ng presentation sa IATF before we will come up with the recommendation to the President. But meanwhile, tuluy-tuloy iyong consultation ng IATF and NTF sa lahat ng mga affected areas. In fact, this afternoon, we have a consultation dialogue meeting with Region IV-A. All the governors, mayors, league president of barangays for Region IV-A, we will have this afternoon. We will go down to the details even on the process of localized lockdown.

We expected that there will be a rise in numbers because we opened up our economy and somehow ni-relax natin iyong ibang mga rules because we would like to give the economy a chance to open up.

So it is a continuing a consultations. And our second phase of the National Action Plan, natapos na tayo sa una which is building up and increasing our health capacities, testing centers, isolation facilities, PPEs, COVID hospitals. Now, dito naman tayo sa economic recovery while still sustaining what we have gained during the lockdown.

And the third part will be on ... you know, the continuing rebalancing between the health and economy. And we also consult our own people para... sabi nga sa participatory governance 'no, kailangan din natin ng feedback from the people. And still, the involvement of every individual in obeying, complying with the health standards and protocols that is really very, very important.

So today, hindi pa natin masasabi, Joseph, kung ano iyong susunod na classification natin. It's still July 22, we have still eight days to go, actually, nine days to go. So makikita naman ng publiko kung ano ang magiging trend natin. And our mayors, particularly here in the National Capital Region, nakita naman natin iyong kanilang sinseridad at commitment sa pagpapatupad ng localized lockdown.

**JOSEPH MORONG/GMA-7:** Sir, ang concern ko, sir, papaano kung halimbawa 'no ay nagpatuloy iyong ganitong klaseng trend, mga 1,500 to 2,000 cases every day and then iyon pong dumadami iyong ating paggamit ng mga critical care facilities. Kapag, sir, nagpatuloy iyan—I mean, of course, we have nine days, pero kung halimbawa na wala na tayong magagawa to lower these numbers, are we going back to MECQ? And a related question is; Will it be difficult for the government to return to an MECQ?

**SEC. AÑO:** There's always the possibility of going back to MECQ or even ECQ depende sa development. And even the President said na—actually, noong huling meeting namin, he was opting for MECQ, but we requested the President that our NCR mayors really promised that they will make sure that localized lockdown are implemented. So andiyan din iyong possibility, Joseph. It depends really on the data analysis.

**JOSEPH MORONG/GMA-7:** Pero, sir, ibig sabihin, this trend does not lend to a decision na MECQ?

**SEC. AÑO:** No, I cannot say that, Joseph, kasi maraming factors ang tinitingnan natin dito – the doubling rate, of course iyong sinabi mo, iyong health utilization rate and of course, iyon nga, iyong other risk factors. So as of today, hindi pa talaga natin masasabi iyan. So we'll just await for the coming days sa mga development.

**JOSEPH MORONG/GMA-7:** Okay, sir. Thank you for your time.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Okay. Thank you, Joseph. Thank you, Secretary Año. Can we have now Jiale Tao of CCTV?

**JIALE TAO/CCTV:** Thank you. Good afternoon. I have a question to Secretary Locsin. My question is, first, many people have drawn comparisons between Hong Kong's security laws and the Philippine's anti-terrorism legislation both aimed at enhancing national security but are criticized in the west. What is your comment?

**SEC. LOCSIN:** Do you want me to compare the national security law. Well, I have to tell you, I haven't read the Hong Kong security law. But I do know this, and we have consistently voted this way of abroad, that that is a matter of the internal security of the People's Republic of China. And to what extent, it may have affected the handover terms—I haven't studied that. But the Anti-Terrorism Law is a completely different thing altogether.

The Anti-Terrorism Law is aimed to prevent an event that hasn't really happened in the Philippines yet. We have had insurgencies, the longest running communist insurgency – that's not terrorism. And the answer to insurgency is called "combat", and that's why we have the longest trained army in the world. And we do that, we fight them.

We also had the longest secessionist war and we had our great army fighting that, and we beat it, instead you have now peace in Mindanao. But one thing that we are warned about even, I remember this in the time of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, US Homeland Security came and said, "You people have never experienced a real terrorist attack. I suggest you prepare for it." Because United States was not prepared for it; Spain was not prepared for it. And this is the answer. I was an author of the first Anti-Terrorism Act, and frankly I thought it's brilliant. But, of course, there are compromises. When it got to the Senate, Nene Pimentel, basically emasculated it a bit; but now comes the improved version.

And the purpose of the Anti-Terrorism Act is to prevent something that we have yet to experience in its full scale, and that is a terrorist attack. Aimed—remember, it's aimed at the Armed Forces. The Armed Forces is armed, that's their job is to fight. It's aimed at innocent civilians, totally powerless against the carnage of a terrorist attack. But this is the Law that prevents it.

People say, "Can it be abused against the civilians it is meant to protect?" I suggest to all the critics who apparently are either illiterate or they just won't read it, is to read the Law to see all the protections National Security Adviser Esperon has put out there. Any abuse of this law, any—it cannot be abused; it can only be misused by law enforcement authorities.

The penalties on law enforcement officers are horrendous. And you know what, this is a vast improvement of the version I introduced in Congress in my time.

When they abuser cannot be found, maybe because the abuse happens in a detention cell. You know who goes to jail? His commanding officer. That is law. And he goes to jail in place of



that abusing officer. Where do you find that? I don't think you find that in Homeland, in the Patriot Act.

That's the kind of law that Ping Lacson and others put together, and they don't see any equivalence between one and the other. Because, one, as to the issues against the national security law of Hong Kong have to do with the matter of the internal security of the People's Republic of China. This has to do with ours, and it's not internal security, which is a specific act – terrorist act. We've done other things. When we fight insurgencies, we have laws for that. We fight rebellions, we have laws for that. Aggression, foreign invasion, we have laws for that. But the insidious new method of attack against innocent civilians, not soldiers. Soldiers are armed and they protect themselves. If they don't protect themselves, they are not real soldiers.

This is what the Anti-Terrorism Act. It's a very specific act, and it's perfectly done.

**JIALE TAO/CCTV:** I have a follow up question. So you had a video conference with the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi as the coordinator of the ASEAN and the China. What role will the Philippines play in the regional [unclear] cooperation, economic recovery and the stability in the South China Sea?

**SEC. LOCSIN:** Well, that's [unclear]. For the first cooperation we had was a meeting we had in Laos because the west was intent on pillorying China for the COVID virus. Instead of cooperating with China, because China is doing its best to try to contain this thing that broke out in China and from spilling out and also from destroying their own country, instead the west was determined to just pull them down.

So I insisted with Wang Yi, I said, "No, we meet in Vientiane. Can I speak up for China and say, China is doing the best it can to contain this virus, to find the cure, to find and discover methods by which to contain it, and we ASEAN stand by China in that." And you know, we got all of ASEAN to go with us.

The second meeting we had recently had to do with the South China Sea. And I again, I reaffirmed the wisdom of both my President and President Xi Jinping. The last time they met, he said very clearly, "We can't agree." So let's just agree to disagree and see if we can move forward from there because, let's face it, it's the biggest market in the world, frankly for us, for most of Asia. It's the biggest market from the United States. It might be even the biggest market for Europe.

So we look forward to the post-COVID recovery of China because that will lead in the post-COVID recovery of the economies of the rest of the world. That's how we got together.

If we're going to be talking about our role in the Code of Conduct, well, yes, we are the China coordinator and that's proceeding of apace. Thank you.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Thank you, Secretary Locsin. Thank you, Jaile. Can we have Claire Jiao from Bloomberg?

**CLAIRE JIAO/BLOOMBERG:** For Secretary Locsin and Secretary Guevarra. Would you know how many more Filipino seafarers remain stranded on ship as COVID keeps port shut and prevent crew changes? Because we've heard [garbled] over worked and asked to go home. Has the DFA or DOJ received any [garbled] or request for assistance?

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Can we have Sec. Locsin first?

**SEC. LOCSIN:** Okay, explanation of what? Pardon, again - again?

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Claire, can you repeat your question, please?

**CLAIRE JIAO/BLOOMBERG:** Would you have the number of how many more Filipino seafarers remain stranded on ships and have the DFA or DOJ received any complaints of forced labor, or request for assistance to get home?

**SEC. LOCSIN:** Frankly, I don't know how many more we have left out there but we are moving them. We also, for the first time in the world, created a green lane. This green lane will facilitate both the evacuation or the expatriation of seafarers and their re-deployment abroad because we don't want—we have the most valued seafaring community, and we don't want them to lose their jobs.

We laid this, we had hope the rest of the world would follow but the rest of the world seems to be narrow-minded, so—but right now, we're well ahead of it and we are the model of the world now in how to handle migrant labor in this pandemic. I don't think anyone comes close to the Philippines in the way we take care of our people out there, the way we transit other workers from other countries. Take care of them, we make them come through here and then go back to their homes. No country in the world has been as cooperative to the extent possible as efficient as we have been. And we're very proud of that.

I've been told that just recently by United Nations officials. They're astonished of our care for migrants both our own and those of other countries. Well, that's just the Filipino way. We're always been like that. We really take care of strangers in strange lands.

Yes?

**CLAIRE JIAO/BLOOMBERG:** Can we have first, Sec. Guevarra? Have you had any reports, maybe of forced labor, or request for legal assistance from seafarers who've been forced to keep working because they can't go home?

**SEC. GUEVARRA:** Hello, Claire. The DOJ doesn't have any information also on the number of seafarers stranded in vessels. But as Sec. Locsin earlier said, we came up with this green lane

procedure where the passage of seafarers coming in and going out has been facilitated. And I think it is working and up to this time we have not received, at the DOJ, any complaints for forced labor or any complaint related for that matter.

**CLAIRE JIAO/BLOOMBERG:** Lastly, for Sec. Lorenzana. How will the recent US position appears on the South China Sea affect our military positioning and how we work with the US in the disputed area?

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Can we have Sec. Lorenzana, please?

**SEC. LORENZANA:** Kindly repeat the question, please?

**CLAIRE JIAO/BLOOMBERG:** How will the recent US position appears on the South China Sea affect our military positioning and how we work with the US in the disputed area?

**SEC. LORENZANA:** The position of the US vis-a-vis South China Sea is—the US... that is their concern actually. We are not part of their activities in the South China Sea. They do it on their own. Now, if it creates peace and stability in the South China Sea then it's also good for us. But on the other hand, it can also create some trouble or instability and we will be adversely affected. So, it cuts both ways, it could benefit us, it could also be detrimental to us.

Thank you.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Okay. Thank you, Claire. Can we have now—thank you, Sec. Lorenzana and Sec. Locsin. Can we have now Sicheng Wang of Guangming Daily?

**SICHENG WANG/GUANGMING DAILY:** Hi, good afternoon. My question is going to DFA Sec. Locsin. The former DFA Secretary Del Rosario suggested Philippines to raise the arbitral ruling to the United Nations Assembly in September. Will the DFA will take it seriously and how will DFA push forward with the arbitral ruling?

**SEC. LOCSIN:** I heard of that proposal and my reaction then was exactly the same as my reaction now. We won it already. Now, why would want to re-litigate something that you've won? It's like, you don't like you won? So, it doesn't make any sense so I rejected it – no. But you want to bring it up to the United Nations—we won it, we don't need to go back to the United Nations. You bring it back to the United Nations and it becomes a question of numbers and this is nothing to do with numbers, this has to do with law. I'm a lawyer so I really have this profound respect for the law. The law is eternal, the rest is opinion.

Thank you.

**SICHENG WANG/GUANGMING DAILY:** Thank you, Secretary.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Thank you, Mr. Wang. Can we have now Ivel Santos of Vera Files? Can we have Ivel?

Okay... Can we have now Anjo Alimario of CNN Philippines?

Wala rin si Anjo...

**ANJO ALIMARIO/CNN PHILIPPINES:** Hi - hi, Usec.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Anjo, go.

**ANJO ALIMARIO/CNN PHILIPPINES:** My question is for Justice Sec. Guevarra.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Sec. Guevarra, please.

**ANJO ALIMARIO/CNN PHILIPPINES:** Hi, Sec.

**SEC. GUEVARRA:** Anjo, good afternoon.

**ANJO ALIMARIO/CNN PHILIPPINES:** Hi sir, good afternoon. Sir, there have been criticisms about the implementation of the rule of law during the pandemic. Thousands have been arrested but most of them are poor. Now, how do you respond to those who say that there's inconsistent, unfair application of the rule of law?

**SEC. GUEVARRA:** I wouldn't really say that there is an inconsistent application of the rule of law. It just so happen that a greater number of those arrested came from the lower income groups and that simply because they're the ones who were caught on the streets. And for that reason, since they have been found or at that time of their arrest were found to be violating certain quarantine rules and regulations kaya sila marami. Pero at the same time, those whom we may say belong to the upper income groups or people who are known in society, by-and-large, they are also charged and prosecuted.

Of course, we know the celebrated case of one senator na in the beginning was thought to be being given preferential or special treatment by law enforcement agencies as well as by the DOJ, but we all know that that's not true and as a matter of fact, the preliminary investigation is going on. And that is the same with respect to certain police officers who have also been found or alleged to have violated certain protocols or quarantine regulations.

So, their cases have also been filed with the prosecutor's office. So, it's really a matter of perception but kasi greater number iyong mga tao sa... masasabi natin na nasa lower income levels, iyong tinatawag nating mga mahihirap, na nahuhuli sa mga violations but it doesn't mean at all that there is an unfair application of the law. We apply this as uniformly as possible, Anjo.

**ANJO ALIMARIO/CNN PHILIPPINES:** All right. Thank you, Sec. Sir, just a follow-up. Sir, yesterday you released... I think data, the number of deaths so far in BuCor facilities. From January to July 19, we have 476 inmates who died due to COVID or non-COVID causes, and of course over the weekend, the death of drug convict Jaybee Sebastian and other high profile inmates broke out. Sir, do you find this numbers alarming and also why limit the NBI probe to just the deaths of the nine high profile inmates?

**SEC. GUEVARRA:** Alam mo, when we had this very long discussion with the Bureau of Corrections or the BuCor people last Monday. They informed us that on the average even prior to the COVID pandemic, ang average daily rate ng death in the penitentiaries all over the country is something like anywhere between two and three persons dying everyday for various causes na iyon, lahat-lahat na.

So, iyong cinite nila na figure na 476 na namatay mula noong January up to July 19, sa lahat din ng penitentiaries ito and prison farms all over the country. So, if you average that, if you divide that by the total number of days during that period, it would appear to be something like 2.3 on the average daily. So, parang masasabi natin na hindi naman siya substantially higher than the daily average during the past year. So, mayroong slight increase and I suppose that that is because precisely of COVID-19.

So, iyong 21 na namatay for COVID-19, hindi naman lahat iyan mga drug offenders, siyam lang sa kanila ang drug offenders. Three of them came from the correctional institute for women and nine from the general population. At iyong mga namatay sa COVID-19, karamihan sa kanila ay may pre-existing na illnesses na mostly respiratory kaya kaunti lang talaga iyong namatay ng actually for COVID-19.

Now, your question as to why we are focusing our investigation on the nine drug offenders who died of COVID-19. You know, when the BuCor people presented to us their protocols kapag mayroong namamatay in prison, we noted na medyo inadequate, so this will be the subject matter of a further discussion – how to improve their protocols kapag mayroong namamatay sa mga prisons.

But... you know, so many stories, so many theories have been swirling around na parang dini-dispute na ang ikinamatay nga ay COVID-19 nitong mga convicted drug offenders na ito at mayroong mga stories or theories saying that in fact, they did not die and so forth and so on, that parang napalitan iyan by someone else and they were let go.

So, because of these various theories and also for the benefit of the BuCor to dispel any doubt na mayroon ngang any anomaly dito sa mga pagkamatay na ito allegedly due to COVID-19, then we thought it proper and prudent to request the National Bureau of Investigation to step into the picture and make its own inquiry into the matter.

That's it, Anjo.

**ANJO ALIMARIO/CNN PHILIPPINES:** Okay. Thank you, Sec. Thank you.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Okay. Thank you, Aljo. Thank you, Sec. Guevarra. Can we have Ivel Santos? Nandito na ba si Ivel Santos ng Vera Files?

Hello? Yes, go ahead.

I think... please unmute. Ivel, we cannot hear you.

Okay. Can you hear us, Ivel?

Okay... please. Ivel, balikan ka namin. Puntahan muna namin si Lian Buan ng Rappler?

Can we have... yeah, go ahead.

**LIAN BUAN/RAPPLER:** This is for either Sec. Guevarra or Sec. Año or both if both want to answer. Sirs, can you explain why there are more than 3,000 quarantine violators still in jail despite that these are bailable offenses? Is it a matter of bottleneck po sa prosecutorial mechanisms or sa pag-file ng complaint ng pulis or is it because they are not able to pay bail? And what are your immediate measures to address this, to free these people considering na off limits muna ngayon iyong BJMP facilities? And is it on the table at all na i-limit na lang muna iyong arrest so not to congest the jails further?

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Can we have Sec. Guevarra first?

**SEC. GUEVARRA:** Well, Lian, on the part of the DOJ, sa inquest, kasi parang mga arrested iyan or apprehended iyan in the act of committing a violation ng let's say quarantine rule or health protocol and so forth and so on.

So, on the part of the DOJ, i-inquest iyan, that will be the logical procedure and we process itong inquest na ito as soon as they are filed by the law enforcement agencies with the Department of Justice. Now, kung hindi possible na ma-inquest kaagad, then we have requested before, we have made arrangements with the law enforcement agencies before na huwag na muna silang i-process, ma-release na lang and then i-subject na lang to regular preliminary investigation at the later time kasi nga naiipon.

But in so far as those who are brought to inquest are concerned, then the DOJ immediately completes the inquest process whether online or actual. So, I don't know about Sec. Año kung mayroong other explanations regarding the cumulative number.

**LIAN BUAN/RAPPLER:** Yes. Sec. Año?

**SEC. AÑO:** Yeah, thank you. Actually, kakaunti na lang iyong number na iyan. Just to straighten the facts, from the start of our quarantine, we have a total of almost 200,000 iyong

na-apprehend natin noon; 112,826 individuals were just warned and sent home. 34,134 people were fined and 64,814 individuals were arrested for curfew disobedience.

Itong 3,000 plus na ito, ito na lang iyong natira. Katulad nga ng sabi ni Sec. Guevarra, iyong inquest na iyong ginagawa natin because as much as possible ayaw nating magkaroon ng congestion and at the same time, hindi rin natin ma-require iyong court para pumasok sila specially during the lockdown.

But bawat isa na iyan ay ina-attend natin and our goal also is to decongest our jails and likewise, out of the result our dialogue with the local chief executives na Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines, the League of Provinces, Cities, Municipalities.

Magkakaroon na lang kami ng uniformed implementation kung papaano ipatutupad iyong health standards protocols. Number of days in prison, kapag nag-violate ka ng hindi pag-wear ng mask, we suggest 10 to 30 days; physical distancing also 10 to 30 days imprisonment. At kung ikaw naman ay ipa-fine, it's about between 1,000 to 5,000 pesos. So iyan iyong magiging uniformed implementation natin.

With this also, we would like to really implement iyong mga standards na ito. If we can do that, actually we will prevent the further spread of this COVID-19. Thank you.

**Q:** Secretary, have we identified bakit 3,000 pa rin, kasi hindi na siya gumalaw from 2,000 to 3,000?

**SEC. AÑO:** I will check on that 'no. Ito na siguro iyong mayroon na talagang existing na kaso. So, we will check on that.

**Q:** This is for either Secretary Año or Secretary Lorenzana, about the Anti-Terror Law. Justice Secretary Guevarra said it may be prudent for law enforcement to wait muna for the IRR before implementing the law. What do you make of that and are you heeding the call of the Justice Secretary to not implement muna the Anti-Terror Law while waiting for the IRR?

**SEC. AÑO:** Yes. It's prudent to wait for the IRR. But you know, IRR is not a requirement for the implementation of the law, there is already jurisprudence on that, People of the Philippines versus Nicolas and it is a Supreme Court decision na after 15 days of official publication, the law is already effective. The only question is siyempre kung wala pang IRR, there are so many people who might question the law enforcers on carrying out this law on certain provisions and applications. So, para maiwasan mo iyong ganoon, antayin mo na lang iyong IRR, kasi open to questions eh. But there is no restriction in implementing the law, because the law is already effective. And what we will do is to fast track the crafting of the IRR as soon as possible.

**Q:** So, sir, are you heeding the call of Secretary Guevarra na hold muna?

**SEC. AÑO:** Ah kung mayroon kasing talagang terrorist threat, we have to apply the law. Kung nakabitin na or nakabingit iyong buhay ng ating mamamayan, we have to implement the law. Now, kung wala namang malakihang terrorist threat, we can wait for the IRR.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** For Secretary Lorenzana.

**SEC. LORENZANA:** Good afternoon. I have nothing more to add to Secretary Año, tama iyong sinabi niya. We could wait for the IRR but if there is a terroristic action now, we are going to use it. Thank you.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Thank you, Secretary Lorenzana, Secretary Año. Can we have Elijah Roberos (?) of Vera Files?

**ELIJAH/VERA FILES:** Hello good afternoon po. Medyo nagloloko po iyong cam ko, pero here's my question po for Secretary Esperon, Secretary Guevarra and Secretary Lorenzana? What are your considerations in crafting the IRR for the Anti-Terrorism Law; and will the issues raised in the petitions in the Supreme Court be factored in like the grounds for warrantless arrest and prolong detentions of suspects?

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Can we have Secretary Esperon, please?

**SEC. ESPERON:** There are many considerations, because we will be practically crafting Implementing Rules and Regulations for actions and programs that we will have to implement not only to counter the kinetic forces of the existing forces but also to prevent and counter violent extremism. And so foremost in my mind right now and this will be my contribution, because I'm a member of the nine-man Anti-Terrorism Council who would be on the matters of organization, because it is provided in the law that we have to designate people who will be conducting apprehensions, conducting surveillance and so indeed, we have to create the units and the people that will be manning this must be nominated and designated or assigned and trained. We want a fair, fast and efficient implementation of the law. So, we have to start with the organization itself.

As of now, we simply use our trained forces, we are sufficient in that, but this time, we want specific persons to be assigned to specific assignments. There are many things more that we could talk about in the IRR. But you know, equipment, etcetera. But that is exactly a—that should actually be a result of the different facets of the law. Meaning, since the members are the Executive Secretary who could lead the Terrorism Council, I act as the Vice Chairman. As of now, I am the designated Vice Chairman. The Secretary of National Defense of course has a lot of inputs into this. Secretary of DILG has a lot of input into this. Secretary of Finance has to come in, because of financial matters and AMLAC has to come in also. Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Justice, Department of ICT, because we have to be able, be enabled to really monitor the probable terrorist.



I see that the Implementing Rules and Regulation will actually be even a manual, I must say, that would straighten out all the doubts that you have now. We are assuring you that we have all the safeguards, but the IRR is important because it will be our operating manual and this will be provided to the Joint Congressional Oversight Committee as well as to the Commission on Human Rights. So we will be very transparent, but we will assure you that what we really want to accomplish is to defeat the terrorist especially the matter of foreign terrorists, because in this Human Security Act that this act repealed, the FTFs, Foreign Terrorist Fight were not covered. And this time also, the Anti-Terrorism Council has to come up with that we call the preventing and countering violent extremism programs, which covers all the five vulnerable sectors of society. So, there's a lot that we should be doing there. Thank you.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Thank you Secretary Esperon. Can we have Secretary Lorenzana, please?

**SEC. LORENZANA:** I think Secretary Esperon have already covered everything. I have nothing to add, thank you.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Okay, Elijah, do you have any question?

**ELIJAH/VERA FILES:** Yes po. I have a question for DOF Asec. Paula Alvarez or NEDA Usec. Sambila (?). As mentioned all over the news, the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed our kababayan's here in NCR to go back to their provinces because they don't have work or they don't have businesses anymore. Thus they are remain in their provinces until the economy fully reopen and the pandemic ends. Can you provide any update on the promise of the President Duterte last SONA 2019 to encourage more investments in the countryside? How much foreign and Filipino investments approved for other regions besides NCR to date?

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Can we have, Asec. Alvarez or from NEDA? I think Elijah, mukhang hindi na sila nakasali, babalikan na lang natin Elijah kung makakausap natin sila. Salamat Elijah Roderos ng Vera Files. Puntahan natin si Jillian Cortez, Business World, Jillian? Can I have Jillian now?

**JILLIAN CORTEZ/BUSINESS WORLD:** Hello. My question is directed for CabSec Nograles. So, Secretary Roque said that for President Duterte's SONA he will be focusing on the COVID-19. So what are measures he will be emphasizing in his address?

**SEC. NOGRALES:** Abangan na lang natin, ayaw nating pangunahan si Pangulong Duterte. Pero ang naging mabuti dito sa ating Pre-SONA forum is at least naibahagi na po natin sa ating mga kababayan kung ano na iyong mga nagawa natin, mga programa na ginagawa natin at patuloy nating gagawin maging this year 2020 hanggang sa next years and then iyong ating mga bagong programa panlaban sa COVID-19. So, dahil naibahagi na natin, then si Pangulong Duterte now is free to discuss other matters. Kaya minabuti ni Pangulo na dito sa SONA niya, dahil naibahagi na po sa Pre-SONA iyong iba't ibang aspeto ng governance ay libre na po si Pangulo to discuss ano naman iyong actions, plano at ang mga roadmap niya kumbaga in terms of handling, fighting and conquering this pandemic.

**JILLIAN CORTEZ/BUSINESS WORLD:** So, still on the SONA, sir. So besides his priorities and combatting the COVID-19 crisis, will he discuss more economic reforms, the Cha-cha or maybe even the death penalty, which were all mentioned in his past—

**SEC. NOGRALES:** Dahil ang kausap niya doon sa SONA at ang physical presence niya ay nandoon sa Kongreso, maaari din po niyang banggitin iyong ano ba ang priority legislation niya. So, because it is not only an address to the people, but addressing the legislators, then he may also talk about legislative priorities niya. And going into the, kumbaga next two years, marami pa tayong mga low hanging fruits in terms of legislation and possibly new legislation that we want to push forth especially in battling this COVID-19 pandemic.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Okay, thank you, Jillian. May pahabol po na question from Riza Robles for Secretary Lorenzana and for Secretary Locsin. Ang tanong po niya: US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper said on Tuesday, he hope to visit China by the end of the year to improve crisis communications, channels and address other areas of mutual interest even as he condemned China's maritime activity in the South China Sea. What is the Philippines' view on this? What implications would US Defense Secretary Esper's visit to China have on the current situation in the China Sea and what would you see as an ideal outcome? For Secretary Locsin and Secretary Lorenzana. Can we have Secretary Locsin first?

**SEC. LOCSIN:** Aah, you are talking about the comment made by Defense Secretary Esper?

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Yes, Secretary.

**SEC. LOCSIN:** That's interesting; I'll take note of his observations. Thank you so much.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Okay. For Secretary Lorenzana, please?

**SEC. LORENZANA:** You are asking my reaction to the visit of Secretary Esper to China, iyon ba iyon?

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Sir, ulitin ko na lang po iyong question niya. US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper said on Tuesday, he hope to visit China by the end of year to improve crisis communications, channels and address other areas of mutual interest even as her condemned China's maritime activity in the South China Sea. What is the Philippines' view on this? What implication would US Defense Secretary Esper's visit to China have on the current situation in the China Sea? What would you see as an ideal outcome?

**SEC. LORENZANA:** I think, it's good that Secretary Esper is planning to go to China to talk to his counterpart. You know if the two super powers will discuss things, especially concerning the South China Sea, it will be good for us here in the region. So, it's good for us. I think, I agree with that plan to discuss, to go there and talk to each other. Thank you.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Thank you, Secretary Locsin. Thank you, Secretary Lorenzana. For Secretary Cimatú. Can we have Secretary Cimatú?

**SEC. CIMATU:** Yes, go ahead.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Secretary, you have a question from Ted Cordero, GMA News Online. Can you confirm that some mining operations suspended by the late Secretary Gina Lopez are now about to resume. How many are given the go signal to resume and what companies are they?

**SEC. CIMATU:** Iyong mga dumaan lang sa proper ano noon, nag-submit ng for reconsideration sa DENR. Mayroon namang—nagkaroon ng audit ng aming mga technical experts, pumunta doon sa mga mining companies na suspended by the former Secretary Lopez. Out of that, 13 ang napunta sa DENR, then 14 ang napunta sa Office of the President. So iyong sa amin sa DENR ay dumaan na ito sa auditing, mayroon na silang mga recommendation. May mga iba naka-comply na sa mga corrective measure, iyong iba hindi pa. So, iyong mga hindi pa ay talagang itutuloy pa rin naman nila iyong kanilang compliance bago naman sila—they will be allowed to open.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Thank you, Secretary Cimatú and ito ubos na po iyong ating oras. Maraming salamat po sa ating mga cabinet secretaries na kasama natin ngayong araw. Salamat din po sa media na nag-participate sa ating Virtual Presser and please follow our social media account on facebook, twitter and Instagram for more updates.

Again marami pong salamat sa inyong pagtutok sa Virtual Presser ngayong araw para sa ating Pre-SONA Tatak Pagbabago. Ako po si Usec. Rocky Ignacio. Maraming salamat po sa inyong pagsubaybay.

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