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

**PRESS BRIEFING OF PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON HARRY ROQUE**
**January 4, 2021 (12:06 P.M. – 1:01 P.M.)**

**SEC. ROQUE:** Magandang tanghali, Pilipinas.

Narito na naman po tayo, mobile presidential press briefing. Nandito po tayo ngayon sa Villamor Airbase kung saan lilipad po tayo papunta ng Davao sakay po ng isang C295; ang tawag po namin diyan, cargo class flight to Davao. So anyway, antayin ninyo po mamaya dahil magkakaroon po ng Talk to the People ang Presidente mula po sa Siyudad ng Davao.

Kasama na po ang Estados Unidos sa listahan ng mga bansang subject to travel restrictions 'no dahil sa bagong variant ng COVID-19 na unang na-detect sa United Kingdom. Epektibo mula kahapon, a-tres ng Enero, 12:01 A.M. Manila Time at tatagal hanggang a-kinse ng Enero. Ang mga banyagang pasahero manggagaling ng Estados Unidos or nagpunta sa bansang iyon labing-apat na araw bago dumating sa Pilipinas at pinagbabawalan na makapasok sa Pilipinas.

Ayon sa Bureau of Immigration, mag-a-apply ito sa lahat ng mga foreigners regardless kung anong visa category or kung may nakuha silang previous endorsement or exemption mula sa Department of Foreign Affairs o mga pribilehiyo sa ilalim ng Republic Act 6768 or iyong tinatawag na Balikbayan Program Law sa panahon ng travel restriction.

Kung inyong matatandaan, una nang na-impose ang restrictions sa dalawampung bansa, ito po ang United Kingdom, Denmark, Ireland, Japan, Australia, Israel, Netherlands, Hong Kong, Switzerland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Lebanon, Singapore, Sweden, South Korea, South Africa, Canada, Spain. Tatagal hanggang a-kinse ng Enero ngayong taon ang restriction sa mga nasabing bansa.

Hindi kasali ang mga Pilipino sa kautusan na ito 'no pero kinakailangan ng ating mga kababayan na sumailalim sa absolute facility-based 14-day quarantine kahit nagnegatibo sila sa kanilang RT-PCR test.

Sa mga dumating mula Estados Unidos or may biyahe mula rito labing-apat na araw bago lumapag ng bansa bago mag-a-tres ng Enero, 12:01 A.M. Manila Time, pinapayagan silang makapasok ngunit kinakailangan nilang sumailalim sa absolute facility-based quarantine period kahit may negatibong resulta sila sa swab test.

Sa mga banyagang pasahero na naka-transit sa listahan ng mga bansang nasa travel restriction, pinapayagan silang makapasok ng Pilipinas kung sila ay nananatili lamang sa mga paliparan ng mga bansang nabanggit or hindi na-clear na pumasok sa mga bansang iyon. Pinapayagan silang mag-home quarantine kung ang result ng kanilang RT-PCR test ay negatibo.

Pero kung ang transiting foreign passenger na ito ay umalis ng airport or pinayagang makapasok sa mga bansang kasali sa travel restrictions, hindi sila maaaring makapasok sa Pilipinas.

Ngunit kung ang transiting passengers ay mga Pilipino, papayagan silang makapasok sa bansa ngunit kailangan nilang sumailalim sa absolute facility-based 14-day quarantine period kahit negatibo pa ang kanilang mga swab test.

COVID-19 updates po tayo. Ito po ang global updates sang-ayon sa Johns Hopkins 'no: Higit 85 million or 85,068,700 na po ang tinamaan ng COVID-19 sa buong mundo. Nasa 1,842,095 katao naman po ang nabawian na ng buhay dahil sa coronavirus.

Nangunguna pa rin ang Estados Unidos na mayroong mahigit 20.6 million na mga kaso at 351,452 deaths; pangalawa ang India; pangatlo po ang Brazil; sumusunod ang Russia at ang France.

Dito po sa ating bayan, mayroon po tayong 20,292 na mga aktibong kaso ayon po iyan sa January 3, 2021 datos ng Department of Health. Sa mga aktibong mga kaso, 89.1% ay asymptomatic, mild or moderate, samantalang 6.7% ay kritikal. Nasa 3.6% naman po ang severe; mahigit walonlibo or 8,316 naman po ang gumaling. Ang buong bilang ng gumaling ay halos nasa kalahating milyon na or 448,258 or 93.8% recovery rate. Samantalang malungkot naming binabalita na 9,257 ang nabawian na po ng buhay dahil sa coronavirus. Nananatiling nasa 1.94% ang fatality rate, nakikiramay po kami.

Kumustahin naman po natin ang ating mga ospital: Nasa 61% available pa po ang ating mga ICU beds; 70% available pa po ang ating isolation beds; 78% available naman po ang ating ward beds; at mayroon pa tayong 78% na mga available ventilators.

Dito po tayo nagtatapos sa ating presentasyon pero mayroon po tayong dalawang panauhin. Unahin po natin si Mr. Fernando Zobel de Ayala tungkol sa private sector initiatives sa bakuna; at ang ating Ambassador sa China, ang ating suki, Ambassador Chito Sta. Romana.

Sa ating mga kasama sa media, dahil mayroon pong pagpupulong si Mr. Zobel ng 12:30, uunahin po natin ang mga tanong para sa kaniya. Mr. Fernando Zobel, thank you for joining us.

Ang tanong ko po ay ano po ang naging commitment ng Ayala Corporation sa pagbili ng AstraZeneca? Ilan po at magkanong halagang bibilhin ninyong bakuna? At ilan po ang ibibigay ninyo sa gobyerno at ilan ang ibibigay ninyo sa inyong mga empleyado? Mr. Zobel, the floor is yours.

**MR. FERNANDO ZOBEL:** Thank you. Thank you, Harry. Happy New Year to everyone, to your audience, to all your guests today. Thank you for this opportunity to be with you, Secretary Harry.

So our commitment, thanks to the help of General Galvez and Vince Dizon and the leadership also of Joey Concepcion and the private sector, we've decided to order 450,000 vaccines of AstraZeneca. So the total donation that we will be giving to government will be about 120 million pesos.

Government in turn, as you know, Secretary Harry, has requested that 50% be given for individuals that the government selects; and 50% will be given back to the private sector so that we can also provide the vaccine for the people who need it.

The total cost as I have understood it is five dollars 50 centavos, with the 50 centavos being for the logistical requirements to bring it in. But in addition to that, Secretary Harry, I wanted to mention that along with Secretary Galvez and Secretary Dizon, we're also helping with the distribution which is going to be a very important component in making sure that the vaccines can get to the public, this is a critical component and as you know, each of the vaccines, whether it's AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Moderna, J&J, Novavax or Sinovax have their own peculiar requirements for distribution.

So through T3 and the government were also helping try to figure out how the distribution will take place as this is such an important part.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, Mr. Zobel, alam ko po na napakadami ng tulong ang naibigay ninyo sa gobyerno mula noong nagsimula ang COVID-19. Hindi po bababa yata sa walong bilyon na ang naibigay ninyong tulong, bukod pa dito sa bibilhin ninyong bakuna. Bakit napakalaki po ng ginagastos ng Ayala Corporation para po dito sa ating COVID-19 response?

**MR. FERNANDO ZOBEL:** Secretary Harry, actually as of the end of the year, it's 12.7 billion already. We've never faced anything like this in, at least in our recent history as a company, Secretary. This is a time for everyone – private sector, public sector – to work together. Never have we faced a crisis of these proportions that has produced so much suffering in our country.

So I'd like to think that the private sector has come through in a very big way with the call from the government and try to do everything that they could not only for their employees, their suppliers, but the public in general. I think we're all here to help the country as a whole in the best way that we can. And so never in the history, at least in my career, have I seen so much work taking place between the private sector and the public sector. And we appreciate, Secretary Harry, that you've also and that the other members of the government have mentioned the contributions of the private sector – that's greatly appreciated. And this will, of course, continue into next year. It has continued also through some of the recent disasters and typhoons that we've had.

So there's a great spirit of collaboration among everyone to make sure that we get our country through this pandemic and through the many different challenges that we have been facing.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, sa ngalan po ng ating Presidente, Rodrigo Roa Duterte, at sa ngalan po ng buong sambayanang Pilipino, nagpapasalamat po kami sa inyong mga tulong na ibinibigay sa ating mga kababayan; and it will not be forgotten.

Well, because you have an appointment po at 12:30, mga kasama sa Malacañang Press Corps, kung mayroon po kayong mga katanungan kay Mr. Zobel, can you ask them now?

**MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC:** Yes. Good afternoon, Secretary Harry; Melo Acuña here.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes. Go ahead, Melo.

**MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC:** Thank you. Happy New Year! I'm just as curious as anybody else of Mr. Zobel's outlook for business because the private sector has contributed a lot to the government's efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Filipino people. But given the business climate, will it not also affect your and your assistance to the government and your stakeholders? May I have your views about this, sir?

**MR. ZOBEL:** Yes, of course. I think a lot of companies last year especially during the worst part of the pandemic were on survival mode. They really had to look back at their businesses—we have to do a combination of two things: One was to help people, but the other was to keep our businesses running. And it's not just our internal businesses; we rely so much on suppliers and other businesses as part of the running of our businesses and so we really have to watch out for many people to make sure that they could survive this.

So it was really very rough during that period, fortunately, I feel that a lot of the businesses were fairly well-capitalized before going into this crisis.

We've been lucky as a country and that's thanks to the good efforts of the government to be operating in a fairly low interest environment and where we have been able to raise capital in the past. We were actually also able to raise capital in the middle of the pandemic – this was the comfort that banks and bondholders had and investors had in the Philippines. And we've actually been able to borrow at record-low rates during the pandemic year.

So what that does is that, that helps us get through the crisis and it allows us to continue investing as a company. As a matter of fact, if I could mention that last year, we invested about a 157 billion pesos in different types of CAPEX – telecom, real estate, land, water; and next year, we may spend up to about a 182 billion.

So I think if companies continue to invest and create jobs, we will be able to help people get out of this crisis. It will not be easy but we have to continue; we have to continue growing the engine of the economy.

**MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC:** You are that optimistic, sir.

**MR. ZOBEL:** Well, I hope we don't get a second wave. I think Secretary Harry and all our officials have cautioned all of us that we must be extremely careful. We are seeing around the world that everyone is being faced with the second wave. If we get the phase two, the second wave, the situation will be very different. But if we don't, every month that passes has started to show better results in terms of consumer behavior, in terms of mobility, in terms of people expanding and investing again.

I was quite pleasantly surprised that our OFW remittance numbers did not go down as much as we thought they would and are now doing a little better – that's a safety net for many of our Filipinos in the country.

So I'm cautiously optimistic and hopeful that we will see growth next year, hopefully 5 - 6 percent which will be a very dramatic reversal from what we have seen for this year for understandable reasons.

**MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC:** Thank you very much. Thank you. I wish you the best.

**MR. ZOBEL:** Thank you.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Okay. Thank you, Melo. Mayroon pa bang ibang katanungan para kay Mr. Ayala? Since wala na po 'ata, Mr. Fernando Zobel, thank you very po. On behalf again of the President and a grateful nation, thank you very much for all your assistance in these times of pandemic. Good morning to you, sir.

**MR. ZOBEL:** Thank you very much.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Kasama rin po natin ang ating suki ngayon, walang iba kung hindi ang ating Ambassador to China, si Mr. Chito Sta. Romana.

Ambassador may nabalitaan po ako na parang mayroon nang bakuna na binigyan ng General Use Authorization dito po sa China. Ano ba ho itong General Use Authorization at ano ba ho itong brand na nabigyan na ng GUA sa China; at kung alam ninyo po, ano iyong pagkakaiba ng GUA sa Emergency Use Authorization? The floor is yours, Mr. Ambassador Sta. Romana.

**AMBASSADOR STA. ROMANA:** Happy New Year to everyone. Thank you for inviting me and it's a good opportunity to give you an update on the status of the Chinese vaccine here.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Happy New Year.

**AMBASSADOR STA. ROMANA:** Before the New Year weekend, last Thursday, the Chinese government announced that it had granted provisional approval for general use to a vaccine produced by Sinopharm. This is actually a state-owned pharmaceutical company, and its vaccine has been used for emergency use since July together with Sinovac.

Now, Sinopharm and Sinovac have both applied for this General Use Approval – Sinopharm was the first one to get it last Thursday but we're in touch with both companies, Sinopharm and Sinovac. Both company—Sinovac has also indicate—told us, the Philippine Embassy here in Beijing that it is expecting. It has filed for the same application for General Use Approval and it expects there will be announcement by the government sometime this month, most likely around the middle of this month.

But to explain, the General Use Approval basically means they can now—[AUDIO CUT]

**SEC. ROQUE:** Naputol po, Mr. Ambassador. Okay, babalikan po natin si Ambassador Sta. Romana. Meanwhile, siguro Usec. Rocky iyong ating mga paunang mga tanong galing sa ating mga kasama sa Malacañang Press Corps.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Yes. Secretary, good afternoon. Tanong po mula kay Rose Novenario ng Hataw—

**SEC. ROQUE:** Good afternoon po. Happy New Year!

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Happy New Year, Secretary. Ano po ang mensaheng nais ipabatid ng Palasyo sa paggamit daw po ng Presidential Security Group nang smuggled at hindi FDA approved COVID-19 vaccine? Alam ba ito ni Vaccine Czar Carlito Galvez? Makakatulong ba ang isyung ito sa National Vaccination Program ng administrasyon?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, tingin ko po ang mensahe ng PSG ay handa silang mamatay para protektahan po ang seguridad ng ating Presidente. Alam ninyo po ang PSG bagama't iyan po ay—ang mga tauhan niyan ay galing sa lahat ng sangay ng Hukbong Sandatahan ng Pilipinas, malinaw po ang kaniyang misyon 'no – ito po ay to protect the President of the Republic of the Philippines and his immediate family.

Nagkaroon po ng desisyon ang PSG na sa panahon ng pandemya eh isa sa malaking banta sa kalusugan ng Presidente ay kung mahahawa siya noong mga taong nakapaligid sa kaniya – at ito nga ang PSG. So nagdesisyon sila maski wala pa pong authorization na magpabakuna.

In other words po, dahil handa naman silang mamatay para sa Presidente eh pumayag na rin sila na magpasaksak dahil sa kanilang pagnanais na huwag sanang mahawaan ang ating Presidente.

Ang mensahe po nila ay malinaw: magpapakamatay po sila sa Presidente, para sa Presidente para bigyan siya ng proteksiyon.

At ang sambayanang Pilipino naman po at ang ating Presidente ay nagbibigay-pugay sa katapatan ng PSG sa kanilang misyon na protektahan ang ating Presidente.

Haharap ho ba sila sa mga imbestigasyon? Siyempre po! Wala po tayong tinatago VP Leni Robredo. Kaya nga po nagkakaroon po ng mga imbestigasyon ang NBI, ang DOJ at ang FDA. Wala pong takot ang ating mga PSG kung papatawan sila ng parusa. Kagaya ng aking sinabi po, magpapakamatay nga po sila para sa Presidente, ano naman ang pakialam nila kung anong parusang maibibigay sa kanila kung mayroon mang parusa. Tigilan na po natin ang usapang ito dahil ang usapan natin dapat ngayon, nakatutok doon sa vaccine: Kailan darating; paano po natin iyan mapapakalat sa ating mga kababayan. Tigil na po ang pulitika! Alam naman po natin na walang tigil ang isyu na ito na ginagamit ng mga kalaban ng gobyerno. Pero ngayon po para matapos na, nagbibigay-pugay po ang Presidente sa ginawa ng PSG. Sinugal po nila ang kanilang buhay para bigyan ng proteksiyon ang ating Presidente. At lahat po nang naniniwala na kinakailangan ng sambayanang Pilipino ang Presidente Rodrigo Roa Duterte, nagpapasalamat po kami at nagpupugay din sa lahat po ng mga miyembro ng PSG na nagpaturok. Maraming salamat po sa inyong katapatan, sa inyong katapangan.

Now, nakabalik na po si Ambassador. Ambassador, as you were saying po, naputol po kasi kayo. I just read-in a question, pero go ahead. Mr. Ambassador?

**AMB. STA. ROMANA:** Okay, so ang nangyari ngayon dito is mayroon ng approval for general use in China ang Sinopharm vaccine. Iyong specific vaccine na ito iyong ginawa ng China National Bio-Tech Group – CNBG vaccine, iyon ang na-approve. Sinovac has a pending application and they informed us that they expect to hear from the authorities sometime this month, hopefully by the middle of January.

The other thing I want to add, our embassy is in touched with this, two companies of course and we tried to facilitate their contact with IATF and if there is any information that is needed. We ask them when they will file for EAU sa FDA sa Pilipinas. Apparently, their plan right now, according to them is that they hope to file in the next few days sometime this week. They will file their EUA application with the FDA in the Philippines.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Now, Mr. Ambassador, marami po kasing mga kalaban ang gobyerno na nagpapakalat ng takot dito sa mga Chinese vaccine. Now, ano po ang ibig sabihin ng Generally Use Authorization at ano ang diperensiya ng Emergency Use Authorization pagdating doon sa safety at saka efficacy ng mga bakuna na gawa po diyan sa Tsina, sang-ayon po sa FDA ng Tsina?

**AMB. STA. ROMANA:** What they have now is based on the data of the phase 3 clinical trial. Iyong Emergency Use that was based on the phase 1 and phase 2 clinical trials. So, tapos iyong Emergency Use was limited in terms of number. As of now, they have vaccinated already 1

million Chinese citizens ‘no. Karaniwan dito iyong mga lalabas ng bansa, you know, either student or as businessman; as well as iyong frontliners sa hospitals and clinics; and then they included iyong those workers involved in cold storage facilities; as well as iyong public sector workers sa airport at saka sa port areas, where they deal with arrivals as well as the incoming products, imported products.

Iyong General Use ngayon, they hope to ramp-up iyong production and embark on a mass inoculation campaign. Ang plano, initial plan is between now and Chinese New Year, which is February 12. Actually, ang target nila by February 5, at least 50 million Chinese ang mabakunahan. The reason for this is because one, it is winter here in China particularly Northern China malamig, ito iyong flu season, pneumonia season. Second, it is also Chinese New Year is the time of the year when most Chinese travel to their hometowns and so they expect a lot of travel and possibly it increases the risk ng infection of the virus.

Kaya, that is why they want to embark on this mass immunization campaign which is now being carried out and ito ang binigay na approval for Sinopharm ‘no, so ginagamit iyong kanilang bakuna for a lot of these Chinese citizens that is now being vaccinated. Sinovac is looking forward also to participating in this as soon as possible, as soon as they get the approval, so that is the difference between the two. Iyong EUA that they were granted last July at iyong provisional approval for general use that they got, that Sinopharm was granted last Wednesday.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Maraming salamat, Ambassador. I’m sure maraming tanong ang mga kasama natin sa Malacañang Press Corps. Balik tayo kay USec. Rocky sa pangalawang tanong?

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Yes, Secretary. From Rosalie Coz ng UNTV. Ano po ang reaksiyon ni Pangulong Duterte sa pambabatikos sa mga PSG personnel na binakunahan ng unauthorized vaccine? Naging kontrobersiyal ang isyu at nanawagan si Vice President Robredo ng transparency at accountability po kaugnay nito? Ano po ang masasabi ng Palasyo dito?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Kagaya ng aking nasabi po kanina, nagbibigay-pugay, nagpapasalamat po ang ating Presidente sa katapangan, sa katapatan ng PSG na magawa ang kanilang katungkulan na protektahan ang ating Presidente.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Ang second question niya, papahintulutan ba ng Punong Ehekutibo si PSG Commander Durante na dumalo sa gagawing pagdinig ng Senado sa vaccine rollout? Bakit or bakit hindi?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Hindi ko po alam, pero hindi ko po maintindihan kung bakit paghihimasukan ng Senado ang co-equal branch of government, ang seguridad ng ating Presidente, eh gayong hindi naman pinanghihimasukan ng Presidente ang seguridad ng Senado? So, siguro po, mutual respect for co-equal branches of government.

**TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS:** Sir, how do you understand that that's the mandate of the PSG? Sir, marami pong gustong magtanong, what does this say about how the government values the legality and processes and iyong pamba-bypass po sa FDA o sa ating mga offices sa due process? Doesn't it send, sir, the wrong signal to those na iyong iba pong hindi naman maganda ang intensiyon na puwede pala nilang gawin ito sa bansa if it's the PSG or people close to the President can do it, baka puwede nilang gawin?

**SEC. ROQUE:** That is far-fetched! Alam po natin ang misyon ng PSG – to protect the President. Iyan po ang ginawa nila, eh iisa lang naman po ang Presidente ng Pilipinas, siguro naman walang Pilipino – well, siyempre may mga kalaban ang Presidente na who are wishing otherwise – pero tingin ko naman po lahat iyong mga natatakot sa Panginoon ay hindi naman po na nagnanais na magkasakit ang ating Presidente. Dahil alam natin kapag nagkasakit siya, senior citizen siya eh malala po ang tama ng COVID. So, sa akin po, wala po iyang mga usapin na anong mensaheng pinaparating natin. Iyon lang po iyon – pinuprotekatahan nila ang Presidente, they standby by it, iyong mga may problema bahala kayo sa mga buhay ninyo.

**TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS:** Pero, sir, what about the legality, the bypassing of the process?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, sinabi ko na po ano. Iyong pagtuturok po, wala pong nalabag na batas; wala pong nagbenta, wala pong nag-distribute.

**TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS:** Sir, doon naman po sa isyu ng face shields. Kasi po 'di ba ginawa po siyang mandatory because of the fear of a surge this holiday season, but will the IATF reconsider making this mandatory considering, sir, iyong complaints ng marami that it's uncomfortable? More than that, iyong iba po nahihilo raw while using it and some are feeling that it triggers their vertigo.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, gaya ng aking nasabi po 'no, magkakaroon po ng guidelines ang ating IATF; inaantay lang po natin ang mga rekumendasyon ng ating technical working group. So antayin po natin ang guidelines.

**TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS:** Sir, may I please go to Ambassador Sta. Romana po?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Go ahead, please.

**TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS:** Hi! Good afternoon, Ambassador. Sir, can you just share with us your general observation now that, iyong sabi ninyo nga po, one million people have already been vaccinated in China? How's been the response in terms of—how you juxtapose this to the number of cases that you have now there in China? Or is it too early to tell?

**AMBASSADOR CHITO STA. ROMANA:** Okay, can you hear me?

**TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS:** Yes, sir, we can hear you.

**AMBASSADOR CHITO STA. ROMANA:** Okay. So your question is general observation about… the receptivity towards the vaccine in China?

**TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS:** Yes, sir, and its general its general effect that you've been seeing so far since one million who have already been vaccinated?

**AMBASSADOR CHITO STA. ROMANA:** You know, I've met quite a number of Chinese particularly Chinese business executives who have taken the vaccine. Actually, most of the Chinese business managers and engineers who are involved in infrastructure projects in the Philippines are now going back and almost all of them, if not all of them, they take the vaccine before they go to the Philippines. And so far, the results have been pretty good. It's a preventive measure.

We also know from news report—we've met at least one Filipino doctor who works in a Chinese hospital here, a joint venture, they were offered, all the frontliners including him, were offered the Chinese vaccine. In the beginning, he was not willing; he [unclear]. He basically said, "I'll think about it first," and he let his colleagues take it. And they all took it and he observed them, and finally he decided, he joined them. So, so far, he told me and this was only last week that the results were pretty good and he feels quite well. There was no adverse reaction in his case.

There have also been press reports; the Chinese have been conducting clinical trials in a number of countries – Indonesia, Brazil, Turkey, in the Middle East. A number of Middle Eastern countries have approved the vaccine already, the Chinese vaccine. As a matter of fact, I was reading a news report yesterday or last night that the Philippine Ambassador in Bahrain actually took the Chinese vaccine because it's approved there, it's registered there and it's already being distributed for free.

So, so far—there's actually a … you know, the Chinese are being asked, Chinese citizens are being asked to register. There is actually right now a long list, and that's why they are trying to keep up with the demand. And the plan is, as I said, they want to meet the target of 50 million this year.

In terms of press report also, the Chinese vaccine producers, they intent to produce about a billion doses this year. So they're ramping up their production no doubt, and there is a lot of play up in the media.

So thus far my personal experience. China, of course, has been able to control the virus here. I've been able to travel to four or five provinces in the past couple of months. But at the same time—you know, they are very disciplined, they wear masks, practice social distancing. So it's a combination now – the vaccine plus the measures that have been taken that have contributed to what they have achieved right now. And that's why their economic recovery is proceeding quite strongly.

**TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS:** Sir, given the high demand now for these vaccines, as you mentioned ‘di ba they are targeting 50 million, to vaccinate 50 million people. How many vaccines can the Chinese government or Sinopharm or Sinovac can provide if, for example, they get an EUA from the Philippines?

**AMBASSADOR STA. ROMANA:** Well, I can’t give you the exact figure. That is something that is subject of talks between IATF and the Chinese companies. But the Chinese government has already repeated that they will share some of their vaccines particularly with the global [garbled] developing countries. Because what’s happening right now is that the countries with money are able to corner the market, and they are promising to sell it or provide it at fair and reasonable prices. So some of the prices I’ve seen being quoted in the Philippine media [garbled]

**TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS:** Ambassador, hello?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Okay. Maraming salamat po. Maraming salamat, Trish. Maraming salamat, Ambassador. Can we go to Pia Rañada now?

**PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER:** Sir, just on [garbled] vaccines. Sir, kasi the vaccines have to be administered, and administering an unapproved vaccine is illegal according to the FDA law. And the PSG said that they supposedly administered the vaccine themselves. So even if, as you say, it’s their duty to protect the President, does that justify breaking the law?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Sinabi ko na iyan, Pia. Kung sila’y handang mamatay para sa Presidente, handa sila kung ano ang ipapataw na parusa. Pero ang ginawa nila ay prinotektahan nila ang Presidente; let’s leave it at that.

**PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER:** Yes, but, sir, you earlier said that the President is lauding them on what they did. So it’s like he’s lauding them for breaking the law, for bypassing certain processes. He is a lawyer, does he not know better? And what does it say about how Malacañang views our laws?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Hindi po. He’s lauding them—what’s the question? Nakiki-argue ka, walang question ‘no.

Ang sasabihin ko po ay ganito: Nagbibigay-pugay po siya dahil sinugal nila ang mga buhay sa kagustuhan nilang protektahan ang buhay ng Presidente laban sa COVID-19. At isa ako doon sa nagbibigay-pugay din kasama ng karamihan ng sambayanang Pilipino na sumusuporta sa Presidente.

Yes, I don’t think it was a mistake to protect the President. If there’s whatever accountabilities issue, sasagutin po iyan ng PSG. Gaya ng sinabi ko, ‘Eh kung kamatayan nga tatangapin nila, ano naman iyang mga ibang parusa na pupuwedeng ipataw sa kanila.’ Let’s leave it at that.

Kung may kaso, let the cases be filed and let them proceed. Sino ang magsasampa ng kaso 'no? Sino ang magbibigay ng ebidensiya? Legal issue po iyan.

**PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER:** So, sir, given that the President sees nothing wrong with what the PSG did, can the Palace now give the public details about who provided the vaccines to the PSG? What process it went through?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Wala pong kinalaman iyon. Kung gusto po nilang sabihin, sasabihin nila. Pero ang importante po, pinuprotektahan nila ang Presidente.

**PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER:** Sir, kasi importante po iyong transparency in this issue—

**SEC. ROQUE:** Itigil na po natin itong mga napakadaming kuru-kuro tungkol diyan eh hindi naman kayo nagpaturok para protektahan ang Presidente, eh bakit ninyo naman minamasama iyong mga sinugal ang kanilang mga kalusugan.

**PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER:** Oo, sir, kasi we're talking about the law, protecting the law. And I think it's in the interest of Malacañang to also respect the law and show that the citizens that it is also respectful of the law. So my question is—

**SEC. ROQUE:** Go ahead!

**PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER:** Given that this is an issue of public interest and transparency is something the public wants to see, can the Palace divulge details of this agreement? Who is the businessman or whichever entity who gave the vaccines to the PSG? I think it's a fair question, everybody wants to know.

**SEC. ROQUE:** No, it's not a fair question; it's immaterial. Ang materyal dito, sinugal nila ang mga buhay nila para protektahan ang Presidente – full stop. That's their business. Okay?

Alam ninyo, because of lack of time, I have to go 'no. Nandito nga tayo sa Villamor Airbase because of a one o'clock flight. Pero thank you very much, Pia. Ian Cruz. Please.

Okay, walang Ian Cruz. Usec. Rocky, as many as questions as you can read, please.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Secretary, nandito na po si Ian Cruz. Ian, go ahead.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Okay, okay. Go ahead, Ian.

**IAN CRUZ/GMA7:** Sec., nandiyan pa po ba si Ambassador Sta. Romana?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, nandito si Ambassador Sta. Romana.

**IAN CRUZ/GMA7:** Ambassador, may we know po kung kayo po ba ay nagpabakuna rin ng Sinopharm vaccine, pati po iyong mga taga-Philippine Embassy po natin diyan sa China?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Walang sounds, wala… Next question, Ian. Hintayin natin kung narinig ni Ambassador iyong question.

**IAN CRUZ/GMA7:** Okay. Secretary, sa iyo po. Iyong mga travel restrictions po, magkakaroon pa po ba nang additional like po iyong China and iyong Vietnam? Mayroon na rin po kasi silang mga new variant ng COVID virus.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, sang-ayon po sa memorandum na inisyu ng Executive Secretary, magkakaroon po nang joint recommendation ang DOH at ang DFA kagaya nang nangyari po sa bansang Estados Unidos 'no. So hintayin na lang po natin kung mayroong ganiyang joint recommendation at aaktuhan naman po iyan ng ating Presidente.

**IAN CRUZ/GMA7:** Opo. Secretary, may apela naman iyong sa mga taga-Quiapo Church 'no dahil alam natin na malapit na po iyong kapistahan. Gusto nila na maging 50% po iyong capacity noong simbahan leading to the fiesta. May mensahe na po ba diyan ang IATF?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Hanggang 30% lang po ang ating pupuwedeng religious services, so hindi po iyan nababago pa. Hanggang mabago po iyan, eh kinakailangan sundin po natin iyang 30% capacity.

**IAN CRUZ/GMA7:** Opo. Secretary doon sa mga bakuna, may reaksiyon po kayo, kasi may mga LGU na po na may sarili din po silang programa para sa vaccine like ang Manila, ang Makati at kanina nakausap nila Usec. Rocky ano, si Mayor Vico sa Pasig, mayroon na rin po sila. Hindi po ba ito magkakaroon nang kalituhan ano or ng problema kasi mayroon ding niru-rollout ang national government at magkakaroon din nang hiwalay ang mga LGU po?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, unang-una, lahat po ng mga transaksiyon sa mga manufacturers will be government-to-government. So wala naman pong mau-order na independent doon sa mga orders na gagawin po ni Vaccine Czar Secretary Galvez 'no. So let's just say we welcome the contribution of the LGUs kasi ibig sabihin mas marami tayong budget para bumili ng vaccine at hindi lang iyong manggagaling sa pondo ng national government.

**IAN CRUZ/GMA7:** Opo. Secretary, may inuutang tayo 'no, may nilu-loan tayo sa mga banks—

**SEC. ROQUE:** Okay. I think Ambassador Sta. Romana is back. Ambassador, the question of Ian Cruz is nagpaturok na ba ho kayo either ng Sinopharm or ng Sinovac, or anyone in the Embassy? Ambassador, the floor is yours.

**AMBASSADOR STA. ROMANA:** Okay. Wala pang access dito to foreigners to get the vaccine 'no. But now that there is approval for general use, it is quite possible in the coming … in the near future or the coming … sometime this year. As of now, we have not had the vaccine yet.

**IAN CRUZ/GMA7:** Opo. Ambassador, iyong itinurok po na bakuna sa mga taga-PSG na Sinopharm, may knowledge po ba ang Embassy tungkol dito? Naimbestigahan na rin po ba ninyo kung saan po galing ito?

**AMBASSADOR STA. ROMANA:** Well, I have no knowledge about it. We're also curious to know but unfortunately, we were not involved.

**IAN CRUZ/GMA7:** Thank you, sir. Kay Secretary Roque po. Secretary iyon nga po ano, may 300 million dollars tayo na new loan sa World Bank na gagamitin daw po sa bakuna. Para kanino po itong mga bakuna at saang mga lugar po ito gagamitin, iyong mga bakuna?

**SEC. ROQUE:** That's for the entire country 'no. Minimum 60 million but the goal now is to provide a 150 dosage 'no for all Filipinos at hindi lang doon sa inisyal na pinakamahihirap. So we're aiming to give vaccines for everyone.

**IAN CRUZ/GMA7:** Secretary, may patanong po ano. Sabi daw po ni Senator Gordon, admirable man ang hangarin ng PSG, mali pa rin! Someone powerful gave the go signal. Who is behind the vaccine po na smuggled po?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Hindi ko po alam kung anong sinasabi niya, baka mas may alam siya sa akin 'no. Pero tapos na po iyan, lahat ng pananagutan sasagutin po iyan ng PSG dahil paulit-ulit ko namang sinasabi eh kung kamatayan nga tatanggapin nila para sa Presidente, ano ba naman iyang kulong na posible 'no. Wala pong issue iyan, basta sila ginawa nila ang katungkulan and isa po ako doon sa talagang humahanga sa ginawa ng PSG.

Punta na tayo—Ian, kasi three questions lang ang rule dito sa Malacañang Press Corps 'no. Melo, please, Melo Acuña.

**MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC:** Happy New Year, Secretary. Magandang bagong taon sa iyo. Nabanggit ng ating kaibigang si Teresita Ang-See sa 'Tapatan sa Aristocrat' na nabakunahan na raw po ang may isandaang libong Tsino na nagtatrabaho sa mga POGO sa Pilipinas. Would you have any information about this information?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Wala po akong impormasyon. Kung totoo man, eh 'di mabuti! One hundred thousand less possible carriers of the COVID-19 virus.

**MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC:** Yeah. Pero definitely hindi gasinong masasabi nating malaking bagahe ito kung papasok sa Pilipinas, kung papaano nakapasok at kung sino nagpasok – iyon pa rin ang tanong. Ano po kaya, Secretary?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, wala po akong kasagutan diyan 'no. Ang sinasabi ko lang kung totoo ha pero of course, hindi ko kinukumpirma iyan 'no – that's a hundred thousand less possible carriers of COVID-19. Iyon lang po ang aking masasabi diyan.

**MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC:** Yeah, opo. For Ambassador Chito Sta. Romana. Mr. Ambassador, Happy New Year and nice to see you. I just want to find out because this information came from Tessie Ang-See. I know it's not that easy to export goods particularly vaccines from China. Would you be able to help us find the missing pieces of the jigsaw puzzle?

**AMBASSADOR STA. ROMANA:** Happy New Year, Melo.

**MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC:** Happy New Year, yes.

**AMBASSADOR STA. ROMANA:** We'll see what we can find out but as I've said we're not in the loop on this matter. But regarding the one hundred thousand, unless they came back to China and had the vaccination here in China. As to whether it was brought out of China, I cannot, you know, I cannot confirm or deny – certainly don't know.

**MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC:** Okay, let's leave it at that. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. Thank you, Secretary Harry. Happy New Year. Thank you.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Thank you. Happy New Year. My flight po is at 1 o'clock, I am on board Cargo Class C295 pero we have time for 3 to 5 more questions. Pakibilisan lang, Usec. Rocky.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Yes. Secretary, medyo napakarami pong tanong dito ang ating mga kasamahan. Business Mirror: Na-expire na po noong January 1 ang Executive Order 85 which maintain daw po tariff for mechanically deboned meat for chicken and turkey to 5%. The tariff is now at 40% and is expected to increase the prices of processed meat products which makes use of MDM (mechanically deboned meat), like hotdogs and canned luncheon meat. May plano ba kayong mag-issue ulit nang new EO, si President Duterte, to maintain daw po the 5% tariff?

**SEC. ROQUE:** May consensus na po doon sa Cabinet level committee on tariff related matters na panatilihin muli sa 5% iyong taripa diyan. Pero siyempre dumadaan po iyan sa proseso at hinihintay pa ng Office of the Executive Secretary iyong pormal na rekomendasyon ng Cabinet level committee on tariff related matters tungkol dito.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Second question po: Na-complete na kaya ng NTC ang performance assessment for telcos? If yes, na-submit na kaya nila kay President Duterte?

**SEC. ROQUE:** It's the first working day of the year po, I'll find out siguro tomorrow or on Thursday I'll answer this question.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** May position kaya si President Duterte if he will support the premium hike of SSS and PhilHealth or will he listen to calls to defer the said rate increases?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Sa SSS, well mayroon naman pong supervision ang Office of the President sa lahat naman po ng executive agencies 'no. Pero siyempre po ang tinitingnan diyan is ano iyong

kinakailangang rate para maging viable pa rin ang buhay ng SSS. Alam natin ayaw nating magbayad nang mas mataas na premiums pero kung mawawala naman iyong benepisyo natin kung kailan kakailanganin natin ang SSS benefits eh masasayang din iyong pagtayo ng SSS. So let's just say the Palace, the Office of the Executive Secretary is closely monitoring the decisions being made by SSS.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Mula po kay Kris Jose ng Remate. Reaksiyon lang daw po sa mungkahi ni Senator Richard Gordon na ikunsidera ni Presidential Security Group Commander Brigadier General Jesus Durante III na magbitiw sa kaniyang puwesto?

**SEC. ROQUE:** That's addressed to General Durante; pero ako po personal at ang Presidente, nagbibigay-pugay at nagpapasalamat po ako kay General Durante.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Posible raw muling mapilitan ang Philippine Red Cross na suspendihin ang COVID-19 testing sa oras po na mabigo ang PhilHealth na pumalo na sa 762.8 million at umaasa itong hindi na lulobo sa 1 billion. Sinabi po ni Chairman at Senator Gordon na kailangan ng Philippine Red Cross ng pera para ma-replenish ang kanilang supply upang maituloy ang pagbibigay ng COVID-19 testing at iba pang serbisyo.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Alam po ninyo pangatlong beses na yatang nangyari ito, parang—anyway, same answer po. Mayroon naman po kasing proseso na sinusunod, hindi naman po parang pribadong organisasyon ang PhilHealth, mayroong mga verifications, mayroong mga COA rules and regulations na dapat sundin dahil gobyerno pa rin po ang PhilHealth.

Pero going by the track record of PhilHealth nagkakautang, nagbabayad naman po; at ang Presidente na mismo ang nagsalita, he vouches na lahat po ng pagkakautang ng PhilHealth pagdating sa PCR test will be paid.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** From Leila Salaverria of Inquirer: What is Malacañang's directive to the PSG amid the multiple probes on its use of a COVID-19 vaccine on its personnel?

**SEC. ROQUE:** They will cooperate. Malalaman ang katotohanan at the same time, ang importante, the purpose kung bakit nila ginawa iyon, and ako mismo and the President are very grateful for their courage.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** There are proposals daw po to call the PSG to a Senate probe, is the President's permissions needed for them to attend it and can the PSG refuse to disclose the source of the vaccine it acquired?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Hindi ko po alam sa ngayon kung ano ang magiging direktiba ng Presidente, because I only speak for him and I am not the President himself 'no.

Pero ulitin ko iyong sinabi ko: Kung hindi naman po—hindi naman po pinanghihimasukan ng Presidente ang seguridad kung paano nagpapatupad ng seguridad ang Senado, bakit naman

panghihimasukan iyong pagbibigay seguridad sa ating Presidente. Co-equal branches po kasi iyan, respect po sana.

Last two questions, because I have to leave, baka iwan ako ni Secretary Galvez at ni Secretary Duque.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Kawawa naman iyong ibang reporters, Secretary. Bibilisan ko na lang. From Jinky Baticados ng IBC: Ano daw po iyong take ninyo sa PRC? May mahigit 90% accuracy sa US ng saliva for COVID-19 test, mas mura daw po ito at mabilis ang proseso.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Hallelujah, sana maipasok na sa Pilipinas iyan. And of course, we are asking the FDA for speedy evaluation para makakuha na tayo ng mas mura na test laban sa COVID-19.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Iyong second and third question po niya nasagot na po. Tanong naman po ni MJ Blancaflor ng Daily Tribune.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Siguro ito iyong solusyon doon sa paulit-ulit na nagkakautang ang PhilHealth sa Philippine Red Cross.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Opo. From MJ Blancaflor: Was the President informed that some students reportedly offered a Christmas sale of their sensual photos and videos so that they can have money to buy gadgets for distance learning?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Ang tanong eh, was the Presidente informed? Probably not! Pero MJ naman 'no hindi naman lahat ng bagay na nangyayari eh kinakailangan ay iparating sa Presidente. Iparating lang po iyan sa kapulisan, dahil mayroon naman tayong batas na nagpapataw ng parusa sa mga ganiyang gawain.

**USEC. IGNACIO:** Tanong naman po mula kay Virgil Lopez, iyong unang tanong niya about Senator Gordon's suggestion nasagot na po ninyo: Any update on the signing of Bayanihan 2 extension and validity of funds under the 2020 national budget?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Kung hindi naman po mapirmahan iyan, it will lapse into law. Unfortunately, I am out of time, it's 1:00 o clock, the flight is at 1:00 o'clock, although I am just across Villamor Air Base, I still need 5 minutes to get there.

So maraming salamat sa ating mga kasama sa Malacañang Press Corps. Alam ko bitin kayo, pero mas mabuting nagkaroon na tayo ng ganitong madaliang presscon kaysa wala. Maraming salamat din po kay Ambassador Sta. Romana; Sir, huwag po sana kayong magsawa sa ating mga invitations. At siyempre maraming salamat din po kay Mr. Fernando Zobel De Ayala.

Maraming salamat sa inyong lahat, sa inyong patuloy na pagtatangkilik ng ating regular Presidential Briefing. Ito po ang inyong Spox Harry Roque, sa ngalan po ng inyong Presidente Rodrigo Roa Duterte, nagsasabi: We will heal as one.

Magandang hapon po at Happy New Year sa inyong lahat.

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