

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OPERATIONS OFFICE
News and Information Bureau

INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON HARRY ROQUE
BY KAREN DAVILA – HEADSTART/ANC
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SEC. ROQUE: Good morning, Karen. And good morning, Philippines.

DAVILA: All right. After your announcement over the weekend, you had many people frankly who were quite anxious, confused, text being exchanged left and right. Give us the expectations and the lowdown of this ECQ?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, this is not the first time we have gone on ECQ. This is a second time ‘no, and this for a very limited period coinciding with the Holy Week ‘no. Traditionally, during Holy Week, we have work Monday and Tuesday, people go and leave on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday are really public holidays. So we actually took advantage of the fact that this would have minimal effect on the economy; but as far as implementing the community quarantine is concerned, we know what it is. Substantially, the economy is closed, except for industries which are deemed to be necessary; and that people are expected to stay home.

And that is why not only are saying that people should remain home; they are required to stay home. The only times when they are allowed is, number one, when they need to go out and get the necessities of life; number two, when they are authorized to work in industries allowed to open; and number three, when they are authorized persons outside of residence. The rule now is stay home.

DAVILA: Okay. Now, prior to your announcement over the weekend, you had an earlier announcement – and remember we spoke about that – and there was still the economy is not lockdown, there are still essential works, there are still... other economy in effect ‘no was still ongoing. You said it wasn’t a lockdown. What triggered this decision to go on ECQ all of a sudden? Who made the suggestion, Secretary, after your first announcement that we now move on to an ECQ?

SEC. ROQUE: We’re always data-driven and we have existing criteria ‘no. We look at the daily average attack rate, the two-week average attack rate, and if it reaches critical or 200%, then that’s a red flag ‘no, and we couple it with the healthcare utilization rate ‘no. It is primarily the healthcare utilization rate that triggers the tighter quarantine classification, and in this instance, the whole of Metro Manila and the adjoining provinces have reached critical level.

In other words, if we don’t lockdown again, our hospitals will be overwhelmed and the frontliners may not be able to help those who will seriously or critically get ill.

DAVILA: Oo. Dr. Tony Leachon was just interviewed and he said he was even suggesting two-week ECQ. Is this thing discussed also?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, I don't know if he's really suggesting 'no. But the reality is, this is the second week of tighter restrictions that we have imposed on Metro Manila. So we will see the effect of this two-week period two weeks after Easter Sunday 'no. But we are hoping that it will, because there has been substantial reduction in mobility plus absolute reduction in mobility now during this one-week period.

Now, I'd like to [garbled] and it's very easy for non-experts to say, 'Oh, we want this and that,' but the reality is you need to not strike a balance but you need to aim for the total health of the nation. We understand that there are 700,000 people who will get sick, many of whom will be mild and asymptomatic, and about 13,000 people have died but compare this with the millions and millions of people who will go hungry and who will die from other reasons as a result of a lockout.

So we resort to ECQ as an absolute last resort where it appears inevitable that the hospitals will be overwhelmed.

DAVILA: Okay. Now, that we're on ECQ in Metro Manila and nearby provinces, maybe you can be specific 'no, kumbaga may pera pa po ba ang gobyerno para magbigay ng ayuda itong panahon na ito, Secretary? May plano po ba?

SEC. ROQUE: [OFF MIC] tulong po ang aking sinasabi 'no, kasi ayaw nating isipin ng tao na kagaya rin ng ayuda na binigay natin dati. Dati-rati po ay nagbigay tayo ng fixed amount na ayuda kasi napakahaba nung period ng ECQ. Pero ngayon po ay isang linggo lang naman po.

So magbibigay po tayo ng tulong sa lahat 'no. Pero unang-una, noong Sabado ay nasiguro na ni Secretary Wendel Avisado na mayroon po tayong pagkukunan. Na-identify na po niya kung saan natin kukunin iyan sa 2021 budget. Kasi unlike iyong naunang ayuda, nagkaroon po ng Bayanihan I at Bayanihan II, nagkaroon ng special law ang Congress; ngayon po, we are relying on our existing budget.

[Garbled] iyong detalye po will be finalized today kung how much [garbled] them, in what form at sino po iyong magbibigay. Pero may nabubuo pong consensus na siguro local government po pero—

DAVILA: Para mabilis.

SEC. ROQUE: Opo. Hinahayaan natin ang local government also na magkaroon ng boses dito sa how much and whether or not it will be in cash or in kind. Pero by 12 noon today, I hope that by the time I hold my press briefing, mayroon na pong final decision tungkol sa bagay na ito.

DAVILA: Okay, that would be big today. I'm curious, noong una po, I remember, ang ayuda was 8,000 'no – roughly, iyon po naman ang average. Do you believe that it will, I mean, more or less, preliminary meetings, is there a figure that you've already discussed?

SEC. ROQUE: I'm hesitant to say a figure po kasi remember itong assistance na ibibigay natin is for one week pero effectively it's for two days of work. Kasi traditionally, work is only Monday and Tuesday. Sabihin na natin, Wednesday kasama rin for daily wage earners 'no. Pero wala po talagang trabaho ng Thursday and Friday and this is the time of the year na even if gusto mong mag-overtime, eh halos wala talagang nagpapa-overtime because even media goes off the air on Friday. So that's the one time ... one day of the whole year that people really rest 'no and contemplate [garbled].

DAVILA: So it's fair to say, Secretary, parang it's a loss of income for three days that the government would like to cover for minimum wage earners. Is that correct?

SEC. ROQUE: Effectively po 'no. So I'd like to manage iyong expectations na hindi po gaya ng dating binigay nating ayuda dahil matagalan iyong ating ECQ.

DAVILA: Oo. So I don't mean to press you on it, but that would mean if we're going on minimum wage for NCR, it would be a little below 2,000 pesos or a max of two?

SEC. ROQUE: I would estimate mga ganiyan po iyan 'no, baka it may even be smaller. At saka may mga mayors po as of last Saturday nagsasabi, they prefer to give in kind kasi iyong mga binigay na ayuda, napakarami po diyan ay napunta sa sugal, napunta sa bisyo, kaya mas gusto nila iyong mga nakakain na ng kanilang mga constituents.

DAVILA: Okay, some clarifications 'no. People have fears, let's talk about transportation at this week, at least in the Monday to Wednesday period, Secretary. Number one, may Grab po ba?

SEC. ROQUE: Mayroon.

DAVILA: Mayroon, go ahead.

SEC. ROQUE: Ito na po iyong pagkakaiba 'no kasi nga po panandaliang ECQ lang ito:

- Hindi po natin ititigil ang transportasyon, kaya lang po 50% capacity ang ating transportasyon, and this was made clear in the latest pronouncement of the DOTr. Even domestic flights will not be cancelled except that of course, lahat po ng pasahero natin in whatever mode of transportation will be limited to APORs or Authorized Persons Outside of Residence.
- Number two, iyong mga kumpaniya na gusto pa ring magbigay ng shuttle service, siyempre we will not discourage them dahil alam natin na talagang babawasan pa rin ang capacity ng transportasyon, although hindi po natin inaalis unlike the first ECQ.

DAVILA: Oo, that's clear ha. Fears when it comes to transportation – 'cause I already heard one this morning from a teacher – may transportasyon itong Monday to Wednesday, technically, yes, oo.

SEC. ROQUE: Opo, at 50% capacity.

DAVILA: At 50%, okay. Okay, you also announced road, rail, maritime, aviation sectors allowed to operate. Ang tanong ko: When it comes to MRT/LRT, are we looking at the same schedule, Secretary?

SEC. ROQUE: Pareho pong schedule iyan, 4:30 in the morning, tapos nakalimutan ko lang kung ano iyong sa bandang gabi. There'll be a less of a service, but it will continue, it will be at 50% capacity.

DAVILA: The new curfew, of course the last time, it was 10 PM to 5 AM; now, it's at 6 PM to 5 AM. What was the science of 6 PM, Secretary? Has it been proven, frankly, to work?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, first and foremost, unlike in the bubble, people are supposed to stay home now, that's the general rule. So we don't need a curfew so to speak because people are supposed to be in their homes. But of course, we allow people to go out for the essentials. So if you must go out for the essential supply, make sure you are home from 6 in the evening until 5 in the morning.

DAVILA: And when it comes to the malls, ang allowed lang ba, Secretary, is – I've read some articles – it's really just supermarkets and banks, and drugstores too?

SEC. ROQUE: Banks, and those that offered take-out and delivery services because all forms of dine-in, whether be it sit down or al fresco, are now prohibited – just deliveries and take outs.

DAVILA: Okay, and no travel passes needed for this ECQ?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, so far none. But I understand that some cities may require again the issuance of quarantine passes. Now, in my last press briefing, I said if you have your old quarantine pass, might as well bring it with you, if you need to go out for necessities. But now I understand that some LGUs will actually issue quarantine passes. I was walking when I made the announcement that they may not be enough time because it's only one week, and of course Thursday and Friday are both public holidays. But I understand that some cities within Metro Manila will still issue that.

DAVILA: Now, I know that starting today, the City Manila, I am not sure if other city too, will be inoculating seniors, tama ito, Secretary?

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, there is prohibition po in proceeding po with our vaccination deployment and this is now the first day that we will comply with the IATF resolution that we are now allowing not just the medical frontliners to be vaccinated, we are now allowing the senior citizens as well persons with comorbidities to receive their vaccinations.

DAVILA: Okay, so itong senior citizens, they will be inoculated – is it with Sinovac from China’s donation or is this from the WHO facility?

SEC. ROQUE: It’s from the COVAX facility, AstraZeneca.

DAVILA: AstraZeneca. So, ano ang final words, Secretary, with Sinovac? Is the government or the National Task Force allowing Sinovac for senior citizens? I know there has been a controversy on this for a while.

SEC. ROQUE: It’s still not allowed for senior citizens because of the EUA issued by the FDA. But it will be given to persons with comorbidities. And today, the IATF resolution we are also defining who will be in the A4 priority list because, basically, the Sinovac will go to the medical frontliners, persons with comorbidities and A4.

DAVILA: Parañaque Mayor Olivarez issued a statement and he reacted. He was, of course his attention was called upon by the DILG already. But he said that Malacañang had announced that mayors can actually qualify as a frontliners because they are out serving the people. So he used that as a reason na wala siyang nilabag.

SEC. ROQUE: I don’t think the issue with Mayor Olivarez was whether or not he took the jab himself, because he did not, he actually allowed an actor to have a jab and it turned out that the actor was part of the substitution list. We have since clarified two things: The mayors have been included in the priority but as A4, again as A4, not as A1. At that time, we are only limited to A1. Today we begin with A1, A2 and A3. Mayors are still not part of the priority; it is now clear that hospitals and local government units should have substitution list in case expected individuals do not show up. But the substitution list must consist of persons within A1, A2 and A3.

DAVILA: So, iyong mayor ay puwede basta lumampas na, natapos na ang A3?

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, oo. When it’s [garbled] and this will be soon. The reason being, Sinovac cannot be used really for senior citizen, so we will limit AstraZeneca to the senior citizens. Now, Sinovac will then be available for people with comorbidities and hopefully to the A4 individuals. But today, I don’t know if that is part of the agenda of the IATF.

DAVILA: Are penalties necessary for those mayors who jumped the line? I interviewed Marikina Mayor Marcy Teodoro and he said they should be penalized.

SEC. ROQUE: Well, in terms of criminal penalty, the rule is, *nullum crimen sine lege, nullum poena sine lege* – you need a law to make an act, criminal. But as far as the mayors are concerned, there is a law, it is called ‘Code of Conduct for public officials’, otherwise known as the Salonga Law which could be used as basis criminal prosecution for mayors who jumped the line. But for ordinary citizens, we really need an ordinance or a penal law providing for penalties for those will jump the line.

DAVILA: Okay. So, kumbaga walang parusa per se na puwedeng ibigay, kahit it’s a short specific penalty on just jumping the line?

SEC. ROQUE: Kung ikaw ay pribadong indibidwal. But if you are a public official, there is a Salonga Law.

DAVILA: It was President Duterte’s birthday yesterday, correct?

SEC. ROQUE: Yes.

DAVILA: He is now 73? Forgive me.

SEC. ROQUE: No, 76.

DAVILA: Seventy-six. How did he spend his birthday? There were photos that are spreading right now that went viral on the President having a meal, but can you share with us essentially how the President spent his birthday?

SEC. ROQUE: I wasn’t there, but I know from the account of Senator Bong Go and the pictures, that he spent it only with his immediate members of the family. The controversy is whether or not, supposedly the President pretended to be poor ‘no. I don’t think the President even pretended to be poor. He has always been known as simple and that is why he did not have guest on his birthday. There may have been food served for special occasions, but that did not violate any sense of decency. There was no extravagant show wealth, because the President was in t-shirt and in short and celebrated only with his family. It’s crab mentality really for anyone to suggest that the President was pretending. No, the President never pretends! He is known for his authenticity. He has simple celebrations and I think that’s what happened to his birthday.

DAVILA: Okay. Malacañang issued a statement and wished him more healthy years ahead. How would you describe the President’s health at 76?

SEC. ROQUE: He is as healthy as any 76 person could be ‘no. He retains to have a very active calendar and he continues to discharge the functions of the presidency at the time of pandemic.

DAVILA: Oo. Some actually say that the President may have already been inoculated with Sinopharm.

SEC. ROQUE: I don't think so that's why he's very keen on having Sinopharm enter the country.

DAVILA: Okay. All right. Well, I wanted to ask you also about you. So you are out of quarantine already, Secretary? What's your status?

SEC. ROQUE: I'm out of quarantine and thank God I did not have any symptoms. I remained asymptomatic and I thank God for that.

DAVILA: Okay. A question coming in here: Is it really already sure that masses are allowed this ECQ period?

SEC. ROQUE: They are not allowed! They are not allowed. We have taken back the earlier pronouncement that they will be allowed from April 1 to 4, of course that has been deemed revoked with the tighter quarantine classification of an ECQ. Absolutely no mass gathering now!

DAVILA: Oo. Eh kahit po sampu? Because it says here gatherings of more than 10 are not allowed. What if sampu lang po? I'm just curious.

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi na rin po pupuwede kasi iyong sampu na iyan is for residents purposes 'no.

DAVILA: Only?

SEC. ROQUE: Oo, only. But absolutely no public gathering outside of private homes.

DAVILA: Oh, I see. So that's been a confusion this weekend ha because there's been some messages saying that I think they're allowing. So it's not allowed, no masses yeah.

SEC. ROQUE: Also acknowledged that during the NCR bubble, it was allowed by way of responding to a request of the CBCP. But of course, things changed when we re-imposed ECQ – all mass gatherings not allowed.

DAVILA: Oo. And just for the record ngayong ECQ, it's just a period of course, well for Metro Manila kasi we know that salons, certain businesses... they tend to have a boom back eh 'no kapag nasa Metro Manila naman iyong mga tao. But ang salons are closed again, Secretary?

SEC. ROQUE: All these industries unless [overlapping voices]—

DAVILA: All of those?

SEC. ROQUE: —are closed. Yes. We're back to ECQ, the general rule: Stay home!

[Garbled] the essential industries such as the food industry, banking, export-oriented industries, BPOs and the same kind.

DAVILA: Okay. When I first interviewed you, you said that you are estimating a 25% decrease because of the NCR bubble lockdown in the numbers 'no. But then now the latest numbers we have is we are at a 20% positivity rate – 1 of every 5 people tested is positive. With this latest ECQ 'til April 4, what is the data showing you Secretary? What kind of a decrease is the government seeing?

SEC. ROQUE: At 12 noon in my press briefing, the country's chief epidemiologist will be joining me to address precisely this [garbled] expect it to be a lot higher than 25% because this is for all intents and purposes a total lockdown where we only allow essential industries to operate. This is the most drastic classification that we can ever have.

DAVILA: All right. I guess my last question would be: there are critics coming from your statement that the government did a good job in the COVID-19 response. Many experts have said the response is not excellent. If so, why are we on ECQ again right now? We're back to square one. I'm sure you've read all these articles criticizing the government for a lack of transparency, there's a lack of moral ascendancy – that's what also Dr. Tony Leachon just said earlier. At the end of the day, why are we back to square one, Secretary?

SEC. ROQUE: It's not because of government; it's because of the virus. It's because the virus mutated – there's now the UK, South African, Brazilian and even the Philippine variant 'no. Unfortunately all these variants made the disease more infectious and more transmissible 'no. So I'd like to stress it's not just foreign variants, even the Philippine variant now 'no and that's something that no one could have done anything about because it's in the nature of viruses to mutate.

So what we need to adopt to do now is to adapt to these new variants, if they are more transmissible then we will be more vigilant in our mask, hugas, iwas and of course our bakuna.

So iyong mga nagsi-second thoughts pa po about the bakuna, it's more transmissible although it is not deadlier – well because of statistics and probabilities although it's not deadlier, with more people getting sick, there will be more people inevitably who will get sick in serious or critical manners. So have your vaccine if you're able to have it now.

DAVILA: Okay. Ito may pumasok lang, last question na 'to Secretary: With the new ECQ, puwede ba ako umuwi sa aming probinsiya sa Cavite? Puwede pa ba daw?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, alam ninyo po ang rule talaga is only APORs should leave their homes—

DAVILA: At this point 'no. They should have done it earlier.

SEC. ROQUE: Oo. But if Cavite is your home and you could not leave because of work, then show proof 'no where you work and where you actually live. As I said, public transportation remains open because that's one of the lessons that we learned from ECQ, that if you remove public transportation, people will walk and we don't want that happening 'no. But let's not use it as well, nandiyan lang po iyang mga public transportation for Authorized Persons Outside of Residence.

DAVILA: Okay. Secretary, one more: Is the DOH acting on the request of the medical community for more personnel, volunteers personnel? I know earlier on I interviewed kasi PGH and they were requesting that the DOH send substitutes but the DOH pay for their stipend. Is that being acted upon, Secretary?

SEC. ROQUE: Last Saturday in the emergency meeting of the IATF, Dr./Usec. Vega reported that they are actually in the process of—

DAVILA: Hiring...

SEC. ROQUE: —hiring temporary health workers to augment the existing workforce of all public and even some private hospitals 'no and they are now in the process of implementing this.

DAVILA: Okay, that's good. All right, last words Secretary, anything you wanna add before your press conference at 12 noon today?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, you know, the President would like to personally thank the Filipino people for their cooperation and their patience in the more than one year that we've had this pandemic. And of course, we impose this ECQ as a matter of last resort knowing that we need to have the economy open so that all of us can pursue our livelihood.

The final appeal mga kababayan: Pag-ingatan po natin ang ating mga buhay para tayo po'y makapaghanapbuhay; kaya po natin ito. Magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat.

DAVILA: All right. Thank you so much, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque.

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