

**Presidential Communications Operations Office  
NEWS AND INFORMATION BUREAU**

**INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON SECRETARY HARRY ROQUE  
BY RUTH CABAL – CNN PHILIPPINES SONA SPECIAL PRESENTATION  
JULY 26, 2021**

**CABAL:** Good morning, Secretary! Thank you for joining us.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Good morning, Ruth. And good morning, Philippines!

**CABAL:** Secretary, some sort of sneak peak, what can we expect with the President's SONA? When was the last time that he was able to rehearse? How long will it be and what would be the content?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, he rehearsed at least four times, the last time was yesterday last night. And we're expecting the speech to last about an hour, and, of course, bulk of the speech will be to review what his Administration has achieved in the past five years and of course, the way forward 'no for the remaining ten months in office.

He's also expected to endorse at least five bills as priority Administration bills to the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress, the third regular session of the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress.

**CABAL:** Secretary, this is the last SONA of President Duterte, what can we expect? What will be something new about the SONA?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, of course, it's going to be a listing of the accomplishments of the President. And I think on top of it would be achievements as far as the war on drugs is concerned and he will highlight the fact that at least 55% of our barangays are already declared drug-free 'no.

He will also highlight the golden age of public infrastructure in the Philippines through the Build Build Program highlighting that we have built about 30,000 kilometers of roads, highlighting also the bridges, the many bridges that we have built including the connector connecting the NLEX with the South Expressway, the new CLLEx as well as the different—CAVITEX highways 'no.

He will also highlight the fact that we have had about 240 new airports and 451 port facilities all inaugurated during his term of office. I think what's important too is that HSBC singled out the Philippines as among the top places to live and work and we ranked 25<sup>th</sup> in the world.

Of course, the President will also address his COVID-19 responses. He will highlight the fact that we're close already to 17 million doses of COVID-19 administered and that we will be importing a total of about 170 million or so of COVID-19 vaccines and the fact that we're hoping to achieve population protection within the year still 'no.

In addition to that, President, of course, will single out past laws which have promoted the welfare and well-being of our people. There are bills which are sponsored in 17<sup>th</sup> Congress including Universal Health Care. He's expected to point out that 109 million Filipinos are now members of PhilHealth.

There's also free irrigation that has benefited a million farmers, small farmers of up to five hectares of land and there's also the free lunch given to the malnourished children in our public schools even if there's no more face-to-face classes for the time being that these new supplements have been delivered to the residence of the children including a milk supplement. There's also the free Wi-Fi program where we have installed about 10,000 Wi-Fi hotspots 'no.

And he's also expected to ask Congress to file at least five important bills amongst which include the creation of a Virology Institute and of course the Virology Institute has a significance particularly at this time of pandemic to improve our capacity to deal with future pandemics; There's also the proposed bill creating the CDC, the Center of Disease Control; A proposed bill that would create the Department of Overseas Filipino Workers; And in the economic front, there's the Public Service Act, the Foreign Investment Act as well as the GUIDE bill, the Government Financial Institutions Unified Initiatives to Distressed Enterprises for Economic Recovery.

The President is also expected to address the issue on West Philippine Sea highlighting what he has already declared before the UN General Assembly that we will not surrender even a single inch of our territory to any other foreign power although we will pursue bilateral relations with everyone 'no including China in so far as trade and investments are concerned.

So, those are some of the items of the President is expected to mention this afternoon. And I think he's also expected to thank the many individuals who have helped him succeed in the past five years cognizant to the fact that this will be his last SONA as President.

**CABAL:** Secretary, that was like there's a substantial explanation na rin of what we can expect to the President's last SONA 'no. But I think you were asked this before already but will we hear about the President's political plans in the future?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, as far as I know it's going to be a review of accomplishments and the road forward. He could probably give us hints but I don't think that will occupy major part of his speech 'no. It could be in passing at most what's really expected of him is to report to the people that he has delivered on his campaign promises and that despite the fact that this pandemic was completely unexpected at the beginning of his term that we have done everything and anything possible to address this pandemic.

**CABAL:** Okay. We will talk more about this with Secretary Harry Roque. This is the CNN Philippines' Special Presentation. We have live coverage all throughout the day as we await President Duterte's final State of the National Address at 4 P.M.

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**CABAL:** Secretary, of course, a lot of people would be expecting to hear from the President talk about the COVID-19 response. Vice President Leni Robredo was saying that the President should be very candid or should be honest about the current state of the government's pandemic response and then we've also heard from the Alliance of Health Workers they were saying that the President should admit failure in the pandemic response. Can you react to that or what can we expect to hear from the President?

**SEC. ROQUE:** We are currently number 23 in terms of total cases worldwide; about number 33 for active cases; 110 for cases per one hundred thousand; and of course, we have a case fatality rate of 1.7 which is below the world average of 2.1.

I would say we have managed the situation very well as in fact the WHO permanent representative to the Philippines, Dr. Rabindra, has said that we have managed very well given our limitations in resources. He has said that our achievements or ability to manage COVID is similar to what more developed countries with more resources have achieved noting that in fact the top ten countries in the world for COVID are the more developed countries with far more advanced state of hospital facilities.

So, I think we have to give credit where it is due. We have an objective basis by which to compare our COVID responses with the rest of the world and I think our current standing shows that we have been very well or we have managed it very well although we admit it is far from being perfect as no one can be perfect since no one really expected a pandemic of this scale and scope.

**CABAL:** Another issue also, siyempre centerpiece din ito ng Duterte Administration, Secretary, the drug war. You also mentioned naman kanina about iyong accomplishments in terms of more than 50% barangays cleared from the problem of illegal drugs 'no, ano ba ang inaasahan po natin? Kasi of course nagpapatuloy iyong criticism against the President na hindi daw talaga napigilan itong problema sa illegal drugs?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, alam mo, talagang aminado naman po si Presidente that the problem of drugs became—well, he discovered it was far worse than he expected when he was running for office which is why until now, we have not achieved a 100% drug-free as far as our barangays are concerned.

But we can point to 203,715 anti-illegal drug operations; we now have lower crime volume of about 64% and about 50, almost close to 60 billion worth of illegal drugs destroyed in half of this year alone 'no. That's the figure that I cited in our mid-year report 'no.

So, all these show that the renewed vigor and intensity by which we conducted this war on drugs has produced positive results. It may not yet be a completely drug-free Philippines but we have made significant gains against prohibited drugs.

**CABAL:** And how about gains in terms of the Duterte Administration's fight against corruption, can you tell us about this, Secretary?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Until now we have no basis really 'no, no barometer by which to indicate the success in the drive against corruption although you have a President who for the first time actually fired in public closest advisers that he had during the campaign 'no. He in fact fired two of his closest allies in the beginning of his term and has been determined in removing corrupt individuals from government.

I think the recital of the names which he does regularly in his Talk to the People Address shows that while corruption has not been permanently removed from the bureaucracy, that the message has been very well received by the bureaucracy that corruption has no place in his Administration.

**CABAL:** Siguro isa rin that you mentioned, Secretary, of course the President will be talking about the economy and the anti-poverty drive but recently there was an SWS survey that found over four million families experienced hunger in the past three months. This is higher than the pre-pandemic December 2019 levels So, can you tell us how the government is addressing this?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, of course, it's regretful that the pandemic struck and of course, as a consequence of our closing the economy in order to control the spread of the disease, there were more people that went hungry.

The positive side is as we have opened the economy, we now know that more jobs have been available, the level of unemployment has gone down to 7.1% and we have actually created more jobs now even rising above the levels of pre-COVID levels.

So, as we are able to manage the pandemic, we have been able to open more sectors of the economy resulting in more jobs for our people. We will continue to pursue a three-pronged approach in order to ensure that we head towards the path of recovery, that is the use of fiscal monetary incentives as well as of course, resort to public spending including the Build Build Build.

And let's not forget also the many ayudas that we have given to our people. So far, we have released about P600 billion by way of subsidies in the form of ayudas and soft loans to our people in response to the COVID pandemic.

**CABAL:** Okay. Secretary Roque, will still be with us. This is a CNN Philippines' Special Presentation. We have live coverage all throughout the day as we await President Duterte's final State of the National Address at 4 P.M. Stay tuned.

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**RUTH CABAL:** Let's now go back to Secretary Roque. Secretary, are you still there?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, I'm here.

**RUTH CABAL:** Secretary, we just saw nagsisimula na pala iyong protest rally in Quezon City. We have in UP-Diliman and also in Commonwealth Avenue with their saying "goodbye Duterte", "WakaSONA", "Once is enough", referring to the President statement that he is considering

planning to run for vice president in the next elections. And also, David Santos was reporting that they have a litany of grievances daw? What's your response to that?

**SEC. ROQUE:** You know that's an annual affair. It's almost expected that the left-leaning groups will have this kind of a rally every SONA. And of course, every SONA they have gripes. But I think the people know better. If we are to believe Pulse Asia surveys, the President's 90/91 trust and satisfactory barely moved, meaning that five years into office, he remains to have very high trust and satisfaction ratings. I believe, it went down from 90/91 to 88 and 88. So no other President has achieved this. So despite the fact that we have handful of protesters and almost professionally conducting these protest actions, an overwhelming majority of the people support the President, continue to trust and are satisfied with its leadership.

**RUTH CABAL:** Secretary, also iyong common response nila is iyong doon sa plano ni President Duterte to run for vice president and even the reported plan of Mayor Sara Duterte naman to run as president, they are saying daw, that's unacceptable, another Duterte in Malacañang. Ano po ang masasabi ninyo diyan?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, that is not what the survey says. The survey says that presidential daughter Sara Duterte and the President himself are the frontrunners for the position of president and vice president. So, the opinion of a handful protesters clearly is not reflective of the opinion of the majority. Let's just leave it to the people to decide. Because as they say, the voice of the people is the voice of God.

**RUTH CABAL:** And you also mentioned iyong ratings nga po ni President Duterte, the last, I can just cite the last Pulse Asia survey, September 2020, kasi nga po nagka-pandemic, so they don't have recent surveys. He was still at 91% approval rating. He is consistently been on *[unclear]*, excellent ratings from Pulse and SWS. To which do you attribute that, Secretary?

**SEC. ROQUE:** The fact that the people know that the President delivered on his campaign promises, particularly on the war on drugs and on the war against corruption. No one can actually say that the President has been corrupt or has been tolerating corruption in his government and that people know that we now have safer communities as a result of five years of Duterte's administration.

**RUTH CABAL:** While we are talking to Secretary Roque, we are also seeing live pictures by the way from the Senate, that's the opening on the third regular session of the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress. A while ago, we were seeing Senate President Tito Sotto and there are the other senators. We will expect them to do some, a few of the usual ceremonies to adopt a resolution about that there will be a quorum and that there will be both the House and the Senate will be attending the State of the National Address of the President this afternoon. And let's go back to Secretary Roque.

Secretary, can you give us more inside info about the SONA, sino po ba nagsulat niyan? Paano po ba iyong naging process? And you mentioned kanina, apat na beses na po palang nakapag-rehearse si President Duterte.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, he had two rehearsals in Davao, two rehearsals here in Malago. He has a team of speech writers under the Office of the Presidential Assistant and that there were many consultants that were involved in the process. Of course, as usual the different line agencies were asked to submit for the inputs by way of accomplishments and by way of legislative agenda. So, that has been the usual process, but what is significant is that, for every time, the President rehearses, he edits the speech himself. So much so that actually the fourth edit of the speech now is substantially different from the first edit of the speech as presented to him. He remains to be to the final editor of the speech and I believed last night was the last rehearsal and that was the last time he had revisions on his speech. It is expected to last about an hour. As far as attendance of family members, we are expecting Deputy Speaker Paolo Duterte to be present together with its family, as well as Presidential partner Honeylet Avanceña.

**RUTH CABAL:** Would you describe it something maybe as more—will you say it more personal or more sentimental, this being the last SONA of President Duterte?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, it's expected also to be a farewell speech, though it is bound to be emotional at the end. And as I said, he is expected to thank voters for the confidence that they gave him where he garnered the single largest winning margin in recent history. And he is expected also to ask for the cooperation of the people as we face ten more months of this pandemic.

**RUTH CABAL:** And right now, Secretary Roque, we are also seeing a live pictures naman from the House of Representatives, also opening the third regular session of the 18<sup>th</sup> congress. Kanina si Xianne Arcangel, our reporter there was saying na the Congressmen and other expected guest for the President SONA later were being tested, antigen test and we had RT-PCR test before today, to make sure that everyone will be negative, everyone in attendance expected later will have a negative COVID-19 test results. These were live pictures from the Batasang Pambansa with the opening of the House of Representatives.

Secretary Roque, iyong sinasabi ninyo na consistently high ratings of President Duterte, do you expect that? Kasi usually 'di ba, at the end of the term, parang sinasabi nagkakaroon na daw ng lame duck President, na wala ng masyadong influence. But are we seeing that right now? Or sa tingin ninyo, the President can still be as popular hanggang sa dumating po iyong elections natin?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, the President, I guess is a precedent setting President. Yes, all Presidents go down, two years even before the end of the term. But in the case of President Duterte, this still not happened. He continues to enjoy trend setting popularity in terms of trust rating and satisfaction rating. This is the reason why Pulse Asia, according to Ana Tabunda, has ceased to release their latest results because the figures have not changed from 90 to 91.

**RUTH CABAL:** And you are calling this, the SONA as the legacy of change, “Pamana ng Pagbabago”. Para po sa inyo, Secretary Roque, what do you think is, you know, the biggest achievement of the Duterte administration and what will be the legacy will leave behind to the Filipino people?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I would still point to bills which I filed during the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress which is certified and enacted plus implemented as laws 'no. Universal Health Care where 109 million Filipinos are

now members of PhilHealth; there is the free tuition for state colleges and universities; there is the free irrigation and free WiFi as well as the response against COVID-19, which show that the Philippines has managed the pandemic rather well, compared to the rest of the world.

**RUTH CABAL:** And can we ask you, personally, sir, napapag-usapan na rin lang natin iyong elections next year, what are you plans?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, first and foremost, this is also my last SONA as Spokesperson. So I would like to thank CNN for the cooperation that we have had for the past six years. I would say we have had an overall harmonious relationship, there has been hiccups, but I think that is part of a healthy working relationship between government and the media. So, I look forward to an equally good working relationship with the CNN for the last ten months of the administration highlighting that we are still facing a pandemic and the utmost cooperation between the government and the media is indispensable, if we are to win and prevail over this pandemic.

As my personal plans. I'm focused still on my role as a Spokesperson at the height of pandemic, I came back to this position at the height of the pandemic to give accurate and reliable information to the public, knowing that this is indispensable at the time of pandemic and I expect to continue doing this for as long as I can.

**RUTH CABAL:** Thank you very much. That's Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque.

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