

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
News and Information Bureau

PRESS BRIEFING OF MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ
WITH DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS-OFFICE OF ASEAN AFFAIRS
ASEC. DANIEL ESPIRITU
AUGUST 31, 2023 [11:34 A.M. – 12:02 P.M.]

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Magandang umaga, Malacañang Press Corps, and welcome sa ating press briefing ngayong araw, August the 31st. We are also joined by the Department of Foreign Affairs Press Corps via Zoom.

Next week, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. is set to attend the 43rd Association of Southeast Asian Nation Summit or the ASEAN Summit in Jakarta Indonesia from September 5 to the 7th with the theme, “*ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth*”.

Para bigyan tayo ng detalye sa gaganaping ASEAN Summit, kasama natin ngayon from the Department of Foreign Affairs-Office of ASEAN Affairs, Assistant Secretary Daniel R. Espiritu. Good morning, Asec. Espiritu.

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Hi. Good morning, Daphne. Thank you, Daphne.

Let me read to you, ladies and gentlemen... of course, let me say that it's again a pleasure to be with you after several summits na 'no ng ASEAN during my time and the President's term. Let me read to you the statement on the President's participation in the 43rd ASEAN Summit and Related Summits:

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., along with the leaders of the other ASEAN member-states and several dialogue partners will participate in the 43rd ASEAN Summit and Related Summits in Jakarta, Indonesia – this will be from 5 to 7 September 2023 at the invitation of the President of the Republic of Indonesia, His Excellency Joko Widodo as this year's ASEAN chairman.

It will be remembered that this will be the second summit this year. The first one was in Labuan Bajo in May 2023. Now, the second summit will be a follow-on to the May summit and will accelerate the momentum of the ASEAN community building process under the theme, “*ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth*”. It will serve as a platform for leaders to exchange views on key regional and international issues, build consensus on matters of mutual interest and provide policy direction for the ASEAN community in the years to come.

The 43rd ASEAN Summit and Related Summits will include meetings with several dialogue partners of ASEAN as well as summits of ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the ASEAN Plus Three Summit and the East Asia Summit.

The President will also attend the opening of the ASEAN Indo-Pacific Forum upon the invitation of the Indonesia. This event will serve as a platform for ASEAN to discuss infrastructure projects and programs to implement the priority areas of cooperation under the ASEAN Outlook in the Indo-Pacific with external partners and other participants.

Overall, the President is expected to attend 13 leader's level engagements – 12 of them summit sessions with other leaders, these are: Let me start with the September 5, Tuesday, the 43rd ASEAN Summit Plenary Session, the Opening Ceremony of the ASEAN Indo-Pacific Forum and then the 43rd ASEAN Summit Retreat Session. On September 6, Wednesday, the President will attend the 26th ASEAN-China Summit, the 24th ASEAN-Republic of Korea Summit, the 26th ASEAN-Japan Summit, the 26th ASEAN Plus Three Summit and then the ASEAN-US Summit and the ASEAN-Canada Summit. On the last day, September 7, 2023, Thursday, the President will attend the 20th ASEAN-India Summit, the 18th East Asia Summit, the 3rd ASEAN-Australia Summit and the 30th ASEAN-UN Summit.

In these engagements, the President will continue to uphold and promote Philippine interests in ASEAN. He will highlight our advocacies in strengthening food and energy security, harnessing the potential of the digital and creative industries and MSMEs and addressing the impacts of climate change among others. The President will also continue to emphasize our efforts to protect migrant workers in crisis situation as well as combatting trafficking in persons especially with the use or abuse of technology. Other priority areas of cooperation with dialogue partners will also be discussed.

Furthermore, the President will continue to promote a rules-based international order including the 92 UNCLOS especially in the South China Sea. The Philippines will continue to uphold and exercise freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea in accordance with international law.

The leaders are expected to discuss various international issues that impact the region and beyond. These include the situation in Myanmar, the conflict in Ukraine as well as geopolitical rivalries in the Indo-Pacific region. To date, over 90 outcome documents are being targeted to be issued, adopted or noted during the summits. The key outcome documents would include the following: ASEAN leaders' declaration on strengthening food security and nutrition in response to crisis, and also individual joint statements on strengthening cooperation on food security between ASEAN, Australia, Canada and India; ASEAN guidelines on the protection of migrant workers and family members in crisis situation; ASEAN leaders statement on the development of the digital economy framework agreement and the ASEAN joint statement on climate change to the 28th session of the Conference of the parties to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, among others.

The 43rd Summit and Related Summits will conclude on 7 September 2023 with a handover ceremony of the ASEAN chairmanship from Indonesia to Lao People's Democratic Republic.

That ends the briefing. I'm now open to your questions. Yeah. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Jinky Baticados, IBC-13...

JINKY BATICADOS/IBC: Hi, sir, good morning po. Sir, how is the summit different from the 42nd in terms of agenda and purpose?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay. Most of the agenda items are the same, but in the 42nd Summit last May, it was primarily a series of activities setting the frameworks of this agenda. Now, in the 43rd Summit, the activities of the various participants will now focus on the follow-on activities to realize the deliverables of the 42nd Summit, so parang the completion or the next steps for the 42nd Summit. But of course, just like in most ASEAN summits, the story does not end there,

yeah. Usually these are long-term activities that continue on and on depending on the issues concerned. Yeah, thank you.

JINKY BATICADOS/IBC: Sir, on 43rd Summit is expected to produce 'no more agreements. May we know kung saan po naka-focus iyong agreements na gagawin on this particular summit po?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Well, actually as I said a moment ago, there are 50 deliverables but iyong pinakaimportante... let me just say na siguro sa atin, let's focus on what's most—what are... the ones that are most important to the Philippines. So we'll be focusing on food security and energy security, of course post-pandemic transformation and then the digital economy and e-commerce and the creative industries, MSMEs and of course, protection of migrant workers.

So if you will remember during the 42nd Summit, there was this leaders' declaration on the protection of their migrant workers and their families in times of crisis. This time, under the 43rd Summit, we are now discussing the guidelines for the implementation of that. Yeah, thank you.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Maricel Halili, TV-5...

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Hi, sir, magandang umaga po. Sir, is the President—or mayroon po bang scheduled bilateral meeting with the President and other leaders of ASEAN and other leaders who will be present during the summit?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Yeah, there are actually several. Not all of these are confirmed, ang iba niluluto pa 'no. But there will be... one with Prime Minister of Cambodia Hun Manet, bilateral meeting with the Republic of Korea President Yoon Suk Yeol and a bilateral meeting with Timor Leste Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão, and there's another one with the Vietnam Prime Minister [Pham Minh Chinh](#).

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: And, what will be the focus of the discussion among the leaders?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay. With Vietnam, the focus will be on strengthening the strategic partnership between the two countries and of course cooperation on rice and food security. With Xanana Gusmão of Timor Leste, of course the President will congratulate him on his assumption of office last July, but at the same time we will reassure Timor Leste of our cooperation with their country in the years to come especially in their preparations for final membership in ASEAN.

And then with Hun Manet, again, the President intends to congratulate the new Prime Minister on his assumption of office... and again will be discussing matters of mutual concern between our two countries. And then with President Yoon Suk Yeol of Korea, we'll be discussing new areas of cooperation in time for the 75th year anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between the Philippines and Republic of Korea.

At the same time, we will be thanking also Korea for its support for the Philippines in terms of the assistance that they gave during Typhoon Egay, around 300,000 dollars and then also the intent to donate, under the ASEAN Plus Three, rice reserve arrangement, a total of 750 metric tons of rice to the Philippines. [Unclear] are already in the pipeline. Thank you. There are others, but I cannot confirm at this point yet, the others, because they are still being arranged.

ALLAN FRANCISCO/PTV 4: Hi Ma'am, hi Sir, good morning. Sir, in layman's term, how can our kababayans benefit from this kind of summit which the President will be attending?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay, in layman's term, we can say that in several ways, our kababayans will definitely benefit. Like what I said a moment ago, the focus. If you will look at all of these, in general, the focus will be on our post-audit recovery and transformation, especially in terms of the economy and food and energy security.

During the summit, mayroon din iyong tinatawag na meetings concerning trade and investment. Of course, the President will be pitching for more trade and investment with ASEAN countries as well as external partners. And at the same time, during the infrastructure forum na na-mention ko kanina, there will be five infrastructure projects of the Philippines that will be included in the promotion during that forum, and all of them – airport development projects in Zamboanga, Busuanga, Sanga-sanga in Tawi-Tawi, also in Brookes Point, Palawan and there's another one in—Basta all in all, there are five of them.

So, at the same time, we will also very much benefit from the arrangements for the protection of migrant workers and their families na pinag-uusapan na since the last summit.

CELERINA MONTE/NHK: Good morning, sir. Sir, regarding the joint statement or joint communiqué that will be released during the summit, may we know if the Philippines would be insisting on like, because of the recent incidents in Ayungin, as well as the new map being released by China, so would that be discussed in the joint communiqué or will the Philippines push for any statement regarding that matter?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: The Philippines is definitely pushing for statements in that regard. But, of course, I cannot give you yet the final text of that because it's still being negotiated.

CELERINA MONTE/NHK: But most probably, what could be the wordings – possible?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: I cannot say. There are ten countries and, in other statements there are external partners involved and it only takes one to object and you lose consensus. So, I cannot predict at this point.

CELERINA MONTE/NHK: So, do you think, you could get the support of the other ASEAN members?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Definitely, there are external partners who support us, but I cannot say at this point if it will be at the level of consensus in the end.

CELERINA MONTE/NHK: So, it's just not merely condemnation or what?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Well, we are saying something in that regard, yeah, not exactly with the word condemnation but ... [unclear].

CELERINA MONTE/NHK: What could be the diplomatic way of saying it?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Alam mo iyong language, pinag-uusapan pa eh, so I cannot predict at this point kung ano ang magiging outcome. Magbabago iyan many times, depending on compromise and usapan doon.

KEN SASAKI/KYODO NEWS: I'm interested in the Philippine policy on the Myanmar issue. How do you evaluate the initiative by Thailand to make a dialogue with the Myanmar regime? And also the decision of ASEAN had been consensus-based but adversely and now the decision is made exclusive of the Myanmar, do you think the principle should be changed for the decision-making of ASEAN?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Well as far as the Philippines and ASEAN is concerned, we are still hinging everything on the Five-Point Consensus. So, all efforts in ASEAN are in accordance with the Five-Point Consensus. Now, in that regard and also with regard to the actions of Thailand, the consensus at the last Foreign Ministers' Meeting is that all efforts in ASEAN will have to be coordinated and done in concert with the chair and the Office of the Special Envoy of the chair. So, that is our position on that. Now, we fully support all the efforts of the ASEAN chair, Indonesia right now, in increasing engagement with all stakeholders, all the parties in the Myanmar issue to come up with a constructive dialogue in this regard.

ALEXIS ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: Good morning, Asec. Do you expect significant developments during the summit with regard to discussions on a binding Code of Conduct for South China Sea claimants? Because as we all know, taun-taon na lang kasi itong ASEAN and then laging binabanggit iyong the need to fast-track the binding Code of Conduct, nothing seems to be happening. So, do you expect a significant development, at least during this summit with regard to that?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: I think during the summit napakaiksi ng panahon. We just hosted the Joint Working Group meeting on the DOC in the Philippines last week, August 22 to 24. And kasama doon sa pinag-usapan among what we call milestone issues, ito nga, itong whether, the COC should be legally binding or not. So, hindi pa tapos ang usapan diyan, pag-uusapan pa iyan. And most probably, we will have to wait, because hindi pa natin alam kung ano ang magiging actual na laman noong COC and whether it's good for all of us for it to be legally binding or not.

ALEXIS ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: So, realistically what will be achieved in this summit in terms of that Code of Conduct?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Well, at most, there will be a report on what happened during the last meeting in the Philippines on the Joint Working Group on the COC. But, nothing definitive yet in terms of iyong sinasabi mong whether legally binding or non-legally binding, and other issues. It's a very methodical process. So, hindi natin dapat madaliin ito.

ALEXIS ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: What impediments do you see in the crafting of that Code of Conduct?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Well, marami, definitely iyong mga national interest natin, medyo nagkakaiba 'no. But at this point, I cannot exactly say that to you kung ano itong mga ito. So, since there are several countries involved here and nandiyan din iyong ASEAN, we will have to come up with a compromise every step of the way. It has been happening for already a long time. So, I think it will take a little bit longer para matapos ito.

DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay, we have a question from Malou Bartolome of Business Mirror from the DFA Press Corps: ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights have condemned the expulsion of Timorese diplomats from Myanmar. What is the Philippines' position regarding this?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Well, I cannot exactly comment on that because that's a bilateral issue; it's being handled by another office. Well, suffice it to say that on matters of declaring people persona-non-grata or declared as persona-non-grata, that's a sovereign prerogative of the state concerned. But as far as we are concerned, the Five-Point Consensus calls for the engagement of all parties. So, let me tap on that one. I think you already understood.

EDEN SANTOS/NET 25: Asec, good morning po. Siguro po alam na ninyo iyong regarding sa balita na iyong 10-dash line po na mapa ng China. Ano po iyong stand ng Pilipinas through DFA? Ano po iyong mga puwede pa nating gawin, baka dahil sa gusto nating idaan sa mapayapang negosasyon ito pong isyu na ito ay baka hindi lang 10-dash line po iyong aabutin ng mapa ng China, baka magising na lang tayo eh, pag-aari na pala nila iyon or sakop na po ng China iyong pinag-aagawang teritoryo po na tubig na iyon?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Oo. Eden, hindi ko din purview 'no, but suffice it to say that we already protested against that 'no. Definitely we're not in favor of that, we reject that and we continue to promote a peaceful settlement of disputes in that regard.

EDEN SANTOS/NET25: Thank you po.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Harley Valbuena...

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Hi. Good morning po. Sir, you mentioned that there will be meetings concerning trade and investments. So, will the President pitch the Maharlika Investment Fund sa ASEAN Summit po and also with this meeting with the other leaders?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay. Let me... there are business events being planned but wala namang sinabing exactly na Maharlika na pag-uusapan doon 'no. In fact, the meetings being planned by the Philippines kasi hindi ito... hiwalay iyong sa ASEAN, there's this economic pillar of ASEAN handling in general terms, trade and investment, FTAs et cetera, et cetera 'no.

But the President will also be attending events specifically to pitch trade and investment in Indonesia, one of them will be a meeting with the ASEAN Business Advisory Council and another one with certain businesses who intend to expand their presence in the Philippines.

And in fact, among the companies who will be there would be the WIR Asia who intends to expand one of its subsidiaries already existing in the Philippines to the tune of one billion pesos or 20 million dollars in fresh infusion to expand innovations in metaverse and artificial intelligence applications.

And another one would be Pasifik Satelit Nusantara who already signed a letter of intent in September 2022 with the Philippines and will report to the President the progress of their project in the Philippines and the launching of a satellite in December 2023. And then, they also plan to allocate 13.5 gigabytes per second of bandwidth for the Philippines.

And then another company who will be present during one of these meetings would be the Darya-Varia Laboratoria and Vaksindo Satwa Nusantara. They will soon provide the Philippines with avian influenza vaccines. So ito pa lang iyong nasa pipeline ngayon; may mga ginagawa pa.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. I just have a question here from DFA Press Corps. Joseph Pedrajas: "Is there a significant development in the recent South China Sea conduct talks in Manila and how will this affect the upcoming position of the Philippines particularly at the highest level when President Marcos meets ASEAN and Chinese counterparts during the summit?"

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay. During the joint working group meeting held at the Manila Peninsula last week on 22-24 August, they discussed a lot but I think the most important one would be the discussion of the so-called milestones 'no.

Among those discussed are issues concerning the definition of the necessary terms for the COC, of course it's not over yet because it's a work in progress – the same is true with whether iyong na-raise kanina, I think ni Alexis 'no, the same is true with whether to make the COC legally binding or not. And then another one would be the relationship of the DOC to the COC and then the geographic scope of the COC... ano maging purview nito 'no, geographical extent. These things are very detailed and very wide on themselves 'no. So, even iyong usapin sa apat na isyung ito will not be finished on one, two or just three meetings. So, so far iyan ang naging progress.

During the same meeting, we also expressed our—definitely our displeasure over the recent developments in the South China Sea especially iyong water cannoning. And we stressed that all these actions should be avoided because they undermine trust, they escalate tensions in the South China Sea and they undermine the stability and peace in the area. So, I guess I'll stop at that.

CELERINA MONTE/NHK: Sir, just to clarify your earlier statement. You said that we have already protested this new map that China issued, correct, tama po ba?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Yes. In fact, I think just this morning naglabas na iyong OPCD, iyong Office of Press ng DFA ng statement on that. So, I would recommend that you look at that for more details.

CELERINA MONETE/NHK: Yeah, I already read that statement. But it was not mentioned when did the DFA file the protest.

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Definitely earlier than today. Hindi ko din alam kasi we are not with that office 'no, we are with ASEAN.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Hi, sir. Balikan ko lang po iyong dalawang laboratories 'ka ninyo na magpo-provide ng Avian Influenza Vaccines, from what countries po itong dalawang laboratories?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: These are from Indonesia.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Magdadala ba sila rito ng gawa na o dito sila magma-manufacture?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Well, actually nasa development na sila ng vaccine but primarily most of these will be done in Indonesia.

HAYDEE SAMPANG/FEBC-DZAS: Sir, curious lang kami, gaano po kalaki iyong delegation na kasama po ng Pangulo?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay sa ngayon, I can only confirm three, aside from the President. Kasi ang sa purview lang naman ng ASEAN National Secretariat, iyong tinatawag nating the head of three pillars of ASEAN among the Philippine Cabinet members, so that's Secretary of Foreign Affairs Enrique Manalo, si Secretary Gatchalian of DSWD who heads the socio-cultural pillar of ASEAN within the Philippines and then si Alfredo Pascual of DTI who heads also the economic pillar.

Now, it's up to the President kung sino pa ang idadagdag niya. So there will be more, definitely.

JEAN MANGALUZ/INQ.NET: Good day, sir. Will Vice President Sara Duterte be designated as OIC while President Marcos is away?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Sorry, I do not know that. I guess you have to direct those questions to the Office of the President.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Will there also be a business delegation coming with the President?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Yes, definitely. Kasi as I said a moment ago, there will be a meeting with the business sector at least on two occasions. One is with the Business Advisory Council, so nandodoon iyong at least some of the members of the Philippine members of the ASEAN Business Advisory Council and of course iyong magiging partners nitong sinasabing mga foreign companies who are coming in or infusing more investment.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Yeah, and is there also a gathering with the Filipino Community?

DFA-OAA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Oh, that one I cannot confirm yet. Wala sa program pa namin dito.

DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ: We will be announcing as we come close to the date. If there are no other questions, I think this ends our press briefing. Thank you so much, Assistant Secretary Espiritu. Thank you, Malacañang Press Corps and the DFA Press Corps, as well. Have a good afternoon.

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