

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
News and Information Bureau

**PRESS BRIEFING OF MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ WITH PHILIPPINE AMBASSADOR TO ISRAEL
PEDRO “JUNIE” LAYLO JR., DFA UNDERSECRETARY EDUARDO DE VEGA AND AFP
SPOKESPERSON COLONEL MEDEL AGUILAR**
October 11, 2023 [12:19 P.M. – 12:44 P.M.]

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Magandang tanghali, Malacañang Press Corps, and welcome sa ating press briefing ngayong araw, October 11th.

The Philippine Embassy in Israel continues to coordinate with Israeli authorities and local contacts to ensure that all Filipinos are safe and accounted for amid the conflict there.

In keeping with President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.’s directive for an all-of-government approach we are getting an update on the situation today from multiple agencies. Joining me here in Manila is AFP Spokesperson Colonel Medel Aguilar and also via Zoom, we have Undersecretary Eduardo de Vega in Manila. But we are going to start with the Philippine Ambassador to Israel Pedro ‘Junie’ Laylo Jr. in Tel Aviv. They are joining us via Zoom so we will have a briefing from the team there and we will open it up to questions immediately because I know that your time is limited.

Thank you so much for joining us, Ambassador Laylo. Go ahead, sir.

AMBASSADOR LAYLO JR: Good morning from us here in Israel and good afternoon to everyone there in the Philippines. Thank you for joining us today and for giving us this opportunity to inform the public of the situation on the ground and the embassy’s efforts to protect the safety and well-being of Filipinos amid the conflict in Southern Israel.

We take this opportunity to assure not just our kababayan here in Israel but also their families there in the Philippines who we know are anxious to find out how their loved ones are coping in this difficult time.

I am joined here today by our embassy officers who have tirelessly work with me since the hostility started. May I introduce Consul General Anton Mandap; Vice Consul Patricia Narajos; Vice Consul Teri Bautista; Labor Attaché Rudy Gabasan; Welfare Officer Dina Ponciano; Defense Attaché Colonel Ewald Manay; and Commercial Counselor Michael Angelo Roaring. They will all join me in responding to your questions.

As earlier announced by Secretary Manalo this morning, two of our kababayan are killed following the violent attacks of Hamas in Southern Israel. These have been confirmed by Israeli authorities.

Last night in the most difficult phone call in my career, I spoke to the wife of one of the victims to inform her of this sad news and to convey our sympathies. I promised her that the embassy will provide all the necessary assistance she needs. The President will also speak to her today to convey his personal condolences and offer additional assistance.

The embassy will not disclose the identities of the deceased in line with the family's request for privacy at this very difficult time. May the memory of our kababayan be a blessing...

We continue to work closely with Israeli authorities and local contacts to find the three Filipinos who are still missing. Despite sporadic rocket attacks and the distressing images you see in the news and on social media, these depict only certain areas in Israel particularly in areas surrounding the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli military has retaken control of the communities infiltrated by Hamas militants. Rocket attacks have considerably lessened except in Southern Israel. People can move freely in areas far from the combat zone and we have returned to work here at the embassy since Sunday.

As much as we would like to immediately extend assistance to our kababayan in conflict areas, the embassy must adhere to the strict travel restrictions enforced by Israeli authorities in these areas. However, the Israeli government assures us that during emergency situations, Israeli security authorities and the home front command have established protocols for evacuating anyone who is in Israel regardless of nationality and status.

The embassy thus takes this opportunity to express its gratitude to Israel for ensuring the safety of Filipinos especially the Israeli security forces who rescued our nationals and continue to risk their lives in finding the last missing Filipinos.

We also thank the Israeli emergency and medical personnel who took care of our injured kababayan as well as the kibbutzim who included our nationals in their evacuation operations.

Meanwhile, the embassy's Migrant Workers Office and Overseas Workers Welfare Administration Team, continues to provide assistance to evacuated Filipinos, relocated to safer ground or being treated for injuries.

The MWO-OWWA Team has been working tirelessly in the last two days to ensure that all Filipinos are accounted for and that those affected are given medical emergency assistance.

We continue to provide Filipinos in Israel with timely advisories, safety guidelines and important instructions through our social media accounts and messenger platforms. We also regularly hold zoom briefings with Filipino community leaders.

While the situation remains tense and [unclear], the embassy strives to provide factual and reliable updates and advise on the status of Filipinos in Israel and the situation on the ground.

This is our message and we welcome your questions. Thank you very much.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you. We'll start with Nestor Corrales, Philippine Daily Inquirer.

NESTOR CORRALES/PDI: Good afternoon, sir, from Manila. With the confirmed killing of two Filipinos, is the embassy not yet recommending the mandatory repatriation or evacuation?

AMBASSADOR LAYLO JR: What's the question?

NESTOR CORRALES/PDI: With the confirmed killing of two Filipinos there in Israel, is the embassy not yet recommending mandatory evacuation or repatriation?

AMBASSADOR LAYLO JR: Actually, we're not recommending that because these fatalities happened during the day of attack and the situation, the Israeli Defense Forces have already regained the areas attacked by the Hamas via [unclear].

CONSUL GENERAL MANDAP: We are not recommending repatriation right now and I think it's inaccurate to word it as mandatory repatriation because we are not recommending it now and as the Ambassador has mentioned the killings happened on day one and the situation has considerably improved since then.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Go ahead.

DFA USEC. DE VEGA: May I add to that. The embassy has not recommended it because mandatory repatriation or Alert Level Four is called when the country has broken down and the rule of law and everything about peace and order has broken down [unclear] war throughout the country – that is not the case in the state of Israel.

The killings occurred because of the attack last Saturday and the situation has turned to certain sense of normalcy as the Ambassador and his team has indicated. However, Israel now, by decision of Foreign Ministry is under Alert Level Two – meaning, restricted deployment. We're not going to deploy new workers which is actually a status quo anyway because we still have to negotiate the agreement about caregivers and about the hotel workers is by a G2G agreement (government-to-government) and right now there is no deployment.

So, we still urge precaution; the embassy already issued a travel advisory – we repeat that we do not recommend visits to Israel at the present time. I believe the Ambassador will back me up on this that this is still their continued advice although you can travel to Israel, there are flights, but if you have Holy Site visits perhaps you can postpone it until after the conflict has subsided.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you, Undersecretary De Vega. Eden Santos from Net25.

EDEN SANTOS/NET25: Itatanong ko lang po kung ano iyong arrangement para doon sa mga kababayan nating nasawi, iyong dalawang Pilipino po, para maiuwi po sila dito sa Pilipinas? May ganoon na po bang pag-uusap or kahilingan iyong family ng mga biktima?

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Go ahead, from the embassy in Tel Aviv.

WELFARE OFFICER DINA PONCIANO: We have received request for assistance para sa pagpapauwi ng dalawang nasawi. We are still coordinating with the authorities po sa pag-retrieve po ng body.

EDEN SANTOS/NET25: Clarification lang po: Nasawi po iyong dalawa nating kababayan dahil doon sa mga pambubomba, pag-atake or dahil po na-hostage sila?

WELFARE OFFICER DINA PONCIANO: Hindi po sa na-hostage, ma'am, but napatay po sila doon sa ... habang umaatake po ang terorista sa kanilang communities po.

EDEN SANTOS/NET25: Sa Gaza po ba iyon? Sa Gaza po ba sila na—

WELFARE OFFICER DINA PONCIANO: Dito po sa—hindi po, sa kibbutz po, kibbutz community ng Israel.

AMBASSADOR LAYLO JR: Border ng Gaza.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay, next question? Ivan Mayrina, GMA 7.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Magandang hapon po. May we get more details, sirs, tungkol sa circumstances ng pagkamatay nitong dalawa nating mga kababayan? You said, they were killed on the day of the attack in kibbutz. Ito ho ba'y nadamay sila noong nag-open fire itong mga Hamas militants or were they hit by a bomb? Hindi ho sila na-hostage and then, later on murdered? Papaano po kaya ang mga nangyari?

LABOR ATTACHÉ RUDY GABASAN: Iyong isa po ay habang pinupwersa ng militanteng mga terorista iyong kanilang pinto, pagbukas po ng pinto, niratrat po iyong mag-amo, iyong caregiver at saka iyong kaniyang amo.

Iyong isa po ay pinatay pero hindi po namin alam kung anong circumstance pero isa po siya doon sa mga natangay ng Hamas sa kasagsagan po ng pananalasa ng mga terorista.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: So, na-hostage po siya initially and then, later on murdered?

DFA USEC. DE VEGA: Iyong mga hostages, dinadala sa Gaza para maging human shields. May tanong kanina about kung saan iyong attacks doon sa Gaza, let's remember, the Hamas came from Gaza, pumasok sila sa Southern Israel at ito, nag-commit ng acts of terror and violence.

Dahil doon, iyong first day, maraming namatay kasi either tinamaan ng rockets, ng ganoon, or pinagbabaril, iyon ang most likely nangyari sa isa. Hindi siya kinuhang hostage na dinala sa Gaza tapos binaril; iyon ang most likely nangyari po. But out of respect, the wishes of the family, as the Ambassador has indicated, we are not going to give details. Perhaps, the President will speak about it. But for now, no po, we are not going to give more details on that other than namatay sila on Saturday.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Okay. Usec. De Vega, sir, yesterday we had a briefing in the afternoon. Ang nabanggit po ninyo, may seven na unaccounted. What is the number today, sir? In the last 24 hours, baka nagka-development.

DFA USEC. DE VEGA: Yes, I believe it was seven and then minus two. But let us clarify with the embassy. Ang alam namin is seven missing pero dalawa, well, deceased na. Is it three or five? We'll ask them, kung sino.

VICE CONSUL NARAJOS: Okay. Hello, everyone. I will just give po a recap of the figures as of this morning, early morning. Okay, of the 32 that was reported missing to us, to the embassy, there are two confirmed deaths; one reported death but this is subject to confirmation by DNA evidence; and then, there are still three missing; and 26 have been rescued so far. So na-update po iyong figures, na-increase po iyong amount na rescued. Thank you.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Iyong injured po?

VICE CONSUL NARAJOS: There is one injured person and recovering po siya ngayon at the hospital. So he is doing well. He underwent surgery in his spine.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: As of yesterday po, two injured? Can we have a clarification on the numbers of the injured?

VICE CONSUL NARAJOS: One injured.

CONSUL GEN. MANDAP: Initially, there were two who were brought to the hospital; one of smoke inhalation, the other one of a gunshot wound. Iyon pong dinala because of smoke inhalation ay nai-discharge na po. So, isa na lamang po ang nasa ospital ngayon.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you. Okay, Maricel Halili, TV5.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Hi, sir. Magandang hapon po. Sir, we respect the wish of the family not to disclose the identity of the fatalities of the victim. But at least, can we have additional details like lalaki, babae po ba sila, ilang taon ba sila, taga-saan po sila dito sa Pilipinas?

VICE CONSUL NARAJOS: So, I will just give a profile of the two. Okay, so without disclosing any names, okay, so the female has been ... is 33 years old and six years working here in Israel, and she is from Pangasinan. And she is newly married but the husband is in the Philippines.

And the other one is male. He is 42 years old. He comes from Pampanga and he is married. So that's what we'll disclose for now. Thank you.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you. Okay?

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Clarification lang po to our ambassador or the embassy staff. So aside from the two confirmed fatalities, mayroon pa hong isa tayong kino-confirm through DNA testing, is that correct?

Q: Yes, yes, oo.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Thank you po. Ingat po kayo. Thank you.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Thank you so much, Ambassador Laylo, ambassador to Israel; Deputy Head of Mission Consul General Anthony Mandap; Vice Consul Patricia Narajos and Teri Bautista; Labor Attaché Rodolfo Gabasan; Defense and Armed Forces Attaché Colonel Ewald Manay; Commercial Counselor Michael Angelo Roaring; and Welfare Officer Dina Ponciano. We wish you well and please keep safe. Thank you so much.

Q: Thank you.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you. Be well. Let's proceed with our briefing here. We have with us the AFP Spokesperson Col. Aguilar, and we still have Usec. De Vega with us.

AFP SPOKESPERSON COL. AGUILAR: Good afternoon. I am here to assure everybody that with the guidance of our President, his Excellency President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr., the Armed Forces of the Philippines is prepared to execute evacuation operation should there be a need for that. And we already came up with a plan on how to do it, and this will be a whole-of-nation approach because what is important for us is the safety of our countrymen there in the conflict area.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Go ahead, Maricel.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Sir, clarification: So paano po iyong magiging plano natin because yesterday, ang sinasabi po nina Usec. De Vega, medyo mahirap iyong sa repatriation. Kasi kung halimbawa iyong manggagaling sa Gaza, sarado naman iyong border ng Israel. So ano po iyong ibang options? Paano po?

AFP SPOKESPERSON COL. AGUILAR: Can we show the slide this because we have a plan here? Okay. We have identified first the temporary safe haven where we can bring our countrymen should there be an escalation of hostility. Aside from that, we also identified airport of embarkation – two airports – where we can consolidate those who will be evacuated. And

that will be—now the mode of transport, we will be using at least two C-130 and one C-295 should this plan be executed.

DFA USEC. DE VEGA: There are no Filipinos asking for repatriation so far from Israel. However, we have from Gaza and the number keeps increasing. I believe yesterday, I said there were about 38; according to Ambassador Wilfredo Santos, there are now 70. So, we haven't repatriated them yet because as I said yesterday po, well, naka-blockade ang Gaza, at saka iyong kanilang borders both through Israel and to Egypt. So, it's now a diplomatic approach; we are using diplomacy along with other countries in order to have the borders open so that we can help iyong mga kababayan natin. So we can help countrymen and women, go through the border and kung kailangan ng evacuation, well nandiyan. Kung hindi commercial flights, the AFP as announced, will be able to fly them home.

If they pass through the Egypt border, if they are able to pass the Egypt border, our embassy in Cairo will fly them home on commercial flight. Remember there are 70, it may increase. These are Filipinas married to Palestinians, they are in Gaza; pero sa Israel mismo, no evacuation is required yet but our AFP is ready.

EDEN SANTOS/NET 25: Usec, iyon pong mga kababayan nating Filipina na nag-asawa po ng Palestinian, welcome na mag-repatriate sa Pilipinas, how about po iyong kanilang mister na Palestino? Are they welcome also?

DFA USEC. DE VEGA: Yes. There is a situation there, kasi po restricted national iyong Palestinians sa atin, on the other hand, they are married to Filipinas na under our laws, immigration laws ay puwedeng pumunta sa Pilipinas. So far, we have not indicated that we will not allow them to come back, to enter the Philippines. Ang isyu is, will they be allowed to leave Gaza either by the local officials or iyong border, either in Egypt or Israel? Kasi ang mga kababayan natin, they can feel confident that for humanitarian reasons, papayagan silang makaalis, kasi hindi naman sila combatants or hindi sila part of the conflict. So, I cannot answer that now, but we are not preventing them from flying home to the Philippines with their wives if we are able to extract them.

EDEN SANTOS/NET 25: Sir, kay Col. Medel Aguilar po. Sir, pakilinaw lang po iyong transit from, kunwari Israel or Gaza to Egypt, iyong magiging ano po ng C-130 natin at saka C-295, if in case po na magkaroon na nga ng repatriation?

AFP SPOKERSPERSON COL. AGUILAR: Yes, we will be traveling, we will be sending two aircraft, C-130 aircraft and one C-295 and we have already identified the Adana Sakirpasa Airport in Turkey as the temporary safe haven. From there we will be shuttling Filipinos who are affected by the conflict with the identification of Haifa Airport and in the Tel Aviv, the Ben Gurion Airport. But all of these will only be executed based on the recommendation or instruction coming from other government authorities.

EDEN SANTOS/NET 25: Basta kayo po naka-ready lang.

AFP SPOKERSPERSON COL. AGUILAR: Yes, we are ready, because that is the primary concern of our President.

MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay, any further questions? I think we are good. Usec. De Vega, any further updates from you, sir?

DFA USEC. DE VEGA: Yes, the assurance of the embassy, the embassy is not just in Tel Aviv but also in Amman, we channels as far as in Cairo; they are doing all they can and it's a whole of government approach, the DMW, the OWWA, we heard the AFP and DND and other agencies are into this all in compliance with the instructions of the President. We hope for peace to eventually return to the region.

MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay, thank you very much, Usec. De Vega. And Colonel Aguilar from the AFP, any last words, sir?

AFP SPOKERSPERSON COL. AGUILAR: Let me use this opportunity to also express our condolences to the bereaved family of our two countrymen who died in Israel.

MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ: Our deepest sympathies to our kababayans. Thank you very much gentlemen and thank you Malacañang Press Corps. Good afternoon.

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