

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
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MALACAÑANG INSIDER HOSTED BY MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ
WITH DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY (DTI)
ACTING SECRETARY MARIA CRISTINA ALDEGUER-ROQUE
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MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Current developments, presidential directives, accurate and reliable updates straight from the Palace. This is Daphne Oseña-Paez, your Malacañang Insider.

A country where Filipinos can thrive in a secure and comfortable business environment and participating in a globally competitive economy – iyan ang layunin ng Department of Trade and Industry sa bansa. Paano nga ba ito maisasakatuparan?

We have with us today the newly appointed Department of Trade and Industry Acting Secretary Maria Cristina Aldeguer-Roque. Good morning, Secretary Cris.

DTI ACTING SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Good morning, Daphne, thank you for having me and good morning to all the viewers out there. I'm happy to be here, thank you.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Yes. Welcome to Malacañang Insider. How is it been like for you? It's been a few days as the acting secretary of the DTI?

DTI ACTING SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: I started my work actually Monday and today is Wednesday and it's been really hectic but I'm really enjoying it because I'm really out there to do what the President has told me to do – and I'm really gonna do it aggressively and as quick as possible so that we can really give our countrymen the best service that the Department of Trade and Industry can give them.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: That's wonderful. This is not new to you. You've been an assistant secretary and an undersecretary for the DTI since the Marcos administration.

DTI ACTING SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Yes. I started as an Asec and I really liked it because I started from the bottom so I really knew what exactly was happening there. And I started with the regional operations group which is the different regions of the country and it was quite exciting. And then when I moved to the undersecretary, they gave me the department of MSME development which is quite close to my heart because that's where I started, my career in entrepreneurship, and I felt that I could really share my experience and the things that I know. And then after that, I became now the Acting Secretary with Department of Trade which is another step higher for me. And I feel that I'm ready to take the challenge.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: That's wonderful. Now, let's go back to where you started because you mentioned it – that your heart is the heart of an entrepreneur. You started... 30 years of experience as an entrepreneur and you started small.

DTI ACTING SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Yes. I started with six thousand pesos and that was all I had. But during the time, I never looked at it as a hindrance or I never looked at starting small as something that was difficult. I felt that it was a challenge that maybe I could do something out

of this money. So, this kind of mindset is also what I want to share with the MSMEs because we have to remember, a lot of the tycoons started as an MSME – Jollibee, SM, even Robinsons and so many other out there all started as an MSME and why did they thrive? Because they know what it is down there to get all the way up to where they are today.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: That is so inspiring. And, is that the goal? I know that we have a high rate of MSMEs in the country.

DTI ACTING SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Yes. MSME comprises 99.5% of the business sector and 60% of the workforce. But you won't believe – 65% is women-led. So, if we uplift the MSMEs which is 99.5% then that would really uplift the economy instantaneously that's why there's really a drive to really uplift and to level up these MSMEs as best as we can. And this is a quick way because, actually, the MSME are really raring to go – they just need to be helped, to be mentored and to be told, 'what are the different programs that the Department of Trade and Industry has for them'.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: So, in your opinion and in your experience, what do the small businesses need? What kind of help and assistance do they need?

DTI ACTING SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Okay. We have the five-point strategies which is really where we're pushing for the MSME which is, number one, the mandate of the President which is digitalization, to go digital. We are a global world and digitalization is the way to go and we are also 7,600 islands so how do we get our message across? How do we get to deliver the goods? How do we get to sell the goods and how do we get information from Luzon all the way to Mindanao instantaneously and quickly, except through digitalization?

And the fastest way to sell is also through digitalization which now is the very popular TikTok. So, all you need is just the product and yourself and the guts and the know-how to be able to do TikTok. And there're lot of stars and a lot of people who made money in TikTok and by doing this, we can really provide more jobs once we've uplifted these 99.5%.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Uhum. You were mentioning that there was a growth in registration of small business, micro and small businesses during the pandemic.

DTI ACTING SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Yes.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Ano iyong reason kaya bakit lumaki lalo and how important is that?

DTI ACTING SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Yeah. Actually, before, the sector was lower, 90% but now—Of course, the pandemic has hit everyone globally, it's not just us and a lot of the businesses were closed but you'll be shocked, there were a lot also who thrived. In a crisis, not everybody goes down – there are people who thrived. And there are some businesses like, I won't say the name of the food business but they started with 13,500 pesos during the pandemic and they just sold party trays and after two years, they were being bought by a conglomerate for 200 million – and they were just selling products like kare-kare, adobong pusit, you know the usual. So, sometimes we don't have to think of something so difficult, we just have to know what our expertise and where we're good at – and that's where we'll push.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: How amazing. Your conversations with the President so far, I know that he also appreciates the role of the MSME and how important it is to our economy, what have you discussed and what are his directives?

DTI ACTING SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Okay, yeah. So, the first one was the digitalization which I mentioned. Number two is the diversification, we must diversify – meaning, if I only sell this one product, I must also try to explore other products. As what Warren Buffet said, “Never rely on a single income.” A second source is always better, the better one. Like, let’s say Jollibee, they started with the hamburger. Then when they got into Chickenjoy, they realized that Chickenjoy was selling more than burgers and they started to diversify – and now, they’re really very big because of this diversification.

So, like for us, let’s say we’re selling rice – we already have the ‘puwesto’ so we can sell other things. We can sell suka, we can sell eggs. So, if one thing goes down, we still have other sources of income – that’s diversification.

Number three is access to funding. Before I became secretary, I was the chairman of the Small Business Corporation, the SB Corp which is the bank of the government. So, at that time, I’ve made lots of changes which before they needed collateral, but the MSMEs don’t have collateral. So, now we did PO financing – so, once I get an order and I don’t have the money to fund this, I’ll go there and say, “*I have an order.*” So, they can fund it.

And then there’s also check release counting so when I get my payment and its 30 days and I wanna move to the next PO, so I need the funds right? So, that’s check release counting.

Then there’s franchise funding which in Malaysia, that’s where I got the idea because in Malaysia they fund franchises. Because some businesses are already sunset industry so instead of pumping in money in a sunset industry, then we can put the money that we borrow from the bank into an industry that’s thriving. And you know naman kapag franchising, there’s a manual and there’s track record so it’s very easy to follow and the batting average for success is very high.

Actually, I spoke to Secretary Hans because there’s 37 billion pesos remittances from the OFW and he asked... they had the... like they open a business but what kind of business? So, I said they must coordinate with the Philippine Franchising Association which is also we can coordinate with them and we can give them the list of the top franchise brands or companies so that they can choose where the money is, doon ang pa-franchise nila kaya... iyon ang franchising.

And then, number five, is the mentoring. Kailangan lang ma-mentor kasi kung minsan, they only need, let’s say basic accounting, they only need branding, they only need how to use social media as an avenue for selling. They don’t need the MBA course or they don’t need anything because the need is urgent. So, kung anong need nila, iyon lang ‘yung gagawin and then we’re also gonna be more aggressive using the digital platform kasi sometimes they have to go to school or they need to enroll, they have to go to Manila or they need to go to the big cities. So that one, we will go digital so it’s easy for them to access also masterclasses, then inspiring talks. Actually, we have been doing that when I was undersecretary also.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. You were also a mentor; you are known to mentor a lot of...

DTI ASEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: I don’t mentor but I choose who the mentors are like we had TikTok. So, when TikTok came to us I said na we have to do how to use TikTok as a platform for selling and then when they came home, they already had the different paraphernalia needed to be available to sell.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: One of the priorities of the President is of course to ensure that there is ease of doing business in the country. What could you do as a DTI Secretary to help achieve this goal?

DTI ASEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Okay. For that, I'll make it accessible for the consumers – so, now I created a hotline which is report to sec@dti.gov.ph.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. That's an email so anytime...

DTI ASEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Yeah, anytime they can email to me directly and everyday I'm going to check on them one-by-one. I mean, I have a group now, I set up a team – usually, matutok ako eh so that's what we'll do on a daily basis and then we'll forward it to the different departments.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: That's great. And, the government of course, functions in clusters, and not just as individual departments but you will be coordinating a lot with like you mentioned you were already discussing with Secretary Hans and of course you'll also be coordinating with Secretary Go?

DTI ASEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Yeah, Secretary Go for the international trade. I'll be working closely with his office for this.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: That's amazing. So okay, well, we still have a lot to discuss and we want to get to know you more, Secretary Cris, and in a little while we'll be continuing this conversation.

So, prayoridad ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ang makalikha ng magandang business environment para sa mga micro, medium, small enterprises or MSMEs. Ano ang dapat asahan ng MSMEs sa ilalim ng pamumuno ni Acting Secretary Cristina Roque? At ano ba ang 2023 to 2028 MSMEs Development Plan? We will be right back.

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: And we're back here at Malacañang Insider, with us is Acting Secretary Maria Cristina Aldeguer-Roque of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Okay, Secretary Roque, let's go back to the figure 99.5 percent MSMEs in the country. Is that normal for a country like us? How do we fare compared to other countries? We are about to achieve higher middle income country status next year – is this an okay figure?

DTI ASEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Actually, coming from the pandemic, it's really a normal figure but of course, we can get better. So, the only way for us is really to go up and with the President now and his directives and he is really all out in helping the MSMEs – we are really on the way up.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: That's great. Let's talk about also attracting foreign investors and your role as the new DTI Chief.

DTI ASEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Okay. For the international trade, we will be really pushing aggressively and very intensively to attract the international investors. Actually, while I was ano...I've met a lot of businessmen abroad and they really wanted to invest in the Philippines, you know why? Because of our strong population – we are 115.6 million Filipinos, so that alone is a big buying power for this people in the international investment.

So, the BOI, the PEZA which is all under the Department of Trade and the other agencies will be working very closely with the office of the Special Assistant to the President which is SAP Go and we have a good synergy and we will be working strongly and together and closely with him on this one.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: That's great. What are the priority industry clusters again if you can [unclear].

DTI ASEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Okay. The priority industry clusters—there are four priority industry clusters which is the industrial, manufacturing and transport; technology, media and telecommunication; health and life sciences; modern basic needs; and then the resilient economy; and also the retail...there's a lot of retail also that are from abroad that want to invest in the Philippines.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. What about consumer protection?

DTI ASEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Okay. Consumer protection is very important. It's an important part of the Department of Trade and Industry, why? Because we need to protect the consumers, we need to make sure that the products meet the standards that are really, I mean, high and that are set by the Department of Trade so that we make sure that the consumer get the products that they deserve. Because, like example for construction, we cannot go for the substandard or the low standards because the buildings or the structures will collapse; and then for the food, they cannot be without FDA or they must follow the six standards because it's something being taken in and we will really closely monitor this and we will regulate this aggressively.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Let's go back to your role as Secretary of DTI. This came to you – it wasn't a surprise. You've already been with the DTI – what was it like receiving the message that you would be the next acting secretary?

DTI ASEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Yeah. Actually, it was a surprise for me because of course Secretary Alfredo Pascual resigned and when they gave it to me, I took it on as a challenge and I felt that I could do...I could really contribute something because I have a strength which is the MSME which is a business large sector. So, I felt that if we were very strong in international trade, we were very strong in tourism and we were very strong in then MSME then that would really uplift the country. We need a strong MSME also because that's an instantaneous growth – if they grow by 10 percent, that's really a huge growth for us.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: And if you get them to graduate also?

DTI ASEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Yeah. And the buying power and if they uplift then that would make them expand, right? So, dadami din ang jobs na mabibigay sa kanila. So, it's really, we must really put focus also on this, aside from, of course the international trade, the investors coming in and also the consumer protection.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: So, you were saying that your role here is not just also to encourage economic development but you'll also have a big role in social development. You mentioned the role of women in MSMEs, 60%?

DTI SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Yes, 65%. So, for the women, they are usually very passionate about getting into business, why, because they know the needs of the family. Example, the kids need this, they need to go to school. They have so many things that they need to pay, so many things that they need to do so. They are really more thinking of the family and they are really more

thinking that they must do something to help also the male. So, together, as I said the double income is always better than a single source. So, that's why the females now—before they just used to be housewives or what but they realized the strength of a double or a second income.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: In your opinion, what do you think are the skills or training or education that a person needs in order to be a good entrepreneur, especially now in this kind of era, where it's digital, it's borderless?

DTI SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Actually, if you have a passion or if you know you are good at something, I think, you should go for it, because you never know, you could be the next big thing. I mean, it happened to me and I just felt that, that was my passion and I felt that I really needed to do this to be able to uplift my life and to be able to have a better life for myself. So, sometimes, I think, we are given this life to live, why don't we make the best out of this life. So, let's just pursue and take the chance, who knows, we could be the next big thing. I'm sure all of the tycoons they also took the chance, and looked where they are now. So, we should take this chance.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: That's inspiring. Now, your leadership style, you raised many companies in 30 years, very successful. What is your leadership style like in DTI?

DTI SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: My leadership style is, I am very open, I like to talk to the people and I really want to know what's happening. I really like an exchange of views and I am very open, but I am quite straight also. And I am super 'tutok'. And I also want to get the job done because in business time is gold. We cannot delay, because the delay will cost us money. So, I have been with that kind of mindset for 30 years and I carried on now. And my team, they know that, that's really my style. But I'm friendly and approachable and I'm very easy to talk to. So, I want to bring that also here and I really also like to collaborate with people because for me, I believe that alone, I can do so little but together, we can do so much.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: That's great. So you are collaborative, you are fast, you are passionate and also, you know, you mentioned that you are super 'tutok' and really fast. This is a special time for the Philippines now, we saw our country, in the past two years, go into being the darling of the international trade arena. And I could say that with confidence because we saw that.

DTI SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Yes, and the President is very—he is really open to all of these investment and he's really representing or selling the Philippines very well internationally and I have talk to so many so many business people abroad and they really love the President, our President, they really love PBBM and they feel that in his presidency, it will be easy for them to be able to come in and to really do their business here.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Yeah, we are seeing that and the support and the collaboration of the private sector. We are also seeing that through the interest in the foreign market, the World Economic Forum president came here and did a country roundtable – that was pretty amazing. So, this is a special time for the Philippines and you have your vision and the special role of course, of the MSMES and also bringing foreign trade investments here. How do you feel?

DTI SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: I am really looking forward to it and I am very excited to be part of this and to be given the opportunity and the privilege to honor to serve our country under this administration who, I really believe in and I am proud to be part of this administration.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: That's great. Do you have any wish lists from any potential collaborator that could help you achieve your goals right now?

DTI SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: I would like to work with all the agencies, so that we can really strengthen the needs of the people and to be able to really push the businesses. So, like my first Saturday, I took my oath on Friday, and Saturday I already spoke to Secretary Hans for the migrant workers so they can come home and be there with their family and they establish business here also. I feel that if I can work together with them, then we can really be strong all together.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: If there is a short-term goal that you would like to achieve, what would it be?

DTI SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: To get all these things going as I feel that there is a need and there's an urgency and I want to do something quickly also.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Yeah, that's great! Any message for the public, for your team and for the country?

DTI SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Okay, for the public, the Department of Trade and Industry is all-out to serve the people and to serve our countrymen. So, please take advantage of this department and we will do our best to be able to help you as best as we can.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Well, thank you so much, this has been a very interesting conversation, Secretary Cris Roque. Congratulations again and welcome, of course.

DTI SEC. ALDEGUER-ROQUE: Thank you so much and have a blessed day ahead.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Patuloy na isinusulong ng Department of Trade and Industry ang paglago at pag-unlad ng kalakalan at industriya sa bansa. Makagawa ng de-kalidad na trabaho, mapataas ang kita ng mga Pilipino at mapangalagaan ang kapakanan ng bawat mamimili.

We bring you in-depth views of the latest issues and regular Palace updates. I'm Daphne Oseña-Paez, your Malacañang Insider. Have a good day.

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