

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
News and Information Bureau

PRESS BRIEFING OF DEPARTMENT OF MIGRANT WORKERS
SECRETARY HANS LEO CACDAC
APRIL 3, 2025 [1:56 P.M – 2:15 P.M.]

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Magandang hapon, Malacañang Press Corps. Welcome muli sa ating press briefing ngayong araw. Makakasama natin ngayon si Department of Migrant Workers Secretary Hans Leo Cacdac para magbahagi ng mahalagang anunsiyo. Secretary Cacdac?

DMW SEC. CACDAC: Maraming salamat, Asec. Dale.

Upon directive of the President, since he learned about the arrests of the around 20 Filipinos, OFWs in a resort in Doha, Qatar last March 27, gabi, around 10:30 – he immediately directed the Department of Migrant Workers of course in partnership under the same One Country Team with the DFA and our embassy in Doha to provide legal and welfare assistance to the 20 who were arrested.

More specifically, first and foremost, ang tanong ng Presidente, “*Kumusta na sila? Their welfare, their well-being?*” Kaya’t nagkaroon tayo ng welfare visits with our One Country Team under Ambassador Melicor; we had our labor attaché, his name is Atty. Ed Ferrer along with our retained Qatari Legal Counsel, conduct visits in the detention centers in the jails where the 20 were held. There were 12 males and 5 females and 3 minors and, of course, we know na unang nakalaya iyong tatlong menor de edad – naiwan iyong labing-dalawang kalalakihan and lima na kababaihan in separate detention or jail facilities.

The second and more important, should I say directive of the President, was to secure their immediate release. And with gladness, we report today that—of course, based on the President’s directive to secure the immediate release of the 17 who are still detained, the Qatari authorities in two separate batches – the males at around 2:30 A.M. Qatari time and the females around 4 A.M. Qatari time were provisionally released pending investigation.

So, this means they have their liberty. Pending investigation, they are able to all go home, to their respective homes in Qatar, in Doha and able—yes, able to spend time for themselves and their loved ones. But at the same time, since they are still subject to investigation, patuloy iyong pinag-utos ng ating Pangulo na legal assistance, legal counsel who will provide the necessary legal assistance to the 17 who are still under investigation.

No charges have been filed. In fact the President, when he gave us instructions to secure immediate release was pointing out the matter on whether or not charges have indeed been filed. And so, our legal counsel in Qatar had put forward this point to the Qatari authorities. We’re very, very thankful to the Qatari authorities, to the Qatari government for allowing the provisional release of the 17 as the investigations proceed. And as directed by the President, legal assistance and welfare assistance will continually be provided to the 17.

So, iyon na lamang po.

JINKY BATICADOS/IBC13: Good afternoon po, Secretary. Sir, since it is provisional release pa lang po... what if po, sir, kapag may nakasuhan, what is the potential penalty?

DMW SEC. CACDAC: Yes. I think before I respond to that, Jinky, I need to always put in that reminder to our kababayans to please observe host country laws and regulations. Dito, iyong nangyari sa Qatar, humantong sa arrests but when it comes to mass action and assemblies, they are regulated in their respective host countries. And in some countries, maaaring walang arrest na nangyari but we know there are other countries that have taken note of mass actions and have been monitoring the movements, the behavior of our Filipino communities abroad. So, ang mensahe ay mag-ingat lang po. Siguraduhing sundin ang batas, ang mga regulasyon ng host countries.

And sorry, Jinky, pakiulit na lang.

JINKY BATICADOS/IBC13: Yes, sir. If ever lang po, sir, na may nakasuhan or makakasuhan, ano po iyong mga potential penalty?

DMW SEC. CACDAC: Okay. Ang alleged dahilan ng kanilang pagkaaresto ay iyong matter on illegal assembly or gathering without a permit and gatherings that potentially disturb public security – ito iyong mga alegasyon, okay. Kaya't ang legal defense natin will be there, ready to defend our 17 from these allegations as directed by the President.

So, ang penalties nitong illegal assembly is six months up to three years imprisonment and a potential fine of ten thousand Qatari Riyals to fifty thousand Qatari Riyals subject of course to the recommendation of the prosecutor and the discretion of the Qatari criminal court. So, iyan ang potential penalty but as I said, part of the legal assistance that have been so carefully directed by the President is to put up the best legal defense for our 17 kababayans.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Magandang hapon po, sir. Sir, ano po iyong naging argument ng Philippine government or at least iyong basis na inilatag natin to convince the Qatari government na bigyan ng provisional release itong 17 Filipinos?

DMW SEC. CACDAC: Yes. Ang main point is iyong... iyon nga, that they had been detained and an inquiry as whether charges have been filed. Wala pa naman sa ngayon so perhaps it would be best to secure their provisional liberty in the absence of charges and while investigations are still going on. We know for sure that the Qatari prosecution service is still conducting its own inquiry and investigation.

Of course, we are also—dahil welfare check ang gusto rin ng ating Pangulo, we want to know for sure if our 17 kababayans are medically safe, are in good physical condition. So, in fact, of the things that we will do of course under the leadership of Ambassador Melicor, our labor attaché, we'll bring in medical help and assistance to check on the 17. So, medical condition would be another argument or point raised there in terms of ensuring that they are all physically in good health.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: And of course, sir, habang nasa provisional release sila, hindi sila puwedeng umuwi dito?

DMW SEC. CACDAC: Yes, they could not travel outside of Qatar while investigations are going on. But ang mahalaga dito, provisional liberty is still liberty and that's very important to the

President and that was the first and foremost; alongside the welfare aspect is to secure their immediate release.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: And, sir, just so we can have an idea. Usually po ba sa Qatar, gaano kahaba iyong procedure, iyong mga legal procedure nila bago naglalabas ng decision iyong korte?

DMW SEC. CACDAC: Well, we know for sure na sa Qatar ay mabilis naman ang dispensation ng justice, ang mga proseso/proceedings. I cannot just peg exact timeline or date so as not to raise inaccurate expectations. But at this stage, rest assured our legal counsel will also be there to look out for among other things – iyong speed, iyong determination ng ultimate findings ng Qatari side para ma-settle once and for all ‘no iyong kasong ito para sa kapakanan na rin ng ating mga kababayan.

TRISTAN NODALO/NEWSWATCH PLUS: Hi, Sec., good afternoon. Sir, siguro po... mayroon din kasing mga sentiments online ‘no regarding dito sa 17 Filipinos na na-detain na alam naman nilang bawal iyong pagsasagawa noong political protest or ng any demonstration, and yet, ginawa pa rin po. So, nakausap na po ba natin sila on ano po ba iyong explanation why they push through with that activity knowing na posible silang ma-put at risk?

DMW SEC. CACDAC: Yeah, mayroon ng mga pag-uusap. There were jail visits, no less than five jail visits. Again, as directed by the President, number one concern was the welfare side, wellbeing side. So in line with that, there were jail visits.

But I can’t get into details at this point. There is an attorney-client relationship that is confidential, and most of the conversations will be related to the legal defense to be foisted in behalf of our kababayan. So, I hope you understand, hindi ko muna mai-divulge iyong mga exchanges between our labor attaché, our legal counsel and the OFWs.

But right now, they are just given time to, again, rest and spend time and message and communicate with their families. But in the due time, of course, Ambassador Melicor and Labor Attaché Ferrer will be meeting them.

Again, should I say, in terms that will be in line with iyong preparation also for their defense, so again, a lot of these will be confidential. I hope you don’t mind and I hope you understand.

TRISTAN NODALO/NEWSWATCH PLUS: Last follow-up lang. Sir, siguro po kasi, siyempre ‘di ba, iba iyong pinaglalaman nila. What kind of message does this send at least for the Marcos administration na kahit iba po iyong paniniwala ng mga OFWs ay tinutulungan pa rin po sila?

DMW SEC. CACDAC: The message this sends is care for our people, for our OFWs. That’s the first thing in the President’s mind. We have been also ... I have been personally communicating with him for the last few days, at paulit-ulit niyang sinasabi iyong making sure that the welfare, wellbeing and the release will be secured.

And we also have to emphasize it: This is mandated under the law. The President very well knows the mandate of the DMW. Parati niya kaming pinapaalalahanan tungkol sa pangangalaga ng ating mga OFWs, lalo na sa panahon ng matindi nilang pangangailangan – at ito iyon, ‘di ba.

Second, I always like to point out that there were women and children involved in the arrest. And for a while, iyong mga unang oras, may mga dalawa o tatlo na hinanap pa kung nasaan sila,

iyong detention center. So, they really had to be interventions made. So, we're thankful na nakalaya iyong tatlong menor de edad. So, there really was no other recourse but humanitarian and legal and welfare assistance, recourse, course of action that the President had so directed.

TRISTAN NODALO/NEWSWATCH PLUS: Reminder na lang, sir, sa mga OFWs para hindi po umabot ulit sa ganito.

DMW SEC. CACDAC: Good point. At the same time, paalala po sa ating mga kababayan na sundin ang batas ng host country. Uulitin ko iyong sinabi ko kanina, maaaring sa Qatar aresto ang kinahinatnan but remember, hindi kailangang may pag-aresto para hindi sumunod sa batas ng host country because in some countries, ang reaction ng host country is monitoring, surveillance ng activities ng Filipino community. So, kailangan talagang mag-ingat, dobleng ingat, tripleng ingat dahil kailangang sundin ang batas ng host country.

And, ako naman din, I will also be the first to say, tanyag naman ang OFWs sa pagsunod sa batas ng host countries. We have always been good citizens, residents of host country. Kaya tayo naging sikat sa buong daigdig eh. So, we are very confident and sure that our OFWs will continue to comply with host country rules, laws and regulations.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Secretary, seeing up to this point that no charges have been filed, are we definite that the Filipinos were being held for mass actions because I was just watching a video on social media of a Filipino in Qatar claiming to have personal knowledge of the incident— personally knowing one of the seventeen and claiming that they are being held not for mass action but for expired Q IDs. How true is that?

DMW SEC. CACDAC: Iyong personal opinion at rekomendasyon o anuman ng isang tao is one thing. Pero iyong nakikita ng Qatari authorities at kung ano ang iniimbestigahan nila at kung ano ang magiging depensa natin doon is another thing, and that will be the subject of the investigation. I hope you understand, Ivan, hindi ko muna sasagutin ng detalyado iyon kasi kasama iyan sa pagtulong, legal assistance at defense natin sa kababayan natin, iyong mga detalyadong aspeto ng *“bakit kayo naroon? Ano ang hinala or charge ng Qatari side?”* all of these things will come to the fore doon sa investigation, and our lawyers are well-equipped to address this in defense of our people.

So, hindi ko muna tatalakayin iyong bahagi na iyon, that's a very, very sensitive area. And the opinion of one, should I say, will not necessarily affect, will have any bearing doon sa proceedings before the Qatari authorities.

IRA PANGANIBAN/DZRJ: Sec., I'm just going to ask, regardless of whatever happens in the case, whether it goes sideways, upwards or northwards, is it safe to assume that these people who were arrested will be told to leave Qatar? And how is the Philippine government..?

DMW SEC. CACDAC: That in itself will be the subject of the investigation. So, hindi ko pangungunahan ang imbestigasyon; hindi ko pangungunahan ang Qatari authorities. Hindi ko pangungunahan iyong firm legal defense that we will put up for our people.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, outside of their legal troubles, mayroon po ba sa kanila ang nawalan ng employment because of the incident? And is the Philippine government ready to provide longer term na welfare assistance sa kanilang re-employment and repatriation if it comes to that?

DMW SEC. CACDAC: Wala pa tayong detalyeng alam sa ganoong aspeto. But as you know, in the past, 'di ba, iyong mga issues natin about airport delays here or disasters here that prevent our people from going abroad, nakahanda iyong mga labor attachés natin – MW personnel, in tandem with the embassy – to reach out to the employers and explain what happened and what could possibly happen if an OFW, for instance, eventually be given another opportunity to work abroad or in the same host country.

So, wala pa tayong detalye kung ano ang nangyari sa kanilang employment. But rest assured our people on the ground will be there to do all they can in terms of reaching out to employers, in terms of how best we could work in the interest of maintaining the employment of our OFWs. Actually, not just for this case but in general, right, alam ninyo na iyon, trabaho talaga ng labor attachés natin iyon.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Do you have more questions for Secretary Cacdac?

Q: [OFF MIC]

DMW SEC. CACDAC: Ano?

Q: [OFF MIC]

DMW SEC. CACDAC: Taiwan. Oh, what about Taiwan? I think sumagot na si ES.

Q: [OFF MIC] ... in case there's a need for massive—

DMW SEC. CACDAC: We will go by the statement by the good Executive Secretary that the Philippine government stands ready. Under the Marcos administration, we have met; we have been meeting to discuss the contingency plans. But having said that, we also would like to assure our OFWs and OFW families of safety of their loved ones in Taiwan and anywhere in the world dahil handa naman ang Philippine government under the Marcos administration na tulungan sila.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you very much, Secretary Cacdac. And maraming salamat, Malacañang Press Corps. Magandang hapon.

###