Presidential Communications Operations Office

News and Information Bureau

PRESS BRIEFING OF PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON

SECRETARY HARRY ROQUE

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TABUK, KALINGA

MODERATOR: Welcome to the Press Conference of our Presidential Spokesperson, Secretary Harry Roque. He is joined by our officials of the Province of Kalinga. May I start with our Vice Governor, Sir James Edduba; and then our Governor, the father of Kalinga, Governor Jocel Baac; our Congressman of Kalinga and caretaker of Mountain Province as well, Congressman Allen Jesse Mangaoang; and of course his classmate, General Imbang.

Sir, your opening statement, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque. Sir… we are live over PTV and Radyo Pilipinas. Sir, your opening statement…

SEC. ROQUE: Good morning Philippines, and good morning to the first Malacañang Press Briefing in the Province of Kalinga, the City of Tabuk. And I'm joined here by Governor Baac, Congressman Mangaoang, and of course other officials of the Province of Kalinga. First and foremost, Happy Birthday Kalinga. It's the 23rd Founding Charter Day of Kalinga, as well as Happy 2nd Bodong Festival, which brings us here to Kalinga.

Let me begin with the good news. We are pleased to announce that as of December 31 last year, the Province of Kalinga has a total of 5 Negosyo Centers, namely: 1 in Rizal, 1 in Pinukpuk; 1 in Balbalan and 2 in Tabuk City. They also have a total of 22 Shared Service Facilities. Through these Negosyo Centers, we hope to promote ease of doing business in the province. Through our SSF Project, we aim to provide tools, system skills and knowledge to improve the competitiveness of micro, small and medium enterprises in Kalinga.

Now, we thank the Filipino taxpayers for helping the government achieve its highest tax efforts in 11 years. Preliminary data from the Department of Finance shows that last year's total tax effort registered a 14.3% of GDP, an increase of 0.6 percentage point from the previous year compared to the average of 0.3 percentage point per year in the previous administration. Congratulations of course, to the officers and employees of the Bureau of Internal Revenue.

As we thank our taxpayers for their cooperation, we likewise assure them that this government would use the taxes they paid to fund the administration's priority programs such as education, health and housing and infrastructure. Makakaasa kayo na ang buwis na binabayad ninyo ay isasauli naman po sa taumbayan sa pamamagitan ng mas pinaigting na batayang-serbisyong panlipunan.

Of course, we're also happy to announce that 80,964 PAGIBIG members were able to apply for socialized housing loans with a total amount of P65.1 billion released by the Home Development Mutual Fund or PAGIBIG Fund last year. Recorded as the highest housing loan in its 37 years of service, this can be attributed to the introduction of the lowest housing loan interest rate of 3%.

In addition, PAGIBIG Fund recorded a 21% increase in the net income amounting to P30.27 billion compared from the P24.9 billion in 2016. It is noted that the highest income recorded by the agency due to the 13% of the 2018 gross revenues of P43.33 billion compared to the previous year. Congratulations to the management and staff of PAGIBIG. We are joined by one of the trustees of PAGIBIG in Kalinga today.

Now, update on storm 'Basyang' – As of 8 A.M., 13 February, 'Basyang' is about to make landfall between Surigao and Dinagat Provinces. [It is] expected to make landfall around 9 to 11 A.M., February 13. The following areas are under Tropical Storm Signal No. 2: Bohol, Southern Cebu, Siquijor, Negros Oriental, Negros Occidental, Southern Leyte, Dinagat Island, Surigao Del Sur, Surigao Del Norte, Agusan Del Norte, Agusan Del Sur, Camiguin, Misamis Oriental and northern section of Bukidnon.

Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 1 is imposed on Palawan including the Calamian Group of Islands, southern section of Masbate, Aklan, Capiz, Antique, Iloilo, Guimaras, rest of Negros Occidental, rest of Cebu, Leyte, Biliran, Samar, Eastern Samar, Zamboanga Del Norte, Zamboanga Del Sur, northern section of Zamboanga Sibugay, Misamis Oriental, Lanao Del Norte, Lanao Del Sur, rest of Bukidnon, North Cotabato, Compostela Valley, Davao Del Norte and northern Davao Oriental.

As of February 13, 6 A.M., 528 families or 1,829 persons are affected in 13 barangays in Caraga, while a total of 585 families or 2,077 persons are currently staying inside 17 evacuation centers in Caraga. As of February 13, 6 A.M., there are 618 stranded passengers in Regions VII, VIII and Caraga.

Meanwhile, the DSWD Central Office, Field Offices and National Resource Operation Center have stockpiles and standby funds amounting to 1.136 billion pesos. There are total of 407,871 family food packs amounting to P137 million pesos and available food and non-stock items amounting to 476 million pesos. There's an additional standby fund of P522 million in CO and FOs.

Okay. So this being regular press briefing, we shall first accept questions from the local media here in Kalinga, and then our emcee will be reading questions from the Malacañang Press Corps.

BASIL BALUYAN/RADYO PILIPINAS-KALINGA: Good morning sir, and welcome to the Province of Kalinga.

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, good morning.

BASIL BALUYAN/RADYO PILIPINAS-KALINGA: The Province of Kalinga, particularly the City of Tabuk is the rice granary of the Cordillera. And according to the Department of

Agriculture in the province, they monitored the supply of rice in the province and they are happy to inform you sir that we have enough supply of rice. What saddened them sir, the farmers, is the plan of the national government to import rice – they are against this sir. And they are recommending that if NFA buying price will be increased, they will be happy because it will help them recover from their past disasters especially 'Lawin' in the Province of Kalinga. What can you say about this, Mr. Secretary?

SEC. ROQUE: I think the decision is really that there is no rice shortage and I failed to notice what the declaration so far from Secretary Evasco is, but I know that the confirmation is there is no rice shortage. There's already 325,000 metric tons coming in by the end of the month pursuant to the Minimum Access Volume under the WTO. So there is no need to panic, and there is now support for NFA to increase its price in purchasing locally produced rice.

BASIL BALUYAN/RADYO PILIPINAS-KALINGA: Thank you, sir.

APONG DALEN (?)/RADYO NATIN: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Good morning, Sir Harry…

SEC. ROQUE: Good morning, ma'am.

APONG GALEN (?)/RADYO NATIN: Sir Jocel, good morning sir. Sir Sonny, good morning. Sir Boyet, good morning. And Sir James, good morning. This concerns the illegal drug campaign of our President, sir. May I just—may I ask for an update if we are moving on forward or we are stagnant? Thank you, sir.

SEC. ROQUE: We are definitely moving forward with the war on drugs. As you know, Operation Tokhang was re-launched by the President, by the PNP, General Bato. The difference is, there was intensified training given to our men in uniform and that the overall supervision now of the drug campaign is still vested with the Dangerous Drugs Board and the drugs enforcement agency. So we're hoping that with this renewed efforts, the people's fears about another spike in the threat coming from illegal drugs will be assuaged. Although we assure you that with the increased training too and with the supervision of the drug enforcement agency, the PDEA, we would certainly aim for less collateral damage in this ongoing war against drugs.

PAULA ESGUERRA/PEOPLE'S TELEVISION-CORDILLERA: Hello po. Magandang umaga po. Sir, regarding po doon sa pagsibak po sa puwesto ng Commissioner and sa Chairman ng SSS. Ano na pong susunod dito, saka kung—siyempre po involved po iyong mga nasa matataas na position, hindi po kaya masira iyong serbisyo ng ahensiya sa mga members?

SEC. ROQUE: Ay hindi po, dahil ang Chairman naman po, ang trabaho niya ay nagpi-preside lang sa mga board meetings. At ang isang Director naman po ay nag-a-attend lamang ng board meetings. Pero iyong management po ng SSS ay hindi po nabago, patuloy naman po ang trabaho diyan sa SSS. Sa tingin ko po, kaya pinalitan 'yan ni Presidente ay dahil nakikita niya na mas magiging efficient ang SSS kung walang hidwaan po sa board ng SSS.

CAYETANO TUDAO/GMA: Happy Valentines sir at sa ating lahat happy birthday po sa Kalinga. Sir, sa isyu po ng TRAIN Law. Marami po doong nagrereklamo na nabigla po iyong ating mga kababayan lalung-lalo na po iyong nasa baba.

SEC. ROQUE: Well, ang nakakalap ko pong balita, marami ring natutuwa dahil beginning January ay napakadaming mga taxpayer natin na kumikita ng P250,000 at pababa na wala na pong withholding tax, buong-buo na po nilang nakukuha iyan. So iyan naman po ang pangako ng ating Presidente, mas maluwag na kabuhayan para sa lahat, dahil iyong mga mahihirap hindi na po kinakailangang magbayad ng buwis, kung P250,000 and below.

TUDAO/GMA: Sir, marami po tayong naririnig na wala raw proper consultation sa ating mga kababayan?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, ako naman po ay nasa Kongreso noong pinasa po iyang TRAIN na iyan. Mahigit isang taon po na nagkaroon ng pagdinig po dito sa TRAIN na ito at nagkaroon pa nga ng mga out of town hearings po bago naisabatas itong TRAIN.

JOAN: Good morning sir. Itanong ko lang po, sir, kung ano po iyong reaksyon ninyo tungkol sa pagkuwestyon po ng Canada sa $233 million helicopter contract dahil sa napaulat na gagamitin daw natin ito sa internal security operations, sir?

SEC. ROQUE: Malinaw po ang posisyon ng Presidente, 'bumibili kami ng helicopter, wala kayong pakialam kung paano namin gagamitin iyon. Kung ayaw ninyong magbenta bibili kami sa iba.' Goodbye Canadian helicopters.

JOAN: So ito, sir hindi kaya—sinabi po ni Secretary Lorenzana, hindi kaya maapektuhan po ang partnership ng Canada and Philippines, sir?

SEC. ROQUE: Ay maaapektuhan po iyan, kasi bababa ang kita ng Canadian companies na gumagawa ng Bell Helicopter. Dadalhin natin sa ibang bansa iyong $230 million natin. Ayaw n'yo ng pera namin, 'wag.

JOAN: And last na lang po, sir. Ano po ang susunod na hakbang ng Palasyo kaugnay po dito, sir?

SEC. ROQUE: Bibili tayo ng helicopters either sa China, sa Russia o kaya sa South Korea.

IRYL: Good morning sir welcome po sa Kalinga. Sir, ano naman po iyong update na po ng autonomy bill po na as urgent po sa Congress?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, gaya ng aking nasabi bagama't sinusulong ng Presidente ang pederalismo ngayon eh sinabi rin niya na sa loob ng pederalismo dapat magkaroon ng BBL at dapat magkaroon ng otonomiya dito sa Cordillera.

IRYL: Sabi nga po, sir, ng Presidente na isasabay niya sa BBL ang autonomy bill ng Cordillera, sir. So, meron po ba tayong time table sa pag-usad po nitong bill?

SEC. ROQUE: Siguro po ibibigay ko ang mikropono kay Congressman Manaoang dahil siya po ngayon ang nakaupo sa Kongreso, tatlong buwan na po akong wala sa Kongreso.

CONG. MANAOANG: Thank you so much Secretary Harry. Ang update is by 15, the 15th that would be on Thursday dapat may meeting together with Senator Zubiri who sponsored the autonomy for the Cordillera sa Senate together with Secretary Dureza and the rest of the Cordillera leaders. Kasama nga dapat kami ni Governor, but since we are celebrating the 23rd Founding Anniversary of our province, we are here. But anyway, magaganda naman iyong salita na binigkas nila na kung itutuloy ang BBL before federalism, ganun din with the Autonomous Region of the Cordilleras. So I think we are on the right track as of now.

IRYL: Pero wala pong specific na number of years or timeline po?

CONG. MANAOANG: Since urgent iyong bill ng BBL, di urgent din iyong House Bill 5343.

GOV. BAAC: Yes, I go with the statement of Congressman Manaoang that it has much that the BBL is really working, it follow because it is the promise of the leadership that should there be any move to approve BBL, kasama rin iyong autonomy for the Cordilleras. So magandang significance na at least mapapasama tayo as a provision to the Constitution that there shall be autonomous region in the Muslim Mindanao and so with the Cordillera region, iyon at least matutupad na ito sa administrasyon ni President Duterte, iyon ang kagandahan nito.

SEC. ROQUE: Kung idadagdag ko lang, nagkakaroon po ngayon ng prayoridad ang Presidente sa mga Lumad at kasama naman po sa mga Lumad ang mga katutubo dito sa Cordillera. Ninanais po niya na magkaroon ng mas malawakang pag-unlad ang mga Lumads natin, ang mga indigenous communities natin dahil alam po natin na iyong kahirapan ng mga indigenous communities ang dahilan kung bakit ang NPA ay patuloy na binibiktima ang mga Lumads, sapilitan silang kinukuha para maging mandirigma sa hanay ng NPA. At sa pagtataguyod ng otonomiya inaasahan ng Presidente na magkakaroon din ng mas malawakang pag-unlad na magiging dahilan na bababa iyong pag-aabuso ng NPA sa ating mga Lumad.

CONG. MANGAOANG: Last Tuesday, we had a forum sa Congress just beside the office of Speaker Alvarez. Lahat ng mga tiga-Muslim Mindanao and Cordilleras were there. Ang topic was 'Where would be IPs go if there is federalism.'

Pero part of the topic was a discussion on the BBL as well as the discussions on the Autonomous Region of the Cordilleras, which is House Bill 5343. So iyon ang usapan doon na binitawan mismo din ni Speaker Alvarez that BBL first—autonomy for Cordillera first before Federalism. So iyon ang thrust ngayon. So it could be an autonomy within a federal state or form of government.

MARCIANO PAROY: Good morning, sir. Welcome to Kalinga. This is lighter and this leans more towards our media work in the province. We are all from the information industry here and mostly from the government side for that. Now, with the current news creation and delivery that we are plunged in, we are in a quandary if there are new standards under which we all performed our tasks considering that we would like to be effective as information workers in the

government side. We are part of the this national network of information officers and we would like to know if Malacañang indeed has new standards and to put it more bluntly, does Malacañang tolerate fake news, sir?

SEC. ROQUE: Malacañang has never tolerated fake news. We maintain that freedom of the press is anchored on responsibilities and one such responsibility is a total commitment to the truth.

Now, if you want to ask about the recent legislation on fake news, I have said that it is presumed to be unconstitutional, because it contemplates restriction, it is therefore prima facie violating the principle… the principle in enshrined in the Bill of Rights that there shall be no law prescribed abridging freedom of expression as well as freedom of the press. Obviously, that bill pending in the Senate is one such law that will abridge freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

And secondly, we also don't see any reason why they should be singling out government. I think the commitment of the truth should be a responsibility imposed in all form of journalists, not just those writing for the government. There simply is no basis for distinguishing between the commitment to write the truth if you are a government employee and a commitment to write the truth if you are private journalist.

And I can say with confidence that oftentimes, sometimes it is by accident, but all writers, whether it be journalist from the government or from the private media are equally guilty of publishing false news.

So there is no basis by just singling out government officials for criminal liability. That's in my mind unconstitutional. I promise that if one such law is enacted in Congress, I will resign from my post and I will sue before the Supreme Court to challenge its constitutionality.

DARWIN: Good morning sir Harry and welcome to Kalinga.

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, it's a pleasure to be here.

DARWIN: Idol kita talaga, sir. Sir, Inquirer.net reports that for January to October 2017 there were about 9,217 of HIV.

So sir would you say that the HIV is a human invention meant to reduce world population? And for the second question: Suppose the country is vying to be HIV and AIDS free country in the near future, why is it that the government issues business permits or licenses to businessmen wanting to operate a sex trade business especially in highly urbanized area? And for the third question sir: the health centers have been distributing condoms, do you have made HIV counseling and testing free and accessible but the problem remains apparent. So what is the long term solution of the government to stop this global pestilence from soaring? Thank you, sir.

SEC. ROQUE: Well, to begin with, when I was a member of Congress, I as the author, the principal of amendments to the AIDS law and I wanted it to be a stiffer crime for individuals to

actually discriminate against those with HIV and I wanted a bigger role from government in disseminating on the means of preventing AIDS.

SEC. ROQUE: But unfortunately I transferred to government; but I'm still acknowledged as the primary author of the AIDS amendments.

Now number one, I don't think it's a human invented disease, I think it's a public health problem, we did not invent it, it happened in the course of nature. And of course the number one means of dealing with public health threats such as AIDS is public dissemination on how the disease can be spread. It is spread primarily through same sex contact between male and of course it can also be transferred through joint needle use, because—well it acknowledged as one of the potent sources of AIDS.

I think government has to do more to disseminate on how the disease is transmitted. I think we should treat the problem of homosexuality with less stigma so that we can probably address the public health dimension of AIDS as afflicting—well, mostly and largely the most prone population are homosexual men but it's not limited to homosexual men. But I think government must do more to disseminate, government must do more to promote the use of condoms and government must do more also to provide treatment to those who have already have AIDS. There's now cocktail treatment that is being distributed by the Department of Health and we should allot more public finance towards this purpose.

RENCIE/RADYO PILIPINAS: (dialect) Secretary.

SEC. ROQUE: Yes.

RENCIE/RADYO PILIPINAS: Welcome to the province of Kalinga. Thank you for coming over and give feedback to our President how beautiful Kalinga is and of course—

SEC. ROQUE: I will tell him, we should move Malacañang to Kalinga, it is so beautiful.

RENCIE/RADYO PILIPINAS: Yes. And please give him also our concerns. We are so very thankful that in the Cordillera, about the Dengvaxia vaccine did not reach our children. But nakikiramay din kami at nakikipagsimpatya doon sa nangyari po sa mga bata na nabigyan po ng Dengvaxia vaccine.

Now sir this is my question, kasi kung iyon po ay gamot na pangkalahatan at mangyari po iyan, darating din po sa aming lugar iyon dito sa rehiyong ng Cordillera. Ano po ba iyong dapat na measure na sundin, masigurado po natin sir na ang gamot hindi lang po pambata, ay masigurado nating hindi ito delikado sa taong bayan?

SEC. ROQUE: Well unang una po, ang mayroon lang pong eskandalo ay Dengvaxia, iyong vaccine laban sa Dengue dahil ito po ay bago. Wala pong banta ang mga dati na nating ginagamit na mga vaccination laban sa iba pang mga sakit. Naku po mga nanay, mga tatay, huwag po kayong matakot sa iba't ibang klase pang pabakuna bukod lang po dito sa Dengvaxia dahil ito naman ay bago. So kapag hindi ninyo pinabakunahan ang inyong mga anak laban doon sa iba

pang mga sakit na alam naman natin na safe iyong mga bakuna ay talaga pong magkakasakit lalo ang ating mga anak.

Nagsimula na nga po iyong measles outbreak muli sa Davao pa. Kasi nga po iyong mga nanay natatakot na magpabakuna laban sa measles. Mas makakasama po iyong takot natin sa lahat ng klase ng bakuna; ang mayroon lang pong kontrobersiya ay iyong Dengvaxia.

Ang Presidente naman po nangako na tapusin lang ang imbestigasyon, tanungin natin, alamin natin kung alam ba ng Sanofi na talagang may side effect na ganito ang kanilang bakuna and yet binenta na nila sa mga bansa kasama ang Pilipinas. Alamin din natin kung iyong mga opisyales na bumili ng Sanofi ay alam itong ganitong side effect at kung alam nila talaga iyan, ang sabi nga ng Pangulo ay hindi lang iyan simple reckless imprudence, baka iyan po ay homicide pa, kung talagang alam noong mga kinauukulan—mga opisyales noong nakalipas na administrasyon na may side effect na ganiyan ang Sanofi.

Pero hanggang wala pa naman pong findings ang mga nag-iimbestiga, huminahon muna po tayo at mayroon naman tayong preliminary finding po ng PGH na doon sa katorseng kaso na pinag-aralan nila, siyam po walang kinalaman ang Dengvaxia, dalawa hindi sapat ang impormasyon para magkaroon ng conclusion, mayroon pong tatlo na posible na may relasyon sa Dengvaxia; pero sa dalawa po, ang finding nila ay parang walang epekto po iyong Dengvaxia vaccine, parang hindi nabakunahan iyong mga bata at doon sa isa ay namatay daw iyong bata matapos lamang ng apat na araw matapos siyang mabakunahan, ibig sabihin mukhang nag-i-incubate na iyong sakit.

So on the basis of this first 14 examinations conducted by the UP-PGH ay siguro naman po pupuwede nang huminahon iyong ating mga magulang. Pero patuloy po ang imbestigasyon at patuloy po ang paghahanap ng pananagutan dito sa Dengvaxia vaccine na eskandalong ito.

RENCIE/RADYO PILIPINAS: Maraming salamat, sir.

LARRY LOPEZ/PIA: Again, welcome to Kalinga, Secretary Harry Roque and future Senator of the Philippines. Sir, first we assure you that we will not give you any fake news from Kalinga.

SEC. ROQUE: [laughs]

LARRY LOPEZ/PIA: Still on our rice situation, the follow up with the question of kasamang Basil here. Mr. Secretary, do you think it's high time that government should adjust its palay procurement price through NFA that was pegged since time immemorial at 17 pesos per kilo and make it more competitive with the price offered by our private palay traders which is definitely higher. So that instead of helping Vietnamese farmers, we will help our own Filipino farmers by buying our own produce?

SEC. ROQUE: Well definitely po kagaya ng sinabi ko kanina, iyan po ay kinokonsidera na ng NFA na taasan iyong presyo ng bigas natin. Pero alam ninyo kasi Law of Supply and Demand maski hindi naman binibili ng NFA nabebenta pa rin sa merkado. Kaya nga po walang

kakulangan tayo sa bigas dahil ang naubos lang iyong NFA stockpile. Pero hindi naman po ubos na ubos.

So talaga nga lang… tama kayo mababa masyado ang bili ng NFA kaya iyong mga magsasaka ayaw magbenta sa NFA. So siguro ho kung magkakaroon ng adjustment at maging mas realistic ang presyo ng NFA ay mapapalago natin iyong NFA stock at hindi magiging problema iyong kaubusan ng NFA stock.

Pero ang inuulit ko po pagdating naman po sa commercial rice, wala po tayong problema. Ang problema po talagang tumaas ang presyo ng bigas full stock dahil lumalaki ang populasyon at tumataas talaga ang presyo ng bigas sa merkado ng bilihin. Okay? Malacañang questions na ang dami ditong—

LARRY LOPEZ/PIA: My second question is for Congressman Allen Jesse. On the current push for federalism sir—on the part of our Cordillera Congressman, are we ready with a copy of our proposed organic act so that in case na move for autonomy rolls on in Congress, we are ready to submit the—a copy of it?

CONGRESSMAN MANGOANG: Tapos na iyong copy ng organic that's why it's filed—it's called House Bill 5343, its now at the committee level in Congress and another… the Senate version was filed by Senator Zubiri. So with that pino-push ng both Houses hopefully para matapos ngayong taon dapat. Ang sabi nga ni President Rodrigo Roa Duterte urgent bill iyong BBL and so with the House Bill 5343.

LARRY LOPEZ/PIA: Sir last question. Sir, with the development now towards federalism, do you think there's still a space left on the quest for Cordillera autonomy?

CONGRESSMAN MANGOANG: I think so. Because urgent nga iyong bill ng BBL. Ang sabi nga ni President, there's should be BBL first before federalism and so with the House Bill 5343 which is the creation of the Autonomous Region of the Cordilleras. So it's—there's ample time to—for as long as it's marked urgent, then both Houses would definitely work on it, meaning the Lower House and the Senate.

LARRY LOPEZ/PIA: Thank you sir. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Okay we'll give in to our Malacañang Press Corp, waiting, watching in **Malacañang. From Chona Yu:** Sir reaction dumadami iyong batikos na sinabi ng Pangulo iyong order niya sa rebel na barilin sa private part?

SEC. ROQUE: Alam ninyo po matapos ang isang taon at kalahati dapat kakilala na natin ang Presidente. Paulit-ulit kong sinasabi 'do not take the President literally but take him seriously.'

Ang mensahe po ng Presidente, dahil wala na nga pong pagkakataon na magkaroon ng peace talks dahil puro katrayduran naman ang ipinakita ng CPP-NPA, asahan ninyo na tayo po ay papasok sa digmaang sa NPA at tayo po ay magwawagi. Iyan lang po ang mensahe ng ating Presidente. Huwag ninyo pong kunin literally iyong kaniyang sinasabi dahil kung ang Presidente

po ay labag sa kapakanan ng mga kababaihan ay hindi po niya dapat ipinag-utos iyong pagtigil ng deployment ng ating mga kababayan sa Kuwait dahil ang mga nabibiktima po sa Kuwait karamihan po mga kababaihan natin. Iyong kaniyang order po na itigil na iyan maski tayo mawawalan ng kita, iyan po ay isang paghihiwatig at pruweba na inuuna ng ating Presidente ang interes hindi lang ng mga Filipino kung hindi ng ating mga kababaihan. Hindi dapat binabastos, hindi dapat inaapi, dapat po ginagalang.

MODERATOR: Maraming salamat. From Leila Salaverria: Good a.m., ang question ko: What is the government's policy or plan of action for OFWs in Kuwait who don't want to go home? Also what is the government's plan about OFWs in other Middle Eastern countries based on governments data? Is it okay only Kuwait where there are massive abuses of OFWs?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, unang-una po, wala pong sapilitan. Kung gusto naman iyong mga nagtatrabaho sa Kuwait na manitili, nasa kanila po ang desisyon. Pero kung sila po ay inaapi, ang sabi ng Pangulo, hindi naman siya papayag na ang mga Pilipino, lalo na ang mga kababaihan, aapihin ng mga dayuhan. Naghihirap na nga, nagtatrabaho na nga, malayo sa kanilang mga mahal sa buhay ay tatratuhin pang parang hayop. Iyon po ang sabi ng ating Presidente, na sa kanila na lang ang kanilang pera. Mas importante po ang dignidad at iyong katauhan ng ating mga Filipina.

Pangalawa po, ang polisiya po diyan, iyong mga gustong umuwi, mabibigyan naman po ng immediate P5,000 financial assistance, P20,000 to begin another livelihood galing po sa OWWA. Pero lahat po ng ating mga misyon ay binigyan na rin ng order na maghanap ng alternatibong trabaho para doon sa mga aalis ng Kuwait. Ang binibigyan po ng prayoridad, iyong mga bansa na lumagda na ng mga ILO Convention na kinikilala po ang karapatan ng mga migrant workers, at tinitingnan po natin iyong mga bansa kagaya ng Oman at Bahrain na walang kahit anong reklamo pong pang-aabuso sa ating mga kapwa Pilipino.

MODERATOR: Hi, sir. Good morning. Makibalita lang: Missing Pinays in Kuwait, balita po kina Rosalie Doliente and Evelyn Bisiledes?

SEC. ROQUE: Siguro po magre-release ako ng statement dahil kinakailangang tanungin ko po ang ating embahada sa Kuwait tungkol dito sa dalawang nawawalang workers natin.

Can I ask the PNA staff to take down the two names so that we can immediately forward it to the Philippine Mission.

MODERATOR: We have it here, sir. [DIALECT] Reymund Tinaza: DA Secretary Piñol announced DA to sell rice at 32 pesos tomorrow in front of DA office in Quezon City. Stocks reportedly from private sector. Why can't government just bring and sell the cheaper rice to the public market to make them available to the masang Pilipino at maiwasan na PR stunt lang ito?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, siguro po ito na iyong panimula nga na dadalhin muli sa sambayanan iyong mas murang bigas dahil nga po dito sa tingin namin ay artipisyal na nangyayari pagdating po sa ating bigas.

Uulitin ko po, wala pong shortage, dapat wala pong nararamdamang shortage, at dapat po ang halaga ay hindi naman ganito kataas. So asahan ninyo po, gagawa ng hakbang si Secretary Piñol para maibsan itong ating problema sa presyo ng bigas.

MODERATOR: Salamat po. **From Aileen:** Reaksiyon po ng Palace sa viral video na pina-paddle ng local officials ang mga sumusukong drug dependents sa Lamitan, Basilan. Sabi po ng netizen, natatakot po ang iba na lumantad kung ganito ang ginagawa sa mga sumusuko. Kaya paano raw po mapagtatagumpayan ang war on drugs kung mismong mga lokal na officials ang sumisira sa kampaniya?

SEC. ROQUE: Unang-una, hindi po ganyan ang polisiya natin sa mga sumusuko. Sa dami po ng mga sumusuko, milyon na po ang mga sumusuko, ngayon lang naman napabalita na may ganyang paddling incident. Iimbestigahan po natin iyan. In fact, bago po tayo mag-next press briefing, siguro po naparating na natin iyong importansya na maimbestigahan ito. Dahil tayo po, ang ginagawa natin ay binibigyan natin ng pagkakataon na ang lahat ng drug dependents ay sumuko. At napakalaki na pong budget ang nailaan natin para sa rehabilitasyon po ng mga sumusukong mga users.

Uulitin ko po, sa ating gobyerno, ang user po ay biktima, kinakailangan bigyan sila ng pagkakataon po magbago. At napakadaming mga pondo na po ang nailaan para sa rehabilitation ng mga drug users.

MODERATOR: Maraming salamat po. From Maricel Halili: May we have the Palace's reaction, Beijing is seeking naming rights for the seven or eight submarine within or seven months in Philippine Sea.

SEC. ROQUE: Well, iyan po siguro naman ay isang kagustuhan ng Tsina na pag-aaralan ng Pilipinas. Pero wala pong pupuwedeng magdikta sa atin kung ano ang ipapangalan natin doon sa mga submerged features na ito.

MODERATOR: Follow up po: What's the motive of China? Is this a cause of concern?

SEC. ROQUE: Ako po ay tagapagsalita ng Pangulo; hindi po ako tagapagsalita ng Tsina. Tanungin po ninyo sila. Bakit kaya ganoon?

MODERATOR: From Badette: Tanong ko lang po, may update na po ba sa trip ni Duterte sa Kuwait? May final answer na po ba kung tuloy or not? If not, why at sa Kuwait lang po tayo may problema pagdating sa treatments ng OFW? Ang hingi po sana namin ay kung saan na po talaga dadalhin ang displaced OFW? Thanks po.

SEC. ROQUE: Alam ninyo, napakabilis ng mga pangyayari. Sinabi minsan ng Presidente na siya ay nakipagpulong sa Ambahador ng Kuwait, at dahil diyan ay nagkaroon ng plano sa Kuwait sa lalong mabilis na panahon. Naunahan po tayo dahil ang sabi ng Pangulo, pero kapag mayroon na namang Pilipino na naging biktima, talagang mag-i-impose na ako ng total deployment ban to Kuwait. Isang araw lang po ang nakalipas, nakarating na sa kaniya iyong larawan ng Pilipinang kapatid natin na nilagay sa freezer, at naging dahilan naman noong

Biyernes – wala nga po ako doon sa Davao, hindi ko inaasahan na siya ay magpe-press conference – inanunsiyo niya na iyong total deployment ban na. At ang mga larawan naman pala po ay ibinigay ng aming kasama sa Kongreso na si Congressman John Bertiz ng ACT OFW Party List. So napakabilis po ng pangyayari.

Sa ngayon po, walang kasiguraduhan kung matutuloy pa ang trip to Kuwait. Pinag-aaralan po iyan dahil ang inaantay din natin ay senyales galing sa gobyerno ng Kuwait kung paano mabibigyan naman ng katarungan iyong ating mga kababayan na nabiktima ng karumaldumal na mga pangyayari sa bansang Kuwait. Under international law po, may obligasyon ang Kuwait na bigyan ng katarungan iyong ating mga kababayan.

MODERATOR: Salamat po. From Jo Montemayor: Rep. Garcia and Fr. Ranhil Aquino says, Ombudsman can go to Supreme Court to ask for mandamus compelling Congress to enforce the decision. Any comment po? Thanks.

SEC. ROQUE: Alam ninyo, puwede silang dumulog sa Korte Suprema. Wala pong pipigil diyan. And this is in relation ata to Rep. Gwen Garcia.

Well, ako naman po, alam ninyo naman po, si Gwen Garcia and I are very close. Pareho kaming nanindigan para sa impeachment ni Chairman Bautista. Noong una po, tatlo lang kami, kasama namin si Congressman Bambol Tolentino. So I cannot be impartial as to Congresswoman Gwen Garcia. I consider here as my best friend forever. At naninindigan po ako na sa ating Saligang Batas, tanging Kongreso lang po ang pupuwedeng magdisiplina sa kaniyang mga miyembro.

Noong nasa Kongreso po ako, maraming nagpapatanggal din doon sa akin. Pero hindi po sila nagtagumpay dahil ang desisyon lang po, kapag ikaw ay nanumpa ng congressman ay mapapatanggal ka lang o madidisiplina ka lang sa boto ng iyong mga kasama sa Kongreso. At iyan nga po ngayon ang estado nung diumano pagsisisante kay Congresswoman Gwen.

Kung matatandaan ninyo po, si Senator Joel Villanueva ay may order din, na sinisisante ng Ombudsman si Senator Joel Villanueva. Congress, either the House or the Senate, has taken the same view that under the Constitution, the Ombudsman cannot order either House of Congress to do as it wishes.

So they can go to court, why not. They will not be prevented. Pero sa konting kaalaman ko sa batas, at labinglimang taon naman po ako nagturo ng Constitutional law at international law, ang alam ko po, ang covered lang ng mandamus ay iyong mga ministerial, iyong paper pushing na tinatawag, wala ng pag-iisip na kinakailangang gawin. Pero iyong pagpapatanggal po, iyan po ay discretion; hindi po iyan ministerial so baka ma-dismiss din iyong mandamus na puwedeng ihain sa Korte Suprema.

So iba po iyong puwedeng maghain doon sa pagbibigyan ba at aaktuhan ba ng ng korte. Puwede pong maghain pero baka ma-dismiss po iyan.

MODERATOR: Sir, we're down with last two questions, if you don't mind, sir. From Tuesday: Reaction, Davao City Council declared Trillanes persona non grata.

SEC. ROQUE: I do not know how you want me to react because this has nothing to do with the President, and I speak for the President. Other than, congratulations to Davao City.

MODERATOR: Dagdag na reaksiyon ng Palace on Senator Villar's suggestion na female Filipino domestic workers could do also good jobs as welders in government's Build, Build, Build infra program and local tourism industry?

SEC. ROQUE: Ang talagang gusto hong mangyari ng Presidente ay hindi na makipagsapalaran sa mga malalayong lugar ang ating kapwa Pilipino. At ang tanging paraan na makakamit ito ay mabigyan sila ng trabaho dito sa Pilipinas. Itong build, build, build po ay inaasahan nating magkakaroon nang mas maraming trabaho, at ito po'y trabaho hindi lang para sa ating kalalakihan, pati rin po sa ating mga kababaihan.

MODERATOR: Maraming salamat po.

SEC. ROQUE: Teka ho, baka mayroon pang further questions dahil mayroon akong dalawang text messages. Actually, mayroon nga po.

From Dexter Ganibe: Ano po ang updates sa magiging deputy spokesperson ninyo na binanggit mo noong unang press briefing? Malapit na po, nag-aantay po ng resulta sa bar.

Tapos mayroon pa pong isa. Jo Montemayor—ayun, natanong na po. Si Joseph Morong, maraming salamat, Joseph Morong. It wasn't a question, but maraming salamat, Joseph. So wala na pong questions.

MODERATOR: Sir, pahabol, please. Reaksiyon on Gabriela's statement to President Duterte's order to government to shoot female members of the NPA in their private parts. Gabriela Women's Party Representative Emy De Jesus said the President's remark is openly encourages violence against women.

SEC. ROQUE: Sinagot ko na po iyan. Huwag po nating tanggapin na literal ang sinasabi ng Presidente, pero seryosohin natin siya. Siguro po itong major decision na ipagbawal ang deployment sa Kuwait ng ating mga Pilipinang kababayan ay patunay na pinangangalagaan ng ating Pangulo ang seguridad, ang pagkatao ng ating mga Pilipinang mga kapatid.

MODERATOR: Sir, your parting words po sa ating mga manunood at nakikinig din po.

SEC. ROQUE: Well, maraming salamat po kay Governor, kay Congressman, kay Vice Governor at sa aking kaklase, si General Imbang. Maraming salamat po sa mga Kalinga at sa buong probinsiya ng Kalinga at mga taga-Kalinga, ito po ang kauna-unahang pagkakataon na nagkaroon tayo ng press briefing dito sa Kalinga. Asahan ninyo po na mauulit pa ito dahil ang ating layunin po ay ilapit sa inyo ang Malacañang.

Pero sa ngayon po, bumabati po ako ng Happy Birthday, 23rd Founding Anniversary of Kalinga and Happy Budong Festival, 2nd Budong Festival.

Para po sa mga nanonood, ang Budong Festival po pala ay isang festival kung saan pinapatibay po ng mga Kalinga iyong kanilang pagnanais na magkaroon ng kapayapaan sa iba't-ibang tribo dito po sa Kalinga.

So hanggang sa araw po ng Huwebes, galing po sa Malacañang, maraming salamat po sa inyong pagtutok. Ito po ang inyong Spox Harry Roque, magandang umaga po sa inyo lahat.

 # END#

Source: PCOO-NIB (News and Information Bureau) #NIB