

Presidential Communications Operations Office

News and Information Bureau

PRESS BRIEFING OF PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON HARRY ROQUE

APRIL 26, 2018 (12:22 – 12:46 P.M.)

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Good afternoon, MPC. Good afternoon Presidential Spokesperson, Atty. Harry Roque sir...

SEC. ROQUE: Good afternoon Pilipinas, and good afternoon ladies and gentlemen of the Malacañang Press Corps.

Good news first. Credits Suisse established a representative office in the Philippines – this reflects the high confidence in our economy by the international community and the strides taken by the government to boost economic growth. The bank believes that with the total household wealth in the Philippines growing by 10.7% per annum since 2000, to reach 662 US billion dollars in 2017, as well as the growing number of high net worth individuals in the country, it can do business here in wealth management.

The Duterte administration is committed to fostering a conducive business environment in the country that would attract more banks and other reputable financial institutions such as Credit Suisse to setup shops here.

Now, we take note that the Philippines dropped a few slots in the ranking of the 2018 World Press Freedom Index. We are now 133rd, but this is still an improvement from where we were at 138th with the entry of the Duterte administration. We'd like to highlight that we are addressing the biggest threat to press freedom, which is the killing of journalists. We have established the Task Force on Media Security created by the President to monitor cases of media violence and to provide legal assistance to the victims and to their family members.

Earlier this month, its special agents went to the provinces to investigate and/or initiate reinvestigation of cases of media workers' killings. The mission resulted in discovery of five more convictions in addition to three that had been previously reported, bringing up to eight the total number of convictions from 2012 to 2016. This shows our very strong resolve to genuinely and concretely address violence against members of the media and/or journalism profession. We note that the World Press Freedom Index also expressed very strong alarm over the developments in the United States, China and Russia.

And of course at 115, having been a professor for 15 years of law, we'd like to congratulate in advance and wish everyone, all the barristers good luck on this year's bar exam. We hope that many of our country's new lawyers would pursue a career in government so that they may take part in helping us with our shared goal of creating genuine reforms for the nation. Your idealism,

integrity and competence are most welcome under the current administration. Should he passed, you will meet our Deputy Spox next week.

The President has already ordered the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency to disclose the names of barangay officials included in its list of all those allegedly involved in the illegal drugs trade. Relative to this, we are grateful for China's support for our campaign against illegal drugs through personal training and detention of drug retention seizure and testing equipment. If you will recall during the President's state visit to China last October 2016, we've signed the protocol on cooperation between the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency and Narcotics Control Bureau of the Ministry of Public Security of China.

Let me now recognize the elephant on the room. We would like to reiterate the statement of the Secretary of Foreign Affairs that the Palace is equally disturbed by the recent developments involving the recall of our Ambassador to Kuwait, Ambassador Villa. After the meeting of the President with the Kuwaiti Ambassador, we were convinced that all kinks had been ironed out reinforced by the apology given by the Secretary of Foreign Affairs the following day.

We hope that this development will not lead to a further worsening of bilateral ties between the two countries. We hope that this is Kuwaitis' way of just expressing its anger for which SFA Alan Cayetano had already apologized, and we believe and hope that the passage of time will heal all wounds and will lead to normalize ties. We continue to hope that the MOA on the minimum terms and conditions of employment relative to the hiring of Filipinos in Kuwait would also be signed as scheduled after Ramadan.

On Sister Fox, I'd already articulated the position of the Palace. The latest move of the CID was to cancel her missionary visa because of a violation on the terms and conditions of her stay in the country which requires that she should not participate in political activities. I believe I've shown you proof that she did in fact participate in a political activity; she was speaking in a KMU-Gabriela rally in a strike involving a multinational corporation in Davao. That clearly proves that she has been participating in political activities. I know it's not good visuals, but *dura lex sed lex* – the law might be harsh such is the law – we have no choice but to implement.

My appeal to the opposition is, please look into the mirror. You did the same thing to foreigners. Why? Because it is the law! In fact, the law that is in placed now was still approved by former Secretary Leila De Lima.

On the Boracay case, I believe I've also said that the position of the Palace is while we respect the rights of individuals to sue and we respect the independence of the Judiciary, we are confident that this petition will not be given merit by the court. An earlier Supreme Court ruling had already recognized that bulk of Boracay except for a private titles issued to Tirol family belongs to the state. And an indispensable element of a petition for injunction or a prayer for TRO is there must be irreparable injuries. We do not see how individuals who cannot claim ownership over Boracay can suffer any irreparable injury that would warrant the issuance of a Temporary Restraining Order or a permanent injunction. And that is why unless restrained, the closure of Boracay to all tourists will proceed as planned.

Likewise, I'd like to assure you that all the relevant proclamations had been received by the President this morning. There was some delay from the NDRRMC's office, but I was assured it has been received; it will be signed by the President in due course.

Questions?

CELERINA MONTE/MANILA SHIMBUN: Good afternoon sir, regarding the Kuwait issue. So whatever happened to the President's DDS – Duterte Diplomacy Style? Do you think there's a need to change the fact?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, I don't think so. But we do not know what happened, that's why the Secretary of Foreign Affairs also summon the Kuwaiti Ambassador to his office today, to find out what really happened, because we genuinely thought that the issue was behind us.

CELERINA/MLA SHIMBUN: So, what's the feedback from the DOLE regarding this labor deal that we're working out with Kuwait?

SEC. ROQUE: I believe it's been finalized and will see when it will be signed, it was scheduled to be signed at the end of Ramadan. There's no indication that it will not be signed.

CELERINA/MLA SHIMBUN: But at least iyong demand natin could still be there?

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, all our demands are there.

LIELA SALAVERRIA/PDI: Sir is the administration considering doing anything more to assuage Kuwait's feeling over the incident?

SEC. ROQUE: I do not know what the next steps are. In very ticklish diplomatic incidents such as these, obviously I have to defer to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs. So, I hope you understand. I believe that the Secretary of Foreign Affairs will also have his own press briefing today.

ROSE NOVENARIO/HATAW: Sir, nag-usap na ba si Presidente at saka is Secretary Cayetano tungkol dito sa isyung ito? Dahil apparently, lumalabas na nabaligtad iyong sitwasyon, imbes na iyong Kuwait iyong ating hinihingan ng paliwanag sa diumano ay mga pagmamamaltrato nila sa mga OFWs, ngayon sila na bale iyong—tayo na iyong defensive position dahil doon sa ginawa ng DFA – doon sa rescue ng OFWs?

SEC. ROQUE: Wala naman pong offensive/defensive. Ang tingin ko naiintindihan naman ng gobyernong Kuwait na itong Presidente natin, hindi naman pupuwede pabayaang ating mga kababayan na nagtatrabaho sa Kuwait. At the same time nga, sinabi ko na nga kahapon na kinikilala naman natin ang soberenya ng Kuwait. So the bottom line is, the President must stand for the welfare of our workers and iyan po ay non-negotiable. So ang tanong ninyo kung in contact si Presidente kay Secretary Alan, yes po! Alam ko po iyan, dahil nakikigulo rin ako kagabi. I understand eh sobra na iyong kanilang communications. So pinabayaan ko na po sila at sinabi ko na lang that I will defer to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs.

SHIELA FRIAS/IBC 13: Sir, good afternoon. Sir, you said earlier na there were no indications that the MOA will not push through, bakit po, paano n'yo po nasabi ito na magpu-push through after nitong nangyari?

SEC: ROQUE: Well, ang sinabi lang naman nila, eh iyon nga po, eh dinemand nila na umalis iyong Ambassador at pinababalik nila iyong Ambassador nila. Now, in diplomacy, that's really a grave expression of displeasure, pero wala naman po silang binitawang salita na wala nang MOA na malalagdaan. So habang wala namang ganoong salita, we supposed and assume that it will push through.

MARITA/PTV: Sir, reaksyon n'yo lang po doon sa apparently, may ilang mga Congressman na calling for the resignation of SFA Cayetano?

SEC: ROQUE: Naku! Hayaan na muna po natin iyan, ayusin muna natin itong gusot na ito: That there are 250,000 Filipino workers in Kuwait and 10,800 apparently undocumented. So unahin po muna natin itong ating mga nandoodon sa Kuwait. Lahat po ng hakbang natin, para po sa kapakanan ng ating mga mamamayan dahil napakadami po nila diyan sa Kuwait. Hinay-hinay po lahat tayo dito sa Pilipinas at nandoon po ang 250,000 Filipinos, including 10,800 undocumented Filipino's.

ROSALIE COZ/UNTV: Sir, maituturing po natin na lowest point po ito sa diplomatic relation ng Philippines at Kuwait, ngayong pinaalis na po ang Ambassador ng Philippines doon. Papaano ngayon natin matitiyak ang kapakanan ng mga OFW after nitong desisyon na ito?

SEC: ROQUE: Well, gaya ng sinabi ko, humingi na ng paumanhin si Secretary of foreign Affairs bago itong insidenteng ito. Siguro this is just their way really of stressing their displeasure, pero for now the Filipinos continue to be protected by international law and the laws of humanity. So, kahit ano pa pong mangyari, ang basehan po ng proteksiyon ay batas pang-international.

ROSE/HATAW: Sir, hiniling ba noong Kuwaiti Ambassador na i-delete iyong mga na-upload pong video doon sa rescue sa OFWs. May ganoon po ba silang demand?

SEC: ROQUE: I am not aware, pero hindi ko po alam kung nandoon pa iyong mga pinost ng mga taong-gobyerno, parang wala naman po.

SHIELA/IBC 13: Sir, quick lang doon lang sa process, kasi di ba pinapaalis ng Kuwaiti government iyong Ambassador po natin doon sa Kuwait, so paano po ba iyon magpapadala ba tayo ng bago or papano po ba?

SEC: ROQUE: Well, ang ibig sabihin lang naman noon, hindi katanggap-tanggap iyong Ambassador na ito. So palitan mo, iyon po ang ibig sabihin kapag ikaw ay nadeklarang persona non grata! So, kinakailangan kang magpadala ng bagong Ambahador.

SHIELA/IBC 13: Sino po ang ipapadala natin, sir?

SEC. ROQUE: Ah wala pa pong napipili.

LIELA SALAVERRIA: Sir doon sa World Press Freedom rankings, kasi there was also an observation that the President's tirades against the media contributed to the lower ranking. So, do you agree with this assessment?

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi ko po alam, kasi iyon din naman ang sinabi nila sa Amerika eh. So hindi lang po Pilipinas ang sinabihan nila. Ganundin ang sinabi nila sa Amerika, kay President Trump, iyong mga tirades ni Trump sa Amerika raw is also a cause of concern. So hindi lang po iyan directed to the Philippines, directed also to the US and in any case, it's a private organization.

Our record will stand for itself. We have taken steps po para pangalagaan ang buhay ng mga mamamahayag – wala naman po tayong pinakukulong na mga mamamahayag. Ang Presidente, hindi nagdedemanda ng libel. Kung ang Presidente nagagalit sa media, eh kasi kasagutan iyon doon sa mga tingin niyang hindi katotohanan ang sinusulat sa kaniya. So that's within the free marketplace of ideas. Hindi naman po pupuwede gagawing punching bag ang Presidente, hindi siya sasagot. Pag ginawa ninyo siyang punching bag, sasagot iyong Presidente natin! Iyon po siguro ang kakaiba kay Presidente and I like him for that.

Q: So you don't think it's danger to press freedom and—

SEC. ROQUE: No, not at all! Who's been in danger in the Philippines? Alam ninyo naman iyan! Sino bang na-in danger dito with tirades of the President? Does Pia feel that she's in anyway in danger?

Q: Maybe not in danger but preventing them from doing their job.

SEC. ROQUE: Has the President rants prevented PIA or even Rappler from continuing what they habitually do? Hindi!

Q: Sir, iyong ban you don't think it's a—

SEC. ROQUE: No, she's able to cover our press briefing. She's able to write her stories. Nawalan lang siya ng contact kay Presidente. Ewan ko kung they missed each other already. But certainly you're in a better position than her kasi kapag mayroong public function ang Presidente na open to the media, nakikita ninyo, nakakausap ninyo ang subject ninyo. Iyon ang nawala sa kaniya. At sa akin naman, that goes with the trade. I think journalist should always value the relationship with their subjects. So hindi pupuwede na bale-walain iyong relasyon at kung anu-anong ginagawa mo. Puwede ba naman iyong babatuhin mo ng babatuhin tapos gusto mong maging kaibigan iyong subject mo para magkaroon ka ng access. No, I think part of the profession entails giving a premium and importance to your relationship with the principal. I think all professions follow that same rule. We have the same rule in lawyering.

ROSE NOVENARIO/HATAW: Sir, iyong kay ano lang po, kay Tourism Undersecretary Pompee La Viña kasi noong sinibak siya sa SSS, sa press briefing dito sinabi ninyo na nasangkot siya sa katiwalian at may vilification campaign siyang ginawa laban sa kaniyang mga

kasamahan. Ano po iyong dahilan at binalik pa siya sa puwesto considering iyong kaniyang naging track record sa SSS?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, sabihin na lang po natin that the power of appointment – particularly to post which are really reserve for the president is really a presidential prerogative – na kay Presidente na po iyon.

ROSE/HATAW: So hindi po nakumpromiso iyong kaniyang kampanya laban sa korapsiyon doon sa pagbabalik niya kay Pompee La Viña?

SEC. ROQUE: Gaya po ng sabi ko, na kay Presidente na po iyon. He was the appointing authority to both – the position of SSS and the DOT.

ROSE/HATAW: May kaso po ba si Pompee La Viña sa Ombudsman?

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi ko po alam, as of now.

ROSE/HATAW: Okay. Thank you.

LEILA SALEVERRIA/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: Sir, was there a process in which Mr. La Viña was cleared – kasi, for him to be returned to a government position?

SEC. ROQUE: As I said, it is a presidential prerogative. I don't really have to explain, justify an act which is inherently executively nature and subject absolutely to the President's discretion.

LEILA/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: Pero sir, doesn't he seem inconsistent with his frequent pronouncement that he won't tolerate a whip of corruption?

SEC. ROQUE: My friend as I said, it's his prerogative. [laughs].

LEILA/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: Sir, about naman po sa narco-list na... inalumahan po kasi ito ng CHR dahil paglabag po ito sa karapatang pantao noong mga barangay officials po and kagawad na ilalabas po?

SEC. ROQUE: I confirm that the order was given and again that's within the powers of the executive to warn the public on the possible drug personalities who may be elected into public office. So that's a judgment call of the President. They could object and object but the voters are entitled to this information.

LEILA/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: Personally sir nakita ninyo na po ba iyong narco-list?

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi pa po.

TINA MENDEZ/PHIL. STAR: Sir, good afternoon. Follow up lang on the executive—on declaration of state of calamity on Boracay?

SEC. ROQUE: Nandoon na po sa kaniya at ilalabas naman iyan siguro anytime now. So nandoon na po iyan.

TINA/PHIL. STAR: Sir, can we have at least few of the salient points of the—

SEC. ROQUE: Alam ninyo ang mangyayari diyan as usual as per our SOP, it's the Malacañang Press Corps that will have first crack. Ilalagay ko po iyan sa ating heads-up. Okay? It's still your first crack.

TINA/PHIL. STAR: Sir, before the deadlines? Please. [laughs].

SEC. ROQUE: Hopefully before the deadlines but you will have first crack.

ROSE NOVENARIO/HATAW: Sir, last na lang. Sir, ilang araw na lang po Labor Day na. Sir, mayroon na po kayang resolusyon iyong idinulog ng PTV sa kanilang karaingan tungkol po sa kanilang mga collective negotiation agreement; tungkol po doon sa non-payment ng kanilang back wages. Nakarating na po ba kay Presidente ito dahil nagpadala po sila ng sulat last month pa?

SEC. ROQUE: Pahingi po ng sulat ng PTV, ibibigay ko mismo kay Secretary Andanar dahil sa ilalim po iyan ni Secretary Andanar. At tingnan po natin kung maaaktuhan ni Secretary Andanar iyan.

ROSE/HATAW: Ay parang ano ho, nag-usap na sila pero hindi yata ibinigay iyong kanilang demands.

SEC. ROQUE: Eh tatanungin ko muna kung anong response ni Secretary Andanar. So hayaan ninyo munang ibigay ko formally at i-clarify kung naaktuhan na niya iyong liham ng mga taga PTV4.

ROSE/HATAW: Pero liham po iyon kay Presidente, hindi kay Secretary Andanar.

SEC. ROQUE: Pero alam ninyo naman ang Presidente, hindi po nagma-micromanage. Kayo naman pati ba naman terms and conditions of PTV4 gusto ninyo ang Presidente maghimasok. Anong mangyayari sa ating Presidente?

ROSE/HATAW: Labor agreements po iyon, hindi po iyon terms and conditions.

SEC. ROQUE: Okay, okay, okay, okay. Cool ka lang. Baka mamaya pumangit ako sa PTV4. Kaya ayusin natin iyan, okay!

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Anymore **Questions?** Other matters, other topics? Sister Fox or—?

SEC. ROQUE: Wala na? Maraming salamat po at see you next week. Ah no, see you on Singapore para doon sa mga pupunta ng Singapore. Nandoon na? Okay, magandang tanghali po.

ALVIN/RADYO PILIPINAS: Maraming salamat Spokesperson Attorney Harry Roque. Back to studio sa PTV4, Radyo Pilipinas.

###

Source: PCOO-NIB (News and Information Bureau-Data Processing Center)