

Presidential Communications Operations Office

News and Information Bureau

PRESS BRIEFING OF PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON HARRY ROQUE

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ORCHARD HOTEL, SINGAPORE

SEC. ROQUE: Good evening Pilipinas, and good evening to the ladies and gentlemen of the Malacañang Press Corps; including members of FOCAP. This is an open press briefing even for members of FOCAP. And take note that this is the first time that I'm having a press briefing in Singapore. So whatever press briefings you have been had earlier, was not an official Palace briefing but briefing of the respective secretaries who appeared in those conferences.

Now I only have matters taken up in the bilateral between the Vietnamese government Prime Minister, Nguyen Xuan Phuc and the President which ended about an hour and a half ago. And some pointers for the pull aside meeting with Indonesian President Joko Widodo, although I think it may still be—ah, it hasn't started yet, so perhaps I should not mention what will be discussed there yet. So, we'll just talk about the Vietnamese meeting and its substantial.

To give you a background, the President and the Prime Minister discussed about purchase of rice of course; Vietnam reiterating their willingness to supply quality rice to the Philippines. The issue of fishermen being arrested for illegal fishing was also discussed. Our President stressing na hindi naman masyadong malaking issue ito, marami naman daw isda; nabo-bore na iyong mga isda, nag-aantay na mahuli at ito ay maliit na bagay so pagkahuli eh nire-release naman. At nagpasalamat din naman iyong Prime Minister po ng Vietnam, lalong-lalo na nabalitaan nila na si Presidente pa mismo ang nag-send off noong huling mga pinalayang mga mangingisda.

Nag-usap din sila na palalawakin pa iyong kooperasyon pagdating sa seguridad, pag-uusap ng seguridad sa panig ng Pilipinas at ng Vietnam. Na-discuss po ang West Philippine Sea; Ang sabi po ng Vietnam, hinahangaan po nila ang naging posisyon ng Pilipinas pagdating sa China sa usaping West Philippine Sea, at dahil nga po diyan ay magkakaroon ng mas madaming kooperasyon sa panig ng Pilipinas at ng Vietnam tungkol dito sa West Philippine Sea. Pero iyan po iyong kauna-unahang beses na nagsabi ang Vietnam na hinahangaan nila tayo, samantalang sa Pilipinas po eh binabato tayo ng oposisyon pagdating sa usaping West Philippine Sea.

At ang Presidente naman po, nilinaw na sa West Philippine Sea, dalawang bagay po iyan; iyong arbitration na ating napanalunan na, na sinabi niya na a-address-in niya sa takdang panahon. Sa akin po importante ito dahil ito po talaga ang first time na narinig ko sa bibig mismo ni Presidente na hindi niya isasantabi/bina-balewala itong arbitration na ito. At in fact, sa takdang panahon ay babalikan niya iyang arbitration na iyan; at ang Vietnam naman ay humingi ng tulong dahil mayroon silang joint submission for an extended continental shelf with Malaysia.

So ang sabi ng Presidente, dalawa kasi iyan: iyong West Philippine Sea, iyong mga maritime disputes at saka iyong extended continental shelf. Puwedeng pag-usapan ng Pilipinas kung paanong magkakaroon ng kooperasyon o paano tayo makakatulong doon sa kanilang submission for West Philippine Sea, pero sa takdang panahon ay babalikan talaga ng Presidente itong arbitral award kung saan nanaig ang Pilipinas. Bagaman at nilinaw ng Presidente na itong panalo natin ay panalo lamang ng Pilipinas, dahil it is binding only on the parties to the arbitration.

Now, President Duterte also thanked Vietnam for warm reception being extended and good treatment being extended to around 3,800 Filipinos working in Vietnam. And at the end, he appealed for humanitarian assistance in favor of a certain Captain Rommel Aleria who has been detained in Vietnam since 2016 for alleged illegal cross-border transport of goods. Nag-ano nga rin pala ang Presidente na talagang hindi niya tatantanan iyong mga Abu Sayyaf na sadyang—iyong mga nangidnap (kidnap) doon sa mga Vietnamese sailors na ilan pa yata ay nandoon sa kamay ng mga Abu Sayyaf. At ang pangako niya ay hindi siya titigil hanggang hindi niya tuluyang napulbos at nasupil na talaga iyang mga Abu Sayyaf na iyan.

Now... at nanindigan din sila na talaga iyong usapin ng Code of Conduct ay importante; iyong Code of Conduct for the West Philippine Sea is importante, at ito iyong isang bagay na pupuwedeng makipagtulungan at manindigan na bilang isa ang mga bansang ASEAN para mas malakas ang boses natin pagdating sa bansang Tsina.

Now, expected to be discussed naman by the President on his pull aside with President Joko Widodo and he did say it during his bilateral with Prime Nguyen Xuan Phuc; was security concerns. He wants to talk about modern day extremism and terrorism with President Widodo, as well as the leaders of Malaysia and Singapore as well. He's expected to talk about increased security, fight against illegal drugs and transnational crimes, and implementation of trilateral maritime and air patrols with Indonesia and Malaysia.

Of course, he's expected to underscore that both the Philippines and Indonesia must remain resolute in the fight against violent extremism while addressing both the symptoms and causes of terrorism. He is expected also to say that he is increasing or he is hoping for even further trade agreements and noted the presence of several big companies in Indonesia including San Miguel, URC, Splash, Kahaya and Liwayway. And He's expected to invite Indonesians to participate in the Build, Build, Build program of the government.

Questions?

Q: Sir good evening, Edith Regalado po. Sir, you made mention about rice, that was [unclear] Vietnam. Could you please explain further about it? And then since we have a problem with the supply of rice in—

SEC. ROQUE: Nanindigan lang po ang Vietnam na susuplayan nila tayo ng bigas kapag tayo ay nangangailangan at susuplayan nila tayo sa mababang halaga at sa mabuting kwalidad ng bigas. At ang Presidente naman ay sumang-ayon na ang quality naman talaga ng Vietnamese rice ay napakaganda.

Q: Ah, walang—o iyong ano na kung ilang ano, iyong volume?

SEC. ROQUE: Wala pa pong volume, pero nanindigan po ang Vietnam na kung kinakailangan natin, bebentahan tayo ng bigas.

Q: At sa mababang halaga, at magandang quality.

SEC. ROQUE: Sa mababang halaga... magandang kuwalidad.

Q: When it comes to the fight against terrorism in that part of the—between Indonesia and the Philippines, there are about 126 thousand boat trips between Mindanao and North Sulawesi, so ang point niyan and even that territorial waters there. May ano ba na to strengthen the cross-border...?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, we're talking of a trilateral maritime and air patrols. Ibig sabihin, tatlong bansa po ang magbabantay diyan sa rutang iyan. Kasi nga, eh bago naman dumating ang mga westerners sa lugar na ito, iisa lang iyang mga karagatan na iyan eh. So it's not just a bilateral sea patrol, it's going to be trilateral sea patrols that they want to implement in the waters around Mindanao.

Q: Hi sir, I'm Christine Avendaño, Inquirer. Sir clarify lang; when you said kanina that the President will address the issue on the West Philippine Sea—ah no, sa arbitral tribunal ruling. What was the context of that when he said that did the Vietnamese Prime Minister asked him about it?

SEC. ROQUE: Well it was definitely discussed, okay. And I guess the President just wanted it very clear; that we are not abandoning, we are not ignoring, we are not setting aside the arbitral tribunal's decision which is in our favor, and that he will deal with that arbitral award in due course. Not now, but at the right time.

Q: You also said it was his first time to...

SEC. ROQUE: Well first time I personally heard him say that. Although that has been his position even in the past – that he is not abandoning it; he is not relinquishing it. But he made it very clear, to a head of state that he recognizes that the gains of the arbitral award and that he will refer to the arbitral award in due course. Because he wants the totality of the West Philippine Sea controversy settled under the rule of law, and pursuant to the binding norms of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Q: Is he expected to raise that as well during the leaders retreat?

SEC. ROQUE: I'm not sure but it was raised in the bilateral.

Q: Okay, just clarify. So he raised it, wala naman? I mean the Vietnamese Prime Minister did not asked him about it?

SEC. ROQUE: Let me see the context. Well the context was... it was the Vietnamese Prime Minister that brought it up, because he was appealing for support on the joint filing of Malaysia and Vietnam for an extended continental shelf. Of course our submission has been acted upon and that is why the Philippine Deep belongs to us, was awarded to us by the extended continental shelf.

But if I understand correctly, he... the Prime Minister of Vietnam was lobbying even for other countries to support that submission, because that would be—that would have substantial ramification. Although of course China is opposing it, and in the process of opposing it, that was the first time that they made mention of the Nine-Dash Lines.

So the reply of President Duterte was: ‘Yes there are two things that we are talking about here, the West Philippine Sea and the Maritime territory, and the extended continental shelf and...’ that’s the context by which he mentioned that the arbitral award he will refer to in due course. But that’s binding only in the Philippines and China and he will study the option of how the Philippines can be involve in the ongoing joint claim for an extended continental shelf between Vietnam and Malaysia.

Q: Sir, last question na lang. So did I get it right, he—the President offered to help Vietnam on that issue with—

SEC. ROQUE: He will study and explore.

Q: What kind of help did he exactly offer to Vietnam?

SEC. ROQUE: None. Oo none pero if I—I don’t know, maybe I’m revealing too much so I would not reveal, but there was a specific proposal made by Vietnam which I think would be going into too much detail, if I were to reveal so I leave it at that.

Q: Thank you sir.

MARIZ UMALI/GMA7: Sir good evening, Mariz Umali po GMA7.

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, Ma’am.

MARIZ/GMA7: Sir, just a follow up to what Kristine asked because you mentioned that this is the first time that you’ve heard the President to be talking about this arbitration—

SEC. ROQUE: With a head of state.

MARIZ/GMA7: With a head of state. So how significant is this development sir specially that he is discussing this during the ASEAN Summit?

SEC. ROQUE: Well I hope Justice Carpio and all the critics of President Duterte will now keep quiet because this is now a statement of the Philippine President made to another head of state; that he is not abandoned, he is not reneging, he is not relinquishing, he is not in any way ignoring

the arbitral arbitration and he considers it as a binding arbitral decision in favor of the Philippines.

MARIZ/GMA7: And you mentioned sir that the Code of Conduct. Iyong the discussion of the Code of Conduct, makikipagtulungan or the Philippines will be cooperating so that the ASEAN will have a louder voice—

SEC. ROQUE: And yes because—

MARIZ/GMA7: Against China—

SEC. ROQUE: Yes.

MARIZ/GMA7: So how is this going to happen exactly? Can you just give us—

SEC. ROQUE: But because the conduct on the Code of Conduct is bilateral and also between ASEAN and China. So it's happening in both levels. So I think there will be common Code of Conduct to be arrived at even if on a bilateral basis by and between members of the ASEAN and China itself.

MARIZ/GMA7: So sir you mean to say that at the end of this Summit, do we expect like message or—how do you call that, statement from the different leaders issuing—

SEC. ROQUE: This is not a Summit ha. This is not an ASEAN Summit. This is an ASEAN leaders meeting.

MARIZ/GMA7: ASEAN leaders meeting.

SEC. ROQUE: The Summit is still on November. But I believe in the last ASEAN Summit in Manila, there was a statement that we should move forward with the Code of Conduct on the West Philippine Sea.

MARIZ/GMA7: Sir, one last. Medyo magda-divert lang po ako ng kaunti because a while ago, Secretary Bello in his press conference, he mentioned that the President will be announcing something big with regards to the next step of the Philippines regarding the Kuwait issue.

SEC. ROQUE: I confirmed that he will announce the Philippine position personally, during his arrival statement in Davao on Sunday.

MARIZ/GMA7: Oh. So, not here in Singapore or not in the Filipino Community, sir?

SEC. ROQUE: He wants to announce it in Philippine soil. And we will all not be in Davao. [laughs]. Bulaga, all of us will not be in Davao when he does so.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Hi sir. Sir, Pia Gutierrez from ABS-CBN. Sir, I know that the course of action will be revealed by the President, pero can we ask whether that course of action includes going forward with the signing of the MOU?

SEC. ROQUE: I do not know anymore what will happen to the MOU. As I said even when I addressed this issue in Malacañang, I could only surmise. But I do not know. Everything is up in the air now with recent developments with the Philippine Ambassador being recalled and well with the Kuwaiti Ambassador being recalled and the Philippine Ambassador declared persona non grata. So anything that we say on this matter will be pure speculation and let's not speculate.

PIA/ABS-CBN: Sir can you tell us how the President was able to come up with the course of action considering na wala pa po iyong hinihintay na clarification coming from Kuwait?

SEC. ROQUE: I have to say that the President being a lawyer with 30 years of executive experience certainly had a very different reaction to the controversy. It was a course of action that was not specifically recommended by anyone. He made up his mind and I appreciate it. It shows really his experience in governance. And there's wisdom I guess, even in his number of years of leadership as well as in his age, but he will announce it. Well, Edith can perhaps look at the past and look at the pattern. But I have to say it's a position that he personally crafted.

PIA/ABS-CBN: Sir, another question naman po this time on the ASEAN Summit. Today was a very historic day especially doon sa Korean Peninsula; with both Koreas agreeing to pursue peace. How likely is it that ASEAN leaders will be discussing the developments during the ASEAN Summit sir?

SEC. ROQUE: I think it's almost sure that they will express relief over this development and will congratulate the Koreans for the effort to talk peace amongst themselves, as an encouragement to proceed with the talks.

PIA/ABS-CBN: What was the personal reaction po of President Duterte over this development?

SEC. ROQUE: Of course everyone is relieved, because we were all looking at the past prospects of our nuclear encounter in our backyard. So very much relieve, as you know whenever they test their missiles, it always lands in Philippine waters.

PIA/ABS-CBN: Thank you sir.

SEC. ROQUE: We only have the Room until 8:45 some other state reserve it, so we have 4 minutes. 7:45 yeah so we have 4 minutes. Ron, you are from?

Q: Hi sir on the—

SEC. ROQUE: You're from?

Q: From Kyodo News sir.

SEC. ROQUE: Kyodo.

Q: Yes sir. Iyong sinabi mo sir, that Vietnam, parang praised the Philippine position against China. Is this the present strategy that we have now with China or the move that we did in bringing up the matter to the arbitral tribunal sir? Iyong pag-praise ni Vietnam?

SEC. ROQUE: I think in general, the way we have handled China so far, is what they were referring to. So here oh, I quote, “We will learn from his handling of China.” And then quote, “The President handled China very well.” Iyon po ang quote.

Q: And sir last, do you think China will react negatively by this discussion of our President with the Vietnam Prime Minister over—

SEC. ROQUE: I don’t think so because they have their own bilateral discussions ongoing. In fact they even have joint patrols already over disputed waters. We haven’t actually sign a joint development with China, they already have, joint exploration at least. Okay? If there are no more questions we are out of—wait my last question.

Q: Sir, phoned-in question lang from the Philippines. Nag-fail daw po kasi sir iyong bidding ng NFA sa Vietnam at Thailand on the procurement of rice dahil sobra pong mahal. Napagdiskusyonan po ba ito sir kanina doon sa meeting? Kasi ayon daw po sa Vietnam representative hindi daw hawak ng kanilang government ang pricing ng bigas dahil price ito ng mga rice traders doon.

SEC. ROQUE: Well siguro po iyan iyong tinatawag na—iyong importation through minimum access volume. So—pero ang naapruba naman po noong huling pagpupulong ay G to G. Ano itong opening of ASEAN Summit? Ah okay, the event pala is the opening of the ASEAN Summit where all meetings will gather. Sorry, sorry. So it’s not just a leaders meeting, it’s opening of the ASEAN Summit. So iyon po ang sagot ko ‘no. Kasi na-authorize lang po iyong G to G importation; kailan lang iyong pagpupulong sa Palasyo noong in-announce ko po, hindi ba? Kailan iyon? Wala pang isang Linggo siguro iyon hindi ba o may dalawang linggo na ba? Ewan ko ba, basta kapag nasa Malacañang ka wala ka ng sense of time basta you are there. [laughs]. But hindi pa po, matagal iyon pero I can surmise po na kapag ganitong bidding po baka iyan iyong private sector driven.

Q: I understand sir government to government bidding daw po iyon sir?

SEC. ROQUE: Ganoon kabilis, nakapag-bidding na sila? Ewan ko po. Hindi ko po alam.

Q: Iyong 250,000 na—

SEC. ROQUE: So my answer is I do not know, I’ll check.

Q: Okay sir. Thank you.

SEC. ROQUE: Okay, maraming salamat po, and good evening po sa lahat.

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