

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OPERATIONS OFFICE
News and Information Bureau

INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON HARRY ROQUE
BY KAREN DAVILA, HEADSTART - ANC
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DAVILA: Joining us now via Zoom is Presidential Spokesperson, Secretary Harry Roque. Secretary Roque, good morning to you, sir.

SEC. ROQUE: Good morning Karen; and good morning Philippines.

DAVILA: All right. Let's start first with the Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine. May mga LGUs na hinihingi nila to be retained under ECQ even after you've listed them under Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine. Correct, Secretary?

SEC. ROQUE: Well I think marami pong mga probinsya na gustong mag-ECQ pa rin although they are now classified as GCQ 'no, at mayroon naman po tayong Validation and Appeals Committee sa IATF na ang kanilang mandato is to receive these kinds of appeals and to rule on them 'no. So, so far we have had many of such appeals; mayroon na pong iba na mayroon nang recommendation ang Regional IATF, for instance sa Bulacan at saka sa Pampanga pero wala pa pong desisyon ang IATF. Our next meeting will be later this afternoon po.

DAVILA: What's difficult about this situation is the reopening of the economy is an important factor. If a particular area insists to practice ECQ measures, how will this affect, let's say transport of goods, manufacturing, people going back to work?

SEC. ROQUE: Well there's at least double the number of industries that are allowed to operate under Modified ECQ compared to ECQ 'no, so that means the economy will be starting later in these areas if their appeals are granted 'no. And there's also, of course ramifications 'no because right now the decision of the IATF is to limit already the amount of social amelioration, the second tranche of which should be limited only to areas remaining under ECQ 'no for the month of May. And we're still not sure where to get the amelioration for the third tranche of ayuda for areas which remain under Modified ECQ.

DAVILA: You've said you've spoken with President Duterte last night regarding the SAP.

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, this morning 'no we had a 20-minute conversation and he's really—he's ordered Wendel Avisado, our DBM Secretary and I will use the word used by the President, '*tuliin na niya*'; try to prune down or try to really come up with the viable list of budgetary items that can be realigned for the purpose of giving social amelioration to the people.

It's all a matter of mathematics Karen 'no, right now Congress gave us under the We Heal as One Act 205 billion for social amelioration. The intention was to give this to 18 million Filipinos from 5 to 8 thousand each. Now of course we've had complaints that not everyone who really need the ayuda were given, so the President decided let's give to all those who need and that is why IATF authorized the payment of SAP to 5 more million beneficiaries, making it 23.

But as a matter of mathematics, Congress gave us 205 billion and since we are giving now SAP to 23 million instead of 18 million, that's already 133 billion. And that is why the original decision was to limit SAP to areas still under ECQ which would amount to another 77 billion and that would amount to 210.7 billion already as is. But the President has ordered DBM Secretary to find ways and means to give social amelioration to everyone in the second tranche.

We're not sure this will happen because the President said, number one, ask Secretary Avisado to find out if we could realign funds; and if we cannot realign funds, ask Congressional leaders 'no to help him find the financing 'no because this is a staggering additional 50 billion if we were to give social amelioration to all 23 million beneficiaries of SAP on the second tranche.

DAVILA: Yeah. So if 23 million Filipinos will receive SAP, you need an additional 50 billion just for the month of May, Secretary?

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, and already of course we would be giving, I suppose, amelioration also to those who remain under Modified ECQ. And that is why the IATF would be hard-pressed to decide on the appeals 'no because remaining in Modified ECQ means, of course, having to give amelioration because when majority of the people still cannot work, where would they get their livelihood 'no, they would have to continue to rely on social amelioration.

Although as I said in Modified ECQ, we do have quite a substantial increase of industries that are now allowed to open. If I'm not mistaken, it's probably a 100% more industries compared to those allowed under ECQ, but still very limited.

DAVILA: What would the basis of the IATF be in making a decision on the appeals of LGUs, Secretary?

SEC. ROQUE: Well I think IATF has already considered the case doubling rate of COVID in these places and their critical care capacity. So I think an important consideration would be the economic 'no, if we can still also afford to give social amelioration to even more people 'no who want to remain under Modified ECQ.

DAVILA: Okay. Are there changes in the businesses allowed to operate? I know that you already gave a list, but many have asked what about the controversial simple but needed – barbers, parlors. These has been asked in so many programs.

SEC. ROQUE: I have never seen any issue as controversial as barbers in the IATF. I am telling you, there was someone who was teary eyed ‘no. Of course we were all meeting online, someone almost cried about the issue of barbers because there is no way we can actually maintain safe social distancing in barber shops and in salons ‘no. So it has been a topic that has consumed so much time. If I were to estimate the amount of time given to this issue, it’s probably around 8 to 10 hours already on barber shops.

But I think the decision for now is we went by the recommendations of the Chief Implementer, Secretary Galvez. And for now barber shops and salons are still not allowed in MECQ.

DAVILA: Pero paano po ito Secretary Roque, until a vaccine is discovered, are we saying that it’s an impossibility to open barber shops and salons?

SEC. ROQUE: Well I think for now, they don’t want it because they want to veer on the safe side, but I’m not saying that under GCQ it will not be allowed. It’s just that—[audio cut]

DAVILA: —charges will be filed, PNP Chief Gamboa said that, but many are asking will he be relieved? He was an appointed official, is the President also asking for his resignation?

SEC. ROQUE: We have also initiated and—the Executive Secretary has actually asked the IAS ‘no, the Internal Affairs of the PNP to forward to his office the results of its investigation on this incident. And the reason is as a presidential appointee, there will have to be a prior Malacañang clearance before the administrative case can be filed against General Sinas ‘no. And I think the issue whether or not he will be relieved will be decided in the separate administrative case ‘no.

But meanwhile, PNP Chief Gamboa has assured me that they will be initiating today, no later than today ‘no, a criminal complaint before the fiscal’s office for violation of the ordinance on quarantine.

DAVILA: But what’s the status if they’re filing a criminal complaint, does he keep his job as NCRPO Chief?

SEC. ROQUE: That’s actually in the administrative case ‘no. So Malacañang has ordered; did not wait for PNP to forward the evidence to wit but Malacañang through the Office of the Executive Secretary had gone out of its way to demand from the IAS the result of its investigation so they can decide whether or not administrative charges should be filed against General Sinas.

DAVILA: But will somebody take his place temporarily because there is also an issue Secretary of credibility in this whole situation?

SEC. ROQUE: I have no information as of yet, but I think it’s a major development that Malacañang itself has taken the initiative to get the evidence and the PNP on the other hand

has also even prior to the request coming from Malacañang said that they will get clearance from Malacañang to proceed with an administrative investigation. The decision to relieve him, to suspend him or to dismiss him is part of the administrative case.

DAVILA: Okay. All right. Concerns coming from—actually there’s a viewer right now who texted: “Mother’s Day, we saw traffic in Quezon City.” Did you see that, Secretary?

SEC. ROQUE: Well not on Mother’s Day because I stayed home on Mother’s Day ‘no so I do not see the traffic—

DAVILA: But you saw the photos?

SEC. ROQUE: Yeah. I’m really concerned that despite the fact that we have said over and over again, that until we find the cure or a vaccine, social distancing is still the key to at least containing the spread of the disease. The people seem to take this for granted ‘no. But as you’ve noticed, perhaps Karen ‘no, we have also taken the initiative in partnership with the private sector to come up with TV advertisements, na warning about the dangers of COVID-19, iyong ‘Takot Ako Sa COVID’ and it’s because we need to send the message that they should be scared of COVID. We don’t want to be fear mongers, but it’s a reality. Without a vaccine, without a medicine, it is a threat that will persist.

DAVILA: Now, the text of the viewer Secretary is: “Are the decisions of the IATF,” it seems to be—this is a viewer watching, this is not my question. “The decisions of the IATF seemed to be pro-rich and very pro-middle class. Those with cars are allowed to go out. Those without vehicles don’t have public transportation as an option. The decision of the IATF, golf is allowed, tennis is allowed which is allowed which is also once again pro-rich.” This is a message. “What about our poorer kababayans? What can they do?”

SEC. ROQUE: Well we have announced that in Modified ECQ, jogging, running outside and walking is now allowed. Now let me reiterate that golf is not allowed in MECQ. It is only allowed in GCQ areas ‘no. So I think there is no bias as far as the economic status is concerned ‘no because now we can all exercise outside. We can run and we can bike and we can walk.

DAVILA: Okay. What about the issue of cars? I think that’s a legitimate question because if you own a car, then you can go out, either go to the supermarket, palengke, etcetera. Pero kapag wala ka pong sasakyan, wala naman pong public transport. Paano po iyon, Secretary?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, we’re also cracking down on cars ‘no. If you do travel, you’ll find out that it takes long also to travel because the queues in the checkpoints are very long. So we are also cracking down on unnecessary travel. It is true that if you have a car, then you can go to the grocery. But I think as far as shopping for essentials are concerned, ang maganda naman po sa ating urban planning, whatever urban planning we have, that there’s always an accessible store or a market ‘no to wherever we live ‘no.

But make no mistake about it, in fact one time I decided to stay home and do a broadcast because I saw the checkpoint in EDSA and it would take probably around 30 minutes 'no to traverse that checkpoint 'no. We are enforcing the rules on everyone, rich or poor, and I think Sinas is the test case for this because he is a high-ranking enforcer and we're taking steps 'no to hold him liable for non-compliance with quarantine rules.

DAVILA: Okay. My last question is the ABS-CBN issue. You said that President Duterte is not inclined to veto the franchise if there is no constitutional infirmity. Can you cite possible examples of what a constitutional infirmity might consist of?

SEC. ROQUE: Well I can't think of any right now, but normally in terms of legislation, it must deal-only with one subject matter so that (unclear) by which legislation has been struck down as unconstitutional if it is vague for vagueness. Those are some of the traditional constitutional grounds by which statutes are struck down as being unconstitutional.

DAVILA: Okay. Did Speaker Alan consult with the President on this, Secretary?

SEC. ROQUE: I'm sure not 'no, because the President has said he is already neutral. That's the full extent of the communication he has made with Congress, 'vote according to your conscience.'

DAVILA: Okay. Now, how does the President then reign in members of the Executive? For example, the NTC, even the Office of the Solicitor General.

SEC. ROQUE: Well you see, there are opposing views but we have made a research and the NTC really is a quasi-judicial body and proof of that is that its decisions are never appealed to the Office of the President. So iyong decision ina-appeal to the Office of the President, it's clear that we cannot interfere in the decision making process of the NTC.

And if you look at the, number one, the statutory basis, it clearly says that it is only attached to the DOTr—DICT now for purposes of programs and policies 'no, but never for decision making process.

As far as the Solicitor General is concerned, you know, the President has taken the attitude that Cabinet members are given leeway to do their job and if the Solicitor General thinks that there is a violation of the existing franchise, then he's free to file whatever legal remedy he may think is proper.

Having said that of course, everything else is now in the court including the quo warranto case filed by the Solicitor General and the petition for TRO filed by ABS-CBN. So let's allow the court to decide on these two petitions.

DAVILA: All right. On that note Secretary Harry Roque, thank you so much for your time this morning. Sir, is there anything you want to add before we go?

SEC. ROQUE: Well I would like to thank ABS-CBN for their continuing partnership with government in information dissemination and I would hope that in the near future, that we can restore the reach that we've had in the past when you had a franchise.

DAVILA: On that note, thank you so much Secretary Harry Roque.

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