

**PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OPERATIONS OFFICE**  
**News and Information Bureau**

**INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON HARRY ROQUE**  
**BY PINKY WEBB – THE SOURCE/CNN PHILIPPINES**  
**AUGUST 26, 2020 (9:03 A.M. - 9:29 A.M.)**

**WEBB:** Secretary Roque, you are finally on air on The Source. Thank you for your time.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, good morning, Pinky. And good morning, Philippines.

**WEBB:** All right. Let's start, Secretary, with the President's health. In his address yesterday morning, he said that his doctor actually advised him not to drink because his Barrett is nearing stage one cancer. Can you give us more information on this?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, I think people are putting too much meaning on that statement. I think that the advice was given to him a long time ago, when the President was still drinking. He has since stopped drinking and as far as I know, since he became President, he has not resumed drinking 'no. So, you are talking of a medical advice that happened many years ago, even prior to the presidency. And I think the reason why the President precisely stopped drinking was to prevent it from developing into stage one cancer, and that is the context of what the President said.

So, I guess, rephrasing what the President said, he almost had cancer if he did not stop drinking. But he has since stopped drinking. So, I think everyone saw how the President's demeanor was. Cancer stage one for a prolonged period of time would need treatment including, well, treatment that would have adverse effects on his physical appearance even 'no.

So, I think people should appreciate and base their perception on the people's health as they saw him 'no every week, and the latest being last Tuesday. The President, Pinky, is a lawyer, he knows what the Constitution provides in case he has a serious illness, he would have to divulge his medical condition to the public. And I assure everyone that as officers of the court, the President and I, will divulge any serious illness to the public pursuant to the Constitution.

**WEBB:** So, this nearing stage one cancer, the President was actually referring to even before he became president that the doctors advised him to stop drinking, hence, he stopped drinking and you never saw him drink again?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, and that is why he doesn't drink; he doesn't smoke; he has no vices as president because he wants to be in good and healthy condition.

**WEBB:** Let's go back to back to about two years ago. In 2018, there was of course a report that there was—the doctors found a growth during his endoscopy. Does this had anything to

do with the President saying that he had—the doctors advised him to stop drinking because he was nearing stage one cancer. Is this related?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, I am not a doctor myself, Pinky, so I would not know with ... I would not have any idea. But what I do know is that the Barrett's disease has to do also with the esophagus and I think it's part of monitoring basically if the President is okay, and so far he is okay. As far as I know, there is no cancer and as I said if there is cancer and if it is a serious illness, he will be reporting it to the people.

**WEBB:** But you were Presidential Spokesperson in 2018 if I am not mistaken, because you were the one being interviewed during that time when they found a growth during the President's endoscopy. Am I correct, sir?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, I believe it also came from the President's mouth that he consulted and there was endoscopy 'no. Now, obviously the endoscopy turned out that there was cancer there, then we would see in the President's physical condition if he already has cancer 'no. There will be chemotherapy for instance, and chemotherapy leads to hair loss and general weakening, a condition that you don't really see in the President 'no. He is fit and healthy for a person of his age.

**WEBB:** So, what was that growth in 2018?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Which one?

**WEBB:** What was that growth found during his endoscopy in 2018?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Whatever it is, it could not have been cancerous because as you see, the condition of the President is, he is fine.

**WEBB:** Secretary, do you know if at any point, even when you were saying that this possibly happened before he became President, do you know, have you asked him, if he underwent any kind of treatment for this nearing stage one cancer?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, you know, the words of the President, repeating what the President said is, if you don't stop drinking, it may lead to stage one cancer. He stopped drinking upon doctor's advice, and he is reaping the harvest of heeding medical advice, Pinky.

**WEBB:** So there is no need, you don't think there is a need for a medical bulletin for now?

**SEC. ROQUE:** As I said, the President—I am a lawyer myself; the President is a lawyer, we will comply with the constitutional provision. If there is a serious illness, the people will know; we will not hide it.

**WEBB:** So, he does not have a serious illness?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, as far as the President's medical condition is concerned, take note that it comes from his own mouth. So, it's not as if he is trying to hide anything; he is very transparent. He has repeated what his doctors have said and that is why he has taken specific courses of action, i.e., he stopped drinking. When he talked about his endoscopy, also came from his own mouth. So, I don't think the people should worry about lack of transparency because the President himself will say what his condition is. But, as of now, there's really no serious condition. And I would like to say to those who wish the President ill, sorry na lang po kayo, because God has given the President [garbled].

**WEBB:** Secretary Roque, in July, I remember you were saying, when you were being asked about the President's health, you said, he is 88% healthy. How healthy is he now in August?

**SEC. ROQUE:** He is healthy as any 75-year-old could be in the Philippines 'no, and that is the reason why he regularly delivers his messages to the people weekly so that they would know and see him and judge for themselves. Let him start talking about the anti-drug war becomes all animated 'no. And in the last message to the people, he was also animated because he was trying to prove the point that in his administration, money intended for COVID will go for its intended purpose and he has vowed that in the two remaining years of his term of office that he will cleanse the ranks of PhilHealth.

**WEBB:** Is he still 88% healthy as you said in July?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I believe so, yes, he is.

**WEBB:** All right. Let's shift topics, Secretary, the situation is Jolo. My first question here is, there are some wondering why the President did not talk about the twin explosions in Jolo in yesterday's televised address? Why is this or was this edited out?

**SEC. ROQUE:** We have previously issued a statement condemning the attack. It is a violation of the laws and customs of warfare and previous to that, he had a command conference where it was discussed but the command conference was confidential in nature. I was not even allowed to sit in through the meeting where he met with the top leadership of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippines National Police. So the fact that he did not say anything, it's probably because he has given the necessary orders to the top brass of the AFP and the PNP, and he doesn't discuss what he intend to do as far as situation on the ground is, publicly.

**WEBB:** Pero nasanay din po tayo. I'm sure you will agree, Secretary, that kapag may nangyayari po sa mga sundalo, may namamatay na mga sundalo o mga pulis, the President always sends his condolences or definitely he always talks about this. So, again, it was something possibly that, I for one, was also wondering what the President would say about that explosion that happened because we lost, the President lost, you know, 15 lives were lost during that twin explosion.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, whether or not the President verbalized his concern for the soldiers, he walks the talk. He has a policy of not just condoling with the family, but providing financial assistance for the family and the victims of this latest attack will not be an exception to the rule; they will be given due recognition as modern day heroes.

**WEBB:** Is he planning to visit Jolo anytime soon?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, under the circumstance, he has visited Jolo, and under the circumstance let's just say that it's very difficult not only because of the pandemic, but also because of the situation on the ground in Jolo.

**WEBB:** Army Chief General Sobejana and PNP Chief Gamboa are—well, first, the Army Chief was recommending martial law in Sulu, the PNP Chief also agreeing to this. Do you think the President will consider this recommendation?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, the President will, of course, consider this recommendation as will both Congress and the Supreme Court because as you know a declaration of martial law now contains safeguards not found in the 1935 Constitution.

Now, they will have to be notice given to Congress, and Congress would have to be satisfied with both the legal and factual basis for the declaration and this is without prejudice to judicial review on both the factual and legal considerations for the imposition of martial law.

So, although the recommendation has been made, the President has to be very careful that it will pass the scrutiny of both the legislative and the judicial branches of government.

**WEBB:** Absolutely! But is he leaning towards the declaring martial law in Sulu?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, let's just say that the recommendations have been made, and the President listens to those on the ground.

**WEBB:** All right. We'll be taking a very short break. The Source would be right back.

[BREAK]

**WEBB:** You're watching The Source on CNN Philippines, I'm Pinky Webb. Our guest today, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque.

Let's talk about PhilHealth, Secretary. Has Gen. Morales tendered his resignation?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I have no information yet.

**WEBB:** But let's talk about what Secretary Guevarra actually said. Ang sabi po niya, the President took note last night which was during your meeting of Morales' on and off health situation, and he stated that it would be best for the latter and for the PhilHealth to give up his post during these critical times. And even added that Executive Secretary Medialdea said that he talked to General Morales and that the latter said that he would understand if he had to be replaced. So, such tender of resignation is expected very soon according to Secretary Guevarra. Can you give us more information on this? What was talked about when you were with the President regarding Gen. Morales?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I can't. As a veteran spokesperson, as a former professor of Constitutional Law, there are matters taken up during Cabinet meetings and the President which should not be divulged to the public. And what is for public consumption is what is broadcasted every time the President meets with selected members of the Cabinet and delivers his message to the people. So, with your kind indulgence, anything not shown to the public is covered by executive privilege and I leave to the statements of Secretary Guevarra as is and I will ask you to ask your further queries from Secretary Guevarra.

**WEBB:** So, you don't want to confirm this, sir?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I cannot because I am bound by privilege.

**WEBB:** Yeah, even if as we were talking about—you're telling, it's best that we ask Secretary Guevarra about this because he is the one that divulged this?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, Pinky.

**WEBB:** Anything though? Is there anything about that that you can even at least tell us, because obviously it wasn't part of the address? Anything that may not be covered by executive privileges you say, sir?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I'm sorry but maybe it's really the fact that I taught Constitutional Law for fifteen years and I know how important it is for the President to make the right decisions, albeit unpopular, and that's why we have this concept of executive privilege.

**WEBB:** So, I guess also if—because there are reports, Sec. Roque, really just need to press this because there were reports earlier today that General Morales will tender his resignation today. So, are you saying it's best that we just wait first because I'm not going to get anything from you?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, matter of resignation is a personal decision of the appointee. And if it is indeed filed, then it becomes my obligation to make it public.

**WEBB:** Are you expecting today?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I'm not expecting anything but I will do my job.

**WEBB:** All right. Let's talk about the revolutionary government. So, the President also said yesterday morning that, "Wala akong pakialam diyan. Hindi ko sila kilala." However, sir, there were videos coming out of the President actually attending an event of the ones behind this revolutionary government, the President Rodrigo Roa Duterte National Executive Coordinating Committee. He showed up in 2018, how can he say, "Hindi ko sila kilala?"

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, alam mo as a public figure myself, I go to many, many affairs. I acknowledge everyone, I smile at everyone, I'm friendly to everyone but quite frankly, I don't know everyone in particular. I think the same thing goes for the President because he has attended more public functions attended by more individuals.

So, I think seeing someone in a public event with the President does not necessarily mean that the President will know that person. And I think as a result of human experience, people can understand this.

**WEBB:** Does he know the Mayor Rodrigo Roa Duterte National Executive Coordinating Committee, sir?

**SEC. ROQUE:** He knows the M... R— Mayor Rodrigo Roa Duterte—he knows MRRD.

**WEBB:** M-R-R-D N-E-C-C.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes. I don't think this is officially an event of the MRRD, otherwise MRRD would publicly owe up to this revolutionary government which it has not. I understand it's a different organization spearheading it, and that's why [garbled] what is important is the President has said, he is not in support of revolutionary government because obviously he is a constitutional government.

**WEBB:** Do you think, Secretary Roque, that this is freedom of expression or this could be tantamount to inciting to sedition?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, as I've said, there has to be clear and present danger; and I don't see any clear and present danger. It is simply advocate and in no position really to threaten the existence of the Republic. So, that is why I have often said that in the same way that the 'left' have said many, many things against the President, let it be because that is still protected speech.

**WEBB:** But PNP Chief Gamboa is ordering a probe on the organizers of this revolutionary government. Do you support this?

**SEC. ROQUE:** That's the discretion of the police authorities and we respect that. In fact, whether or not it is inciting to sedition or not, is really the realm of the police and the prosecutors at the DOJ. But from what I've seen, there is no clear and present danger.

**WEBB:** We're taking a very quick break. Later, we're going to talk about President Duterte hitting back at Vice President Leni Robredo after her assessment on the government's COVID-19 response.

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[BREAK]

**WEBB:** You're watching The Source on CNN Philippines. Our guest today, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque.

Secretary, let's talk about the President's saying towards the end of his speech yesterday: "Don't fuel the fire". This is of course in reference to the speech made by Vice President Leni Robredo. Can you tell us more about how the President actually viewed that speech, and the recommendations of the Vice President?

**SEC. ROQUE:** That is all that he said about the speech 'no. "Times are dire; we are doing the best that we can. Let's set aside politics for the time being. Let's not add fuel to the fire."

**WEBB:** Actually, iyong sinabi pa niya, Secretary Roque, right, he said "Do not destroy the government."

**SEC. ROQUE:** And do not destroy the government, yes. When the President has said certain matters, I'm duty bound just to repeat them.

**WEBB:** So, was there anything else that he said about 'do not destroy the government', anything about what the Vice President said that he viewed as possibly destroying the government or what the government is doing?

**SEC. ROQUE:** That is the entirety of what he said. But putting it in context, the President has said, now is not the time for politicking; now is the time to focus on COVID. When one of his appointed officials dared to investigate the Vice President for trying to alleviate the suffering of our people, the President sacked him and said that everyone is welcome to help. So, in the same manner, I guess the President is saying, the Vice President is welcome to help. He recognizes this, that she has been helping as far as providing assistance to our people are concerned. But right now, set aside politics and continue with helping the people in these very trying times.

**WEBB:** Just very briefly, Secretary. Was there any recommendation that the government viewed or you viewed as new or that could be adopted by the government in terms of the number of recommendations the Vice President suggested?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I have written to the Vice President in response to her letter and we have informed her that we have considered everything that she is recommended even prior to receipt of her recommendations. We are adopting the entire nation approach in the IATF. And I can tell you, all ideas that could be considered in alleviating the condition of our country while the pandemic is ongoing has been considered, and we are considering even new approaches as we study best examples that we have worldwide.

**WEBB:** The nurses continue, Secretary, to ask the government to lift the ban on the nurses going abroad. Is there any talk regarding this or any plan to lift the ban on nurses working abroad?

**SEC. ROQUE:** We have clarified that all those with processed papers as of 8<sup>th</sup> March of 2020 could leave, but all those who do not have their papers yet after 8<sup>th</sup> March must stay meanwhile. Two reasons for this: We are Number 22 in the number of COVID cases and I am sure that most if not all, the nurses are leaving for countries who have more number of cases particularly in the United States which is number one. So, it's inherent police power of the President to delay their deployment to uphold the public health.

And number two of course, charity begins at home. We may need their services here, and that is why we have made it attractive for these nurses to stay and work in the Philippines.

**WEBB:** So, that's it. So, the ban still stays until now. I do understand of course, Secretary, that the March 8, those who finished their contracts by March 8 are the ones allowed to leave, but they are still calling to lift this total deployment ban. So still that ban stays according to Secretary Roque. Thank you, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque.

**SEC. ROQUE:** As usual, it's my pleasure and have a good day.

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