

PRESS BRIEFING OF PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON

SECRETARY HARRY ROQUE

WITH DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE (DOJ) SECRETARY VITALIANO AGUIRRE II

AND USEC. JOEL M. SY EGCO

JANUARY 11, 2018 (1:36 – 2:33 P.M.)

ROCKY IGNACIO/PTV: Good afternoon Malacañang Press Corp.; and welcome sa press briefing ni Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque. Good afternoon, sir.

SEC. ROQUE: Good afternoon to all of you. We have two very important guests today. The first is Secretary of Justice Vitaliano N. Aguirre II, and we also have Undersecretary Joel M. Sy Egco of the Presidential Task Force on Media Security.

Ladies and gentleman let us welcome Sec. Vitaliano Aguirre II.

SEC. AGUIRRE: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I was requested by Secretary Roque to be here this afternoon. I was informed yesterday while your Secretary and the President were in Baguio. So I have to go back this... early this morning. But I first attended the convention between PDP and the Communist Party of China. So I was told that you were interested... or you are going to have some questions with respect to the case of the dismissal by the RTC Valenzuela, by Judge Nena Santos of Valenzuela, of the 6.4 billion information for the importation of shabu. So I'm now ready to...

ROCKY IGNACIO/PTV: MPC, questions about the 6.4 billion shabu? Question Tina? Tina Mendez from the Philippine Star.

Tina Mendez/PhilStar: So sir—hello. Good afternoon, Sir. Sir with the dismissal sa local court, anong magiging impact ng campaign ng gobyerno on illegal drugs?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Well, because of the dismissal, then it is as if there no information yet filed against the respondents, specifically, against Mr. Taguba, Kenneth Dong, Richard Cheng and as a matter of fact, we have received information, in fact... reliable information that one of these prosecutors were trying to get out of the country. But they—he was timely prevented by the issuance of ILBO or the Immigration Lookout Bulletin Order.

So since there is yet no warrant of arrest issued against any of the respondents, then that could be the reason why some of the respondents wanted to leave the country.

But we know also that with the dismissal of the case, the National Prosecution Service, the DOJ filed a timely motion for reconsideration. And it was specifically...or originally set on January 5 but since there was no...apparently there was no notice to the DOJ panel, the hearing was reset to January 8 and it was continued. And on January 8, the incident, meaning to say the motion for

reconsideration was considered submitted for resolution after the respondents were given five day period within which to comment. The five day period would end this coming Saturday. So by Monday, January 15, the court could issue its ruling on whether to reconsider or to affirm its dismissal order.

ROCKY IGNACIO/PTV: Follow-up question? Joseph Morong.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: I'd like to pick up on your point sir, that one of the—you meant the respondents or the prosecutor who was trying to leave the country?

SEC. AGUIRRE: One of the respondents.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Respondents. Who is this, sir?

SEC. AGUIRRE: I was told that it was Richard Cheng.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Kailan po siya nag—?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Ah iyong details niyan eh nasa... with the Bureau of Immigration. And as a matter of fact, parang mayroon diyang other persons who was working for him so that he would be able to leave the country.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: When did he attempt again—sorry. When did you find out at least that he would?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Last week, but the details of which are with the Bureau of Immigration.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: When you said there's another person working for him, this is from the government trying to help him?

SEC. AGUIRRE: No. Well, a person who was formerly—as a matter of fact still connected with the BI but now on AWOL, who was trying to help him leave the country.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Sa NAIA sa Manila or sa Clark, sir?

SEC. AGUIRRE: In one of the provincial... not here in Manila.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Pero sir he was—he didn't—he wasn't successful, right?

SEC. AGUIRRE: He wasn't successful, because our senior supervision officers rejected the bribe being offered.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: What do you think that he's trying to get out of the country by Mr. Cheng as far as motive go or involvement in the case is concerned?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Well, we didn't want to speculate. But I just wanted to lay the facts before you – that he might be—he has no impediment in leaving the country. But the only thing that is preventing him from leaving the country without any hitch is the ILBO, which we have issued. And so we didn't know if he will be still persisted in trying to leave the country through some other means or with help of some people. So we even don't know if... kung nandito pa siya.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Really?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Wala pa namang information from the Bureau of Immigration that he left the country already. Kaya the presumption is still he is here.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Kasi iyong mga hold departure areas, mga RTC yan na lang 'di ba? The least that you can issue is the watch list, tama?

SEC. AGUIRRE: ILBO, Immigration Lookout Bulletin Order

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Ah, lookout na lang.

SEC. AGUIRRE: Just like the watch list. So hindi natin alam na—because parang twice na siyang nag-attempt to leave the country. Although after the case has been filed, so hindi natin alam kung... he could leave the country through some other means. For example, if by using some fake documents... hindi natin alam iyon.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Sir, the BI employee who is AWOL, you've identified this person?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Yes, we have identified.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Any actions on him sir—or her?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Ah wala pa kami. Actually pinahahanap ko nga sa NBI.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Alright, thank you sir.

LLANESCA PANTI/MANILA TIMES: Good afternoon, sir. What did you do differently doon sa motion for reconsideration as compared with the previous, because as it turned out dismissed? So what did we do differently this time to make sure that they won't get away with the crime?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Well I reviewed what happened. Because as we have already known, the Office of the Secretary does not comment or make anything about this—what our National Prosecution Service downstairs are doing. And so, we just read in the papers that the case has been dismissed because it was filed—because of improper venue. In other words, we came to know from the papers that the judge' position that the case was dismissed because it has no jurisdiction – because the venue—we know very well that venue jurisdictional in criminal cases.

So sinasabi ng RTC ng Valenzuela na ang may jurisdiction dito would be Manila, and so hindi kami – dito sa Valenzuela. So, it was dismissed. And the National Prosecution Service, our panel handling, this filed a timely motion for reconsideration – iyan ang incident na naka-pending which could be resolved as a early as Monday. So on the part of the National Prosecution Service, it argued that it is improper for the Valenzuela RTC to dismiss the same, because it is not correct to say that it has no venue... it has no jurisdiction over this case because of improper venue.

Sinasabi ng NPS that, “May jurisdiction kayo diyan because your dismissal order was premised on the fact that the importation.” Ang question dito is: is there importation? Oh where is— mayroon pa bang importation after it entered the Bureau of Customs? Sinasabi ng National Prosecution Service mayroon pa, kasi ang importation na sinasabi ninyo, that is being considered by the court eh iyong importation in view with the violation with the Customs and Tariff Code – so importation noon. So sinasabi naman ng NPS, “Hindi maaring ganoon, sapagka’t hindi mo maaaring i-import ‘yan.” Kasi only the non-contrabands, iyong legally... legal—in other words, iyong hindi bawal na mga goods ang pupuwedeng i-import. You could not validly import, ang argument ng NPS ng mga contrabands.

So wherever it is caught, as in this case nahuli ‘yan sa Valenzuela, mayroon pa ring importation – iyon ang argument ng National Prosecution Service.

And besides sabi niyang ganiyan, importation it’s—iyong pagdala sa Valenzuela is just a part of the importation. In other words, it is a continuing process kaya’t ‘pag ganiyang continuing offense kahit saan—in any place where one of the elements of the offense happened, pupuwede mong i-file diyan since dire-diretso ang process niyan, ang continuing offense niyan since isa, nangyari ‘yan, nahuli ‘yan sa Valenzuela, then Valenzuela court has jurisdiction. Iyon ang argument ng—pinaglalaman ng respondents and the prosecution.

LLANESCA PANTI/MANILA TIMES: Thank you, sir.

LEILA SALAVERRIA/INQUIRER: Good afternoon, sir. Sir could you give us an update on the government’s expectation to declare the NPA as a terrorist organization?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Ah, yeah. I just talked to the... Prosecutor Peter Ong, and hopefully in the coming week it could be filed because mayroon palang last minute consultation with the Office of the Executive Secretary, as well as with the other intelligence services of the government.

LEILA SALAVERRIA/INQUIRER: Sir, what are our expectations about the petition? Do we expect this to be, parang like summary proceedings or do we expect a long trial?

SEC. AGUIRRE: It is a full blown trial, I believe. Kasi—that’s why medyo hindi mamadali, hindi puwedeng madaliin. They have to gather all the instances where terroristic activities could be attributed to the NPAs.

LEILA SALAVERRIA/INQUIRER: Do you expect the NPA, the CPP to put up a fight?

SEC. AGUIRRE: I believe so. Kasi ayaw naman nilang makuwan sila eh, masabihan silang they are... na they are engaged in terrorism. As a matter of fact, they have been named already by the US as an organization engaged in terroristic activities, but in other parts of the world such as the European countries na mayroon siyang asylum doon. Even here in the Philippines, hindi pa sila nagde-declare.

LEILA SALAVERRIA/INQUIRER: Sir, how about the arrest of the consultants released for the peace talks, ano na pong—?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Well, the same has been... the warrants for the arrest of these consultants have not been lifted, although there are moves to resume the peace process. Wala iyon, parang sa diyaryo lang iyon. But still, if these consultants who have released because of this peace process, at their bail has already been canceled, if cited, they will be arrested.

LEILA SALAVERRIA/INQUIRER: Sir, na-cancel na iyong arrest warrant nila? Is that correct?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Hindi lahat eh. I'm not sure kung lahat ng courts nag-cancel na, but there are motion to cancel.

LEILA SALAVERRIA/INQUIRER: Ah motions lang, okay.

ROCKY: Follow up questions?

CELERINA MONTE/MANILA SHIMBUN: Good afternoon, sir. So do you know where these high-ranking NPA officials are, like the couple Tiamsons? Nandito ba sila or nasa abroad?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Ah, alam ko nandito na eh. They are here already.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Sir sa status nung couple, iyong mga motion for the cancelation of their temporary liberty haven't filed yet or na-file na po, sir?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Meron nang na-file. Hindi lang naman iisang court ang... naka-pending ito. There are several courts, but ang sabi ko ang nakakalam niyan iyong aming National Prosecution Service. So, I am not updated of that as of this week.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Pero, sir iyon pong pag-file doon sa—with respect to just the Tiamzon couple, that has been done right after the President declared the NPA as terrorists organization?

SEC. AGUIRRE: That has been done, meaning to say.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Iyong sequence lang, sir.

SEC. AGUIRRE: The motion to cancel?

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Yes, sir.

SEC. AGUIRRE: Yes, it was refiled. With respect to the couple

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: With respect to the couple. And no action yet! I mean, trial din iyon ‘no?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Hindi ko alam kung ano iyong pinaka-latest development or status of these cases. But definitely, many, almost all I think has been, the cancelation bail has been filed.

Because iyong lahat ng bail na iyan presupposes that the OPAPP or the peace process is ongoing, but since no longer—the President has declared that’s it’s no longer being pursued, and so our National Prosecution Service has filed the appropriate motion to cancel the bail of these respondents.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: And if they should be arrested, it should be upon court order, correct?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Yes, kasi ganoon iyon, once na nag-file sa court iyan, pag-kinansel ng court iyong bail pursuant to the motion of the prosecution, then the necessary consequence that the court will issue an order of arrest.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: All right, so hindi sir, parang citizen na kapag nakita nila, eh they can just arrests these people?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Pag alam po ninyong mayroong order of arrest, you could implement a citizen’s arrest.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Once the order is issued.

SEC. AGUIRRE: Once the order is issued.

TINA MENDEZ/PHIL. STAR: Sir, any follow up po doon sa reports, doon sa kaso ni Palawan Governor, kay Reyes na involvement ng CA Justice daw is retiring early. May insinuation na---

SEC. AGUIRRE: Actually I wanted to be prepared on that, but I asked my Prosecutors to give me a briefer, pero alam mo iyan, once a case, a criminal case is on appeal, like this Ortega case, nasa hands of the office of the Solicitor General, SolGen na iyan.

Kaya’t iyong comment na lang ni SolGen Joe Calida na sinasabi niyang “the decisions stinks,” so iyon na lang. As to the basis, hindi ko po alam iyan. Kaya’t hindi kami makakuha kanina ng—we are trying to get a – the dismissal or the resolution expressing that there was no probable cause for the arrest of the respondents.

TINA MENDEZ/PHIL. STAR: Just a clarification, sir. You agree with the SolGen that the decision stinks?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Hindi ko pa nga nababasa eh, sorry. I am sorry I could not comment further.

TINA MENDEZ/PHIL. STAR: Sir, any update on the case of Miss Mary Jane Veloso?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Mary Jane Veloso, wala pa akong update. I'm sorry.

DEXTER GANIBE/DZMM: Sec., clarification lang. Nabanggit ninyo kanina iyong supervisor ba or manager ng Immigration doon sa airport sa probinsya, ni-reject niya iyong bribe in Richard Cheng. May isinampa bang kaso, sir ang BI or ang DOJ?

SEC. AGUIRRE: May isinampang kaso?

DEXTER GANIBE/DZMM: About doon sa bribery attempt?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Actually pinahahanap ko nga iyong the one supposed to, who introduced himself as that person. Kung totoo iyong sinabi nung BI na iyon, which an BI employee who is in AWOL, na nago-offer ng 10 million bribe, ni-reject lang nung ating supervisor Immigration Officer. So, kung totoo iyon, then at the very least, an attempted case of corruption of public officers being committed.

DEXTER GANIBE/DZMM: Sir, clarification lang. Nabanggit ninyo iyong executive judge ng Valenzuela, si Judge Nena Santos, the same person ba siya, iyong abogado ng Mamasapano?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Mamasapano?

DEXTER GANIBE/DZMM: Opo, sa Mamasapano, sir.

SEC. AGUIRRE: Ah ng Ampatuan? Hindi ko alam eh.

DEXTER GANIBE/DZMM: Kapangalan lang, sir.

SEC. AGUIRRE: Akala ko nga. Iyon nga ang ko nasa isip kanina. According to Secretary Roque, hindi raw parehas.

ROSALIE COZ/UNTV: Good afternoon po, Secretary. Ano po iyong particular na reason ni Pangulong Duterte kung bakit nais niyang paimbestigahan muli sa DOJ iyon pong kaso na, na umiiral na pagbebenta noon pong PNP firearms sa NPA?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Opo, iyan po kasi dumaan sa discussion ng cabinet, iyong mga baril na iyan, iyong mga hindi pagbibigay sa atin ng baril ng US, gawa nung merong mga senators na nagba-block. So---tapos iyong mga offer ng China and other countries to give us, to sell us these long firearms. Then, dumaan ang discussion about this 1,004 AK-47, so nagalit siya.

So, imbestigahan mo nga 'yan Vit, ito! Kung meron pa tayong, may mai-demanda dito. So immediately after cabinet meeting, I asked General Año, who is now the OIC DILG Secretary.

Sinabi niya sa akin meron anya Secretary na-file diyan sa Ombudsman, but ang alam ko, puro mga police officers lamang.

Since wala kaming jurisdiction doon sa aming pag-imbestiga sa mga mga civilian, non-military officers or non-government officers. So iyon ang tinitingnan ko, are there other persons liable na non-government officials who should be included in the charge, iyan po ang ibibigay sa akin ni General Año, lahat ng records nila doon.

And then I am going to send this to the NBI for farther investigation kung meron ngang hindi pa na—malaman natin kung meron ngang hindi pa napa-file-an ng kaso tungkol dito sa—kasi parang galit na galit siya kasi iyan ang parang ginagamit ng NPA sa pagpatay sa mga sundalo eh, napakagandang baril niyan eh., AK-47. So, thank you, very much.

REYMUND TINAZA/BOMBO RADYO: Sir, just on the Ortega murder case. Sir, in your own legal opinion, can the CA actually overrule or disregard an existing Supreme Court ruling and does CA has the jurisdiction to determine the probable cause of a case?

SEC. AGUIRRE: You are referring to the?

REYMUND TINAZA/BOMBO RADYO: Ex-Palawan Governor Reyes case.

SEC. AGUIRRE: Could you go to the specific. What particular aspect of the decision that you are referring?

REYMUND TINAZA/BOMBO RADYO: I think there's a ruling to Supreme Court to allow RTC to conduct its own determination of the probable cause where in fact, the RTC already denied the bail or application of bail of Governor Reyes.

SEC. AGUIRRE: Kasi kung tama iyong aking pagkakaintindi. The findings of probable case was raised, was questioned by the respondents, the Reyes brothers, among them the Reyes brothers.

Tapos pumunta ito sa Court of Appeals and I was reviewed by the 5-man division, meaning to say na originally, hindi magkasundo iyong three man division kaya nagdagdag diyan ng two additional. Kaya special division of five iyan and doon sa five, tatlo ang nagsabi na, no probable cause, dalawa ang nagsabi na malakas ang ebidensiya.

So, hindi ko malaman kung meron ngang violation dito ng Supreme Court. If this case has already gone to the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court has said that there was probable cause, eh hindi na maaring baligtarin ng Court of appeals, but apparently, hindi pa naman nangyayari iyon, kaya preceding from other issues, the Court of Appeals still has the power to rule that—on the existence or non-existence of probable cause.

REYMUND TINAZA/BOMBO RADYO: But what could be the regular, I mean, just to educate us perhaps. Who has the sole jurisdiction to determine the probable cause? I mean, I understand there is no conviction yet or any acquittal or ruling from the lower court?

SEC. AGUIRRE: Well, it is the court actually. Kasi ang court ang nagi-isyu ng warrant of arrest, without the findings of probable cause, the court will not issue the warrant of arrest.

Apparently, the lower court in this case found probable cause and thus issued the warrant of arrest. This was questioned by the Reyes brothers and other respondents who went up to the Court of Appeals. And the Court of Appeals apparently reversed the findings of the RTC.

USEC. EGCO: Thank you. Good afternoon, brothers and sisters. Today, I'd like to clarify some issues with regard to allegations that Secretary Harry Roque had conflict of interest when he assailed the CA ruling on the Ortega murder case.

So, I'd like to begin, Secretary Harry Roque is the Spokesperson of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte who issued Administrative Order Number 1 on October 11, 2016 for the purpose of protecting the life, liberty and security of media workers.

When Secretary Roque commented on the CA ruling on the murder case against former Palawan Governor Joel Reyes, he did so within the purview of AO1 as the alter-ego of the President of the Philippines who has vowed in his first SONA that, and I quote, "This government does not condone violence and repression of media workers."

The 14th whereas clause of AO1 expressly provides that "Unsolved cases of grave violation of the right to life, liberty and security of a person, are revisited, investigated and prosecuted until final determination and penal conclusion."

Further, AO1 mandates the creation of the Presidential Task Force on Media Security for the purpose of monitoring all cases of media killings and mobilizing all member agencies in order to attain justice for the family of slain journalists and media workers. The office of the Solicitor General is one of the member agencies of PTFoMS. The OSG is the government's lawyer and its Chief Solicitor Jose Calida has criticized the CA decision dismissing the murder case of former Palawan Governor Reyes saying that, and I quote, "The decision of the CA is stinks." And that he will conduct an investigation to, "Find out where the stench came from." We share the same sentiment.

The PTFoMS, having been created under AO1 for the protection of the life, liberty and security of media workers, will do all within its powers under the said Admin Order and will perform all legal and appropriate actions and ask our media partners like the NUJP, NPC, KBP, MFR, PAPI and the Philippine Press Institute for support in order to find out where the stench really came from with regard to the CA's order to release former Governor Reyes to the detriment of a slain journalist whom we are bound by law to protect and serve until justice is achieved. This unwelcome development is a nightmare from where we all should wake up, it sets a bad precedent to cases of similar nature. It sends a chilling effect not only to the families of victims but even to us, to those at the frontline against the problem of media killings. Samahan ninyo po kami sa laban na ito.

REYMUND TINAZA/BOMBO RADYO: Hi sir. Can your office can do something? I mean, to appeal or to file case to... for example, to the CA judge or justice whom you believe his decision is stinks?

USEC. EGCO: [laughs] Okay, iyon din ang question mo kanina. Well to answer that Reymund, actually we had a meeting a few days ago and we discussed that with the PTFoMS lawyers, the lawyer of the family and the members of the family themselves 'no. You were pointing about the SC earlier—previous SC decision upholding the authority of the local Court. So iyon iyong nakita namin. Mayroon nga eh, the SC has previously upheld the right of the—jurisdiction of the lower court 'no in determining probable cause. So ito iyong nakikita namin na possible, possible, I'm not saying that this is going to happen. But we are... maybe the CA justices maybe they're courting an administrative case 'no. But well it depends on the—to the interested parties in this particular case specifically the family. Kung gusto nilang mag-pursue, may interes sila sa kaso. They may do so. But we are of that belief eh 'no.

And of course Supreme Court iyan eh, so iyon nga iyong sinasabi natin that's why we share the sentiments of the OSG. And the OSG is a member of task force 'no. And we give our full trust and confidence to the office of the Solicitor General to effectively seek a reversal of this nightmare... of this according to Secretary Roque nga the past few days which is a travesty of justice. Natatakot ako dito, ako personally eh. We are on the frontline of the fight against media worker killings. Napakahirap maghanap ng witness, ang hirap mag-file ng kaso, ang hirap magpahuli ng suspect, ang hirap mag-monitor ng kaso sa Korte, ang daming kung anu-ano. And then sa isang iglap biglang mawawala. What about the other... more than 100 cases that we're handling? So iyong—that's my—kumbaga iyong primal fear, ito iyon eh.

And again, I'm getting very sentimental about this because two weeks ago - and I told Secretary Roque about this - mayroon tayong isang kaso na hawak na media worker killing ano. The point—the person of interest was dismissed, order dismissed by the Ombudsman. The MR was I think rejected and two weeks ago—I think after Christmas he was able to get an injunction from the Court of Appeals. So, well I don't know, I'm not here to speculate or bad mouth the Court of Appeals justices. But I'm not happy about it personally.

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Usec. Egco, magandang hapon po. Puwede rin sigurong sumagot si Spokes Roque kung... after kay Usec. Egco.

Sir, ano pong reaksiyon natin doon sa parang timing noong allegedly pasya ni Justice Pizarro na mag-retire o mag-avail ng early retirement after the controversial decision tungkol kay Reyes?

USEC. EGCO: I have friends also in the Court of Appeals and I've been asking around the past few days kung ano talagang nangyari. I told some people to... you know, iyon naman tayo eh, as former journalist iyon ang trabaho natin, magtatanong tanong tayo.

Isa iyon sa tinanong ko lang. "Is it true that particular justice is retiring?" "Yeah, he opted for early retirement." Well okay, that's all I can say. So iyon-iyon.

And I think there is another view here that iyong tatlo kasi they were - out of the five, three iyong nag-approve ano. I think at least one according to my source there, believes that mahihirapan because may namatay na supposedly mag-corroborate doon sa witness. Pero sabi ko nga, eh teka hindi ba dapat ano na iyon? Mas maganda kung full blown trial eh, mas maganda ang Korte na ang mag-determine niyan. Well I'm not a lawyer but iyon ang ano ko in my experiences like you as a journalist 'no, puro ganoon eh. So let the Court determine 'no, probable cause or until guilt. But in any case, iyon nga iyong sinite ko kanina, expressly provided under AOI hanggang penal conclusion, talagang tututukan natin ito 'no. So that's why I'm going to reiterate that they were wrong in claiming that Secretary Roque had conflict of interest.

Mula noong namatay si Doc Gerry 2011, I was Director of the National Press Club, and we've been also calling for the immediate arrest and prosecution of the suspects in this case. And when I was President of the NPC, naaresto siya. And we even issue the very strong statement welcoming the arrest 'no. So nasaan ang conflict of interest doon now that I'm part of government and I'm in charge of going after them.

Everything that Secretary Roque said and everything that I'm saying now all fall within the purview of AOI, trabaho lang naman natin ito eh. And very explicit iyong sinasabi. We ran after them. So we provide legal assistance, we provide any assistance that we can provide to the family. We have been in close contact with Michaela Ortega and Ma'am Patty 'no ever since, iyon ang kausap natin eh. In fact, when this happened I was already in communication with Mika Ortega as early as Saturday.

Nagkausap na kami and I told her, I assured her na pinag-uusapan namin ito at pag-uusapan namin nila Secretary Roque at ng mga Task Force lawyers natin and members. And during our next meeting, we are going to discuss this. And I'd like also to announce that I prepared a formal request for SolGen Calida 'no to take charge, to do whatever—what has to be done 'no, to seek a reversal ha. Hindi lang ano, kailangan ma-reverse ito eh. Because as I said for me this is a nightmare and kailangan pagtulong-tulungan natin ito otherwise natatakot ako na bumagsak iyong ibang mga ganitong klase ng kaso. Hindi magandang example.

ROCKY IGNACIO/PTV: Thank you, Undersecretary Joel Egco. Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque...

USEC. EGCO: Thank you.

SEC. ROQUE: Nawala ang aking mga reading materials here, nadala mo 'ata (laughs). Let me go to two good news, first. Let's go first to the good news...

The World Bank's Global Economic Prospects, January 2018 Report – We welcome the latest forecast of the World Bank in its Global Economic Prospects, January 2018 Report which cited the Philippines to be the fastest growing economy among ASEAN countries.

With the implementation of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion Act, the Philippines will continue to be one of the top performing economies as it will boost infrastructure spending.

The big rollout of major infrastructure projects would result in a substantial increase in our Gross Domestic Product for 2018. The timely implementation of our infrastructure program will be critical in bringing down the cost of doing business and making our exporters more competitive.

More good news – The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas in the October 2017 Foreign Direct Investments Net Inflows—or the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas reported in the October 2017 Foreign Direct Investments that net inflows reached 2 billion, compared to 670 million last October of 2016.

Foreign direct investment net inflows for the first 10 months of 2017 grew from year-on-year by 20.5% to US 7.9 billion. Netherlands, Singapore, Kuwait, United States and Germany were our top sources of foreign direct investments in October 2017.

According to the BSP, a significant portion of equity capital placements were channeled to electricity, gas and air conditioning supply activities. Meanwhile, other sectors that received investment inflows were manufacturing, construction, real estate, wholesale and retail trade.

Now, questions...

ROCKY IGNACIO/PTV: Sir, in dollars iyon? Iyong...

SEC. ROQUE: In dollars.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: Sir, the Japanese Minister on Internal Affairs said that he expressed regret over the comfort women's statue erected in Roxas Boulevard. May we know how the President reacted to this?

SEC. ROQUE: I think we issued a press statement, and we stand by the press statement.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: So sir, you're denying that the Minister ever said—

SEC. ROQUE: I'm not denying. I'm saying that the press statement prepared by Malacañang – and that's the press statement.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: Sir, do you believe in that statement?

SEC. ROQUE: Which one?

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: Can you respond on the premise that she gave those remarks? Because my next question would then be, how the remarks would impact on the relationship between Japan and the Philippines?

SEC. ROQUE: Well as I said 'no, there's a press statement issued. Not everything that goes on closed doors bilateral talks can be reported upon or commented upon.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: But sir, Japanese media already reported on it. Because she, herself admitted that during a press briefing or interview.

SEC. ROQUE: Let Japanese media report on it. Next question, please.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: But is the pre—will the Philippine government be doing anything about the statue at least, given how it has caused such controversies?

SEC. ROQUE: You know, the statue is not erected by Malacañang. What are we supposed to do ‘no? So...

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: But sir it was—it has the seal of the NHCP, which is a government agency.

SEC. ROQUE: Then, that should be addressed to the NHCP. It’s not something that the President will act on himself.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: So sir, hands off ang Malacañang in this issue?

SEC. ROQUE: We didn’t erect the statue, so it’s not a Presidential project, so to speak.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: So the government doesn’t see this as a diplomatic issue?

SEC. ROQUE: I don’t think it is really a diplomatic issue. No, because our ties with Japan remain very strong. We have every reason to be optimistic, that bilateral relations with Japan would become even stronger.

CELERINA MONTE/MANILA SHIMBUN: Good afternoon, sir. Ako iyong nag-text sa inyo yesterday regarding that. During the forum this morning, Gabriela said they’re challenging you, specifically you, since you’re a former council for another lolas, the Malaya Lolas when you were still with the private sector.

They’re asking you, they’re challenging you na... I want to quote them: “Naghihintay ang comfort women and advocates na gumawa siya,” meaning you, “na positibong remarks na Mananatili ang statue sa Roxas Boulevard.” So, can we get your reaction on that?

SEC. ROQUE: I’m Presidential Spokesperson now, may past involvements have become irrelevant. The President did not erect that statue it’s up to the people who erected the statue to do anything they want with it.

CELERINA MONTE/MANILA SHIMBUN: Sir, there’s this letter daw from the DFA asking the mayor or the local government of Manila to remove that statue. Since the DFA is a national government, part of the national government, is that the policy?

SEC. ROQUE: I do not know about that letter, and if there is such a letter, to confirm it, please ask Mayor Estrada.

PHILIP TUBEZA/INQUIRER: Sir good afternoon, reaction lang. The camp of Gov. Joel Reyes is asking the Court of Appeals to cite you in contempt of court for allegedly lawyering for the camp of Gerry Ortega.

SEC. ROQUE: Well I welcome that, so I can probably explain to the convicted felon – he is a convicted felon, remember?

What the role of the Executive is, the Chief Executive – the Chief Executive is the chief implementor of the law.

Every crime is prosecuted by the Executive in the name of the people of the Philippines. Of course, it is the duty and obligation of the state to accord its citizens justice. I spoke in that capacity. I have no regrets, and even the President approved of my statements.

PHILIP TUBEZA/INQUIRER: Thank you, sir.

LLANESCA PANTI/MLA TIMES: Sir, sorry I will go back with the Japan, with statue. Because the President said even before he won as President. He said that he will raise this issue with the Japanese, if he wins.

And he repeated that same statement two months after his election in August 2016. He said that he is willing to raise that issue when he goes to Japan as President. So, can we expect him to at least initiate compensation or any deal with the...with our comfort women considering that there is an existing deal between the Japanese government and the South Korean comfort women.

SEC. ROQUE: I can only say again that diplomatic negotiations constitute an established exception to Freedom of Information, because of the delicate nature of maintaining bilateral ties.

I cannot confirm if the President will bring up the issue of the comfort women, what I can confirmed whole heartedly is that he values the very close bilateral relations that we have with Japan currently.

Q: Sir, reaction po to Makabayan Bloc saying the President committed grave abused of signing TRAIN into law, which according to them was not properly ratified.

SEC. ROQUE: Well, I don't think they are a court. Only the court can conclude that there was grave abused of discretion and of course, I have said it before that there's overwhelming presumption of regularity because of the enrolled bill doctrine that the TRAIN was signed by the Senate President and the Speaker of the House before it was signed by the President into law. That's entitled to full respect from our courts.

Q: They say sir, it was not properly ratified due to the lack of quorum?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, I understand that brought a suit already alleging this ground, let the court decide.

Q: Sir, on Veloso, is there any offer or request from the President to help her so that she could testify against her recruiters?

SEC. ROQUE: I don't understand what exactly the President can do in this regard. She is detained in foreign soil because of breach of Indonesian Penal Laws, she continues to be alive despite being meted the death penalty.

But there is such a thing as sovereignty and the matter is completely in the hands of the Indonesian government, although I think the Indonesian government by not carrying out the punishment of death penalty has shown clemency on a daily basis.

Q: Yesterday former Senator Bong-Bong Marcos said he will not stop pursuing his electoral protest, even if the President would endorse him as a candidate for the next—. Is there a possibility for the President to possibly, to endorse him for the next senatorial election?

SEC. ROQUE: I am not aware and as you yourself said, a decision has been made by Mr. Marcos. That he will not give up his election protest.

PHILIP TUBEZA/INQUIRER: Hi sir, confirmed na po ba iyong trip ni Presidente sa India, at the end of the month?

SEC. ROQUE: I do not... Well it looks like, but you know anything can happen. I mean, it looks like it's going to push through, because it's a gathering of heads of States of ASEAN in a summit with India. So, I don't see why it will not push through, except if for some reason, he decides not to push through with it.

PHILIP TUBEZA/INQUIRER: Ano po ang magiging agenda ng Presidente?

SEC. ROQUE: It's an ASEAN Summit. So, the agenda is set by the secretariat of ASEAN.

PHILIP TUBEZA/INQUIRER: There has been criticism before about iyong size ng delegations niya pag nagta-travel siya abroad. Will he have a leaner delegation this time around?

SEC. ROQUE: Number one, I am not sure about the criticism. Number two, I am not sure if it's really not lean enough. Because I've seen, I've been on some of these trips it's rather lean, if you compare it, let say with the presidential trips President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

I've went to some of these trips as a Congressman and there were only one or two members of Congress accompanying him and I heard anecdotally that in past administrations there were more members of Congress that were allowed to go on these state visits. That's what I heard.

PHILIP TUBEZA/INQUIRER: Will there be fewer trips this year?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, as I said, the President is not kin on making foreign trips, he's not been kin of flying to Manila, that's the truth. So, I don't think it will be a problem. I think he will lead by way of example to others, to minimize foreign trips.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Sir, iyong sa teachers' pay. What's really the status? Ano ba talaga, sir meron o wala na aasahan?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, it's very clear, even the transcript of what I said here is clear, because I was based on the transcript of the cabinet meeting. He asked his cabinet members to find ways to increase the salary of teachers. I did say, I did not know by how much, I speculated, it is true that my speculation could be wrong. But I did not unequivocally state how much the increase will be. I am unequivocally stating that the President ordered everyone to study how to increase the salaries of teachers.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Sir, iyon pong sinabi ni Secretary Diokno na, well, I think iyong context noon, iyong 500 billion kung double, no hindi kaya, what does the Palace think about it? Hindi kaya!

SEC. ROQUE: He knows best, but as I said, it was not as if the President said, let's double, like what he said on the salaries of the AFP and the police. But what you need to note is that the President says he wants to increase the salary of teachers. He does not go back on his promises, he will increase the salary of teachers by as much as we can.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: So sir the intention is there no?

SEC. ROQUE: The intention is there. It will not be taken back.

JOSEPH/GMA7: So sa sir sa GAA wala yan, diba?

SEC. ROQUE: Wala pa.

JOSEPH/GMA7: Correct, correct. So probably next budget nayan.

SEC. ROQUE: We don't even know when but he has asked them to look for ways and means to increase the salaries of teachers

JOSEPH/GMA7: So they can expect if some teachers..?

SEC. ROQUE: Of course! In the same way that it took time for his election promise to double the salary of policemen and military. It will take some time but it will happen during his administration.

JOSEPH/GMA7: And of course between the Secretary Diokno and the President, the president will prevail of course.

SEC. ROQUE: Well of course, there's only one.

JOSEPH/GMA7: Kamontra lang ng ulo. [laughs].

SEC. ROQUE: Chief Executive—

JOSEPH/GMA7: Okay, sir. Other issue—tapusin ko lang itong checklist ko. Sir, kay Ma'am Licuanan? Ano yung status niya?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, as I said we publicly heard Congressman Nograles complain about the trips. I said it helps if a formal complaint is filed because if all instances where the president acted there was a formal complaint.

I do not know if there is a formal complaint against Chairperson Licuanan but I'm sure the President, because he reads the papers himself, knows about the trips.

JOSEPH/GMA7: So sir if there is going to be any action from the President it should be prompted by a formal complaint?

SEC. ROQUE: It's just that the track record is—there was a complaint filed. There was an investigation and there was a decision.

JOSEPH/GMA7: So kung may mangyari man kay Chairman Licuanan, dapat mayroon munang magko-complain, otherwise it just those reports or allegations from several Congressman that will not be sufficient enough for the President to do any action.

SEC. ROQUE: I'm not speculating now on what the President will do. I'm just highlighting his track record. Usual complaint, investigation and action!

JOSEPH/GMA7: Sir iyong kay Usec. Diñon ire-require niya iyong mga barangay captains to come up with the listahan ng mga alleged or those who are involved in drugs. As a lawyer and as a Presidential Spokesperson, do you see anything wrong with that coming up with that kind of lists?

SEC. ROQUE: None so far, because he just wants to get information on the basis of which the DILG should conduct an investigation. Now there are two possible cases that could be filed, administrative for removal, or criminal.

So depending on the amount of evidence uncovered either administrative case for removal of the local government official could be filed resulting in severance from duty of that public officer or if there is more than enough evidence to establish even probable cause for criminal case and a criminal case should be file.

JOSEPH/GMA7: No, but the process of drawing up the lists, hindi ba siya sir medyo iffy? Kasi baka mamaya since they require, they just put any other name there?

SEC. ROQUE: As I said 'no, it's just a request to come up with names so that they could conduct investigations. It's always begins with an investigations.

JOSEPH/GMA7: Sir iyong third telco, Korean ba ito sir? May pangalan ba ito sir?

SEC. ROQUE: It's not Korean. Why are you saying Korean?

JOSEPH/GMA7: Well Martin said so.

SEC. ROQUE: I don't know.

JOSEPH/GMA7: [laughs].

SEC. ROQUE: But I can only. I can only repeat that the President offered with the Chinese—

JOSEPH/GMA7: No, mga fourth pala? China iyong third eh. Iyong forth player?

SEC. ROQUE: I don't know. I haven't heard about the fourth. I only know about the third.

JOSEPH/GMA7: Pero ang sabi niya iyong PT&T has already like a partner iyong PTV?

SEC. ROQUE: I don't know maybe you should ask that of Secretary Martin. But I know only of the third.

JOSEPH/GMA7: Okay.

PHILIP TUBEZA/INQUIRER: Sir follow up lang doon sa barangays. Kasi the President mentioned before na 40 percent ng barangay officials involved sa droga? And right now Usec. Diño is going to ask them to come up with the list? 'Di ba medyo problematic iyan?

SEC. ROQUE: You know I see no problem because all he wants is names to investigate. What's wrong with that? Because people should know, by way of general reputation who are involved in drugs. I think communities know 'no. But it is not enough for anything. You have to investigate on the basis of these leads.

PHILIP/INQUIRER: Or I mean drug link officials coming up with the list kasi sabi ni Presidente 40 percent ng barangay officials?

SEC. ROQUE: That didn't come from Secretary Diño, he was not yet in DILG 'no at that time 'no. So perhaps that's another lead that Usec. Diño should pursue 'no, the already existing data bank that we have. But the question is there anything wrong with asking for list? There's absolutely nothing wrong for as long as it will entail conduct of an investigation, to verify the information.

PHILIP/INQUIRER: Okay, thank you sir.

ROCKY/PTV4: Okay, thank you, Malacañang Press Corps. Thank you Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque.

SEC. ROQUE: Thank you.

ROCKY/PTV4: Back to our main studio sa Radyo Pilipinas and People's Television.

--- END ---

PCOO-NIB (News and Information Bureau)