

**Presidential Communications Operations Office
News and Information Bureau**

**PRESS BRIEFING OF PCOO ASSISTANT SECRETARY KRIS ABLAN
RE: FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
FEBRUARY 14, 2018 (11:06 – 11:22 A.M.)**

ROCKY IGNACIO/PTV: Good morning Malacañang Press Corps and guests, welcome sa Press Briefing. Today we have Assistant Secretary, Attorney Kris Ablan to tell us more about FOI. Good morning, sir.

ASEC. ABLAN: Good morning, Rocky. Happy Valentines Rocky. Happy Valentines to the Malacañang Press Corps and to everyone. Happy Valentines Philippines.

Alright. The last time we met was in December, when we discussed the preparations for the FOI Summit and the FOI Awards. Today, the FOI Office is pleased to give the public some updates on the FOI program. We prepared a slideshow presentation for everyone.

As the designated lead agency in the implementation of Freedom of Information, we are glad to report the accomplishments and upcoming plans of the FOI program under the PCOO. As of today, FOI People's Manuals from the following agencies are currently available in their respective transparency seal pages in their respective websites.

For national government agencies, we have 100% or 189 out of 189 national government agencies with FOI Manuals downloadable from the internet. For GOCCs, we have a compliance of 67% or 101 out of the 151 GOCCs. For State Universities and Colleges or SUCs, we have 88% compliance or 99 out of the 113 SUCs. And for local water districts, we have 35% or a 175 out of the 500 local water districts.

The publication of the manuals is a good governance condition for the 2017 Performance Based Bonus or PBB eligibility. This year, we will update the FOI requirements for the 2018 PBB to increase agency compliance and further improve performance of agencies in disclosing their information.

To further promote openness and transparency through proactive disclosure, we also require agencies to submit their agency information inventories. So the agency information inventory is a listing of all information recorded, stored, kept, controlled or archived by any agency which serves as reference for citizens on the scope and limitations on specific information they can request. This is a best practice we got from other agencies here in the Philippines like the PSA, the DBM and the DOF, as well as in other countries.

As of today, we have 66 NGAs and GOCCs who have submitted their information inventories. We likewise published an initial consolidated list of the submissions in machine-readable format through the DICT Open Data Portal. Meaning, any citizen can go to gov.ph/data and look for the FOI Information Inventories, and see what information is already available. It's good not only for citizens but also for government, because they don't need to research everytime there's an FOI request.

Our vision is to create the first ever consolidated information inventory under the Executive Branch. The FOI Team has also focused on information dissemination and capacity-building activities for the government, civil society and the business sector, as well as the academe and media. In total, the team has conducted and participated in 154 knowledge-share activities such as orientation sessions, collaborative meetings, technical on boarding workshops, consultative workshops, training of trainers, road shows, major events and international fora.

This February 28, we plan to conduct an in-depth orientation for the Malacañang Press Corps to provide more details on how to access government information. The FOI Team will continue to conduct these activities to encourage more Filipinos to ask questions from government.

As a result of our efforts, the electronic FOI portal or foi.gov.ph now has 3,253 online requests for information lodged for 218 national government agencies and GOCCs currently on-board the platform. Out of these requests, 32% have been facilitated successfully and 37% are currently being processed. The rest are either denied or went out of time.

Tomorrow, Thursday, February 15, the number of agencies on e-FOI will increase to 267 as we will chain more than 49 GOCCs and capacitate them on using the e-FOI portal. Such GOCCs include the SSS and Landbank.

We envision to on-board 100% of NGAs, GOCCs and SUCs by the end of this year to further equip them in facilitating these online requests. In the same vein, we will be improving the portal further to include more features based on feedback from the agencies and citizens.

In terms of policy, we are now exploring the creation of the FOI advisory committee tasked to provide strategic policy direction and oversee the implementation of the FOI program. It will be composed of government representatives and non-government representatives.

We took a cue from the playbook of the open government partnership where they have a steering committee comprise of both government and non-government representatives. Likewise, we lifted the template of the FOI advisory committee in the US.

From the government, the members will be PCOO, the Department of Justice, the DBM, the DICT, the National Privacy Commission, the National Archives of the Philippines, one representative from the Senate and one representative from the House of Representatives.

On the other hand, representatives from the business sector, the academe, the civil society and media will compose the non-government members of the committee.

This 2018 we are also focusing on expanding the program to local government units with the help of the DILG to the promotion of the local FOI ordinance. This is in response to the observation that citizens have been asking for local information from national agencies.

Furthermore, capacitating the LGUs will help prepare them in the passage of the FOI Bill.

Taking stock of the learnings and challenges from more than one year of implementation, the PCOO commits to continue its efforts in strengthening public access to government information.

Lastly, we remain hopeful that the FOI Bill will be passed to further strengthen this administration's effort in promoting transparency, accountability and citizen participation.

So that ends the presentation. Thanks so much, Rocky.

ROSE NOVENARIO/HATAW: Sir, may na-publish ngayon sa isang broadsheet tungkol po doon sa pagiging apparently a junketeer ni Secretary Wanda Teo. Puwede po bang mag-request ang media or iyong mga pangkaraniwang mamamayan ng mga detalye katulad din po nung nilagay po doon sa broadsheet na iyon, para po sa—to curb corruption?

ASEC. ABLAN: Yes Rose, so puwede 'no. We've received request for information on the travel itinerary and travel expenses of the President. For the PCOO part, we have been also receiving request for information on the travel expenses of one of our Assistant Secretary and yes so people can ask these types of questions, because they involve the use of public funds.

SALIMA/GMA7: Sir, you've mentioned kanina doon sa mga request po that some were denied?

ASEC. ABLAN: Yes.

SALIMA/GMA7: Bakit po sila na-deny?

ASEC. ABLAN: They can be denied for various reasons. One of the top na reasons of denying a request is the agency does not have the information. Sometimes people think that an agency has this particular information and it's not with them. So it has to be denied. The reason for the denial is because there is a time period. So, if we just merely pass it on to the other agency, pumapatak pa rin iyong oras, so we have to deny it and assist the citizen to say, you have to ask it from this particular agency.

I will give you an example, request for the SALN of the Cabinet. We have received—PCOO has received requests for SALN of the Cabinet members. We had to deny them because we are not the proper agency that has custody of the SALN. The ones with custody of the SALN for the executive branch is the Malacanang Records Office or the OP.

SALIMA/GMA7: Sir, hindi puwedeng ire-route such request instead of denying it?

ASEC. ABALAN: Those are the one of the things that we have to bring up to give information efficiently. We understand the limitations. But the way the executive order is written and the rules are written is there's a time period - 15 working days.

And if we merely just pass it on, what happens if the one who received the information already used 5 days or let say 7 days and then we pass it on to the other agency, the other agency only has the remaining 7 days.

So we have to fix everything first. Hopefully when everyone is on board eFOI it's going to be faster and if the information is requested from particular agency and it's not the agency, then it doesn't have to be denied, it can go to another agency and the clocks still continues. We'll eventually get there.

Another reason for denial is if it is in the list of exceptions.

ROCKY: Pero sir, can we ask Office of the President to—I mean, the PCOO can ask the Office of the President to facilitate iyong mga recommendation ng SALN ng Cabinet secretaries. Sir, kasi since the President naman ang may gusto talaga ng FOI and iyon talagang to curb corruption.

ASEC. ABLAN: Yes. Actually, our recommendation to the OP is that since SALN is one of the documents frequently asked from the OP and PCOO, that maybe it's time to proactively disclose SALNs after they're made official.

HANNAH SANCHO/SONSHINE RADIO: Sir, last time tinanong namin si Secretary Roque regarding doon sa hinihingi ni Congressman Gary Alejano na i-reveal iyong loan terms between the government and China. Is it possible na i-request it through FOI po?

ASEC. ABLAN: It depends on what stage that the loan is. If it's still in the negotiating stage, it falls under one of the exceptions in the inventory of exceptions. But if the loan agreement has been signed already, then it becomes public document, and any citizen can ask that particular information.

HANNAH SANCHO/SONSHINE RADIO: Sinabi kasi ni Secretary Roque kay Congressman Alejano na lumapit sa inyo regarding doon sa loan terms na ito. Lumapit po ba si Congressman Alejano to request or nag-request ng FOI po sa office ninyo regarding dito?

ASEC. ABLAN: We have not received any request from Congressman Alejano. Perhaps, we're also not the proper agency. Maybe, what Secretary Roque was pertaining to – since I am the FOI Program Director – I can assist Congressman Alejano as to what agency holds those loan agreements.

DEO DE GUZMAN/RMN: Good morning, sir. Sinabi ninyo po kanina ire-release ang mga SALN once it's made official. Kailangan mag-request pa!

ASEC. ABLAN: Yes. So right now, yes, kailangan mag-request pa ang citizen for the SALN because there is a project with the Ombudsman to have the e-SALN, as well as to revitalize the review compliance committee of all agencies.

You see, when people or government officials like me, and government workers, other government workers submit their SALN, it has to pass through a review compliance committee in the agency to make sure that the submission is correct. So we're fine tuning that. And after that's fine tuned, then citizens can request for the SALN.

DEO DE GUZMAN/RMN: Okay, sir. The question is: After it's made official, so iyong—kasi last administration, walang FOI. Walang ... iyong FOI n'yo.

ASEC. ABLAN: Yes.

DEO DE GUZMAN/RMN: During the past administration, once iyong Cabinet secretaries ay official na iyong SALN nila, they automatically released it to the media so that the people don't have to request it. So bakit hindi pa ... bakit parang nilagyan ninyo pa siya ng isang level of bureaucracy para ibigay sa tao iyong information na dapat namang automatic na binibigay sa tao?

ASEC. ABLAN: So, we will recommend to the OP to proactively disclose the SALN of the government officials.

DEO DE GUZMAN/RMN: Will we expect that this year, sir?

ASEC. ABLAN: Yes, yes.

DEO DE GUZMAN/RMN: Na automatic ibibigay sa media so that people won't have to request it to PCOO?

ASEC. ABLAN: Yes, because the recommendation will include the manifestation that SALNs are the most frequently asked information by the citizens. So the way it should work is, agency should learn from the requests. We have to find out kung ano ba iyong hinihingi ng mga citizens, and then kapag nalaman namin na ito iyong palagi nilang hinihingi, imbes na maghintay next year, January 1 pa lang ay i-publicize na iyong mga particular information na iyon.

DEO DE GUZMAN/RMN: Okay, sir. So another question: You said earlier na mayroon isang—a particular assistant secretary ay madaming nagre-request nung sa travel expenses. We know who that is. Pero mayroon na bang na-release na information doon sa mga request? Mayroon na bang na grant na request doon?

ASEC. ABLAN: For that assistant secretary—should I say ... For Assistant Secretary Uson, we've released information on her budget and her accomplishment. For the travel expenses, it's a pending FOI request. It's due this month, so we will be disclosing the travel expenses of the Assistant Secretary.

DEO DE GUZMAN/RMN: So may we request, the media, may be given the copy ng—kasi maraming nagre-request na, so kung bibigyan ang media, at least we could inform the public na rin.

ASEC. ABLAN: Yes, I'll take it up with my superior.

ROCKY: Thank you, Attorney, Assistant Secretary Kris Ablan.

ASEC. ABLAN: Thank you, Ms. Rocky.

##

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