

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OPERATIONS OFFICE
News and Information Bureau

PRESS BRIEFING ON LAGING HANDA
WITH PCOO SECRETARY MARTIN ANDANAR, BI SPOKESPERSON DANA SANDOVAL,
DOH ASEC MARIO ROSARIO VERGEIRE, OWWA ADMINISTRATOR HANS LEO CACDAC
AND DFA ASEC ED MEÑEZ
March 2, 2020 (10:43 A.M. – 12:00 NN)

SEC. ANDANAR: Maraming salamat at magandang umaga po sa ating mga kasamahan sa Malacañang Press Corps. At magandang umaga sa lahat ng nanunood po ng telebisyon, nakikinig sa radyo at nanunood sa live streaming ng Presidential Communications Operations Office at ng iba pang private broadcast companies.

Let me begin by commending everyone by doing a good job. The World Health Organization recently cited the Philippines as one of the countries that had not reported a new case of the coronavirus disease for more than two weeks now. This is no time to celebrate however though as there are still much work that needs to be done. In some parts of the globe, local transmission has been prevalent. We thus cannot let our guards down and lull ourselves into complacency. We have to remain vigilant, prepared and united in combatting this global health emergency.

Simply put, we have to be Laging Handa, always prepared, from knowing the alert levels to safety precautions and preventive measures, plus government interventions.

To talk about this and more, we have representatives from the Department of Health, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Overseas Workers Welfare Administration and the Bureau of Immigration.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome our resource persons from my far right is Ma'am Dana Sandoval of the Bureau of Immigrations; next is Asec. Rosario Vergeire of the Department of Health; followed by Administrator Hans Cacdac of OWWA; and Assistant Secretary Ed Meñez - who just got back from his post to Japan - from the DFA.

Unahin po natin ang ating Spokesperson ng Bureau of Immigration, si Dana Sandoval. Ma'am, the floor is yours.

BI SPOX SANDOVAL: Good morning. Magandang umaga po, Sec. Martin. Of course to our representatives from the Department of Foreign Affairs Asec. Ed. Meñez; the Department of Health Asec. Rosario Vergeire; OWWA Administrator Hans Cacdac; our PCOO Team; and of course our friends from the media, good morning.

In behalf of Bureau of Immigration, Immigration Commissioner Jaime Morente, we are joining you this morning in this Laging Handa press briefing to clarify details about the recently implemented and expanded travel bans which affect four countries. Said travel bans have been

implemented following directives from the Office of the President as recommended by Interagency Task Force for the Management of Infectious Diseases.

I will give you a quick rundown on the timelines of said bans. And later on, I will discuss existing bans that we are currently implementing, as well as clarify some of the frequently asked questions about this.

On January 24, the BI started denying applications for visa upon arrival for Chinese nationals coming from Wuhan province following the temporary cancellation of the Civil Aeronautics Board of all direct flights from Wuhan City to the Philippines.

On January 28, the issuance of the visa upon arrival for Chinese nationals was suspended in an effort to slowdown the arrival of Chinese tour groups.

On February 1, the BI implemented a ban on foreigners from Hubei province following an order from the President to stop the entry of all visitors from Hubei.

The following day, on February 2, the President ordered an expansion of the travel ban to include entire People's Republic of China and its Special Administrative Regions which are Hong Kong and Macau.

On February 10, the BI implemented the expanded travel ban which includes Taiwan as confirmed by the Secretary of Justice and the Department of Health.

On February 14, the BI implemented the full lifting of the travel ban to Taiwan as ordered by the Office of the President following the recommendations from the IATFMID.

On February 18, the BI implemented the lifting of the travel ban for Hong Kong and Macau OFWs, student-visa holders and permanent residents.

On February 26, the BI partially implements travel ban to South Korea and allowed only OFWs, students and permanent residents to travel to South Korea.

On February 28, the BI fully implemented travel ban to South Korea.

To sum things up: We are currently implementing travel bans for four countries. First is for China - for arriving passengers: all foreign nationals coming from China within the last 14 days. Exemptions are Filipinos and their spouse and children, foreigners with Philippine permanent resident visas and members of the diplomatic corps.

For departing passengers: all Filipinos regardless of visa types are not allowed. For transiting passengers: not allowed. For Hong Kong and Macau - for arriving passengers: all foreign nationals coming from Hong Kong and Macau within the last 14 days. Exemptions are Filipinos and their spouse and children, foreigners with Philippine permanent resident visas and members of the diplomatic corps.

For departing passengers - all Filipinos, with the exemptions of Filipino holders of permanent resident visas, student visas or OFWs; for transit passengers - also not allowed.

For South Korea - for arriving passengers: all foreign nationals coming from North Gyeongsang province, Daegu and Cheongdo within the last 14 days. Exemptions are Filipinos and their spouse and children, foreigners with Philippine permanent resident visas and members of the diplomatic corps.

For departing passengers - all Filipinos, with exemptions of Filipino holders of permanent resident visas, student visas or OFWs; for transit - it is allowed as long as it does transit through North Gyeongsang province, Daegu and Chengdu.

We are clarifying that it is not a total ban for foreigners coming from South Korea, but rather a selective ban for aliens coming from North Gyeongsang province, Daegu and Cheongdo. However, Filipino tourists bound for Korea will temporarily not be allowed to depart; only those in the exempted classes will be allowed to travel to South Korea.

The ban includes passengers who have been to these areas of concern in the last 14 days.

The BI has also sent a notice to airlines and shipping agents, requiring them to screen passengers for boarding to restrict the arrival of aliens who have visited China, Hong Kong, Macau and parts of South Korea in the last 14 days.

The BI again urges everyone to temporarily refrain from unnecessary travel and to bear with the government as this measure is being implemented. Commissioner Morente is appealing to the public for their understanding as these sacrifices are being implemented by the government to ensure that the country is protected from COVID-19.

Moving forward, the BI is ready to implement further policy changes relating to foreign travel as deemed appropriate by the Office of the President, as recommended by the IATFMID. Thank you very much and a blessed day to all.

ASEC. VERGEIRE: Good morning everyone. The Department of Health is updating the public on the COVID-19 health situation on the repatriates from the M/V Diamond Princess, Diamond Cruise Ship and the global situation.

The Department of Health reported that as of today, there are now only 43 patients under investigation; 13 would be coming from our New Clark City repatriates admitted here in our various health facilities. A total of 592 patients have already been discharged.

The decrease in the number of patients under investigation being admitted is welcome news to all. This may be attributed to our strengthened surveillance, early travel restrictions and enhanced laboratory processes. But this is not enough reason to let our guards down, the DOH will continuously assess the situation and improve its surveillance protocols based on evidence and further developments, our Secretary explained.

Updates on our repatriates at the NCC quarantine facility - DOH reported that 14 quarantined individuals at the New Clark City showed sign and symptoms of respiratory illness.

The patients under investigation manifested sore throat, cough and fever. Ten of them experienced sore throat; three of them experienced cough; and one of them experienced fever; and ten of them had tested negative, and we are still waiting for four laboratory results to be issued maybe within the day.

Among the 14 PUIs, ten tested negative for COVID-19, while four are with pending laboratory results. The patients under investigation are still admitted at our referral facility.

We are more than ready to cater to the needs of our kababayan should they test positive for COVID-19. We are also geared up for the possibility of local transmission.

The welfare and safety of our healthcare workers are our top most priority. And as such, we have adequately trained and equipped them to carefully handle positive cases once they arise.

Updates on our global situation: DOH is adopting its contingency plan as the World Health Organization raised its risk assessment on the COVID-19 to very high at the regional and global levels. Currently, there are 58 countries with confirmed cases, and 20 countries with local transmission.

DOH also reported that as of March 2, there are total of 86 confirmed COVID-19 cases among our overseas Filipinos around the globe. Japan recorded the most overseas Filipino cases with a total of 80 from which 48 are still admitted and 32 had been discharged already; followed by UAE, Hong Kong and Singapore with two cases each. The most recent case was a 41-year old Filipina who was admitted to a health facility in Singapore.

The Philippine government has already repatriated ten overseas Filipinos from the M/V Diamond Princess cruise ship who were initially positive for COVID-19, and were later discharged after their recovery. President Rodrigo Roa Duterte has been personally monitoring their status and promised the same care and protection to our other kababayans who might soon find themselves in the same position. He is keen on ensuring our fellow Filipinos' health and safety wherever they are in the world, the Health Chief remarked.

So that is our updates for today.

ADMINISTRATOR CACDAC: Sige, sa akin brief lang. Una—three slides. Una is an update on the COVID-19 relief assistance that we've been giving to stranded/affected OFWs here in the Philippines. So—wala ba?

But anyway, total amount released as of March 2, 7 A.M., 84,480,000 covering 8,448 OFWs - so most of them are from Hong Kong, and then Macau, China, then Taiwan. Iyong Taiwan was just for a brief period of time 'no but nevertheless, some of the OFWs we also provided the 10,000 pesos livelihood assistance. So iyan iyon, iyan iyong total as of 7:38 A.M.

Next slide is—for the next two slides would cover iyong 400 plus Diamond Princess seafarers currently quarantined in New Clark City. So the first is decision of the OWWA Board Trustees last week, and there were four points decided upon by the OWWA Board. Una, the OWWA Board recognized the one-country team effort, and we're thankful of the one-country team effort by the Philippine embassy in Tokyo, Philippine Overseas Labor Office, as well as the OWWA in preparing the Diamond Princess seafarers for repatriation home.

In fact, the OWWA personnel involved in this repatriation effort together with the one-country team are currently in quarantine in Tokyo, kasi nga they directly dealt with the Diamond Princess seafarers.

Second is the provision of 10,000 financial assistance to each returned Diamond Princess seafarer. Third is the provision of transport assistance from Manila to the home region for each M/V Diamond Princess seafarer. And then, for those who wish to permanently stay, so there will be a 20,000 peso livelihood grant on top of the financial assistance provided for those who wish to permanently stay in the Philippines.

So numbers two, three and four shall be given after the seafarer completes the mandatory 14-day quarantine period. And in this connection, we issued an advisory which is the third visual ... we issued an advisory also upon advice of our Chair in the inter-agency task force, the DOH, that we issued an advisory about completion of the 14-day quarantine period just to make sure that our seafarers in the M/V Diamond Princess complete the 14-day quarantine period. So iyong assistance po and transport assistance will be provided upon completion of the 14-day quarantine period for the protection of their communities, their families and themselves.

Iyon lang po, thank you.

ASEC. MEÑEZ: Magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat. Katulad ng iba, update lang ho noong ... since Monday last week, kung ano ang ginagawa ng DFA with regard to the COVID issue. May mga slides ho.

Katulad ho ng kuwento ng mga kasama natin dito, with regard to the M/V Diamond Princess, the 14-day quarantine period started on the 25th of February after the 445 repatriates were successfully brought home.

And as was also mentioned by OWWA Administrator Hans Cacdac, aside from the 13 persons who were onboard the flight from DOH and the DFA, mayroon din hong 18 na kasamahan ho namin sa Philippine embassy composed of DFA, OWWA and POLO, Labor personnel who volunteered. Naka-hazmat ho sila buong araw, tumulong ho sa pag-disembark ng mga kasamahan ho natin sa M/V Diamond Princess. So we'd like to also of course recognize their efforts in helping to ensure the successful return of our kababayan.

On the 28th of February, naglabas din ho ng public advisory ang aming consular office with regard to all Filipinos who are affected by, in one way or another, by the COVID issue and are not able to appear for their confirmed appointments. So mayroon hong pinalabas na advisory na

lahat ho ng affected will be able to be accommodated by the Office of Consular Affairs within 30 days of their missed appointment.

With regard to the monitoring of overseas Filipinos abroad, may mga binanggit din ho ang ating mga kasamahan dito, but we will focus on certain countries which are showing the most activity with regard to COVID cases.

Unang-una ho, iyong South Korea, the latest data that we have is that they now have 3,736 confirmed cases; and 18 persons who have expired. The total number of Filipinos in South Korea as of January this year is 60,139 Filipinos.

We do have some breakdown of figures with respect to affected areas but baka sa Q and A na lang ho iyon.

For Italy, as of this morning, the total confirmed cases are 1,694; reported deaths in Italy are 34. The number of Filipinos in Italy as of January this year is 161,885 Filipinos.

I must also mention that both for South Korea and Italy as of current information, wala pa naman hong Filipino na na-identify as either PUM, PUI or COVID positive in both South Korea and Italy.

For the Islamic Republic of Iran, another country that has registered some high figures, total confirmed cases as of this morning, 978; reported death are 54. The number of Filipinos in Iran as of January this year is 1, 181 Filipinos. Again, wala pa rin hong report na may Pilipinong identified PUM, PUI or COVID positive sa Islamic Republic of Iran.

There are two other countries that I will be updating on basically Singapore and Hong Kong, nabanggit na rin ho ni Asec. Vergeire. So for Singapore, 106 confirmed COVID–19 cases; no deaths as far as I'm aware as of this morning.

In Hong Kong 95, 95 confirmed COVID–19 cases and two confirmed deaths.

Filipino population in Singapore is a little less than 200,000 Filipinos; sa Hong Kong naman po ay 244,333 Filipinos. In Singapore, as was reported by Asec. Vergeire and for Hong Kong both apparently now have two confirmed COVID cases na Filipino.

So, 'yung lang po ang updates namin for the past week. Maraming salamat.

USEC. IGNACIO: MPC, questions? Reymund Tinaza, then Gillian and Tina.

REYMUND TINAZA/BOMBO RADYO: Doon lang kay Ma'am Dana. Ma'am, so 'yung sa arrival ng mga Korean nationals or foreign nationals from South Korea ay 'yung nanggagaling sa... 'yung tatlong spots, Daegu—

SPOKESPERSON SANDOVAL: Yes po.

REYMUND TINAZA/BOMBO RADYO: Ma'am, do we have a way para ma-confirm or ma-trace kung if they did not actually come from that place pero galing sila ng South Korea?

SPOKESPERSON SANDOVAL: Actually, 'yan 'yung naging difficulty natin in implementing dito sa arriving because what's particular about this travel ban, it's not the entire country ang naka-ban but only selected areas ng South Korea. Unlike for the past bans for China, Hong Kong and Macau, alam natin na once galing doon sa port na 'yun, automatic hindi natin papayagan 'pag may travel sila within the last fourteen days.

This one, it's not the entire South Korea. So what we did is through the inter-agency is we coordinate with the South Korean government and they pledged to issue a certification to know if that person, that foreign national is coming from those areas. But temporarily habang wala pa po 'yung ganoong mechanism, we are looking at the resident registration certificate or the national ID of the foreign national for us to know kung nanggaling po siya doon, kung 'yun 'yung kaniyang address.

REYMUND TINAZA/BOMBO RADYO: Thank you. Anyone siguro from our guest. With this trend lalo sa pag-shoot-up ng cases of COVID-19 in Italy, Middle East, Islamic State of Iran, so are we expecting also of imposing same travel ban with these now newly affected countries?

ASEC. VERGEIRE: The inter-agency task force regularly does its assessment every time that they meet 'no. So the inter-agency task force meets once a week dahil level officials, and the technical working group for this task force meets twice a week.

So, with that, it's always—as part of the agenda doing risk assessment for all of these countries which we think are on the top of the list right now because of the number of cases, because of the volume of travelers going to the Philippines, and because of the evidence of local transmission.

So there are criteria, there are these criteria that is being used for us to ascertain if countries should be restricted or not. So, after our meeting tomorrow maybe we can be providing you with further updates.

REYMUND TINAZA/BOMBO RADYO: Thank you po.

GILLIAN CORTEZ/BUSINESS WORLD: Hello po. For Asec. Meñez po. Are there any OFWs in the mentioned countries – South Korea, Italy and Iran – who have expressed that they want to be repatriated considering the surge in the COVID-19 cases?

ASEC. MEÑEZ: If we are speaking OFWs in particular, maybe OWWA will have better information on that. But in general, 'yung OFWs, I know on media mayroon hong mga interviews with Filipinos in some of these countries and the responses have been varied. I'm sure that they are very concerned about their health pero... posts in the countries are continually monitoring 'yung mga needs ng ating mga kababayan kaya mayroon silang mga advisories with contact numbers.

So based on mga, tumatawag malalaman din natin ho kung ano ‘yung level of assistance required or needed from our overseas Filipinos. I would imagine that depending on the severity of the situation, some may feel that they would want to go home and the others perhaps not.

So ‘yun ang mga trabaho ng mga foreign service post - to monitor continually what the situation is on the ground and to report to Manila so that the IATF can consider all these inputs and make recommendations and perhaps some decisions.

GILLIAN CORTEZ/BUSINESS WORLD: So there’s still any Filipino that has reported to the embassies here who want to be repatriated?

ASEC. MEÑEZ: I can speak of... in the case of Iran because kaunti lang ho ang ating mga Filipino doon and about ninety percent ay mga ... well, asawa ng Iranians and their children. So there are very few OFWs in Iran. And last I heard, well, before the surge in the number of cases, wala pa naman hong nag-indicate na gustong umuwi. But part of the information that the IATF also considers is also the ability of people to leave the country.

Again, for example ang Iran, marami na hong nag-travel restrictions from the neighboring countries on travelers from Iran. So as far as I’m aware, there are only maybe three airlines that still continue to fly out of Iran and there are no direct flights between that country and the Philippines. So automatically, may parang process of screening by the mere fact na wala nang lumilipad.

But in the case of South Korea and Italy, because of the large numbers of Filipinos, I’m pretty sure na mayroong mga kababayan tayong nag-iisip na talagang umuwi na lalo na kung affected sila by other factors.

TINA PANGANIBAN–PEREZ/GMA 7: Tina Panganiban–Perez from GMA. For anyone: May possibility po na na ma-expand ‘yung travel ban sa South Korea to cover more areas or to cover the whole country?

ASEC. VERGEIRE: That was part of the agreement during the last interagency task force meeting. Part of the agreement was, within the 48 hours, it would be again reassessed if needed to cover the whole of South Korea. Because as you remember in our interagency task force resolution, the decision was just to ban selectively the Gyeongsang Province including Daegu and Cheongdo. But after 48 hours, as agreed upon, they would be reassessing. So, maybe tomorrow during the IATF meeting that’s part of the agenda.

TINA PANGANIBAN–PEREZ/GMA 7: Ma’am, Asec. Vergeire, may mga reports po kasi ng re-infection in other countries. Ano po ‘yung maybe precautions ng DOH na puwedeng ibigay sa atin or confirmed po ba na may mga positive na nag-recover na may sakit na ulit?

ASEC. VERGEIRE: There are already three countries which have reported these cases of re-infection. And accordingly with the reports that have been issued, you can read through those articles that they are saying that it still needs further study.

Because as we all know, this Novel Coronavirus, that's why it's novel, it's something new. So we need a lot of science, a lot of evidences so that we can provide definite answers to our questions for now because, as you know, it is evolving day by day. So we just take note of that and whatever we are doing here in the Philippines, let me just tell you that there is still no case such as this here in the Philippines. We have adequately prepared if and when this thing happens to us and we have doubly ensured especially those who are coming from abroad, those affected areas that they be monitored and quarantined.

TINA PEREZ/GMA7: For OWWA Admin Cacdac. Sir, mayroon po bang projected job losses tayo because just last week, PAL let go of 300 employees partly because of COVID-19. So mayroon na po bang pag-aaral iyong DOLE, OWWA kung may mga OFWs tayong mawawalan ng trabaho because of the disease?

ADMIN CACDAC: Wala naman. The one thing that I can share right now is we are monitoring the situation of workers in Macau; some of them have been placed on forced leave. But the Consulate Generals' Office and the POLO, OWWA welfare officer, there are in close touch with Macau Ministry of Labor and the Macau Ministry of Labor is fully aware of the situation at ginagabayan din ng Macau Ministry of Labor iyong mga kumpanya - the rights of the workers under Macau law, as well as the rights of the employers under Macau law.

Also, we have been providing relief assistance to these workers who were meted a forced leave. So we have been providing relief assistance, basic necessities, food, etc. So we are assisting them at the moment. So far iyan ang pinakamino-monitor nating mga sitwasyon but other than that, we cannot foresee at this stage any significant job losses.

On the contrary, the poll of foreign employers in this affected areas is greater than ever in the sense na nakita nila iyong kalidad ng mga Filipino workers. Iyong mga Diamond Princess seafarers sabi ni Sec. Bello nung isang araw, ino-nominate niya for the Bagong Bayani Awards. Kasi kung hindi n'yo naitatanong, while everybody on that ship was on quarantine, they were asked to work and serve the 3,000 plus passengers. I am not sure how. We ourselves can't take that kind of a situation – naka-quarantine ka dapat, pero nagtatrabaho ka at naninilbihan ka pa rin. And so they served beyond the call of duty. And more than ever, the quality of Filipino workers, domestic workers included whether it's Hong Kong, Taiwan or Macau, of course cannot be overemphasized.

Last point would be, we are very much in touch with the DFA, kapag mayroong nananawagan o may kagustuhang ma-repatriate, one example is China. So since this outbreak began, we have always been in touch with the DFA. When someone calls the 1348 hotline in OWWA, gusto mong umuwi, mostly in these places, China ... well, dati nung may ban Hong Kong and Macau. But these days, it's still pretty much China, kapag may humihingi ng tulong, we immediately endorse to the DFA kapag gusto nilang umuwi.

EVELYN QUIROZ/PILIPINO MIRROR: Good morning. Kay Administrator Cacdac. Na-mention n'yo po kanina, 84,480. So 10,000 each po doon sa—pero doon po sa Diamond Princess na 400 plus, mayroon pong 10,000 na relief assistance. Ano po iyong transportation from... saan po papunta iyon?

ADMINISTRATOR CACDAC: Transportation from Manila. Well, maybe New Clark City to their home region, dito, domestic.

EVELYN QUIROZ/PILIPINO MIRROR: Ah domestic, sir.

ADMINISTRATOR CACDAC: Yes.

EVELYN QUIROZ/PILIPINO MIRROR: How about iyong sabi ninyo, kung gusto nilang mag-permanently stay?

ADMINISTRATOR CACDAC: Gusto nilang mag-permanent, iyong livelihood benefit, it's there anyway; it's an existing program. It's the 20,000 Balik-Pilipinas, Balik-Hanapbuhay Livelihood Grant. Grant po iyan after an entrepreneurial seminar, submission of business plan and a site inspection. So, iyon po.

EVELYN QUIROZ/PILIPINO MIRROR: So ito, in-offer hindi lang sa Diamond Princess, pati po iyong naunang 8,448 kung gusto rin po nilang mag-stay?

ADMINISTRATOR CACDAC: Yes, of course, it's a long standing program. You are right, kapag mayroong gustong mag-permanent... kumbaga eh resident or stay na dito sa ating bansa – of course hindi sila resident, they are citizens – so we will provide them this livelihood benefit. And I think we also need to emphasize that in the case of the M/V Diamond Princess, nasabi na ng manning agent nila, iyong Magsaysay group, that all of them will be rehired. So, they really have the genuine option of whether or not to keep themselves employed or livelihood na dito sa ating sariling bansa. So, hindi dim ang prospects nila kasi sabi ng manning agent mismo, they can go back on board.

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Asec. Meñez, magandang umaga po. Asec., mayroon po ba tayong ginagawang coordination sa Embassy ng Saudi Arabia to the Philippines kasi may mga report na may mga Pinoy na pagdating ng Saudi, doon sa Dammam ay pinapauwi din? Parang hindi po klaro kung mayroon silang pinapatupad na travel ban, kaya kawawa din iyong mga Pinoy na ano...

ASEC. MEÑEZ: Yes. We are quite concerned about reports of the Saudi governments' action with regard to this particular COVID-19 issue. We understand that the government announced that they would be rejecting or—the Umrah Pilgrims would not be allowed to come to their country and also tourist visas would not be issued to those countries were the COVID is found.

Our embassy in Riyadh, of course, is closely monitoring the situation. At iyon nga, may mga reports din na maski iyong hindi covered ng Umrah or tourist visas ay may mga reports na hindi nga sila pinapapasok sa bansa. So, all these information is being processed by the embassy and they are looking into these reports. I can only imagine that because of the action taken by the Saudi Arabian government perhaps may mga lag time or misunderstanding with regard to the scope of their own regulations.

So, we hope to clarify all these reports and be able to inform the public kung ano ho talaga ang existing policy ng bansang iyon. At if there are those who are negatively affected, we will also bring those cases to the attention of the Saudi government so that they are better able to implement to whatever policy they decide to take.

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Asec, may figures po ba tayo kung ilan iyong mga napauwi na legal naman iyong documents nila?

ASEC. MEÑEZ: Wala pa po akong nakikitang actual figures, puro mga reports lang about a flight being turned away, some travelers who are not Umrah and tourists also being not allowed to board. In fact, I understand the other day, there was even someone from government who was not able to proceed to Saudi Arabia.

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Usec., follow up na lang kay Ms. Dana Sandoval. Ma'am Dana, mag-i-isyu pa ba tayo ng clearance, papayagan pa ba natin doon sa Immigration na makabiyaha pa sa Saudi?

SPOKESPERSON SANDOVAL: Sa ngayon po, until makatanggap po tayo ng clear information, if there is a travel ban indeed sa Saudi natin, ongoing pa rin po iyong pagki-clear natin. But once we receive a clear information po kung talagang mayroon na pong travel ban, then definitely I'm sure even at the airline counter, hindi na rin po mabo-board iyong mga Filipino nationals going there.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Kay Asec. Vergeire po. Ma'am, the WHO has commended the efforts of the Philippine government in containing the coronavirus. But what are the chances po that there are unreported or undetected cases of coronavirus here in the Philippines?

ASEC. VERGEIRE: We can never be sure, we are not really certain as to if there would be any undetected coronavirus in the Philippines. Kaya nga po pinag-iigting natin iyong surveillance natin eh; kaya nga po pinaigting natin iyong pagmo-monitor natin para magkakaroon tayo ng at least that comfort na sinasabi natin na puwedeng magkaroon. Pero ito, we are strengthening our surveillance and we are trying as much as possible to identify cases, persons under monitoring, patients under investigation, isolate them and then tingnan natin 'no.

But definitely, we are guarding our ports. Our local governments are doing their efforts also in identifying and trying to monitor all of these persons that should be monitored. So hopefully in the next couple of weeks, wala naman tayong makita talaga na sinabing undetected and nagkaroon tayo ng transmission 'no. Because sa nakikita natin ngayon sitwasyon sa Pilipinas, everything has been covered 'no. But as I've said, I cannot really be certain to tell you now that there are no undetected cases, but we are doing our best with regard to how we are doing our surveillance.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Thank you po. Kay Admin. Hans Cacdac. Sir, may case po sa Italy na may Pilipino na sinuntok kasi napagkamalang Chinese. So may mga na-report po ba na mga ganoong klaseng discrimination against Filipino workers lalung-lalo na po pagdating sa employment because of the coronavirus?

ADMINISTRATOR CACDAC: Wala naman. Of course, we're working with the DFA with regard to the case nga na allegedly na-assault on discriminatory grounds. We all know that Filipinos in Italy are well-loved. Ang tagal-tagal nang naninilbihan ng OFWs sa Italy at dumadami pa nga sila. So nagtitiwala naman tayo na in cooperation with the DFA and as well as the Italian government that these small incidents of discrimination, unfortunate incidents will be carefully addressed by the Italian authorities.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, ulitin ko lang iyong tanong ni Alvin regarding iyong mga Filipino OFWs in Saudi. May mga na-monitor po ba tayong cases doon, iyong pinapabalik po?

ADMINISTRATOR CACDAC: Ah ibig mong sabihin iyong gustong umalis dito na hindi maka—

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Iyong mga dumating na sa Saudi, sir—

ADMINISTRATOR CACDAC: Galing dito?

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Galing sa Pilipinas tapos pinababalik?

ADMINISTRATOR CACDAC: I think the ... maybe Amba Ed could clarify. But I think the Saudi government has already clarified this. Walang ban on re-entry sa mga OFWs. And of course, Saudi, speaking of governments whom we have a very, very good cooperative relationship, the Saudi government is closely in touch with us, iyong counterparts namin. Iyong Ministry of Labor nandito lang last week ano, at napag-usapan din namin iyong cooperative measures from the labor side, labor front. So we're likewise confident na with the Saudi government we will carefully look out for the welfare and protection of our OFWs.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, last na lang po. All in all, sir, how was the COVID-19 outbreak affected the hiring of Filipinos po?

ADMINISTRATOR CACDAC: Wala naman tayong nakikitang epekto nito. Of course, we will carefully observe, together with the DFA, iyong labor market forces in the affected countries.

But so far, there have been no negative signals in the sense na magbabawas sila o ayaw na nila ng Pilipino. Sabi ko nga, more than ever, nakikita nila iyong tiwala nila sa ... at iyong kalidad ng Filipino worker. Korea for instance, we have a government-to-government hiring program. It's a long standing, maybe 16, 17-year old G-to-G program with the Korean government on the hiring of around 25,000 Filipinos who are already there.

So we are very confident that the governments of that areas affected, as well as the employers in the areas affected, have their full faith and trust with the Filipino workers.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV4: For Admin. Cacdac po. Sir, based on our monitoring, may update po ba kung over-all ilan iyong Overseas Filipino Workers na affected ng travel restrictions?

ADMINISTRATOR CACDAC: Okay. Kasi ang travel restrictions na lang remains with China, right? Kasi wala na sa other areas; mga turista ang apektado, hindi OFWs. So if you look at China, mga around 7,500 ang deployed noong 2019, that's an average of around 640 a month, around 21 a day. So iyan ang extent ng mga apektado.

And as I said, we are in close touch with the DFA. And also the Filipino communities are just... got off the phone with a Filipino community leader in Shanghai, for instance, who have been giving us information about workers who want to be repatriated, at agad naman namin itong pinapasa sa DFA for appropriate action. And of course, we are continually monitoring the situation with DFA.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV4: And, sir, just a quick follow up. Sapat naman po ba iyong ... sa ngayon po, sapat pa rin po ba iyong pondo ng gobyerno para nga matulungan itong mga affected OFWs po natin?

ADMINISTRATOR CACDAC: Yes, we're looking an OWWA fund that we've tapped with the assistance of the stranded workers. We're considering sustainability, of course, iyong judicious use ng funds. So rest assured sapat ang pondo natin. Siguro at an appropriate time, we will report on the 2019 financial health of OWWA. But in advance, I will say that we are on the plus side. We had financial gain in 2019 – hindi ko pa muna iuulat kasi hindi pa naiuulat formally sa OWWA board. But the short answer is 'yes, we have sufficient funds to help OFWs in this crisis.'

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS: Hi, good morning. To DOH. Asec., there are reports that OFWs from South Korea are requesting for face masks. What's the process for this? And are we capable of sending face masks knowing that we also have limited supply here?

ASEC. VERGEIRE: Yes, ma'am. Actually, this kind of request will be forwarded to the office of the Secretary, and then we respond to them. But as it is, as we speak right now, yes you are right, we are having challenges in our sustainability for the supplies of these face masks.

We already have received commitment coming from the Department of Trade and Industry that they would be providing us with weekly supplies of these face masks for our medical workers.

We also now in direct coordination with one of our local suppliers in Bataan wherein the supplier already has committed also that he can do the production. So right now, we are still challenged but we have existing supplies which would last and adequate for our medical workers. But if and when the situation would heighten up, that's the time that we would be really needing more of the supplies. That's why it was really the commitment coming from the Cabinet meeting where the DTI has already committed to assist the Department of Health in this challenge that we have.

So if ever our overseas Filipinos coming from abroad who are requesting for supplies, I don't know if we can accommodate this kind of request for now because, as I've said, our existing logistics are just enough for our medical workers.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS: Thank you, ma'am. To Admin Cacdac. Sir, just to clarify: Iyong magiging sakop ng bibigyan ng assistance, those Filipinos affected by the travel ban, all countries na mayroon po tayong travel ban? Tama po ba?

ADMINISTRATOR CACDAC: Yes, that's right. So wala nang travel ban sa Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan. So mayroon pa rin sa China so we're still continually assisting, providing assistance to stranded OFWs in China, to China. Siguro i-announce ko na rin kung saan kami nagdi-distribute ng releases – nasa Cuneta Astrodome kami ngayon, this week. Nasa Pasay area kami this week. Cuneta Astrodome until Wednesday; and Pasay City Hall – Thursday, Friday. I hope I got that right. Pasay City.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL STAR: Sa DOH po. Nabanggit last week na pag-aaralan natin iyong possible lengthening nung quarantine period kasi nga iyong incubation period, sinasabi nila ay baka more than two weeks po 'di ba. Mayroon po ba tayong change doon sa aspetong iyon or 14 days pa rin po?

ASEC. VERGEIRE: Sa pagkakasabi natin, sir, na itong sakit na ito, this is evolving kaya marami na ring eksperyensya at saka mga obserbasyon ang naitatala for these past weeks galing sa mga ibang bansa. And they are nga saying na humahaba raw iyong incubation period. And one even published na humaba ng 27 days ang incubation period. That's why noong inuwi po naitn iyong ating mga kababayan galing sa M/V Diamond Princess, government thought it best na mag-ulit sila ng quarantine period nila para tayo ay sigurado.

Ngayon, kung hahabaan pa natin itong additional 14 days nila, we will ... doon sa alam natin, mayroon ho tayong ginagamit 'no na pamantayan na binibigay na direksyon galing ng World Health Organization na until now, the working definition for incubation period is still zero to 14 days –and we base it from there.

Kung saka-sakaling dumating ang araw or this coming days or weeks that we would be changing it and they would be extending it, and then susunod po kami doon sa guidance na ibibigay nila.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: Sa Immigration po. Ano po iyong travel guidelines naman sa mga taong papunta, paalis ng Japan? Kasi iyong Japan, marami rin pong cases; nagsara pa nga po ng schools di ba.

SPOX SANDOVAL: Well, sa ngayon po, wala pa po tayong ini-implement na travel ban from Japan, but that would be subject of the inter-agency meeting sa mga susunod po na araw. So siguro, let's just monitor kung ano iyong mga magiging result ng inter-agency meetings natin and from that on, we would be implementing kung mayroon man po na mali-lift or mai-expand nitong travel ban natin.

FRANCIS WAKEFIELD/TRIBUNE: Para sa DOH po. Ma'am, itatanong ko lang kung may update tayo doon sa mga additional quarantine facilities na na-mention ninyo before sa mga past press conferences? Kasi sabi ninyo mayroon sa Cebu; sa North di ba po, mayroon rin. Kung sakali hong magkaroon tayo ng mga cases po, Ma'am, dito ho ba dadalhin iyong mga pasyente o

right now ho ba iyong mga pasyente na may COVID positive, nasa local hospitals lang po ba sila?

ASEC. VERGEIRE: Sir, klaruhin natin ha. So sa ngayon po, wala na po tayo dito sa loob ng bansa na COVID-19 positive. Nakaalis na po iyong dalawa na naka-recover, nakabalik sa kanilang bansa. At iyong isa naman po ay iyon pong mortality natin.

So sa ngayon po, ang ating decision tool na ginagamit, sinasabi na kapag ikaw ay nanggaling or you had history of travel coming from these countries which we have restrictions, katulad po ng China, kasama ang Hong Kong and Macau, tapos po iyong sa South Korea nga po na Gyeongsang Province, with Daegu and Cheongdo, ito po iyong mga tao na kapag bumalik po sila dito at mayroon silang sintomas, sila po ay patients under investigation at doon sila ire-refer sa ating mga ospital.

Kapag dumating po sila dito na wala silang sintomas naman, ngunit mayroon ngang history of travel to these places, they are now considered persons under monitoring. Kapag po persons under monitoring, ang ginagawa po natin, they do home-based quarantine. Monitored home-based quarantine, meaning, sila po ay nasa bahay and then they are being monitored by our health workers from the local government, as well as the Barangay Health Emergency Response Team.

So ito po iyong mga quarantine facilities na kakailanganin natin kung saka-sakali po. Ito po iyong kapag may iri-repatriate uli tayo kung sakali na malalaking numbers na kailangan po natin sila talagang ilagay sa isang facility na magkakasama sila. But as of this time po, we are preparing for these facilities to be functional. Ang sabi nga natin, there is this instruction coming from our Secretary that there should be one somewhere in Cebu, somewhere in Davao, another one, and here in Northern Luzon.

CHONA YU/RADYO INQUIRER: Kay Secretary Andanar. Sir, sa Singapore iyong top government officials are donating their one month salary sa health workers. Is there any move from the Palace to do the same?

SEC. ANDANAR: Can you repeat please?

CHONA YU/RADYO INQUIRER: Sir, iyong sa Singapore, iyong top government officials, they are donating their one month salary sa health workers. Is there any move from the Palace to do the same?

SEC. ANDANAR: Wala pa naman sa ngayon. Wala pa.

ROSALIE COZ/UNTV: Good morning. Kinansel po ng DOT iyon pong month long mall sales po dahil po sa ... kahit wala po tayong positibong kaso ng COVID, pero sa ibang bansa po ay mayroon pong mga community transmission na. Mayroon din po bang balak bawiin ng pamahalaan iyon pong pagka-conduct ng public gatherings na i-discouraged or mananatiling pinag-iingat lang ang publiko?

ASEC. VERGEIRE: Ma'am, matagal na po tayong nakapaglabas ng advisory galing sa DOH and also we have advisories coming from DILG na nagrekomenda po tayo, we encourage our kababayans na iwasan muna sana kung maipagpapaliban ang mga big crowd events. So kasama po iyon doon sa mga advisories.

Hindi po tayo makapag-isyu ngayon ng imamandato talaga na bawal kasi wala pa ho tayong local transmission. Kaya po tayo laging nagpapaalala na sana huwag munang ... kung maipagpapaliban nga ang mga big crowd events, maaaring gawin muna natin iyan. And kung hindi talaga maikakansela, let's practice the universal precautions, iyon pong kailangan mayroon pong mga hugasan ng kamay o di kaya iyong mga sanitizer or alcohols around the area. Iyong mga may sakit, huwag nang pumunta doon; kung hindi mapigilan, kailangan mag-wear ng mask kung ikaw ay may nararamdaman. Tapos, of course, iyong practice po natin ng cough etiquette at respiratory hygiene.

ROSALIE COZ/UNTV: Ang WHO ay itinaas po sa high alert iyong risk assessment po nitong weekend. So ang mga first world country katulad po ng Australia, mayroon po silang tinatawag na mga emergency plan in case of worst case scenario. So, can you provide us details kung ano iyong hakbang ng pamahalaan sakali nga pong magkaroon - sana naman hindi - ng community transmission? For example, are we going to close down schools, discourage use of public transportation and iyon pong pagko-conduct nga po ng public gatherings ay iwas muna?

ASEC. VERGEIRE: Yes, Ma'am. Lahat iyan ay mapag-uusapan through the inter-agency task force. We will take each thing or each issue one at a time, pero mayroon na ho tayong contingency plan. We are making ourselves prepared dito po sa eventuality na magkakaroon po tayo ng local transmission. Iyon pong magsu-suspend ng klase, iyon pong hindi pasasakay ng public transport or even not attending public gatherings ay depende po iyan sa magiging sitwasyon natin kapag dumating po iyong panahon na iyon. But definitely we already have contingency planning, mayroon na po tayong preparation for this. We are trying to expand our capacity para po tayo ay maging capacitated to respond to this kind of situation.

ROSALIE COZ/UNTV: Lastly na lang po. Kasi last week, nauna po iyong announcement ng partial travel ban sa North Gyeongsang province, and then parang Friday pa po nai-release iyon pong formal regulation coming from the DOH or IATF. So nagkaroon ng confusion sa mga airlines, paano iyon ipapatupad.

Can you give us run through? Paano ba iyon? Kailangan munang pirmahan, magbotohan ba iyong mga member agency ng IATF? Mayroon ba talaga kayong checklist bago ipatupad o i-announce iyong travel ban, kailangan pirmahan ni Pangulong Duterte? Sorry po, pero nagkakaroon kasi ng confusion paano ipapatupad – nauuna iyong announcement, wala pa iyong formal regulation or rules.

ASEC. VERGEIRE: Actually, ma'am, noong nag-usap-usap po at saka nakapagdesisyon doon sa inter-agency task force last week, nagbigay naman po and it was agreed on by all members during that meeting. Now, we have 48 hours na palugit para sa lahat ng ahensiya para makapagpatupad kasi hindi naman po agaran na maipapatupad especially for those who are

wanting to cancel flights ay nasa ere na po iyong ibang eroplano, hindi naman agad-agad maipapatupad.

So 48 hours were given to all these national agencies to implement this travel ban, this temporary travel ban. So iyon pong sinasabing hindi po maipapatupad dahil walang mga pirma and all, ito naman po ay ... ang sinasabi nga base po doon sa ating mga nakausap na legal experts, when you have your resolution, doon po sa IATF, it's something executory already.

So iyong pirma, it's a formality actually. So napagkasunduan na, kaya po pagkatapos noon, nakapag-announce na po ang ating mga high levels regarding this matter. So hindi naman po talagang inantay 'yung pagpipirma. Pero iyong 48 hours na inabiso kasi na binigay na palugit para sa ating mga member agencies para makapagpatupad sila, iyan ho siguro iyong inaantay muna saka sila nakapagpatupad nang maayos.

SPOKESPERSON SANDOVAL: Siguro, ma'am, additional ano din doon sa matter na iyon. Just a clarification, we were able naman din to implement it immediately iyong travel ban natin, it's just that there was some difficulty implementing it under the arrival area. Kasi sa departure natin, as soon as it was announced, it was already implemented. But in the arrival area, there had to be ... iyon nga dahil nandoon pa siya sa loob ng 48 hour period, there had to be discussions on how to implement it.

Like I mentioned earlier, it's very hard to screen kung sino lang iyong galing doon sa specific regions na iyon because it's not the entire country ang naka-ban; selective iyong ban natin. So we have to formulate or we have to discuss and coordinate with the Korean government to look for ways on how to screen efficiently and effectively itong mga passengers na dumadating. Hence, it was implemented naman within the 48 hour period; on Friday, na-implement naman po siya.

USEC. IGNACIO: Okay. Thank you, Rosalie. Thank you, Ma'am. Last words po, Miss Dana?

SPOKESPERSON SANDOVAL: Siguro again a reminder to everybody if you travel is non-essential, it's best lang siguro to delay it while everything is being sorted out. Hopefully in the next few weeks, matapos na po itong ating problema with the COVID. Rest assured po that the government is implementing this travel bans to protect us, para maprotektahan po tayo at hindi na po further kumalat itong sakit na ito. Thank you.

ASEC. VERGEIRE: Yes, ma'am. Very short lang. We'd just like to remind our kababayans, let us remain to be vigilant. Huwag kayong mag-alala, ang gobyerno po ay gumagawa ng mga hakbang para mapangalagaan ang public health.

ADMINISTRATOR CACDAC: Yes, po. Salamat po. Kailangan ko lang pasalamatnang iyong mga nag-host ng mga financial distribution, financial assistance distribution centers. So noong first few weeks, ang SM Group, sa SM MOA tayo noon. And then dito sa PTTC, so salamat Sec. Mon Lopez sa DTI facility. And then for a week, si Yorome, si Yorome Isko, salamat, sir – nag-host ang Manila City Hall. And this time, itong papasok na linggo, si Mayor Calixto Rubiano, ma'am, maraming pong salamat.

And then lastly, 1348 po ang hotline ng OWWA. Sinuman pong nangangailangan ng tulong, tumawag lang po dito sa hotline 1348.

ASEC. MEÑEZ: Yes. Sec. Andanar mentioned earlier that the Philippines was cited by the WHO because of no new COVID positive cases being reported over the past two weeks. Aside from what Asec. Vergeire from DOH said about good public health policy and preparedness, I also believe that the government's transparency in reporting the latest and most accurate information to the public has also contributed to the good performance of our country.

The government also accepts all comments and tries to process these reports to discuss and arrive at informed and data-driven policy decisions to assure public health maintain the safety and security of all people in the Philippines and of course our Filipinos abroad.

Makakaasa po kayo na tuluy-tuloy ang tulong na ipinaaabot ng DFA sa lahat ng ating kababayan sa ibang bansa, hindi lang tungkol sa COVID-19 kung hindi sa lahat ng problema't suliranin na hinaharap nila sa ibang bansa.

So maraming salamat po.

USEC. IGNACIO: Secretary Andanar?

SEC. ANDANAR: Thank you, Rocky. Thank you once again to our Spokesperson of the Bureau of Immigration, Ms. Sandoval; the DOH, Asec. Vergeire; OWWA Administrator Cacdac; and Asec. Meñez of the DFA.

Quickly on another matter. I am pleased to inform everyone about the Presidential Communications Operations Office's most recent international engagement where the highlight is the Philippine dignitary statement at a high level segment of the 43rd Human Rights Council Session which I delivered last February 26 in Geneva, Switzerland.

We find it unfortunate that in that part of the world, there was scant information about the Philippines and in instances where there was information, the information was bogus and the dominant narratives about our government and our people have been false.

In view of this, our primary strategy was to simply tell the truth. And our main message was that the Philippines is a free country, that we have a prosperous democracy and that we have functioning and independent justice system. I therefore called for prudence in the Council's action on the Philippines, actions that were based unsubstantiated claims made by critics especially by those who are behind the longest insurgency in the country and are forwarding their agenda by masquerading as human rights defenders.

At the same time, I affirmed the country's headways on inclusive growth, sustained peace and social justice agenda for all Filipinos with human rights at the forefront. I likewise underscored how press freedom in the Philippines is very much alive and how it is the most vibrant in the Southeast Asian region. This is evident in President Rodrigo Roa Duterte's achievements and initiatives in strengthening the space for a free and empowered media while proactively

safeguarding them from threats. Such includes the creation of the Freedom of Information Program by the Executive branch which provides for the disclosure of all government records involving public interests; and the creation of a Task Force on Media Security under the Office of the President headed by Usec. Joel Egco with its twin tack approach of solving cases of media killings while promoting their socio economic welfare such as the push for the Media Workers Welfare Act.

In addition, I also discussed the verdict on the Ampatuan massacre verdict, considered to be the single deadliest assault on journalists which saw the conviction of the key suspects last December.

Some critics would say that we are seeking to paint a false picture of the situation under this administration just as these same detractors have the right to make their claims no matter how hollow and inaccurate. The government is also well within its right to correct the falsehood they have pervaded in the international community. The fact that these critics are able to slam the government as they do and are able to peddle their untruths, already refutes their claim that press freedom and human rights is not valued by the government.

The 43rd regular session of the Human Rights Council gave me the opportunity to demonstrate how the Duterte administration continues to engage constructively within the UN system in promoting human rights notably on the UN Secretary General's call to action on a concerted approach to constructively advance human rights through practical and actionable solutions for meaningful results.

The Human Rights Council was receptive to the Philippine dignitary statement as I received favorable responses from the UN delegates, as well as the Philippine permanent mission. And I thank Ambassador Evan Garcia for the assistance.

Moreover, we reiterate that we welcome the UN Secretary General's call to move away from the naming and shaming approach that has led to politicize and arbitrary actions that offer no productive and concrete actions on the ground. This is important for a credible platform to discuss objectively the global and urgent issues on human rights without any ulterior motives. Outside of our activities in the UN, we had productive engagement with the international media, EU parliamentarians, diplomats, think-tanks, human rights experts, advocacy groups, former local officials, the Filipino communities and other dignitaries in Paris, Brussels, The Hague, London and Geneva.

Our meeting and discussions amplified the milestones of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte especially on the campaign against hard drug and on media freedom, as well as how we have sought to combat disinformation about policies on these issues.

We held separate film showings session of the anti-illegal drugs documentary film "Gramo" produced by the Presidential Communications Operations Office and presented the Presidential Task Force on Media Security report on media freedom to each of the countries we visited.

We turned over copies of the film and the PTFOMS report to the foreign post of those five countries I mentioned along with the anti-drug journal “Saving the Future of a Nation Countering Hard Drugs”, the Duterte Legacy magazine and the Duterte Legacy accomplishment journal for them to further spread the message to other European personalities, Filipino community leaders and the international media.

We came to tell the world that human rights and fundamental freedoms are guaranteed in the Philippine Constitution, and that the Duterte administration has shown and continue to commit to its priority of promoting and preserving human rights, safeguarding press freedom and protecting journalist and its citizens. For this, we have accomplished the mission of our trip.

Maraming salamat po. And I would like to request Usec. Joel Egco to say a few words because he was the one who briefed UN Human Rights officials and experts during the trip to Geneva. So, Joel, you may have a few words.

USEC. JOEL EGCO: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Good morning po mga kasama. Well, maigsi lang po ito ‘no. But first, let’s congratulate Secretary Martin Andanar for being the first Press Secretary from the Philippines to address the UN Human Rights Council and to summarize our truth and information mission there. It was not only fruitful, but it was impactful and very successful. Napakahalaga po noon because in terms of human rights ang mahalagang mensahe na dapat nating maiparating sa kanila is that there are existing mechanisms in the country, especially on accountability. Iyon ‘yung lagi nilang hinahanap sa atin eh, ‘di ba?

Yes, I met personally with some experts there, including those from countries that, well, that are actually critical of the Philippines since last year.

In fact, iyong first mission namin, iyong Iceland mismo, that filed the resolution last year, hinarap din po namin. So ito ho ay, you know, to provide context to these human experts to give substance to our counterclaims because traditionally in the past, napakahina or kaunti lang ang engagement ng Philippine government sa kanila. Kaya kung napansin ninyo, tama iyong sinabi ni Secretary Andanar, bugbog na bugbog po ang bansa natin when it comes to the UN and other international bodies.

But this time, they were so happy that those at the frontline of these campaigns, for instance, I represented the Presidential Task Force on Media Security there and they had—alam ninyo, nagulat din sila doon sa mechanism, mayroon pala. Kasi from being touted as one of the deadliest countries for journalist, we now boast of being the only country in the world to have actually 49 court convictions of media worker killers. Ni hindi po ito nababalita before. So 49, 31 doon ay iyong sa Ampatuan massacre. Tandaan ninyo 31, hindi 32. Because iyong kay Reynaldo Momay, ini-report din natin sa kanila, iyong missing, iimbestigahan pa uli namin. Talagang titingnan namin kung saan puwedeng mahukay iyong mga labi ni Momay para mabigyan naman ng hustisya pati family niya.

And besides those 31 convictions from the Ampatuan, the gruesome Ampatuan massacre case, we also have 18 previous convictions of media worker killers. At lahat po ito, sinabmit po natin iyong mga court records sa kanila - iyong mga 49 court decisions convicting those killers of our

colleagues. We have always been at the forefront of the fight against impunity against our colleagues in the media noon pa man.

So that fairly summarizes our mission there. So kailangan balance. Ang call po ni Secretary Andanar noon, the mission was capped by his very powerful message to the Council. Malinaw lang naman po ang sinasabi namin doon, na hindi kami pumunta roon para magsinungaling. Malayo po iyon para kami ay magkuwento ng kasinungalingan. Ang hiling lang po ng Philippine government through, well, the eloquence of our Secretary here is that, alam ninyo prudent, kailangan maging prudent at maging diligent ang Council sa pag-handle ng mga reports na dumarating po sa kanila.

In the past, bihirang-bihira nga iyong report coming from the government. I even asked experts there, during one of our previous sessions: Saan kayo kumukuha ng report? Saan kayo kumukuha ng data? Ang sagot nila: Media. Lahat itinuro eh, media, their missions here, everybody, except the government.

So that is why we really have to engage them more. So iyon po ang buod, ang summary ng aming pagtungo po doon sa Europe. And again, congratulations Secretary Andanar. It was... ours was a very small team and it was great. Congratulations and thank you very much.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you Usec. Egco. Thank you, Secretary Martin. Salamat po sa ating mga bisita. Salamat din kay Usec. Queenie Rodulfo at Director Pebbles Duque. Salamat, MPC.

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