

Press Briefing
by
Presidential Spokesperson Ernesto Abella
with
Former Senator Aquilino “Nene” Pimentel, Jr.

[Kalayaan Hall, Malacañan Palace | 07 September 2017]

OPENING STATEMENTS:

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: Good morning.

Today is very special. We’re featuring one of the truly great statesmen of the nation.

We are fi... We are pleased to have today former Senate President Aquilino “Nene” Pimentel. He will be sharing with us the salient points on federalism and this serves as the kickoff for a series of features that we’ll be having regarding federalism, which would take about the next several weeks.

Ladies and gentlemen... And he is known also as the father of the Local Government Code for being the principal author of Republic Act No. 7160.

Ladies and gentlemen of the Malacañang Press Corps, it gives us great pleasure to welcome Senator Nene Pimentel.

MR. PIMENTEL: [*Okay na ba 'to?*] Thank you very much, Secretary.

And let me go straight to the point. Our proposal for the adoption of a federal system is designed to disperse power.

Mainly from the central government to the various federal states and therefore also to the local governments composing the federal state. Ilan ang federal states na gusto nating gawin? Labindalawa.

Lima sa Luzon, apat sa Visayas, tatlo sa Mindanao. Northern Luzon, Central Luzon, Cordilleras, Bicol at tsaka Southern Tagalog, for Luzon. What about Metro Manila? Metro Manila parang --- will not be converted into a federal state pero magiging capital ng federal state, tulad ng Washington, D.C. Hindi

naman federal state ang Washington, D.C. or New Delhi in India or Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.

So pagdating sa Visayas, apat din: Eastern Visayas, Central Visayas, Western Visayas, and the provinces of Mindoro, Palawan, Romblon, at tsaka Marinduque.

Pagdating sa Mindanao, tatlo --- Southern Mindanao --- ah, Northern Mindanao, Southern Mindanao and Bangsamoro. Very important 'yung Bangsamoro because primarily the federalization of the country will dissipate the causes of Muslim unrest and speed up the development of the country.

So basically 'yon. Anong mangyayari sa Presidente? Elected nationally pa rin. Bise Presidente? Elected nationally pa rin. Mga senador? By federal state na. Imbes national, federal state na. Ilan ang proposal nating senador? Anim. So, if there are 12 feder --- federal states, ano 70 --- ilan, 76? Plus kuwan pa, Metro Manila, so aabutin ng otsenta.

Sabihin, "Oh, masyadong marami 'yun". But there --- I will show you the --- at the slide that [Clarisse?] will present to you that there are 10 federal state-nations in the world with lesser population pero mas marami ang kanilang senador.

So, you --- you keep note of that so that you will have a guide about what we are saying. It's not the number 'no --- you know, really counts is the thing that the people must be represented fully. Sapagkat 'yung 24 na mga senador ngayon, tingna mo ang nangyari sa nakalipas na halalan. Sinong napiling senador? Franklin Drilon lamang na taga-Visayas. Walang iba. Wala taga-Eastern Visayas, walang taga-Central Visayas, walang taga-Mindoro, Palawan.

Sa Mindanao, tatlo lang ang senador doon. Si Migz Zubiri, ewan ko kung kilala ba niyo si Koko Pimentel at tsaka 'yung pangatlo, si pangalan nito? Pacquiao.

But Koko Pimentel and Migz Zubiri come from Northern Mindanao. Then Migz Zubiri only from South Cotabato, if I'm not mistaken. The rest of Mindanao, wala pang representations sa Senado. That is why it's better na they should be elected by --- by federal state.

What about the congressmen and the local government? Pareho lang. No change.

So basically, 'yun lang po ang gusto kong mai-share sa inyo. We're now open to any questions.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: Really? All right. Open to questions, please.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Joseph Morong (GMA): Sir, for both 'no? Ah, good morning, sir. Na 'yun pong commission that the President is thinking of creating, ang sabi may mga names na po. Would you be able to reveal the names that the President has for the position --- for the 25 members of the commission that will study our shift to federalism?

MR. PIMENTEL: Ah, 'di ko gaanong... You know, at 83, medyo bingi na ako. I want you to know that. So I have to...

Now, regarding the 25-man commission, wala naman akong official communication, except what my secretary here would tell me. Pero I am ready to serve in whatever capacity.

Kung saan ako makakatulong, I will do that. Tatal, sa Binisaya pa, *[speaks Bisaya]*. Until the graveside, we should devote our time to help our people.

Mr. Morong: Were you offered the chairmanship of the commission?

MR. PIMENTEL: No, not really. I mean, 'yun naman ay nasa kamay ng Pangulo 'yun. Let him decide that. What is more important is that 'yung mga tao na ma --- mapili niya, makakatulong.

And that is the most important thing. It's not the position.

Leila Salaverria: (Philippine Daily Inquirer): Good morning, Senator Pimentel. Sir, do you have a timeline on when you intend to complete all this?

MR. PIMENTEL: A timeframe? Well, actually, I heard from the President's pronouncements lang ha --- I have not talked with him personally --- that he wants this done within --- originally within the first two years of his presidency. So that, pagkatapos nun, the third year, implementation na.

Pero mukhang medyo mahirap siguro 'yung timeframe na 'yun because we have already spent one year na 'di ba? And then... So sa palagay ko, aabutin pa ng tatlong taon sa kanyang term --- term limit.

At ang ayaw ko lang doon sa sinasabi ng Pangulo, sabi niya, he will resign after that. Huwag siyang mag-resign. He should stay on and implement it. Para makita ng tao, "Hoy, maganda talaga ito."

And it will take a man who believes in it para maisulong. Otherwise, kung sino-sino lang diyan ang mag-implement, baka wala sa puso nila.

Ms. Salaverria: Sir, to shift to federal government, we will need to change the Constitution. Sir, are you concerned that --- because when we open the Constitution to changes, other provisions could also be amended. So are you concerned that this could complicate the process?

MR. PIMENTEL: Now, if I got your question right. Number one, the President's parang thrust ngayon, iiwan niya sa Constituent Assembly 'yung pagbabago ng Saligang Batas.

Now, 'yung iba, nangangamba na maraming magandang provisions sa old Constitution baka madamay. Well, let us make it clear na ang --- as far as I'm concerned, ang gusto kong maipasok, 'yung istraktura ng federalismo.

Kung merong additional benefits na gusto ni President Digong maisingit for the good of the country, why not?

Pero 'yung mga good provisions diyan, for example, sabihin na natin 'yung Commission on Elections, 'yang ibang mga komisyon diyan na --- who are performing their duty, hayaan na 'yun.

But most of what's going to happen will depend on the intention of the President because he is the guiding principle, you might say, on this effort to revise the Constitution.

Mr. Morong: Sir, with regard to the BBL and MILF 'no? The BBL envisions a specific type of regional government 'no? In terms of relationship with the central and then the autonomous region. 'Yung pong features ng BBL con --- BBL-proposed regional government, how are these different from the federal states?

MR. PIMENTEL: All right. Now, first of all, I want it very clearly understood that from what I hear of the President's pronouncement in that regard, is that the BBL proposal will be taken up, will be subsumed in the deliberation for the adoption of the federal system. That's what I heard.

Now, going to your second point, how different would that be in our --- from our proposal?

Number one, my --- my concern about the BBL is the fact that it actually tends to favor only one of the major units or armed --- armed groups in Mindanao challenging the government and that is the MILF. I --- I'm speaking very frankly ha?

And then secondly, if you really look at the actual provisions, what they want to do is when the Bangsamoro entity is established, they will elect only the congressional representatives, hindi na 'yung mga executive leaders.

Palagay ko, mahirapan sila doon because the people want to elect their own leaders. Hindi po pwede na, "Ito lang ha? Diyan lang kayo, hanggang dito lang kayo," because sanay na tayo na we elect all the way. In other words, we are not a parliamentary kind of government, where you elect only numbers of the legislature, and the legislature elects the executive department.

So 'yun ang aking punto diyan, that itong mga po --- mga proposal of the BBL for the dissipation of the Muslim unrest in Mindanao, will be totally adopted by the federal system. But there will be modifications in the kind of, you might say, rise that will be accorded to the Muslim people.

For example, I want --- I want this very clear ha? The federal --- the proposal of the BBL will in effect adopt the practices of the Middle East about Sharia to be adopted in the proposed Bangsamoro entity.

But there are certain practices of the Sharia in the Middle East that cannot be accepted here. For example, 'yung babae mabuntis siya ng hindi asawa niya, binabato. That's allowed by the Sharia there. We cannot accept that because that would be cruel and unusual punishment 'di ba?

'Di ba 'yung sinasabi pa na 'yung mga magnanakaw, putulan ng kamay, sa isip ko, "Naku, ang daming mga walang kamay paligid-ligid doon sa ibang mga ahensya ng gobyerno."

But kidding aside, the thing is, we cannot allow that to happen, because that would be cruel and unusual punishment prohibited by the Constitution. Therefore, certain aspects of the Sharia, particularly the right of the Muslim people to settle their own differences, dapat fully acceptable 'yan sa atin.

Basta ang mag-asunto --- for example, Muslim versus Muslim, Sharia will apply. Kung Kristiyano versus Muslim, national law will apply. Lumad versus Muslim, national law will apply.

Mr. Morong: Sir, do --- do we take it to mean na the BBL or the Bangsamoro entity as proposed in the BBL, may run into conflict with our federal state concept?

MR. PIMENTEL: Well, as a matter of fact, if you look at it now, we are not yet a federal state.

Mr. Morong: Correct, sir.

MR. PIMENTEL: Meron `yan kaibahan because they want to establish a federal system in that particular part of the country, which would be very awkward, to say the least, that we have a national --- you might say --- system, where we are --- we are following a Presidential type of government --- form of government, and yet it would now allow, you know, a portion of that --- of our state to be run like a federal --- like a parliamentary state --- entity. Hindi po siguro maganda.

Mr. Morong: Last na lang, sir, pasensya na. Do we not run the risk of not complying with the CAB given na medyo may fundamental differences between the concept of a regional --- Bangsamoro regional entity and supposing we go to federalism?

MR. PIMENTEL: Well, if the intention is fully explained to our Muslim brethren, I think they will accept it and then that is my initial feeling, having talked with practically all the known Muslim rebels in this country --- from Nur Misuari to Salamat Hashim when he was still alive, and Hadji Murad and all these people.

They are amenable to, you know, a reasonable formula. They are not insisting on something that is not acceptable to the rest of the people.

Rocky Ignacio (PTV-4): Okay. Sir, speaking of Nur Misuari, the President is pushing talaga federalism. Aside from the President, the government, the country should be needing a very good Mindanao leaders?

MR. PIMENTEL: Well, we already have a very good leader from Mindanao. So in other words, whether we shift to a federal system or not, we depend to a large extent on the present leadership of President Digong to push forward this kind of an idea.

That's exactly why I said earlier na kung ma-adopt na itong federal system within the first three years of his incumbency, huwag siyang mag-resign,

that's what I'm saying. He should go ahead and implement this process so that the people will say na, "Ayos pala."

Pia Ranada (Rappler): Good morning, sir. Sir, are you open to answering questions about another issue? Specifically, sir, the suggestion of the President to --- for Congress to craft a law that would grant immunity to the Marcoses in exchange for the return of some of their wealth?

MR. PIMENTEL: Ah Marcos. You are talking now about the Marcos wealth?

Ms. Ranada: Yes.

MR. PIMENTEL: Okay.

Ms. Ranada: Sir, could you just enlighten us on how --- what the President might have meant by this?

MR. PIMENTEL: Yes. Now, that alone that the President wants a law to be adopted is a sign that he does not want to decide it on his own. Because otherwise, why will... He's already in power.

And our people should realize that considering the realities of politics, I am sure that I may, for example, must have supported President Digong during the [*what's this?*] during his running for the presidency.

But even that, you can see the hesitancy of the President to say, "I will decide this thing on my own." Mas maganda na mayroon talagang batas tungkol diyan.

And maidagdag ko na rin lang sapagkat when I was chairman of the Blue Ribbon Committee several years ago, before you were born, we were already talking about this return of the Marcos wealth. And what I wanted really to do is to be able to pinpoint the exact location of the different depository banks of the Marcoses.

Sapagkat ang nangyari noon when I was chairman of the Blue Ribbon, may information kami na, "Uy, may depositor dito sa bangkong ito." Puntahan naming 'yung bangko, wala na, nakalipat nasa iba.

So unless we are certain just exactly what is the full amount of the Marcos wealth that we are talking about, mahirapan siguro na piecemeal ang kuwan --- ang thrust of the government because that will not put a closure to the whole issue.

Ms. Ranada: Sir, to what extent would this law affect the current cases against the Marcoses?

MR. PIMENTEL: Well, number one, 'yung law na pinag --- that you mentioned, that to my mind is necessary. Okay. Now, who's going to implement that law? Eh 'di the President.

I think we have full trust in his capacity to do that. And if, for example, he is hesitant to do it, then let --- I don't know what is the status of PCGG now, I really have no idea. Because the PCGG was created precisely to recover the Marcos wealth.

At kung mapagtiwalaan pa ni President Digong 'yung mga namamahala sa PCGG, then probably the better way would be for them to handle it.

Kung hindi na ito --- ang mga taong ito does not have his confidence, then he is you know, as President, he has the right to appoint the new members of that body who can really recover the Marcos wealth for the benefit of the people.

Ms. Ranada: Sir, can you just confirm if immunity --- granting immunity would require the Marcoses to admit any guilt before this could happen?

MR. PIMENTEL: Well, 'yung tungkol sa immunity, that will depend on the outcome of the negotiation for the return of the Marcos wealth.

Because actually if you look at it, 'yung pagsauli ng hidden wealth ng mga Marcoses, that will cover only the civil aspect of the cases.

'Di ba you know very well that under our law, you can settle the civil aspects. Pero 'yung criminal aspect, ibang usapan 'yun, depende 'yun sa pruwera.

So if isauli nila 'yung pera and then there is a general amnesty plan for them, that can be done. It can be done.

Mr. Morong: Sir, when the President said that he --- that there's a law required for the negotiations 'no, is he not envisioning, is he not thinking of amnesty?

MR. PIMENTEL: Well, not really at that particular point because meaning to say, enact mo muna 'yung law kung anong sasabihin ng batas tungkol sa recovery, that will govern the process of recovery.

But the general power of the President to grant pardons is not affected by that.

Mr. Morong: Correct, sir.

MR. PIMENTEL: It depends on him.

Mr. Morong: But supposing, sir, let's assume that amnesty 'yung pinag-uusapan, do you think that the Marcoses should return the wealth and apologize? Are you amenable to the concept of them returning and --- returning first, returning their loot?

MR. PIMENTEL: Number one, the return of the loot of the Marcoses must be done in order to assuage the people that meron nang --- a certain degree of regret even if it is not verbally expressed.

But at the same time, 'yung policy arising from that will have to be determined by the President with his --- with Congressional support.

Kasi hindi naman pu-puwede na siya lang din ang mag-decide. That's why he said, "A law has to be enacted."

And in the enactment of the law, please remember ha that the enactment of laws does not depend only on the lawmakers.

Ang mga taong bayan must be able to participate there. How? Through the public hearings of the committees being created for that purpose.

So it will be a national process, it will not be an isolated decision, you might see, by the President.

Mr. Morong: Sir, second part of my question. Should they be granted amnesty?

MR. PIMENTEL: Should be what?

Mr. Morong: Should they be granted amnesty, sir?

MR. PIMENTEL: That will depend on... I have no specific, you know, answer to that. That will depend on the circumstances as they arise.

Mr. Morong: Okay, sir, thank you.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: A few notes before we proceed with the Q & A.

Regarding the awarding of the MIMAROPA cops:

We welcome the news that PNP-MIMAROPA's "One Time, Big Time" operations recorded 233 arrests in just one day with no deaths reported.

Regarding Reynaldo de Guzman:

It is with profound dismay that we regard the disturbing death of 14-year-old Reynaldo de Guzman.

The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) has already been ordered to conduct a thorough investigation and case build-up over the killing of the young boy Reynaldo.

We call on authorities to bring the perpetrators of this suspicious crime to justice.

Regarding the DACA termination:

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), through our embassy and consular officials and staff, is closely coordinating with the members of the Filipino community in the United States following President Donald Trump's announcement that he would revoke the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program allowing undocumented immigrant children to stay legally in the US.

We will provide assistance, through the use of the Assistance to Nationals Fund and the Legal Assistance Fund, to Filipinos who may end up getting deported as a result of Washington's decision.

On Vice Mayor Duterte and Atty. Carpio's appearance at the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee:

Today's appearance of Davao City Vice Mayor Paolo Duterte and Atty. Manases Carpio before the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee demonstrates that both gentlemen are willing and ready to face malicious allegations intended to impugn their character and credibility.

The President has said in numerous occasions that he would not interfere and he believes that both Vice Mayor Duterte and Atty. Carpio can hold their own at the Senate.

Also, as of 7 p.m., September 5, 2017:

Enemies killed - 649 or an increase of 8

No change for civilians killed or rescued

No change for firearms recovered

Buildings cleared – 8; and as of September 4, another 8.

Regarding the status of cash donations:

For the Marawi AFP casualties: P38,098,853.23

Marawi IDPs: P963, 145.21

Regarding the Mabilogs leaving the Philippines:

As per verification from the Bureau of Immigration (BI), Mayor Jed Patrick Mabilog left on 31st of August 2017 bound for Narita on board flight PR428 while his wife, under the name of Ma. Victoria Mabilog, a Canadian citizen, departed on the same day also bound for Narita but on a different flight, PR 432.

All right. A short statement from the DOJ:

The DOJ is still verifying the reports regarding the members out of the country.

DOJ is now requesting some time to confirm the report regarding the Mabilogs.

I'm sorry. My apologies. Okay.

Alvin Baltazar (Radyo Pilipinas): Usec. Abella, magandang umaga po. Sir, good morning, Usec. Sir, walang activity yata si Pangulo ngayong araw na ito. Nanunuod po ba siya ng pangyayari sa Senate as of this moment?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: Hindi ko masabi pero he is not in... He is not in Manila. I believe he is in Davao.

Mr. Baltazar: Are you aware na... May idea ba kayo kung hindi man siya nakatutok pero minomonitor niya kahit papano 'yung event?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: I'm sure he is always on top of all events.

Alexis Romero (Philippine Star): Usec., regarding the death of De Guzman, it happened months after President Duterte suspended Tokhang because of the death of the Korean inside Camp Crame. Does the Palace think it's about time that the PNP reexamine its policies or the way it handles the drug war anew because of recent events?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: I believe they are all in the process of rethinking everything.

Mr. Romero: Does the Palace condemn what happen to --- ?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: I just read a statement.

Mr. Romero: You used the word "dismayed". Does the Palace condemn this incident?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: I believe it delivers the same intention?

Mr. Romero: Okay. But then, we remember the President saying, I think last year, that the policemen, the soldiers do not --- are not in the business producing mummies. Hindi sila naglalagay ng packaging tape sa mukha.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: That's right.

Mr. Romero: And then there are claims now that the policemen are responsible for the death of De Guzman. Does the President still hold that view that policemen are not involved in these kinds of torture?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: Let's put it this way. The whole matter is under investigation. In fact, those details that you mentioned are truly suspect.

However, we cannot go into any speculation at this stage. It must be properly investigated. And the assurance is there will be no whitewash.

Mr. Romero: Thank you, Usec.

Mr. Morong: Yes, sir. In one month's time 'no, we have three young persons being killed by police. Si Kian and then we have si Carl and then we have Reynaldo. Are we not worried that these things are happening?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: We are very concerned.

Mr. Morong: How do we stop this from happening?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: Let's leave it to the proper agencies to regard --- to address the matter. Thank you.

Ms. Ranada: Sir, earlier you mentioned that we are in the process of rethinking everything. Could I just clarify what are you rethinking and what would be the outcome of this? Have there been any concrete discussions on actually making over the --- doing over the whole drug war?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: The fact... For example, the fact that the PNP is being investigated, that there are Senate hearings, this indicates that actually the whole nation is in the process of rethinking the way we do --- the way we do things.

And so that is part now of the --- of entire restructuring and renewing. And actually it falls within the ambit of the President's campaign that there should be lesser crime, lesser corruption and lesser --- also address illegal drugs.

In other words, it's not just one isolated event. It's the whole process that we're undergoing, that we can see that there is a rethinking. A major rethinking going on.

Ms. Ranada: Is Malacañang now open to calls from citizens that a commission or a task force focused on EJKs be created so that they can run after these cases

precisely because you mentioned they are no longer isolated cases?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: Malacañang is open to all significant and actually workable solutions.

Kris Jose (Remate): Sir, isa lang po.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: Yes, ma'am.

Ms. Jose: You think it's about time na maibalik na po 'yung curfew hour para po ma-lessen 'yung mga kabataan, 'yung mga minors na nasasangkot sa --- ?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: I think that... Well, we do have concerns and we would like to avoid all of these things especially regarding

minors. I believe that still goes back to the LGUs. So that will have to be worked out.

Mr. Morong: May call po 'yung ilang senators particularly si Senator Pangilinan to stop the war on drugs, sir, Tokhang. Any... What is the Malacañang's thoughts on it? May call po from senators, si Senator Pangilinan in particularly to stop the drug war, the Tokhang. What do you think of it?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: I think, you know, those are two different things 'no.

One, the campaign against drugs, illegal drugs is something that the President is entirely committed --- his entire administration.

However, the manner in which these things are carried out need to really be re-examined.

Ms. Salaverria: Sir, good morning. The PNP Chief said that he needs the President's permission before releasing reports, police reports on the killing of suspects in operations. Sir, what's the President's reason for requiring his permission?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: I don't think it's permission that was indicated. I think it's just to --- for the President to see what is being put out there.

Although, officially there is no... For example, there is no --- actually written policy regarding that as far as the Office of the Executive Secretary is concerned.

However, the PNP Chief has taken it as a standard procedure that the President --- which is valid for the President to see what he talks --- what he actually reports.

Ms. Salaverria: But, sir... So will the PNP... Will the President allow the PNP to have --- to get --- have other agencies access to these reports?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: Which?

Ms. Salaverria: To allow the Senate for instance to access these police reports, will the President allow the PNP?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: I'm... I may be assuming here, but as far as I know that that is going to be a call of... As far as I can say, that that's going to be a call of the...

They may access, they may request. Any agency may request access to the PNP.

Ms. Salaverria: Yes, but the PNP is saying that he needs the permission of the President.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: It's not permission. I think it's just, you know, it's just --- [*How would I put it?*]

He didn't use the word permission. He just said, I think, just to --- as if like a heads up.

Ms. Salaverria: So we can expect the PNP to release these reports?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: That will be their policy. That will have to be their call, to release or not release. Okay?

Hannah Sancho (Sonshine Radio): Good morning, sir.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: Yes, ma'am.

Ms. Sancho: Sir, ang members po ng Makabayan bloc, ire-reassess po daw nila kung ipagpapatuloy po daw nila ang pag-suporta sa mga advocacies ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte. Ano po 'yung masasabi ng Palace? At kung may nag-express na rin po ba doon sa mga natitira na mga progressive members sa Cabinet po na magpapatuloy pa ho ba sila to work with the President or magre-resign po ba sa position after nung ilang sa mga kasama nila ay na-reject po sa CA?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: Tatlo po 'yung tanong niyo. O, isa-isahin po natin.

Ms. Sancho: Sorry, one at a time, sir.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: Binilang eh 'no. Unang-una, whatever parties are out there, they may express their own belief, disbelief or participation, non-participation, support and non-support. We are... We live in a democracy.

However, regarding the senators. Not the senators. The Cabinet members who are --- who are labeled progressive, although we don't... You know, actually there's no such perception. I mean, you know, there's no label actually that says that.

But, it's going to be their call if they resign or not resign. But you know, like for example, everything is... Although, you know it's... It's quite regrettable that, you know, the [inaudible] of Cabinet --- that people of opposing beliefs are not there. But because, it would really add to the --- It would really add to the richness of the dialogue.

Ms. Sancho: Sir, is the President consi --- Kinokonsidera ba ng Pangulo na i-reappoint, like si Mariano po?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: Wala po tayong ano diyan. I think it's only the second 'no? Second.

Ms. Sancho: Thank you, sir.

Ms. Ignacio: Sir, pero may OIC na daw po bas a DAR ngayon?

Ms. Sancho: OIC po ng DAR?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: We can check. Wala pa po.

Ms. Halili: Sir, just a follow-up on the decision of CA on Secretary Mariano.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: Yes, ma'am.

Ms. Halili: Sir, following `yung magkakasunod na pagkaka-reject doon sa mga progressive members of the Cabinet. Does it has something to do with the issues on NPA?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: Well, those are not the reasons raised during the --- the statements made by the Commission on Appointments.

They simply pointed that there were certain factors that led to their being rejected by the CA. It did not make reference to the NPA or to the movement of the CNN, I mean Communist Party of the Philippines, NPA, blah blah blah.

Ms. Halili: But how about the Palace, sir? [inaudible] the support given by Secretary Mariano to armed struggles?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: Well, we respect the decision of the CA.

Ms. Halili: But of the Palace, sir. Do you...

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: We cannot speculate on the matter.

Ms. Halili: Thank you, sir.

Ms. Salaverria: Sir, how would you describe the status of the administration's relationship with the left? Does the administration still consider them as allies?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: *[How do you put it?]* It's complicated. *[laughs]* No, I mean, I'm just --- The President continues to be open. And I believe, you know, continues to be open.

However, there must be an agreement on both sides. You know, when you say left, that's a very broad label covering just about everybody, from the Cabinet secretaries, all the way to those who are in the field.

So, you know, if we are going to work together, then there must be some form of agreement. And apparently, at this stage, it's a little bit, in the words of Mr. Morong, "complicated."

Ms. Salaverria: Sir, how about in your own words?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: Come again. My own words? Complicated.

Mr. Romero: Usec., regarding the ongoing Senate hearing on smuggling. Senator Trillanes tagged Davao City Vice Mayor Paolo Duterte as a member of a drug triad. What is the Palace statement on this?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: That's pretty drastic.

Mr. Romero: So it's not true?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ABELLA: No, I'm saying that, you know, those are very serious allegations. And he better... He needs to have some pretty substantial evidence to support that statement.

Mr. Romero: Thank you, Usec.

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