

# Filipino fatality in crash not yet confirmed

THE Department of Foreign Affairs has yet to confirm that any Filipino was among the fatality in the Yemeni plane crash. In a statement, the DFA said "the Philippine embassy in Riyadh, which has jurisdiction over Filipino nationals in Yemen, is trying to confirm reports that a Filipino crew of Yemenia is one of the casualties in the Yemeni plane crash."

It said the department "is monitoring developments and will release information as soon as possible." (*Inquirer.net*)

# Arroyo begins quarantine in hospital

by TJ BURGONIO  
*Inquirer.net*

PRESIDENT Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is kicking off July 1 her remaining 12 months in office virtually in isolation. Fresh from her four-nation swing, Ms Arroyo canceled last June 30 some activities scheduled for this week, including a regular Cabinet meeting, as she began her quarantine amid the Influenza A(H1N1) virus scare.

And for good measure, Arroyo has also decided to check in at Asian Hospital in Muntinlupa.

"That's precisely because of the President going on quarantine," Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said at a briefing, confirming the cancellation of June 30's Cabinet meeting.

Her self-quarantine began June 30, according to Remonde, exactly a year before she steps down on June 30, 2010.

"She's confirming her quarantine," Remonde said shortly after getting a call from Arroyo in the middle of the televised briefing. He said this was not mandatory but "advisable."

Arroyo arrived in Manila on the night of June 29 from a 13-day swing through Japan, Brazil, Colombia and Hong Kong, which have all reported cases of the swine flu virus.

### Keeping her promise

While Arroyo was not showing signs of the swine flu, she was keeping her promise to go on self-quarantine once she was back, according to Remonde.

Arroyo would go on quarantine but not necessarily for "10 days," the original protocol for incoming travelers from A(H1N1)-hit countries, he said.

Arroyo would also check in at the Asian Hospital in Alabang, Muntinlupa to lead by example, and at the same time, to "undergo checkups," Remonde said.

Asked if Arroyo decided to check in at the hospital because she was exhibiting swine flu symptoms, Remonde said: "No, definitely not."

"She just wanted to show an example. She just wanted to cooperate with the well-meaning suggestions of well-meaning people [to go on quarantine]," he said.

### Rest, regular checkup

At the same time, she would take advantage of her quarantine to "take a rest and undergo her own regular checkups."

Arroyo also underwent an "annual gynecological checkup" at the same hospital before her flight to Japan.

During her self-imposed quarantine, she would designate Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita to represent her in her personal engagements.

She would take calls on the phone, but forgo meetings with a large number of people. She would probably meet one-on-one with officials "when necessary," Remonde said.

### Advisable but not necessary

"It won't affect her work so much. She'll continue to do her paper work as she does on her trips," he said.

Asked why she had to rest at the hospital, instead of Malacañang, Remonde said: "Just as well. The environment is different."

THE House of Representatives is now turning its ire on the Department of Health, saying the DOH kept secret the case of a House employee who died of an illness related to the A(H1N1) virus.

South Cotabato Rep. Arthur Pingoy, chairman of the House

committee on health, is recommending to Speaker Prospero Nograles the immediate holding of a congressional inquiry on the standard operating procedures and practices of the DOH in containing the virus.

"The DOH gravely endangered the health of our employees by

keeping us in the dark. I think that the House should conduct an inquiry," Pingoy, a doctor by profession, said.

The House would check how the DOH is responding to the A(H1N1) outbreak and other similar cases after "Secretary (Francisco) Duque's explanation that the DOH kept it secret from us because it was part of DOH protocol and to prevent panic is very ironic."

Pingoy stressed that the DOH should better explain its action on how it is coordinating treatment of A(H1N1) victims.

Contrary to the DOH's position, what it did was "against protocol because the DOH could have reported this to the leadership which could have exercised discrete health procedures," he said.

He added that he could have immediately mobilized his committee and the House medical services to conduct contact tracing and other measures that would ensure the immediate containment of the disease.

"We have our own medical personnel who are competent to do this in close coordination with the DOH. It is very irresponsible for the DOH to only report this to us when one of our employees died because of A(H1N1)," he said.

Parañaque Rep. Roilo Golez agreed with Pingoy's ob-

servation as he pointed out that, unlike schools and universities, the House is an institution with implications on national security.

"Apart from the fact that we have at least 4,000 employees who are potential victims of this virus, the House of Representatives is also host to government dignitaries and officials of foreign governments who come to us almost every day," said the deputy minority leader.

"This action of the DOH also endangered the health of the members of the media and resource persons who attend our hearings," he added.

"We also have employees who are in constant liaison with other government agencies, including the Office of the President. The House of Representatives is an institution with national security implications and I wonder why the DOH did not realize that," he said.

An-Waray party-list Rep. Florencio Noel and Cavite Rep. Crispin Remulla also raised the need to conduct an inquiry on DOH policies and procedures in responding to the A(H1N1) outbreak.

Both agreed that the department's action on cases involving House employees might not be the best practice in containing an outbreak.

"It would have been more prudent if the DOH coordinated with us upon detection of an A(H1N1) case involving our employee," Noel said. ■



Philstar.com photo

# Ramos: Judge foreign trip by its results

by JEROME ANING  
*Inquirer.net*

FORMER President Fidel V. Ramos refused to join the growing debate over the expensive foreign trips of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

"I don't like to make any comparison between my trips [when I was president] and hers," Ramos told reporters at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport presidential lounge last June 29, while he waited for his flight to Canada.

However, Ramos said that ultimately, a foreign trip's success "would be judged by its results," adding, "The benefits could be long-term and short-term" and these could be economic or diplomatic.

Among such benefits he said, would be attracting foreign investments to the country, improving the Philippines' image overseas, involving the country in world affairs, boosting bilateral ties with the host country and reaching out to Filipino communities abroad.

These, according to Ramos, are the aims of the Ramos Peace and Development Foundation (RPDEV), which he chairs. The organization promotes Philippine interests abroad, among others, at no expense to the government.

Ramos' presidency from 1992 to 1998 was also noted for his many foreign trips but he did not get as harsh a criticism as Arroyo due

mainly to the stable conditions of the country's economy and politics during that time.

Meanwhile, Ramos ruled out running for an elective post in the 2010 elections, following reports the Arroyo has been planning to run for Congress.

"I've already been there. I don't need that," he said, adding that he was content to be a private citizen and statesman still serving the Filipinos in other ways.

He echoed 19th century American preacher and author James Freeman Clarke, who said, "A politician thinks about the next elections; the statesman thinks about the next generations." ■



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