FFICE OF THE PRESS SECRETARY
News and Information Bureau

PRESS BRIEFING OF OFFICE OF THE PRESS SECRETARY-OIC
UNDERSECRETARY CHELOY GARAFIL
WITH DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM SECRETARY CHRISTINA FRASCO
OCTOBER 25, 2022 (12:29 P.M. – 12:42 P.M.)

ASEC. DE VERA: Magandang hapon, Malacañang Press Corps. Kasama natin ngayon si OPS-OIC Atty. Cheloy Velicaria-Garafil – Ma'am…

OIC-USEC. GARAFIL: Magandang hapon sa inyong lahat. Katatapos lang po ng ating 12th Cabinet Meeting at ngayon ay makakausap natin, kasama natin ngayon ang DOT Secretary, si Secretary Christina Frasco to make some announcement as a result of the Cabinet Meeting kanina. Secretary…

DOT SEC. FRASCO: Good afternoon/Maayong hapon kaninyong tanan. I am Christina Garcia-Frasco, the Secretary of the Department of Tourism. We have just concluded a Cabinet meeting with President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. together with our fellow Cabinet secretaries.

And in that meeting, the matter of the mask mandate policy of the Philippines was discussed. As you are aware, the President has already issued an executive order to make outdoor mask-wearing voluntary all over the Philippines with certain exceptions.

As a result of the Cabinet meeting this morning, it was agreed and that the President would be issuing an executive order per the IATF recommendation to make indoor mask-wearing also voluntary all over the Philippines with few exceptions, namely: That mask-wearing would still be required in public transportation as well as medical transportation and in medical facilities; mask-wearing would also be highly encouraged for unvaccinated individuals, persons with comorbidities as well as senior citizens.

But generally, the direction of the Marcos administration is to lift the remainder of travel restrictions into the Philippines, and that includes easing of our mask mandates to allow our country to be a par with our ASEAN neighbors who have long liberalized their mask mandates.

In addition to this, it was also discussed that the remainder of stringent protocols such as the requirement of pre-departure testing into the Philippines in the form of an RT-PCR would also be removed.

In addition to this, as far as unvaccinated foreigners are concerned, they would henceforth be allowed entry into the Philippines with only the requirement of presenting an antigen test 24 hours taken before departure or an option of taking an antigen test upon arrival into the Philippines.

In addition to this, it was also agreed that the One Health Pass would be removed as already publicly announced and replaced with an e-Arrival platform that introduces great convenience to our travelers and tourists in a sense that the interface is now more user-friendly – 20 questions that used to be in place have now been reduced to 10, specifically those that are tourism-related.

And as agreed during the meeting, it was clarified that the filling out of the e-Arrival card would not be made mandatory as a prerequisite to boarding. In other words, you can fill out the e-Arrival card at your own convenience – prior to departure or upon arrival. It was also agreed together with the Department of Health and in their discussions with the BOQ that special lanes would be provided in the airport for those that have not had the opportunity to fill out the e-Arrival card.

The overarching direction of the Marcos administration is to allow our country to convey 'an openness and a readiness' to the world to receive tourists and investments, so that we would give our fellow Filipinos an opportunity to regain all the livelihood and losses that were incurred during the pandemic.

So, we are optimistic that with all of these restrictions being lifted by the Marcos administration that this can only be redound to the benefit of the lives of millions of Filipinos that serve to benefit as well from the reinvigoration of the tourism industry.

ASEC. DE VERA: Questions for Secretary Frasco? Maricel Halili, TV-5.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Hi, Sec. Magandang hapon po. Ma'am, clarification: I understand kung ano iyong purpose for the EO na gawing voluntary na lang iyong wearing of indoor face mask. Pero, ano po iyong napag-usapan sa Cabinet meeting tungkol doon sa XBB and XBC cases because I understand it is still a cause of concern considering iyong pagiging immune-evasive daw ng mga virus na ito?

DOT SEC. FRASCO: To be very clear, the matter of mask-wearing as well as the new variants was extensively discussed during the IATF meeting that was conducted last week together with our fellow Cabinet secretaries. And the DOH had presented its discussion on the new variant. But the overall direction of the IATF and as discussed earlier during the Cabinet meeting is that first, this is not the very first variant of the pandemic. We have had several other variants in the past and that is the reason why the DOH has been very aggressive in its vaccination campaign and booster campaign which are all still ongoing.

In the end, we simply cannot go on in a pandemic perspective, because we have to give our country an opportunity to thrive while maintaining basic health protocols on one hand and safeguarding and protecting livelihood and the economy on the other. And this is the reason why the new variant is being managed by the DOH, while the government is considering ways in which our economy can recover. It is not a mutually exclusive exercise wherein

implementing the easing of these travel restrictions efforts towards managing the pandemic would cease because it continues to be managed by the DOH.

There are two pieces of good news that I wanted to share also. First, because of our President's position of prioritizing travel and tourism as a priority agenda of his administration and the sense of optimism and hope that has reverberated across the Philippines, there is great interest in the Philippines. This is actually well-reflected in our tourist arrivals which have now reached 1.827,603 arrivals as of today. Notably, this exceeds the previous projections of the Department of Tourism, before June 30, which peg international arrivals only at 1.7 million by December of 2022.

In addition to this, the optimism and positive outlook for the Philippines are also very well-reflected in the recently concluded Philippine Travel Exchange, which is the biggest government-led travel exchange organized by the Tourism Promotions Board, which is the marketing arm of the DOT. The numbers are record-breaking. In that, there are sales and leads of upwards of 173 million pesos. This far exceeds previous sales in that the highest sales achieved was in 2018 at 94.8 million and in 2019 sales were pegged at 46 million.

What does tells us, this tells us that the Philippines remains a top-of-mind destination all over the world, only that we need continuously improved and enabling mechanisms of coming into the Philippines and this is exactly the direction that the Marcos administration has taken in easing travel protocols as well as the other programs and plans of the Department of Tourism under this administration.

MARICEL HALILI/TV 5: Ma'am follow-up. How about the timing, considering na mag-u-Undas and it will be ber months na. So, of course expected natin na mas magiging matindi iyong pag-mobilize ng mga tao. Is it this a cause of concern?

DOT SEC. FRASCO: What we have to understand is that the shift in the mandatory nature of mask-wearing to the voluntary nature of mask-wearing leaves the choice to the individual to whom we entrust, to make an informed choice about mask-wearing. We have seen from the issuance of the Executive Order of the President on outdoor mask-wearing, that notwithstanding the fact, that outdoor mask-wearing is now voluntary. People still like to wear masks, at least some of them do, outdoors. Because now, it's their informed choice. And we foresee the same for indoor mask-wearing as well.

By no means, are you required not to wear a mask, only that you are given an option not to wear a mask this time around. Notably as well, from the issuance of the Executive Order by the President, we have seen that since September there has been a decrease in COVID-19 cases by 2.8%, and up to 22 October 2022, there has been a decrease of 22.74% in positive cases. And therefore, this supports the empirical data that we had previously presented, vis-à-vis our ASEAN neighbors. Wherein the lifting of the mask mandate in no way led to any surges in the majority of these countries.

And this is also what we have seen here in the Philippines and what we anticipate with indoor mask-wearing being made voluntary.

ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you very much, Tourism Secretary Christina Frasco. Maraming salamat, Malacañang Press Corp.

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