



## Cebu bows to IATF over health protocols

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*The Freeman*

Cebu Gov. Gwendolyn Garcia has set aside her Executive Order 23, which threatens government agencies with criminal and administrative charges should they refuse to follow the provincial government's protocols for returning Filipinos (ROFs) and overseas Filipino workers (OFWs).

In a statement aired over Facebook live yesterday, Garcia said she is setting aside her EO in "deference to the President."

"This Executive Order I am now setting aside in deference to the President even as we look forward to the scheduled meeting on the 28th of June with (Health) Secretary (Francisco) Duque and the same technical experts who had advised the President last night, as regards the need to

Turn to Page 4

## Cebu From Page 1

strictly implement the IATF guidelines," Garcia said, referring to the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases.

President Duterte on Monday told Cebu to follow the IATF protocol.

Even as she withdraws the EO, Garcia said the swab-upon-arrival policy will be implemented on OFWs and ROFs arriving at the Mactan Cebu International Airport.

"Allow me to thank again the President, for announcing last night that the ROFs, aside from the OFWs, will not need to pay the hotels since this will be answered by the national government. This certainly lessens the financial burden of our ROFs," Garcia said.

She said the swab-upon-arrival policy would give the provincial government better control of those who would test positive.

"This will continue at no cost to arriving OFWs and ROFs," she said.

She thanked Duterte for recognizing the wisdom of her plea, that is to give human consideration to OFWs and ROFs.

As this developed, Duterte

threatened to defy court orders on managing the COVID pandemic after two Cebu-based lawyers asked the court to stop the implementation of the government's testing and quarantine protocols.

Duterte said he would continue to do what is necessary to protect the public during a national emergency.

"I do not want to lock horns with the judiciary, I said, I respect them. But...there is always a time that the courts can function normally and maybe grant injunctions and all. But this time, I said, they are put on notice that I won't restrain myself. I will not obey the courts in a matter now of management the pandemic," Duterte said during a pre-recorded public address last Monday.

"I'm a lawyer, I respect the judiciary and I can assure them that we will follow the orders. But at this time of a national emergency, I would just like to inform the courts that I will not follow them. I will insist on what is necessary to protect the people. It is not what the legal book says about, well, in the matter of stopping the

protocols, the requirements by law," he added.

On Monday, Cebu-based lawyers Clarence Paul Oaminal and Valentino Bacalso Jr. asked the Cebu City Regional Trial Court to stop the implementation of the testing and quarantine protocols of the government.

Under the government's protocols, ROFs and OFWs should undergo quarantine for at least 10 days and swab tests on the seventh day from date of arrival.

The procedure is different from the policy of the provincial government of Cebu, wherein arriving passengers are required to undergo swab tests upon arrival at the Mactan Cebu International Airport.

The passenger will be taken to a hotel where they would stay for three days to wait for the test results.

Cebu amended its procedure to include another swab test on the seventh day from the date of arrival.

Oaminal and Bacalso asked the court to issue a 20-day restraining order against the government protocols, saying the regulations issued by national agencies "do not have the permeating effects as

greater than that of a local law or ordinance."

Duterte said an ordinance of a local government cannot be higher than a national policy.

"So not all cases can really be the subject of an injunction or a TRO for that matter. This is not a question of justice and equity. This is a question of survival of the nation. And I will not allow any court for that matter (to interfere)," the President said, referring to temporary restraining order.

He said he met with Garcia the other week and that he assured her that the government would be fair.

"I see the wisdom in her view. But, I said, the overwhelming notion among us in government and the medical doctors, simply do not agree with her," the President said.

"I leave the fate of Governor Garcia to the DILG (Department of the Interior and Local Government). There are some mechanics that can be put into action to, well, compel obedience. Not because we want to be more knowledgeable, but remember, I said that all our decisions are based on what the medical people say," he added. — **Alexis Romero, Christina Mendez**