



# Duterte gives anti-vaxxers a choice

By RAYMUND ANTONIO

**P**resident Duterte has given persons averse to the coronavirus vaccine two choices: get the anti-parasitic drug Ivermectin or leave the country.

"Ito 'yong ayaw magpabakuna. Kayong ayaw magpabakuna, ipabakuna ko 'yong itong sa bakuna ng baboy, 'yong Ivermectin. Iyon ang ibakuna ko sa kanila (Those who refuse to be vaccinated, I will give you the vaccine for hogs - Ivermectin)," the President said in his taped public address on Monday night, June 21.

Ivermectin is being used experimentally to treat COVID-19. However, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has only approved its use as an anti-nematode drug.

It is still not registered in the country for the treatment of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), although the FDA gave six hospitals compassionate special permits to administer Ivermectin to coronavirus patients.

Duterte called on Filipinos who "travel from one place to another, carrying the virus and then contaminating other people," not to force his hand.

"Strong-arm method 'yan eh. Walang—walang may gusto niyan. Pero kung hindi kayo magpabakuna, umalis kayo sa Pilipinas. (No one—no one likes it. But if you don't like to be vaccinated, leave the Philippines) Go to India if you want or somewhere, to America," Duterte said.

"But for as long as you are here and you are a human being, and can carry the virus, eh magpabakuna ka (get vac-

inated)," the President added.

In the same public address, Duterte warned those who refuse to get COVID-19 vaccines that he will send them to jail.

"Mamili kayo: magpabakuna kayo o ipakulong ko kayo sa selda? (You choose: Get vaccinated or go to jail)," the Chief Executive said.

Duterte said he will start asking the barangay captains through the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) to list down the names of their constituents who don't want to get the COVID-19 jab.

But Justice Secretary Menardo I. Guevarra defended the President's jail threat.

"I believe that the President merely used strong words to drive home the need for us to get vaccinated and reach herd immunity as soon as possible," Guevarra said.

"As a lawyer he knows that not getting vaccinated is a legal choice," he added. "There is no law as yet that compels vaccination against COVID-19, much less criminalizes it, as presently available, vaccines are still in their trial phases," Guevarra said.

The latest survey showed that 40 percent of Filipinos eligible to get the vaccines don't want to get vaccinated because of fears the vaccine may be more harmful than the disease.

"I am just exasperated by, you know, Filipinos not heeding the government. Eh tatal tayo dito wala naman tayong hangarin kung 'di kabutihan ng ating bayan (All of us here, our goal is for the betterment of the country)," Duterte said, and castigated Filipinos for being hard-headed amid the national emergency.

More than 2 million Filipinos have completed the two-dose vaccination since the government started the inoculation campaign last March. The government aims to jab as many as 70 million Filipinos before the end of the year to achieve herd immunity.

## Lift restrictions

Reacting to the President's warning to anti-vaxxers, Rizal 2nd District Rep. Fidel Nograles urged the Department of Health (DOH) to lift health protocols for those fully vaccinated by allowing them to play basketball and exempting them from curfew hour restrictions to boost the government's vaccination program.

In a press statement, Nograles said the DOH must tell the public what a fully vaccinated person can do as compared to those who have yet to complete their anti-COVID 19 jabs.

"In fact, we can even further highlight advantages by revising some of our policies and protocols. We can probably exempt those who have completed their vaccine doses to the curfew being imposed now due to the pandemic. Considering the vaccination card as some form of a passport to ease travel and movement may also be considered," said Nograles, vice chairman of the House Committee on Higher and Technical Education.

He said fully vaccinated individuals should be allowed to return to physical activities that are currently disallowed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as playing basketball and other close contact sports. (With reports from Genalyn Kabiling Jeffrey G. Damicog and Ben R. Rosario)