

Philippines: The two faces of COVID-19 lockdown in the Philippines

Wednesday 20 January 2021, by [RODEROS Elijah](#), [SANTOS Ivel John M.](#) (Date first published: 21 December 2020).

In more than nine months of community quarantine in the country, law enforcers have warned, given tickets to, and arrested about [598,000 persons](#), whom they call “pasaway,” for allegedly violating quarantine and health protocols meant to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

Most of the violations involved noncompliance to [minimum public health standards](#) such as wearing face masks and shields outside places of residence, and breach of the ban on “unnecessary” mass gatherings.

However, as the number of so-called violators rose, so did reports about abusive and humiliating ways by which people were apprehended and punished.

Retired Army corporal Winston Ragos, who had [post traumatic stress disorder or “war shock”](#) from a stint in Marawi, made headlines in April when he was [shot dead by a police officer](#) for ignoring a checkpoint in Quezon City.

Palace Spokesperson Harry Roque then [dismissed as “speculation”](#) criticisms that the incident was a consequence of President Rodrigo Duterte’s earlier [instructions to law enforcers to “shoot \[violators\] dead”](#) if they resist arrest.

The government’s [declared tough stance](#) against violators, however, did not apply to all “pasaways.”

From Philippine National Police (PNP) Chief Debold Sinas’ “mañanita” in May to Roque’s “tourism trips” in November, VERA Files Fact Check looked back on reported violations of public officials and high-profile personalities and how those cases were handled. While some face investigations, others seem to have gotten away unscathed.

Here’s a rundown of the incidents:

Pimentel’s breach of quarantine protocols for COVID-19 patients

Sen. Aquilino “Koko” Pimentel III was one of the first ranking public officials who drew flak for breaching quarantine protocols.

In the early months of the lockdown, not all suspected patients of COVID-19 were tested due to a [limited](#) supply of test kits. Some [died before their results were released](#).

Mocha Uson’s mass gathering with quarantined Overseas Filipinos Workers

Margaux “Mocha” Uson, deputy administrator of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration

(OWWA), [came under fire](#) in April for violating the ban on mass gatherings in Batangas which, at the time, was under enhanced community quarantine (ECQ).

‘Mañanita’ birthday blowout of Sinas

In early May, Sinas, then director of the National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO), drew public outrage when photos of his “mañanita” — a traditional pre-dawn birthday serenade — circulated on social media at a time when the region was the [“epicenter” of the COVID-19 outbreak in the country](#).

San Juan Mayor Francisco Zamora’s breach of Baguio City protocols

San Juan City Mayor Francisco Zamora found himself in hot water in June after his convoy of six vehicles “ignored” the border control quarantine checkpoints in Baguio City.

Sen. Manny Pacquiao’s mass gatherings in Batangas

After a series of typhoons struck most parts of Luzon in November, Sen. Emmanuel “Manny” Pacquiao was seen distributing relief goods and Christmas gifts in mass gatherings in [Batangas](#).

Harry Roque’s swim with dolphins in Subic, ‘tourism trip’ in Cebu

Roque had been heavily criticized for violating quarantine protocols at least twice: during his side trip to Ocean Adventure park in Subic last July, and his tourism promotion trip in Cebu last November.

Roque [also drew flak](#) on social media when a video of him singing at a restaurant in Baguio City without a mask surfaced online on Nov. 13 — when the city was [under modified general enhanced community quarantine](#). This came a week after DOH discouraged public videoke sessions to impede COVID-19 transmission.

‘The law is the law’

As early as the first month of implementation of the ECQ in April, Duterte [ordered](#) the police and military to “shoot ... dead” unruly quarantine violators.

Nearly three weeks later on April 21, the PNP [said](#) there will be “no more warning” for ECQ violators. Instead, “arrest and inquest procedures will be applied” to those who will violate relevant laws.

More recently in October, Interior and Local Government Undersecretary Martin Diño was quoted by [several news reports calling on the police](#) to “apprehend” beggars, get them off the streets, and escort them to the Department of Social Welfare and Development. He said they “might be the ones spreading the pandemic (sic)” since they are “exposed.” Diño said: “*Batas ay batas* (the law is the law).”

Several civil society and human rights groups have pointed out the “double standards” applied by the government in implementing COVID-19 restrictions.

The National Union of Peoples’ Lawyers, in a [statement](#) after the Sinas mañanita went viral, said: “The PNP is unrelenting in its crackdown on ordinary people for purported violations of the law and quarantine rules, which its officials and personnel are themselves breaking.”

With the general’s promotion as police chief, local human rights group Karapatan [said](#) it was “not

only a glaring double standard of justice and law enforcement in the country but how this fascist regime shamelessly coddles and rewards human rights violators.”

Human Rights Watch Philippines, in a [statement](#) in April, reacted to “increasing incidents” of law enforcers and government officials “mistreating” Filipinos during the lockdown:

“The lockdown and quarantine, and even the emergency powers bestowed on President Duterte, do not excuse the actions of officials to wantonly violate international human rights norms and the Philippine Constitution, which specifically protects citizens from unreasonable searches and arrests.”

Aside from Ragos’ case, VERA Files Fact Check noted other reported incidents of violations of health and safety protocols by ordinary citizens, [whose punishments drew concern](#) from netizens and human rights watchdogs.

Apprehension of Caloocan fish vendor for not bringing quarantine pass

In May, fish vendor Joseph “Dodong” Jimeda [went missing for a week](#). It turned out that he was detained at Navotas Sports Complex, along with 500 others for various ECQ violations, according to a viral Facebook post uploaded on May 15 by photojournalist Vincent Go.

Jimeda was arrested for not bringing a quarantine pass when he went to the Navotas fish port, where he buys and sells fish, from his residence in nearby Caloocan City. His family did not know where he was because he did not have a cellphone, Go said in his post.

Jimeda was able to go home 12 days later after paying a bail bond of P3,500 and filing a guilty plea [for the offense of simple disobedience](#).

Degrading treatment of quarantine violators

As punishment for breaking the 8 p.m. curfew in April, Barangay Chairman Christopher “Bombing” Punzalan of Pandacaqui in Mexico, Pampanga, [forced three persons](#), who happened to be part of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) community, to [perform](#) a “sexy dance” in front of a 15-year-old boy, also a curfew violator, while two of them were instructed to kiss each other.

Punzalan later apologized for the incident, which was broadcast in an April 5 Facebook (FB) post, now taken down, when the whole Luzon island was still under the ECQ.

In a statement on April 8, Commission on Human Rights Spokesperson Jacqueline De Guia [called out](#) Punzalan’s actions, saying he violated several laws and rights of children and LGBTQ individuals and child rights, the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act included. De Guia said the regional office of the CHR was already investigating the incident.

Meanwhile, two minors in Naic, Cavite were reported to have been [made to lie in a coffin](#) for at least an hour by their barangay captain in late March for allegedly [violating curfew](#) rules. In Paranaque in April, quarantine violators were made to hold a [fake wake and parade a coffin around their village](#) to dissuade other residents from violating health protocols.

In another incident in Sta. Cruz, Laguna in March, a barangay captain [locked up five individuals inside a dog cage](#) for disobeying curfew hours and disrespecting village officials. Local chieftain Eric Ambrocio apologized for the incident in a [Facebook post](#), but added that barangay officials were rounding up stray dogs when they encountered the “drunken” curfew breakers who refused to obey

their orders to go home. Criminal charges, including violation of the Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act and grave threat and coercion have been filed against Ambrocio, as reported by [Philstar.com](https://philstar.com).

Editor's Note: This article was updated to include the latest press release of the Department of Interior and Local Government, issued Dec. 21, regarding the probe on Roque's and Pacquiao's "quarantine breach".

Elijah Roderos
Ivel John Santos

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and or French. You will receive one email every Monday containing links to all articles published in the last 7 days.

P.S.

Vera Files

<https://verafiles.org/articles/vera-files-fact-check-yearender-two-faces-covid-19-lockdown>