



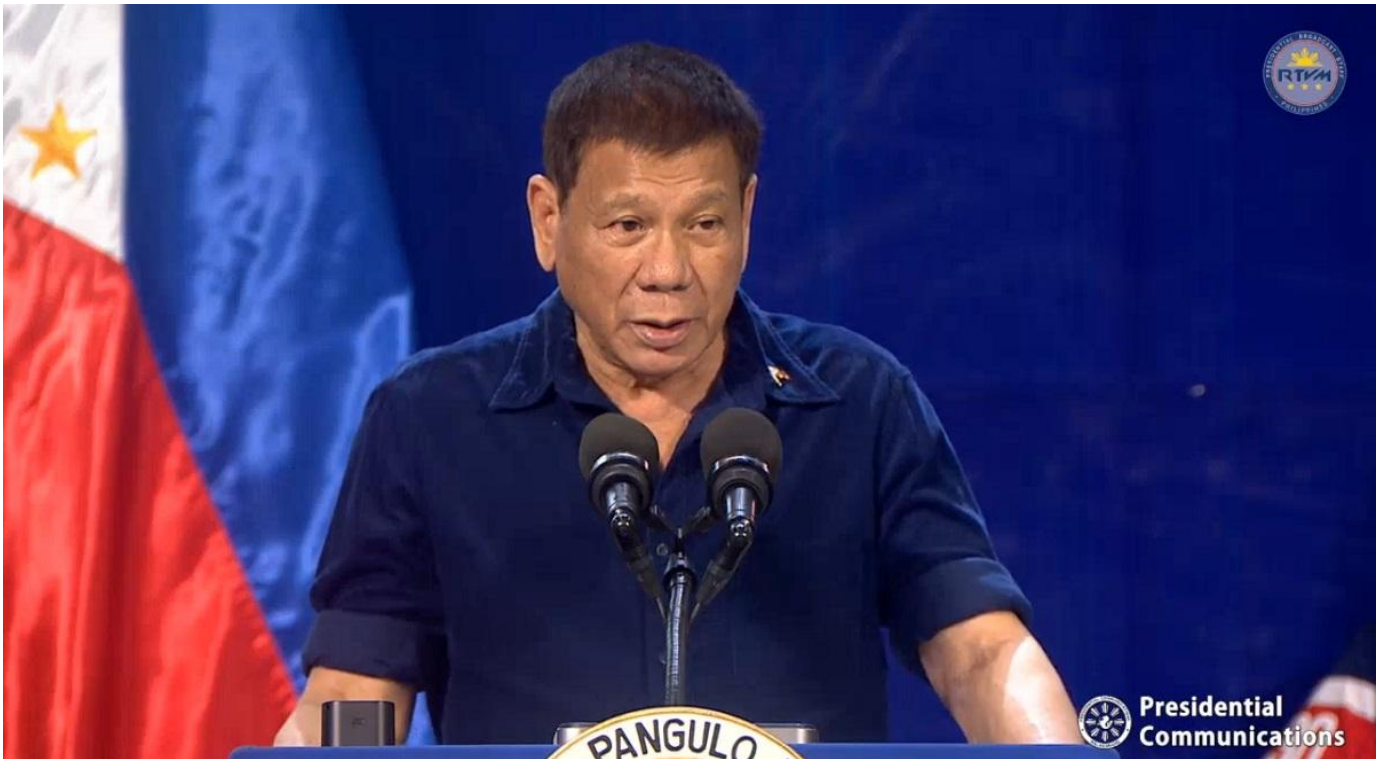
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Duterte to open economy soon, says social distancing impossible

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Despite the recent steep increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in the country, President Rodrigo Duterte said he would reopen the economy in a matter of weeks because Filipinos needed to return to work and avoid going hungry.

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The President, however, conceded that he is having difficulty with his timeline because the country's supply of COVID-19 vaccines stood only at 1.12 million doses.

"I have to reopen the economy. I have given a timetable, just weeks... We cannot be forever under strict quarantine protocol because people are getting hungry. They have to work, to eat, to survive," Duterte said at the inauguration of the Port Operations Building in Dumaguete City on Thursday.

"The economy must be opened in a short while. Kaya kung paspasan na 'yang bakuna, tatal umabot na. If it reaches the big cities, okay na," he added.

[We need to accelerate our vaccination efforts. If there are enough and they reach the big cities, it will already be fine.]

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click **FIND OUT MORE** "But for now, I am in a quandary on what to do," Duterte said.

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At least 4.5 million Filipinos already lost jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic according to government records.



~~As of March 11, over 114,000 people have been given a COVID-19 vaccine according to presidential spokesperson Harry Roque.~~

Too many people

Duterte said observing social distancing amid the COVID-19 pandemic was impossible because there were just too many people.

"Wear face mask, face shield for protection. Social distancing...it's impossible, there are too many Filipinos in the urban areas," Duterte said.

"Social distancing...when somebody goes out of the house, you can hardly have the space to move around. Just look at the bus, Quiapo..." he added.

The President then traced this to weak implementation of the government's family planning program, including providing contraceptives which has long been opposed by the Catholic Church.

"Our population is 110 million. I hope we can do something about it. I won't be around then, but we will have to pass it to the next generation," Duterte said.

"I hope we can match the family with our gross domestic product. Dapat tamang tama lang ang tao na kaya pakainin [Our population should match the resources needed to feed people]," he added. -NB, GMA News

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