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JOINT PANEL PROBES 300K 'EXCESS' COVID-19 DEATHS



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The joint House Committees on Public Order and Safety and on Human Rights, chaired by Reps. Dan Fernandez and Bienvenido Abante Jr., respectively, began on Tuesday its investigation into the reported 297,000 “excess deaths” based on data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The inquiry was being undertaken pursuant to House Resolution (HR) 1481 filed by Fernandez, who said the figure cited puts into question the overall safety and efficacy of the response of our healthcare system at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rep. Jonathan Keith Flores (2nd District, Bukidnon), who co-presided with Fernandez, said the inquiry seeks to delve deeper into two major issues.

The first is whether or not the reported excess deaths in 2021, which allegedly reached a total of 297,000, cases may be largely attributed to the vaccination efforts of the government during that period, or such deaths violated the people's right to life.

Second is whether the newly crafted Pandemic Treaty and the International Health Regulations (IHR) have been entered into by the Philippine government in a judicious and lawful manner or not.

"Almost four years after the nation survived the harrowing challenges brought about by the pandemic, the country remains hounded by some serious concerns that require an urgent and full inquiry in aid of legislation to ferret out the truth," Flores said.

Fernandez pointed out how in 2021, when vaccination commenced, there was a 43% surge in mortality rates compared to the 2% increases in death rate over the period 2016 to 2020.

"It stands to reason that this very substantial increase in the number of deaths in 2021 could be attributed mainly to either two factors -- to COVID-19 infection or to the vaccines themselves," Fernandez said in HR 1481 .

He cited that in 2020, the deaths were 40,147 lower than expected but it was 297,000 higher in 2021. The lawmaker said to determine and compare the number of deaths during the pandemic, and deaths under normal circumstances, the concept of excess mortality or "excess death" is used.

Excess death, according to Fernandez, is computed by subtracting the expected deaths from the actual number of deaths during the five years previous to the pandemic -- that is, the average annual number of deaths from 2015 to 2019.

Fernandez inquired with the resource persons from the Department of Health (DOH) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) whether they can attest on the safety and effectiveness of vaccines rolled out during the pandemic.

FDA Director Joyce Cirunay replied that there was a process to prove the safety of the vaccines administered.

Lawyer Tanya Lat, Lunas Pilipinas co-convenor, informed the joint committee how their group in December 2021 was able to gather 2,050 reports on coercion, discrimination, and bullying in relation to the mandatory COVID-19 vaccination, among others.

"If the WHO Pandemic Treaty is passed, the WHO IHR amendments are passed, Senate Bill (SB) 1869 is passed implementing effectively the WHO Pandemic Treaty and IHR amendments, then we will have exactly the same problem," Lat told the panel. SB 1869 is the proposed "Philippine Center for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) Act."

Committee vice chairperson Romeo Acop requested that former DOH Secretary Francisco

Duque III and the vaccination chief of the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr. be invited in the next hearing of the joint committee.

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