PH eases travel ban vs. South Korea

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The government on Tuesday partially lifted the travel ban to South Korea, allowing Filipino tourists to go there except to North Gyeongsang Province, including Daegu City and Cheongdo County, where novel coronavirus (COVID-19) cases are concentrated.

Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo said Filipinos who intend to visit other parts of South Korea must execute and sign a declaration, signifying they understand the risks involved in taking the trip.

Panelo added that foreign nationals traveling from North Gyeongsang Province, including Daegu City and Cheongdo...

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County, are still prohibited from entering the Philippines.

The Palace official made the announcement after the members of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases convened to review travel restrictions and protocols imposed by the government.

The task force said South Korea has reported a low case fatality rate of only 0.5 percent and the successful containment of local transmission to only certain areas.

The IATF also agreed to expand travel exemptions allowing dependents of permanent residents of South Korea, Hong Kong, and Macau to travel to these areas as long as they also sign a risk-acknowledgment declaration.

On Tuesday, South Korea “declared war” on the coronavirus as cases inside the country reached 4,812, the highest number of COVID-19 cases after China.

About three-fourths of the cases are in the southeastern city of Daegu. The country also recorded a total of 28 deaths, pushing global fatalities over 3,100.

“Guided by the Health, Security Risk Assessment Matrix, which evaluates the hazard, exposure and context relative to the risks involved, the IATF has also agreed that there is to be no new imposition of travel restrictions or lifting of the same as regards other countries or jurisdictions,” Panelo said.

On Feb. 26, the government imposed a temporary travel ban in South Korea, but exempted Filipino workers and permanent residents, as well as those who are leaving for study.

Meanwhile, the Department of Foreign Affairs has been preparing for the repatriation of 148 Filipinos from Macau via a chartered flight, while the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration has been arranging to repatriate 48 of its active members through a commercial flight, Panelo said.

Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said repatriated Filipinos will undergo the prescribed screening and quarantine measures being implemented by the government.

“The IATF-EID is closely monitoring the spread of COVID-19 cases in other countries and is regularly updating its travel restrictions based on standardized risk assessment indicators. We are working non-stop to ensure that our (countrymen) are protected from COVID-19 no matter where they are,” Duque said. "To date, we have not recorded any cases of local transmission of COVID-19 in the country. The WHO Director General has cited the Philippines as among the few countries in the world which have not recorded any new cases of COVID-19 for more than two weeks,” he added.