

# Palace, gov't offices responsible in fighting fake news – Poe

By **PAOLO ROMERO**

Malacañang and other government offices involved in the dissemination of information bear great responsibility in preventing the spread of fake news, Sen. Grace Poe said yesterday.

Poe, who chairs the Senate committee on public information and mass media, gave the reminder at the resumption of hearings on fake news attended by, among others, officials of the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) headed by Secretary Martin Andanar.

The probe was prompted by the manifestations as well as bills filed by Poe, Senate Majority Leader Vicente Sotto III and Sens. Sonny Angara,

Paolo Benigno Aquino IV, Richard Gordon, Risa Hontiveros, Manny Pacquiao, Antonio Trillanes IV, Joel Villanueva and Juan Miguel Zubiri.

Poe said the committee was trying to determine the extent of responsibility and accountability of bloggers and journalists in spreading misinformation; the effect of online platforms like Facebook in shaping public opinion and facilitating the spread of misinformation; and the accountability of government for the use or misuse of resources in spreading disinformation or suppressing the truth.

During the hearing, most of the resource persons agreed that "fake news" was a misnomer and was better referred to as misinformation or disinformation.

"We need to look into setting parameters for official government platforms so that these can't be used as tools of hateful propaganda and misinformation – guilty on both sides," Poe said.

The senator cited the case of Communications Assistant Secretary Mocha Uson, who also maintains a controversial and popular private blog, which has been accused of being a source of fake news.

Poe cited Republic Act 6713 or the Code of Conduct and Ethical Conduct of Public Officials on the possible "overlap" in the role of Uson as an official of the Duterte administration and as a private blogger.

She said her two roles are causing confusion among the public, who cannot easily and immediately distinguish be-

tween her private opinions and pronouncements as an official.

"Have you ever considered asking (Uson) to shut down her blog?" Poe asked Andanar, who replied that he has on many occasions called out Uson on her controversial posts that she immediately took out.

"She knows she's not exempted (from the law)," Andanar told the hearing, referring to Uson.

The senator stressed she was not singling out Uson, who she said was admirably effective in generating support for President Duterte.

She said there should be no efforts to impinge on the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression and of the press as doing so may lead to censorship.

– With Eva Visperas

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