

Noy, ex-officials face new raps over vaccine

By EDU PUNAY

Criminal charges will be filed at the Department of Justice (DOJ) today against former president Benigno Aquino III and several of his former officials over a controversial anti-dengue vaccine.

The Volunteers Against Crime and Corruption (VACC) said it would file a complaint for malversation of public funds and violations of Republic Act 3019 (Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act) and RA 9184 (Government Procurement Reform Act) against Aquino, former budget secretary Florencio Abad,

former health secretary Janette Garin and other former and incumbent officials of the Department of Health and executives of pharmaceutical firms Zuellig and Sanofi Pasteur.

"We will hold all of them to account for the highly irregular, if not downright unlawful, procurement of P3.55 billion worth of Dengvaxia vaccines and for their premature and imprudent implementation of the dengue immunization program and for the deaths associated with the administration of Dengvaxia," VACC lawyer Manuelito Luna said in a statement over the weekend.

Dr. Francisco Cruz, who is

said to be a whistleblower in the alleged anomalies in the P3.5-billion vaccination program, is set to join the VACC in filing the complaint.

Luna said the VACC is also planning to file separate plunder charge linked to the controversy.

Earlier this month, the VACC filed a complaint for violation of election laws before the Commission on Elections against Aquino and other former officials also in relation to the Dengvaxia controversy.

The DOH earlier suspended the implementation of the dengue vaccination that reportedly poses health risks to children

already injected but without history of dengue.

Justice Secretary Vitaliano Aguirre II has tapped the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) and the Public Attorney's Office to conduct a fact-finding probe to determine possible liabilities of officials behind the project that was approved during the Aquino administration.

Aquino and Garin have denied any irregularity in the purchase of the vaccine.

But information gathered by probers showed that the program was approved despite strong objections from medical experts due to lack of certification from the World Health Organization.

* VACCINATION

* DOH

* RA 3019, RA 9184

* DOJ