Health protocols set for SONA protests

Organizers of various protest actions during President Duterte's final State of the Nation Address (SONA) on Monday have agreed to implement health protocols to ensure the safety of attendees against COVID-19.

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Mayor Joy Belmonte and Quezon City Police District (QCPD) director Brig. Gen. Antonio Yarra yesterday met with protest organizers to discuss how they can carry out their SONA-related activities without risk to public health.

"We have an existing health crisis made more volatile by the presence of the highly infectious Delta variant in Metro Manila. It is everyone's civic duty to adhere to minimum health standards and limited mobility," said Belmonte.

"We were assured by the rally organizers that they would closely monitor their ranks and we consented, subject to strict adherence to health protocols," she added.

The QCPD earlier denied the request of Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan) to hold a rally along Commonwealth Avenue due to the threat of the Delta variant.

But during the meeting, Belmonte agreed to the request of the groups to hold a march on a portion of the thoroughfare, provided that it will not extend beyond the intersection of Tandang Sora Avenue.

Programs will be held in freedom parks such as the Liwasang Diokno in front of the Commission on Human Rights central office.

According to the city government, the organizers have agreed to submit the names and contact details of the participants for contact tracing purposes in case of a positive COVID-19 case.

The programs at the assembly areas will be shortened to reduce exposure, with face masks, face shields and hand sanitizers provided to those who will be in attendance.

Belmonte encouraged organizers to allow only the fully vaccinated to attend the rallies to lessen health risks, and prohibit minors and senior citizens – including those fully vaccinated – from attending.

Among those who met with Belmonte were Renato Reyes of Bayan Muna, Joshua Mata of Sentro, Flora Santos of Sanlakas, Gio Tiongson of Akbayan and Dante Lagman of Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino.