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Is he for real, people must be asking of Philippine National Police chief Gen. Nicolas Torre III’s recent initiatives to buff the image of the police force previously seen as “Mission Impossible” given its known proclivity for abuse and corrupt practices.

But if there’s one person adept at beating the odds, it would be Torre, who managed to smoke out self-proclaimed Appointed Son of God Apollo Quiboloy, the pastor facing money laundering, human trafficking, and child abuse charges. More impressively, Torre managed to tamp down the drama to unceremoniously whisk off former president Rodrigo Duterte to The Hague to face trial before the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity.

As if to live up to lofty expectations, Torre hit the ground running, introducing several changes meant to make the PNP more responsive to the incidence of crime. His latest move, and one that shows he means business, is the dismissal of eight police chiefs for their subordinates’ failure to meet the five-minute response call on the 911 police hotline. “I want them to actually command not only figuratively but literally,” Torre said,

His leadership will be anchored on “swift and responsive public service, unity and morale within the ranks, and accountability through modernization,” Torre said as he took command of the country’s over 220,000 police force early this month.

## Police visibility

For a start, he ordered that the police’s 12-hour shift be trimmed to eight hours, “to help ensure their well-being and efficiency,” even as he promised to provide them legal services for their personal and professional needs. An inventory of equipment especially radio and technical devices to ensure their functionality should help with police efficiency as well, he added.

Police visibility is high on his priority list, Torre explained of his order to replace existing police boxes and community precincts with roving police patrols for a more immediate response to calls for assistance, especially in school zones where students are easy prey for criminals.

School bullying has also become an abiding concern, Torre said, adding that students can report instances of bullying through the 911 hotline, with the police coordinating with school authorities to resolve the issue. A crackdown on illegal gambling—which has led desperate gamblers to turn to crime—is forthcoming as well, at the same time that Torre encouraged support for licensed and regulated gambling.

## Alarming headlines

The newly minted police chief is definitely on the right track, though much remains to be done to arrest the crime rate that, despite Malacañang’s protestations about its decline, remains a source of alarming headlines and negative travel advisories from other countries.

In a statement, the National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO) said that the crime rate in Metro Manila has dropped by a “significant” 22.53 percent over the last five months. But news reports give a more accurate and chilling face to the metro’s crime situation.

Who can forget the kidnapping and murder of Filipino Chinese businessman Anson Que and his driver in April, even after the Que family had reportedly paid P200 million for their release? Then there’s the unfortunate killing of a House official a few days ago, with the motorcycle-riding assassins able to get away. The rise in robbery and holdup incidents at the Bonifacio Global City, despite being considered one of the safest enclaves in the metro, also gives the lie to the NCRPO claims.

So how can Torre whip up the police to do better? A good start is closely coordinating with the Department of the Interior and Local Government which pledged, thru DILG Secretary Jonvic Remulla, to procure more mobile patrol vehicles to significantly improve the PNP’s five-minute response time strategy.

## Welcome initiatives

The full use of body cameras should meanwhile ensure that police adhere to accepted protocols that respect the human rights of suspects, and preclude allegations of police abuse. Installing more CCTV cameras especially in crime-prone areas to identify and track suspects, as well as more streetlights to prevent criminals from lurking in the shadows are welcome initiatives that can be coordinated with local and city governments.

With Torre promising an easier and more streamlined gun permit renewal process, he should also consider a stringent psychological test for license applicants, given how profligate gun ownership has led to violence even in simple road rage incidents.

As well, the dismissal and prosecution of erring cops should be on the PNP’s priority plans, as it would ensure police accountability and discourage abuse. This also means better police training and the tightening of the police force’s recruitment process to drill in such values as integrity and professionalism. Torre has pledged that the PNP would “work harder” to keep the country safe, respect Filipinos’ rights, and gain the people’s trust. It’s a promise that his previous record should handily redeem.