



Republic of the Philippines
Senate

***Human Rights Challenge:
Drug War Extrajudicial Killings Continue***

Side Event, Commission on Narcotic Drug

Vienna Austria
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MESSAGE

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Senator

A pleasant day to everyone. From Camp Crame in Manila, I extend my warm greetings to the organizers, fellow speakers and participants of this side event aptly titled: *Human Rights Challenge: Drug War Extrajudicial Killings Continue*. I am grateful for this invitation to engage with you on the occasion of the 61st Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drug here in Vienna. I also wish to extend my appreciation for your continued concern regarding human rights violations related to the ongoing war on drugs in the Philippines.

Duterte's war on drugs continues without let up despite the absence of any moral or legal justification. It continues to be operationalized by the police force without adherence to due process and the rule of law. Extrajudicial killings or state-sanctioned murders as a result thereof continue to be committed with impunity. As of this writing, rights groups estimate that there are around 13,000 reported cases of extrajudicial killings committed in the name of this war. This number is presumably higher if we consider those that remain unreported, out of fear of the victims' families or refusal by government to acknowledge that they are extrajudicial killings.

A few months back, the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines stated that the "death toll in drug war is higher than what the government suggests." But actually, in the Duterte administration's 2017 Year-End Key Accomplishments Report, the Department of Interior of Local Government (DILG), in "Fighting Illegal Drugs" section, it was stated that a total of 20,322 were killed under the war on drugs.

Out of this sheer number and continuing death toll, only a handful is being investigated and prosecuted. The families of victims do not have immediate access to effective remedy because government fails or is unable to provide such. Even human rights defenders who investigate the killings are threatened by Duterte himself when he ordered the police to "shoot the advocates if they obstruct justice."

Yes, the war on drugs still continues to target and victimize low-level dealers and users from the marginalized and disadvantaged sectors of Philippine society. It fails to target, as part of an integrated and comprehensive approach, the middle and big operational layers of the problem. Big time drug suppliers remain scot free and even the names of those close to Duterte have been dragged into yet another shipment of billions of peso-worth of illegal drugs. Corruption in government and law enforcement agencies has likewise not been addressed and compounds the problem.

The President continues to fail to see the country's drug problem as a public health issue which needs an entirely different set of approaches. He is bent on resolving the drug problem in his own unjustified way, at the expense of the rule of law and human rights and

despite the lessons learned by countries which adopted the same hard stance against the drug menace and failed.

How many more lives are going to be cut short? How many more Filipino families are going to suffer? How far will my country regress in the name of Duterte's war on drugs? Until when do we reach the tipping point and say, as a collective people, enough is enough?

With my fellow human rights advocates, I urge the international community to continue to condemn and sanction the Duterte government for its conduct of this war. Recently, the International Criminal Court opened its preliminary examination into allegations of crimes against humanity committed by Duterte in his war on drugs. I welcome this development. It is an initial step to demand accountability for the violations committed by the highest official of the land. Quoting Phil Robertson of the Human Rights Watch Asia Division, the ICC "absolutely should initiate a full investigation into these alleged crimes because to date, there has been no serious attempt to investigate them by the Philippines police or prosecutors, much less take suspected killers to court."

I would like to share with the group some initiatives of my office that seek to address not just the country's drug problem but also seek accountability on the multitude of abuses in the context of Duterte's illegal and immoral war on drugs.

As early as 2016, we have filed Senate Resolution No.9 that called for an investigation, in aid of legislation, on the rampant extrajudicial killings and summary executions of suspected criminals, to strengthen the mechanisms of accountability of law enforcers, and to institute corrective legislative measures to ensure full respect for basic human rights, especially right to life. Unfortunately, after I was ousted from the chairmanship of the Justice and Human Rights Committee tasked to conduct such investigation, said committee concluded that the killings are not state-sponsored. I strongly disputed this finding in my own Dissenting Report submitted to the committee.

Further, we proposed Senate Resolution Nos. 357, 358 , 421, 451, which seek the investigation of the alleged involvement of police officers in cases of extrajudicial killings and the concealment of the same.

We likewise proposed legislative measures that a.) defines extrajudicial killings as a crime; b.) defines cadaver desecration as a crime; c.) mandates regular drug testing in correctional and penal institutions; d.) institutionalizes Human Rights as a separate and specialized subject in basic and higher education.

We likewise filed the appropriate Senate Resolution No. 153, urging the executive department to extend an invitation to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions to visit the country to look into the extrajudicial killings and summary executions amidst the administration's war on drugs.

Let us all unite against Duterte's immoral and illegal war on drugs. Let us all say NO to extrajudicial killings committed in its name and demand accountability for this government's failure to adhere to the rule of law and human rights.

Mabuhay tayong lahat! Thank you.