

# **Philippines (Mindanao) - The Victims of the Davao Death Squad : Consolidated Report 1998-2015**

mercredi 21 mars 2018, par [PICARDAL Amado](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 2016).

I RECENTLY received a consolidated report of the killings perpetrated by the Davao Death Squad (DDS) since 1998 up to the end of 2015. The source will not be mentioned for obvious reasons. Suffice it to say that since the killings started, they have been monitoring these cases. I know them very well and I have been collaborating with them as we denounced these killings and worked with the Commission of Human Rights and the Human Rights Watch. They are hesitant to make the report public out of apprehension that it will be used for political purposes. I believe that to hide this would be a disservice to the nation since I believe that the body count could multiply many times over throughout the whole country in the next six years. The original report that I have is in Excel format, and very detailed (year by year, according to age, sex, areas, weapons used, etc). What I present is a summary and my own analysis. I know that when I do this, I am risking my life. But the truth must come out before it is too late.

The total number of persons killed by the DDS from 1998-2015 is 1,424. Let me repeat in words-ONE THOUSAND FOUR HUNDRED TWENTY-FOUR victims. This can be considered as MASS MURDER perpetrated by the same group, inspired and supported by the same persons. The data does not include those killed in other cities where the DDS have expanded franchise-style.

Out of 1,424, there were 1,367 male and 57 female. This means that those murdered by the DDS were not only men, there were also fifty-seven women.

Looking at this according to age there were 132 children killed (17 and below)-126 boys and 6 girls. The youngest was a 12 years boy and a 15 year girl. There was a 9 year old boy who was killed by a stray bullet-he was not an intended target.

There was a total of 476 young adults (18-25) murdered-466 male, 19 female. The number of older adults (26 years and above) killed were 612 (466 male, 28 female). There were victims whose age were not given-201 (191 male, 10 female).

Thus, almost 50 percent of the victims were young people (children and young adults). Most the victims were killed in urban poor areas (e.g. Buhangin, Agdao, Bangkerohan, Boulevard, Matina, Toril). Most of those killed were involved in illegal drugs - as users and pushers. There were also those involved in petty crimes-theft, cell-phone snatching, gang members. There were 14 cases of mistaken identity-they were not the intended targets but the DDS hit men mistakenly hit the wrong target. There were some who had gone away after being warned that they were on the hit list and after some years, after reforming their lives, came back thinking that they were safe. Their names were still on the list so they were still killed.

Thus, one can say that majority of the victims of the DDS were young and poor-juvenile delinquents considered as the weeds of society. There were no reports of drug lords or big time criminals among those killed by the DDS. There were two journalists who were believed to have been murdered by

the DDS-Jun Pala and Ferdie "Batman" Limtungan. Jun Pala was a radio commentator who constantly spoke out against the DDS and Mayor Duterte. There were two previous attempts on his life and he accused Duterte of being behind these attacks. He was finally killed by motorcycle riding men on the third try. Ferdie "Batman" Lintuan also spoke out against the DDS and also the alleged anomalies in the construction of the People's Park which he linked with Mayor Duterte. He was also killed by motorcycle riding men.

The victims of the DDS were unarmed. They did not fight back. Many were just sitting down on street-corners outside sari-sari stores, talking with friends and then suddenly shot in cold blood. There were some who were just released from prison and while waiting for public transportation on the side of the road were suddenly shot by motorcycling men. How the DDS knew the exact time and place they were to be released is amazing. Another victim was killed inside his home in front of his mother and three children who were begging the DDS not to kill him. One of the most well-known case is Clarita Alia-a vegetable vendor in Bangkerohan-whose teen-age sons (who were below 17 years old) were murdered by the DDS. I was asked by Clarita to bless the body of her boy, Fernando before he was buried.

I have personally witnessed the aftermath of two DDS killings. The first was in our parish church in Bajada. While officiating a Wedding Mass I heard shots outside in the carpark. I immediately rushed outside after the Mass to find out what happened. I saw the body of a teen-age boy lying in our church ground surrounded by people. He had just been shot by DDS hit-men while sitting in the car park with his friends. The killers escaped on a motor-cycle. There was a police car nearby but the police just fired warning shots into the air and did not go after the killers. The boy who was killed lived in a nearby slums area. He had been suspected as one of those who broke the window of a car park in our church and stole some items two weeks earlier.

The second time I witnessed the aftermath of a DDS killing was while mountain-biking in Lomondao, a distant barangay in Davao. As I neared the place I met three motorcycle riding men speeding back to the city. When I arrived in the place I saw people who gathered around the body of a young boy. When I asked what happened, someone told me it was the DDS. The boy was cell-phone snatcher and drug user. He added, the boy deserved to die.

The killings have not stopped. The DDS continue their murderous spree even to this day. For the last five years (2011-2015), there were 385 victims of extrajudicial killings in Davao-39 of them below seventeen years old and 118 young adults (18-25). In 2011 there 111 reported DDS killings, in 2012 there were 61, in 2013 there were 101, in 2014 there were 52 and there were 60 in 2015. The DDS usually take a break during the campaign period. They will continue their operations after the elections.

So far, no one has been held accountable for these killings. There has been no official investigation by the police or the city government. The police do not acknowledge the existence of the DDS. The Commission on Human Rights (CHR) came to Davao for a public hearing and also met secretly with witnesses - family of the victims and former members of DDS. Although the CHR recommended prosecution, this could not prosper because nobody was willing to testify in court out of fear. The DDS are still around and anybody who testifies will surely be targeted for assassination. I have met some of these witnesses and understand their fear. They claimed that some of those listed as victims were their former companions who knew too much and were suspected of betraying the DDS. So while former DDS members talked about how they were recruited, trained and how they operate, and who their handlers were and their link with some police and local government officials, all these information could not stand in court because they were not willing to testify in spite of the sworn statements made before the CHR. Much of the information can also be found in the report of the Human Rights Watch in 2009 *You Can Die Anytime : Death Squad Killings in Mindanao*. One of the

findings of the Human Rights Watch report reveals the link between the DDS and the police :

“According to these “insiders,” most members of the DDS are either former communist New People’s Army insurgents who surrendered to the government or young men who themselves were death squad targets and joined the group to avoid being killed. Most can make far more money with the DDS than in other available occupations. Their handlers, called amo (boss), are usually police officers or ex-police officers. They provide them with training, weapons and ammunition, motorcycles, and information on the targets. Death squad members often use .45-caliber handguns, a weapon commonly used by the police but normally prohibitively expensive for gang members and common criminals.

The insiders told Human Rights Watch that the amo obtain information about targets from police or barangay (village or city district) officials, who compile lists of targets. The amo provides members of a death squad team with as little as the name of the target, and sometimes an address and a photograph. Police stations are then notified to ensure that police officers are slow to respond, enabling the death squad members to escape the crime scene, even when they commit killings near a police station.”

The Human Rights Watch Report also revealed the modus operandi :

“Our research found that the killings follow a pattern. The assailants usually arrive in twos or threes on a motorcycle without a license plate. They wear baseball caps and buttoned shirts or jackets, apparently to conceal their weapons underneath. They shoot or, increasingly, stab their victim without warning, often in broad daylight and in presence of multiple eyewitnesses, for whom they show little regard. And as quickly as they arrive, they ride off—but almost always before the police appear.”

“They deserved to die.” This is what Mayor Duterte said while denying involvement in these extrajudicial killings. At one time, he read a list in his TV program. A few weeks later many of those in the list were killed by the DDS.

“They deserve to die.” This is also the attitude of many residents of the city towards the victims of the DDS. This shows who are behind them and why there has been little outcry regarding these mass murders.

It appears that the DDS killings are the center-piece of Mayor Duterte’s campaign against criminality in Davao City. To fight against criminality, you simply kill the criminals through extra-judicial executions carried out by the DDS. No need to arrest them, put them on trial and imprison them if proven guilty. No need for due process of the law. Criminals do not have rights—that is a western concept. For criminals there can only be one punishment—death. It doesn’t matter if you are a petty criminal—even if you are only a drug addict or pusher or cell-phone snatcher, you deserve to die. The killings are meant to be a deterrent to crime – to instill fear on everyone so that they will stop committing crime. According to Human Rights Watch Report :

“The continued death squad operation reflects an official mindset in which the ends are seen as justifying the means. The motive appears to be simple expedience : courts are viewed as slow or inept. The murder of criminal suspects is seen as easier and faster than proper law enforcement. Official tolerance and support of targeted killing of suspected criminals promotes rather than curbs the culture of violence that has long plagued Davao City and other places where such killings occur.”

It has been very difficult to speak out against these extrajudicial killings because majority of the people in Davao support these. The archdiocese of Davao under the leadership of Archbishop

Fernando Capalla came out with a pastoral letter : “Thou Shalt Not Kill” and held several prayer vigils. We were a minority—a small voice whose cry in the wilderness was drowned out by the applause of the majority. The blood of 1,424 victims of the DDS was the price that was paid so that there could be peace and order—so that all can walk at night without fear. This was the peace of the cemetery, an order maintained by death squads—by criminals.

And the mass murder continues and there will be more blood spilled—not just in Davao but the entire Philippines. Mayor Duterte promised that if elected “the 1,000 will become 100,000.” He declared that “it will be bloody.” He said there will be “no need for more jails—just funeral parlors.” He promised to “eliminate criminality in the entire country within 3-6 months.” How will he do it ? The answer is what happened in Davao—through the DDS under the direction of many police officers who deny their existence, with the financial support coming from businessmen and also drawn from the government coffers.

“I’m willing to go to hell, as long as the people I serve live in paradise.” Is this an admission on the part of Mayor Duterte that what he has done is a grave sin against God that could someday earn him divine punishment ?

Is Davao a paradise after 18 years of DDS extrajudicial killings ? Has criminality been eradicated ? According to the data from PNP covering 2010-2015, out of 15 chartered cities Davao was fourth in terms of Total Index of Crimes : 37,797 incidents. In terms of murder, Davao was no. 1 (1,032 incidents) and in terms of rape Davao was no. 2 (843 incidents). This report gives the impression that in Davao you can be murdered and raped any time. Murder is not really that bad if the DDS and the Mayor can do it. Rape is not really that bad if the Mayor can callously joke about it, wishing he was the first in line when he heard that a hostage—an Australian Lay Missionary—was raped.

Meanwhile, the families of victims cry out for justice as the DDS continue their killing spree. The national government has failed to address this mass murder that could soon multiply many times over, God forbid.

If the DDS are not stopped and those behind it are not held accountable, this will be a national bloodbath. Those who support it and allow it to multiply will have blood in their hands—they will be accomplices to mass murder. The one who order this is a mass murderer—the biggest Criminal of them all.

If it is alright to kill suspected criminals—who can stop any one from taking the law into their own hands ? Anyone can become judge and executioner—not only the police and public officials. Anyone can form their own vigilante groups. There won’t be any need for prisons or lawyers or judges. There won’t be any peace, no order as long as human rights and the rule of law are disregarded. Meanwhile, the big criminals, the big thieves and murderers will continue to rule the land. If it is o.k. to kill criminals, who can prevent anyone from killing the biggest Criminal of them all ? We could be entering another dark period of our history—like the dictatorial period in the past or worst.

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\* Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) website :

<http://www.cbcnews.com/cbcnews/?p=76531>