

Philippines - Statement: Challenges for President Duterte

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PLM Statement

Challenges for President Duterte:
Stop the Killings! Prosecute the Generals and the
Top Henchmen of the Illegal Drug Trade!

In less than two weeks, more than a hundred alleged drug pushers and petty drug traffickers were killed in the war against drugs called by the Rody Duterte government.

Some of the killings were undertaken by the police after the arrests or surrender of alleged drug pushers and dealers. These killings were purportedly undertaken in self-defense by the police whose guns were grabbed by the suspects. More alleged drug lords and pushers were victims of 'salvaging' or extra-judicial killings undertaken by unknown groups or forces.

The killings are generally aimed at the drug traffickers in the community who constitute the lower rung of the drug syndicate in the country. The victims are mostly poor people who are forced by poverty to engage in petty drug dealing in the community.

The 'terror effect' intended against the drug syndicate is already terrorizing and disempowering a number of communities in the country. It is also nibbling away at the base of President Duterte's popular support in these communities. We do not believe that this type of operation is a winning strategy to win the war against drugs.

The Duterte government should use all its forces to stop the killings of alleged drug pushers and petty drug 'lords' as this constitutes a grave violation of human rights and aggravates the peace and order situation in the country. The killings open up the floodgates of gangland execution that cannot be controlled by anyone, including the state agencies.

The government has to strike at the crown of the hydra-headed drugs syndicate instead at snipping away its tentacles at the community-level which is a bloody, messy strategy.

This is why we welcome President Duterte's recent acts of publicly naming police generals, government officials, and top drug dealers as coddlers and henchmen of the drug syndicates. The President's attempts to go after the generals and the top henchmen of the drugs trade demonstrates that he is committed to addressing the problem of criminality and social decay in the country.

We take note, however, that the poor people in the lower rung of the syndicates have already ended up killed and salvaged, while the top henchmen named by the President stay loose and have not been prosecuted. The President could start by prosecuting by full force of the law those who have been named as top drug lords and protectors.

As shown by the President's exposé, we believe that the PNP has become a source of the drug problem in the country. The PNP needs to be cleaned up and transformed from being a protector of

the big drug syndicate to a protector of the people.

In this regard, we call on the President to set up an independent inquiry into the role of the PNP in the drug trade, with the view of weeding out the hooligans from the good ones. It is crucial that the government mobilize and empower the communities and win their support and active participation in the campaign against drugs. The barangays and the community organizations with long record of service to the community can join hands to protect peace and order and the rights of every person in the community.

Lastly, if the President is intent on winning the war against drugs, the best strategy is not just about strengthening police actions or striking at the criminals in the streets. Poverty is at the very roots of the problem. To win the war against drugs, President Duterte should enhance his poverty eradication program by implementing such measures that do away with the neoliberal policies of the previous governments, provide jobs for all, stamp out contractualization, implement genuine agrarian reform, and others.

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