

Polemics on extrajudicial killings: Barack Obama cancels meeting after Philippines president calls him 'son of a whore'

Duterte also threatens to eat Abu Sayyaf Islamist militias "alive, raw."

Wednesday 7 September 2016, by [GAYLE Damien](#), [HOLMES Oliver](#) (Date first published: 6 September 2016).

Rodrigo Duterte further strains diplomatic ties with Washington as he warns US leader not to question him on extrajudicial killings.

Barack Obama has cancelled a meeting with the president of the Philippines after Rodrigo Duterte appeared to call him a "son of a whore".

The move followed a warning from Duterte to the US president to keep off the subject of extrajudicial killings in his country's brutal drug war when they were due to meet on Tuesday at a regional summit in Laos. Duterte told a press conference that Obama "must be respectful".

The firebrand president was answering a reporter's question about how he intended to explain the extrajudicial killings to Obama, before boarding a plane to Laos for the Association of South-east Asian Nations summit.

"You must be respectful. Do not just throw away questions and statements. Son of a whore, I will curse you in that forum," Duterte was quoted by as saying by Agence-France Presse. "We will be wallowing in the mud like pigs if you do that to me."

When his comments reached the Obama camp, the US president initially said he was asking his staff to find out whether holding the meeting as scheduled would be useful.

"What I've instructed my team to do is to talk to their Philippine counterparts to find out, is if this in fact a time where we can have some constructive, productive conversations," Obama said at a news conference at the end of a G20 summit in the eastern Chinese city of Hangzhou.

"Obviously the Filipino people are some of our closest friends and allies and the Philippines is a treaty ally of ours. But I always want to make sure that if I'm having a meeting that it's actually productive and we're getting something done."

But hours later the decision was made to cancel, a White House spokesman said. Instead, Obama will meet with South Korean president Park Geun-hye.

Duterte has faced condemnation from human rights campaigners, diplomats and the UN for inciting a war on drugs that, according to official figures published on Sunday, has led to 2,400 deaths in just two months.

The defiant Philippine leader has responded to critics with a string of outbursts, including labelling

the US ambassador to Manila a “gay son of a whore”, telling the Catholic church “don’t fuck with me”, and accusing the UN of issuing “shitting” statements about his anti-drugs policies.

Obama joins a long list of people whose mothers’ purity have been called into question by Duterte, including Pope Francis, Philippine bishops and a murdered journalist, as well as the drugs traffickers who are the main targets of his domestic law and order policies.

He took office in June after winning a landslide on promises to sort out drug crime in the country, and told crowds on the day of his inauguration: “If you know of any addicts, go ahead and kill them yourself as getting their parents to do it would be too painful.”

During his campaign, he said 100,000 people would die in his crackdown, with so many dead bodies dumped in Manila Bay that fish there would grow fat from feeding on them.

The call has led to what critics say amounts to open season on suspected drug criminals on the streets of Manila and other major cities, with thousands killed by vigilantes and police, who invariably claim to have fired back in self-defence.

In June, the UN secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, condemned Duterte’s apparent support for extrajudicial killings, saying they were “illegal and a breach of fundamental rights and freedoms”. Duterte replied by calling the UN “stupid” and threatening to withdraw the Philippines from the supranational body.

Asked about the possible consequences of his comments, he said: “What is ... repercussions? I don’t give a shit to them.”

Damien Gayle

@damiengayle

* The Guardian. Monday 5 September 2016 23.22 BST Last modified on Tuesday 6 September 2016 12.32 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/05/philippines-president-rodrigo-duterte-barack-obama-son-whore>

Duterte tells Obama ‘son of a whore’ remark wasn’t personal

After Philippine president’s aides try to limit damage, saying he’d been addressing a reporter, he threatens to eat Islamist militias alive.

The president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, has expressed regret for calling Barack Obama a “son of a whore” – a remark that led to the US leader cancelling their meeting during a regional summit in Laos.

In a statement read by his spokesman, Duterte said the remark was not intended as a personal insult. “While the immediate cause was my strong comments to certain press questions that elicited concern and distress, we also regret that it came across as a personal attack on the US president,” Ernesto Abella quoted Duterte as saying.

He added that a meeting with the US had been “mutually agreed upon to be moved to a later date”.

Duterte made his initial remarks following weeks of criticism from the US against extrajudicial killings in the Philippines’ bloody drug war. “Son of a whore, I will curse you in that forum,” Duterte was quoted as saying.

Obama said he was trying to schedule “some constructive, productive conversations” with Duterte but a White House spokesman later confirmed the meeting had been cancelled.

As Duterte arrived in Vientiane, the capital of Laos, for the Association of South-East Asian Nations summit on Monday evening, he was already rowing back on the remark, saying he did not want a fight.

“I do not want to quarrel with him. He’s the most powerful president of any country on the planet,” Duterte said. Instead, he said, he was angry at members of the US state department who “keep on mouthing” statements about human rights.

Elected in May on an anti-crime platform, Duterte has lashed out at the US and others for criticising his war on drugs, in which more than 2,400 people have been killed by police and vigilante militia.

Duterte’s personal aides and the Philippine government often try retroactively to soften comments from the man who frequently insults world leaders and promises bloodbaths to achieve his aims. Late on Tuesday, his communications team said Duterte had been addressing a reporter, not Obama.

But even as his team was conducting damage control, the head of state was making more inflammatory remarks as he arrived at the conference, expecting more bloodletting in the Philippines in his war on drugs.

“More people will be killed, plenty will be killed until the last [drug] pusher is out of the streets,” he said in quotes carried by Agence-France Presse.

He also said he would eat members of Abu Sayyaf, a small Islamist militant group in the country’s southern islands, which claimed a bomb that killed 14 people last week in Duterte’s home city Davao.

“They will pay. When the time comes, I will eat you in front of people,” Duterte said. “If you make me mad, in all honesty, I will eat you alive, raw.”

The Philippines has been a key US ally for years and Washington hopes it will remain one, especially as a partner against China’s military expansion in the South China Sea.

The country, which has overlapping claims with China to islands and atolls in the sea, won an international ruling against Beijing in July. But Duterte has said it is “better to continually engage China in a diplomatic dialogue rather than anger officials there”, starkly at odds with his recent comments about Obama.

Duterte’s spokesman Abella said on Tuesday: “Our primary intention is to chart an independent foreign policy while promoting closer ties with all nations, especially the US, with which we have had a longstanding partnership.”

With domestic popularity ratings in the order of 90%, the Philippine leader has won approval for his foul-mouthed press conferences from a public tired with years of well-spoken politicians from a small Manila-based elite.

Duterte previously named the US ambassador to Manila a “gay son of a whore” and told the Catholic church: “Don’t fuck with me.”

He has called the United Nations “stupid” for criticism of his controversial war on crime, in which he said 100,000 people would be killed and told citizens they should murder addicts.

The Filipino leader did manage to hold meetings with the Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, and Singapore’s prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong.

Oliver Holmes in Bangkok

AFP contributed to this report

* The Guardian. Tuesday 6 September 2016 13.36 BST Last modified on Tuesday 6 September 2016:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/06/son-of-a-whore-was-not-meant-to-be-personal-duterte-tells-obama>
