

**Forum:** United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (UNPBC)

**Issue #14-01:** Addressing the Philippines War on Drugs

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## Introduction

On June 30, 2016, Rodrigo Duterte became the 16th president of the Philippines. During his campaign, he promised to wage a war on the drug that was largely affecting the Philippines, locally known as Shabu (methamphetamine hydrochloride). Since then, Duterte's policy on drugs has killed more than 22,983 drug dealers and cartels. While this policy has been the cause of many deaths, some could argue that the policy has done its job and reduced the drug crime rates in the Philippines. According to a recent survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) on December of 2018, 66% of Filipinos claim that there is a decrease in drug use in their livelihood. Among these deaths, many are cases of homicide under investigation with 4,948 suspected drug dealers killed, although these numbers aren't exact since the government hasn't disclosed official documents on the executions (Roque). Social advocacy groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have reprimanded the president and the campaign for neglecting to protect the children and the rights of the people. This policy was supported by citizens of the Philippines initially; however, since its implementation, many have started speaking against the extrajudicial killings carried out by the Philippine government. (find source here). The policy has left families broken apart and many innocent lives killed during the process of carrying out a promise of a better future for the country. It is crucial that an alternative and more effective solution is found in order to prevent future policies that result in similar situations as the war on drugs has caused in the Philippines, as well as the current chaos that the country is facing.

## Definition of Key Terms

### **Extrajudicial**

Pertaining to being unlawful. For this issue, this refers to the drug-related killings that are considered extrajudicial by many human rights advocacy groups. Proving and defining this term as it relates to the issue is key to successful solutions.

### **Martial Law**

The pause on the nation's law in place with military government (usually in cases of emergency). For this issue, this refers to the President's declaration of martial law in Mindanao, which may have provided a window for Islamic fundamentalist violence. Whether or not martial law should have been declared is controversial, and the committee will need to decide if martial law should continue.

### **Reprisals**

Counteract or "revenge" of an action taken. Because of the supposedly extrajudicial killings, the families of the victims may want to write complaints to the police. However, due to corruption and the overall lawlessness in the country, there is fear that there would be reprisals if families were to speak out. Hence, the committee must find a solution that helps the citizens feel safe in their own country.

### **Extralegal**

Beyond the boundaries of law. Once again, this refers to the anti-drug framework, which is criticized because it doesn't prevent the larger roles of the drug chain from controlling the issue through violence.

## General Overview

The War on Drugs began in 2016, when President Duterte was elected. Since then, thousands of lives have been taken both towards the goal of dropping drug use, as well as situations that didn't necessarily need to involve killings. The internal conflict of the

country such as the unjust killings of innocent, children and human rights activists have severed the place of peace, and prosperity. However, one could say that this issue is not something that is important enough to be discussed, and moreover, the numbers show that the crime rates in the Philippines have dropped since the president took office.

## Peace

**Negative Peace** is the absence of violence or fear of violence. **Positive Peace** is defined as the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies.

“Well-developed Positive Peace represents the capacity for a society to meet the needs of its citizens, reduce the number of grievances that arise and resolve remaining disagreements without the use of violence” (Vision of Humanity). The outcomes of positive peace are thriving economies, better inclusion, high levels of resilience and better capacities to adapt to change. It is also correlated to the prevention of polarization. “Eighty-four percent of major political shocks occurred in countries with low Positive Peace” (Vision of Humanity).

The Global Peace Index (GPI) measures the state of peace by assessing three domains: Societal Safety and Security; the extent of Ongoing Domestic and International Conflict; and the degree of Militarisation. In 2018, the Philippines ranked 137th out of 163 on the GPI, with a score of 2.512-- a low state of peace.

## Police Brutality and Corruption

As of 2018, there have been more than 7,000 people killed since President Duterte took office in June 2016. About one third of the executions were during formal police operations; the rest of the drug-related killings are extrajudicial, according to 110 interviews and 33 documented cases. The killings are heavily focused on the poor, and some unknown shooters are paid by police officers, suggesting that police officers are using assassins. ‘If you are poor, you are killed’ (Extrajudicial Executions in the Philippines’ War on Drugs, [ASA 35/5517/2017](#)).

Evidence of crimes against humanity can be found in the oddly organized and seemingly planned killings of many Filipino citizens. Furthermore, these killings are shown to be supported by authorities. By August of 2018, the number of drug-related deaths

went up to 32 people per day. These killings were based on lists of people supposedly dealing with drugs, which were not, in fact, verified. Any legitimate investigations of unlawful killings of alleged drug offenders did not take place, and the family of the victims don't feel compelled to write complaints against the police out of fear that there might be reprisals. According to research done by Human Rights Watch, the police often falsely claim of acting in self-defense. By February of 2019, close to 20,000 people were executed during the peak of President Rodrigo Duterte Jr.'s war on drugs. When the government investigated the higher class households, they did it in an orderly manner in contrary to poor civilians, who were executed on the spot, after having been raided by the police forces (Samonte).

### **Protection of Children and Adolescents, Foreigners**

Many human rights activists have spoken out against Duterte and the government. These people are arrested and threatened by President Duterte's government and allies. On February 23, 2017, Senator Leila de Lima was arrested as a prominent human rights defender. Her arrest was described by [source] as a "blatant attempt by the Philippine government to silence criticism of President Duterte." Some speculate that this was also done to steer attention away from the human rights violations during the war on drugs (Neista).

According to Amnesty International, a radio broadcaster, Rudy Alicaway and columnist Leodoro Diaz, were being publicly critical of the government, and in August of 2018, they were shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Zamboanga del Sur and Sultan Kudarat. During a hearing in the Philippines Senate on August 24, 2017, the national police was accused of having failed to protect children from the dangerous situations that derived from "war on drugs". Also, the week before the hearing, a 17 year-old student, Kian Loyd Delos Santos, had been killed by the police. Despite evidence of CCTV footage and eyewitness accounts proving otherwise, police claim that the killing was done in "self-defense" (Philippines: Senate Hearing)

The drug war also presents a different issue: the violation of a child's right to a stable childhood. On November 28, a man who had a pregnant wife, was killed due to the drug war. Another death of a man in the following December left behind a wife and six

children, showing how the war on drugs has affected families, especially those of the lower class (Nachewey).

On June 30, 2016, a bill was filed in Congress to lower the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility from 15 years old to 9 (Legaspi). This means that a 9-year-old child would be held responsible for any drug trafficking that they might have been forced into. This would violate many conventions on children's rights. Since then, the age has been changed to 12. However, 12 is still adolescent age, which should not warrant going to jail. The Children's Legal Advocacy Network (CLAN) called the House of Representatives in the Philippines to reconsider its decision to lower the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility (MACR) to twelve years in early February of 2019.

### **Poverty Rates**

Since 2012, 19.2% of Filipinos live in extreme poverty, earning only about \$1.25 per day. This problem has been an ongoing issue in the Philippines even before the start of Duterte's policy, which means that it likely it was partially caused the drug and crime rates. The rates of poverty has not changed much since Duterte's policy, which means that this problem will be ongoing if not taken care of from the roots. This situation suggests that even after Duterte's presidency, this problem might come back in the future. This is why preventing such things and tackling this issue from a different approach might be more effective. One of the benefits of Positive Peace is that it strengthens domestic currencies, meaning the poverty rate will decrease. The number of people who rely on drug dealing as a source of income, will lessen as well (Liberation Staff).

### **Martial Law and ISIS in Marawi City**

In May 2017, while Duterte's policy was ongoing, President Rodrigo Duterte declared martial law over the entire island of Mindanao, supposedly responding to the violence committed by groups connected to the Islamic State (ISIS) in Marawi City in the Philippines. Armed forces linked to ISIS started bombing and shelling parts of Marawi City, which gave the civilians no choice other than to flee their homes. Although Mindanao is full of materials and resources, it is home to some of the poorest people in the Philippines. This region is home to the Moro people, most of who are Muslim. Fighting broke out between government forces and an alliance of militants who were

connected to ISIS. Of at least 25 killings, most were Christian civilians. The conflict ended in October that year, with the killing of ISIS military leaders by the government. The conflict left entire neighborhoods in Marawi City wiped out due to bombings. The killing of civilians due to the conflict violates international humanitarian law and categorized as a war crime. In December, the Martial law was extended (Liberation Staff).

Countries such as Australia and the US have provided military aid as airborne intelligence and "special forces liaison" for fighting the groups linked to ISIS in Marawi City. As Duterte might face human rights violation charges, supporting and sending help, even in the context of fighting groups that are in alliance with the ISIS, might come off as defending the Philippine leader. "This is a matter of social cleansing, with many of the victims among the poorest people in Filipino society. And yet many nations refuse to sign a UN declaration condemning the policy" (Sombatpoonsiri).

### **Similar International Drug Policies**

#### ***Colombia's Drug War***

The Colombian drug war, while resulting in the clearance of powerful drug lords, heightened the levels of violence in the country. In 1987, there were about 16,200 homicides in Colombia. Additionally, marginalisation and human rights violations rose. In the 1970s, as the numbers of organized drug mafias rose, the systematic campaign of murdering government authorities increased as well. Murder became a source of income for many by the time the war on drugs killed the drug lords that were responsible for organizing the assassinations. As a result, even after the policy rid the country of major drug lords, violence was still a big issue in the country (Bagley).

#### ***Thailand's Drug War***

In 2003, former prime minister of Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra, held similar policies against drugs. The political repercussions of allowing violence to control drugs were not in favor of anyone. The former police lieutenant colonel (Thaksin) declared a war against methamphetamines; ya ba, a drug largely produced by the Burmese rebels on the Thailand-Myanmar border. They had been using the profit of drug dealing to arm themselves. The way that they measured the success of the campaign was by counting the bodies, which fortified the hierarchy that embodied abuse, and corruption. In 2006,

an official investigation was held out and was found that more than 50% of the people who were killed as part of the drug war weren't remotely related to the actual drugs themselves. Also, the "blacklists" that were compiled in order to arrest or to kill rarely contained the drug lords, the culprits behind the scenes. Instead, the "lower-scaled" drug dealers were the ones targeted, which shows clear inefficiency and corruption in the system. The type of anti-drug framework has shone in the past to let the larger roles of the drug chain slip past the extralegal tactics to controlling the drug issues by the use of violence (Sombatpoonsiri).

## **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

### **Philippines**

The Philippines' President reacted to Iceland's resolutions saying, "They don't understand the social, economic, political problems of the Philippines." Duterte's spokesman continued on to say that the resolution was based upon false information. Duterte says that there is nothing wrong about protecting the country by killing the people who "destroy" it (Morales).

### **Iceland**

Iceland is the country that proposed the probing of the Philippine drug war campaign. Being one of the most stable and peaceful countries in the world according to many indices, Iceland initiated the investigation of the situation in the Philippines. As of last year, they have been an active member of the UN Human Rights Council. Now, Iceland is one of the prime examples of the countries that take human rights seriously (Tomacruz).

### **Angola**

This country has been widely scrutinized for violations of human rights since the rule of Jose Eduardo dos Santos, lasted for 40 years. During his time as the leader of Angola, reports document that Jose Santos oppressed the country and violated many human rights. In addition, he has been internationally criticized with corruption charges. In 2017,

Joao Lourenco was elected president and he campaigned to strengthen international relations as well as pledged to be less corrupt. Due to the nation's human rights record, Angola's decriminalization of homosexuality was seen as a positive step forward (Gonzalez).

### **Bahrain**

Human rights advocates have frequently called out Bahrain for the repression of human rights. Anyone who is critical, and speaks up about the government could be sent to jail. These human rights defenders are also under a lot of scrutiny from the government. In April, the country was criticized for jailing 138 people and revoking their citizenship (Gonzalez).

### **Cameroon**

Since 1982, President Paul Biya has been ruling. The country, originally colonized by both the British and the French, is divided into an Anglophone region and a Francophone region. Starting in 2016, the government implemented harsh regulations threatening the freedom of the Anglophone region. Threats from Boko Haram have also plagued the country's national security since the group's formation. This has left tensions in Cameroon extremely high and allowed organized crime and gang violence to grow (Gonzalez).

### **China**

"We have said before that since he took office, President Rodrigo Duterte has firmly cracked down on drug-related crimes and improved public security, which creates a sound environment for the Philippines' economic development and its people's peaceful life and wins full approval and wide support at home," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lu Kang said in 2018. This shows the support of the Chinese government of Philippine's drug campaign. China had also withdrawn from the International Criminal Court (ICC) who were planning on investigating on the issue beforehand (Mercado).

### **Qatar**

Qatar has been widely criticized by human rights advocacy groups for the exploitation of humans and unrealistic policies on domestic worker's rights, which would mean that



there isn't much compensation for the work that these people do. Also, this country still holds capital punishment (Gonzalez).

## Egypt

Under the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah, the country arrests and oppresses the voices that shout against the government. The authorities block many sites including the Human Rights Watch as well as other media outlets (Gonzalez).

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
2016	Duterte is elected and starts to carry out his plans on war on drugs
2017	Martial Law is declared because of the ISIS attacks in Marawi city
2019	Iceland proposes a resolution to probe the situation in the Philippines, and the resolution passes in which 18 countries voted for, and 14 countries voted against.

## UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

On July 11th, the United Nations signed a resolution made by Iceland to investigate the current issue in the Philippines. Other than this recent action made by the UN, there have not been any previous actions on this matter.

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Since this issue is not very old, it is sequitur that there are not many relevant resolutions or treaties regarding the drug war in the Philippines. However, many have criticized that the UN should be more involved, as it has been nearly four years since Duterte's policy

first launched. The resolution states that it is in order that the United Nations investigate the injustice actions that might be going on in the country of the Philippines.

## Possible Solutions

Some argue that the root of the drug use problem would not be solved simply by killing dealers and offenders. It doesn't prevent future generations from dealing drugs as well. Furthermore, it would increase the chances that children will rely on drug use because of the stressful situation caused by violent shootings. Therefore, the committee should look for other ways to solve this problem. It is important to look at what causes people to use substances. It could be that an individual encountered an experience with the drugs by chance, and happen to enjoy the result of doing the drugs; or, it could be that some individuals want to escape from their stressful, menial reality. One key to solving this issue is by resolving the problem of poverty in the Philippines. When there is only a scarce income or livelihood to sustain a family, people try to find ways to obtain money without much effort--in this case, dealing drugs. If people had stable jobs and if the economy was stable, there wouldn't be reliance on "non-proper" ways of filling that gap. Education is also very important to solving this issue. Educating children gives them better opportunities for the future and decreases their chance of being involved in organized crime and gangs. Additionally, if people are more informed about the harmful effect on drugs, then there would be less usage of it.

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## Appendix

### I. The Philippines in 2018-2019

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