

A wave of summary executions following the Philippine election

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Philippine President-elect Rodrigo Duterte, the head of death squads in Davao City in the Southern Philippines where he has been the long-time mayor, vowed during his campaign to kill and dump over a hundred thousand alleged criminals in Manila Bay within six months of his election. Less than a month before his presidential inauguration, police and vigilantes have already launched a murderous campaign against alleged criminals throughout the country.

Duterte announced on May 31 that he would be paying bounties for every person killed who was alleged to be in the drug trade. He also announced the value which he would assign to every human life taken, promising up to 3 million pesos (\$US64,000) for every “drug lord,” 2 million for those deemed to be in charge of distribution, 1 million for “syndicate members,” and 50,000 for “ordinary” drug peddlers.

Duterte further stated that he would begin making payments for those killed prior to taking office, stating that he had enough money left in his campaign funds to pay for “100 persons dead.” He explicitly included in his bounty offer a reward for lives of inmates within the prison system who were alleged to be dealing drugs.

Since his election, a wave of executions of alleged criminals carried out both by vigilantes and the police has swept the country.

On May 19, vigilantes executed an alleged drug pusher in Bulacan province on the island of Luzon. According to the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the vigilantes abducted Ramonito Nicolas Mendoza immediately following his court hearing on drug charges and release on bail. Mendoza’s dead body, riddled with bullets, was later found with his hands and feet hogtied, his head wrapped with packaging tape and a sign on his neck stating “Huwag akong tularan. Drug Pusher Ako.” (Don’t be like me. I’m a drug pusher).

On May 25, *Sourc* according to the *China Post*, five motorcycle-riding gunmen shot dead three alleged petty thieves in Davao city.

“Police records show these men were pickpockets and burgled cars,” the city’s police spokeswoman, Senior Inspector Milgrace Driz, told the newspaper. She then added the well-worn rationale of the city’s police for such assassinations, claiming that they were “due to gang warfare” and insisting that the Davao Death Squads were a “myth.”

“They don’t exist, it is only you journalists who say they exist,” she said. Duterte himself has repeatedly acknowledged the existence of these death squads, as well as his direct oversight of them.

Three days later, unknown gunmen shot and killed two other suspected drug dealers in the same city. One victim, attacked at an Internet shop on Wednesday, had been out on bail on a drug-related offence.

The police have not been far behind in racking up kills. Two suspected illegal drug traders died in a shootout with police during a sting operation in Biñan City, in the province of Laguna on Luzon, in the early morning of May 20.

On May 26, police in Bulacan killed four alleged drug dealers in a gun battle in the town of Norzagaray town. The next day, another four drug suspects were killed after allegedly trading shots with the police in General Santos City on Mindanao Island.

Over the weekend, police shot and fatally wounded Rowen Secretaria and three others in a shootout at Banacon Island, 33 kilometres from Cebu city, the second largest city in the country. The police accused Secretaria of ranking “third among the top drug personalities in Cebu City.”

The police killings follow the explicit instruction of Duterte’s new national head of the police,

Superintendent Ronald de la Rosa. Speaking to the press last month, de la Rosa exhorted his men to “shoot-to-kill if the criminal fights back or is armed.” When asked by reporters what police should do if the criminals did not fight back, de la Rosa responded, “Make them fight back.” He thus publicly green-lighted extra-judicial killings on the pretext of resisting arrest.

This spate of killings is unfolding as the entire Philippine political establishment is rapidly shifting to the far-right. From city mayors to congress, under the banner of an “all-out war against crime, drugs and corruption,” the pretence of adhering to democratic rights and due process is being discarded.

In Tanauan city, the newly-elected mayor twice forced suspected drug pushers to parade through the streets in a so-called “Walk of Shame” with signs on their chests stating “Ako’y Pusher, Huwag tularan” (I’m a drug pusher, Don’t be like me.). The local police have admitted formal charges have yet to be filed as their investigations have not been completed.

In Cebu City, days after gaining the mayoralty, Tomas Osmeña announced a \$US1,000 dollar bounty to the police for every suspected “drug lord” or petty criminal killed or wounded. “It can be their extra source of livelihood,” Osmeña told the Cebu media.

Last week, the mayor-elect awarded the bounty to a police team for killing Teodoro Cabrana, suspected of drug pushing, after he allegedly tried to shoot it out with the police. The previous week, Osmeña handed over a bounty to an off-duty policeman for shooting and wounding two suspected robbers alleged to have held up a public utility Jeepney.

Underscoring his murderous intent, the mayor-elect handed out only \$US427 dollars, explaining that the suspects “were injured and were not shot dead.”

In the Philippine congress, with even nominal opposition to Duterte expected to be just 20 congressional representatives out of 300, a repressive legislative agenda of “all-out war against crime, drugs and corruption,” including the return of the death penalty and the reduction of the age of criminality, will be rapidly advanced under the guise of a national crisis of drug addiction and drug-related crimes.

Even more ominously, Duterte announced plans to add two divisions to the military, recruit 3,000 new police and to organize and arm militias down at the

barangay level, the smallest local government unit.

Justice in the Philippines, designed under US colonial rule, has always been a repressive and corrupt affair. There is no trial by jury. The state security forces, in general, and the police in particular, are brutal, corrupt and have a well-earned reputation of torturing suspects and conducting extra-judicial executions.

Moreover, according to Human Rights Watch, between 85 and 90 percent of the more than 94,000 inmates in the penal system are still awaiting or undergoing trial. The Philippines is the Southeast Asian country with the highest number of pre-trial and remand detainees and the second highest in all of Asia.

Duterte’s so-called “war on drugs” is aimed at the working class. The main victims of drug addiction in the Philippines are workers, the poor and the youth, who have also been the main victims of Duterte’s death squads in Davao.

The summary executions across the country which Duterte is calling for and rewarding, and which have already commenced, are intended to dramatically increase repression in the face of a mounting social crisis and to prepare to brutally crackdown on any resistance from the working class.



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