

Philippine police and vigilantes kill 72 during first week of Duterte government

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In the first week of the newly-installed Philippine administration of President Rodrigo Duterte, a total of 72 people have been killed by either the police or vigilantes on accusations of alleged criminality or participation in the illegal drug trade.

Duterte took office on June 30, having campaigned on a law-and-order platform that publicly called for the large-scale, extra-judicial killing of supposed criminals.

Since his election in early May, Duterte has received the enthusiastic support of the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its front organizations. Duterte has now appointed four CPP selected candidates from its front organizations to cabinet positions in his government. The most recent appointee, Liza Maza, will head the National Anti-Poverty Center (NAPC).

On the evening of June 30, after Duterte's inaugural address and first cabinet meeting, the CPP's front organizations, at Duterte's request, arranged a dinner which he attended in the working class and urban poor community of Tondo. A crowd of 500 community members were gathered.

In his speech at the event, Duterte stated to applause that he was a "leftist" and was glad to be working with the Communist Party. He concluded his speech by denouncing drug pushers, "These sons of whores are destroying our children." He told his audience, "If you know of any addicts, go ahead and kill them yourself."

The next morning Duterte addressed the Philippine National Police (PNP) in their headquarters in Camp Crame, during the ceremony installing Director General Ronald de la Rosa as PNP head. He told the police that if "you kill one thousand persons because you were doing your duty, I will protect you." He instructed the police to "shoot-to-kill" anyone deemed to "resisting arrest."

The same day the police killed 12 alleged criminals, and vigilantes killed an additional two. Another 12 were killed the following day, seven by police, five by vigilantes. On

July 3, 19 were reported killed.

By July 7, 72 two people had been killed in the bloody crackdown—43 by the police and 29 by vigilantes.

The details of many of the deaths are sketchy, but the overwhelming majority were executed in generally impoverished communities such as Quiapo, Muntinglupa, Baclaran and Tondo.

Those killed by vigilantes often had their corpses mutilated. Their bodies have been found hogtied and their eyes blindfolded, shot in the back of the head. Signs were left on the bodies saying "I'm a pusher, don't imitate me."

The police killings are likewise often being carried out execution style, with almost no effort being made to depict the victims as having "resisted arrest." On July 6, for example, two brothers were killed by the police while in custody and handcuffed.

Duterte meanwhile is pursuing other components of his fascistic agenda. He controls a super-majority in both houses of the legislature and has called for measures to reinstate the death penalty and to lower the minimum age of criminal accountability.

Incoming Speaker of the House Pantaleon Alvarez has responded by drafting House Bill no. 1, which re-introduces the death penalty. The only significant debate that the bill currently faces in the legislature is whether the death penalty should be carried out by lethal injection or by hanging. Duterte has strongly called for the latter method of punishment, describing public hanging as "not a deterrent but retribution." Incoming Senator Manny Pacquiao has introduced a bill in the Senate which would make death by hanging possible.

Alvarez has introduced a second bill that lowers the minimum age of criminal accountability from 15 to nine years old. If the bill—which Duterte supports—passes, second graders will be tried as adults, and could possibly face death by hanging for drug related offenses.

In a speech before the country's top military leadership on July 1, Duterte issued a public appeal to the CPP, and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), to assist with his murderous campaign. While addressing the heads of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Duterte called on the Maoists to "use your kangaroo courts to kill them [alleged drug pushers] to speed up the solution to our problem."

The CPP responded on July 2 with a statement entitled "Response to President Duterte's call for anti-drug cooperation," which opened by declaring that the party "welcomes President Duterte's call for cooperation with the revolutionary forces against widespread drug trafficking." The CPP stated that they "share in President Duterte's reprehension of the illegal drug trade."

They continued, "While the CPP does not accept his reference to the duly constituted people's courts as 'kangaroo courts,' and reiterating the right to due process of criminal suspects, the CPP and the revolutionary forces accept President Duterte's offer of anti-drug cooperation." In the next paragraph, they wrote "The NPA is ready to give battle to those who will resist arrest with armed violence."

Joma Sison, the CPP's founder and head, appeared the next day in an interview on CNN, in which he announced that the party would be violently cracking down on alleged drug dealers. Asked how suspects would be accorded due process in the NPA's courts, he stated that the "people's prosecutor" would present prima facie evidence in the form of witness testimony before "revolutionary justice" was carried out.

The NPA has a long history of bloody show trials. In the 1980s, the party carried out internal purges in which they murdered over a thousand of the party's own cadre in a series of witch-hunts for military agents within its ranks. Conviction, based exclusively on witness testimony and forced confessions, resulted in summary execution and burial in a mass grave.

The CPP's front organizations have likewise lined up behind Duterte's murderous campaign. BAYAN chairperson Carol Araullo, writing in her regular column in *Business World*, the country's leading business daily, stated that "the role of politically conscious, progressive people's organizations and the Left in general becomes clear—to arouse, organize and mobilize the people to support Mr. Duterte's progressive policy statements, intentions and concrete actions."

Renato Reyes, secretary general of BAYAN, declared in an interview on national television carried over ANC 5,

"It is very clear that he [Duterte] defends human rights and democratic rights." He followed this up with a statement published on July 4 addressed to those who have "misgivings or reservations about the Duterte regime." Reyes stated "To put it plainly, he is an ally." While he admitted that BAYAN has "differences" with Duterte, he argued that "to be immediately confrontational ... every time the President said something disagreeable during the past month would have weakened the alliance." He appealed to his readers, "We should at least give him a chance."

As the scale of the executions and killings became clear, BAYAN issued another statement expressing "grave concern" over the "spate of extrajudicial killings of alleged drug dealers over the past few weeks." BAYAN immediately stated that Duterte was committed to defending due process, then with breath-taking dishonesty, it stated that the killings, the majority of which were carried out by the police, were in fact "part of the house cleaning being done by the big criminal syndicates to avoid detection by the new regime."

The victims of the wave of state-sanctioned vigilante and police murder being carried out in the Philippines came from the ranks of the poor and the working class. Their suppression serves the interests of capitalism. Goldman Sachs published a report in June which hailed Duterte's "strong political will" as a key factor in their assessment that "the upcoming administration will conduct growth-oriented and business-friendly policies."



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