

# Over 1,800 extra-judicial killings under new Philippine government

Joseph Santolan  
23 August 2016

Ronald de la Rosa, chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP) testified Monday before a Senate investigation into the extra-judicial killings since President Rodrigo Duterte took office on June 1. He said the official police count of those who were killed by either police or vigilantes for the first six weeks of the Duterte administration was 1,789.

De la Rosa told the Senate that from June 1 to July 15, 712 people had been killed by the police as part of Duterte's "war on drugs." Vigilantes, he stated, had killed 1,067 in the same time frame.

These official figures are at least twice the tally estimated by the press prior to de la Rosa's testimony. They reveal that Duterte, who has repeatedly endorsed the state and vigilante killings of alleged criminals, has launched a crusade of mass murder.

This slaughter has received the support and funding of Washington. Secretary of State John Kerry visiting Duterte in Manila on July 30, pledged \$32 million earmarked specifically to fund Duterte's anti-drug crusade.

Washington is not pleased, however, with Duterte's failure to aggressively assert the country's territorial claims in the South China Sea following the ruling against China by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague. Where his predecessor, Benigno Aquino, actively spearheaded the US drive against China in the region, Duterte has pursued bilateral negotiations and trade talks with Beijing.

As Kerry's visit to Manila demonstrates, Washington has no qualms about funding Duterte's death squads, provided he toes its line. The recent flurry of negative international press about police and vigilante killings in the Philippines, headed up by the *New York Times*, is an implicit threat from Washington: Duterte will serve the US imperialist war drive against China, or the US will exploit "human rights" as a weapon against him.

On average, 40 people a day are being killed. Extrapolating on this basis, more than 2,000 would have been murdered by police and vigilantes under the Duterte administration by the time de la Rosa testified before the Senate.

The victims of the state murder campaign are the impoverished and oppressed. They are killed in the working class districts of Tondo and Quiapo. Their corpses, wrapped in duct tape and cellophane and shot through the back of the head, are abandoned in the narrow alleyways of shantytowns. Others, having been picked up without warrant, were executed while handcuffed in police custody.

The victims who have been identified in the press have been either unemployed or informally employed in occupations like pedicab driver or market vendor. Duterte is overseeing the systematic murder of the most oppressed layers of the Philippine population.

On August 18, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on summary executions, Agnes Callamard, called on the Philippines authorities "to adopt with immediate effect the necessary measures to protect all persons from targeted killings and extrajudicial executions." She said Duterte's calls for killing criminal suspects "amount to incitement to violence and killing, a crime under international law."

Duterte staged a two-hour press conference at two in the morning from his home in Davao in the southern Philippines in which he launched a profanity-laden tirade against the UN. He called Callamard "a sh\*t" and threatened to pull the Philippines out of the international body. He said his role model was the vigilante played by Charles Bronson in the movie *Death Wish*.

Duterte postured as an opponent of imperialist interference, denouncing the hypocrisy of the UN voicing concern over death squads in the Philippines while allowing the "big powers" to bomb Syria and US police

to murder “black people.”

Duterte is no opponent of imperialism, but is attempting with populist rhetoric to secure support for his administration. He has announced his full support for the basing of US military forces in the country, and has repeatedly proposed to alter the country’s constitution to allow increased access for foreign investors.

The next morning, Secretary of Foreign Affairs Perfecto Yasay held a press conference for damage control. No, he stated, the Philippines would not be pulling out of the UN. The president, he stated, had been “tired and hungry” the night before. “We must give him leeway. He is also human.”

However, Yasay said UN rapporteurs were not welcome to come to the country to investigate, because “they had already jumped to conclusions.”

A ubiquitous claim in the international media is that Duterte’s murderous campaign enjoys mass support. The *New York Times*, for example, wrote on August 19 that “his drug war has proved wildly popular in a country plagued by crime.” This is a baseless slander against the majority of the Filipino people.

Only two pieces of evidence have been supplied to substantiate this claim. First, Duterte is stated to have “received overwhelming support” in the election, winning “by a landslide.” This is a lie. He received 38 percent of the vote, a mere plurality of those who actually went to the polls. Second, Duterte received a very high trust rating in a survey conducted in mid-June, that is to say before he ever took office.

The ruling class, on the other hand, has demonstrated that it supports the use of death squads and police killing. Virtually the entire political establishment has lined up behind the Duterte administration.

The Senate, under the joint leadership of the committee on Human Rights and Justice under Sen. Leila de Lima and the committee on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs under Sen. Panfilo Lacson, launched an investigation of the extrajudicial killings. PNP Chief de la Rosa testified before this committee regarding the number of people killed.

Lacson was one the chief torturers of the Marcos dictatorship in the Military Intelligence and Security Group before rising in the ranks of the PNP to become its head under the Estrada government. Lacson publicly stated that the investigation must not interfere with the “momentum” of the police war on drugs.

De Lima was head of the Justice Department under President Aquino. She was responsible for prosecuting

corruption cases against various figures with economic ties to China as part the Aquino administration’s integration in the US “pivot to Asia.” De Lima was responsible for securing the imprisonment of former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo as part of this campaign. Arroyo has now been rehabilitated under the Duterte government and is serving as a key ally in the legislature.

To the extent that there has been any political opposition to the extra-judicial killings it has been articulated by de Lima. At the opening of the Senate investigation she stated that Duterte “could face charges before the International Criminal Court.”

Duterte responded by denouncing de Lima as an “immoral, adulterous woman,” who had a long-standing affair with her driver. He claimed that her driver also served as her bagman to collect payoffs from various drug-lords.

There had been a proposal in the House of Representatives to carry out a parallel investigation into the police and vigilante killings, but this was immediately rejected and the lower body of the legislature voted instead to conduct an investigation of de Lima and her driver.

As the staggering figures of police and vigilante murders emerged on Monday, the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) was preparing to hold the first round of formal peace negotiations with the government in Oslo. The talks are slated to run from August 22 to 26.

Joma Sison, the head of the party, hailed Duterte as a man who uses “street language and methods of the mass movement.” He declared that the CPP was “ever willing to cooperate with the Duterte government in pursuing the just cause of national and social liberation against foreign and feudal domination.”

The CPP is hostile to the working class and serves the interests of sections of the Filipino bourgeoisie. As Duterte, with funding from Washington, is carrying out a campaign of mass murder against the working class and the poor in the Philippines, the CPP is preparing to end its armed struggle and fully support his regime.



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