

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

Index: 35/5894/17

16 March 2017

Philippines: Stop new killings and implement police reforms urgently

Dozens of further killings by police of people suspected of using and selling drugs indicate that police reforms, promised by the President during a month-long suspension of anti-drug operations in the country, have failed to materialise.

According to figures provided to the media by the Philippine National Police, there have been at least 27 killings in anti-drug operations since the government relaunched its anti-drug campaign, “Double Barrel Reloaded” ten days ago.

Last month, Amnesty International released a report, “If you are poor, you are killed,” documenting unlawful killings by police and unknown persons, some of whom are paid by police, in anti-drug operations.

The recent spate of killings is evidence that this deadly ‘war on the poor,’ is continuing, despite the forming of a new anti-drugs agency, which Police Chief Ronald dela Rosa pledged would “guarantee full accountability and internal discipline amongst all personnel.”

Following the killing of Korean national Jee Ick-joo in police custody, President Duterte suspended the anti-drug campaign and vowed to “cleanse” the Philippine National Police of rogue police officers. However, there has been no indication that independent and effective investigations into reported extrajudicial executions or concrete reforms necessary to ensure an end to police killings and corruption, have since taken place.

Furthermore, despite deep concerns that extrajudicial executions in the ‘war on drugs’ may amount to crimes against humanity, the Philippine government has failed to address any of the other human rights violations Amnesty International and other organisations such as Human Rights Watch have documented and published.

In order to institute urgently needed reform of the Philippine National Police, Amnesty International calls on the government to prioritise prompt, impartial, independent and effective investigations into drug related killings that implicate

police officers, either directly or indirectly, suspend from active duty any officer against whom there are credible suspicions of involvement in an unlawful killing and press charges in any case where investigations uncover sufficient and admissible evidence that individuals have engaged in offences involving human rights violations. Investigations and prosecutions should cover all suspects, including those with command or other superior responsibility and irrespective of rank or status.

To investigate ongoing human rights violations, Philippine authorities should grant immediate access, without condition, to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and the Special Rapporteur on the right to health to carry out an independent assessment of the governments' anti-drug campaign.

Background

Since the start of 2017, the human rights situation in the Philippines has continued to deteriorate. In February, the most prominent critic of the government's 'war on drugs', Senator Leila de Lima, was detained on politically motivated charges. In recent weeks, allies of the President have threatened to silence her further, by imposing a gag order. Amnesty International and other human rights organisations, including the International Commission of Jurists and Human Rights Watch have called for de Lima's immediate and unconditional release and the dropping of all charges against her.

In March, lawmakers in the House of Representatives voted to reintroduce the death penalty for drug-related crimes. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception as the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment and calls on the bill to be rejected by the Senate.

In November and December 2016, Amnesty International conducted extensive field research to investigate 33 incidents of drug related killings, and the implementation of anti-drug policies in the Philippines.

The findings, published on 1 February 2017, highlighted how the vast majority of the drug related killings appear to be extrajudicial executions. The research also found strong evidence of links between state authorities and some armed persons who carried out drug-related killings. Most of those that have been killed were men from urban poor communities, in effect making the "war on drugs" a war on the poor.

In most cases documented by Amnesty International, there was a link between the killings and "drugs watch lists" prepared by government officials and shared with the police, with little verification or effective investigation of those on it.

The research also documented how anti-drug operations have involved killing or otherwise harming children, and undermined people's right to health, pushing those who use drugs into involuntary and inadequate drug rehabilitation programmes and rendering inaccessible essential testing and treatment services.

In May 2017, the human rights record of the Philippines will come under scrutiny by UN member states as part of the Universal Periodic Review. In 2012, the government pledged to address issues of impunity, torture and ill-treatment amongst police and law enforcement agencies.