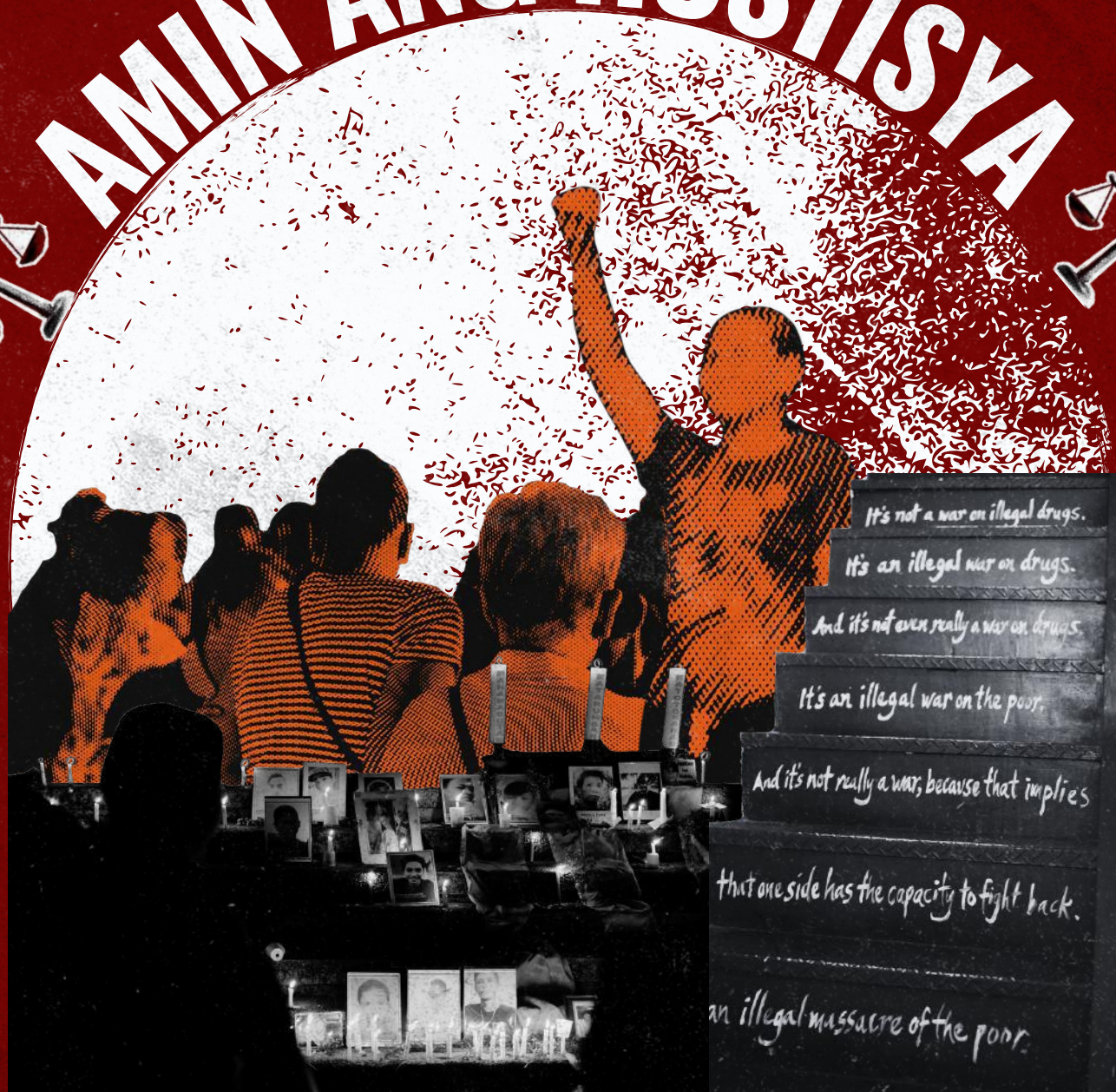




PHILRIGHTS
Philippine Human Rights Information Center

AMIN ANG HUSTISKA



It's not a war on illegal drugs.
It's an illegal war on drugs.
And it's not even really a war on drugs.
It's an illegal war on the poor.
And it's not really a war, because that implies
that one side has the capacity to fight back.
an illegal massacre of the poor.

Findings of the 2017-2026 Documentation of Extrajudicial Killings (EJKs) and other Human Rights Violations Committed Under the So-Called War on Drugs

PANTAO REPORTS

AMIN ANG HUSTISYA

Findings of the 2017-2026 Documentation of Extrajudicial Killings (EJKs) and other Human Rights Violations Committed Under the So-Called War on Drugs

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FOREWORD

It is a well-documented but unacknowledged fact that the violence of the so-called war on drugs did not end when Rodrigo Duterte's term did. Many families have lost a loved one to the drug war under this current administration, joining thousands others who continue to live with the burden of rebuilding lives that have been forever altered.

But despite the fear and grief they have brought to the families of the victims, these years have also borne witness to shared healing, courageous resistance, and a collective pursuit of justice.

In this year's Monitoring and Documentation Report, we revisit the past ten years of the drug war as experienced by our partner communities. Our journey with them, which began in 2017, has continually reminded us that documentation is more than the collection of testimonies and data. It is an act of bearing witness to lives interrupted, of preserving the memory of those whose lives were taken, and of affirming the dignity of every person whose rights were violated.

This report stands as a testament to the enduring struggle of the victims' families, ensuring that the stories of their loved ones—and the lessons of this dark chapter in our nation's history—are neither forgotten nor repeated. Their struggle reminds us that justice is not a privilege to be bestowed or a favor to be granted. It is an inherent right of every victim and every family left behind that refuses to forget.

Justice for all, human rights for all!

Prof. Nymia Pimentel-Simbulan, DrPH (ret.)

Executive Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Monitoring and Documentation of Extrajudicial Killings (EJKs) and Other Human Rights Violations

Since August 1, 2017, PhilRights has been conducting fieldwork and community-based monitoring on human rights violations under the so-called war on drugs in its partner communities in Metro Manila, Bulacan, and Rizal. This effort has continued beyond Rodrigo Duterte's presidency, revealing that despite shifting modalities, the anti-illegal drugs campaign remains to be brutal in urban poor areas under the Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. administration. In this annual report, PhilRights sums up some of the key findings from the data it has gathered until May 31, 2026.

The past year saw many crucial developments related to the drug war, most important of which has been the confirmation of the crimes against humanity charges against Duterte at the International Criminal Court (ICC). This has sparked a hope that many survivors and victims' families have fought long and hard for throughout the

ten years since the launching of the infamous Oplan Double Barrel. Today, they find themselves at a critical juncture where much has already been achieved, but much must yet be pursued to secure a just and humane future.

Each chapter in this report focuses on the victims to illuminate their experiences, responses, and urgent calls throughout these developments:

Confronting the War on Drugs: A Decade of Living Despite, Through, and Beyond It

Chapter 1 recounts the events from Duterte's presidential campaign in 2016 up to his arrest by the ICC in 2026, as experienced on the ground by communities targeted by his drug war. It is a retelling of the stories and reflections shared during a focus group discussion by women left-behind, who over the years

have become dedicated community-based monitors and human rights defenders.

Victims' Profiles: Targets of the War on Drugs

Chapter 2 presents the profiles of the documented individuals, providing statistical data by sex, age, and the locations of the incidents. Beyond presenting their data as victims, this chapter also gives an overview of the varied efforts and activities that the families left-behind have undertaken to reclaim their rights and seek justice not only for themselves, but also for their fellow victims and survivors.

From Arrest to Affirmation: Developments in Rodrigo Duterte's Case from the Past Year

Chapter 3 narrates the developments on Duterte's case at the ICC, from the former president's arrest up to the serving of Senator Bato Dela Rosa's warrant of arrest, and adjoins these with the reactions and calls to action of families left-behind, as documented in group discussions and

surveys conducted in the previous year.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter 4 closes the report with the conclusions and recommendations arising from the data. It outlines short and long-term steps that the Philippine government must take in order to fulfill its mandate of protecting, respecting, and fulfilling the rights of the victims and of current and future generations of Filipinos.

Overall, this report enjoins all readers to look back on the journey that has taken thousands of victims up to this point of reckoning, and to decisively move forward, collectively, towards genuine justice and accountability.

METHODOLOGY

PhilRights' documentation abides by the principles and investigation guidelines set by The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016). This document, also known as *The Minnesota Protocol*,¹ was issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) to set international legal standards to prevent unlawful deaths and investigate extrajudicial, summary, and arbitrary executions.

The Minnesota Protocol clarifies that a “potentially unlawful death” may (1) have been due to the acts or omission of the State, its organs or agents including law enforcers, paramilitary groups, militias or death squads allegedly “acting under the direction or with the permission or acquiescence of the State,” and “private military or security forces exercising State functions,” (2) have happened when the victim was in detention by or in custody of the State, its organs or agents, and

(3) have been due to the failure of the State to fulfill its obligation in protecting life. Under international law, a “potentially unlawful death” is the product of an arbitrary, summary, or extralegal execution or an alleged extrajudicial killing. In the event that the victim survived the incident, the violation is referred to as “frustrated or attempted extrajudicial killing.”

PhilRights works with community partners in Manila, Caloocan, Malabon, Navotas, Valenzuela, and Quezon City, and the provinces of Bulacan and Rizal for the referral of cases that occurred from July 2016 until the present, for the monitoring of the human rights situation in the communities, and for the provision of assistance to victims and their families. The information obtained from the interviews with victims, families, and witnesses is checked against media reports, police records, death certificates, and other sources of information.

¹ The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (New York: United Nations Publications, 2017), <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/MinnesotaProtocol.pdf>

CHAPTER 1



CONFRONTING THE WAR ON DRUGS:

**A Decade of Living Despite, Through,
and Beyond It**

A decade has passed since the war on drugs first swept the nation in shock. Yet the need to retell its stories—as lived by those who endured, survived, and continue to live beyond it—has only grown more urgent. Ten years of waiting have reaffirmed the importance of establishing the truth, especially in the face of historical erasure and distortion. Resistance has always been central to this effort. It means confronting the culture of impunity that persists and continuously bringing to light the experiences of those most affected by the drug war. Surfacing these narratives is essential to demanding accountability from the state for the lasting harm inflicted on victims, their families, and their communities. Meaningful and lasting change, including the non-recurrence of such violence, can only be built on truth.

The following feature recounts the drug war as lived by PhilRights’ partner families. While their stories remain marked by grief, loss, and suffering, they are now told with a renewed determination to press forward in the struggle for truth, justice, and accountability.

Divide & Conquer

Duterte anchored his presidential campaign on a populist outlook—pinpointing the ruling “oligarchs” of Manila, criminality, and drugs as the core enemies of the Filipino people—and him as the savior that will take them on. Duterte’s promise of effecting rapid change grounded in force proved to be effective as he amassed 16.6 million votes from it.¹

This became the groundwork that dehumanized drug users months before Oplan Double Barrel took effect, long before Duterte came to power, and consummated immediately upon his assumption to office.

Populism is a political approach that claims to represent the will of “the people” against a corrupt elite. Duterte’s populism drew on public anxieties about crime and disorder, presenting the war on drugs as a direct response to the demands of ordinary Filipinos.

In campaign rallies, crowds reveled in Duterte's declarations of war against drug users:

“When I become president, I will order the police to find those people [dealing or using drugs] and kill them. The funeral parlors will be packed.”²

What initially seemed as a campaign strategy to signal his bravado eventually turned bleak as he took office:

“If you are still into drugs, I am going to kill you. Don't take this as a joke. I'm not trying to make you laugh. Sons of bitches, I'll really kill you.”

Duterte's continuous escalation of his rallying call dehumanizing drug users eventually crept into the demonization of human rights, seeing it as an obstacle to “loftier” goals of a drug-free society:

“My order is shoot to kill you. I don't care about human rights, you better believe me.”

This strategy of divide and conquer worked eerily well. Our partner families admit that at the level of the community, and even in their own families, support for Duterte was divided. His strong anti-drug campaign reeled in supporters in hoards, but skepticism remained as they understood that any forceful campaign made against drugs in the communities would inevitably involve them, even if they were not involved in drugs.

Lofty Drug War Expectations

When asked for their opinions of Duterte's campaign and its promise of rapid change from the onset, particularly in curbing drug use, our partner families offer a nuanced answer—much of which consists of a disbelief at the force their communities were subjected to in the name of the war on drugs.

Kristine from Caloocan City captures the sentiment of the group as she narrates her initial expectations on how the war on drugs would be put in effect:

*“Kasi ang una is katok. **Katok sabi, katok tapos bang, ‘di ba?** At first hindi naman ‘yun yung pagkakalam ng mga tao e... na sinabi pag katok, akala nila, ano muna, surveillance tapos interview. Kakatukin ka, i-interviewhin ka kung mayroong nagda-drugs sa inyo then ipapa-barangay tapos ipapamedical, di ba? Tapos kung sino yung mag-positive, dadalhin sa isang rehabilitation. Tapos in mga after two to three months, ipapamedical ulit para malaman kung safe o free na siya sa drugs. Kaso hindi nga ganun yung nangyari.”*

*(“Because at first, it was supposed to be just a knock. **A knock, they said—a knock, and then bang, right?** At first, that wasn't what people understood it to mean. When they said 'knock,' people thought it would involve surveillance and interviews first. They would knock on your door and interview you about whether there are drug users in your household. Then you would be referred to the barangay and undergo a medical examination, right? Whoever tested positive would be brought to a rehabilitation facility. Then after about two or three months, they would be medically examined again to determine whether they were safe or already free from drugs. But that's not what happened.”)*

A part of the public, including our partner families, earnestly thought that Duterte’s remarks were just made in jest—that his bluntness and profanity were just part of his “charismatic” campaign. Moreover, Kristine’s expectations come from an acute understanding of the embeddedness of drug use in her community. She, along with others, agree that drug use and peddling indeed must be curbed, but this should not come at the expense of human lives.



Defining the Enemies of the State

To some extent, Kristine’s initial expectations were true in that the early phases of the drug war were used to profile the men who would later on be killed, either in police operations or by vigilantes. Before the war on drugs became a formal policy through Oplan Double Barrel, extensive groundwork was done at the community level to profile and instill fear among suspected drug users, and to mobilize the community against them.

Our community partners recount how barangay chairpersons, barangay police, and sitio chairpersons in their communities were mobilized into coming up with what would eventually be the formal barangay watchlists for suspected drug users. Those in the list

would be subjected to home visits, asked to surrender for being suspected drug users, and required to undergo weekly community service where they would present themselves at the barangay to undergo seminars, wellness programs,³ and affirm their pledge of leading a “new life” away from drugs. Those who eventually graduated from the community service program would be given identification cards certifying their admission as former drug users and of their completion of the community service program. Many were then expected to carry or display these IDs in public.

Mere profiling soon led to the indiscriminate tagging of men in communities as suspected drug users through mass roundups. During police operations, men were gathered from their homes and assembled in public spaces, often basketball courts, as a form of public shaming. These practices exposed them to surveillance and suspicion without due process. Coupled with the Mamamayang Ayaw Sa Anomalya, Mamamayang Ayaw Sa Iligal na Droga (MASA MASID) Program, the Duterte administration’s community-based criminality and drug-use reporting program,⁴ residents were encouraged to report suspected drug users, deepening divisions within communities and reinforcing the portrayal of drug users as “enemies of the state.”

Death by the Doorstep

Their communities, once vibrant and tight-knit, transformed into ghost towns almost overnight. As police operations intensified during the early phases of the drug war, residents increasingly feared for their lives, with each passing night raising the possibility that their family could become the next target. This fear was heightened by the apparent arbitrariness of the killings. Residents could not assume they were safe simply because they had no connection to previous victims. As our partner families recall, cases of mistaken identity had already begun to emerge early in the campaign: “*Noong umpisa pa lang, sa mga pinatay, may mga nagkakamali na; na hindi sila [drug user].*” (“Even in the beginning, among those who were killed, there were already cases of mistaken identity; some of them were not actually drug users.”)

PhilRights documented 19 cases of mistaken identity, referring to incidents in which victims were killed despite not being the intended targets of the operation.

Sunshine, a friend and neighbor of Kristine, remembered the terror that gripped their community when Kristine's husband became one of the latest casualties of the war on drugs. For many residents, death no longer felt distant—it was suddenly at their doorstep. Death lingered in whispered conversations throughout the neighborhood and appeared nightly on television screens, creating a pervasive sense of dread.

Even before her husband was killed, Kristine lived with the constant fear that he could become one of the victims reported in the news. Working in Caloocan while her husband remained in Bulacan, she anxiously followed television reports each day, fearing that one day she would see his face among the dead:

“Ako nung una kasi hindi pa namamatay yung asawa ko parang may takot na. May takot na ako na baka one day yung asawa ko na yung napapanood ko. Takot ko na yun kasi nagtatrabaho ako sa Caloocan, siya nasa Bulacan. Pero sa, sa araw-araw na ginawa ng Diyos, umaga, tanghali, gabi, madaling-araw, ganun at ganun pa rin. Nag-a-update ako sa TV, sa mga balita. Ang daming namamatay. Kaya lalong natatakot ako kasi baka one day, yung asawa ko na yung mapapanood ko.”

(“Even before my husband was killed, I was already afraid. I feared that one day I would see my husband on the news. That fear was always with me because I worked in Caloocan while he was in Bulacan. Every day, from morning, noon, and night until the early hours of dawn, it was always the same. I kept myself updated through the television news. So many people were being killed. That made me even more afraid; I feared that one day, it might be my husband I would see on the news.”)



Communities were kept awake through what felt like endless nights marked by death and suffering. The terror that swept through neighborhoods affected adults and children alike. Children who once played freely in the streets after dark were now exposed to the aftermath of nightly killings. The sound of motorcycles passing by—often associated with riding-in-tandem assailants—prompted families to lock their doors, stay indoors, and pray that they would emerge from the night unharmed.

Changing Tactics, Same War on Drugs, Continuous Human Rights Work

A decade of documenting drug-related human rights violations would not have been possible without PhilRights' community partners engaged in community monitoring, or the systematic documentation and reporting of human rights conditions by trained community-based monitors. In the context of the war on drugs, this includes recording killings, arrests, harassment, and other rights violations experienced by victims and their families, as well as monitoring broader civil and political rights (CPR) and economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR) conditions within their communities. Through regular data gathering, interviews, referrals, and case documentation, community monitoring seeks to generate evidence, support affected individuals, and strengthen local human rights advocacy.

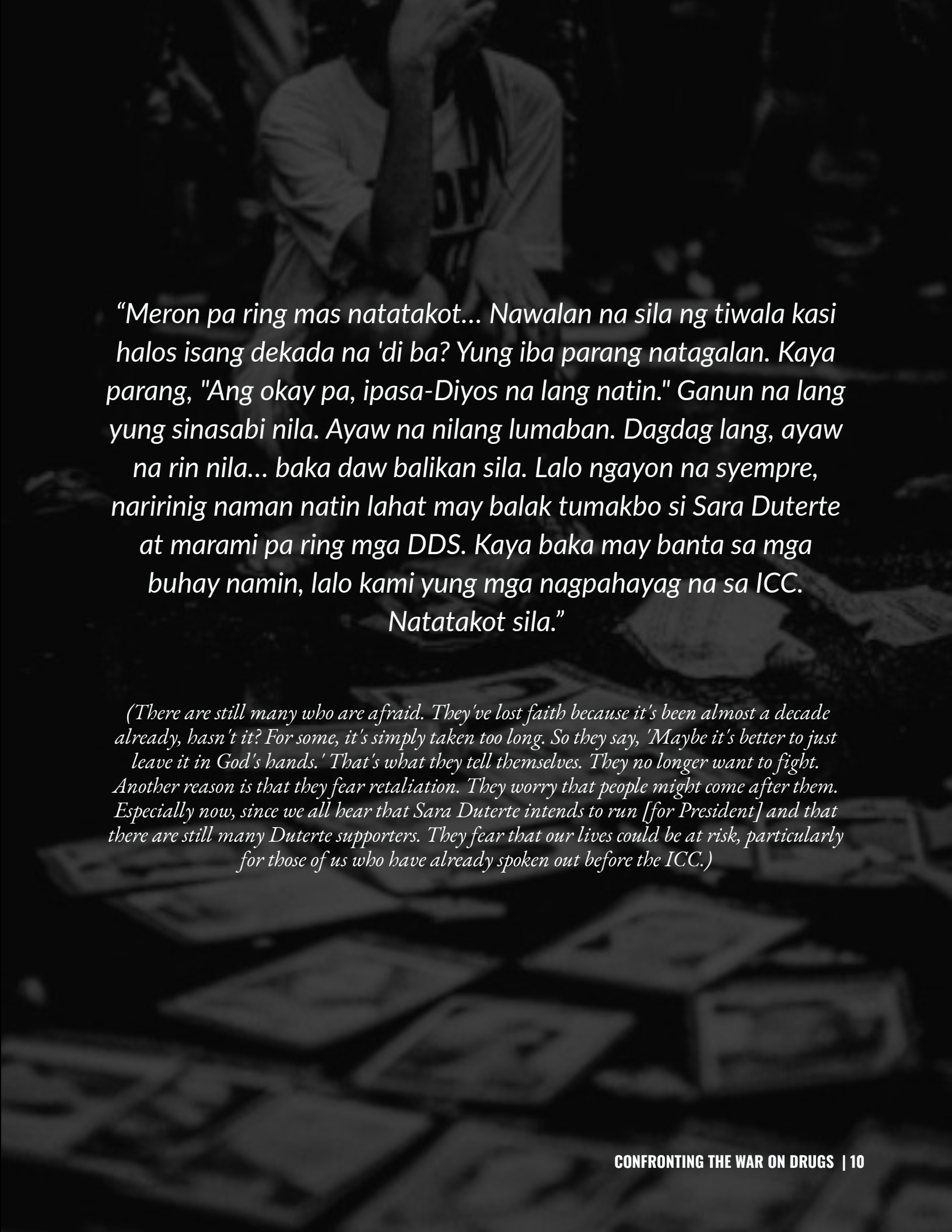
When recounting the harrowing events of the war on drugs, our community partners have become attuned to chronicling the changes in how it is conducted—now throughout two administrations, that of Duterte and of Marcos Jr.

They describe the general conditions at the height of the war on drugs as akin to that of a state of lawlessness. Emboldened by Duterte’s clear shoot-to-kill orders, police operations prioritized “neutralization” of suspected drug users above all else. They recall that the police at the time operated without the slightest regard for due process and the rule of law—rights nor warrants were nowhere to be found and bodies only piled up as the days passed.



Community monitoring at this time was dangerous work. It was imperative for them to carry out clandestine operations as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were vilified by Duterte and his supporters, tagging those in NGOs as addicts and supporters of drug pushers.

As the killings continued well into the pandemic, community monitoring became even more difficult. Significant restrictions on mobility curtailed efforts to document killings as they were happening. Without in-person communication and as networks of people were dispersed by the COVID-19 Pandemic, it became increasingly difficult to see developments in the war on drugs first-hand. Even worse, difficulties in communication and the passage of time only instilled fear in other victims—fearing reprisal from the police and further vilification from Duterte’s supporters. This prompted some victims to just move on from the killing of their kin.



“Meron pa ring mas natatakot... Nawalan na sila ng tiwala kasi halos isang dekada na 'di ba? Yung iba parang natagalan. Kaya parang, "Ang okay pa, ipasa-Diyos na lang natin." Ganun na lang yung sinasabi nila. Ayaw na nilang lumaban. Dagdag lang, ayaw na rin nila... baka daw balikan sila. Lalo ngayon na syempre, naririnig naman natin lahat may balak tumakbo si Sara Duterte at marami pa ring mga DDS. Kaya baka may banta sa mga buhay namin, lalo kami yung mga nagpahayag na sa ICC. Natatakot sila.”

(There are still many who are afraid. They've lost faith because it's been almost a decade already, hasn't it? For some, it's simply taken too long. So they say, 'Maybe it's better to just leave it in God's hands.' That's what they tell themselves. They no longer want to fight. Another reason is that they fear retaliation. They worry that people might come after them. Especially now, since we all hear that Sara Duterte intends to run [for President] and that there are still many Duterte supporters. They fear that our lives could be at risk, particularly for those of us who have already spoken out before the ICC.)

These conditions did not stop the work of human rights defenders and other allies in the movement. Throughout the war on drugs, despite Duterte's relentless attacks and tirades against progressives and the human rights movement, grassroots work with communities much afflicted by the war on drugs only strengthened. Community monitoring alongside continuous human rights education armed communities with the knowledge that they have all the right to resist unlawful police operations. As such, our community monitors report that their communities emerged more empowered amidst continuous attacks. Kathy, a community monitor from Manila recounts her experience:

"Nagkaroon kami ng pag-aaral sa mga community 'nung pwede na lumabas. Nagkaroon kami ng mga human rights session sa mga barangay. So may mga naka-attend sa amin kahit papano, nagkaroon sila ng lakas ng loob. Kaya that time, may alam na sila na pag may aarestuhin, dati hindi sila nakikialam. Parang tsismis, tsismis lang. Ngayon hindi, nakikialam na sila. So meron kaming isang na-document na pinasok yung bahay tapos mismong yung mga kapitbahay na yung [nagsabi], "Ano po bang kaso?" Parang ganun. Kaya hindi nila nahuli yung suspect kasi wala ngang mapakita na arrest warrant."

(We conducted studies in the communities once we were allowed to go out [after the lockdown]. We also held human rights sessions in the barangays. So even if only a few attended, they gained some courage. By that time, they already knew that when someone was being arrested, people used to not get involved—they would just treat it as gossip. But now it's different; people already intervene. We documented one case where a house was entered, and it was actually the neighbors who asked, 'What is the case?' Because of that, they were not able to arrest the suspect since they could not present an arrest warrant.")

Toward the end of Duterte's term, efforts of his administration in damage control and narrative-building after his presidency were noted by community monitors. Before Duterte stepped down, many of our partner families were visited by the police in their homes to ascertain that they would not press charges against those who killed their kin. Said police officers would repeatedly visit them, urge them to just "move on," and coerce them into signing a blank piece of paper. This was accompanied by an uptick in the number of barangays that were being declared "drug free" as our community monitors noted—from around 5000⁵ during 2017, the figure grew to around 24,000⁶ in 2022, bolstering the Duterte administration's claim of the alleged effectiveness of the war on drugs.

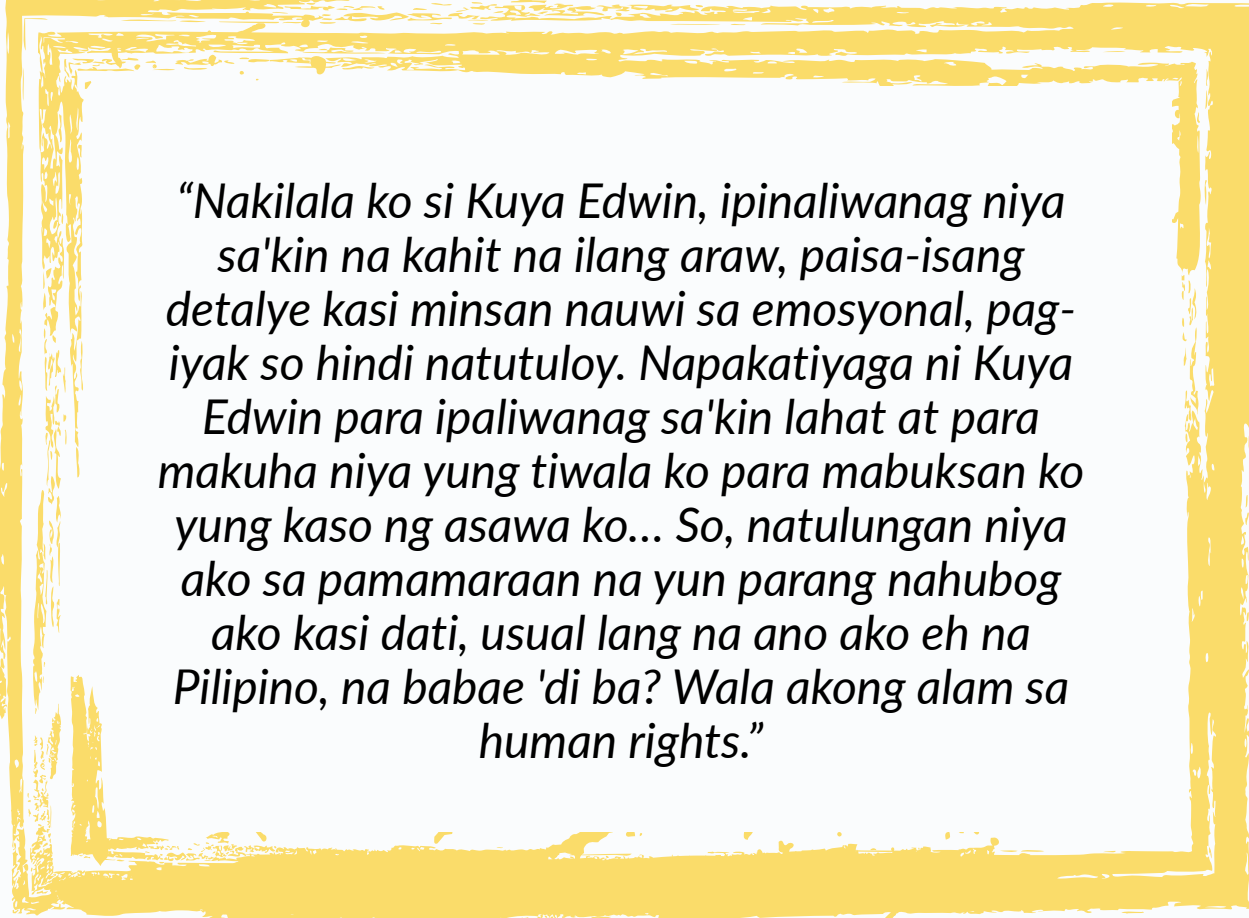
The transition towards the administration of Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. did not provide relief to communities much afflicted by the war on drugs. While *tokhang* and nightly mass killings have now become a thing of the past, our community monitors protest Marcos Jr.'s "humane" war on drugs for being a mere change in rhetoric. Drug-related deaths, illegal arrests, torture, and other gross human rights violations still persist but are now carried out in more covert operations.⁷ The problem of illegal drugs has only worsened under Marcos Jr. as heightened poverty has caused more people to descend into drug use.⁸

Tokhang (from the Cebuano words *toktok* and *hangyo*, meaning "knock and plead") was a police anti-drug campaign in the Philippines that involved visits to suspected drug users and pushers to encourage their surrender. It later became synonymous with the Duterte administration's broader war on drugs.

Allies Amidst the Storm

As our community monitors recount the past decade, a feeling of disbelief fills them as they realize what they had to navigate in order to move past and grow around the death of their loved ones. Left behind as the sole breadwinners of their family, they knew that life could not stop at the point of tragedy. They are reminded of the numbness of having to go about their daily lives immediately after the demise of their kin as if everything was normal. There was no time for mourning as they had to stand strong for their families, to ensure that food was on the table, and to provide a semblance of normalcy for their children.

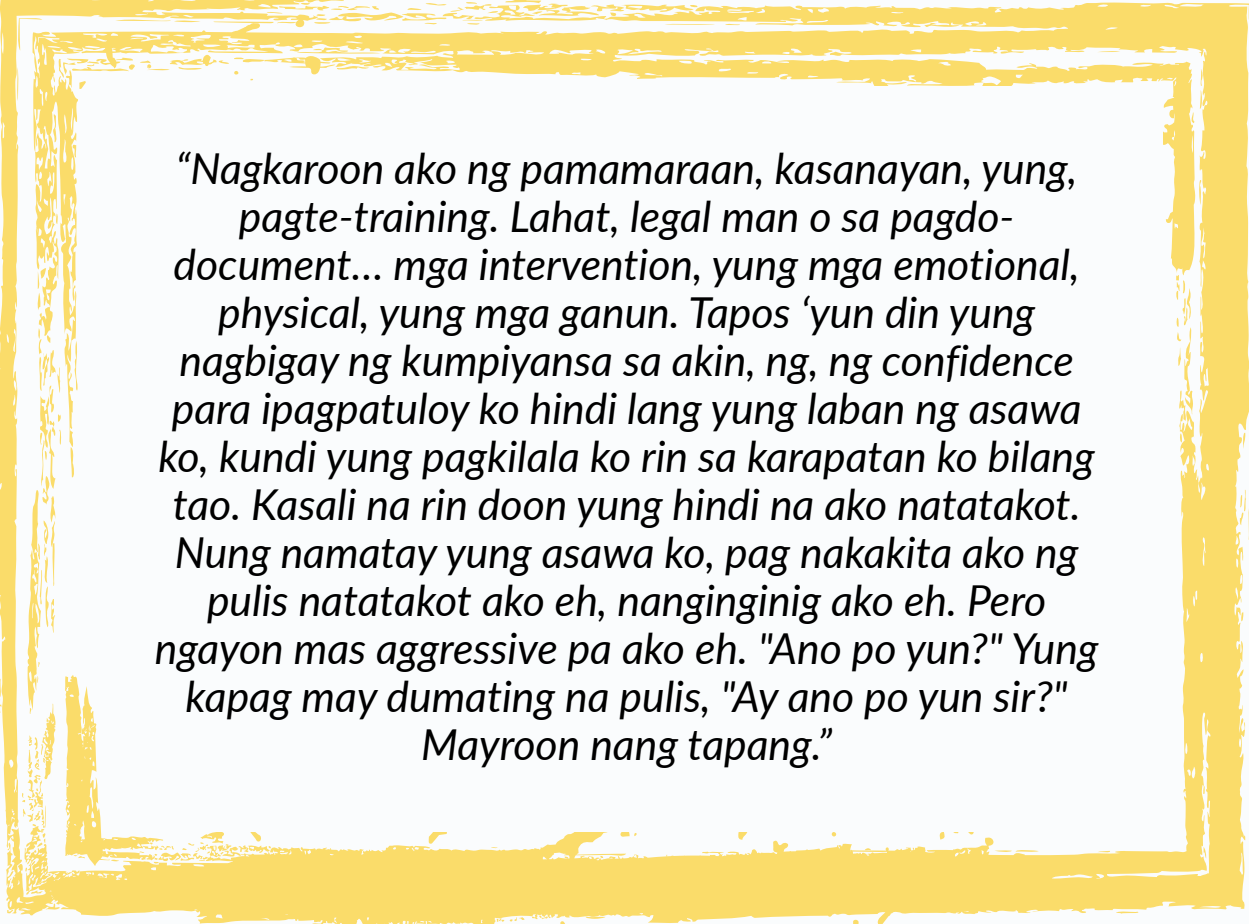
As fear permeated communities, help within was not to be expected. Even as they longed for help, they did not know who to reach out to; they were the “enemies of the state” and the entire nation was mobilized against them. It was amidst this climate of fear and apparent helplessness that civil society organizations (CSOs) first reached out to victim families of the war on drugs. Still scarred and in shock, extending trust, for them, felt like a gamble. Our community monitors recount the persistence of CSO workers to know their stories, win their trust, and extend help:



“Nakilala ko si Kuya Edwin, ipinaliwanag niya sa'kin na kahit na ilang araw, paisa-isang detalye kasi minsan nauwi sa emosyonal, pag-iyak so hindi natutuloy. Napakatiyaga ni Kuya Edwin para ipaliwanag sa'kin lahat at para makuha niya yung tiwala ko para mabuksan ko yung kaso ng asawa ko... So, natulungan niya ako sa pamamaraan na yun parang nahubog ako kasi dati, usual lang na ano ako eh na Pilipino, na babae 'di ba? Wala akong alam sa human rights.”

(“I met Kuya Edwin, who patiently explained everything to me over several days. Sometimes I became emotional and cried, making it difficult to continue. He earned my trust and helped me open up about my husband's case. Through this process, he helped shape me. Before that, I was just an ordinary Filipina and knew nothing about human rights.”)

As trust was being rebuilt amidst the bloodshed, help poured out through various interventions. Church and faith-based organizations extended much needed help in processing grief and trauma through psycho-spiritual interventions; charitable institutions extended scholarships for the children of those left behind; organizations of healthcare professionals attended to their medical needs; and research and advocacy institutions helped raise their consciousness and courage through continuous human rights education.



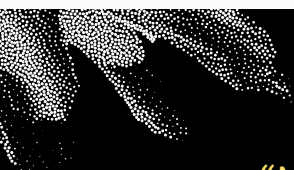
"Nagkaroon ako ng pamamaraan, kasanayan, yung, pagte-training. Lahat, legal man o sa pagdo-document... mga intervention, yung mga emotional, physical, yung mga ganun. Tapos 'yun din yung nagbigay ng kumpiyansa sa akin, ng, ng confidence para ipagpatuloy ko hindi lang yung laban ng asawa ko, kundi yung pagkilala ko rin sa karapatan ko bilang tao. Kasali na rin doon yung hindi na ako natatakot. Nung namatay yung asawa ko, pag nakakita ako ng pulis natatakot ako eh, nanginginig ako eh. Pero ngayon mas aggressive pa ako eh. "Ano po yun?" Yung kapag may dumating na pulis, "Ay ano po yun sir?" Mayroon nang tapang."

("I found a way by building my capacities. Through trainings in legal advocacy, documentation, and interventions, I gained the confidence to continue not only my husband's fight but also my own recognition of my rights. I am no longer afraid. After my husband died, I would tremble whenever I saw a police officer. Now, I can be even tougher than them. I have the courage to approach them and ask, 'What is it, sir?'"")

Hope Abounds

When our community monitors first decided to take on the struggle against Duterte's tyranny, they knew they were in for the long haul. Especially in the context of the Philippines where impunity is the norm, exacting accountability and achieving justice for their kin was a pipe dream. In the ten years that have passed, our partner families did not sit idly by waiting for justice to knock on their doors. Those left behind have always been at the forefront of the struggle. Against the misinformation campaign and machinery of the Dutertes and the Diehard Duterte Supporters (DDS) who seek to taunt them into silence, our partner families courageously use their stories to safeguard the truth. The act of consistently retelling their stories has become a way to reclaim it.

After almost a decade, their dreams are suddenly coming to fruition. Upon Duterte's arrest by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in March of 2025, hope has materialized and achieving justice is suddenly within arm's reach:



“Noong una kasi, parang wala pa. Parang ang lagi kong sinasabi, sana makamit, sana. Ngayon hindi na eh. Abot-kamay na. Kasi lalo na 'di ba yung ang bilis ng pangyayari sa ICC.”

(At first, it felt distant. I kept saying, ‘Hopefully, someday.’ But now it no longer feels that way—it feels within reach, especially with how quickly things have been moving at the ICC.)



Even at the ICC, our community monitors lament how Duterte seeks to circumvent and undermine the law—using his health and alleged unfitness to stand trial as delaying tactics for his trial to not push through.⁹

As such, the confirmation of all three charges against him and the commencement of his trial this November of 2026 marks the start of a new fight ahead:

“Umpisa pa lang. Hindi pa ito yung totoong laban. Sabi nga nila, malayo pa pero malapit na, 'di ba? Kasi nandito na eh. Naging positibo na tayo e. Kumbaga meron nang resulta ang mga paglaban natin.”

(“This is only the beginning. The real fight lies ahead, but we are getting closer. It is finally here. Our struggle is finally showing results.”)

The decade that has passed has been an arduous journey of persistence. Victim families have witnessed it all—from the elusiveness of justice in the Philippines to the pervasiveness of misinformation in shaping public life. Families of victims of the war on drugs have persisted anyway because they not only fight for themselves; their struggle is also for the thousands of other families victimized by the killings.

Toward Truth, Justice, and Accountability

The war on drugs has not stopped; it continues to leave a legacy of violence, fear, and upheaval in communities across the Philippines. While the modalities of the campaign may have changed, its impacts remain deeply felt by victims' families. It is in this context of remembrance and retelling that PhilRights, together with our partner families, reaffirm our calls for justice and accountability:

1

First, the Philippine government must acknowledge the killings committed in the name of the war on drugs and recognize the suffering endured by the victims and their families. Meaningful accountability cannot begin without recognition of the harms that have been inflicted.

2

Second, the Philippine government must fundamentally change its drug policy by abandoning punitive and militarized approaches in favor of rights-based, health-centered, and community-driven responses to drug-related issues.

3

Third, the Philippine government must renew its cooperation with the International Criminal Court (ICC), including rejoining the Rome Statute and supporting efforts to investigate crimes committed during the drug war. We further urge the ICC to expedite its proceedings and pursue accountability not only for Duterte but also for co-perpetrators and those who enabled, ordered, or facilitated the killings.

4

We also call on the international community to continue supporting victims, human rights defenders, and accountability mechanisms to ensure that justice remains within reach.

5

Finally, we urge the Filipino public to remain vigilant against the return of policies and political actors who enabled or justified widespread human rights violations. The lessons of the drug war must not be forgotten, and its abuses must never be repeated.

Ten years ago, we bore witness to the atrocities of an unspeakable crime against humanity.



Ten years since then, we decisively move forward and struggle for justice, accountability, and respect of the rule of law.

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CHAPTER 2



VICTIMS' PROFILES: **Targets of the War on Drugs**

Drawing on nearly a decade of documentation, this chapter presents PhilRights' data on the victims and families left-behind by the war on drugs. It seeks to outline the human faces of those who, for much of Rodrigo Duterte's administration, lived in fear and were discouraged from seeking justice or demanding accountability.

For many of the victims' families, the election of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. as President and Sara Duterte as Vice President in 2022 appeared unlikely to alter this situation. Their fears have since been confirmed by the persistence of a culture of violence and impunity. And while the past year saw a whirlwind of events, among which was the breakdown of the Marcos-Duterte alliance and the ICC's intervention sparking a debate on whether or not it is undermining Philippine sovereignty, very little attention has been given to the left-behind families as they continued to endure profound loss, grief, and uncertainty of what lies ahead. Yet many have gradually found the courage to assert their rights and pursue justice. Their journey has taken them from victimization to resistance, defending human rights, and advocating for truth and accountability.

Overview

Types of Violation

From August 2017 to January 2026, PhilRights has documented a total of 600 victims of the so-called war on drugs in its partner communities in Metro Manila, Bulacan, and Rizal. Among them were:

- 319 victims of extrajudicial killings
- 11 victims of enforced disappearance
- 8 victims of frustrated extrajudicial killings

- 254 victims of unlawful arrest and detention
- 3 victims of torture alone
- 5 victims of threats, harassment, and intimidation

These categories pertain to the final violations experienced by the victims in cases involving multiple violations. For example, some extrajudicially killed victims experienced torture and harassment in a series of events before they were killed.

Compared to PhilRights' previous reports, which highlighted human rights violations distinctly in separate parts, this report aims to highlight victimization of the drug war regardless of the type of violation committed upon them.

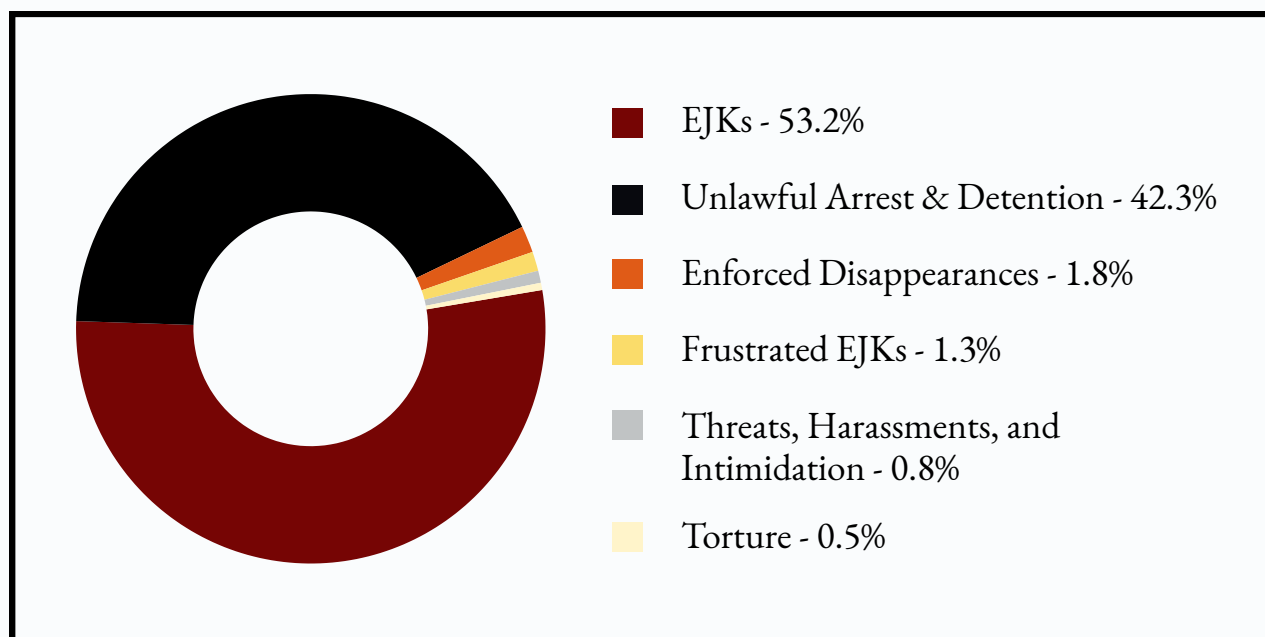


Figure 1. Types of Violation under the War on Drugs

Sex and Gender

Among the 600 documented victims, 516 are male, and 84 are female. Three victims were identified as LGBTQIA+ individuals by the informants—two of them were extrajudicially killed, and one was unlawfully arrested and detained.

According to the informants, male victims were vulnerable due to the nature of their work: as construction workers, transport

drivers and assistants, vendors, and fisherfolks, among others, their jobs required them to stay outside of the security of their homes even at night, when most police and vigilante operations happen. Nonetheless, staying at home could not guarantee immunity, as many victims were targeted precisely within their homes. This has been the case for the majority of the female victims.

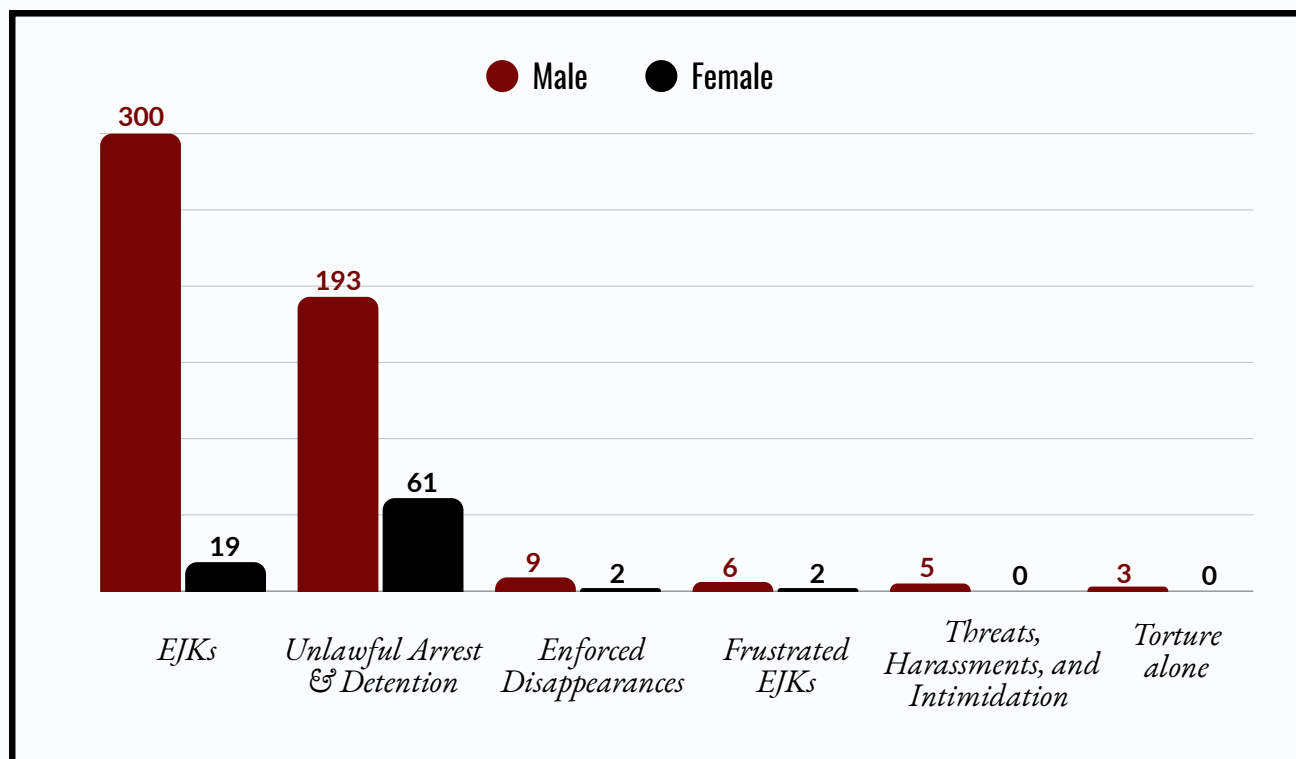


Figure 2. Victims by sex

Age

Among the 600 documented victims, 283 or 47% were young adults (18-35 years old) and 257 or 43% were adults (36-59 years old) at the time of the incident. The loss of life or freedom has had significant impacts on the incomes and sustenance of their left-behind families, as at least 60% were primary income earners, or those who used to contribute more than 50% of their household incomes, prior to the incident.

Children were not spared from the drug war. Twenty-eight (28) of the documented victims were children, aged 0

to 17 years old at the time of the incident. Their cases are not mere incidents of collateral damage; each of them were intentionally killed, tortured, disappeared, arrested, or detained in violation to the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. They were peacefully spending time with their parents at home, playing outside, or on their way home when they were targeted by police and vigilante operations.

Twelve documented victims were older adults, or those aged 60 years old and above.

Table 1. Victims by age group

Type of Violation	Children (17 years old and below)	Young Adults (18 - 35 years old)	Adults (36 - 59 years old)	Older Adults (60 years old and above)
Extrajudicial Killings	14	158	133	6
Enforced Disappearance	1	5	4	0
Frustrated Extrajudicial Killings	1	3	3	0
Unlawful Arrest and Detention	11	114	113	6
Torture	1	0	2	0
Threats, Harassment, and Intimidation	0	3	2	0
Total	28	283	257	12

Note: The age group of 20 victims could not be determined.

Their families claimed that they were frail or had debilitating physical conditions, contrary to police narratives that claimed they were capable of committing violent crimes and resisting arrest.

Places of Residence

More than 60% of the documented victims were residents of urban poor dwellings, deprived of their right to adequate housing and safe communities. They reside in informal settlements, relocation sites with constant risks of eviction, houses of relatives and friends, and public thoroughfares in Caloocan, Manila, Navotas, San Jose del Monte, and Antipolo City, among others. Their residence made them more susceptible to drug war-related human rights violations, as most police and vigilante operations are conducted in urban poor communities such as these.

Occupation and Income

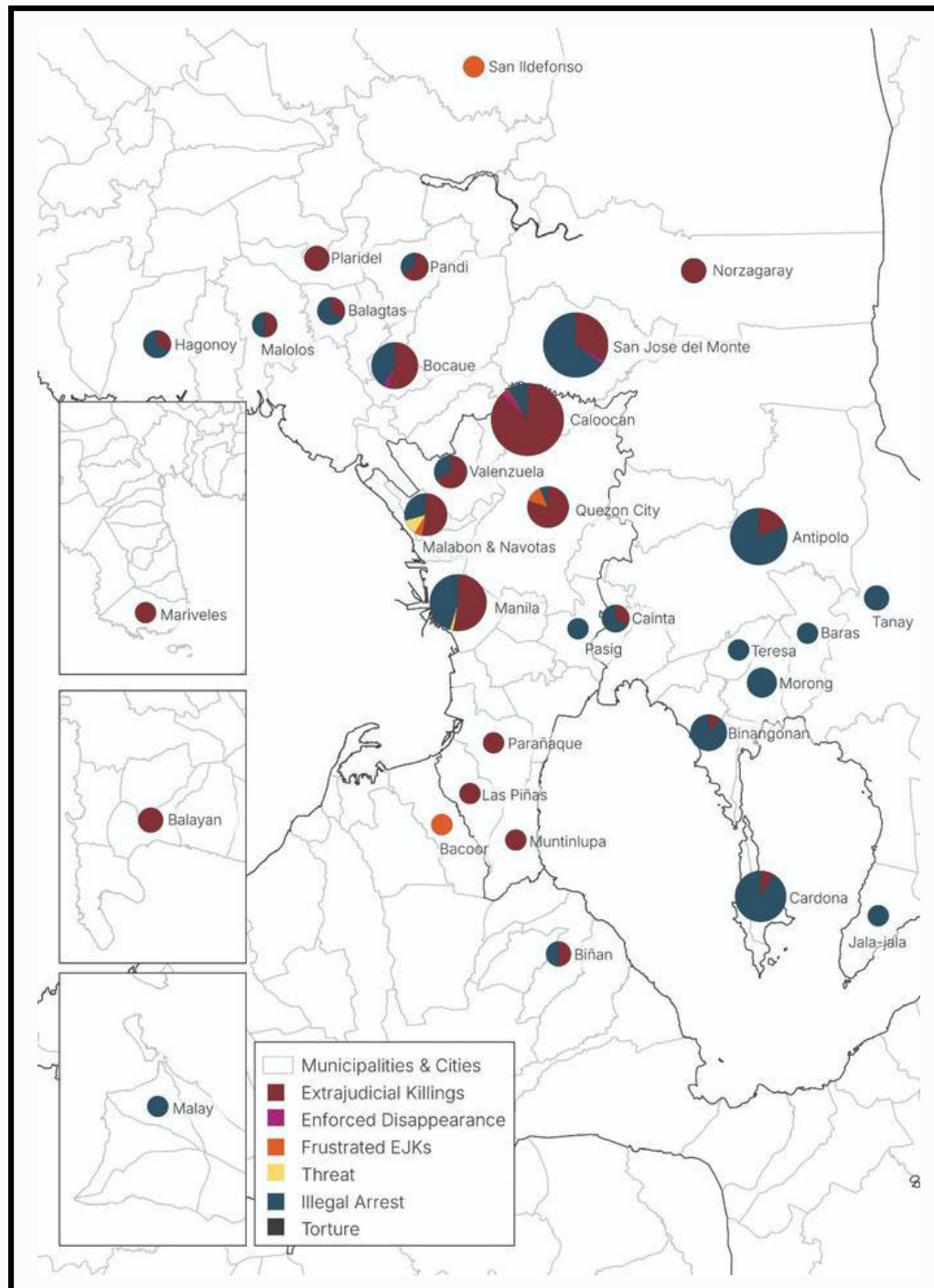
The victims earned their incomes from grueling construction, transportation, agriculture, and informal work; earned an average daily income of around Php 640.00 and below; and supported an average of five dependents or more. Most of them—especially those who were construction workers, carpenters, house painters, porters, and electricians—worked on a seasonal basis, earning only when assigned to a project or task.

Dependents

The extrajudicial killings left an average of three orphaned child dependents per victim. Among the 368 children left behind, 365 lost one parent due to the drug war, while three lost both parents.



Map 1. Map of Documented Victims' Places of Residence (2016-2026)



Note: The size of the circles correspond to the number of documented cases in each city/municipality.

From Victims to Human Rights Defenders

For all of the families represented in these numbers, choosing to have their cases documented was the courageous first step in transgressing the barriers of repression and injustice even as they continued to confront the daily need to survive. This has opened up opportunities for them to link up with civil society organizations; access support services for their legal, medical, psychosocial, financial, and educational needs; boost their knowledge and skills in doing human rights work; and campaign on behalf of their communities and fellow victims. Most of them now proudly call themselves human rights defenders.

As human rights defenders, they have undertaken at least some, if not all of the following endeavors:

- Accessing government services to claim their economic, social, and cultural rights;
- Participating in and conducting human rights education sessions;
- Sharing human rights knowledge materials in their communities
- Participating in focus group discussions
- Monitoring human rights issues in their communities and encouraging other victims and families of victims to have their cases documented;
- Joining mass mobilizations;
- Lobbying at government agencies and international organizations;
- Speaking in public and media events;
- Filing cases in domestic legal and quasi-legal mechanisms; and
- Communicating to the International Criminal Court (ICC) Pre-Trial Chamber I their views and opinions on the issues of granting interim release to Duterte and the jurisdiction of the ICC.





The Lives Beyond the Numbers

The exact number of victims nationwide from the start of the drug war to the present remains difficult to ascertain. The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) in 2022 stated that the number of EJK victims had reached only 6,241—a number contested by news agencies, civil society organizations, and international human rights organizations.¹ Meanwhile, sources cited by the ICC in its investigation on the Philippines say that the number of victims is somewhere between 12,000 and 30,000.² Beyond this

however, a deeper look reveals the patterns of victimization, the demographics of the victims, and most of all, the stories of their families and communities as they continue to struggle and strive to overcome the barriers to justice. While the number of victims continues to rise with the continuation of the drug war, the number of those who grow in courage and defiance also continues to rise. Their collective strength, growing with persistence through the years, will carry them forward towards justice.

NOTES

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CHAPTER 3



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FROM ARREST TO AFFIRMATION:
Developments in Rodrigo Duterte's Case
from the Past Year

More than a year has passed since the arrest of Rodrigo Duterte on March 11, 2025, an event that in itself was a major triumph of hundreds of families left-behind by the victims of the so-called drug war. The months that followed evoked a mixture of anxiety and confusion as the case underwent multiple procedural delays. Nevertheless, the ICC proceedings stand today as a beacon of hope for the victims' families.

EVENT	DATE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
Arrest and Initial Court Appearance	March 9, 2025	Rodrigo Duterte addressed Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Hong Kong during a campaign rally for the Partido Demokratiko Pilipino (PDP-Laban) a few days before the midterm elections.
	March 11, 2025	Duterte was arrested by the Philippine National Police (PNP) in cooperation with the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport and was flown to The Hague in the Netherlands.
	March 14, 2025	The ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I held a hearing to verify the identity of Duterte, inform him of the crimes he allegedly committed, and inform him of his rights before the Court. He attended via video link appearing frail and sickly.
Challenges on the Court's Jurisdiction	May 1, 2025	Duterte's Defence team submitted a document challenging the ICC's jurisdiction on the alleged crimes, emphasizing the Philippine's 2019 withdrawal from the Rome Statute.

EVENT	DATE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
Urgent Request for Interim Release	June 12, 2025	The Defence submitted an urgent request for Duterte's interim release. To the victims' relatives, this posed a heightened risk of Duterte evading accountability and of violence returning to their communities.
	June 23, 2025	The ICC Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) released its view on the request, echoing the sentiments of the victims' families and rejecting the plea.
"Bring Him Home" and the Spread of AI Disinformation	June 24, 2025	Senator Robinhood Padilla filed a resolution seeking the immediate repatriation of Duterte.
	July 10, 2025	Senator Alan Peter Cayetano filed a resolution seeking house arrest for Duterte.
	July 27, 2025	Vice President Sara Duterte echoed the call for her father's urgent interim release to an audience of Filipino expatriates in Seoul, South Korea. Meanwhile, artificial intelligence (AI)-edited and generated content supporting the repatriation of Duterte and fueling the mockery of victims and their families circulate in social media.
Submission of the Document Containing Charges	July 4, 2025	The OTP submitted the Document Containing Charges (DCC), which lays out the three counts of crimes against humanity Duterte is suspected of.
Postponement of the Confirmation of Charges	August 18, 2025	The Defence submitted a request for the indefinite adjournment of the process, stating that Duterte is not fit for participation.
	September 8, 2025	The Pre-Trial Chamber I announced the postponement of the Confirmation of Charges, originally set from September 23 to 27.
Positive Shifts in the Tide for Victims' Families	September 26, 2025	The Pre-Trial Chamber denied the request for interim release.
	October 23, 2025	The Pre-Trial Chamber rejected the Defence's challenge on the ICC's jurisdiction on Duterte's case.

EVENT	DATE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
Positive Shifts in the Tide for Victims' Families	November 8, 2025	Philippine Ombudsman Jesus Crispin Remulla claimed that the ICC has already issued an arrest warrant against Senator Ronald "Bato" dela Rosa. Dela Rosa began his months-long absence from the Senate.
	November 28, 2025	The ICC Appeals Chamber denied the Defence's appeal for interim release, which was submitted on August 18.
	December 18, 2025	A panel of medical experts announce that Duterte is fit to participate in the proceedings of his case.
Appointment of the Common Legal Representatives for Victims (CLRVs)	January 26, 2026	The ICC Registry appoints lawyers Joel Butuyan, Gilbert Andres, and Paolina Massidda as Common Legal Representatives for the Victims (CLRVs). They are also joined by Nicolene Arcaina as case manager.
	February 11, 2026	A few days ahead of the Confirmation of Charges, the Defence sought the disqualification of Butuyan, Andres, and Arcaina from the CLRV, citing conflict of interest.
	February 20, 2026	The Court rejected the request for disqualification and ruled out the Defence's argument on the existence of a conflict of interest.
Confirmation of Charges	February 23 - 27, 2026	The Confirmation of Charges Hearing was held and broadcasted live by the ICC. The OTP, Defence, and CLRV each presented their arguments before the Pre-Trial Chamber.
	April 22, 2026	ICC jurisdiction over Duterte's alleged crimes is confirmed by the Appeals Chamber.
	April 23, 2026	All three charges against Duterte were confirmed. The Pre-Trial Chamber announced that the case will now proceed to trial, with the first hearing set to November 30, 2026.
Bato on the Run	May 11, 2026	After six months of absence, Bato dela Rosa reappeared at the Senate, causing a standoff with the NBI and a lockdown at the Senate building. On the same day, the ICC publicly released dela Rosa's arrest warrant.
	May 14, 2026	Dela Rosa reportedly slipped out of the Senate building after three days of protective custody. He remains at large as of writing.

Arrest and Initial Court Appearance

Duterte had just arrived from a political rally on the 9th of March in Hong Kong, where he addressed a large crowd of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) with his usual confidence and bravado.¹ He was arrested by the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) upon his return to the Philippines on the 11th, and subsequently flown and surrendered to the ICC.

By the 14th of March, Duterte made his initial appearance via video link at the Court, looking much more frail and sickly than he had ever been in public. He said he could not make it to the Court in person as he is too "old, tired and frail", an image that his defence team in the ensuing year exploited as the basis for multiple attempts to either delay the proceedings or request for the former president's interim release. But to the families of the drug war victims back at home, this was an obvious act of cowardice and a mockery of the victims who begged for mercy moments before their killing.²

Challenge on the Court's Jurisdiction

The defence team submitted on May 1, 2025 a document challenging the ICC's jurisdiction on the alleged crimes of Duterte. It primarily argued that the Court had lost its power to exercise jurisdiction upon the Philippines' withdrawal from the Rome Statute in 2019³—an action that the Duterte administration undertook shortly after the ICC's announcement of its own investigation on the killings in the Philippines.

It would take months for the Pre-Trial Chamber I to release its resolution on the matter as more requests and appeals were filed by Duterte's defence team to the Chamber ahead of the Confirmation of Charges.

The Pre-Trial Chamber I is a judicial body of the ICC responsible for the pre-trial and authorization phases of criminal proceedings. It primarily oversees investigations, issues warrants of arrest, and processes the confirmation of charges.

Urgent Request for Interim Release

On June 12, 2025, the Defence submitted to the Pre-Trial Chamber I an urgent request for Duterte's interim release to an undisclosed country, reasoning that his detention is not necessary to ensure his appearance before the Court. It also sought to assure the Chamber that he will not "embarrass" his host country by violating the terms of his release, as he is not a flight risk despite the gravity of the charges filed against him.⁴

While the request did not come as a surprise to the victims' families, they nevertheless urged that the Court should not grant such allowances to Duterte as he remains to be one of the most influential figures in the country. They believed that granting the request would enable him to reestablish access to his networks and allies and effectively worsen the already present physical and digital risks on their safety and security.

Such sentiments from PhilRights' partner families were gathered and communicated to the ICC. V, the mother of a victim, said:

"[Nakakaramdam ako ng] pangamba sa pag-release siyempre... Pagkatakot na mawalan ng hustisya at baka maulit ang karahasan."

("I definitely have doubts on the [interim] release. I am afraid that justice will disappear and that the violence will return.")

On June 23, the ICC Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) released its views on the request, validating the fears and anxieties of the victims' families and assuring them of a fair trial.⁵ It also stated that the detention of Duterte is in line with certain provisions of Article 58 of the Rome Statute, which provides the guidelines for the issuance of an arrest warrant by the Pre-Trial Chamber. In other words, they find his detention to be necessary to prevent him from failing to appear before the Court, obstructing the investigation or court proceedings, and repeating the crimes that constitute the charges filed against him.

“Bring Him Home” and the Spread of AI Disinformation

On June 24, 2025, Senator Robinhood Padilla, invoking reconciliation and national unity, filed a resolution seeking the immediate repatriation of Duterte. This was not accepted by the Senate as the 19th Congress had already adjourned. According to Padilla’s unnumbered bill, Duterte’s repatriation and eventual investigation by Philippine authorities will uphold national sovereignty, echoing the challenge of Duterte’s defence team on the ICC’s jurisdiction.⁶

Less than a month later, on July 10, Senator Alan Peter Cayetano filed a resolution seeking house arrest for Duterte. This resolution called upon the Philippine government to advocate for Duterte’s interim release from The Hague, citing his old age as a necessary consideration on humanitarian grounds. Moreover, Cayetano highlighted that Duterte’s interim release subscribes to the Filipino cultural value of *malasakit* (compassion).⁷

Then, on July 27, Vice President Sara Duterte addressed Filipino expatriates in Seoul, South Korea, urging the interim release of her father. She maintained that he does not intend to escape from nor disrupt the proceedings and only wants to remain in his home city in Davao.⁸

Meanwhile on social media, artificial intelligence (AI)-generated content spread false news about the ICC granting Duterte’s request for interim release, bolstering support for his repatriation even when the Court had in fact rejected his plea.⁹ An even more vicious form of AI use emerged when families participating in the ICC proceedings found themselves the subjects of AI-edited images and videos designed to fuel online mockery and harassment against them. In at least one case, the image of an EJK victim was used to create a video of the same victim claiming that he was alive, and that his sister, who had been fearlessly speaking on behalf of victims’ families in public events, was a liar.¹⁰ Months later in another case, the image of three victims’ relatives was manipulated to make them appear to carry designer bags, which they had supposedly bought with the money they earned for posing as fake victims’ relatives.¹¹ Online fact-checking sites such as VERA Files and Rappler have since taken on a deluge of such types of content to flag and debunk disinformation for the public.

Submission of the Document Containing Charges

The Prosecution submitted the Document Containing Charges (DCC) on July 4, 2025. The DCC states that Duterte is suspected of three counts of crimes against humanity: (1) for the murders in or around Davao City and carried out by the Davao Death Squad during his term as Mayor; (2) for the murders of High-Value Targets during his Presidential term; and (3) for the murders and attempted murders in barangay clearance operations during his Presidential term.¹²

Although the charge is limited to the killings inflicted under Duterte's mayoral and presidential term up to March 17, 2019, when the Philippines' withdrawal from the ICC became effective, many of the families of the victims of other rights violations such as arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, and enforced disappearance remain hopeful that the case may eventually be expanded to include these violations as well.

JP, the common-law partner of an illegal arrest victim and the representative of one of PhilRights' partner families, expressed:

"[T]his [list] was used by the police in their operations. And if you are in the list, you will be subject for police operations. And most of the time, the people on the list are killed. [...] So basically, the PRRD list is [...] a dead list."

“Inaasahan ko na siya ay ma-convict. Para sa akin hindi ako kontento na limitado na kaso dahil may iba pa siyang nilabag na batas. Kung magpapatuloy na limitado lamang sa crimes against humanity of murder ang kaso, paano naman ang iba pa niyang ginawang paglabag? Kung hindi makumpirma ang charges laban sa kanya, mababalewala ang kasong inihabla para sa kanya.”

(“I am hopeful that he will be convicted. As for me, I am not content with the limited charges of the case, as he has also committed other crimes. If he were only charged with crimes against humanity of murder, what would happen to these other offenses? If the crimes against humanity of murder are not confirmed, the case against him will be put to waste.”)



Postponement of the Confirmation of Charges

Maximizing the due process afforded to their client as a suspect in the crimes—a right that he removed from his victims—Duterte’s Defence team on August 18, 2025 filed a request for indefinite adjournment of the process. They cited that Duterte is not fit to participate due to his advanced age, which has affected his cognitive abilities and physical fitness.

On September 8, 2025, the Court decided to postpone the confirmation of charges (COC) hearing originally set on the 23rd up to the 26th of September 2025. The Chamber stated that the postponement was necessary to allow them a reasonable time to adjudicate on the Defence’s request and other related matters.¹³

The families of victims hoped that this was not a sign of weakness in the case against Duterte. They expressed respect for the Chamber’s decision, but also acknowledged the undeniable anxiety that the turn of events has caused them. Luna, the common-law wife of a victim, said:

“Nakakaramdam ako ngayon ng pagkalungkot at dismaya dahil sa pagka-postpone ng hearing kasi mas tatagal pa

ito at mas mabibigyan pa ng chance na makagawa ng maraming alibi o palusot ang kanyang kampo para hindi ito mabigyan ng focus. Nagdudulot ito ng takot at pangamba para sa mga pamilya ng biktima na lubos na umaasang may hustisyang makakamit. Kaya sana sa susunod hindi na ito maantala para kahit papaano ay lumalakad na ang kaso at nang malaman kung may patutunguhan ba ito.”

(“I feel sad and disappointed by the postponement of the [confirmation of charges] hearing because this will prolong [the process] and will allow Duterte’s camp to make more alibis or excuses and lose focus on the case. This is causing fear and doubt among the families of victims who are wholeheartedly awaiting justice. That’s why I hope there will be no more delays in the future, so that the case can proceed and shed light on whether or not it will achieve [what we are all hoping for].”)

Positive Shifts in the Tide for Victims' Families

The ensuing series of developments provided a sense of relief and affirmation. On September 26, 2025, the Pre-Trial Chamber I denied Duterte's request for interim release,¹⁴ and on November 28, the Appeals Chamber denied the renewed request that was submitted on August 18, a few weeks before the Pre-Trial Chamber I announced its rejection of the initial request. On the determination of their decision, the Pre-Trial Chamber noted that certain actions by the Duterte family in response to the arrest—such as calling it a kidnapping and a collusion between the Philippine government and the ICC, proclaiming intent to break Duterte out from detention, and implying that he wishes to return to Davao City if granted his request for interim release—reflect Duterte's overall rejection of the proceedings and contradict the argument that he does not pose a flight risk.¹⁵

In between these pronouncements, the Pre-Trial Chamber I in its decision dated October 23 also rejected the Defence's challenge on the Court's jurisdiction.¹⁶ It primarily cited Article 127(2) of the Rome Statute, which says that a State shall not “prejudice the continued consideration of any matter [in this context, Duterte's alleged crimes against humanity] which was already under consideration by the Court prior to the date on which the withdrawal became effective.”

By November 8, Philippine Ombudsman Jesus Crispin Remulla claimed that the ICC had already issued an arrest warrant against PNP Chief-turned-Senator Ronald “Bato” dela Rosa, for his alleged involvement in the same crimes charged against Duterte. This was not confirmed by the ICC, which had not yet at the time released a public version of the warrant.¹⁷ Notwithstanding this, Bato dela Rosa neglected his duties as a member of the Senate and vanished from public view. He maintained his absence from November 11, 2025 up to May 11, 2026.

On December 18, 2025, the Pre-Trial Chamber I released a document containing the observation of a panel of medical experts that had conducted a medical evaluation of Duterte. This was in relation to the Defence's August 18 request for the indefinite adjournment of the process, which claimed that their client was not fit to participate. The document stated that upon assessment, Duterte, while frail and elderly, still possesses the necessary capacities to meaningfully exercise his procedural and fair trial rights, making him fit to participate in the process.¹⁸

This was followed by a press release on January 26, 2026, from the Court stating that the confirmation of charges hearing will finally proceed on February 23, 2026.¹⁹



Appointment of the Common Legal Representatives for Victims (CLRVs)

Also on January 26, the Chamber ordered the appointment Mr. Joel Butuyan and Mr. Gilbert Andres, two Filipino lawyers actively working with families of victims of the war on drugs, alongside Ms. Paolina Massidda from the Office of Public Counsel for Victims (OPCV), as Common Legal Representatives for Victims (CLRVs).²⁰ Ms. Nicolene Arcaina,

another Filipino lawyer, also joined their team as case manager for the victims.

On February 11, the Defence sought to disqualify the external CLRVs, Butuyan, Andres, and Arcaina. Much of the public version of the request for disqualification remains redacted, although the available information shows that the Defence

claimed to have found in Butuyan and Andres an “appearance of bias incompatible with the integrity of the proceedings”, and claimed that Arcaina’s involvement as case manager posed a conflict of interest.²¹ This was answered by the Court in a decision released on February 20, which states that the Defence’s submission lacked clarity and legal grounding; it also stated that the appointment of Arcaina does not fall under the Code of Professional Conduct for counsel, and such alleged conflict of interest is purely “speculative and hypothetical”.²²



Victims’ Participation

The ICC identifies a victim as any individual who has suffered physical, psychological, emotional, or material harm from a crime conducted within its jurisdiction. It allows direct and indirect victims to apply for participation and reparation through the Victims Participation and Reparations Section (VPRS), which processes and authorizes the participation of victims in the proceedings of the Court. Victim participation does not necessarily mean having to stand in as a witness. Each victim may exercise their right to be informed on the developments of the case; to share their views, opinions, and

concerns with the Judge; to request reparations; and to have their identities protected.²³

As of June 25, 2026, **539 victims’ relatives**, identified by the ICC as indirect victims, have been **authorised to participate in the proceedings** of the case against Duterte.²⁴ Others may still submit their application to participate.

Confirmation of Charges

Duterte formally waived his right to be present at the confirmation of charges hearing that commenced on February 23, 2026. In his letter to the Court, he emphasized that he does not wish to participate as he maintains his belief that the Court has no jurisdiction over his case, that he had been kidnapped, and that his kidnapping is a contravention of the Philippine Constitution and of its sovereignty. He also mentioned that he will forget the proceedings within minutes due to his old age, and as such would prefer to stay within the confines of his detention cell.²⁵

Upon learning of Duterte's absence, PhilRights' partner families said they believe that Duterte is merely playing the victim to maintain public sympathy, especially among his supporters. His claim that he had been kidnapped, despite enjoying his right to due process from the beginning, shows that he believes he is ultimately above the law.

On the first day of the hearing, Atty. Butuyan opened by reminding the public of the humanity of the victims and called on the Court to give central importance to the victims' voices in the proceedings. Meanwhile, the Defence argued that the case against Duterte is on one hand a politically motivated move of the incumbent Philippine president

Ferdinand Marcos Jr., and on the other, the result of the sensationalization of Duterte's naturally exaggerated tough talk.²⁶

On the second day of the hearing, February 24, Atty. Andres reiterated at the Court that the Prosecution managed to present more than enough evidence to confirm the charges and move forward with the trial. The Office of the Prosecutor argued during the hearing that killings have been ingrained in the politics of Duterte since his days as a local government official, something which he carried over to the national level upon his electoral win in 2016.²⁷

It revealed the two major structures that were established and mobilized to carry out the killings—the Davao Death Squad (DDS) and the “national network”. The Prosecution presented witness testimonies on the methods by which Duterte and his co-perpetrators directly incentivized and coerced individual hitmen into killing their victims during Duterte's mayoral period in Davao City. The same model was then expanded across the nation during his presidential term, when Duterte appointed his co-perpetrators to key positions in various Executive departments and offices, including the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Philippine National Police (PNP), and the

Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), among others.²⁸

On the third day of the hearing, February 26, Nicholas Kaufman, Duterte's defence attorney, presented three central arguments: that the Prosecutor failed to establish a direct link between Duterte's public pronouncements and the killings; that there is no "smoking gun" tying Duterte to a criminal plan, as alleged; and that continued detention would be unjustified in the absence of substantial grounds to believe that he committed the crimes. Kaufman described the claim that the war on drugs campaign instigated an attack on the civilian population as "incomprehensible and quite bizarre."²⁹

On the last and fourth day of the hearing, February 27, the Prosecution and the CLRV emphasised Duterte as the mastermind of the killings of mostly poor Filipinos, and that there is sufficient evidence to back this claim—thus, the charges must be confirmed, and the case must proceed to trial. Meanwhile, the Defence maintained that Duterte has killed no one, and the charges must therefore be dismissed.³⁰

The confirmation of charges hearing was concluded, and two major decisions were released one after the other in April.

The Appeals Chamber on April 22, 2026 confirmed the jurisdiction of the ICC on the case, echoing the response of the Pre-Trial Chamber to the initial challenge, and further mentioning that the Rome Statute

must be interpreted in line with its object and purpose, which is to prevent perpetrators of the most serious crimes of international concern from escaping accountability.³¹

The following day, on April 23, the Pre-Trial Chamber I confirmed all the charges against Duterte, and announced that the trial will commence on November 30, 2026. The Chamber concluded that "there is substantial grounds to believe that Duterte is responsible for crimes against humanity of murder and attempted murder and that the crimes were committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack on a civilian population."³²



These decisions were long-awaited manifestations of justice for the victims. They reinvigorated the families' hopes and further encouraged their active participation in the proceedings. Jane, niece of an extrajudicial killing (EJK) victim, expressed:

“Bilang pamilya ng biktima ng EJK, lubos ang pasasalamat ko sa ICC sa kanilang masusing pagsusuri at nararapat na desisyon sa pagkumprima ng sakdal laban kay Duterte. Isa na naman itong tagumpay na hakbang naming mga pamilya ng mga pinatay sa ilalim ng madugong Duterte regime. Napakalaking kagaanan sa aming loob na sa wakas ay mauumpisahan nang harapin ni Duterte ang kaniyang mga kasalanan.”

(As a relative of an EJK victim, I wholeheartedly thank the ICC for their thorough examination and dutiful decision to confirm the charges against Duterte. This is another momentous win for us, the families of the victims of the bloody Duterte regime. A tremendous weight has been taken off our chest, knowing that Duterte will finally face his crimes.)



Bato on the Run

At the Senate on May 11, 2026, after six months of absenteeism from public office, Bato Dela Rosa caused a commotion that led to a standoff in the Senate.

Dela Rosa was on his way to join the Senate session when he was welcomed by officials from the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), accompanied by former Senator Antonio Trillanes who was holding a copy of the ICC warrant of arrest.³³ CCTV footage shows him entering the building from what appeared to be a parking lot, then suddenly breaking off into a panicked sprint through the Senate halls and up a staircase before entering through a door and slamming it behind him. He later admitted in an interview that he escaped the NBI to join his colleagues in ousting then-Senate President Tito Sotto. Due to the commotion, the Senate was held on lockdown, and the newly-elected Senate President, Alan Peter Cayetano (also a Duterte ally) granted dela Rosa protective custody. During this brief period, dela Rosa entertained interviews with the media, expressing indignation at the attempt to execute the warrant of arrest and maintaining that he refuses to be tried or investigated outside the country.³⁴

The ICC unsealed the arrest warrant against the Senator for the alleged crime against humanity on the same day.³⁵ The arrest warrant, which was confidentially published on November 6, 2025, contains the alleged involvement of dela Rosa in EJKs from November 2011 to March 2019, first as the Davao Chief of Police and then the Philippine National Police Chief.³⁶

Dela Rosa reportedly slipped out of the Senate building on May 14. As of writing, his whereabouts remain unknown to the public.

This fiasco is a complete contradiction to his statements after Duterte's arrest, where he claimed he was prepared to join the former president at The Hague. He said in a Facebook post that he wishes to accompany Duterte inside his cell to take care of him, and that he will face the ICC if all else fails here in the Philippines.³⁷

To the mothers of victims of the war on drugs, the release of dela Rosa's arrest warrant felt like a belated Mother's Day gift, as it happened just a day after the Mother's Day celebrations. Lily, the sibling of an EJK victim, described Bato's warrant of arrest as such:

“Nakakatuwa sapagkat ang pagkakaroon ni Bato ng warrant of arrest ay isang indikasyon na kailangan niyang harapin ang lahat ng kasalanan niya noong panahon ng war on drugs. ‘Yung galit na ipinapakita niya ay indikasyon ng pagkaduwag. Sabi niya haharapin niya ang mga kaso, pero bakit ngayon takot na takot siya?”

(“I feel happy because the warrant of arrest for Bato is an indication that he must face his crimes during the war on drugs. The anger he projects is an indication of his cowardice. He said that he will face the cases against him, so why is he now so afraid?”)

Others further expressed the need for assurance through transparency on the developments related to the arrest warrant and called on politicians to focus on helping the victims achieve justice rather than exploiting the situation for their own motives:

“Naniniwala kami na ang mga pag-aresto at warrant of arrest ay hakbang patungo sa pagpapatupad ng batas at katarungan. Gayunpaman, nakikita rin namin na mahalaga na patas at transparent ang proseso upang hindi maging bahagi ng politika o panlilinlang. Ang hustisya para sa mga biktima ay dapat tunay at hindi peke.”

(“We believe that the warrants of arrest are a step towards the rule of law and justice. Nevertheless, it is important for the process to be fair and transparent so that it would not be used for politics or for deceit [against us victims]. Justice must be genuine.”)

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CHAPTER 4



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has discussed the past ten years of the drug war in a recollective manner, highlighting the journey undertaken by victims and left-behind families up to this crucial point in time just months ahead of Rodrigo Duterte's first trial hearing at The Hague. From the foregoing information, PhilRights draws the following conclusions and recommendations:

Conclusions

1 | *The so-called war on drugs is a war on the poor that has pushed victims' families into deeper poverty than before.*

Former President Rodrigo Duterte's anti-crime narrative, which provided the backbone for his so-called drug war, blamed persons with substance use disorder for systemic injustices and mobilized the entire nation against them. This resulted in gross human rights violations against mostly male victims, regardless of whether they were actually involved in the use of drugs or not, who were low-income earners while also contributing more than half of the income of their respective households. However, women, children, and older adults were likewise targeted by police and vigilante operations. Their families are now left to endure the lasting social and economic effects of the drug war on their lives.

Further, despite the killing of tens of thousands of suspected users, the use of illegal drugs has become even more widespread in certain communities as a result of increased poverty under the Marcos Jr. administration.

2 | *The drug war created a state of lawlessness in communities and deepened the social divides within them.*

Duterte's violent rhetoric and successful mobilization of police and vigilante forces transformed many neighborhoods into "EJK hotspots" and virtual "ghost towns" where residents feared for their lives whenever they stepped outside their homes. Ordinary Filipinos effectively lost the protection that the law was meant to provide and were targeted upon mere suspicion or whim, becoming victims first of surveillance and public shaming, and then finally of harassment, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, enforced disappearance, or extrajudicial killings. A collective sense of fear in urban poor communities was used to mobilize neighbors against each other, sowing mistrust and destroying communal relations. Meanwhile, social divides across Philippine society have likewise deepened with the dehumanization of the victims and the vilification of their advocates.



3 | *Rodrigo Duterte distorted the concept of human rights and mobilized citizens against rights defenders. Nonetheless, resistance to this vilification has strengthened the capacities of community members in claiming and defending their rights.*

The former president explicitly said that he had no regard for human rights and touted it as a barrier to the goal of eradicating crime in the Philippines. Community-based human rights defenders (HRDs) and NGOs advocating for the rights of victims were labeled as addicts and supporters of drug pushers themselves, creating high-risk conditions for rights-related work wherever it was needed the most. This has not stopped HRDs from carrying out their work, as they persistently reached out to families even at the height of the war on drugs. Their continued presence in the communities has helped victims and their families summon the courage to pursue justice even in the face of constant danger and a continuing climate of impunity.

Many victims now proudly identify as HRDs, encouraging other victims to likewise seek justice and strengthening the capacities of their own communities in defending their rights.

4 | *The drug war's violence continues under the Marcos Jr. administration, manifesting itself in both physical and digital spaces.*

While EJKs no longer proliferate the way they did under the Duterte administration, other gross human rights violations related to the drug war are still carried out covertly in urban poor communities. The same police officers who killed victims continue to roam free in the communities they have terrorized, actively thwarting the justice-seeking efforts of victims' families through intimidation, harassment, and coercion. Participants in the ICC proceedings for the case against Duterte have increasingly become the subjects of online harassment, disinformation, and threats.



5 | *The victims remain unseen and unheard in their ongoing pursuit for justice.*

The scale of the human rights violations and the outrage they have generated, both among the Filipino public and the international community, have remained insufficient to compel the government to undertake meaningful investigations and prosecutions against state agents who indiscriminately violate the law to wage the so-called drug war, consequently bolstering the ICC Office of the Prosecutor's justification for launching its own investigation on the killings.

The Marcos administration's continued refusal to publicly condemn the gross human rights violations and officially acknowledge the existence of the drug war victims contributes to the continuation of this injustice. Such inaction has the power to bury the truths and allow perpetrators to evade accountability, as though the thousands of lives lost carried little value. It also constitutes a grave human rights concern in itself, reflecting the state's failure to fulfill its obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights of Filipinos.

Meanwhile, the government has not yet extended meaningful assistance to victims' families, many of whom need support now more than ever as they sink deeper into poverty amid worsening economic conditions that further limit their access to basic rights and essential services.

6 | *Persistent efforts from the victims and civil society has finally brought justice within arm's reach.*

After a decade of persistent groundwork, despite constant risks and economic and social barriers, the families of victims now finally feel that justice is within arm's reach. The confirmation of charges against Duterte at the ICC has greatly reinvigorated their hope and encouraged them to keep pushing forward no matter the difficulties. The path ahead is full of challenges, risks, and uncertainties, but they possess a collective strength built over the years with fellow survivors and human rights defenders. They will carry the struggle forward until justice has finally been achieved.



Recommendations

Stop the Punitive Drug War Now



The government's claim that the drug war is now humane and bloodless cannot be farther from the truth. This blatant, self-serving hypocrisy serves only the Marcos Jr. administration as it sweeps aside and covers up the brutal realities of life in the country's most disenfranchised communities. Every life lost, harmed, or put at risk is one too many. **The violence must be put to an end now.**

In place of a punitive anti-illegal drug campaign, **widespread substance use disorder must be curbed at its health-related, economic, and social roots.** The government must recognize and value the capacities of communities in identifying the solutions to their own problems, and work hand-in-hand with them towards transformative change that is grounded on local realities, the dignity of persons, and collective care.

Officially Acknowledge and Condemn the Gross Human Rights Violations

The government must officially acknowledge and publicly condemn the gross human rights violations of the drug war under the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations. From the Office of the President down to the concerned agencies and local offices, it must prove itself willing and able to go beyond simply claiming to be committed to human rights, and actually embodying this commitment through action and accountability. As the country's primary political authority, it plays an important role in **shaping public attitudes toward past abuses and fostering a culture that rejects policies enabling widespread human rights violations.**

Official acknowledgment of the gross human rights violations will also signal the government's readiness to support the victims and their families in their pursuit of justice. It will **open pathways toward recovery and rehabilitation** for those whose lives have been profoundly affected by the violence.

Equally important, such acknowledgment would help **restore the dignity of the victims and their families.** It would help reduce the stigma associated with being related to individuals who were killed during anti-drug operations and support their reintegration into their communities and the broader society.



Cooperate with and Rejoin the ICC

The absence of a systemic response to the injustices has left victims' families and their advocates with no other recourse than to seek accountability through international justice mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court (ICC). Had the Philippines not been a state party to the Rome Statute in 2017 when the first complaints against Duterte were submitted to the ICC, then the victims' families would not have had any option left but to take on the excruciating process of waiting for justice to prevail in a country that has repeatedly denied this from them.

Although the ICC process is already well underway with the charges against Duterte having been confirmed, Filipinos remain divided, as many continue to question the legitimacy of the Court's jurisdiction over the Philippines. Duterte's allies and legal representatives have actively fostered such doubts and continue to challenge the Court's authority, invoking nationalism as a shield against accountability—as exemplified in Senator Bato dela Rosa's evasion of arrest. A more genuine nationalism would prioritize

delivering swift justice to the victims. In the current context, this would mean the use of all possible legal means to **immediately locate and arrest Senator dela Rosa while ensuring that all other identified co-perpetrators in the case remain under close monitoring to avoid any further escape. It would also mean investigating and holding accountable the creators and proliferators of disinformation and online violence against the victims and their families.**

Rejoining the ICC would facilitate cooperation between Philippine authorities and the Court. It would provide a clearer legal framework for government agencies to assist the ICC in carrying out its functions, including efforts related to the investigation and arrest of other individuals who may be implicated in drug war crimes. Such cooperation would be less vulnerable to legal challenges questioning the government's authority to assist the Court, and more generally will help dispel the notion that Duterte's trial constitutes an affront to Philippine sovereignty and lend further legitimacy to the ongoing proceedings.

It would also help **reassure victims, witnesses, and their families that cooperating with the ICC is a legitimate and protected exercise of their rights.** Participation in accountability processes would be less likely to be perceived as an act of defiance against the government and more as a lawful undertaking supported by the state. This could contribute significantly to their sense of security and improve their emotional and psychological well-being.

Finally, rejoining the ICC would signal the government's **commitment to human rights, accountability, and the international rule of law.** It would contribute to restoring confidence in democratic institutions and reinforce safeguards against the dangers posed by personality-driven politics and authoritarian tendencies.

Pursue a Just Transition from the Drug War

The government must undertake **nationwide, comprehensive, and impartial investigations into the drug war killings and other related human rights violations**

in order to hold direct and indirect perpetrators accountable. While the Department of Justice (DOJ) has already initiated efforts in this regard through DOJ Department Order No. 778, which in 2024 created a task force for the investigation of EJKs, these initiatives must be expanded and intensified to include other gross human rights violations, including the obstruction of justice through intimidation, coercion, falsification of evidence, and other related means. Its processes and findings must also be made transparent to the victims' families, whom they are ultimately accountable to. Further, legal assistance and witness protections must be readily provided to victims' families to help them build and strengthen their cases.

The government must recognize its accountability for the effects of the drug war on the lives of the left behind families and communities. A dedicated reparations fund must be established, similar in principle to the reparations program created for victims of human rights violations committed during the Marcos Sr. dictatorship. **Holistic, multidisciplinary reparations must draw from the families' knowledge and expertise** in identifying the minimum reparations that should be provided to all victims and affected communities. Although no amount of compensation can undo the loss of a loved one, such measures would help recognize the harm suffered by the victims and affirm that they have not been forgotten by society.

Relatedly, the government must **establish programs that assist victims' families in rebuilding their lives,** particularly in the economic sphere, given that many of those killed were the primary breadwinners of their households. Drug war victims and their families must be given priority in existing social protection and welfare programs administered by government agencies, including the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP), Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS), and other similar initiatives.

Finally, respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the rights of every Filipino is a mandate that must stand strong against the rise of unjust and inhumane regimes. Institutionalizing rights-based and community-driven policies, providing reparative justice to all victims, and rejoining the ICC all contribute to the non-recurrence of gross human rights violations.

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