

MULA HINAGPIS HANGGANG PAGLILITIS

STOP.
EJK!!

...HAN LABANAN ANG ...IDAD

STOP the KILLINGS!

Caloocan

Quezon Ci

WHEN WE LOSE
OUR FEAR

MARCOS,
DUTERTE
walang
pag-iba!
PAREHO SILANG
TERORISTA!

**STOP
Violence
NOW!**



PANTAO REPORTS

MULA HINAGPIS HANGGANG PAGLILITIS

Findings of the 2017-2025 Documentation of Extrajudicial Killings (EJKs) and other Human Rights Violations Committed Under the So-Called War on Drugs

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MONITORING AND DOCUMENTATION

of EJKs and Other Human Rights Violations

This report presents the findings of PhilRights’ monitoring and documentation of human rights violations linked to the so-called war on drugs, covering the period from August 2017 to June 2025. The campaign, launched under former President Rodrigo Duterte, resulted in widespread and systemic abuses—including extrajudicial killings (EJKs), illegal arrests, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearances. These violations have continued under the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

While the number of killings reported in mainstream media has declined, the drug war remains ongoing and just as deadly. The campaign has become more covert, but violations persist in areas long identified as hotspots. The Marcos Jr. administration has taken no meaningful steps to dismantle the abusive institutions it inherited, nor to hold perpetrators accountable. Instead, a culture of impunity and normalized state violence continues to thrive.

This report also examines how the Marcos Jr. administration has attempted to distance itself from Duterte’s legacy. While official statistics from 2022 onwards show a decrease in extrajudicial killings and arrests during formal police operations, reports from the ground suggest continuity in practice. Police officers have continued to label bystanders as drug users, only for these individuals to later be charged under unrelated laws such as the Anti-

Illegal Gambling Act. These tactics reflect a shift in form, but not in intent.

The publication of this report comes at a pivotal moment. In March 2025, the International Criminal Court’s Pre-Trial Chamber issued an arrest warrant against Duterte for charges of murder as a crime against humanity. This historic development marks a turning point in the fight for justice and reflects the years-long efforts of victims’ families, civil society organizations, and legal advocates to pursue accountability through both domestic and international mechanisms.

Grounded in eight years of fieldwork and community-based monitoring, this report presents a layered analysis of the ongoing human rights crisis. It is structured into five chapters designed to equip readers with both evidence and context:

CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1 features two narratives from victim-families documented by PhilRights. Both families suffered the loss of a loved one due to the so-called war on drugs—one case during the Duterte administration, and the other under Marcos Jr. These stories illustrate the continuity of the violence from the first administration to the next, and serve as entry points for understanding the ongoing human cost of the state policy.

CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2 provides a statistical overview of the war on drugs. It includes data on victim demographics, the profiles of alleged perpetrators, and broader patterns of the killings shown through tables, figures, and maps. Based on cases documented by PhilRights from August 1, 2017 to June 30, 2025 in Bulacan, National Capital Region, and Rizal, this chapter concludes with a comparative analysis of drug war modalities and figures between Duterte's first three years (2016–2019) and Marcos Jr.'s midterm (2022–2025).

CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3 focuses on the timeline and context surrounding the ICC's arrest warrant against Duterte. It details events leading up to the arrest and reiterates PhilRights' call for the Philippine government to rejoin the ICC as a crucial step toward addressing impunity. The chapter also addresses ongoing debates over the legality of Duterte's arrest and the continued support he enjoys among segments of the Philippine population.

CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4 presents conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of PhilRights' long-term monitoring and documentation efforts. It asserts that the so-called war on drugs constitutes a state-sanctioned violation of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. The chapter calls for the immediate end of the drug war and proposes a shift toward a rights-based approach that addresses the root

causes of drug use, treats dependency as a public health issue, and upholds international human rights standards.

It also outlines targeted recommendations for civil society, the academe, media, the international community, and the broader public.

CHAPTER 5

Chapter 5 features statements and messages from partner families of PhilRights. These testimonies offer deeply personal reflections on Duterte's arrest and the long struggle for justice. They also serve as reminders that the real cost of the war on drugs cannot be fully captured in numbers—that behind each statistic is a life lost and a family left behind.

Overall, this report does not claim to be exhaustive. Rather, it offers a representative account of the human toll of the drug war, grounded in survivor testimonies, verified data, and a commitment to justice. Its goal is to contribute to public truth-telling, challenge official denial, and build the evidentiary foundation for accountability.

In the face of injustice, impunity, and historical distortion, monitoring and documentation remain not only necessary—but urgent.

Kayâ naman, magpapatuloy tayo.

OUR METHODOLOGY

PhilRights' documentation abides by the principles and investigation guidelines set by The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Deaths (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

ECHOES OF MOURNING

**Confronting the Continuities of
State Violence in the Philippines**

An illustration in a dark, moody style. In the foreground, a woman and a young girl are sitting up in bed, looking startled and fearful. The woman has a wide-eyed, shocked expression, and the girl looks equally alarmed. They are both wearing dark clothing. Behind them, in the shadows of the bed, are the silhouettes of three other people, also appearing to be awake and looking towards the left. In the background, a clock on the wall shows a time around 9:30. Several small, framed pictures hang on the wall above the bed. The overall atmosphere is one of tension and horror, set in a dimly lit room at night.

WAR ON DRUGS

A Crime Against Humanity

It was raining that night when, at around nine-thirty, Lulu and her family were jolted awake by Carlo, her son-in-law. As she stirred from sleep, the scene imprinted itself into her memory. Her daughter, Julie, Carlo, and her grandchildren were all wide-eyed with fear. They huddled in the corner as gunshots rang out from outside their home. Julie, trembling, said their father had just stepped out to buy a sachet of coffee and a cigarette. Then came more shots—one, two, and three more. Lulu heard them clearly. Even after seven years, the sound of those final gunshots still echoes in her mind.

Soon after, a relative knocked on their door. He told Lulu that someone had been killed outside and that the man looked like her husband, Antonio. She refused to believe it. She calmed her family and clung to the hope that Antonio would return safely. Still, she and Julie rushed out to see for themselves. It was him. In the years that followed, Lulu would recall how deep in denial she was in that moment. She could not see what others, including her daughter, saw so clearly—Antonio was already gone.

It was one of thousands of killings under Duterte’s so-called war on drugs—a campaign that turned poor neighborhoods into war zones, and families like Lulu’s into collateral damage.

Clinging to disbelief, Lulu asked Julie to help her turn Antonio’s body over. He had been lying face down on the road, wearing his cap. Still, she did not notice the blood on his face. Julie, gently and firmly, said what Lulu had not wanted to hear. “*Ma, patay na si Papa. Sa ulo ang tama.* (Ma, Papa’s dead. He was shot in the head.)”

It was overkill. A brutal execution meant to silence the victim. Antonio had been shot in the back of his head, the neck, twice in the chest, once in the side, and once in the right front shoulder. There were also scratches on his left wrist and fist, signs of a final struggle before he took his last breath.

Cold Detachment

Within a few minutes, the police arrived, along with the Scene of Crime Operatives (SOCO) team and a funeral home representative. With them came police assets in civilian clothing. Lulu and Julie remember how they reeked of alcohol. During this time, Lulu was already shaking in fear, unable to respond to the police coherently.

Antonio was 50 years old. Together with Lulu, he had four children—Julie, Yumi, Yuri, and Antonio Junior. Before he was killed, Antonio was already a grandfather to Julie’s four children. He was not perfect, but he was present and devoted to his family in the everyday ways that mattered.

To the people who knew him, he was simply a father and a grandfather, a kind friend to his neighbors, and not a criminal. That night, however, he was treated like a statistic. His life, and the grief of those he left behind, were processed with the cold detachment the family had seen in other killings in their neighborhood.

The police arrived swiftly, inspected Antonio’s belongings, and bombarded the family with questions. Their cold, mechanical response deepened the family’s distrust. This was on top of the fact that the killings around their

neighborhood were rumored to be carried out by the police.

Lulu remarked how they repeatedly asked, “*Asan’yong gamit ng asawa mo?* (Where are your husband’s belongings?)”—referring to drug paraphernalia. She responded, “*Anong gamit po ba ang hinahanap niyo?* (What exactly are you looking for?)” She showed them the storage box that contained their few belongings, all the while watching them closely in case they planted evidence.

While Julie herself was taken aback by what happened to her father and worried about the state of her mother, who was on the verge of collapse, she tried her best to stay composed. Her husband stayed inside to watch over the children. Right before Lulu went back inside their house, she instructed Julie to watch closely what the police were doing with Antonio’s body. “*Julie, wag mong tatanggalin ang tingin mo sa Papa mo. Mamaya kung ano pa ang itanim nila diyan.* (Julie, don’t take your eyes off your Papa. Who knows what they might try to plant there.)”

Though devastated, Julie stood her ground. She watched over the proceedings and patiently answered the questions the investigators threw her way. She repeated that they were sleeping when the shooting happened and emphasized that they didn’t know the perpetrator or the motive for the killing. Meanwhile, Julie’s cousin, who had taken photos of the crime scene, was forbidden from doing so—the police forcibly took his phone and deleted the only visual evidence of the crime scene that the family had.



The police called St. Matthew Funeral Homes to collect Antonio's remains. As the ambulance carried his body away, his grandchildren wailed, "*Si Papa dinadala ng mama*. (Papa is being taken away by a man.)"

The family had no plan to request an autopsy, as there was no question about the cause of his death. But SOCO insisted that they had to pay for it if they wanted to retrieve Antonio's body. Including the funeral services, the family was charged 20,000 pesos. A painful sum they scraped together themselves.

Even in death, dignity was not freely given. It had to be bought. The burden of cost, placed on a grieving and impoverished family, served as one final reminder of how little worth the lives—and deaths—of the poor were given. It was a quiet violence that followed the louder one—the sound of gunfire replaced by bureaucracy and exploitation.

For Lulu and her family, none of it felt random. They believed the killing was planned, possibly part of a police quota. "*Mukhang planado, mabilis. Noon pa namin naririnig na may kinseng quota sa area namin kaya maraming nababaryl*. (It seemed planned, quick. We had long been hearing that there's a quota of fifteen in our area—that's why so many are getting shot.)" Witnesses were too afraid to come forward. The swift arrival of authorities, paired with the absence of meaningful investigation, only deepened the family's suspicions.

Robbed of Dignity

A witness hinted at having seen what happened that night—but soon after, she left the area out of fear. According to her then-partner, she told him that the shooting was carried out by two men they suspected had once worked under the police force. Though the gunmen wore bonnets and face masks to hide their identities, their body builds and gait were recognizable; they had often loitered around the neighborhood.

It would only be revealed years later that the woman chose to stay silent after police officers searched their home twice, even entering their bedroom

under the guise of an investigation. It was the same tactic used in other cases—state forces intimidating potential witnesses into silence.

Their area in Caloocan City has long been considered a hotspot for killings during the height of Duterte’s war on drugs. Antonio was killed in 2018, during what many remember as one of the deadliest stretches of the campaign. His death, like so many others, was quickly reduced to another statistic. Lulu would later say, “*Dati, naririnig ko lang na may mga quota sa lugar namin. Natatakot na kami noon pa man, pero hindi ko inaasahan na madadamay kami.* (I used to hear whispers about quotas in our area. We had been living in fear for a long time—but I never thought it would happen to us.)”

The fear didn’t end with Antonio’s death. The family suspected the police were behind the killing and felt they were being watched. Neighbors kept their distance, afraid that any association with the family might put them at risk. The family was forced to mourn under suspicion, surrounded not by sympathy but by silence.

During the short wake they managed to hold, a motorcycle circled their house repeatedly. Each time, Lulu froze in fear, bracing for someone to barge in and shoot them all, one by one. At one point, she even considered closing the doors entirely. She was afraid that holding the wake might endanger the rest of the family.



Sensing the danger, Antonio's brother offered their home in Bulacan as a safer place to continue the wake. There, away from the constant tension, Lulu and her children found a brief moment to grieve in peace.

Even in mourning, their family was denied dignity. Fragmented by fear, what should have been a time for gathering and remembrance became another site of erasure.

A year later, the grief would be compounded further. Lulu was summoned and pressured into signing a waiver stating that the family would not file charges. She was not alone. With her in the same room were two other widows, their husbands also slain under Oplan Double Barrel. Together, they stood not just as mourners—but as survivors forced into silence.

This erasure, Lulu would come to realize, did not begin at death. In the days leading to Antonio's killing, there were already signs—quiet but foreboding—that something had shifted.



Severely Punitive

In the days leading to the incident, Antonio had stopped going out at night. Lulu remembers how he seemed uneasy. He was always on edge, and while he only mentioned it in passing, it was clear to her that something was bothering him. “*May kinatatakutan, ninenerbiyos siya nang walang dahilan*, (He was clearly afraid, nervous for no apparent reason.)” Lulu said. He was restless, nervous, and afraid—but he couldn’t explain why.

Looking back, Lulu believes it may have had something to do with the growing fear in their community. A friend of Antonio had recently been killed. He, too, was a victim of Duterte's war on drugs. The news of these killings made their way quickly through their neighborhood, creating an atmosphere of quiet panic. Antonio never said much, but it showed—he feared he might be the next target.

Although Antonio was not on the barangay's drug watchlist, he had a prior encounter with authorities a few months before his untimely death. It was a minor violation of Executive Order No. 26 (EO 26), issued in 2017 by-then President Duterte. He had been caught lighting a cigarette while shirtless on the street. The *sari-sari* store where Antonio lit the cigarette was considered an enclosed public space, which made smoking there a violation of the ordinance.

Although it was his first offense, he was detained overnight as punishment. To Lulu, that incident seemed trivial. But in hindsight, it added to their fear. In communities like theirs, small violations could escalate quickly. People had been killed for less.

Before former President Duterte came into power, Antonio had struggled with drug use. According to Lulu, his dependency began largely from peer pressure. He was often asked by others to buy "*shabu*"—the local term for methamphetamine—and eventually began using it himself. But Lulu insisted that he had stopped. His family believed that when Duterte became president and the killings began, Antonio grew terrified and chose to walk away from that life. He just wanted to live quietly.

In a just society, Antonio's earlier struggles would have been treated as a public health concern, not a death sentence. The war on drugs made no meaningful distinction between someone struggling with addiction and someone simply accused. Innocence offered no protection.



Losing a Loved One

Even when Antonio was still alive, Lulu was the primary breadwinner of their family. She worked hard to support their household, while Antonio took on irregular jobs whenever work came his way. He worked as a construction worker, painter, welder—whatever was needed. Many of these jobs came through Lulu’s brother. Whenever he earned, he would give his wages to Lulu. Together, they earned just enough to support their children and grandchildren living under the same roof.

At home, Antonio took care of the rest. He handled the housework—cooking meals, cleaning, washing the dishes, and laundry. He also cared for their son, who was born with cerebral palsy. Antonio was patient and dependable. While Lulu worked outside, Antonio made sure everything at home was in order.

Julie, their daughter, fondly remembers how her father would care for her children. He played with them, carried them in his arms, and cradled them against his chest until they fell asleep. He often took his grandchildren out for walks around the neighborhood just to keep them entertained. The children were close to him. They loved him deeply and miss him even now.

Their family lived a simple but content life. Money was tight, but they found small joys. Lulu recalls how they made time to visit Circle and other parks, just to breathe and be together.

But that peace did not last. Just days before Antonio's death, tragedy had already struck. Lulu's son, who had been named after his father, had just passed away and was recently laid to rest. Then came the night of the gunshots. One loss followed another—too heavy, too sudden.

Antonio was a kind and loving husband. A hands-on father. A devoted grandfather. His absence left a hollow space in their home that has never been filled.

To Grieve

It was not only Antonio's life that was taken from them that night. His death left a deep wound in their family's emotional and economic life. "*Noon, sumasapat. Pagkawala niya, bigla ko nang pasan ang mundo. Hindi ko alam saan o ano ang pagkukuhanan*, (Before, it was enough. But when he was gone, it felt like the weight of the world fell on me. I didn't know where to turn or how I'd survive.)" Lulu shared.

With Antonio gone, everything fell on her shoulders. The household expenses, the daily needs of her children and grandchildren, even the smallest decisions—she had to carry them all. The weight was crushing. She did not know where to turn or how to keep their lives afloat.

But the loss was more than financial. The trauma crept in slowly, day by day. Lulu began to lose her appetite. She couldn't sleep. Her hands would shake from anxiety. For months, loud sounds would send her into panic—she would freeze, unable to breathe, thinking the gunshots had returned. The last three shots that killed Antonio never really stopped echoing in her mind.

Even their grandchildren were not spared. There came a time when the kids were too scared to leave the house. From school, they went straight home, terrified that something might happen. Once, when a representative from

the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) knocked on their door, the children screamed in fear, startled by the man's stature and dark clothing. "*Ma, may malaking tao sa labas! Nakaitim!* (Ma, there's a large man outside! He's dressed in black!)" They cried—repeating the panic of that night.

For a long time, Lulu found herself bargaining with the past. She replayed that night over and over. What if Antonio had stayed home? What if he had not fallen in with the wrong crowd? What if she had been home more, would things have turned out differently? These questions haunted her, especially in the silent hours when the world had moved on, but her grief had not.

Their daughter Yumi, the second eldest, now helps shoulder the bills. But even that hasn't eased the burden. In 2022, another tragedy struck. Carlo, who woke the family during the fateful night of the shooting, was also killed. Another man in their family was killed. Julie, like her mother, was left to raise her children alone. Her youngest child had just turned one month old.

Carlo's death was a reminder that even in Duterte's last days as president, the brutality of the war on drugs persisted. However, impunity did not end with Duterte. Marcos Jr. wielded the same heavy hand. Cloaked in a new rhetoric, his promise of a "humane approach" rang hollow. "*Si Duterte at Marcos, wala naman po talagang pinagkaiba. Hangang ngayon [sa lugar namin], tuloy-tuloy pa rin naman [ang patayan] sa war on drugs*, (There's really no difference between Duterte and Marcos. Even now, in our area, [the killings under] the war on drugs continues.)" Lulu said.

When asked how she coped, Julie said she poured everything into parenting. "*Kailangan kong maging matatag* (I have to be strong)," she said. "*Para sa mga anak ko*. (For my children.)" Being a solo mother gave her purpose, but it did not numb the pain. She now carried the weight of losing two loved ones to a war that never cared for the lives it took. Her father and her husband, both gone.

Julie says they may have moved forward, but they have not forgotten. “*Hindi puwedeng kalimutan. Pinagdaanan namin ‘yun. Buhay ang kinuha sa amin.* (We cannot forget. What we went through was real. A life was taken from our family.)”

Lulu, meanwhile, holds a quiet but burning anger toward Duterte. He may not have pulled the trigger himself, but his words and orders unleashed the violence that stole her family.

She said, “*Kung wala ‘yung utos niya, kung wala ‘yung ‘kill them all’ niya, buhay sana ang asawa ko.* (If not for his order, if not for that ‘kill them all’ command, my husband might still be alive.)”

For the family, justice remains elusive. They do not believe it will come from the local courts. The system, they say, moves too slowly, protects the powerful, and disregards the pain of the poor.

This is why, for them, the International Criminal Court is their last hope. It is a lifeline. It is a way to say that the lives taken had meaning—and that one day, someone will answer for them.

Their belief is not isolated. It reflects the broader sentiment among families assisted by PhilRights—families who lost loved ones to the same bloody campaign. For them, Duterte’s arrest for crimes against humanity offers a sliver of hope. They want the deaths acknowledged. They want justice.

Empowerment

And yet, in the rare times hopelessness abounds, Lulu began to find her footing. Grief did not leave her, but over time, she learned to carry it differently. What was once paralyzing became a source of strength. She could not undo the past, but she could speak of it. In telling her story, she began to reclaim her voice and the narrative that the violence tried to take from her.

For Lulu and her family, justice—if it ever comes—will look like peace of mind. It will be the assurance that what happened to them will never happen to another family. That the pain they carry will not be repeated in someone else's home.

Her journey toward becoming a human rights defender was not easy. The hardest part, she says, was confronting her own fear and despair. “*Sarili talaga. Minsan nawawalan ako ng pag-asa at natatakot*, (It’s really an internal battle. There are times I feel hopeless and afraid.)” she shared. Slowly, she kept moving forward, fueled by the support of human rights groups and the community of victim-families walking beside her.

Lulu draws strength from her faith in God, from her role as a caregiver and provider to her children and grandchildren, and from the solidarity she shares with other families who have also lost loved ones to the brutalities of the war on drugs. That solidarity reminds her she is not alone.

Now, Lulu participates actively in the struggle for justice. She joins protests and mobilizations. She files cases at the CHR and the Department of Justice, and advocates for assistance for other families who were also left behind. Her activism has grown beyond her personal grief—it is now rooted in a shared fight for dignity and truth.

Most importantly, she organizes others in her community. She reaches out to those who have suffered in silence, those still gripped by fear, those whose grief remains buried. She helps them find their voice.

When asked how she does it, she says it’s simple. You have to earn their trust first—by identifying with them, listening without judgment, and showing that you truly understand. From there, people begin to open up. They begin to speak, to assert their rights, and to believe that they, too, can resist. Lulu accompanies them to institutions that can help, listens to their stories, documents their experiences, and walks with them in the long path to healing.

In their community, they have begun building their own group, with the shared goal of slowly learning to stand up for themselves. What binds them together is the pain they endured during the war on drugs—but what keeps

them going, Lulu says, is their collective vision of rising again. “*Samahan ng mga nakabangon na*. (An organization of survivors who have risen up from the ashes.)”

To families like hers, she offers a message: take heart, and never give up. Let the love for those left behind be your strength. Keep fighting—not just for the ones who are gone, but for the ones still here. “*Kung hindi tayo maglalakas ng loob na lumaban*, (If we don’t have the courage to stand up and resist,)” she says, “*walang hustisya. Magpapatuloy lang ang patayan*. (There will be no justice. The killings will continue.)”

For Lulu, healing does not mean forgetting. Acceptance does not mean silence. And peace, if it is to mean anything at all, must come with truth, with memory, and with the will to resist.

Lulu’s story is a journey that moved from deeply personal to the unapologetically political. In her family’s refusal to be silent, they challenged the dominant narrative that only the guilty were lost to the drug war. Her testimony reclaims the truth: what happened to her husband, to her son-in-law, and to thousands of others was not collateral damage, nor a necessary evil. It was a premeditated and orchestrated crime. It was state violence, ordered from the top, carried out with impunity, and cloaked in the language of public service.

While Duterte and his defenders insist it was done for the good of the nation, Lulu and families like hers know otherwise. Justice begins by naming the war on drugs for what it truly was: a crime against humanity.



DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS!



ANYTHING BUT BLOODLESS

Losing A Loved One under the New Administration

It was raining when the clock struck fifteen minutes past midnight. Lady's family was listening to the steady rise of the water behind their house. For a family living by a creek in a flood-prone city, rain at midnight is a signal to stay up and keep watch.

Lady, then 20 years old, was in an adjacent extension of their house with two of her five siblings and an eight-year-old niece. Perpendicular to them in full view was the door behind which their father, Roger, stood with his left hand on the pot from which he was about to scoop a midnight meal.

Out of nowhere, the figure of a man in a dark green raincoat and a black face mask appeared before the old plywood door, peering at their father through one of the jagged holes. Wordlessly, he aimed a pistol at Roger's face and pulled the trigger. Somehow, Roger managed to grab a plate and shield his face, but it was too late.

Three more shots ripped the air loudly before the man sprinted off through the narrow alley in front of the house and into the dark night. Lady, her siblings, and her niece jumped up in terror and fled.

“Bloodless”

Lady and her mother, JM, are certain that the men were police officers on a drug war operation. When asked if Roger had enemies, the two women shook their heads and furrowed their brows because he had none; in fact, he was a man with many friends. But JM says it was Roger’s friends who got him started on drugs.

His drug use was the one thing that often drove the couple into arguing. Initially, she supported Rodrigo Duterte’s idea of eradicating drug use. She longed to see her home as well as her community finally getting rid of all illegal substances. But when the nature of Duterte’s so-called drug war revealed itself in full force, JM feared for her husband’s safety. Policemen hounded the neighborhoods of the city looking for persons on the watchlist while gruesome vigilante-style killings spread across the city.

After six years, Duterte’s term finally ended, and unlike many, Roger remained safe.

When Bongbong Marcos Jr. succeeded Duterte in 2022, JM expected the end of *Tokhang*. One of the promises the new president built his campaign on was that he will make the war on drugs “bloodless”, placing more emphasis on prevention and rehabilitation than Duterte’s administration did.

It has now been three years into the Marcos Jr. presidency, but JM has seen no letup in the violence. “*Wala. Lalo na sa lugar namin, wala. Ganoon pa rin*, (Nothing. Especially in our area, nothing has changed. It’s still the same.)” she says, alluding to the killings in their city.

Remembering Roger

Today, despite having disagreed with his drug use, JM remembers her husband with fondness.



With a little smile and a gleam in her eye, she recalls how she and Roger met each other in 1989. They fell in love and in three years, had their first child. Roger made and sold candles to sustain their growing family and, after the birth of their third child, took on construction jobs to augment his 300-500-peso daily earnings from his candle sales.

JM stayed home to care for the children and occasionally worked as a house help to add to their income. Meanwhile, Roger still made sure to help out at home. He swept around the house, did the laundry, and cooked for the family. JM would often wake up to a delicious breakfast. “*Magaling siya magluto*, (He was a good cook.)” she says with a nod and a smile.

Lady tells of how Roger was an attentive father. “*Sobrang maasikaso... minsan nag-aaway [kami] pero ‘di niya inaalís ang pagiging tatay niya*, (He was very attentive...we sometimes fought, but he never neglected his role as a father.)” she says. “*Siya ang taga-awat sa amin ng mga kapatid ko ‘pag nag-aaway kami*. (He was the one who would break up the fights between me and my siblings.)”

When Lady’s older siblings started their own families, one of her nieces grew up with them, while the others lived with their parents. She and her *Lolo* Roger developed a strong bond as he doted on her endearingly and gave her everything she needed.

Life at “war”

In 2016, as Duterte began his presidency, JM looked forward to the prospect of seeing drugs disappear from their community. But as the months rolled in, so did fear, as news of drug-related killings in the city spread and groups of policemen patrolled the streets. They peered into houses and barged in as they wished.

Several times in 2021 and 2022, the policemen entered JM and Roger’s house. Both parents were always out at work or doing errands, but the police still barged in and ordered the children to lie face down on the floor as they ransacked the house in search of drugs.

The policemen always found nothing; in any case, what they claimed to be drug search operations took on a different character. Not once did they show a search warrant. They would bark at the children to not look up from their places on the floor and threaten onlooking neighbors who dared to take pictures with their phones. Then, they would pick out anything they fancied—cellphones, silver jewelry, the free tablets issued by the Mayor’s office for the students’ online classes. Then they would leave. In a few weeks, they would return again and do the same thing.



This was how the family lived and survived through the so-called “war on drugs” on drugs. If there was anything that changed in their view of law enforcement, it was that they seemed to have developed a disdain for policemen and their ruffian ways. Still, they were thankful that their father remained unscathed.

Then the year 2023 began, and the family’s life changed forever.

Bangungot

The rain was still falling when Lady and her two siblings stepped out of their aunt’s house, where they fled to after the shooting. The man in the green raincoat was gone. Their father was left alone at home.

Inside the house, Roger lay on the floor, conscious, his right hand covering the hole on the upper side of his head where the bullet entered. There was another hole on his left temple where the bullet exited, and a gaping wound on his left cheek. He was muttering voicelessly.

Seeing him in this state, his children went back outside and ran up the long alley to call for help. No one in the houses between theirs and their aunt’s stirred or made a noise. Even the neighbors were scared. The rain alone could be heard along with their distressed voices.

Their cousins and one of their father’s friends came back to the house with them to see Roger while someone ran to knock on the door of a neighbor who owned a motorcab. The others helped carry Roger up the narrow way, boarded him on the roofless sidecar of the vehicle, and took him to the hospital. By the time they reached the hospital, more than two hours had passed since the incident. Another hour later, Roger passed away.

JM was not at home when the incident happened, but she learned all about it through her family’s group chat. She rushed home the following morning and found the house in disarray. Her children were at the neighbors’ houses, still too shaken to go back home.

Witnesses told them that the man in the raincoat was accompanied by a lookout who waited at the top of the hill and noted that his motorcycle was

registered to a motor delivery company. To this day, the identities of the two men have not yet been identified.

“Every night, we were scared”

By around eight o’clock in the morning, Roger’s body was returned to his family without having been autopsied. They opted not to have an autopsy because the cost was beyond their means.

Just eight days after the incident, policemen approached Celine, Lady’s older sister. They asked her to sign a Sworn Statement that identified two neighborhood thugs who sold crystal meth as her father’s killers. The Statement said that she was filing a criminal complaint against them. Her name was already printed at the bottom of the page; but Celine had never heard of the two men, nor was she interested in filing any complaint.

Her father had just been violently killed by men who could return at any moment to silence the rest of her family. Filing a complaint was the last thing on her mind. But because the policemen loomed before her with paper in hand, she placed a small signature on top of the bold letters that bore her own name—letters typed out for her by someone else.

At the plaza where the family held his wake, JM noticed heavily built men watching them closely. This continued until the moment they buried him in the cemetery as three similarly unknown men in civilian clothing looked



on from other graves and watched Roger's family and friends mournfully say their goodbyes.

In the months that followed, policemen continued to visit the family's house, asking JM how her family was doing and asking for permission to look around. Without much choice and not wanting to stir up trouble, JM would let them in and let them look around.

Their continued presence planted a fear that remains with JM's children to this day. When asked how she felt in those months, Lady describes how their own home turned into a place of fear. "*Gabi-gabi pong takot, gabi-gabi pong nangangamba na baka balikan po kami, kami 'yong pag-initan.* (Every night, we were scared; every night, we feared that they'd come back for us, turn their anger against us.)" They firmly believe no one else but the police could be blamed for Roger's death.

Knowing all too well that most targets of the drug war are men, her brothers have transferred homes out of fear that they could be killed next. JM laments how all of this has caused her children to splinter off into separate ways.

With Roger gone, JM's children worked to sustain the family. The eldest, who already had a family of his own by the time of the incident, began splitting his wages to help feed his mother and siblings too. Celine was supposed to begin college, but no longer did so she could find work instead. The same thing happened to Lady, who was supposed to begin senior high. Their youngest, who had stopped studying after Grade 3 and who was 15 years old at the time of the incident, began joining his two older brothers in construction work.

Just like everything else that was valuable to the family—their prized possessions, their father, and their peace—the law enforcers had also taken away her children's most viable pathway out of poverty.

“Dapat managot sila”

In March 2025, two years after Roger’s death, Duterte was arrested by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on the charge of crimes against humanity in connection with the war on drugs. Lady’s personal experience has sparked in her a strong opinion on the matter.

“[Sa] nakikita ko po, kailangan niyang pagbayaran ‘yung dami ng namatay. ‘Di naman lahat adik [‘yung] pinatay. [May] nadamay, napagbintangan. ‘Di rin tama yung ginawa niya, (From what I see, he needs to pay for the deaths of all of those who died. Not everyone who was killed was an addict. Some were mistakenly involved, some were wrongfully accused. What he did was wrong.)” she says.

She also firmly believes that killing drug users and pushers is not right. *“Bigyan sana [sila] ng pagkakataon na magbago. Wala nang pag-asang magbago [kung] patay na, (I wish they were given a chance to change. There is no hope for change for someone who is already dead.)”* she says.

Today, all that she and her siblings really want is a quiet and peaceful life without fear. *“Kaya ‘di na rin po kami nagka-interes sa pumatay kasi po baka kami ‘yung balikan. Hindi rin kasi tumitigil ‘yong mga pulis pumasok sa bahay, kaya hindi na rin po...kumbaga humabol sa pumatay kasi baka balikan po kami. (We have no interest in finding out who killed [our father] because we’re scared that they’ll come back for us. The policemen have not stopped visiting us at home. That’s why we haven’t gone after the killer.)”*

Meanwhile, JM has a different perspective. A friend, another woman who was also widowed by the war on drugs, invited her to join the human rights trainings being offered by PhilRights to the families of victims of the war on drugs, and to have Roger’s case documented as well.

JM has come to the understanding that using and selling drugs is common among the poor precisely because of their poverty. *“Yong iba, dahil sa kahirapan nakapit sa pagbebenta dahil malaki ang kita. (Some have been pushed by their poverty to sell drugs because it pays well.)”*

Having learned more about human rights, her resolve has gradually strengthened, as well as her hope for justice.

Despite their different opinions, JM and Lady both firmly believe that the police have to take accountability, not only for Roger's death, but also for the many other violations they have committed. “[*Dapat*] managot ang pulis dahil basta na lang sila may masabi [*na dapat hulihin*] para magpataas ng ranggo kabit ‘di naman gumagawa. Madaanan lang ay hulahulin na, (The police should be held accountable because they arrest innocent people to get promoted in the ranks. They arrest anyone they see along their way.)” Lady says, referring to the alleged arrest quotas for police promotion. “*Pag ‘di pa gaanong puno ang kulungan, nanghuhuli talaga sila*, (When the jails aren’t full, they make sure to catch more people.)” JM adds.

Something can be done

The memory of the incident still cuts deep for JM and Lady. Tears still keep running down their faces as they piece together their family's story. Every now and then, Lady stares off into space with a blank but exhausted expression on her face. It seems she has cried over this countless times by now.



But while she and her family continue to grapple with grief, they know that something can be done.

“Sa mga pamilya na nakaranas nito, kaya niyo ‘yan, lumaban kayo...kung ‘di kayo natatakot, para sa inyong katahimikan ‘yan, (For the families who have experienced this [too], you can do it, you must fight...if you are not afraid, do it for your own peace of mind.)” Lady says.

“Lumabas kayo, magsalita kayo nang alam ng pangulo natin na dapat itigil na ito, (Go out, speak up, so that our president will know that this has to stop.)” says JM.

For their sake and for the sake of the thousands of other victims and their families, justice must be pursued. Justice must prevail.

DISCUSSION

Lulu and JM (who gave these aliases for their own security) were invited by PhilRights to share their stories in this report so that they may shed light on the nature of the drug war under the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations. Not all widows under circumstances like theirs would have accepted this invitation. The danger of police reprisal is still too potent for most families to accept the risk of having their truths published, let alone documented.

In fact, JM and her daughter, Lady, were not on the original list of informants for this chapter. Another family had initially agreed to tell their story. However, just four days before their first interview, the same family notified PhilRights that the policeman who killed their father had just begun patrolling their neighborhood again after a period of being away. They felt that the risk was suddenly too great for them to talk about their experience, and so they politely withdrew their participation that very same day.

This persistent fear is emblematic of the largely unchanging character of the drug war under the three-year-old administration of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Many Filipinos are unaware that the killings continue to this day. They are truly fortunate, because many families have tragically learned for themselves that the President was merely putting on a show.

For their own part, Lulu and JM are also keenly aware of the dangers of having their stories published. No one knows the risk better than they

do, they who have had to battle with fear for years because of what happened to their husbands. Their decision to tell their stories thus speaks of incredible courage, on one hand, and hope, on the other. They do this for their own families and for all other families with experiences like theirs.

The Hands and Feet of the Drug War

Former President Rodrigo Duterte placed the Philippine National Police (PNP) at the helm of his campaign to eradicate illegal drugs in the country. Lulu and JM's stories allow us to see what that has looked like on the ground. Unfortunately, what the police have done in their lives evidences an incompetence that no authority with the license to hold a gun should ever possess.

The police carried out practices that were non-procedural, illegal, and extrajudicial; beyond these, they have also been extortive, tyrannical, and cruel—demonstrating characteristics akin only to those of a notorious criminal syndicate. Most grievous of all is that they have effectively perpetuated the poverty of Lulu and JM's families, disrupted their peace, and assaulted what little safety and stability they once had amidst the daily violation of their economic, social, and cultural rights. Their intimidation and coercion tactics are also clear violations of the families' civil and political rights.

PhilRights believes that these are clear and compelling reasons to argue that not only are our police forces ill-fit to serve and protect the public, but also that, largely because of these officers who

are responsible for implementing it, the so-called war on drugs has become a scourge to the already disadvantaged communities of the Philippines.

A War for Whom?

At the very beginning of his presidency, Duterte swore he would rid the country of all drug dealers and criminals. His approach has patently likened them to a cancer-struck limb he wants to cut off to save the rest of the body, or a pest to be exterminated to save the crop. But this “war” has focused too heavily on individual drug users, most of whom, as will be shown in the next chapter of this report, come from poor communities. To reduce a drug user to a level below human, undeserving of the human rights they were born with, means that the drug war has been flawed at its very core. If it is killing the people rather than saving them, then who is it really for?

As Lulu and JM have pointed out, the use and sale of drugs persist among the poor because the poor need to find ways to cope with the gruelling costs of daily survival. *Kumakapit sa patalim*, as the Filipino saying goes—they cling to the edge of a knife to survive. If the government fails to acknowledge poverty as a root cause of drug addiction among the poor, then it is denying its own accountability on the matter and eluding its obligations to the people.

Therefore, what has been said before must be said again and again: our communities need a holistic approach that regards drug use, especially among the poor, as both a public health issue and a manifestation of poverty, and persons addicted to drugs as individuals who need immediate medical attention and support.

To Hope is to Resist

The following sections of this report will present the data gathered by PhilRights in its project areas from 2017 to 2025. Readers are enjoined to remember and reflect on how each number and percentage provided represents a family similar to Lulu’s and JM’s, who feel the effects of the drug war reverberating loudly in their lives to this day.

These are only representative of the families who have decided to get documented, families who hold on to a hope that they will one day claim justice. There are others who have not spoken up about their own losses—those whose mistrust for the justice system is greater than their sense of hope, and those who have grown exhausted or desensitized by the betrayals of our systems.

But, though they are not yet able to see it, there is hope. It is built at every small instance of defiance—when one family reaches out to another, when they study about their human rights together, when they hone their organizing skills and lead their own communities, when they find that they have grown strong enough to defend each other. Each family that may yet feel alone in their struggle in fact has a community of survivors waiting to welcome them—*samahan ng mga nakabangon na*, as Lulu put it—an organization of survivors who have risen up from the ashes.

What is our role in all of this? Our role is to keep supporting them, to help remove all hindrances that face them, and to amplify their demands. *Samahan natin sila sa bawat hakbang, mula paghihinagpis hanggang paglilitis.*

CHAPTER 2

EVOLVING PATTERNS

The War on Drugs Under a Microscope

FACTS AT A GLANCE

The cases of Antonio and Roger are only two out of the 262 unique cases documented by PhilRights from August 1, 2017 to June 30, 2025 in its project areas in Bulacan, Metro Manila, and Rizal. The total number is expected to rise as PhilRights continues to document cases in these areas, each one a hotspot of drug war killings in the country.

I. PATTERNS OF VICTIMIZATION

A. Number of Recorded Killings by Year

Out of the 262 documented cases, a total of 250 victims,² or an equivalent of 95.42%, were killed during the Duterte administration from June 2016 to May 2022, while a total of 12 victims, or an equivalent of 4.58%, were killed during only the

first three years of the Marcos Jr. administration from 2022 to 2025. Specifically, as of June 30, 2025, the earliest incident documented by PhilRights happened on June 1, 2016, while the latest happened on February 2, 2025.

TABLE 1. Total number of killings documented by PhilRights per year.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	
JAN		11	0	3	3	3	0	1	2	0	23
FEB		8	4	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	17
MAR		8	2	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	14
APR		6	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	10
MAY		8	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	12
JUN	5	13	4	3	0	3	2	0	0	0	30
JUL	12	6	8	1	4	0	2	0	0		33
AUG	13	12	5	2	2	1	0	0	0		35
SEP	14	3	2	2	0	0	1	0	0		22
OCT	16	5	8	3	1	2	1	1	0		37
NOV	6	3	1	1	0	1	0	0	0		12
DEC	12	0	3	2	0	0	0	0	0		17
TOTAL	78	83	41	23	12	12	7	2	3	1	262

² In this section, the term “victim” refers to the person killed by the perpetrator. In the succeeding chapter, its definition has been expanded by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to include the left-behind families or indirect victims.

More than 77% of the documented victims were killed during the first three years of the Duterte administration, from 2016 to 2018, and more than 46% were killed within a year immediately after Duterte first announced his kill policies in his first State of the Nation Address (SONA) in July 2016.

B. Number of Recorded Killings by Time

Out of the 262 EJK victims, 94 were killed between 12:00 AM and 6:00 AM, while 79 were killed between 6:00 PM and 11:59 PM. According to PhilRights' informants—all of whom are relatives of the victims—perpetrators most frequently carry out the killings during the early morning hours or at night to avoid being witnessed.

C. Identities of the Perpetrators

The cases may be classified according to five types of perpetrators:

1. Police officers

Under PhilRights' documentation, alleged extrajudicial killings are categorized as 'having occurred during police operations' if:

- Police officers, whether in official uniform or not, introduced themselves as such during the course of the operation, or
- The police officers acknowledge (to the media or in official records) that the incident was a police operation.

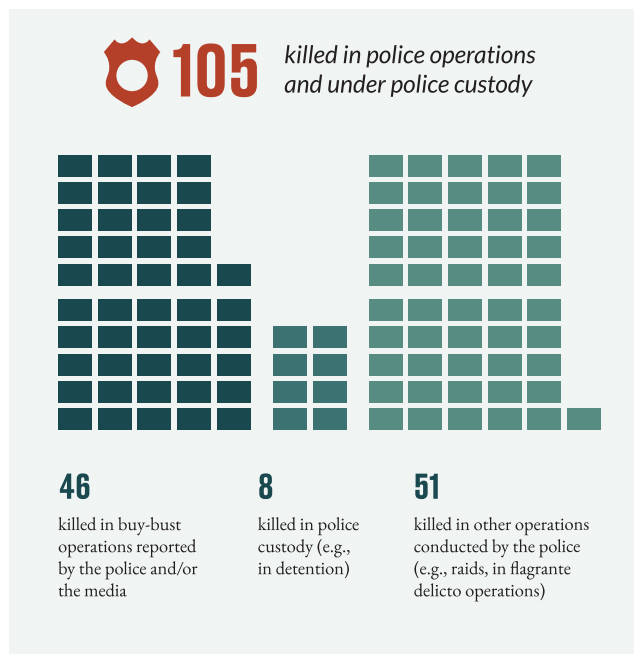


FIGURE 1. Documented extrajudicial killings in police operations and under police custody.

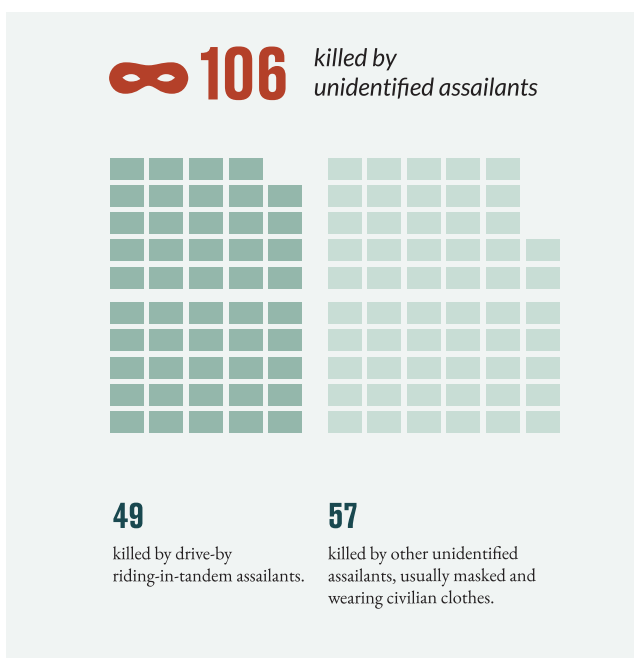


FIGURE 2. Extrajudicial killings with unidentified assailants.

In comparing narratives, there are contradictions between what the police reports state and what the families say about the conduct of the operations. For example, a case may be reported as a buy-bust operation while the family would assert that the police entered their house without any warrant or sufficient acceptable cause. All of the obtained official reports of police operations conflict with the narratives of the families, from the conduct of the operation up to the evidence recovered.

2. Other state agents

The so-called drug war has also been facilitated by local state agents such as the barangay personnel and local village or *purok* leaders. Two victims were documented to have been killed by such local state agents.

3. Unidentified perpetrators believed by informants to be police officers

Apart from police operations, 44 killings were also committed under operations by unidentified perpetrators who, informants believe, are police officers. Informants who witnessed the acts of killing claim that the alleged perpetrators are police officers based on their physical attributes and on the witnesses'/informants' familiarity with police authorities operating within their communities. The presence of patrol cars nearby and/or the immediate arrival of police officers after the killing bolster these suspicions.

4. Unidentified assailants

Another group of alleged perpetrators involves unidentified assailants, killers riding in tandem. The alleged perpetrators of these killings are usually masked and dressed in black or dark-colored clothing. There are also cases with non-police perpetrators who wear civilian clothes and/or do not hide their faces. The majority of the informants and families have stated that they believe that the unidentified assailants have links with State agents. This is consistent with what Amnesty International has revealed in their 2017 report, where they interviewed hired killers who admitted receiving orders to kill from an active-duty police officer.

5. Deaths with no known witnesses and perpetrators

The death of five victims had no witnesses or any supporting documents to indicate any perpetrator. Two (2) of them were said to have died by suicide despite the informants saying they saw signs of foul play on these victims. These victims had also been linked to illegal drugs by local police authorities prior to their deaths.

D. Number of Perpetrators

Informants report varying numbers of alleged perpetrators, ranging from one perpetrator to over 20, regardless of type:

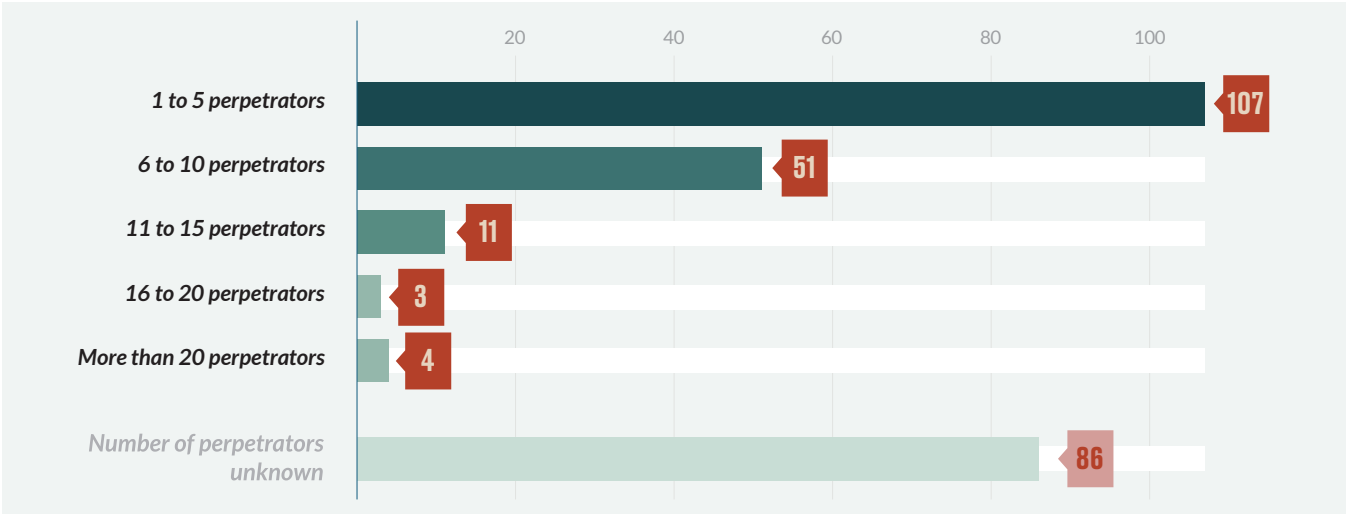


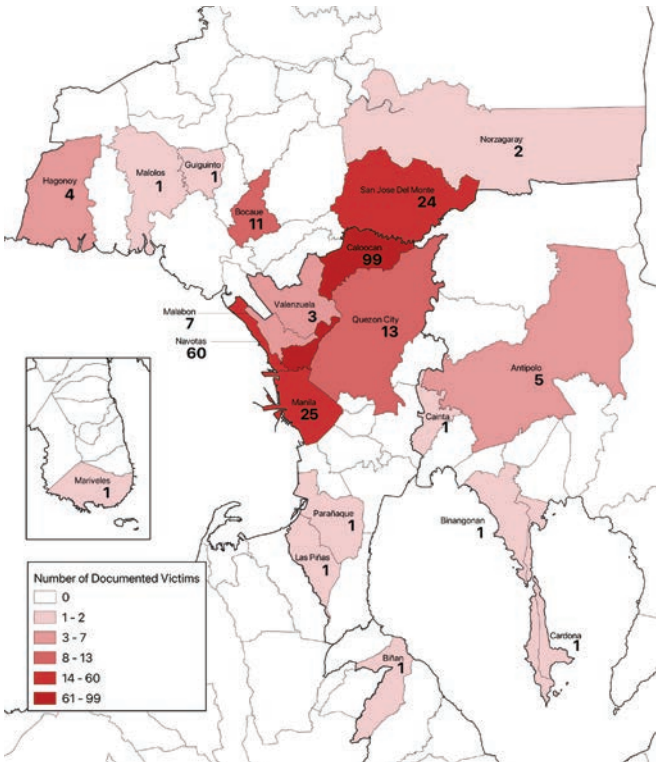
FIGURE 3. Victims and the corresponding number of alleged perpetrators involved in their incidents.

E. Location

Most of the victims were killed and were found dead within the cities/municipalities where they resided.

Similar to the geographic clustering of the victims’ place of residence, most of the killings were also perpetrated in impoverished areas such as the informal settlements of Tondo (Manila), Malabon, Navotas City, relocation sites of Navotas City, and Bulacan, specifically in San Jose del Monte and Bocaue.

Caloocan City has the highest number of documented killings, most of which were carried out in the areas of Bagong Silang and Tala.



MAP 1. Map of Distribution of Documented Killings by City/Municipality (2016-2025).

F. Manner of Killing

Perpetrators employed a variety of methods to kill their victims. (See Figure 4)

During the interviews, informants shared what they regard as signs of torture on the bodies of their relatives who were killed in furtherance of the government's so-called drug war.

32 allegedly bore signs of torture, including:

- Beatings and bruises
- Mutilated body parts
- Broken limbs
- Missing fingernails
- Burn marks
- Cuts and wounds
- Body parts wrapped in adhesive tape
- Asphyxiation

G. Number of Gunshot Wounds

Gunshot wounds are counted individually regardless of whether they are entry or exit wounds. On average, a victim sustained three to four gunshot wounds. Sixty-two (62) victims sustained five or more gunshot wounds.

Of the 243 victims killed with guns, 40 died from a single gunshot wound and 203 sustained multiple gunshot wounds:³



FIGURE 4. Methods employed in killing the victims.

- 51 victims sustained gunshot wounds in the head and neck.
- 84 victims sustained gunshot wounds in the trunk which includes shoulders, chest, back, and abdomen.
- 14 victims sustained gunshot wounds in the upper extremities which include arms and hands.
- 17 victims sustained gunshot wounds in the lower extremities which include thighs and lower legs.
- No information on the location of wounds of 126 victims

³ The sum does not equate to 243 victims killed with guns because the majority of victims sustained multiple gunshot wounds.

One victim had 20 gunshot wounds. He died in an operation that informants allege was conducted by perpetrators believed to be police officers in Plaridel, Bulacan. Firing more than one bullet to stop the target from running away or from resisting the arresting police officers is already indicative of undue force.

The use of excessive force is not allowed as stipulated in Rule 7 (Use of Force during Police Operations) of the Revised Philippine National Police Operational Procedures. Rule 7 also specifies the factors to consider in the reasonableness of the force employed, which include the number of aggressors, nature and characteristics of the weapon used, physical condition, size, and other circumstances to include the place and location of the assault. Based on the narratives of the informants who were present during the time of killings, the circumstances did not warrant the use of excessive force.

H. Other Violations Against the Victims

1. Illegal searching, ransacking, and confiscation of properties

Eleven (11) of the cases involved warrantless (i.e., illegal) police search operations prior to the killing, all of which were characterized by the ransacking of the victims' homes and properties.

Thirty-five (35) victims had their personal properties, such as cash and cellular phones, missing and confiscated after the killings, and 18 of them were killed in police operations.

2. Issuance of threats, harassment, and intimidation of families after the incident

Forty-four (44) families of victims experienced threats, harassment, and intimidation by police officers for months, and in some cases, years after the incident. The fear of reprisal from the perpetrators and other actors involved in the killing has discouraged these families from filing complaints and taking other measures to secure justice for their loved ones.

3. Falsification of the Cause of Death

These are the causes of death, as written, among the available 94 death certificates of documented victims; Sixty-two (62) victims had “gunshot wounds”, “multiple gunshot wounds”, “gunshot”, or “gunshot wound” with body part/s as the cause of death in their death certificates.

Other death certificates show incorrect or incomplete causes of death:⁴

With erroneous and insufficient details on the causes of deaths, families will find it difficult to use the death certificates as documentary evidence in legal cases.

Some families of victims said that they resorted to agreeing with stating the incorrect cause of death, as suggested by the funeral parlors, to hasten the processing of the bodies.

TABLE 2. Falsification of death certificates.

INDICATED CAUSE OF DEATH	NUMBER
"Cardiac arrest", "heart attack", "(acute) myocardial infarction", with no stated underlying cause	10
"Shooting incident"	7
"Pneumonia"	3
"Asphyxia" and "asphyxia with strangulation"	2
"Acute respiratory distress syndrome", with no stated underlying cause	1
"Dead-on-Arrival", with no stated underlying cause	1
"Blunt traumatic injuries"	1
"Hypertension"	1
"Septic shock, anemia, multiple skin infections"	1

4. Involvement of Funeral Parlors

The surge in killings has been generally beneficial for funeral parlors, especially those that are accredited by the PNP Crime Laboratory.

One hundred twenty-seven (127) victims were involved in incidents wherein the funeral parlors were called in by the police officers to collect the bodies, and were immediately present at the sites of killing.

The families of 53 victims struggled to pay for the services of the funeral parlors. On average, families were required to pay around Php 40,000 for funeral services, which may include the transfer of the bodies for processing in the funeral parlors preferred by the families.

Some families reported that they were asked by the SOCO to pay around Php 45,000 before they could retrieve the body. They were told that the payment was for the processing of the body, conduct of poorly done autopsies, embalming, wakes, and burials.

A victim's family was forced to use a barangay vehicle for the funeral procession after failing to complete the payment demanded by the funeral parlor. Families who failed to complete the payment were often met with various forms of harassment and threats.

⁴ Causes of death for 5 victims were not identified, illegible, or had a missing page in their death certificates.

II. THE VICTIMS

A. Demographics

The documented victims were mostly male adults within the productive age range, family breadwinners, low- and irregular-wage earners from the informal sectors of the economy, of low educational attainment, and residents of urban poor communities.

1. Sex, Gender, and Age

Most of the documented victims were male adults. Two hundred forty-seven (247) were males (two of whom identified as members of the LGBTQIA+, according to their families), while 15 were females.

2. Occupation and Income

Two hundred thirty-five (235) were earners and most of them had low-earning jobs. Among these, 161 had variable incomes and only 65 had fixed incomes. The remaining nine had no information on whether they earned variable or fixed incomes.

The mean daily income of victims with a single source of income was around Php 422.00. This was usually earned after engaging in manual labor for a minimum of eight hours per day. The mean daily income of victims with multiple sources of income (si.e., multiple occupations) was around Php 574.00. Most of the victims—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.

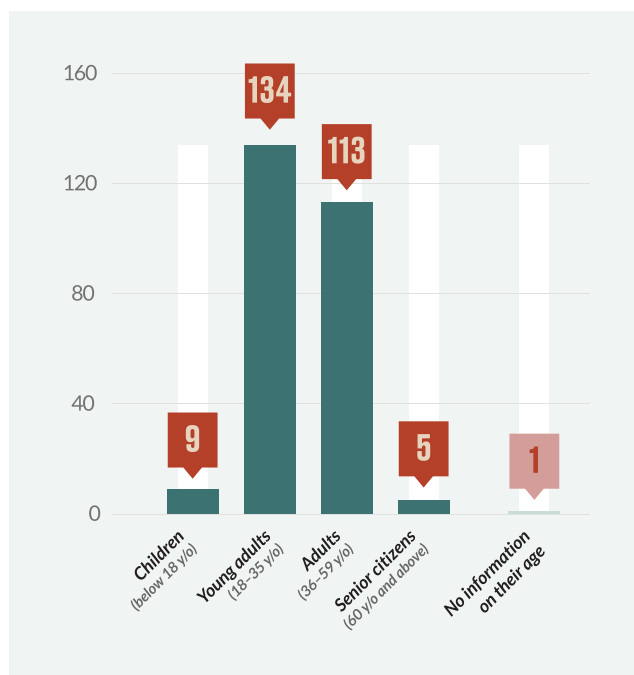


FIGURE 5. Age of documented drug war victims.

TABLE 3. Victims' sources of income.

JOB OCCUPATION	NUMBER OF VICTIMS
Construction Workers / House Painters / Carpenters / Electricians / Linemen	60
Transport Workers (Drivers / Driver's Assistants / Dispatchers / Cargo Workers / Boat Workers)	50
Fisherfolk / Fishport Workers	24
Vendors and Owners of Small Businesses (e.g., piggery, sari-sari store)	23
Garbage Collectors / Scavengers	13
Child Laborers	5
Porters / Kargador	4
Law Enforcers	2
Security Guards	2
Other Occupations (e.g., junk shop staff, house caretaker, messenger, mechanic, appliance and gadget repair technician, rice mill worker, manicurist)	23
Multiple Occupations (e.g., porter and fisherfolk, errand boy and tricycle driver, dishwasher and fish vendor)	29

Victims of the non-wage occupation category include seven (7) students, four (4) housewives, and nine (9) unemployed.

There is no information on the occupation of seven (7) victims.

Out of the 235 victims with known occupations, 205 had sources of income that were completely known by the informants. The remaining 30 had sources of income that were unknown to the informants.

Those who were self-employed (vendors, tricycle and jeepney drivers, scavengers, manicurists, boatmen, repair persons, independent fisherfolk, clothes washer) had fluctuating incomes, ranging from Php 70.00- Php 800.00 a day, depending on their sales, fish catch, or in the case of public transport drivers, the number of trips made.

On average, the victim contributed around 56.86% of their respective household incomes.

One hundred three (103 or 50.24%) of the 205 victims with fully known income were primary income earners, who contributed more than 50% of the total household income.



FIGURE 6. Victims who were primary income earners in their families.

3. Educational Attainment

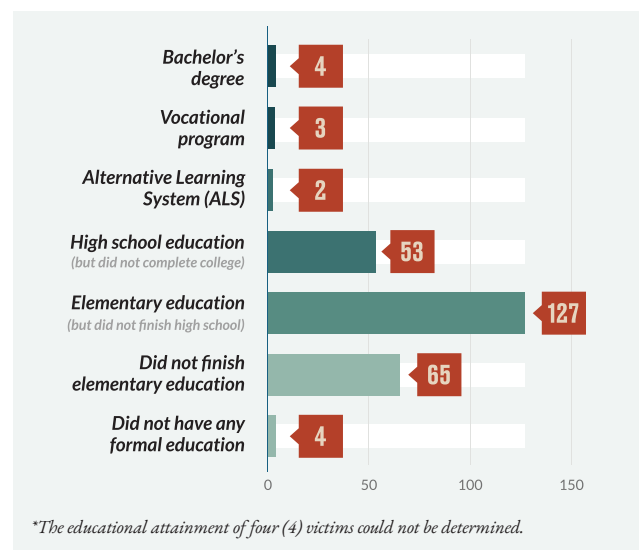


FIGURE 7. Victim's educational attainment,

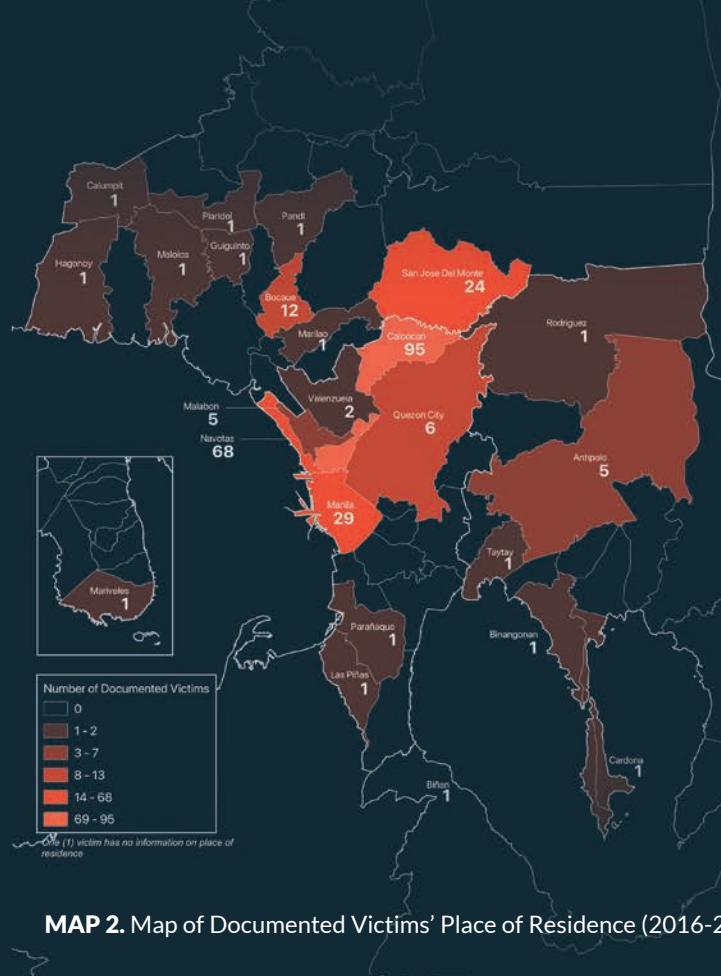
4. Civil Status



FIGURE 8. Civil status of victims.

5. Dependents

On average, a victim had three (3) dependents. Among the children left behind, 349 lost at least one of their parents due to the drug war. Three (3) children lost both parents.



MAP 2. Map of Documented Victims' Place of Residence (2016-2025).

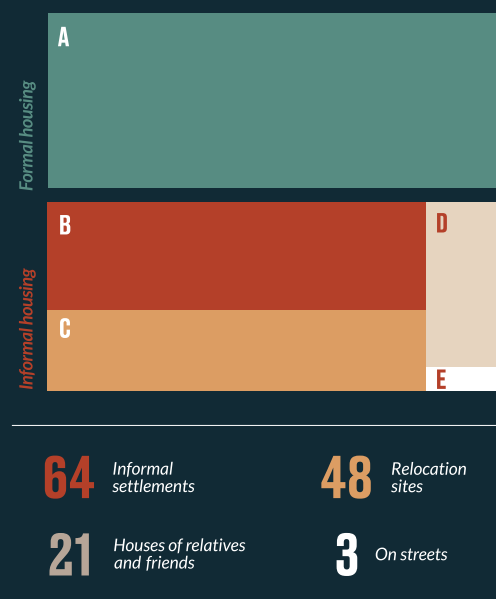


FIGURE 9. Victims' Place of Residence.

6. Place of Residence

Most of the victims documented were residents of urban poor communities who did not own their dwellings. Collectively, 51.91% of the 262 resided in informal settlements, relocation sites, houses of relatives and friends, and public thoroughfares (streets).

Most of the documented victims lived in the cities of Caloocan (36.26%), Navotas (25.95%), and Manila (11.07%). Caloocan and Manila are also

the cities with the highest incidents of alleged extrajudicial killings according to the figures released in July 2018 by the Ateneo Policy Center (APC), based on the media and online data they collected (with Manila having 23.2% of all media-reported extrajudicial killings in the country and Caloocan having 18.7%).⁵ Outside Metro Manila, the City of San Jose del Monte in Bulacan tops the list in the number of victims documented by PhilRights.

⁵ Clarissa C. David, Ronald U. Mendoza, Jenna Mae L. Atun, Radxaneel Peviluar N. Cossid, and Cheryl Ruth R. Soriano, "The Philippines' Anti-Drug Campaign: Building a Dataset of Publicly-Available Information on Killings Associated with The Anti-Drug Campaign," Ateneo School of Government, accessed July 12, 2023, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3201814.

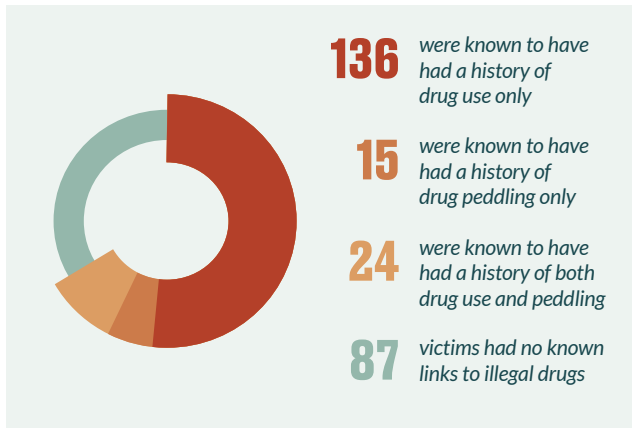


FIGURE 10. Victim's alleged link to illegal drugs.

7. Alleged Links to Illegal Drugs

Informants were asked whether they had knowledge of the victim's involvement with illegal drugs, whether as a user or as a peddler. Their answers have yielded the following data:

According to their families, the nature of the victims' work was a contributing factor for those with known histories of using drugs. There were truck drivers, for example, who, according to their families, used illegal drugs to help them stay awake

during long drives. Fisherfolk victims were also said to use illegal drugs to keep them awake during the night-long fishing in the sea. Some victims were influenced by their co-workers to use illegal drugs. Many others were using drugs in small amounts only to alleviate their hunger as their meager incomes were not sufficient to buy enough food.

Some of the documented victims were engaged in street-level illegal drugs trade ("pushers") due to the lack of livelihood opportunities. However, their families have also stated that the victims' earnings from street-level peddling is minimal.

Eighty-seven (87) victims had no known links to illegal drugs. Four (4) of these victims are believed by their families to have been killed under the *palit-ulo* scheme, or the practice of intentionally killing a victim in place of the actual target to fulfill the goals of the operation or quota. Further, there are 19 victims of mistaken identity, those who were only killed by accident during operations targeting other persons.

III. OTHER GROSS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Aside from EJKs, PhilRights has also documented other gross violations such as frustrated EJKs, illegal arrests and arbitrary detention that did not result in the death of the victims, and enforced disappearances that happened from June 2016 until June 2025.

TABLE 4. Summary of other human rights violations documented from June 2016 until June 2025.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS	NUMBER OF CASES
Frustrated EJKs	7
Illegal Arrests and Arbitrary Detention	195
Enforced Disappearance	11

1. Frustrated EJKs

Seven (7) victims of alleged frustrated extrajudicial killings were documented. Two (2) victims, together with their families, sought sanctuary for their protection; one (1) of them decided to return to their community. The other victims relocated to the provinces or went into hiding.

2. Illegal Arrests and Arbitrary Detention

One hundred ninety-five (195) victims of illegal arrests and arbitrary detention who were not killed under the drug war have also been documented. Amidst the claim of the government that they have brought the drug suspects before the law through arrests and encouragement of “voluntary surrender,” unlawful acts are still being committed. These acts violate the rights of the accused. An illegal arrest and arbitrary detention is characterized by any of the following:

- Having no warrant, except for crimes in *flagrante delicto*
- Harassment, torture, and sexual abuse
- Not informing of and disrespecting the Miranda rights of the accused; forcing the accused to self-incriminate or plead guilty to the crime
- Withholding the necessary information on the cause of arrest and detention and the identities of the arresting officers
- Forcing the accused to give their personal information and fingerprints and be taken with mugshots without undergoing the proper procedures
- Blindfolding and the use of improvised handcuffs
- Arresting officers not wearing a uniform and without proper identification
- Improper chain of custody
- Use of unofficial vehicles
- Detention without permission to seek legal counsel
- Extortion
- Arrest of a minor/child below the age of criminal responsibility
- Other acts not permitted by the police guidelines and by the law

One hundred forty-seven (147) of the victims were males and 48 were females.

Six (6) were children (17 years old and below), 99 were young adults (18-35 years old), 80 were adults (36-59 years old), and three (3) were elderly (60 years old and above). The ages of seven (7) victims could not be identified.

The youngest documented victim of illegal arrest and arbitrary detention was only four years old.

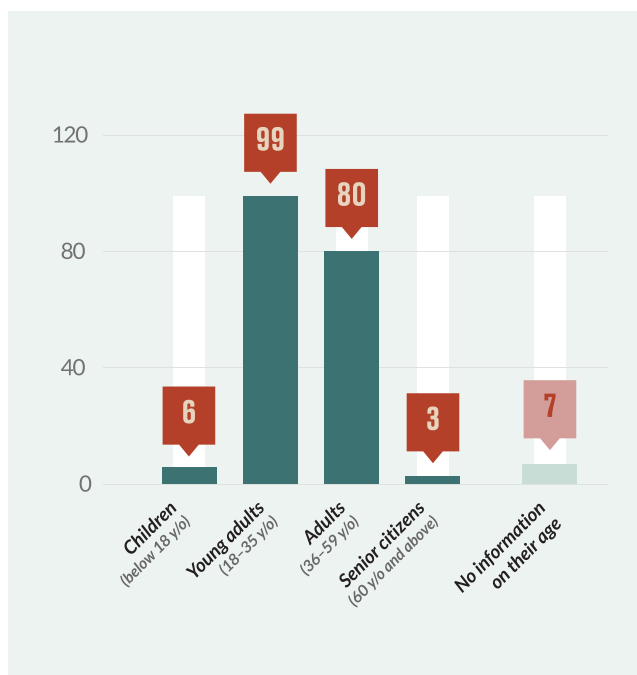


FIGURE 11. Ages of victims of illegal arrests.

Some of the victims also experienced confiscation of their personal properties during the conduct of the arrest.

THE DRUG WAR STEMS FROM AND FOSTERS SOCIAL INJUSTICE

The documentation efforts of PhilRights reveal that the anti-drug campaigns of both the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations have indeed targeted the poor. The drug war anchors its roots in the persisting social injustice that denies the poor their right to a dignified life. The perpetration of these violations took advantage of their precarious socioeconomic situations.

The stories of Antonio and Roger's families, along with the hundreds of others represented in this

3. Enforced Disappearance

Eleven (11) alleged victims of enforced disappearance were documented. All of them have not been found as of this writing.

Nine (9) of the victims were males and two (2) were females.

A female victim was allegedly last seen during a police operation while the other female victim was known to be in a police station, visiting her detained friend when she disappeared.

One (1) victim was below 18 years old, six (6) were young adults (18-35 years old), and three (3) were adults (36-59 years old). There is no information on the age of one (1) victim.

Instead of being assisted, families of victims of enforced disappearance were often instructed by the police officers they approached to look for their family members in funeral parlors.

report, unveil the lingering consequences of the fake drug war on the lives of the defenseless and vulnerable.

The purpose of this report is not to evoke pity from the readers, but to amplify the voices of the victims. Their calls for genuine justice and accountability were ignored by the Duterte administration. As we shall see in the next section, legal mechanisms under the Marcos Jr. administration has undergone some changes, yet it largely remains inaccessible.

THE FIRST THREE YEARS

of the Duterte Administration compared to the BBM Administration

This section will further explore the previously discussed modalities through a comparative analysis of the first three years in power of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and former President Rodrigo Duterte. PhilRights’ analysis is based on the findings of our monitoring and documentation efforts from 2017 to the present.

Our methodology operationalizes “monitoring and documentation” in accordance with the Minnesota Protocol⁶ to investigate potentially unlawful deaths related to the drug war. That is, our monitoring and documentation efforts primarily focus on state-perpetrated killings, referred to in this report as extrajudicial killings (EJKs). Other gross human rights violations, including illegal arrest and arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearance, and harassment, are also included in our documentation as these violations have occurred in conjunction with EJKs.

The information obtained through our efforts comes from interviews with victims, families, and witnesses and is checked against media reports, police records, death certificates, and other sources of information. The geographical scope of our monitoring and documentation efforts covers Metro Manila, particularly Manila, Caloocan,

Malabon, Navotas, Valenzuela, and Quezon City; Bulacan, and Rizal.

Our analysis highlights both presidents’ first three years as their most defining pronouncements regarding the drug war have been made during this period, and are reflected in the evolving drug war modalities and figures of their time. Most notably, Duterte’s drug war peaked during his first three years, per our documentation efforts. This drew backlash at the domestic and international levels and pushed Duterte to withdraw the Philippines from the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Consequently, the victims included in this analysis fall within the ICC’s jurisdiction. By examining Duterte’s first three years—representative of alleged crimes against humanity—alongside Marcos Jr.’s administration to date, this analysis aims to demonstrate the enduring and consistent character of the drug war.

EJKs and Other Rights Violations Continue

Extrajudicial killings, illegal arrests, enforced disappearances, torture, and other gross human rights violations mark Marcos Jr.’s drug war—three years into the administration’s persistent claims

⁶ The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016).

of a better, “bloodless and holistic”⁷ anti-drugs strategy. From his installment in 2022, Marcos Jr. positioned himself as a champion of a renewed rights-based anti-narcotics strategy “geared towards community-based treatment, rehabilitation, education and reintegration.”⁸ However, these pronouncements do not translate to action as the Philippine National Police—the same police said to be responsible for 57.78% of extrajudicial killings in PhilRights’ partner communities during Duterte’s first three years—is still “at the forefront of the crusade”⁹ against illegal drugs.

As of May 2025, 41.67% of extrajudicial killings in PhilRights’ partner communities were said to be perpetrated by the police in and out of police operations. This is based on our monitoring and documentation efforts covering the period 2022–2025 and reflects a 16.11% reduction in killings perpetrated by the police compared to the same period under the Duterte administration. A mere reduction in numbers, however, is not what a

lofty “rights-based and public health approach” espouses.¹⁰

In fact, reports from PhilRights’ partner communities describe the current iteration of the drug war as “tactical” in its use of harassment in perpetuating covert drug-related killings. Community monitors also report how cases of extrajudicial killings are likely underreported, as EJK hotspots are still highly policed and are thus impenetrable. As such, three years on and Marcos Jr.’s drug war is clearly neither “bloodless” nor “non-adherent to extermination.”¹¹

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

Marcos Jr.’s “human-rights-based”¹² anti-illegal drugs campaign claims to “focus on supply and demand reduction efforts and rehabilitation”¹³ where high-value targets and big-time suspects are prioritized. As the president famously claimed in 2022, he is “not interested” in small-time pushers¹⁴—alluding to a systemic drug neutralization outlook focused on addressing the “supply of drugs, the system of

⁷ “Bloodless Campaign against Illegal Drugs Working – PBBM,” News Releases, Presidential Communications Office, April 16, 2024, https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/bloodless-campaign-against-illegal-drugs-working-pbbm/.

⁸ “PBBM Pushes for ‘a New Face’ to Campaign vs. Illegal Drugs,” News Releases, Presidential Communications Office, July 24, 2023, https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/pbbm-pushes-for-a-new-face-to-campaign-vs-illegal-drugs/.

⁹ Christopher Lloyd Caliwan, “PBBM’s 1st 100 Days: Less Bloody, More Holistic Drug War,” Presidential Communications Office, October 5, 2022, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1185235>.

¹⁰ “Philippines embarks on drug policy reform: multi-stakeholder summit launched in Manila,” United Nations: UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, April 16, 2024. <https://www.unodc.org/roseap/en/philippines/2024/04/drug-policy-summit/story.html>.

¹¹ “Extermination was never part of drug war strategy—PBBM,” Presidential Communications Office, July 22, 2024. https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/extermination-was-never-part-of-drug-war-strategy-pbbm/.

¹² Filane Mikee Cervantes, “Rights-Based Approach Defines PBBM’s Anti-Drug Drive – Napolcom,” Philippine News Agency, June 5, 2024, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1226317>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Dona Pazzibugan, “Focus on drug lords, not small fry – President Marcos,” Philippine Daily Inquirer, September 25, 2022, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1669814/marcos-focus-on-drug-lords-not-small-fry>.

distribution, [and] the system of importation.”¹⁵ However, due to the dismal results of the 2025 midterm elections, Marcos Jr.’s directives backslide and now orders the police to return to “grassroots drug operations”,¹⁶ targeting small-time users.

Contrary to Marcos Jr.’s claims, however, operations were never primarily focused on high-value targets, and PhilRights’ partner communities continue to report flawed police operations targeting suspected small-time users. As our figures reveal, while drug-related human rights violations have decreased by 76% over the past three years compared to Duterte’s first three years, violations against those linked to the drug trade as small-time users have increased, with illegal arrests accounting for the majority of these abuses.

Reports from community monitors¹⁷ attribute this surge in drug use to heightened socioeconomic insecurity during the first three years of the Marcos Jr. administration—fewer stable, livable-income jobs have pushed more people into small-time drug peddling, and those working grueling, long hours, labor-intensive jobs resort to drug use to stay awake amidst suppressed hunger and exhaustion.

The socioeconomic backgrounds of victims from both periods further underscore how low-income populations in urban poor communities remain targeted in police operations. Construction workers, individuals engaged in various informal

TABLE 5. Drug-related human rights violations during the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations.

	DUTERTE (2016-2019)	MARCOS (2022-2025)	PERCENT CHANGE
HRV Cases	323	76	-76%
Share of cases with links to the drug trade as users	23%	34%	+11%
Share of Illegal Arrests (users)	23%	79%	+56%

TABLE 6. Occupations of victims of drug-related HRVs during the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations.

OCCUPATION	DUTERTE (2016-2019)	MARCOS (2022-2025)	PERCENT CHANGE
Construction workers	22%	38%	+16%
Informal workers	50%	22%	-28%
Fisheries and agricultural work	5%	27%	+22%

sector jobs, and fisherfolk in Metro Manila’s port and coastal communities—occupations commonly undertaken by men in their productive years—have consistently borne the brunt of the drug war from the Duterte administration to the present.

Moreover, the stark difference in the average daily income of victims between the two periods is notable, as it further reflects not only how the poorest of the poor are targeted, but also how these breadwinners’ incomes continue to plunge amidst the growing number of people they have to support.

¹⁵ Caliwan, “PBBM’s 1st 100 Days.”

¹⁶ Katrina Domingo, “‘Focus ulit sa small-time’: Marcos Jr. pivots to ‘grassroots’ drug operations,” ABS-CBN News, May 20, 2025, <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/nation/2025/5/20/marcos-says-to-focus-again-on-small-time-drug-pushers-1511>.

¹⁷ PhilRights keeps watch of the human rights situation in its partner communities through community monitors. Reports from community monitors mentioned in this report reflect our monitors’ latest observations in their communities through focus group discussions conducted this 2025.

It is also worth noting that the share of illegal arrest and arbitrary detention cases in comparison to all drug-related human rights violations¹⁸ has increased by 55.69%—from 23% of the total during Duterte’s first three years to 79% of the total so far during Marcos Jr.’s first three years. Its evolving motives and effects will be discussed further below.

Lastly, the steep 85% decrease in average daily income not only reflects the harsh socioeconomic realities under the Marcos Jr. administration. It is also reflective of the unchanging face of the drug war, whose victims come largely from those in the most vulnerable sections of society—construction workers, fisherfolk, and those who work various odd and informal jobs whose employment and daily income are most precarious.

Effecting Necessary Force

Marcos Jr. claims that his administration’s “aggressive” yet “intelligence-based”¹⁹ drug war is not just devoid of killings and is systemic in its methods. He also asserts that the overall campaign against illegal drugs places “a strong emphasis on non-violent methods.”²⁰ PNP Chief Gen. Rodolfo Azurin Jr. extends this claim to the renewed objective of drug-related police operations—official directive to the police is to apply the “barest

TABLE 7. Average daily income and dependents of victims of drug-related HRV during the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations.

	DUTERTE (2016-2019)	MARCOS (2022-2025)	PERCENT CHANGE
Income	Php 846	Php 455	-85%
Dependents (average)	2.8	3	+0.2%

minimum application of reasonable and necessary force”²¹ in effecting arrests.

Our documentation efforts, however, reveal a different picture. Firstly, a significant share of extrajudicial killings and illegal arrests still occur in the context of police operations. While EJKs perpetrated under police operations have dipped over the past three years, illegal arrests have increased.

Although Marcos Jr.’s figures are lower than Duterte’s, they account only for killings and arrests officially linked to police operations. A significant share of extrajudicial killings and illegal arrests are still carried out by police outside the purview of official operations.²² Notably, EJKs perpetrated outside of these formal operations have increased sharply over the past three years. This is notable as it reveals how EJKs continue to be perpetrated while circumventing Marcos Jr.’s official directives.

¹⁸ “Drug-related human rights violations” refers to acts of state-perpetrated violence committed against individuals alleged to be involved in the drug trade, either as users or peddlers.

¹⁹ Caliwan, “PBBM’s 1st 100 Days.”

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Under PhilRights’ documentation, violations are categorized as “having occurred during police operations” if: a) Police authorities, whether in official uniform or not, introduced themselves as such during the course of the operation. b) The police authorities acknowledge (to the media or in official records) that the incident was a police operation.

TABLE 8. Violations carried out within police operations.²³

	DUTERTE (2016-2019)	MARCOS (2022-2025)	PERCENT CHANGE
EJKs carried out in police operations	39.56%	16.67%	-22.89
Illegal arrests carried out in police operations	3.95%	8.20%	+4.25

TABLE 9. Drug-related police perpetrated²⁴ violations outside police operations.

	DUTERTE (2016-2019)	MARCOS (2022-2025)	PERCENT CHANGE
EJK by the police outside police operations	1.33%	16.7%	+15.37%
Killed under police custody	1.78%	8.3%	+6.52
Illegal arrests outside police operations	96.05%	54.10%	-41.95%

Brutality during police operations also remains pervasive, even when victims were simply going about their daily lives, far from any confrontation. Both killings and illegal arrests continue to be perpetrated casually by the police. Other violations during the incidents also arose, as 50% of EJK victims bore signs of torture and 20% of illegal arrest cases reported being psychologically tortured—both in the first three years of the Marcos Jr. administration.

The extent of brutality inflicted on victims is underscored by the average number of perpetrators

involved in these violations. While the number of perpetrators in extrajudicial killings has dipped over the past three years, the present figure still illustrates the excessive force tied to the killing of individuals, who at the time of their killings were predominantly occupied with the calmness of their daily routines.

This violence extends to the conduct of illegal arrests as the number of perpetrators in these operations has only increased over the past three years.

TABLE 10. The activities the victims were doing at the time of the killing.

	DUTERTE (2016-2019)	MARCOS (2022-2025)	PERCENT CHANGE
Resting or sleeping	41.57	50%	+8.43%
Socializing	29.21%	0%	-29.21%
Working	6.74%	0%	-6.74%
Doing chores and running errands	8.99%	50%	+41.01

TABLE 11. The activities the victims were doing at the time of arrest.

	DUTERTE (2016-2019)	MARCOS (2022-2025)	PERCENT CHANGE
Socializing and Leisure	100%	20%	-80%
In Transit	0%	20%	+20%
Working	0%	20%	+20%
Doing chores and running errands	0%	20%	+20%

²³ The percentages may not total 100%. This discrepancy arises because certain interviewees were uncertain or unable to recall details accurately at the time of questioning.

²⁴ “Police-perpetrated” violations refer to human rights violations committed by uniformed personnel in and out of official police operations.

TABLE 12. Average Number of Police Perpetrators in Police Operations Involving EJKs.

DUTERTE (2016-2019)	MARCOS (2022-2025)	PERCENT CHANGE
7.4	3	-59.5%

TABLE 13. Average Number of Police Perpetrators in Police Operations Involving Illegal Arrests.

DUTERTE (2016-2019)	MARCOS (2022-2025)	PERCENT CHANGE
6	7.5	+25%

TABLE 14. Manner of killing.

	DUTERTE (2016-2019)	MARCOS (2022-2025)	PERCENT CHANGE
Gunshots alone	91.01%	100%	+8.99%
Gunshots with intermediate causes	4.49%	0%	-4.49%
Asphyxiation	2.25%	0%	-2.25%

TABLE 15. Recurring police threats after the incident.

DUTERTE (2016-2019)	MARCOS (2022-2025)	PERCENT CHANGE
22.57%	0%	-22.57%

Killings have also become more straightforward. All killings in the Marcos Jr. drug war were executed by gunshots alone. In both periods, victims were killed by an average of 5 gunshots. Killings in the current period have also evolved to be swifter as compared to the first three years of the Duterte administration, where 38.20% of EJK cases report other violations against family members during the killing, whereas none have been reported in the context of the current drug war.

Police threats against family members after the incidents have also dipped during the first three years of the Marcos Jr. administration. This indicates the embeddedness of impunity in drug-related human rights violations as the mere perpetuation of the violence beyond the Duterte administration is enough to deter some families from seeking justice. Thus, recurring police threats that seek to silence them have significantly lessened in the past three years.

These figures fit well into the framework of Duterte’s drug war, as the actual nature of the violations has not changed; only the figures have. The 22.89% decrease in extrajudicial killings during police operations in the present administration may be noted in these figures. However, this does not attest to the drug war’s apparent sanitization, as fatalities still occur under gruesome and brutal conditions.

The average number of police perpetrators in these killings remains high, especially given the victims’ ordinary activities at the time of the incidents. An average of three officers deployed to kill victims who were simply going about their day starkly contradicts Marcos Jr.’s repeated claims of keeping violence in police operations at bay.

In this regard, the Marcos Jr. administration misses the mark by a mile as lower figures do not mean the success of the ‘crusade’ against drugs. However steep the reduction in figures may be, these numbers still translate to the loss of lives resulting from the perpetuation of a policy geared towards the indictment and extermination of the poor.

SHIFTING PATTERNS, ENDURING VIOLENCE

Geographical Trends in Partner Communities

From July 2022 to May 2025, PhilRights has documented a total of 77 cases of drug-related human rights violations across its network of partner communities in Metro Manila, Bulacan, and Rizal. Cases of extrajudicial killings constitute 15.58% of all violations. Across our partner communities, NCR and Bulacan saw a decrease in documented EJKs, while Rizal saw an increase over the first three years of the Marcos Jr. administration compared with Duterte’s first three years.

Caloocan City remains the top hotspot for killings, accounting for 33% of all fatalities in the region. Partner community monitors validate these figures, noting that killings in Bagong Silang have reportedly not abated. They have merely taken on a new form—one where the police continue to be shielded from accountability. This translates to the prevalence of killings outside the purview of formal police operations in the current drug war, with vigilantes—whom community members claim to be merely police in civilian clothes—now primarily involved.

Vigilante-related killings account for 25% of all documented killings thus far in the Marcos Jr. administration and constitute the largest share of perpetrators, only next to the police in the context of police operations. This parallels our

TABLE 16. Share of extrajudicial killings documented by PhilRights per region.

	DUTERTE (2016-2019)	MARCOS (2022-2025)	PERCENT CHANGE
Metro Manila	80.89%	75%	-5.89%
Bulacan	16.44%	8.33%	-8.11%
Rizal	2.67%	8.33%	+5.66%

TABLE 17. Extrajudicial killings in Caloocan City.

HOTSPOT	DUTERTE (2016-2019)	MARCOS (2022-2025)	PERCENT CHANGE
Caloocan	37.33%	33.33%	-4%

TABLE 18. Share of Type of Perpetrator for EJKs.

PERPETRATOR	DUTERTE (2016-2019)	MARCOS (2022-2025)	PERCENT CHANGE
Police	57.78%	16.67%	-41.11%
Believed to be the police	1.33%	16.67%	15.34%
Vigilante	40.44%	25.00%	-15.44

prior observation above that EJKs during the first three years of the Marcos Jr. administration are perpetrated outside police operations.

The current narrative on extrajudicial killings has also evolved from the Duterte administration’s

*nanlaban*²⁵ scapegoat. None of PhilRights’ documented cases of extrajudicial killings across all partner communities have reported its usage since the Marcos Jr. administration started in 2022. Unshielded by official directives that embolden them to kill, the police have reportedly become ‘tactical’ in their actions.

Monitors from Navotas, which accounts for 11.11% of all killings in the region, report the sinister ways police circumvent accountability for drug-related killings—suicides are either staged or triggered through persistent harassment, while other deaths are framed as freak accidents during investigations.

One emblematic case of harassment, which led to the suicide of the victim, started as a case of illegal arrest as the victim, a fisherfolk, was on his way home from the day’s catch. The victim was tortured, his day’s earnings seized, and warned that he would not make it out alive the next time the police saw him outside. The sheer terror this posed to the victim led to his suicide on Christmas Eve of 2024.

Beyond extrajudicial killings, cases of illegal arrest and arbitrary detention constitute 79.22% of all violations. The share of cases in the National Capital Region and Bulacan has decreased over the past three years compared with the Duterte administration’s first three years. However, the top hotspot remains San Jose del Monte, Bulacan.

Moreover, there has been a notable upsurge in cases of illegal arrest in Rizal. These figures are comparable to those recorded during the Duterte administration’s first three years as hotspots, then continue to be hotspots in the current drug war.

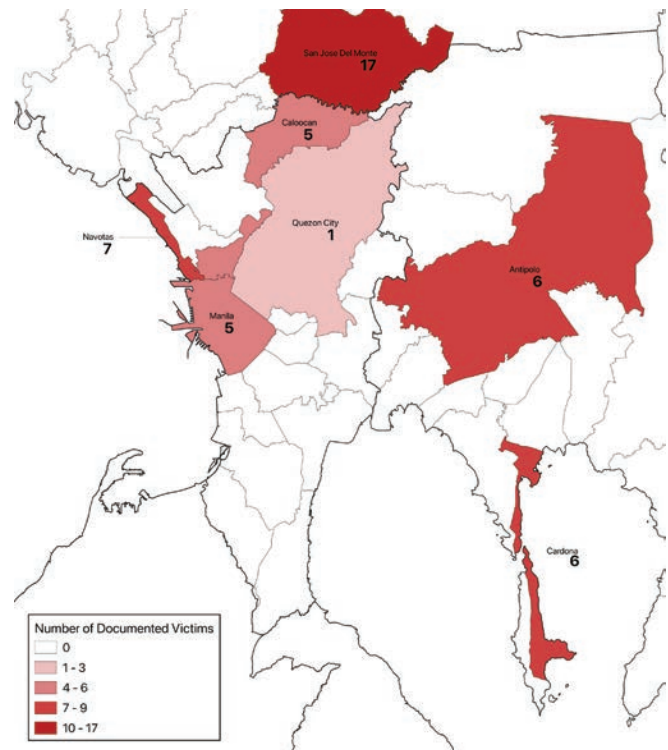
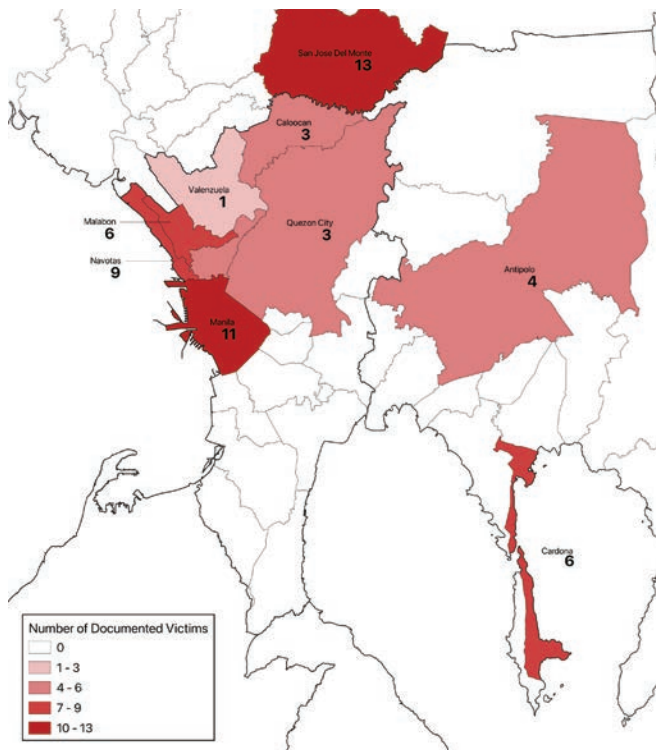
TABLE 19. Share of Illegal Arrests Documented by PhilRights per Region/Province.

PROJECT AREA	DUTERTE (2016-2019)	MARCOS (2022-2025)	PERCENT CHANGE
Metro Manila	42.11%	29.51%	-12.6%
Bulacan	35.53%	32.79%	-2.74%
Rizal	17.11%	32.79%	+15.68

TABLE 20. Share of Illegal Arrests Documented by PhilRights per City.

PROJECT AREA	DUTERTE (2016-2019)	MARCOS (2022-2025)	PERCENT CHANGE
San Jose del Monte, Bulacan	17.11%	27.87%	+10.76%
Manila	14.47%	8.20%	-6.27%
Navotas	11.84%	11.48%	-0.36%
Cardona, Rizal	7.89%	9.84%	+1.95%
Malabon	7.89%	0%	-7.89%
Antipolo, Rizal	5.26%	9.84%	+4.58%
Quezon City	3.95%	1.64%	-2.31%
Caloocan	3.95%	8.20%	+4.25%
Valenzuela	1.32%	0%	-1.32%

²⁵ *Nanlaban* or resisting arrest was used by the police to justify killings that were portrayed as acts of self-defense. See Raymund E. Narag, “How Duterte’s ‘nanlaban’ directive in drug war corrupted police work,” November 2, 2024, <https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/opinion-duterte-drug-war-directive-encounter-killings-corrupted-police-work/>; and Rosette, Judith Camille E., “The Drug War’s Visual Regime,” Dahas, accessed July 23, 2025, <https://dahas.upd.edu.ph/drug-wars-visual-regime/>.



MAP 3. Distribution of Cases of Illegal Arrests in PhilRights' Partner Communities during the first three years of the Duterte administration (2016-2019) [left] and the Marcos Jr administration (2022-2025) [right].

In our partner communities, illegal arrests and arbitrary detentions continue to be an avenue for extortion. In San Jose del Monte in Bulacan, Antipolo in Rizal, Caloocan, and Navotas, community monitors report the increasing weaponization of illegal gambling in drug-related arrests.

In San Jose del Monte, Bulacan, it has become common practice for police-perpetrators to arrest bystanders on alleged drug-related charges—only for the victims to later be informed that they are instead facing illegal gambling charges and are being fined Php 30,000 for allegedly violating the Anti-Illegal Gambling Law.

In many of these cases, police officers offer to cover the victims' release costs in exchange for repayment with interest, effectively profiting from the arrest. In one of the incidents, the perpetrators even went

as far as staging the scene for documentation before the arrest—a garlic vendor going about his day was dragged into the scene and coerced to play rounds of *kara-krus*, a coin tossing game, while being filmed along with other victims.

In Bagong Silang, the same modus operandi persists, but fabrication of initial drug charges goes beyond mere allegation. Police openly plant sachets of shabu (methamphetamine) in front of victims, accuse them of possession, then arrest them—later converting the drug charges into illegal gambling cases.

This modus goes beyond mere money-making, as shown in one Navotas case. A victim arrested on fabricated drug-turned-gambling charges was repeatedly harassed after release, with perpetrators attempting to recruit them as a police asset and threatening renewed arrests on the same trumped-up charges if they refused.

The modus may also be driven by Marcos Jr.'s repeated claims of pursuing a more humane drug war, with lower drug-related arrest figures bolstering this narrative. Official data from each administration's first 100 days support this view: Duterte recorded 22,500 arrests²⁶ during his first 100 days, while Marcos Jr. reported just 14,737.²⁷ As such, converting drug-related arrests into illegal gambling charges helps keep official drug arrest figures artificially low.

Lastly, beyond cases of extrajudicial killings, illegal arrest, and arbitrary detention, other drug-related human rights violations continue to proliferate. Our documentation reveals that 6.81% of the violations recorded thus far under the Marcos Jr. administration consist of enforced disappearances, frustrated extrajudicial killings, torture, and harassment.

More importantly, while fewer in number, these violations follow the same patterns described above

and target the same demographic within the same geographic areas—true to the perpetuation of the form and execution of the Duterte administration's bloody war on drugs. As such, its impact on families left behind, as well as on communities still grappling with its long-standing consequences, persists and continues to take root—especially in the absence of justice.

In conclusion, the drug war's conduct remains unchanged, with modalities and patterns consistent since its launch in 2016 under Duterte. The main difference lies in execution. Duterte emboldened the police to kill, while Marcos Jr. masks ongoing violations with lofty, human rights–laden rhetoric. This shift from overt to covert operations is the hallmark of the current drug war and underscores the reason for Duterte's arrest—Duterte's explicit orders to kill laid the groundwork for the systemic murder of thousands that now continue in more concealed forms under Marcos Jr.

²⁶ Associated Press, "A Look at the 1st 100 Days of Duterte's Phenomenal Rule," INQUIRER.net, October 8, 2016, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/823155/a-look-at-the-1st-100-days-of-dutertes-phenomenal-rule>.

²⁷ Caliwan, "PBBM's 1st 100 Days."

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXTS AND CROSSROADS

Understanding Duterte's ICC Case

BACKDROP TO DUTERTE'S ARREST

Legal and Political Context

On September 23, 2025, the International Criminal Court (ICC) is set to confirm the charges against Rodrigo Duterte and determine whether there is sufficient evidence to proceed to trial for murder as a crime against humanity. As the ICC pursues accountability for the thousands of lives lost in the so-called war on drugs, the Philippines stands at a critical crossroads.

This chapter situates the arrest warrant against Duterte within a broader legal and political context—one that underscores both the enduring importance of international justice and the deepening crisis of impunity in the country. Echoing the calls of the international community and the pleas of victim-families devastated by the drug war, this section lays the foundation for PhilRights' position: that the Philippine government must urgently rejoin the ICC and reaffirm its commitment to truth, justice, and human dignity.

1. The ICC and Its Mandate²⁸

On July 17, 1998, 120 countries adopted the Rome Statute in Rome, creating the ICC—the world's first permanent international court tasked with holding individuals accountable for the most serious crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression. The ICC officially began its work on July 1, 2002.

This section outlines essential background on the ICC and its mandate, the Coalition for the International Criminal Court, the Philippines' role as a State Party to the Rome Statute, and the implications of its withdrawal. Understanding these is crucial to grasp the context behind Duterte's arrest and the civil society campaign urging the Philippines to rejoin the ICC.



FIGURE 12. The International Criminal Court. Photo taken by PhilRights during a watch party for its partner communities.

The ICC is not meant to replace national courts. According to the principle of complementarity, the ICC steps in only when national jurisdictions are unwilling or unable to investigate and prosecute such crimes. Its goal is to help end impunity, promote accountability, and prevent future atrocities.

²⁸ The information presented in the subsection "ICC and Its Mandate" was taken from Understanding the International Criminal Court, International Criminal Court, 2020, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/Publications/understanding-the-icc.pdf>.

History and Context

Calls for an international criminal tribunal emerged after World War II with the establishment of the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals. The Genocide Convention of 1948 recognized the need for a permanent court. The demand gained new urgency in the 1990s during conflicts in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, prompting the United Nations (UN) to set up temporary tribunals.

These experiences led to the creation of a permanent institution—the ICC—through the Rome Statute. Unlike earlier tribunals, the ICC is an independent judicial body and can act without UN Security Council authorization.

The ICC's Role in Upholding the Rule of Law

The ICC plays a critical role in the global justice system by holding powerful individuals accountable when national systems fail. It sends a

strong message: no one is above the law. Through legal proceedings, public awareness, and victim participation, the ICC works to promote truth, justice, and human rights globally.

Civil Society's Role in Supporting the ICC

The Assembly of States Parties (ASP) is the official body made up of all countries that have joined the ICC by ratifying the Rome Statute. It oversees the ICC's work and makes key decisions—such as electing ICC officials, approving the annual budget, deciding on cooperation matters, and proposing changes to the Rome Statute.

Civil society plays a crucial watchdog role. Organizations from around the world, led by the Coalition for the ICC, monitor the ASP's actions and push governments to live up to their commitments. They call for fair decision-making, strong financial and political support for the ICC, and protection for human rights defenders and activists working within the Rome Statute system.



FIGURE 13. Local groups protesting against the so-called war on drugs.



FIGURE 14. The Philippine Coalition for the International Criminal Court, together with other organizations, calls for justice for EJK victims.

II. The Coalition for the International Criminal Court²⁹

The Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC) is a global network of more than 2,000 civil society organizations across 150 countries. It advocates for a fair, effective, and independent ICC and played a key role in the Rome Statute's adoption.

Formed in the 1990s, the CICC emerged from civil society's response to atrocities in Rwanda and the Balkans. In 1998, the Coalition mobilized nearly 500 delegates to participate in the Rome negotiations, providing legal expertise and pushing for victim-centered provisions. Their work helped

enshrine strong protections for victims and gender justice in the treaty.

In 2014, with most of the world now part of the ICC system, the Coalition expanded its mission. Beyond encouraging countries to join the Court, it began promoting national prosecutions of international crimes and stronger cooperation with the ICC. This approach—called complementarity—urges states to pass laws that reflect the Rome Statute and take justice into their own hands when possible.

III. The Philippines as a State Party to the Rome Statute

The Philippines signed the Rome Statute in December 2000 and ratified it in 2011, officially becoming the ICC's 117th State Party on November 1 of the same year.³⁰ This historic step was made possible by sustained pressure from civil society organizations, particularly the Philippine Coalition for the ICC (PCICC), and committed government actors.³¹

However, on March 17, 2018, then-President Rodrigo Duterte announced the country's withdrawal from the ICC. The withdrawal took effect one year later, on March 17, 2019.³²

Failure of Domestic Justice

Even before ratifying the Rome Statute, the Philippines had enacted Republic Act No. 9851 in 2009, also known as the "Philippine Act on Crimes Against International Humanitarian Law, Genocide, and Other Crimes Against Humanity."³³ This law recognizes the responsibility of states to prosecute grave international crimes and prevent impunity. However, under Duterte's war on drugs, thousands of extrajudicial killings occurred, and justice remains elusive for most victims.

²⁹ The information presented in the subsection "The Coalition for the International Criminal Court" was taken from "Our Story: When hope and history rhyme," Coalition for the International Criminal Court, n.d., <https://coalitionfortheicc.org/node/1072> and "About the Coalition," Coalition for the International Criminal Court, n.d., <https://coalitionfortheicc.org/about-coalition-0>.

³⁰ "International Justice and the ICC," Amnesty International Philippines, August 8, 2023. <https://www.amnesty.org.ph/campaigns/intl-justice-icc/>.

³¹ "About PCICC," Philippine Coalition for the International Criminal Court, July 13, 2009. <https://pcicc.wordpress.com/about/>.

³² "The Philippines' Membership in the ICC Comes to an End," Coalition for the International Criminal Court, March 15, 2019, <https://www.coalitionfortheicc.org/news/20190315/philippines-leaves-icc>.

³³ "Republic Act No. 9851," Official Gazette of the Philippines, December 11, 2009, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2009/12/11/republic-act-no-9851/>.

With domestic justice mechanisms failing, civil society groups—led by PCICC—have sought international remedies. In December 2024, representatives from PCICC, Amnesty International Philippines, CenterLaw, and the Network Against Killings in the Philippines (NAKPhil) delivered a statement before the Assembly of States Parties. Speaking on behalf of victims and families, they called for urgent action and emphasized that the ICC remains their last hope for justice.³⁴

History of PCICC³⁵

The Philippine Coalition for the International Criminal Court (PCICC) was formed in November 2000 after two national workshops on the ICC. It became part of a global network of over 2,000 civil society organizations working to promote a fair, independent, and effective ICC.

From the beginning, the PCICC has stood firm in its belief that those responsible for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity must be held accountable. Its core goals include raising public awareness about the ICC, pushing for the Philippines' ratification of the Rome Statute, and promoting the integration of ICC principles into the country's legal system.

The Coalition played a key role in the Philippines' signing of the Rome Statute in December 2000, during the administration of President Joseph Estrada. The path to full ratification took more than a decade and spanned three administrations. Throughout this period, civil society groups, including the PCICC, persisted—petitioning the Supreme Court, publishing educational materials, and keeping the issue alive in public and political debates. Their sustained advocacy kept the ICC in the national spotlight and was instrumental in the Philippines' eventual ratification of the Rome Statute in 2011.

IV. Zooming In: The Philippines' Withdrawal from the Rome Statute

The Duterte administration's withdrawal from the Rome Statute followed the Office of the Prosecutor's (OTP) preliminary examination into the drug war killings. The decision drew sharp criticism. Atty. Ray Paolo Santiago, Chairperson

of PCICC, described it as a betrayal of Filipinos' pursuit of justice. Former CHR Chair and PCICC leader Etta Rosales warned that withdrawing from the ICC undermines the very protections it was designed to uphold.³⁶

³⁴ "Philippine Coalition for the International Criminal Court (PCICC), alongside its members Amnesty International Philippines, CenterLaw and Network Against Killings in the Philippines (NAKPhil) - General Debate Statement - 3 December 2024 - General Debate," Coalition for the International Criminal Court, December 3, 2024. <https://www.coalitionfortheicc.org/document/philippine-coalition-international-criminal-court-pcicc-alongside-its-members-amnesty>.

³⁵ The information presented in "History of PCICC" was taken from "About PCICC," 2009 and "The Philippines' Membership in the ICC," 2019.

³⁶ "The Philippines' Membership in the ICC," 2019.

In response, PCICC and other stakeholders filed petitions before the Supreme Court, challenging the legality of the President’s unilateral withdrawal without Senate concurrence.³⁷ These petitions, however, were deemed by the Supreme Court to have insufficient grounds.

Globally, leaders such as William Pace, former Convenor of the CICC, and O-Gon Kwon, then-President of the ICC Assembly of States Parties, expressed concern. They emphasized that universal support for the Rome Statute is vital to combating impunity.³⁸

Despite the country’s formal withdrawal, the ICC retained jurisdiction over crimes committed while the Philippines was still a State Party to the Rome Statute.³⁹ Civil society groups and victims’ families remained steadfast in their pursuit of accountability, continuing to provide documentation, testimonies, and advocacy on the international stage.

Over the years, the ICC’s Office of the Prosecutor pressed forward with its investigation into the thousands of killings linked to the drug war. As evidence mounted and public pressure grew—both domestically and abroad—the case against Duterte moved closer to a critical milestone: the issuance of an arrest warrant and the formal commencement of proceedings that would test the reach and resolve of international justice.



FIGURE 15. Civil Society Groups hold indignation rallies against the Duterte administration.

³⁷ Pangilinan et al. v. Cayetano et al., G.R. No. 238875 (16 March 2021).

³⁸ “The Philippines’ Membership in the ICC,” 2019.

³⁹ “Republic of the Philippines,” International Criminal Court, accessed August 7, 2025, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/philippines>.

WHAT LED TO DUTERTE'S ARREST?

In 2025, March 11 has become a significant date in the lives of many families left behind by the victims of Duterte's bloody war on drugs. On this day, former President Rodrigo Duterte was arrested by and surrendered to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for the charge of murder as a crime against humanity. The arrest came just a few days shy of the anniversary of the country's withdrawal from the ICC on March 17, 2019. This section chronicles the events leading up to the arrest of former President Rodrigo Duterte.

TABLE 21. Significant Events Leading to Duterte's Arrest.

EVENT	DATE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
Onset of the War on Drugs	November 1, 2011	The Philippines officially became a party to the ICC.
	June 30, 2016	After Duterte's inauguration as the 16th President, suspected drug users and peddlers were gunned down, with police citing <i>nanlaban</i> narratives.
"Name and Shame" Campaign	August 7, 2016	Duterte released a list publicly naming members of Congress, judges, and military personnel as having links to the drug trade.
Attacks Against Women Critics	February 24, 2017	Leila de Lima was removed as chair of the Senate committee on justice and human rights and arrested.
	March 9, 2018	After UN Special Rapporteur Agnes Callamard called for an investigation into the drug war, Duterte responded with threats and repeated insults.
	May 11, 2018	Supreme Court Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno was removed from her position by an 8-6 vote
Involvement of the International Criminal Court	October 13, 2016	Former ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda voiced deep concern over the killings and criticized Philippine officials for enabling Duterte's actions.
	April 24, 2017	Jude Sabio, lawyer of whistleblower Edgar Matobato, filed a 77-page ICC complaint linking Duterte to extrajudicial killings. Malacañang dismissed it as a smear campaign and denied state involvement.
	June 6, 2017	Former Senator Antonio Trillanes IV and former Magdalo party-list Representative Gary Alejano submitted supplemental communications to the ICC.
	August 2017	Kian delos Santos (17), Carl Arnaiz (19), and Reynaldo "Kulot" de Guzman (14)—were killed in separate incidents just days apart.
	August 15, 2017	The police conducted a "One-time Big-time Operation" across Bulacan which led to 32 deaths of alleged drug personalities and 100 arrests within 24 hours.

EVENT	DATE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
Withdrawal from the ICC	February 8, 2018	The Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) to the ICC announced that it will be opening the preliminary examination on the Philippines.
Withdrawal from the ICC	March 17, 2018	As a reply, the Philippine government, on March 17, 2018, submitted a written notification of withdrawal to the ICC, which took effect on March 17, 2019.
	August 2018	With support from Rise Up, families of eight victims filed an ICC complaint alleging murder and crimes against humanity. Malacañang dismissed it, saying it would not prosper.
First Criminal Conviction in the War on Drugs	November 29, 2018	Three officers were sentenced to up to 40 years in prison for killing 17-year-old Kian delos Santos, after CCTV footage disproved their nanlaban claim.
Government Assessments on the State of the War on Drugs	November 30, 2018	Through its #RealNumbersPH campaign, Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) reported 5,050 killed and 164,265 arrested in over 115,000 anti-drug operations, mostly carried out by the PNP.
Bases for the Launching of an ICC Investigation	July 11, 2019	The UN Human Rights Council adopted the “Iceland Resolution,” urging the Philippine government to halt human rights violations, ensure accountability, and cooperate with UN mechanisms.
	September 2019	Philippine non-governmental organizations went to the UNHRC and provided testimonies on Duterte’s war on drugs
	End of 2019	The ICC OTP announced plans to conclude its preliminary examination in 2020 to decide whether to formally investigate the extrajudicial killings.
	December 2020	The ICC reported that from July 2016 to March 2019, murder, torture, and other inhuman acts were committed in the course of the drug war.
	May 24, 2021	OTP requested authorization from the Pre-Trial Chamber I of the ICC to initiate an investigation into the Philippine situation
	September 15, 2021	Pre-Trial Chamber I approved the Prosecutor’s request to investigate the killings, including those in Davao from November 2011 to June 2016.
The Response of the Marcos Jr. Administration	July 2022	Ferdinand Marcos Jr. declared the Philippines would not cooperate with the ICC, calling its investigation a violation of national sovereignty.
	January 26, 2023	The DOJ appealed to the ICC, seeking to assert the Philippines’ authority to handle the investigations independently.
	July 18, 2023	The ICC Appeals Chamber denied the Philippine government’s request
Arrest and Initial Court Appearance	March 11, 2025	International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) arrested Rodrigo Duterte as he arrived at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) Terminal 3 from a trip to Hong Kong.
	March 12, 2025	Duterte was surrendered by the Interpol to the ICC in the Netherlands
	March 14, 2025	Duterte appeared before the ICC via video link. Judges set September 23, 2025, for the confirmation of charges.
	June 12, 2025	Duterte’s camp requested an interim release

Onset of the War on Drugs

On November 1, 2011, the Philippines officially became a party to the ICC.⁴⁰ At the time, Rodrigo Duterte had just completed his nine-year tenure as Mayor of Davao City and was serving his first year as Vice Mayor under his daughter, Sara Duterte, who succeeded him in the city's top post. Known for projects such as improved emergency response and infrastructure development,⁴¹ he ruled with an iron fist, yet maintained strong popular support, winning three consecutive mayoral terms from 2001 to 2010—the maximum allowed by law.

Duterte was widely celebrated for his anti-crime policies, with early versions of the “war on drugs” forming the backbone of his presidential campaign. Central to his platform was a rhetoric of *disiplina* (discipline) and a ruthless approach to criminality—openly advocating for the killing

of “murderers and rapists,”⁴² and “drug addicts.”⁴³ During the presidential campaign, he framed drug dealing and addiction as major obstacles to national progress, vowing a nationwide crackdown modeled after his Davao City campaign.⁴⁴ Upon winning the 2016 presidential elections, he expanded his war on drugs to the rest of the nation.

Inaugurated as the 16th President on June 30, 2016, Duterte swiftly delivered on his promise: suspected drug users and peddlers were gunned down, with police frequently citing the *nanlaban*⁴⁵ narrative. From May 10, 2016—over a month before he assumed office—until March 21, 2017, ABS-CBN News recorded at least 3,155 drug-related killings.⁴⁶ *Tokhang*⁴⁷, *nanlaban*, and vigilante killings became staples in the news.

⁴⁰ “ICC - ICC welcomes the Philippines as a new State Party,” Press Releases 2011, International Criminal Court, August 11, 2011, <https://asp.icc-cpi.int/press-releases/press-releases-2011/pr740>.

⁴¹ Improved emergency response includes a 24/7 CCTV monitoring and emergency call center, a well-equipped ambulance, a mobile maternity hospital, rubber boats, fiberglass boats, and two amphibious vehicles—all maintained in working condition and ready for any emergency. Meanwhile, infrastructure development refers to improvements in health and education facilities as well as ICT connectivity. See: Peter Wallace, “Duterte’s Safe City,” Philippine Daily Inquirer, May 19, 2015, <https://opinion.inquirer.net/85269/dutertes-safe-city>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ John Gershman, “Human Rights and Duterte’s War on Drugs,” interview by Michelle Xu, Council on Foreign Relations, December 16, 2016. <https://www.cfr.org/interview/human-rights-and-dutertes-war-drugs>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Nanlaban, meaning “fought back,” or “resisted” in the context of an arrest, became a common justification by the PNP for killings that took place during police operations.

⁴⁶ Mariquit Almario-Gonzalez, “The Night Watch: Filipino TV Journalists and Oplan Tokhang,” Pacific Journalism Review – Te Koako 24, no. 2 (November 2, 2018): 42–63, <https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v24i2.450>.

⁴⁷ Tokhang, a word combination of “Katok” or knock and “Hangyo” or plead. A code name for the police operation to ask alleged drug suspects to surrender to authorities

“Name and Shame” Campaign

Hours after reiterating his “shoot-to-kill” stance, Duterte publicly named members of Congress, judges, and military personnel allegedly linked to the drug trade.⁴⁸ Some of those identified surrendered to the police while denying the allegations. The move drew grave concern from various groups, who also questioned the accuracy of his information after it emerged that some individuals on the list had long been dead or never existed at all. Duterte announced the names a day after issuing the remark, “I don’t care about human rights, believe me.”⁴⁹



FIGURE 16. Police officers on duty.

Attacks Against Women Critics

Leila de Lima, chair of the Senate committee on justice and human rights, emerged as Duterte’s fiercest critic in the Senate as she publicly condemned the war on drugs while leading Senate investigations into the killings. Duterte responded by attacking de Lima’s professional and personal life, branding her as an “immoral woman” and alleging that she facilitated the selling of drugs during her time as Justice Secretary and received drug payoffs with her driver, whom Duterte also said she was having an affair with. Because of these accusations, de Lima was removed as chair of the committee and was arrested on February 24, 2017.⁵⁰

Throughout his administration, Duterte would continue to attack and disparage his critics, particularly women. When the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnes Callamard, publicly stated that the drug war should be investigated, Duterte threatened to slap her and repeatedly directed insults at her.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Euan McKirdy, “Philippines Names Officials Allegedly Linked to Drug Trade,” CNN World, August 8, 2016. <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/08/07/asia/duterte-war-on-drugs-officials-named>.

⁴⁹ “Rodrigo Duterte: ‘I don’t care about human rights,’” Al Jazeera, August 8, 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/8/8/rodrigo-duterte-i-dont-care-about-human-rights>.

⁵⁰ Rebecca Ratcliffe, “Critic wrongly jailed by former president of Philippines hopes to return to politics,” Guardian, January 1, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/01/critic-wrongly-jailed-by-former-president-of-philippines-hopes-to-return-to-politics> and “Sen. Leila De Lima arrested over drug charges,” CNN Philippines, February 24, 2017, <http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2017/02/24/leila-de-lima-arrested-over-drug-charges.html>.

⁵¹ Pia Ranada, “Duterte threatens to slap UN rapporteur if she probes drug war,” Rappler, November 9, 2017, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/187899-duterte-threat-slap-un-rapporteur-callamard/>.



FIGURE 17. Women Human Rights Defenders protesting.

Supreme Court Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno, also an outspoken Duterte critic, was removed from her position by an 8-6 vote on May 11, 2018, on the grounds that she had failed to file her Statements of Assets, Liabilities, and Net Worth regularly and had incurred tax misdeclarations and unauthorized expenses. The ouster came after Duterte publicly said that he wanted Sereno out, calling her “stupid and ignorant.”⁵²

Later that year, journalist Maria Ressa and her news publication, Rappler, were targeted. Rappler covered the war on drugs from its beginnings and released investigative reports on the killings. On June 15, 2020, Ressa and Reynaldo Santos, Jr., a former researcher and writer at Rappler, were convicted of cyber-libel.⁵³

Involvement of the International Criminal Court

In an official statement on October 13, 2016, former ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda expressed deep concern over the extrajudicial killings in the Philippines. She criticized government officials who appeared to condone these acts while supporting the President’s calls for State forces and civilians to kill drug dealers and users.⁵⁴ Bensouda affirmed the ICC’s jurisdiction if the killings were found to be part of a systematic attack against civilians carried out under State policy.

She further clarified that anyone who incites, participates in, or contributes to mass violence falling under ICC jurisdiction could be prosecuted before the Court. For this reason, she stressed, the ICC had begun closely monitoring the situation in the Philippines.

On April 24, 2017, Jude Sabio, the legal counsel of Edgar Matobato, a self-confessed hitman and

⁵² Mick Basa, “Sereno behind bars? Duterte says he only wants her out,” Rappler, April 13, 2018, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/200141-sereno-behind-bars-duterte-only-wants-her-out/>.

⁵³ “First Conviction of Officers in Philippines ‘Drug War,’” Dispatches, Human Rights Watch, November 29, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/11/29/first-conviction-officers-philippines-drug-war>.

⁵⁴ “Statement of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda concerning the situation in the Republic of the Philippines,” News, October 13, 2016, International Criminal Court, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-prosecutor-international-criminal-court-fatou-bensouda-concerning-situation-republic>.

member of the Davao Death Squad,⁵⁵ Edgar Matobato, submitted a 77-page complaint to the ICC.⁵⁶ This document compiled evidence linking Duterte to the extrajudicial killings and named eleven other high-ranking officials who had publicly expressed their support for the war on drugs. Sabio highlighted the ICC's power as the court of last resort,⁵⁷ given the extent of the human rights disaster in the country.

In response, the Presidential Communications Office described Sabio's actions as a smear campaign that seeks to undermine both the President and the government. The statement also denied the State's involvement in the killings, saying these are neither state-sanctioned nor state-sponsored.⁵⁸

By 2017, about 7,000 drug-related killings had already been reported (Sabio, 2017, p.7). Police forces continued to push the *nanlaban* narrative

to mask gross human rights violations. *Tokhang* was then operating under "Oplan Double Barrel Reloaded", which then Philippine National Police Chief Ronald "Bato" Dela Rosa described as "less bloody if not bloodless"⁵⁹ compared to its predecessor launched the previous year. In May, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) claimed significant improvement, citing one suspect killed for every 50 police operations, down from one for every 20.⁶⁰

Former Senator Antonio Trillanes IV and former Magdalo party-list Representative Gary Alejano reinforced Sabio's complaint by submitting supplemental communications to the ICC on June 6, 2017. They stated that the "State is unwilling to even investigate the extrajudicial killings in the country, and because of the President's immunity, [is] unable to prosecute President Duterte."⁶¹ As

⁵⁵ A Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism report, based on the testimony of self-confessed hitman Edgar Matobato, traces the origins of the Davao Death Squad. Initially part of a police-organized "liquidation squad" called the Lambada Boys, Matobato was later joined by former communist rebels and other gunmen. The group evolved into the Davao Death Squad, officially listed as "Auxiliary Service Workers" on the city payroll but, according to Matobato, tasked with covert assassinations—not only of alleged criminals but also political opponents, suspected terrorists, and individuals Duterte allegedly targeted. Victims were often killed in secret, with bodies buried or dumped at sea.

⁵⁶ Sunnexusdesk, "Matobato lawyer files complaint vs Duterte at ICC," SunStar Publishing Inc., April 24, 2017, <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/more-articles/matobato-lawyer-files-complaint-vs-duterte-at-icc>.

⁵⁷ In the ICC's context, the term "court of last resort" means the Court intervenes only when a country is unwilling or unable to genuinely investigate and prosecute serious crimes. Under the Rome Statute, national courts have the primary responsibility to address such cases, and the ICC acts only when those systems fail to deliver justice (Understanding the International Criminal Court, ICC, 2020, p. 6).

⁵⁸ "From Presidential Spokesperson Ernie Abella – On Atty Jude Josue Sabio, lawyer of Mr. Edgardo Matobato, asking the International Criminal Court in The Hague to hold PRRD accountable for mass murder in the Philippines," Presidential Communications Office, April 24, 2017, https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/from-presidential-spokesperson-ernie-abella-on-atty-jude-josue-sabio-lawyer-of-mr-edgardo-matobato-asking-the-international-criminal-court-in-the-hague-to-hold-prrd-accountable-for-mass-m/.

⁵⁹ Cecille Suerte Felipe, "'Double Barrel' Reloaded," Headlines, Philippine Star, March 6, 2017, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/03/07/1677294/double-barrel-reloaded>.

⁶⁰ "Oplan Tokhang 2 greatly improves PH's campaign vs. drugs - DILG," Department of the Interior and Local Government, May 15, 2017, <https://www.dilg.gov.ph/news/Oplan-Tokhang-2-greatly-improves-PHs-campaign-vs-drugs-DILG/NC-2017-1115>.

⁶¹ Nikko Dizon, "Trillanes, Alejano File Complaint at ICC Vs Duterte's Drug War," Nation, Philippine Daily Inquirer, June 6, 2017, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/157711/trillanes-alejano-file-complaint-at-icc-vs-dutertes-drug-war>.



FIGURE 18. Honoring the victims slain in the war on drugs.

stated in Article 17 of the Rome Statute,⁶² the ICC may exercise jurisdiction over a case emerging from one of its state parties when said state is unwilling or unable genuinely to carry out the investigation under prosecution.

Meanwhile, the killings continued. On August 15, 2017, the police conducted a “One-time Big-time Operation” across Bulacan, killing 32 alleged drug personalities and arresting 100 others within a day. Then Supt. Romeo Caramat said, “We wanted to shock and awe these drug personalities,” as he presented the results at a conference. Duterte

praised the outcome, calling the 32 deaths “good” and adding in a speech, “If we could kill another 32 every day, then maybe we can reduce what ails the country.”⁶³

In the same month, 17-year-old Kian delos Santos, 19-year-old Carl Arnaiz, and 14-year-old Reynaldo “Kulot” de Guzman were killed within days of each other. Their cases would later on become landmarks in the pursuit of accountability, constituting the first two convictions in the country to be served against police perpetrators of drug war killings.⁶⁴

⁶² Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, International Criminal Court, 2021, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2024-05/Rome-Statute-eng.pdf>.

⁶³ Oliver Holmes, “Philippine police kill 32 in bloodiest night of Duterte’s war on drugs,” Guardian, November 27, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/16/philippines-police-bloodiest-night-duterte-war-drugs>.

⁶⁴ “Remembering Kian, Carl, and Kulot: Search for justice and accountability continues,” Philippine Daily Inquirer, April 20, 2023, <https://opinion.inquirer.net/162518/remembering-kian-carl-and-kulot-search-for-justice-and-accountability-continues>.



FIGURE 19. Civil society groups protest against Duterte.

Withdrawal from the ICC

The Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) to the ICC announced on the 8th of February 2018 that it will be opening the preliminary examination on the Philippines.⁶⁵ As a reply, the Philippine government, on March 17, 2018, submitted a written notification of withdrawal to the ICC, which took effect on March 17, 2019. The ICC retained its jurisdiction over the cases of alleged crimes against humanity from November 1, 2011—when the Philippines became a state party to the Rome Statute—up to and including March 16, 2019.⁶⁶

The withdrawal did not discourage those seeking justice. A third communication was forwarded to the ICC in August 2018. The families of eight victims, with help from the group Rise Up for Life and for Rights (Rise Up), filed a complaint in the ICC on the grounds of murder and crimes against humanity.⁶⁷ The Malacañang Palace disregarded the act and said that it would not prosper, according to then Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque. He maintained that the ICC should not intervene in observance of the “principle of complementarity,” wherein the Court may only intervene when the State fails to or is unwilling to investigate or prosecute.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ “International Justice and the ICC.”

⁶⁶ “Republic of the Philippines,” International Criminal Court.

⁶⁷ “Timeline: ICC Investigation of Duterte,” Nation, Philippine Daily Inquirer, March 12, 2025, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/266821/timeline-icc-investigation-of-duterte>.

⁶⁸ Ruth Abbey Gita, “New allegations lodged vs Duterte before ICC,” SunStar Publishing Inc., August 28, 2018, <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/manila/local-news/new-allegations-lodged-vs-duterte-before-icc>.

Harry Roque, before becoming a Duterte ally, was a human rights advocate who praised the Philippines' move to become an ICC member state in 2011.⁶⁹ He is also an ICC-accredited lawyer. His sudden shift in stance made him one of the staunchest defenders of Duterte and the war on drugs.⁷⁰

First Criminal Conviction in the War on Drugs

On November 29, 2018, what previously seemed to be an impossible feat finally came to fruition—for the first time in the history of the drug war, police officers involved in the killing of an alleged drug user were found guilty. The three officers who killed 17-year-old Kian delos Santos were sentenced to up to 40 years in prison without eligibility for parole. Their *nanlaban* argument was discredited by CCTV footage of them dragging Kian to where he was shot.⁷¹ This conviction gave families of victims a sliver of hope for justice.

Government Assessments on the State of the War on Drugs

On November 30, 2018, the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), through its #RealNumbersPH campaign, reported that 5,050 people were killed in the course of 115,435 government anti-drugs operations and 164,265 were arrested, with the majority of the operations conducted by the PNP. #RealNumbersPH is the campaign of the government to counter “false narratives” on the war on drugs. However, contrary to its reports, human rights groups estimated over 20,000 deaths, including vigilante-style killings—almost four times the number provided by the PDEA.⁷²

In a campaign rally for the 2019 midterm elections, Duterte admitted that the Philippine drug situation has worsened, saying that billions worth of drugs have begun entering the country. He blamed members of the government, police and military, and even the judiciary for being involved in the drug trade. The new PNP Chief, Gen. Oscar Albayalde, remarked that Duterte's statement was nothing but emotional frustration, as he was confident that the war on drugs campaign was in fact effective.⁷³

⁶⁹ Kiko Escudro, “Harry Roque under fire again as old ICC tweet resurfaces,” Daily Tribune, March 15, 2025, <https://tribune.net.ph/2025/03/15/harry-roque-under-fire-again-as-old-icc-tweet-resurfaces>.

⁷⁰ In July 2024, Roque was called by the Senate and the House of Representatives to answer on his alleged links to illegal Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators (POGO), which Duterte was also allegedly linked to during his presidency. Roque eventually disappeared from the public view, then resurfaced on March 14, 2025 at The Hague ahead of Duterte's appearance before the Court. At present, Roque continues to be seen on his social media pages rallying support for Duterte. (Sources: Krixia Subingsubing, “Roque called to Senate, House hearings on Pogos,” Philippine Daily Inquirer, July 18, 2024, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1961983/roque-called-to-senate-house-hearings-on-pogos> and Andy Peñañuerte III and Jay-vee Marasigan Pangan, “Sara Duterte, Harry Roque, Robin Padilla arrive at ICC,” GMA News Online, March 14, 2025, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/939306/sara-duterte-harry-roque-robin-padilla-arrive-at-icc/story/>.)

⁷¹ “First Conviction of Officers in Philippines ‘Drug War.’”

⁷² Sofia Tomacruz, “Duterte gov’t tally: ‘Drug War’ deaths breach 5,000-mark before 2019,” Rappler, December 31, 2018, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/220013-duterte-government-tally-killed-war-on-drugs-november-2018/>.

⁷³ Edith Regalado, “Duterte: Philippines drug situation has worsened,” Philippine Star, March 27, 2019, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/03/27/1904945/duterte-philippines-drug-situation-has-worsened>.

Bases for the Launching of an ICC Investigation

On July 11, 2019, the “Iceland Resolution” on the situation in the Philippines was approved in the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). The resolution was supported by 18 countries, and before the vote, 35 states had signed up as co-sponsors. The resolution highlighted “concern over allegations of human rights violations in the Philippines, particularly those involving extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detention, as well as intimidation and persecution of human rights defenders and others.” It also called on the Philippine government to prevent further human rights violations, exercise justice, and maximize the United Nations’ mechanisms.⁷⁴

In September that same year, Philippine non-governmental organizations went to the UNHRC and provided testimonies on Duterte’s war on drugs. A mother of an EJK victim came with the group, wanting to expose the drug war on the national and international levels.⁷⁵

By the end of 2019, the ICC Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) reported significant progress in its legal assessment of the situation in the Philippines. It announced plans to conclude the preliminary examination in 2020 to determine, under Article 15(3) of the Rome Statute, whether there was a reasonable basis to formally open an investigation into the extrajudicial killings.⁷⁶

In December 2020, the ICC found “reasonable basis to believe” that crimes against humanity were committed in Duterte’s war on drugs. Between July 1, 2016, and March 16, 2019, it said, acts of murder, torture, and the infliction of serious physical and mental harm as “inhuman acts” took place. According to Atty. Romel Bagares, trustee of the Philippine Coalition for the ICC (PCICC), then-Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda had already identified these as international crimes.⁷⁷

Subsequently, on May 24, 2021, the OTP requested authorization from the ICC’s Pre-Trial Chamber I to open an investigation into the situation in the Philippines. The Chamber granted this request on September 15, 2021. In its September 15, 2021 press release,⁷⁸ the ICC’s Pre-Trial Chamber I approved the Prosecutor’s

⁷⁴ “Iceland’s resolution on the situation in the Philippines approved in the UN Human Rights Council,” Government of Iceland, July 11, 2019, <https://www.government.is/diplomatic-missions/embassy-article/2019/07/11/Icelands-resolution-on-the-situation-in-the-Philippines-approved-in-the-UN-Human-Rights-Council/>.

⁷⁵ Patricia Lourdes Viray, “Philippine NGOs to raise drug war at UN rights council,” Philstar.com, September 13, 2019, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/09/13/1951495/philippine-ngos-raise-drug-war-un-rights-council>.

⁷⁶ “Report on Preliminary Examination Activities (2019),” International Criminal Court and The Office of the Prosecutor, December 5, 2019, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/itemsDocuments/191205-rep-otp-PE.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Vera Files, “ICC finds “reasonable basis” for crimes vs humanity in Duterte’s drug war,” Press release, December 15, 2020, <https://verafiles.org/articles/icc-finds-reasonable-basis-crimes-vs-humanity-dutertes-drug>.

⁷⁸ International Criminal Court, “Situation in the Philippines: ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I authorises the opening of an investigation,” Press release, September 15, 2021, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-philippines-icc-pre-trial-chamber-i-authorises-opening-investigation>.

request to investigate killings linked not only to Duterte’s nationwide war on drugs, but also to those committed in Davao between November 1, 2011, and June 30, 2016.⁷⁹

Local human rights groups hailed the Court’s decision as a positive step toward the families’ long-awaited quest for justice.

The Response of the Marcos Jr. Administration

The Philippine government rejected the ICC’s decision—a stance maintained under Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who claimed the country’s justice system was “good” and did not need foreign intervention. He dismissed the ICC investigation as an intrusion and a violation of national sovereignty.

On January 26, 2023, the Department of Justice (DOJ) filed an appeal to the ICC to allow the Philippines to independently carry out its judicial authority on the matter, further emphasizing that the country has a “working and organized”⁸⁰ justice system, unlike some of the African nations that the ICC had investigated.

In a July 18, 2023 press release, the ICC Appeals Chamber denied the Philippine government’s request, with Judges Hofmański, Carranza, and

Bossa dismissing its challenge to the Court’s jurisdiction. The Majority upheld the Pre-Trial Chamber’s finding that it was proper to assess whether the Philippines was genuinely willing and able to investigate.⁸¹

Arrest and Initial Court Appearance

On March 11, 2025, acting on an ICC-issued arrest warrant, the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) apprehended Rodrigo Duterte upon his arrival at Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 3 from Hong Kong. He was transferred to the ICC in the Netherlands the following day, March 12, 2025.

On March 14, 2025, Rodrigo Duterte appeared before the ICC via video link. His counsel, Salvador Medialdea, claimed the former president was battling “debilitating medical issues” and was “hard of hearing” and “poor of sight,” limiting his participation to merely confirming his identity. The judges underscored that the appearance served one purpose: to verify that the person in custody was indeed Rodrigo Duterte, charged with crimes against humanity for atrocities committed in the Philippines’ so-called war on drugs.

⁷⁹ The period from November 1, 2011 to June 30, 2016 covers the period from when the Philippines joined the ICC as a member state (thereby granting the ICC jurisdiction over cases from the Philippines), and coincides with Duterte’s first to third terms as Mayor of Davao City.

⁸⁰ “PH Has ‘good’ justice system, won’t cooperate with ICC: PBBM,” Philippine News Agency, n.d., <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1195538>.

⁸¹ “Situation in the Republic of the Philippines: ICC Appeals Chamber confirms the authorisation to resume investigations,” Press Release, International Criminal Court, July 18, 2023, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-republic-philippines-icc-appeals-chamber-confirms-authorisation-resume>.



FIGURE 20. Families of the victims are intently watching over the proceedings of the Pre-Trial Chamber.

They then set September 23, 2025, as the date for the confirmation of the charges against him.⁸² Through this process, the ICC will determine if enough evidence has been collected to merit a trial against Duterte.

Request for Interim Release

On June 12, 2025, Duterte’s newly appointed lawyer, Nicholas Kaufman, petitioned the ICC for his interim release, claiming that an unnamed third country had given its “advance and principled agreement” to receive him. Kaufman cited Duterte’s age as a humanitarian ground and

argued that the former president no longer wields the same command and influence he held in office, portraying him as neither a threat nor a flight risk.⁸³ These arguments ran counter to the sentiments of many victims’ families, who felt threatened and had legitimate concerns for their safety if Duterte were to be released, given his remaining influence.⁸⁴

On June 24, 2025, the ICC prosecution strongly opposed Duterte’s request for interim release to his chosen country, agreeing only to an interim release to a country of their choice. They further noted that Duterte’s chosen country, still undisclosed to the public, “does not have a history

⁸² Lian Buan, “Duterte in The Hague: Can he be released before September pre-trial?,” Rappler, March 15, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/rodrigo-duterte-first-icc-appearance-march-14-2025/>.

⁸³ Sebastian Strangio, “Former Philippine President Files Request for Interim Release From ICC: Rodrigo Duterte’s lawyers say that an unnamed third country has agreed to take in the 80-year-old prior to his trial,” Diplomat, June 16, 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/06/former-philippine-president-files-request-for-interim-release-from-icc/>.

⁸⁴ Sara Duterte, daughter of the former president, currently serves as Vice President of the Philippines. Other Duterte allies, such as Senator Bato Dela Rosa, also continue to wield economic, social, and political influence and maintain access to political machinery.

of extensive cooperation with the Court,” casting doubt on its ability to comply with the conditions of the interim release.⁸⁵

Duterte’s populism follows the familiar strongman playbook built on three pillars: (1) violent aggression against perceived enemies like drug users; (2) sexual domination of women as a show of power; and (3) benevolent paternalism framed as national leadership.⁸⁶

The first element is exemplified by Duterte’s explicit calls for the killing of individuals who use drugs, thereby reinforcing a narrative that frames addiction as a barrier to national development. This was institutionalized through police invocation of “*nanlaban*” narratives, which served as a blanket justification for the use of lethal force, often without due process. The second element manifests in Duterte’s persistent sexist and misogynistic rhetoric directed at women critics, most notably in the politically motivated incarceration of then-Senator Leila de Lima—an act designed to silence opposition and intimidate dissenting voices. The third element was deliberately cultivated through

Duterte’s projection of a paternalistic leadership style, positioning himself as a protective father figure willing to do anything for his children, the nation, a persona reinforced by his sobriquet, *Tatay Digong*.⁸⁷

Presently, these tactics are being repurposed strategically to elicit public sympathy and galvanize support for his interim release. Winning over public sentiment to the side of the victims remains critical. Civil society’s resistance must be strong and unyielding to enable the ICC to fulfill its mandate and ensure that crimes against humanity are never repeated.

Even in detention, Duterte enjoys strong popular backing, sustained by a well-oiled political machinery. The spread of disinformation—including distortions about his arrest—poses a serious challenge for human rights defenders, who must counter these falsehoods as part of the broader effort to hold him to account and prevent future atrocities committed under the banner of the war on drugs. The next sections examine these challenges in greater depth.

⁸⁵ Lian Buan, “ICC prosecution ‘strongly opposes’ Duterte’s release to his chosen country,” Rappler, June 24, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/icc-prosecution-opposes-duterte-interim-release-chosen-country/>.

⁸⁶ Maria Tanyag, “Duterte, Hypermasculinity and the Key to Populism,” Australian Institute of International Affairs, March 06, 2018, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/duterte-governing-hypermasculinity-philippines/>

⁸⁷ Pateno Esmaquel, “[The Wide Shot] ‘Our Father’ in The Hague”, Rappler, March 16, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/the-wide-shot-our-father-rodrigo-duterte-arrest/>

DUTERTE PANAGUTIN, LITISIN

The Campaign to Hold Duterte Accountable

The long fight to hold former President Rodrigo Duterte accountable has gained new momentum in 2025. Duterte was arrested in March and is currently detained at The Hague by the International Criminal Court (ICC), an event that stirred up mixed reactions from the people.⁸⁸ For his supporters and political allies, it was an attack against national sovereignty and the “will” of the people. But for thousands of victims, their families, and all who believe in human rights and the rule of law, it marked a triumph.

This is no longer merely a legal battle but a political and moral reckoning. The quest to bolster why Duterte needs to be held accountable, criminally, is upon us. As history is being written, the narrative based on truth must be the one that prevails, so that horrors like the war on drugs do not happen again in the future.



FIGURE 21. Families of victims come together to inspire one another.

ICC Jurisdiction

The Philippines officially withdrew from the ICC on March 17, 2019, a year after submitting a written notification of withdrawal from the Rome Statute. The withdrawal came after the ICC Office of the Prosecutor began a preliminary examination of the so-called drug war in 2016. The Duterte administration framed the withdrawal as a defense against foreign interference in the country’s justice system.

Despite this, the ICC ruled that it retains jurisdiction over crimes committed while the Philippines was still a State Party, from November 1, 2011, to March 16, 2019. This simply means that the international court could proceed with its investigations of the cases that happened within the said duration.

Similarly, the Supreme Court of the Philippines ruled in July 2021 that the Philippine government has an obligation to cooperate with the ICC for the crimes committed during the period of jurisdiction. It said, “Consequently, liability for the alleged summary killings and other atrocities committed in the course of the war on drugs is not nullified or negated here. The Philippines remained covered and bound by the Rome Statute until March 17, 2019.”⁸⁹

⁸⁸ As of writing, former President Duterte is detained and awaiting the confirmation of charges on September 23, 2025.

⁸⁹ Virgil Lopez, “Philippines obliged to cooperate with ICC despite withdrawal –Supreme Court,” GMA News Online, July 21, 2021. <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/796239/philippines-obliged-to-cooperate-with-icc-despite-withdrawal-supreme-court/story/>.



FIGURE 22. Fight for justice and the protection of human rights.

The Supreme Court further reminded the Philippine government of its obligation to cooperate with the ICC. It said, “Even if it has deposited the instrument of withdrawal, it shall not be discharged from any criminal proceedings. Whatever process was already initiated before the International Criminal Court obliges the state party to cooperate.”⁹⁰

Before the political split,⁹¹ both the Duterte and Marcos administrations rejected the ICC’s jurisdiction, with Marcos pledging non-cooperation

to appease Duterte’s allies. Yet, international and domestic courts have upheld the legal basis to hold Duterte accountable. These rulings are significant given Duterte’s continued influence and power post-presidency, when justice remained elusive.

Grave Crimes of International Significance

Although the charges against Duterte have yet to be confirmed in September, a warrant of arrest issued in March 2025 accuses him of being an indirect co-perpetrator of several crimes against humanity, including murder, torture, and rape.⁹²

According to TRIAL International, crimes against humanity are “specific crimes committed in the context of a large-scale attack targeting civilians, regardless of their nationality.”⁹³ These crimes were first articulated in the 1945 Nuremberg Charter and later codified in international treaties following the genocides in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

Under Article 7 of the Rome Statute, the ICC defines crimes against humanity as inclusive of acts such as murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation or forcible transfer of population, imprisonment, torture, rape and other related sexual violence, persecution based on identities,

⁹⁰ Lian Buan, “Supreme Court: Philippines obliged to cooperate with ICC,” Rappler, July 21, 2021. <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/supreme-court-decision-philippine-government-cooperate-international-criminal-court/>.

⁹¹ Vice President Sara Duterte showed signs of a souring relationship with Marcos Jr. when she threatened to excavate the body of the President’s father, former president and dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr., from the Libingan ng mga Bayani, and issued death threats against him in 2024. It is mainly due to this rift that Marcos Jr. surrendered former president Duterte to the ICC in March 2025 despite his previous pronouncements of non-cooperation with the ICC.

⁹² Court Records: International Criminal Court,” International Criminal Court, accessed July 10, 2025, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/case-records>.

⁹³ “Crimes against humanity,” TRIAL International, accessed July 10, 2025, <https://trialinternational.org/topics-post/crimes-against-humanity/>.

enforced disappearance, and apartheid, among others.⁹⁴ These acts must be committed as part of a widespread or systemic attack directed against a civilian population and result in serious physical, mental, or emotional harm.

Crimes of this scale, as exemplified by those committed during Duterte's drug war, demand international attention and accountability. They require the intervention of international mechanisms such as the ICC.

The Clamor for Justice

The Philippine government has repeatedly argued that the country has a functioning justice system. While this may be true in legal principle, actual events reveal a justice system that remains weak, inconsistent, and vulnerable to corruption. Many perpetrators, particularly those with influence and power, continue to evade accountability. In 2024, the World Justice Project ranked the Philippines 99th out of 142 countries in its Rule of Law global index, scoring 0.46 —below the global average of 0.55.⁹⁵ This reflects the prevailing culture of impunity in the country.

Since Duterte took office in June 2016, only four known court convictions have emerged from the thousands of killings associated with the drug war. Despite initiatives by the Department of Justice (DOJ)⁹⁶ and other institutions to pursue

legal actions, victims and witnesses have expressed concerns over transparency and personal safety. Duterte and his allies maintain political influence, reinforced by appointments during his term and his daughter Sara Duterte's vice-presidential victory, solidifying his network within government.

In 2024, separate inquiries by the House and Senate examined Duterte's drug war. In the Senate, Duterte admitted to ordering law enforcement to kill alleged criminals, even offering a 3-million-peso reward for drug lord captures and acknowledging the existence of his Davao Death Squad (DDS). In Congress, he similarly confessed to instructing police to kill targets. Yet, despite these admissions, neither inquiry led to criminal charges.

In one Senate hearing, Duterte stated:

"The police should not hesitate, especially [when] facing the criminal who is also going to kill you. Kapag hinuli mo, dapat patayin mo talaga. At ayaw kong makita na buhay 'yan kasi gagamutin mo pa sa ospital, gagastos pa ang gobyerno. Tapos itatapon mo sa presuhan papakainin mo pa. Tapusin mo na, that is my philosophy."

(If you arrest the criminal, you must really kill him. And I don't want to see him alive, because then you will have to treat him in the hospital, and the government would pay for that. Then you will throw him in jail and have to feed him. Better finish him off already, that is my philosophy.)"

⁹⁴ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, International Criminal Court, accessed July 10, 2025, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/publications/core-legal-texts/rome-statute-international-criminal-court>.

⁹⁵ "Philippines," WJP Rule of Law Index: Countries, World Justice Project, accessed July 10, 2025, <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/Philippines>.

⁹⁶ Daphne Galvez, "DOJ to witnesses in drug killings: Talk to us," Headlines, Philippine Star, July 29, 2023, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2023/07/29/2284620/doj-witnesses-drug-killings-talk-us>.

Following these hearings, the Committees on Dangerous Drugs, Public Order and Safety, Human Rights, and Public Accounts (collectively known as the Quad Committee) recommended filing charges under Republic Act 9851 or the “Philippine Act on Crimes Against International Humanitarian Law, Genocide, and Other Crimes Against Humanity,” against former president Duterte and Senators Christopher Lawrence “Bong” Go and Ronald “Bato” Dela Rosa. These charges relate to their alleged involvement in extrajudicial killings during the drug war. To date, no further legal action has been taken.

This failure to act reinforces the prevailing culture of impunity. As Kristine dela Cruz, a wife of an extrajudicial killing (EJK) victim, wrote in her open letter published in PhilRights’ 2024 Monitoring and Documentation Report:⁹⁷

“Ang hangarin ng kumite na ilantad ang mga kamalian at katiwaliang naganap kaugnay ng giyera kontra-droga ay natatabunan ng pamumulitika at paghahari-harian ng mga taong may pinakamalaking pananagutan sa mga biktima at sa aming mga pamilya. Tanong ko ngayon sa ating lahat, may kapupuntahan nga ba ang hinaing naming mga pamilyang naiwan?”

(The committee’s intention to expose the errors and corruption related to the war on drugs is being overshadowed by politicking and the domineering of those most accountable to the victims and our families. My question to all of us now is, will anyone listen to the grievances of those left behind?)”

Reactions of Victims’ Families to Duterte’s Arrest

On March 11, 2025, the unexpected arrest of Duterte was announced. For many victims and their families, it was an emotional moment. Few believed that President Marcos Jr. would allow Duterte to be surrendered to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

A niece of an EJK victim in Manila expressed relief and vindication. For many years, fighting for justice for her uncle had long been at the core of her advocacy.

“Sobra namin ikinagagalak ang pagdakip sa dating pangulong Duterte na tumapak sa pagkatao at puso ng bawat biktima at ng kanilang mga pamilya.

(We were overjoyed by the arrest of the former president Duterte, who trampled the humanity and hearts of the victims and their families.)”

Another relative of a victim in Manila, a widow, found her will to fight rekindled.

“Nabuhayan kami ng loob na ang hustisya na aming inaasam ay unti-unti nang makakamtan.

(We were filled with new hope that the justice we have been longing for is now within reach.)” Her renewed hope, she said, was anchored in her unwavering faith.

“Mabait talaga ang Diyos, pinakinggan ang hiling naming mga naulila.

(God is truly kind, for he listened to the wishes of us, left-behind families.)”

⁹⁷ Kaming mga Naiwan: Mga Kuwento ng Pamilya ng mga Biktima ng Giyera Kontra Droga is the 2024 iteration of the Monitoring and Documentation Report, an annual publication on the drug war released by PhilRights.

Katerine, another victim-relative, emphasized that while the arrest is a significant milestone, it is only the beginning:

“Marami pang hakbang sa paglilitis at pag-iimbestiga. Ang sabi nga po mahaba habang laban ito kaya hindi po sa pag aresto natatapos ito bagkus ito ay simula pa lamang ng aming mga laban.

(There are yet more steps for the trial and further investigations. As we were told, this fight is quite long, so it didn’t end here with his arrest. Instead, it is only the beginning of our struggles.)”

Despite these hopeful reactions, some members of the public were influenced by false narratives spread by Duterte’s supporters, including claims that he was “kidnapped” or that no warrant of arrest had been issued. A sister of a 36-year-old EJK victim in Caloocan City lamented,

“Parang hindi pa rin kasi umaayon ang tadhana dahil sa mga lumalabas na bali-balitang may pagkakamali ang ICC sa pagkakadakip sa dating pangulo; parang hindi raw tama ang pagkakadakip sa kaniya at balak pabalikin siya sa Pilipinas.

(It seems that destiny has not yet favored us due to the hearsays that the ICC had committed mistakes in the arrest of the former president; his arrest, they said, was not properly conducted, and he might be returned to the Philippines.)”

Progressive organizations condemned the surge of misinformation, online attacks, and harassment targeting the ICC, civil society groups, and drug war victims and their families. Aling Shiela, whose picture was taken beside other families at a press conference in March 2025 calling for the accountability of Duterte, experienced online harassment. When a social media user pointed out that the son who was in the picture she was holding up died in 2024 and not during the Duterte administration, she was accused of being a “planted” victim, one who pretends to be a victim to inflate the number of victims virtually. Neighbors and online trolls aggressively vilified and mocked her, oblivious that Aling Shiela had suffered the death of two sons, one under the Duterte administration and another under the Marcos administration, and that she had only happened to hold up the picture of her son who died in 2024 at the time the picture was taken.⁹⁸ This typifies a lamentable sociopolitical landscape in which the supporters of one politician (whether they are paid online “trolls” or not) eagerly attack and malign families seeking justice in order to propagate falsehoods to the benefit of the politician.

The Long Road to Justice

Victims⁹⁹ have expressed hope that Duterte’s conviction will eventually lead to reparations. This is a small step in their recovery from the effects of the crimes against them. Under international criminal law, the ICC recognizes victims’ right to reparation, which may include monetary compensation, psychological rehabilitation,

⁹⁸ John Eric Mendoza, “Advocates of EJK victims clarify details on ordeal of ‘Aling Shiela,’” INQUIRER.net, March 21, 2025. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2045615/advocates-of-ejk-victims-clarifies-details-on-aling-shielas-ordeal>.

⁹⁹ Family members of the killed victims are also considered victims at the ICC.

restitution of lost property, and symbolic measures such as memorialization. However, the process is lengthy, dependent on the Court's assessment, availability of funds, and its chosen reparation scheme—whether individual or collective.

Yet, the victims remain firm in their belief that Duterte must be held accountable. When asked whether reparations would suffice, many expressed that true justice goes beyond compensation. It must include broader societal reforms and guarantees of non-recurrence.

The arrest of Duterte and the upcoming proceedings at the ICC are crucial given the limitations of the

domestic justice system. “This is a very important step towards seeking accountability for the thousands of victims of killings and other abuses, as well as their families who have courageously pursued justice,” UN High Commissioner on Human Rights Volker Türk said.¹⁰⁰

Given the severity of the impacts that the killings and other rights violations have dealt on the daily lives of the families left behind, securing the accountability of all perpetrators is but the least that can be done; it is, as Katerine pointed out, the first step in the long journey towards justice. Duterte and his accomplices must undergo the due process that all the victims were deprived of.

PHILRIGHTS' CALL TO REJOIN THE ICC

Overall, PhilRights firmly reiterates its call for the Philippines to rejoin the ICC. The decision of the Duterte administration to withdraw our membership from the ICC in 2019 was a grave mistake that must be rectified. As one of the few ICC member states and among the oldest democracies in Asia, the Philippines should lead in upholding and strengthening the rule of international law.

We therefore urge the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to restore the country's membership in the ICC. Rejoining the Court reaffirms our international commitments, expands access to justice, enables participation in global legal mechanisms, deters future atrocities, and reflects the democratic values and public demands of the Filipino people.

In this section, we outline the key reasons why the Philippines must rejoin the ICC.

¹⁰⁰ “Philippines: Türk says arrest of former president Duterte is important step toward accountability,” United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, March 12, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/philippines-turk-says-arrest-former-president-duterte-important-step-toward-accountability>.

1. Reaffirming Our International Commitment

Rejoining the ICC would demonstrate the Philippines' renewed commitment to international law and human rights. In line with the recommendation of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC),¹⁰¹ it would strengthen the country's standing in the global community and reinforce our obligations under international standards.

2. Expanding Access to Justice

For victims of grave international crimes, the ICC provides a crucial avenue for justice when domestic courts are unable or unwilling to act. Rejoining the ICC would give victims and their families access to an alternative judicial mechanism that upholds accountability and the rule of law.

3. Promoting Influence and International Cooperation

As a member state, the Philippines would have the opportunity to actively shape the future of international criminal justice. Membership enables us to participate in policy development, strengthen international legal mechanisms, and collaborate with other states on critical global issues.

4. Deterrence of Atrocities

The ICC's existence and the potential for prosecution can serve as a deterrent to the commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Membership strengthens preventive frameworks against these grave abuses.

5. Alignment with Democratic Values

The ICC embodies principles that align with the Philippines' democratic aspirations, such as justice, human rights, and the rule of law. Participating in the ICC is an affirmation of our commitment to bolster these shared values that democratic societies must uphold.

6. Public Support for Rejoining the ICC

Public sentiment supports rejoining the ICC. According to the survey conducted by OCTA Research (2025), 57% of Filipinos favor restoring the country's membership to the ICC.¹⁰² Therefore, the current administration must heed the clear call for justice and accountability.

The ICC is not a perfect institution. However, it remains one of the few international mechanisms to address systemic injustice and impunity, particularly when domestic institutions fail to deliver accountability. When the Philippines joined the ICC in 2011, it reflected a national aspiration to deter serious crimes and strengthen access to justice beyond what the domestic system could provide.

¹⁰¹ Robertzon Ramirez, "UNHRC Member States Ask Philippines To Rejoin ICC," Politics & Other News Features, OneNews.PH, November 19, 2022, <https://www.onenews.ph/articles/unhrc-member-states-ask-philippines-to-rejoin-icc>.

¹⁰² Anna Felicia Bajo, "Majority of Pinoys back rejoining the ICC -Octa survey," GMA News Online, June 30, 2025, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/950996/majority-of-pinoys-back-rejoining-the-icc-octa-survey/story/>.

As the late Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago once stated,

“The Philippines has become a party to institutionalizing the Rule of Law in dealing with the perpetrators of international crimes enjoying impunity, while affirming their rights as accused before the ICC.”

We still have the opportunity to correct the mistake of our withdrawal. Now is the time to rejoin.

The State has the obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of all its citizens. It must also deliver

justice to the victims. For more than nine years, entrenched civil and political rights violations have persisted, with deep impacts on the economic, social, and cultural rights of victims and their families. Yet the State has deliberately delayed justice to protect the autocratic and oligarchic interests of a few political families.

Even so, the struggle for truth and justice is far from over. A glimmer of hope remains through the ICC, sustained by the determination of victims’ families and civil society to fight back. Justice, though delayed, is not yet denied.

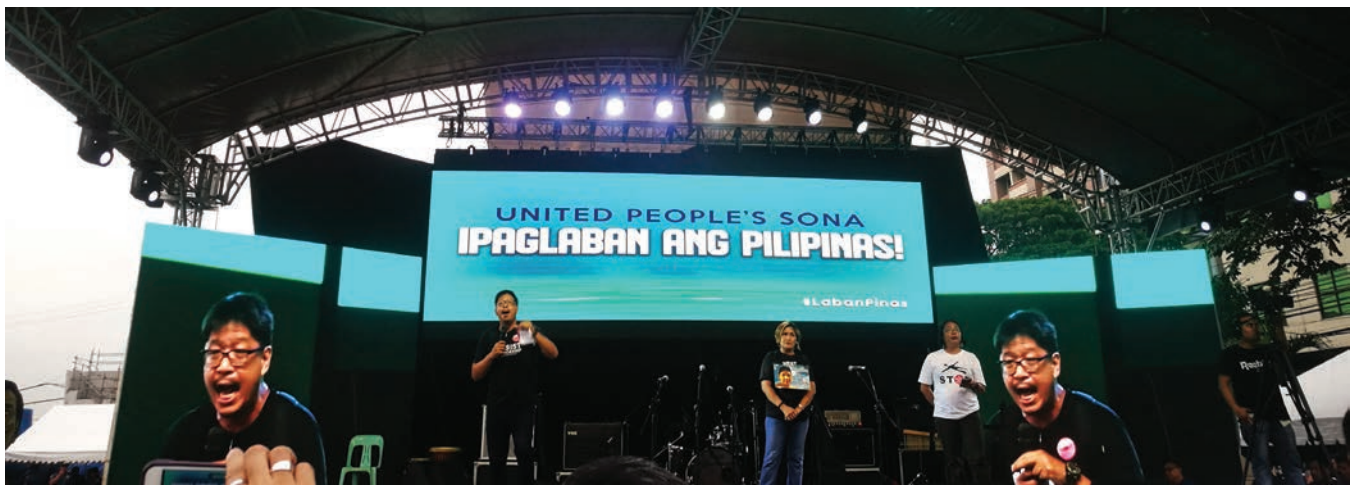


FIGURE 23. People rallying for human rights.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

This report has presented PhilRights’ findings on the Philippine government’s crackdown on illegal drugs, using data collected by the organization during its monitoring and documentation activities from August 1, 2017 to June 30, 2025 in the National Capital Region (NCR) and the neighboring provinces of Bulacan and Rizal.

Beyond providing statistical data, this report has sought to illuminate some of the short and long-term impacts of the so-called drug war on the documented victims and their families, the sectors most heavily targeted and affected by operations within the documented areas, the emerging similarities and differences of operations under the successive administrations of Rodrigo Duterte and Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the socioeconomic, political, and judicial conditions in the country that have enabled the unrestrained commission of human rights violations, and the urgent necessity to hold Duterte accountable and restore the Philippines’ membership in the ICC.

From these findings, PhilRights draws the following conclusions:

1. The so-called war on drugs is a state-sanctioned violation of individuals’ economic, social, and cultural rights, interwoven with the violation of their civil and political rights.

The state remains unapologetic in its approach to the war on drugs. Instead of pursuing major drug trade operators, authorities in the NCR, Bulacan, and Rizal continue to target low-income families—an approach that fails to address the root cause of drug use among these poor communities, much less among the rest of the Philippine population. Poverty-stricken neighborhoods are pushed to the margins, often left with few options to ease the weight of daily hardships. In some cases, illegal drugs serve as a coping mechanism of last resort to meet the grueling demands of low-paying manual work. In addition, drug-related activities have become part of their informal income streams—desperate attempts to make ends meet in the absence of sustainable economic opportunities.



FIGURE 24. Placards of varying calls.

The drug war operations also have, in some cases, fractured the structure of the victims' households. Sustained fears of police presence and reprisal has caused family members to separate ways in search of safer locations. Children have had to stop school to fulfill the economic roles of their deceased parents, and minors have had to join the workforce, bearing adult responsibilities far too soon.

2. Authoritarianism erodes democratic rights

As Philippine history shows, authoritarian leaders are not the solution to the country's long-term struggles with poverty and underdevelopment. Authoritarianism erodes democratic rights, and at its core is the systematic discrediting of human rights defenders who safeguard the rights of every Filipino. Such was the case with Duterte, whose paternalistic style cast him as a protective father willing to do anything for his children—the nation—while vilifying “drug addicts” as obstacles to national development, regardless of whether such labels were true. In his narrative, those who defended the rights of alleged “drug addicts” were framed as dissidents who did not care for the country.

Duterte's explicit calls for the killing of individuals who use drugs were institutionalized through

The victims and their families are not mere statistics. They are rights holders who have been stripped of the dignity they deserve in life as well as in death. A stark example of this is the continued prevalence of intimidation, harassment, and coercion tactics intended to prevent victims and their families from having their cases documented and from taking other measures to secure justice—a phenomenon that also prevents a more complete and accurate account of the real magnitude of human rights violations among the documented communities.

police use of “*nanlaban*” narratives, which served as blanket justifications for lethal force—often without due process. His populist leadership also drew on a prevailing culture of misogyny and patriarchy, where the sexual domination of women became political theatrics to project power. Persistent sexist and misogynistic rhetoric directed at women critics was cheered on and celebrated by segments of the public, reinforcing his image as a macho strongman.

Duterte preyed on the masses' longstanding desire for a leader who would champion their interests, yet in reality, many of those same people became the targets of his war on drugs. By fostering divisiveness, maligning defenders, and weaponizing gendered violence, he ensured that accountability for his crimes remained out of reach.

3. The war on drugs between the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations has only shifted from overt to covert violence.

From July 2022 to May 2025, PhilRights documented 77 cases of drug-related human rights violations across its partner communities in the National Capital Region (NCR), Bulacan, and Rizal. While NCR and Bulacan recorded a decrease in EJKs, Rizal saw an increase during the first three years of the Marcos Jr. administration compared with Duterte's first three years. Illegal arrest and arbitrary detention now constitute the most prevalent abuse, showing a shift from killings to non-lethal but still rights-violating enforcement tactics.

Overall, drug-related human rights violations have decreased compared to Duterte's first three years; however, abuses against small-time users and those merely linked to the drug trade have risen, with illegal arrests forming the majority of these cases. This trend underscores that the crisis of impunity cannot be measured by death tolls alone.

Hotspots remain concentrated in key areas. In the NCR, Caloocan City accounts for 33% of all fatalities, with persistent violence in Bagong Silang. For illegal arrests and arbitrary detention, San Jose del Monte, Bulacan, continues to be the most affected area.

Under Duterte, the drug war operated as a systemic, coordinated campaign of state violence characterized primarily by extrajudicial killings. Enforcement was overt and ruthless, with the President himself urging police officers to kill alleged drug offenders. In contrast, the Marcos Jr. administration has adopted a less visible but still harmful approach, replacing overt violence with

quieter forms of enforcement that continue to violate rights.

Police brutality during operations remains pervasive, often affecting victims who were simply going about their daily lives, far from any confrontation. Both killings and illegal arrests continue to be carried out casually by police officers.

Community operations are now often framed as anti-illegal gambling, masking targeted arrests and



FIGURE 25. An activist holding up a placard.



FIGURE 26. An activist holding up a placard comparing Marcos Jr. and Duterte.

creating new revenue streams for corrupt officers through extortion. Despite the shift in tactics, the outcomes remain the same: low-level suspects and marginalized communities continue to be targeted, perpetuating cycles of impunity and systemic neglect.

Other drug-related human rights violations continue to proliferate under the Marcos Jr. administration. This consists of enforced disappearances, frustrated EJKs, torture, and harassment.

4. Local mechanisms are still out of reach and out of touch with victims' needs.

Due to the lack of institutional support from various government agencies and despite the intimidation tactics of law enforcement officers, many families left behind by drug war victims are compelled to push back and fight for their rights and continually seek for justice. But despite grassroots outreach attempts to establish linkages, the government has remained largely unfazed and unwilling to provide meaningful assistance to pursue true accountability.

Persistent harassment and intimidation by state forces have made local justice mechanisms—such as filing the cases in domestic courts—a significant hurdle. This sustained obstruction has led many families to consider the International Criminal



FIGURE 27. A placard showing the call “Never Again.”

Court (ICC) as a viable and necessary alternative to achieve the justice they have long been denied.

The existence of an international court is the result of a global civil solidarity movement that envisioned a world where the justice system works, such that even the highest officials can be held accountable when found guilty. The relationship between the ICC and a strong civil society is vital: the ICC plays a critical role of complementarity in the global justice system, while civil society serves as a crucial watchdog, ensuring that state parties’ participation and commitments are upheld.

5. Healing does not entail forgetting.

The lingering effects of the drug war extend far beyond the visible violence. These have infiltrated the psychosocial and economic foundations of the affected families and communities, and they do not simply fade with time. Healing, according to many of the families who have chosen to be documented, cannot and must not mean forgetting.

At a macro level, the campaign has fostered fear, mistrust, and collective trauma—normalizing the devaluation of life and eroding confidence in public institutions.

On a personal level, families carry the burden of grief and compounded economic disadvantages. Children—some of whom are minors—are forced to confront the loss of a parent while dropping out of school to join the labor force.

From personal struggle to collective resistance, PhilRights and its communities believe that to hope for a better world—and to actively participate in shaping a just society—is to resist. Hope is not merely a feeling that moves people; it is cultivated in every small act of defiance. It takes

root when one family reaches out to another, when neighbors study their human rights together, when they sharpen their organizing skills and lead their own communities, when they discover they have grown strong enough to defend one another. As long as communities, together with the broader public, hold on to hope for the future and the pursuit of justice, power is reclaimed for those who have long been denied it.

Yet the state's indifference and continued intimidation deny space for true healing. The absence of institutional support, the obstruction of justice in local courts, and the ongoing impunity felt on the ground make the pain heavier and even more present. Families fight not just for justice, but for remembrance. Their push toward avenues like the ICC is not an escape—it is a demand to be seen.

To heal is not to forget. It is to confront, to speak the truth, and to build pathways where dignity can be restored. Only through acknowledgement, accountability, and the restructuring of broken systems can healing begin.



FIGURE 28. Human rights defenders raise their fists as a symbolic commitment to continue the fight for justice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The foregoing conclusions have outlined the compounding effects of state-sanctioned violence on communities in the NCR, Bulacan, and Rizal that have been most heavily affected by the so-called drug war, as well as the need to immediately, comprehensively, and systematically address their emerging needs. In this regard, PhilRights urgently calls for victim-centered responses, economic redress, and systemic accountability—paving the way for meaningful change. Specifically, the following sectors are urged to heed these recommendations:

1. The National Government

The national government must decisively end the war on drugs. It must commit to a genuine human rights-based approach that confronts the root causes of drug use by guaranteeing communities' economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights, treating drug dependency as

a health concern, and adhering to international standards and recommendations. Reforms must go beyond lofty pronouncements. They must be backed by implementation, accountability, and measurable impact.

It must also lead the way towards a meaningful shift from these punitive and systematic rights violations, and diligently work to secure the four components of a just transition—truth, justice, reparations, and guarantees of non-recurrence:¹⁰³

■ Truth

Investigations and prosecutions must encompass all drug war-related cases, including those which occurred, and may continue to occur, after the Philippines' withdrawal from the ICC in March 2019. Victims and witnesses must be protected and encouraged to come forward, independent and credible documentation must be sustained, evidence must be preserved, and the truth must be upheld at all times. Genuine cooperation with the ICC is critical—not only by providing security to families pursuing justice, but by taking the bold step of rejoining the ICC, as advocated by legal experts and human rights defenders.

■ Justice

A crucial step towards dismantling the prevailing culture of impunity would be to hold all perpetrators accountable in accordance with local and international laws. We must learn from the mistakes of the post-Martial Law era of the Philippines, which has allowed hundreds of perpetrators in the police, military, and paramilitary forces to enjoy non-accountability even to this day, almost 40 years since the toppling of the Marcos Sr. dictatorship. This should not be allowed to happen again.

■ Reparations

Holistic and sustained support services for victims and bereaved families must be provided using a victim-centered, participatory, and do-no-harm approach. The government must exhaust all possible means to help all grieving families heal and be able to sustain themselves despite the losses they have incurred.

■ Guarantees of non-recurrence

Reforms must go beyond lofty pronouncements. They must be backed by implementation, accountability, and measurable impact. Institutional reforms must cover law enforcement (eradicating the culture of impunity and excessive force), justice-seeking (protecting victims and witnesses, ensuring the accessibility of justice mechanisms, and upholding the integrity of domestic courts), health (enacting a rights-based approach to addressing the proliferation of dangerous drugs), and education (strengthening rights education and encouraging critical discussions on periods of wide-scale gross human rights violations).

¹⁰³ “The rule of law and transitional justice in conflict and post-conflict societies: Report of the Secretary General,” United Nations Security Council, August 23, 2004, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2004/616>.

2. Civil Society Organizations and the Academe

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and academic institutions must continue, intensify, and expand their documentation and organizing efforts, with the primary aim of amplifying the voices of victims. Collaboration around ICC engagements should be pursued thoughtfully and meaningfully, keeping survivors' interests at the heart of all justice initiatives and ensuring that victims and their families are treated with dignity and respect at every stage of the process.

At the same time, these institutions should strengthen collaboration to actively counter misinformation that undermines human rights and the legitimacy of international accountability mechanisms. This includes producing and

widely disseminating fact-based, accessible, and multilingual resources that debunk false narratives, document violations, and highlight the lived experiences of victims and human rights defenders (HRDs). Joint initiatives—such as community-based programs, educational sessions, public forums, and digital campaigns—should promote a culture of human rights that frames rights advocacy as integral to democracy rather than oppositional to national interest. By cultivating critical thinking, media literacy, and historical awareness, CSOs and the academe can act as a societal safeguard against impunity, ensuring that truth-telling and accountability remain central to public discourse.

3. The Media

Media actors share this responsibility. Coverage must be guided by a do-no-harm approach, prioritizing the safety and well-being of families over spectacle. Journalists must highlight victims'

stories with care, verify facts rigorously, resist the lure of misinformation, and sustain coverage of extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations.

4. The International Community

The international community must remain firmly committed to supporting victims and reinforcing the global campaign against the Philippine drug war. The United Nations must acknowledge the gaps in its prior efforts, including lapses in mechanisms like the United Nations Joint Programme with the Department of Justice (DOJ),

and ensure impartial investigations moving forward. The ICC should broaden its scope beyond murder cases, investigating a wider range of human rights violations and perpetrators. The Philippines must be consistently included in international policy discussions, reflecting solidarity with communities still waiting to be heard.

5. The Public

Finally, the general public has a vital role in safeguarding the rights that have long been won, ensuring they are never taken back. This means remaining vigilant against attacks on our democratic freedoms and being prepared to fight back whenever these rights are trampled on or violated. An attack on one person's rights is an attack on everyone's rights; it is therefore imperative to stand in solidarity with the disenfranchised and to march alongside

the people, even on issues that go beyond our personal struggles. We must resist disinformation, counter falsehoods, and refuse to be complicit in the shrinking of democratic spaces—steps that are crucial to preventing atrocities like the war on drugs. The public is likewise called to volunteer, speak up, amplify victims' voices, be part of a collective, and act with conscience—because justice, healing, and truth all begin with the people.

CHAPTER 5

JUSTICE IS **PENDING** FOR THE DISENFRANCHISED

If the law can be bent by those in power, punishment falls only on the powerless. Nine years have passed since Duterte declared a “war on drugs” on a national level, yet justice remains out of reach. Debates over ‘sovereignty,’ the alleged illegality of the arrest, misinformation about the International Criminal Court (ICC), and political grandstanding share one troubling feature—a disregard for the pain of victims and their families. This disregard persists under President Marcos Jr., whose neutrality and inaction have stalled the judicial process. Political machinery continues to shape public sentiment, but it must not silence the truth: the victims of crimes against humanity deserve recognition, support, and justice. Civil society and communities must persist in demanding accountability until those responsible are held to account.

Duterte’s arrest in the ongoing trial marked a pivotal moment, stirring a complex mix of emotions. For many, it was long-awaited progress toward justice. Yet this milestone was quickly overshadowed by Duterte’s proposed interim release. Victims’ families voiced deep concerns for their safety and for the prospects of accountability, fearing further delays—or even the derailment—of the justice they have long sought.

As the trial continues, their voices must remain at the center of the broader conversation on justice and accountability. The weight of the court’s decisions cannot be overstated. The statements in this chapter come directly from the families of drug war victims, offering their reactions to Duterte’s arrest and their perspectives on his possible interim release.



FIGURE 29. Victims’ families light and hold their candles in remembrance of their loved ones.

FAMILIES' STATEMENTS

on Duterte's Arrest

PhilRights, steadfast in its commitment to truth and justice, stands in solidarity with the unwavering resolve of victims' families to hold Rodrigo Duterte accountable for the crimes against humanity committed during his so-called war on drugs. As part of the ongoing campaign to prosecute Duterte and to urge the Philippines to rejoin the ICC as a vital avenue for redress, PhilRights gathered the statements of these families in the wake of his arrest in March 2025.

LEA

"Naiyak ako sa tuwa dahil matutupad narin ang matagal na hinibintay. Pero bigla akong nalungkot dahil may fake news akong nasagap na balita na na-dismiss si Duterte. Kaya wag mabahala dahil patuloy pa rin ang paglilitis. Pero kailangan natin ng suporta, ang maitutulong natin ay ipanalangin ang bawat isa para sa ating tagumpay na bustisya.

(I cried tears of joy because a long-awaited moment is finally happening. But then I was saddened after hearing fake news claiming that Duterte's case had been dismissed. We must not lose hope—the trial is still ongoing. What we can do now is support each other and pray for our shared victory and for justice.)"

KRISTINE

"Sa ngayon po, sa binalita na pag-aresto ng ICC ay lubos po siyempre ang aming kasiyahan ngunit alam naman po natin na marami pang hakbang sa paglilitis at pag iimbestiga. Ang sabi nga po mahaba-habang laban ito. Kaya hindi po sa pag-aresto natatapos ito bagkus ito ay simula pa lamang ng aming mga laban. Naniniwala kami at aasa sa kakayahan at suporta na ibinibigay sa amin ng ICC. At sa huli, mananatagot ang dapat managot. Maparusahan ang may mga sala.

(We are overjoyed by the news of Duterte's arrest by the ICC. Still, we know that this is only the beginning—there are many steps ahead in the investigation and trial. This is a long fight, and it doesn't end with his arrest. We believe in the ICC's capacity and in the support they give us. In the end, the guilty will be held accountable. Justice will prevail.)"

ANNE

“Sobra po namin ikinagagalak ang pagdakip sa dating Pangulong Duterte na tumapak sa pagkatao at puso ng bawat biktima at ng kanilang mga pamilya. Hindi namin maipaliwanag ang sayang nadarama sa ngayon. Sana magtuloy-tuloy na ang tamang paglilitis at pagbayaran nawa ni Duterte at mga kasabwat niya ang pagpatay sa bigit 30,000 na Pilipino kasama na ang tiyuhin ko na inosente. Maraming salamat din sa inyo PhilRights at sa ating mga partner org. Kun’di dahil sa inyo hindi namin makakamit ito. Today is a very emotional day for us. Binabalikan ko ang laban simula umpisa at kayo ‘yong nandiyan at nanatiling nandiyan, kaya maraming maraming salamat po!

(We are overjoyed by the arrest of former President Duterte, who trampled on the dignity and lives of victims and their families. Words cannot express how we feel. We hope the trial continues and that Duterte and his accomplices are made to pay for the murder of more than 30,000 Filipinos, including my innocent uncle. We are deeply grateful to PhilRights and our partner organizations. Without your support, we would not have come this far. Today is an emotional day. I look back on the beginning of this struggle, and I remember that you were always there—and you remain here with us. Thank you, thank you so much!)

RIA

“Masaya po dahil nabuli na si Duterte pero galit kami at dismayado parang hindi pa rin kasi umaayon ang tadhana dahil sa mga lumalabas na bali-balita na may pagkakamali ang ICC sa pagkakadakip sa dating pangulo. Parang hindi daw tama ang pagkakadakip sa kanya at balak pabalikin siya sa Pilipinas, talagang hindi pa dapat magdiwang sa pangyayari.

(We are happy that Duterte was arrested, but we are also angry and dismayed. It feels like fate still refuses to side with us. There are rumors that the ICC made a mistake and that he may be sent back to the Philippines. We cannot celebrate just yet.)”

NINA

“Bilang magulang na isa sa mga biktima ng ‘war on drugs’ ng administrasyong Duterte, umpisa pa lamang ang pagkakadakip sa dating Pangulo ng binibintay kong hustisya para sa anak kong napatay. Hangga’t hindi siya nahahatulan at nasesentensiyahan sa kasong Crimes against Humanity, hindi pa rin ako magiging kampante sa ngayon. Sa dami ng naging biktima ng EJK karapat-dapat siyang makaranas ng mga sakit at panibugho sa kanyang katauhan na parang isa din siya sa naging biktima ng war on drugs. Ang panalangin ko lang sa Poong Maykapal sana ay buwag na siyang pabalikin dito sa Pilipinas at tuluyang mahatulan o masentensiyahan ng nararapat na bilang ng kung ilang taon siyang karapat dapat na makulong. Mahaba pa ang bagdanan na kaniyang aakyat upang makarating sa kaniyang naghibintay na paroroonan. Laban lang sa panalangin at hustisyang nawa’y makamtan naming mga naging biktima ng EJK. Mula sa Panginoong Diyos ang kabatulan at sentensiya ng labat ng kanyang mga nilalang. Nawa’y loobin mo

po ng iyong makapangyarihang banal na espiritu ang lahat ng mangyayari sa kasong ito at patnubayan ang mga bukom sa ICC upang maipanalò ang hustisya para sa amin.

(As a mother whose child was killed in Duterte’s war on drugs, his arrest is only the beginning of the justice I have long prayed for. I will not feel at ease until he is convicted and sentenced for crimes against humanity. With so many EJK victims, he deserves to experience the same pain and grief—like he, too, became a victim of his own war. I pray to the Almighty that he will not be allowed to return to the Philippines and that he is sentenced to prison for however long he deserves. There is still a long road ahead before true accountability is reached. We, the victims, continue to fight through prayer. Justice will come from God. May His Holy Spirit guide the ICC and its judges to deliver justice for us.)”

The victims’ families recognize Duterte’s arrest as a step toward long-awaited justice. While it has brought them joy and renewed hope, they remain vigilant in the face of disinformation from Duterte’s camp. For them, justice is not yet fully won. They call on the ICC to stand with the oppressed, honor the lives of more than 30,000 individuals killed in the “war on drugs,” and ensure that those responsible are held to account.



FIGURE 30. Those who were left behind.



FIGURE 31. When victims learn to stand for themselves.

FAMILIES' VIEWS

on Duterte's Interim Release

On June 12, 2025, the camp of former President Rodrigo Duterte filed a motion for his interim release, citing his advanced age and “humanitarian considerations”.¹⁰⁴ This move was met with strong condemnation from victims’ families who lost their loved ones in the bloody war on drugs. For them, Duterte’s detention alone cannot account for the scale and gravity of the crimes committed. They insist that all those responsible for the killings must also be arrested and detained alongside him.

For the families, this is more than a legal concern—it is a matter of safety and justice. They warn that Duterte’s release would pose a real and present

danger to witnesses and bereaved families, noting that his vast network of allies could still act on his behalf, even outside the Philippines. To them, granting him temporary freedom would not only undermine ongoing efforts for justice but also send a dangerous message that power can once again be used to escape accountability.

As one family member pleaded, “Together with his victims and the families left behind, we beg you [the ICC] not to allow Duterte’s interim release.” Releasing him now, they warn, would be a grave insult to the memory of the thousands killed and a betrayal of justice.

JEAN

“Hindi ko sinusuportahan ang pansamantalang paglaya ni Rodrigo Duterte habang hindi pa tapos ang imbestigasyon at paglilitis sa ICC. Sa bigat ng mga kaso, sa kasaysayan ng pagtanggap niya sa ICC, at sa posibleng implikasyon sa hustisya at kaligtasan ng mga testigo, mas makabubuti kung mananatili siyang nasa kustodiya ng batas noong siya ay maaresto. Ang hustisya ay hindi lamang para sa isa—kun’di para sa libu-libong Pilipinong nawalan ng buhay at pamilya.

(I do not support the interim release of Rodrigo Duterte while the investigation and trial at the ICC are still ongoing. Given the gravity of the charges, his history of defying the ICC, and the potential implications for justice and the safety of witnesses, it would be best for him to remain in legal custody, as he has been since his arrest. Justice is not only for one person—it is for the thousands of Filipinos who lost their lives and their families.)”

¹⁰⁴ Jairo Bolledo, “Duterte asks ICC for temporary freedom while case is pending,” Rappler, June 13, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/rodrigo-duterte-icc-request-interim-release-june-2025/>.

GIRLIE

“Sa aking pananaw ay tutol ako dito lalo pa’t kaligtasan ng bawat pamilyang EJK ang nakasalalay at baka dahil sa kaniyang pansamantalang paglaya ay makagawa pa ng hindi maganda sa lipunan o sa mga nasabing biktima ng bawat pamilya ng war on drugs. Para sa aming mga pamilyang naiwan ay napaka-delikado ng gagawing desisyon ng ICC kung ito ay kanilang papayagan.

(From my perspective, I am against Duterte’s interim release, especially because the safety of every EJK victim’s family is at stake. If released, he could still cause harm to society or to the families of those killed in the war on drugs. For us, the bereaved families, it would be extremely dangerous if the ICC decides to grant his request.)”

APRIL

“Ako at ang aking mga anak ay isa sa mga naiwan ng biktima ng war on drugs. Mahigpit po naming tinututulan ang aplikasyon para sa pansamantalang pagpapalaya kay Rodrigo Duterte. Siya po ay kasalukuyang nahaharap sa mga seryosong akusasyon ng paglabag sa karapatang pantao at iba pang krimen sa ilalim ng batas pambansa at pandaigdig.

Ang pagpapalayang ito ay isang pambabastos sa mga libu-libong biktima ng madugong war on drugs. Maaaring isa itong senyales na ang kapangyarihan ay maaaring gamitin upang takasan ang pananagutan at hustisya. Kami po ay nananawagan sa mga kinauukulan na suriin ang aplikasyon na pansamantalang pagpapalaya kay Duterte. Igiit ang pananagutan alinsunod sa batas. Ito pong aming biling-makataong panawagan para sa katarungan ng aming mga mahal sa buhay na kanilang pinatay.

(My children and I are among those left behind by victims of the war on drugs. We strongly oppose the application for Rodrigo Duterte’s interim release. He is currently facing serious charges of human rights violations and other crimes under both domestic and international law.

Granting him temporary release would be an insult to the thousands of victims of the bloody war on drugs. It could signal that power can once again be used to escape accountability and justice. We call on the ICC to thoroughly examine Duterte’s request. Insist on accountability in accordance with the law. This is our appeal—a plea for justice for our loved ones who were killed.)”

AURING

“Huwag po sana ninyong papayagan na magkaroon ng paglaya si Duterte. Sana po noong panahon na pinapatay nila iyong mga pinagbibinalaan nila na war on drugs ay binigyan po nila muna ng pagkakataon na mabuhay pati ang kanilang mga pamilya ay dinamay. Tapos ngayon, humihingi ng pansamantalang kalayaan. Kulang pa po ang pagkakakulong niya diyan kung para sa mga taong pinatay nila. Dapat lahat ng kasangkot sa kaso na iyan mahuli na rin para sama-sama na sila sa kulungan, [ito po ang mensabe namin sa] mga taga-ICC. Sampu po ng mga pinatay niya at mga pamilya na naiwan, kami po ay nagmamakaaawa po sa inyo na huwag po sanang mangyari na mapagbigyan ng pansamantalang kalayaan si Duterte.

(Please do not allow the interim release of Duterte. During the time they were killing suspected drug offenders, they never gave those people—even their families—a chance to live. And now, they are the ones asking for temporary freedom. His detention is far from enough to make up for the lives they took. Everyone involved in these crimes should also be arrested and held accountable—so they can face justice together behind bars. On behalf of the victims he killed and the families left behind, we earnestly plead with you, the ICC: please do not allow Duterte to be granted interim release.)”

KAYE

“Para po sa akin, hindi na ako nagulat na mag-aaply siya ng interim release ngunit sana hindi ito mapayagan ng ICC sapagkat kabit na hindi siya maibalik sa Pilipinas, sa dami ng kaniyang tauhan makakagalaw pa rin siya sa gusto niya. Ang pangamba ko lang ang balikan niya ang mga pamilya ng biktima.

(I’m not surprised that he’s applying for interim release, but I sincerely hope the ICC does not grant it. Even if he isn’t allowed to return to the Philippines, he still has many loyal allies who can carry out his orders. What I fear most is that he might retaliate against the families of the victims.)”

These testimonies offer more than just reactions to Duterte’s arrest and possible interim release—they are powerful reflections of the pain, persistence, and demands of families who continue to seek justice. They remind us that the true toll of the “war on drugs” cannot be measured by numbers alone. Behind every statistic is a life unjustly taken and a family forever changed.

As the legal process unfolds, the voices of the bereaved call not only for punishment, but also for recognition, dignity, and lasting accountability. They urge the ICC and the global community to stand firm against impunity, resist political maneuvering, and ensure that justice is delivered fully and without compromise. In their struggle, we are reminded that the fight for truth and justice is not only about the past—it is about safeguarding the future from the repetition of such atrocities.



FIGURE 32. Women can be human rights defenders.

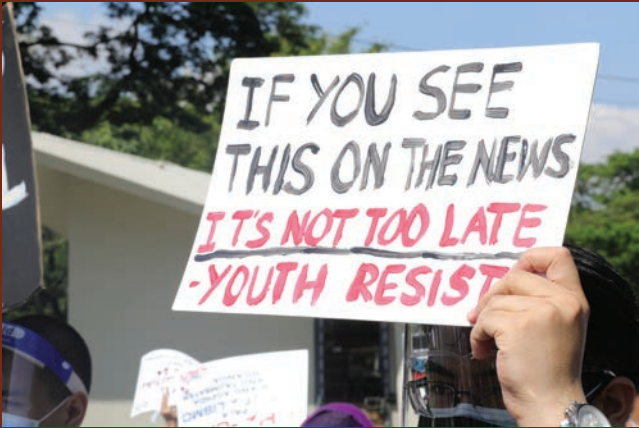


FIGURE 33. Youth organization calls that it is not too late to resist.

FIGURE 34. Women's march against hunger, violence, and calamities.



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