

Crackdown on drugs in the Philippines involves extrajudicial killings

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Human rights and faith groups are speaking out against extrajudicial killings in the Philippines linked to the new president's antidrug campaign.

The National Council of Churches in the Philippines [released a statement in early September](#) decrying both the harm caused by illegal drugs and the execution of alleged drug dealers without trial.

"The continuing killings shake our confidence in the ability of the government to uphold basic human rights and legal processes which are hallmarks of our Constitution," leaders of the NCCP's ten member churches wrote. "We cannot go on with this impunity."

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines [released a pastoral appeal to law enforcement earlier this summer](#), saying that they "are disturbed by an increasing number of reports that suspected drug-peddlers, pushers, and others . . . have been shot, supposedly because they resist arrest."

The bishops called for all to be accountable for stopping the increase in criminal activity.

Archbishop Socrates B. Villegas [disseminated a homily read throughout his archdiocese](#) in early August.

"I do not have to be a Catholic to be disturbed by the killings that jar us every time we hear or watch or read the news," he wrote. "The humanity in me cries each time I see a parent and a child grieve over loved ones killed on the sidewalk or thrown in grassy areas hogtied or masked with tape."

He noted that authorities would say that the antidrug campaign must be given a chance to work, to create a society where children are not threatened by drugs. But the murders are teaching children "that killing suspected criminals without fair

hearing is a morally acceptable way to eradicate crime,” he wrote. “Who can say the killed is innocent or guilty?”

On the campaign trail, Rodrigo Duterte promised to stamp out criminality within three to six months. The people of the Philippines elected him with a large margin.

In his first months as the nation’s president, the rate of extrajudicial killings linked to his antidrug campaign has exploded. One news source reported that more than 1,900 people have been killed in the crackdown on drug trafficking in the Philippines since Duterte was elected. About 800 of the deaths came at the hands of police during antidrug operations, with the rest occurring under as yet unknown circumstances. Human rights groups have suggested that vigilantes acting with the tacit approval of police—and in some cases, police themselves—are responsible for many of the unsolved killings.

At the same time, the crime rate has gone down since Duterte entered office, as it did in Davao City during his term as mayor, said Anni Piiparinen, a specialist on Southeast Asian security at the Atlantic Council.

“Filipinos are very weary of high crime rates in the country, and the president has played successfully to insecurities,” she said. “A lot of people see the killings as a necessary evil in the pursuit of his agenda.”

In Davao, a city of about 1.5 million people, it’s safe to walk anywhere at night, locals say. And the most common drug, the methamphetamine strain called shabu, is no longer sold in the streets. Smoking in public is banned, as is the use of firecrackers and driving at more than 19 m.p.h. on downtown streets. Traffic accidents have fallen more than 40 percent since the speed limit took effect in 2013. —the *Christian Century*; *The Christian Science Monitor*

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