

Duterte's War on Drugs: A Legacy of Bloodshed, Arrogance, and Deception

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The Philippine Senate and House of Representatives are currently embroiled in intense investigations into the “war on drugs” carried out during the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte. These hearings aim to shed light on the brutal campaign that left over 30,000 individuals dead, many of whom were innocent victims—including local government officials tagged as “drug lords” without credible evidence. Now a private citizen, Duterte’s defiant and arrogant demeanor has not wavered, as he faces allegations that paint a grim picture of his leadership.

Senate Divisions and Deference

In the Senate, proceedings have been hindered by a faction of Duterte loyalists who continue to shield him from accountability. Senator Ronald “Bato” dela Rosa, a former national police chief who spearheaded the drug war, remains one of Duterte’s staunchest defenders. During Senate sessions, dela Rosa has consistently deflected criticism and rationalized the extrajudicial killings (EJKs) that defined the campaign. Critics argue that this loyalty undermines the integrity of the investigation, as key senators seem more intent on protecting Duterte than uncovering the truth.

House of Representatives: A More Serious Pursuit of Justice

In contrast, the House of Representatives has taken a more rigorous and impactful approach. The Quadruple Committee (Quad Com) has emerged as a serious force in the quest for accountability. Representative Jinky Luistro has been particularly instrumental in cornering Duterte, exposing his direct involvement in unlawful orders to murder suspected drug offenders without due process. In one explosive session, Duterte even admitted to giving illegal directives, a rare moment of vulnerability from the former president.

Former Senator Antonio Trillanes IV further strengthened the case against Duterte by presenting damning evidence that the so-called war on drugs was a smokescreen. Trillanes revealed bank records linking Duterte to financial transactions with powerful drug lords, suggesting that the campaign was less about eradicating drugs and more about eliminating small-time pushers while protecting large-scale narcotics operators under his patronage.

Duterte's Legacy of Violence

Duterte’s penchant for violence did not start with his presidency. During his tenure as mayor of Davao City, Duterte was accused of operating death squads that targeted both criminals and political opponents. His leadership style, marked by machismo and brutality, has turned

the Philippines into what many describe as a “killing field.”

The testimonies and evidence presented at the House investigations have shattered the narrative that the drug war was a legitimate anti-narcotics campaign. Instead, it appears to have been a facade for consolidating power and protecting Duterte’s allies in the drug trade.

The Marcos Administration’s Calculated Silence

Meanwhile, the administration of President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. has remained conspicuously silent throughout these proceedings. Analysts suggest that this silence may indicate tacit approval for Duterte’s potential indictment, possibly even supporting a move to hand him over to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Such a move could distance Marcos from the atrocities of the Duterte administration while signaling a return to adherence to international norms.

The Path to Justice

As the investigations unfold, a clearer picture emerges of a campaign built on bloodshed, lies, and impunity. The evidence suggests that Duterte’s “war on drugs” was not about justice but about silencing dissent, eliminating perceived enemies, and consolidating power.

While the Senate’s investigation remains mired in partisanship, the House of Representatives, led by figures like Rep. Luistro and bolstered by evidence from whistleblowers like Trillanes, has become a beacon of hope for those seeking justice. The question remains: will the Marcos administration allow accountability to prevail, or will Duterte’s allies succeed in shielding him from the consequences of his actions?

As the nation awaits the conclusion of these investigations, one truth stands starkly clear: the Duterte era was one of blood and betrayal, leaving a dark stain on the country’s history. For the families of the victims, justice remains overdue, and the world watches to see if the Philippines will finally hold Duterte to account.

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