

ICC One Step Closer to Probe of Philippines Murderous ‘War on Drugs’

UN Human Rights Council Should Launch Own Investigation

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Philippines [President Rodrigo Duterte’s chilling promise](#) to “drug pushers, holdup men, and do-nothings, you better get out [...] because I’ll kill you” may finally come back to haunt him.

Today the International Criminal Court Prosecutor [Fatou Bensouda](#) [announced that she has asked the court’s judges to approve her investigation](#) into crimes committed in the Philippines from November 1, 2011, the date the Philippines became an ICC member, until March 16, 2019. On March 17, 2019, [the Philippines effectively withdrew from the court](#).

A possible ICC investigation into the thousands of “drug war” killings in the Philippines is especially welcome given [the United Nations Human Rights Council has yet to effectively condemn](#) the Duterte government’s atrocities, despite a scathing report by the [UN top rights’ commissioner sounding the alarm](#) on the scale and gravity of the situation.

In 2017, Human Rights Watch found President Duterte and other senior officials have [instigated and incited killings](#) of mostly the urban poor in a campaign that could amount to crimes against humanity. According to the [Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency](#), 6,117 individuals were killed during police anti-drug operations from July 1, 2016, to April 30, 2021. The Philippine National Police has a [higher figure](#) – 7,884 killed up to August 1, 2020.

Instead of condemning these abuses, the UN Human Rights Council has opted instead to provide [technical cooperation and capacity-building](#) to the same government that denies the true scale and severity of the human rights violations, has publicly endorsed the policy of killings, avoids independent investigations, and continues to crack down on civil society.

In his February 2021 address to the Human Rights Council, head of the Philippine Department of Justice, Menardo Guevarra, [admitted police culpability](#) in thousands of “drug war” killings. But while the new police chief, [General Guillermo Eleazar](#), has promised to cooperate with the Department of Justice, he is only allowing access to 53 case files.

There is an urgent need for a Human Rights Council-backed investigation. The government's campaign of extrajudicial killings has continued well beyond its withdrawal from the ICC, with [devastating consequences for victims and their families](#), including children. And the killings have [only intensified](#) during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The UN Human Rights Council should course-correct and stand up for the Philippine's victims instead of giving support to the government that kills them.

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Featured image: Protest by local human rights groups, remembering the victims of the drug war, October 2019. (CC BY-SA 4.0)

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