

Statement Submitted to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission in Response to the Hearing on the Human Rights Consequences on the War on Drugs in the Philippines

July 26, 2017

Let me begin by expressing our thanks to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for conducting the hearing on the “Human Rights Consequences of the War on Drugs in the Philippines”.

I am an adviser of Katarungan, (Justice in Pilipino) an organization with members in DC, Maryland, and VA that promotes peace, justice and human rights in the Philippines. Formed in 2008 in response to the human rights crisis under then Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo that gained international notoriety whose military, police and paramilitary forces were responsible for numerous extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances and illegal arrests that were committed to silence its government critics.

Our group has organized speaking tours for Filipino victims of human rights violations, has done media work and community forums to raise awareness in the DC-MD-VA area. We have also participated in legislative advocacy to make lawmakers aware of the human rights situation in the Philippines.

We are greatly concerned by the shocking number---in the thousands--- of extrajudicial killings of drug addicts and dealers living in poverty. Even mere suspects are killed. But those involved in drugs among the wealthy and the police are spared.

This killing spree by the Duterte government has spread to those branded as “enemies of the state” which include journalists critical of the regime, social activists indigenous people called Lumads defending their ancestral lands. Even church people are not spared.

There has been a lack of appropriate investigation, due process, prosecution and punishment in all these violations of human rights. Victims and their families do not get justice.

We are troubled that the Duterte administration, like previous administrations, continues to use brute force as a way to deal with perceived threats to law and order. According to Karapatan, (the Alliance for the Advancement of People’s Rights) the Duterte government is continuing policies detrimental to the people’s interests, especially the marginalized poor who comprise the vast majority of Filipinos.

His war on drugs, and his counter-insurgency plan called Oplan Kapayapaan, instead of providing security gives more insecurity and danger, particularly to the to the poor living in the rural areas.

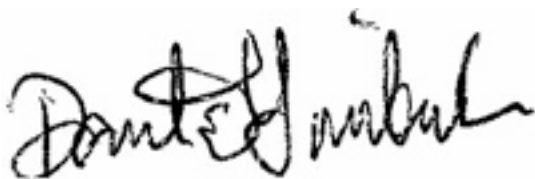
Dutertete's declaration of Martial Law in the whole island of Mindanao gives vast powers of the military and police, over and above civilian local authorities. Initially declared for a period of 60 days, Martial Law was extended by a compliant Congress up to the end of 2017!

Martial Law in Mindanao has already resulted in numerous human rights violations. The national human rights group Karapatan has recently documented numerous victims of indiscriminate shelling, bombing of villages, politically-motivated killings, illegal arrests, and thousands subjected to threats, harassment and intimidation. The recent destruction of the City of Marawi has caused the dislocation of 416,005 of Maranaos who are in evacuation centers.

We and other human rights and peace advocates are strongly urging President Duterte that the solution to the peace and order problem is not Martial Law and the use of the military and police forces. These have failed in the past. We urge the Duterte government to address the social problems of joblessness, homelessness, lack of medical care and educational facilities. We strongly urge him to address the problem of poverty of the vast majority of Filipinos. We believe that these are the causes of the rebellion of the poor.

Lastly, we support the Filipino People's call urging President Duterte to re-open the peace talks between the Philippine government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines which he cancelled and threatened to wage a "total war" for this will only result in the loss of more and more lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dante C. Simbulan', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Dante C. Simbulan, Ph.D
Adviser