



## 14 March 2025 – AFAD Statement on the Arrest of Former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte by the ICC for Crimes Against Humanity



The Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) welcomes the decision of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to arrest former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte for alleged Crimes Against Humanity. On March 11, the ICC through the INTERPOL and the Philippine National Police (PNP) served the arrest warrant to Duterte, instructing for his immediate surrender to the custody of the ICC. As of today, March 14, Duterte is scheduled to make his initial appearance before the ICC's Pre-Trial Chamber.

The ICC has opened investigations into the actions of Duterte related to his controversial war on drugs. The ICC investigation is centered around alleged crimes against humanity, particularly murders committed during Duterte's "war on drugs" campaign, which began in 2016. The campaign led to thousands of deaths, many of which were extrajudicial killings carried out by police officers, vigilantes, and other groups. These killings were allegedly carried out with the approval or encouragement of Duterte and his government, targeting individuals accused of being involved in illegal drugs, often without due process, trial, or legal justification.

Duterte repeatedly encouraged the police to kill those suspected of drug dealing or addiction. In some instances, he publicly endorsed the extrajudicial killing of suspects, even offering rewards for police officers involved in such acts. The killings have been described as state-sponsored, with

little accountability, leading to concerns about the systematic and widespread nature of the violence. The ICC has argued that these killings and related actions may constitute crimes against humanity under international law, particularly in the form of widespread or systematic attacks on civilians. This could include mass killings, torture, and other inhumane acts against civilians in the context of the drug war.

Many of the victims were from marginalized communities, particularly the poor. The campaign disproportionately targeted impoverished areas, raising concerns that vulnerable populations were being unfairly targeted in a manner consistent with discrimination and abuse of power. Duterte has also been accused of obstructing investigations into the killings by limiting the role of independent bodies, attacking human rights organizations, and removing key officials who might have investigated these incidents effectively.

Human rights organizations claimed that the actual number of killings is much higher than the numbers provided by the PNP. They suggest that the total number of deaths, including those carried out by vigilante groups and unidentified gunmen, could range from 20,000 to 30,000 or more. These figures include both the extrajudicial killings (EJKs) and those in police operations. During his term, 56 cases of enforced disappearances were recorded by the Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND).

Duterte has also been accused of either forming or endorsing the creation of the Davao Death Squad, a group believed to be responsible for the killings of suspected criminals, drug offenders, and other individuals. It is alleged that this group operated under Duterte's orders or with his tacit approval during his time as mayor. Human rights organizations, including the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) in the Philippines, have documented numerous cases of extrajudicial killings allegedly linked to the Davao Death Squad. However, investigations into the matter have often been hampered by a culture of impunity, making it difficult to bring the perpetrators to justice.

For the victims, this is a victory in itself – and a step closer to justice. As a Federation working on one of the most cruel forms of human rights violations, Duterte's arrest is a warning to abusers of power across the region and the world. By investigating the massive scale of human rights violation, the ICC ensures that perpetrators are held accountable, and victims' suffering is recognized. Without this accountability, leaders may feel emboldened to continue violating rights without fear of repercussions. When repressive governments are investigated, it promotes the principle of justice on a global scale. It sends a message that no one, regardless of their position or power, is above the law, and that international justice is a universal value.