

## DUTERTE: RICH AND POOR ARE EQUAL

### TARGETS IN WAR ON DRUGS

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**TAGUM CITY**—President Duterte said he could not spare the poor from his anti-illegal drugs campaign because that would be a form of selective justice and against the law.

Thousands of people, most of them in impoverished communities, have been killed since Mr. Duterte launched his war on drugs after taking office in 2016. Human rights groups blamed the police for deliberately killing drug suspects during antidrug operations.

"So if you are poor, I cannot do anything and say, 'I will not arrest you, I will not kill you because you are poor'—that would be selective justice," the President said in a speech on Friday night at the 60th birthday celebration of Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez here.

#### 'Conspiracy'

The President said he had been accused of targeting just the poor. "And worse, they say, 'Duterte only kills the poor,'" he lamented.

But he said the law was very clear. "I cannot say that this law is only for the rich but not for the poor," he said.

Justifying the inclusion of the poor among targets in the war on drugs, Mr. Duterte said "[t]he act of one is the act of all because it is a conspiracy. That is the law."

"And my oath of office says that I have to enforce the law against everybody who violates the law," he added.

All those involved in the drugs trade should be held accountable and "the law says that the one who cooks, the one who distributes and the one who peddles the drugs are equal-

ly—equally—guilty," he said.

Mr. Duterte said one reason

the poor were targets in the drug war was because "shabu" (crystal meth) was "a merchandise for the poor."

"Those in Forbes Park, in Dasmariñas [Village]—they do not do it with shabu. They do it with cocaine and heroin," he said.

#### Shrinks the brain

"At least, it (cocaine) is organic," he said. "But shabu is a mixture of deadly chemicals and it shrinks the brain of a person."

He said minors were also being drawn into the narcotics trade by drug syndicates.

"And most of the time, they are using these minors," the President said. "Sad to say, actually, the law—it was not [Sen. Francis] Pangilinan—but it was his law that provided for this kind of environment now."

He said law enforcers were having difficulty dealing with minors arrested in the course of the campaign against illegal drugs.

\* DRUGS

\* DUTERTE, ROOMBO

# PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

SUNDAY 1 JANUARY 14, 2018

A2

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"The policemen ... even you mayors, you cannot arrest, even detain for a moment, a minor," he said.

### Enormous problem

"And you are not even allowed even to lecture on him or to him, even a minute of what accountability means to society. Nothing. So if they get arrested and they say minor, that is why [they get released]," he said.

Mr. Duterte again vowed to "fight the drug problem to the last day of my term."

"It will not stop" even if making the country totally drug-free was "something which is really impossible," he said.

Duterte acknowledged he was facing an enormous problem in tackling illegal drugs because "even policemen, Customs" were

involved in the drug trade.

He said he was battling a

"formidable group" of drug traffickers but he didn't care whether they included the richest or poorest members of society.

"I do not even care if you are the mayor," he warned. "Using the platform of the mayorship for drug distribution, you're signing your death warrant there. And that's the truth."

In a statement backing the President's strong anti-illegal drugs campaign, Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) Director General Aaron Aquino said he would focus on the country's porous borders to block the entry of illegal drugs.

### 'We will not stop'

He said he would seek deputization of PDEA by the Maritime Industry Authority to allow its agents to inspect domestic and international vessels and public and private ports nationwide.

PDEA also plans to set up

offices in seaports managed by the Philippine Ports Authority and link up with the Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources for joint anti-illegal drug operations in the high seas to halt narcotics smuggling, according to Aquino.

The PDEA recently signed a memorandum of agreement with the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board and transportation network companies to prevent drug syndicates from using their package delivery services to move drugs.

Echoing one of Mr. Duterte's most popular statements, Aquino said: "We will not stop until the last drug lord, the last financier and the last pusher have surrendered or [been] put behind bars." —WITH A REPORT

FROM JEANNETTE LANDRADE INQ