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EJKs as 'mistakes'

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FINALLY, the police have admitted they committed mistakes in the administration's "war" on drugs.

The police have revived their "Tokhang" campaign against drugs, in which thousands of drug suspects had been summarily killed. National police chief Ronald dela Rosa is promising this time that they will not commit the mistakes from their initial spree of extrajudicial killings (EJKs).

I've written very early on that the "war" was wrong from the start. Why have I been saying this?

Because the administration unleashed the police without any training at all in battling drug addiction. Even before the formal installation of the administration, the order had been given that the police could go ahead and get rid of drug suspects.

Without hesitation, the cops took to the task like flies to dung. Night after night, police went out to communities looking for suspects to kill. The murderous frenzy became a nightly happening in many communities around the country.

Our nation had never seen such a spate of killings, not even during the martial rule of the dictator Ferdinand Marcos. At least not in the kind of wholesale murders of suspected drug

dealers or users.

The police proved with efficiency that they didn't need any training if all they had to do was to raid communities and kill drug suspects. They did it without any qualms of conscience or pangs of principle.

When those of us who valued human life complained about the indiscriminate killings, police claimed the casualties were the result of the suspects shooting back at them. Nobody among the citizenry believed the police. The expression: "Tell that to the Marines!" came immediately to mind.

Surveys showed that the people supported the elimination of illegal drugs. But they also said that they didn't believe the police's claim that the dead had tried to fight back. They added that they preferred that suspects are taken alive. In other words, suspects deserve due process.

It was wrong from the start because police did things in reverse. What they should have done was: 1. Train the police in how to subdue suspects without having to kill them. 2. Build drug rehabilitation facilities. 3. Capture suspects and take them to court. 4. Meted the appropriate legal penalty (prison for serious cases, rehab for minor offenders).

Instead, police went to communities without any training at all and killed thousands of suspects without due process. That was their intention from the start.

Why change tactics now? Maybe the police have realized that they indeed were doing it the wrong way. My hunch, too, is that the public outcry here in the Philippines and abroad has finally had an effect on the administration.

Besides getting a very bad image among the people, the administration has probably realized that the case filed against the President at the International Criminal Court (ICC) may be taken seriously by that court. At the very least, the promise by the police of a "less bloody" tokhang campaign this time is a hedge against the ICC case.

Also, the United Nations rapporteurs have been breathing down the President's neck, promising not to stop until they've investigated the summary killings in the Philippines.

Whatever the real reason, the police have at least admitted that their initial version of tokhang, a bloody one at that, resulted in too many mistakes, if killing thousands of people can just be dismissed as "mistakes."

Tantrum Ergo. Now we learn that contraband, including drugs, still flows in and out of the Bilibid prison. That was one of the charges against Leila de Lima, that she, as justice secretary, couldn't control the contraband and therefore was guilty because of command responsibility. Who is the justice secretary now?

- * EXTRA JUDICIAL KILLINGS (EJK)
- * DUARTE, RODRIGO - ADMINISTRATION
- * DRUG WAR