

Rights group says drug war has reached its limits

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An international rights organization yesterday claimed President Duterte has reached the limits of his campaign against illegal drugs.

Phelim Kine, deputy director of Human Rights Watch Asia division, cited the criticisms of the US State Department and the European Parliament that Duterte's drug war has led to more bloodshed and lack of accountability for the killings.

"The European Parliament expressed 'deep concern' about the deaths of some 12,000 people, including women and children, killed in the drug war to date, and warned that failure to stop the killings may prompt suspension of export trade privileges under the EU's Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP+) trade scheme," Kine said.

The European Parliament had urged the European Union and its member-states to consider calling for the removal of the Philippines from the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Kine added the US State Department had described a sharp rise in extrajudicial killings since the start of Duterte's anti-drug campaign in 2016.

"The State Department implied there is official support at the highest levels of the Philippine government for the campaign," Kine said, suggesting Duterte's numerous public statements led to the killing of suspected drug offenders to meet his goal of wiping out drug-related crime.

The group observed the Philippine government's reaction was swift.

Philippine National Police chief Oscar Albayalde questioned the EU Parliament's estimated death toll of 12,000: "We do not know the basis of the accusations... they should list it one-by-one, who those 12,000 victims are."

Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano attacked the US State Department report. "We do not need others, who think they know better than us Filipinos, to tell us what to do," he said.

"Cayetano's frustration is understandable. He has led government efforts to deflect international criticism of the drug war by rejecting outright reports of high death tolls as 'alternative facts.' And he has dismissed statistical evidence and well-documented accounts of a surge in killings of suspected drug users and dealers since Duterte took office in June 2016 as a baseless 'political tactic' wielded by the President's critics," Kine said.

The group stressed the US and the European Parliament's criticism of the drug war showed the government's efforts failed.

"And they provide more support for the International Criminal Court's move in February to launch a preliminary examination into the killings that senior Philippine government officials have incited and instigated, but refuse to acknowledge," it added.

Sen. Risa Hontiveros took note of how Cayetano accused the European Parliament of interfering in the local affairs of the Philippines.

“President Duterte’s foreign policy is protecting impunity not sovereignty. He and his ilk are the ones who are ‘crossing the red line.’ His foreign policy people like to use the word ‘sovereignty’ when what they really want to do is silence all forms of dissent, domestic and international, while they stay appallingly silent about China’s blatant incursions into our territory,” Hontiveros said.

“This administration likes to insist that its war on drugs, which violates our international commitments to human rights, is an issue of sovereignty, but in the same breath, it cannot defend our territory against China. This is not a defense of sovereignty. It is shameless cowardice,” she added.

While the principle still exists that crafting foreign policy lies with the executive branch, particularly the President, Hontiveros called on her colleagues in Congress to have a say in the process.

She urged Congress to take the lead in crafting an independent and progressive foreign policy.