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### **Philippines: How the Devastating Loss of Human Life Affects Further Loss in Food Security**

The pain of losing someone is difficult to process and makes it hard to live life normally as you have before their death. Entire families grieve for days or even years at the newfound absence of their loved ones as the vacant seats at their dinner tables make their hearts break further and further. The sudden death of a family member can be devastating to all, but to some families in the Philippines, the loss is more than just emotionally taxing. Even though the Filipinos' natural right to life is protected by Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), more and more deaths continue to be listed under the current President's "anti-drug policy" established in 2016. After the government has ordered for the nationwide killing of alleged drug users and dealers alike, thousands have been killed without proper trial or arrest. As families deeply mourn and attempt to heal the psychological trauma of a loved one being shot, many struggle to maintain food security after one large provider of income has been killed. Without a steady salary to support the family, obtaining food becomes a daily obstacle that is tough to overcome for these people. However, this may seem too incredulous to believe since the Philippines' has many ideal conditions for the state to produce plenty of food for its whole population to share.

As an archipelago with a tropical marine climate, it makes sense that these conditions help Philippine become suitable for agriculture. The surrounding water of the South China Sea helps with creating fertile soil for farm produce (Dempsey, 2019). This is most likely why 13.32 million hectares of land (Miraflor, 2020), or about 32,914,436.8 acres of land are dedicated to agriculture, and the average farm size is 1.29 hectares (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2012), or for reference, about 3 football fields. The presidential democratic republic under current President Rodrigo Duterte's administration is placing a large concentration on improving agricultural output and increasing farm production (Philippine News Agency RSS, 2018), especially for major crop products such as rice, corn, mangoes, coconuts, cassava, and sugarcane (Philippine Statistic Authority, 2020). Doing so prevents inflation from occurring and helps benefit the economy for the 108.1 million Filipino citizens, whether if they are a part of the 47.4% of people that live in urban areas or the other percentage that live in rural (United Nations, 2019). However, despite these great conditions that cause the Philippines to produce about 83,327.2 metric tons of food (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020), about 7.6 million Filipinos still struggle with involuntary hunger and obtaining an adequate amount of food to eat (Rappler.com, 2020).

For the typical family of 4-5 people (Philippines National Demographic and Health Survey, 2008), their usual diet consists of local foods, such seafood, vegetables, pork, and most significantly, rice (Hays, n.d.). Native Filipino cuisine came from the country's farmers and fishermen and is widely classified as peasant rural food (Hays, n.d.), dishes created by those who live in poverty with cheap and easily accessible ingredients. This food is usually cooked on gas burners inside the typical two-story modern concrete, urban dwelling (United Architects of the Philippines) or above a fire burning wood or charcoal. According to Time Doctor, typical jobs that most people in the Philippines have include accountant, call center agent, inside sales representative, real estate agent, and software engineer, as well as that the average wage for the Filipino population is 161,847.60 pesos per year, or \$3,218 (Martin, 2020). Although public education is free, some are unable to pay for the prices of public transportation, school supplies, or materials for projects, resulting in them dropping out of school. Those deep in poverty cannot afford to pay water and electricity bills. Families in the Philippines fall into poverty for many reasons:

limited jobs that are low quality, high inflation in periods of crisis for the country, unequal income and assets, low economic growth, and increasing rates of population (Asian Development Bank). One increasingly prominent challenge against increasing poverty rates is the devastating human rights situation in the country under its corrupted administration.

Many people can confidently say that their governments protect their human rights, but unfortunately, Filipino citizens cannot share the same sentiment. After President Rodrigo Duterte was inaugurated into office on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the new leader began a drug policy, in which he called for state-sponsored killings of illegal drug personalities, such as users and dealers of drugs. These murders often operate under the police or masked gunmen collaborating with law enforcement personnel, executing those supposedly involved in drugs without any trials, charges, or evidence. At most times, drug charges that do arise are fabricated, targeting political opponents of Duterte as well as his most prominent critics. Commonly termed “The War on Drugs”, Duterte’s drug policy had killed thousands of Filipinos, mostly those already struggling from poverty in urban areas. Although the number of deaths is difficult to determine due to the government issuing contradictory data, or barely any data at all, official figures state that 5,903 people have been executed from July 1, 2016 to September 30, 2020 by the Philippine National Police and the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency in these extrajudicial killings (Human Rights Watch, 2021). These numbers the Human Rights Watch listed excluding the murders committed by the unidentified shooters, which is estimated to both total with the first figure at 8,663 by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights or even triple that amount (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The anti-drug operations typically involve police officers raiding alleged drug suspects’ homes to kill them while disguising their visit as an attempt to take these individuals into custody.

The status of this human rights abuse is ongoing, and even worse than before. During the COVID-19 pandemic, killings increased dramatically by 50% from April to July 2020 (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Law enforcement of government-mandated quarantine has utilized cruel, unusual, and inhumane forms of punishment, such as placing violators of curfew into the dog cages, locking children inside coffins, and exposing lawbreakers to the sun for hours. Although this human rights abuse is a disgusting show of Duterte’s corrupted power, it is not the only consequence of the lives lost.

Not only do the surviving families suffer from immense grief from the death of their loved ones and the psychological trauma of witnessing their death in their own home (Honde, 2020), but many families often struggle with the financial challenges of losing a source of income, especially if those earnings were what primarily supported the family. Often, when the breadwinner is murdered during an anti-drug operation, many families face extreme economic difficulty and fall further in poverty (Honde, 2020). This loss of a source of income can result in the loss of homes, dropping out of education, and tremendous food insecurity due to unaffordable prices.

Men and women alike are both affected in substantial ways from Duterte’s drug policy, but in significantly different ways. According to journalist Bianca Ysabelle from BroadAgenda regarding her visit to the Philippines, she encountered a village chief who collaborated closely with the police who perform anti-drug raids named Josephine. Ysabelle was then shown a controversial drug watch list with over 600 names of supposedly illegal drug personalities. Those highlighted were already killed either by police in anti-drug raids or masked gunmen in drive-by shootings. Concerning the list, Ysabelle states, “There is clearly a gendered aspect to these lists, consisting predominantly of men” (Ysabelle, 2018).

Although men's natural right to life is obscenely violated in the most atrocious manner, some argue that women do not fare much better after the repercussions of their deaths. As they cope with the deaths of their spouses and/or sons, they are forced to carry the burden of supporting themselves and their family financially due to the punitive anti-narcotic program. Additionally, distrust and resentment begin to brew in the community between women that align with Duterte's goals and ideology against women who grieve to their loved one's death (Ysabelle, 2018). In the drug war, harsh conflicts are stirred up between those who encourage Duterte's bloodbath as opposed to radical opposers of his corrupted anti-drug regime. They no longer share compassion or solidarity to help support one another to take care of each other's children.

Compared to men and women, children are one of the most impacted, if not the most, from Duterte's drug war. Because of the families' economic challenges, many have opted out of education to work to compensate for the lack of revenue after their loved one's death. Others have been forced to drop out of school, even though public education is free in the Philippines, because of expenses, such as public transport fees, class project materials, and school supplies (Honde, 2020). This creates a critical dilemma from which it seems there is no escape due to mutually dependent conditions. Education is key combatant against poverty, allowing individuals more access to good job opportunities, which significantly lowers their risk of poverty due to a sustainable income as well as food insecurity. However, if a person struggles to obtain an education because of their own financial challenges, it becomes much more difficult for them to rise out of their destitution. In an interview with the Human Rights Watch, one wife of a victim of Duterte's drug regime, Malou M., said the following about her difficulties providing her children with food and education succeeding her husband's death:

It's hard because you don't know how you're going to start, how you're going to fend for your children, how you're going to send them to school, and how you're going to pay for their daily expenses and their meals. There are times they can't go to school because they don't have school allowance. We lost our tap water because we can't pay the water bill, and electricity and many more things. (Malou M., Human Rights Watch interview, February 8, 2019)

The unavailability of water and electricity as mentioned above can further affect food security. Without a proper water and electricity source, it becomes much more challenging to prepare and maintain food in a safe and healthy manner. Malou expands on the specific finances of her daily struggles, stating:

It's really not enough because it's hard to budget 250 pesos (about US\$5) a day. Sometimes, I won't even earn that much in a day if you cannot make the quota of 250 pesos daily, in which case you only get paid 150 pesos. But how about the children's school allowance? They're four, all attending school. How about the food? They often just make do with eggs. Sometimes, they don't have food when I leave them at home. (Malou M., Human Rights Watch interview, February 8, 2019)

In another instance, three children at the ages 13, 10, and 1, were forced into homelessness after their father was murdered and their mother remarried. Each child had to take peculiar jobs to support their needs such as watching parked cars to ensure no damage to them or teaching hip-hop classes, using their income to scrape by and eat three meals a day. Most nights, they sleep on cardboard mats and hammocks at the back of a local supermarket. Their need to obtain food each day outweighed their education, and they could not afford the fees of public transportation, which was 15 pesos (\$0.30), or lunch, which was 50 pesos (\$1). Both occurrences highlight the immense financial difficulties a family can face after the death of their loved one and how taxing it can be on the children especially.

As time goes on, Duterte's drug campaign becomes an increasingly tough barrier to achieving food security for the Philippines to defeat as more families fall deeper into poverty each day. Immediate action must be taken to prevent more deaths at the hand of Duterte's administration and to help families deal with the aftermath of these tragedies. A clear solution is to urge and convince President Rodrigo Duterte to end his lethal drug policy and instead utilize trials and imprisonment as an alternative penalty to extrajudicial killings. However, Duterte has made it clear a myriad of times that nothing will cause him to cease and desist his horrendous drug campaign. Fortunately, there are many solutions that will ensure that is reign of terror will not last forever or at the minimum prevent its impact from destroying families.

According to the Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, the President of the Philippines is limited to serve one term of 6 years without reelection. This means that Duterte's presidential term ends next year in 2022 and creates the simplest solution to this issue: waiting until Duterte's term ends. Although he is operating outside of the law, the end of his term would allow for his command of the Philippine National Police, the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, and other military forces that he would only have access to if President. This would result in many of the killings to decrease, either be halted completely or completed on a smaller scale with local forces. Waiting is the most inexpensive and effortless answer to this dilemma, but it may not be the correct one. As each day passes, more and more people are shot dead at the hands of Duterte's officers and drive-by shooters in anti-drug operations. If no action is taken against this corrupted president, then the lives of millions of Filipino citizens are at risk of being killed by his brutal regime. Additionally, as his term's deadline inches closer and closer, Duterte looks for various ways to extend his service as President, such as seeking a constitutional change (Castaneda, 2020). Supposing that Duterte's plan to continue his regime works, he may be seated in power for decades to come and his drug policy may last until he dies— which may take a long, indefinite amount of time as well. If the deadly silence remains unbroken, then the lives of millions can be lost simply because of the loss of our words.

Other solutions that seem plausible are revolution and international interference. Throughout history, many powerful, authoritarian political leaders were overthrown due to an uprising by the oppressed people. One primary example of this is the American Revolution, in which exploited citizens organized a rebellion to overthrow the monarchy that abused their natural rights (Stritmater, 2021). In this revolt, the people were successful, and they reshaped the government into a limited, central power that preserved their human rights rather than violated them with the corrupted power it held.

International interference is also a solution found in many nation's history of their independence of a crooked ruling power as well. In the late 1800's, both Filipinos and Cubans (National Parks Service, n.d.) struggled to fight for independence against their ruling monarchy, Spain as the Spanish continued to deny their rights such as equality, representation, and equality of life due to their abuse of the people under their labor systems (Stritmater, 2021). After some time, the U.S. intervened in the conflict due to American sympathy for the Filipinos and Cubans, and the country fought against the great European power in the Spanish-American War (History.com). Fortunately for the Filipinos and Cubans, the U.S. reigned victorious and freed the two nations from Spanish rule— yet still takes control of them both immediately as American territories. Perhaps instead of the U.S. government, the United Nations could intervene and help to create some order in the chaos. Because the United Nations is not specifically affiliated with a specific country but rather a coalition of states, intervention can appear as an international government body trying to maintain peace in a country that needs help, rather than a country intervening in its former territory's politics.

These two solutions were combined and put into use in recent Filipino history to oust a previous dictator that the country had, Ferdinand Marcos. In a peaceful, nonviolent rebellion, thousands of citizens took to the streets to revolt against the rigged reelection of Marcos, who abused the president's right to declare martial law to torture about 35,000 people (Reyes, 2016) for about 20 years (History.com). This mass rebellion combined with American efforts to exile him to Hawaii allowed for transfer of power between Marcos' distorted regime to a peaceful, limited central power.

Positives of these solutions are that they will completely usurp power from the Duterte administration and prevent them from having the chance of abusing their privileges ever again. These solutions have also proven to be able to be employed in the past as well as truly work. However, it would be difficult to incite protest in the country, especially since Duterte has an approval rating of 91% (Reuters, 2020) and those who are either too scared to speak up or are imprisoned or even killed for doing so. Perhaps people still root for Duterte because, after all the millions of deaths he has executed, he still kept drug usage rates down in the Philippines. From the three years that Duterte was in office, the number of drug users decreased from 4 million to 1.67 million— more than 50% percent (Xinhua, 2020). These killings are justified to some people since it is perceived that he is only murdering criminals (Jenkins, 2016). The corrupted president's administration is masterfully skilled at producing propaganda as well, just like any other immoral leader in history (Jalkebro, 2019). They use others as scapegoats for anything that goes terribly and credit themselves when things go right. The most likely reason why Duterte still has supporters despite the atrocities he has committed is because his spirit strongly resembles another previous Filipino president's, Ferdinand Marcos. Many people thought that Marcos was a phenomenal, tyrannical president whose dictatorship was the central point of the Philippines' peak, but research contradicts this claim and says that his reign plummeted the Philippines \$16.2 billion more in debt within 5 years (Francisco, 2016). Marcos also sent 34,000 people to torture through electrocution, strangulation, burning of skin with flat irons, and sexual assault with various objects (Francisco, 2016). Despite all of these human rights abuses, many Filipinos were alive during the time of Marcos and missed his presidency. They strongly believe that the country was better under a strong authoritarian leader. Because Duterte is very similar to the former dictator, it is a possibility that people are projecting their hopes onto Duterte— even though both leaders were terrible for the country (Jalkebro, 2019).

Both protest and international interference may stir up a large amount of violence as well and possibly even instigate a war. Some protests and movements already occur in the country; however, only a minority out of the entire nation. On July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021, an estimated 2,750 protestors have united in front of the National Housing Authority and then marched toward Commonwealth Avenue to protest Duterte's attempts at prolonging his term, the national response to the pandemic, and his extrajudicial killings (Alimario, 2021). Many protests like these have occurred in the country, but just as many critics become silenced. After holding a Senate inquiry condemning the extrajudicial killings against Duterte, Senator Leila de Lima immediately faced three drug charges against her, fabricated so she could be placed in prison and be silenced (Human Rights Commission, 2021). These instances of freedom of speech being stripped away does not stop the opposition, however. Although the end goal may be achieved, the deaths of many more people may rise in numbers if these solutions are acted upon.

One final solution is to specifically address the problem of food insecurity is to financially support families who were victimized by Duterte's drug policy to allow them to obtain the food that they need and to finance the needed fees to proceed with their education. This solution deals directly with the damages that Duterte's anti-drug regime has caused and helps to alleviate the economic struggles of the various families victimized by this unjust legislation. The Human Rights Watch recommends that this donation is

funded by the Philippine government to pay retribution for the consequences of their legal actions and on their law enforcement's behalf (Human Rights Watch, 2020). This solution may not be the most ideal since financially supporting victimized families does not address the root cause of their poverty, the death of a loved one. If this action is chosen to proceed with, then it will not be able to stop the climbing death numbers listed under the anti-drug campaign. Additionally, concerns may arise over welfare dependency and if the families will begin to financially depend on the government to survive daily life. However, research by the World Economic Forum shows that these concerns are not a significant issue and that the benefits are sustainable. They claim that this type of financial assistance allows families to create significant lasting investments in the health of children as well as their education (World Economic Forum, 2019). If the government creates a fund that supports families, this will allow children to attend school without transportation or supply fees as a barrier and later have more access to jobs that will help them rise above their destitution. Furthermore, families would be able to afford daily necessities required to survive and maintain good health such as food costs and water and electric bills.

President Rodrigo Duterte's harsh anti-drug campaign has deeply impacted the Filipino people in numerous ways. Many of the unjust, extrajudicial shootings of civilians has resulted in families losing a valuable member as well as their main source of income. These killings have resulted in massive food insecurity among the people, with some unable to pay for 50-peso (\$1) lunches, and many children abandoning their courses of study, preventing them from escaping their impoverishment and denying them the opportunity to receive better jobs in the future. However, many solutions can take place to reestablish food security and prevent more lives from dying at the hands of the Philippine Police: persuading Duterte to end his anti-drug regime, ending his presidential term, transferring his power to a more peaceful party through revolution and international interference, or financing the families whose steady income was upset by the drug war. All in all, the hope that peace will ensue once again and that justice will reign triumphant still remains strong for the Philippines with these answers.

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