

We, concerned peace advocates, express our deep concern over the relentless spate of drug-related killings in our country today. These killings are taking place at the same time our government is engaged in a “war on drugs,” a policy that it expects to bring about peace and order nationwide.

We believe that extrajudicial killings are never justified. They violate each person’s right to life—a right universally recognized and respected, enshrined in our Constitution, and particularly valued in the culture, values, and faiths of our people. To take another person's life is a crime under the laws that our government, through our President, is duty-bound to enforce.

Although President Rodrigo Duterte has stated that government is not engaged in the summary execution of suspects,¹ over half of the extrajudicial killings have reportedly taken place in the context of police operations targeting drug pushers or users.²

Government correctly identifies the illegal drug trade as a serious threat to individual and collective security. Many lives and families have been destroyed by drug use and drug-related violence. What concerns us is that government calls the crisis a war, and views violence as the expected, and therefore acceptable, response. We are concerned that the position and pronouncements of our leaders on this issue promote a culture of violence that will ultimately diminish us all.

Our view is that violence begets violence, never peace. It inspires anger, hatred, and fear—all of which diminish our ability to trust one another, to speak truthfully, and work with each other. We cannot build a nation in this climate of uncertainty, distrust, and exclusion.

Instead, we urge government to consider the problem of drugs differently. For example, if, as some have claimed, government is justified in disregarding human rights, due process, and the rule of law because our judicial and penal systems do not work—should we not be reforming our justice sector institutions, instead of further weakening them?

Viewing the drug menace through nonviolent perspectives reveals that violence is not the only solution. Already, some legislators have begun talking about drug addiction as a public health issue instead of a crime. If the problem is framed this way, would not improving the health and well-being of drug users be a more effective response?

We hope government and the highest leaders of the land will recognize, respect, and promote the right to life, fulfill their duty to execute laws faithfully, and ensure that the fundamental rights of all citizens are respected. We appeal that government condemns in the strongest terms, the drug-related killings currently taking place. We hope that it exerts all efforts to put an end to these killings. As peace advocates that include teachers, we offer to help in restoring the dignity of many who fell victims to this menace.

We look forward to engaging with a government that is open to seeking nonviolent solutions to the problem of drugs and crime, and shares our desire to build a culture of peace.

¹ <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/578019/news/nation/duterte-to-un-do-not-blame-summary-executions-on-my-gov-t>

² <http://news.abs-cbn.com/specials/map-charts-the-death-toll-of-the-war-on-drugs>