

# Duterte’s relentless war on drugs, corruption, crime

**MANILA** -- Braving strong opposition from his critics, President Rodrigo Duterte has kept his promise to protect his fellow Filipinos by continuing his “relentless” campaign against illegal drugs, corruption in government, and criminality in 2019.

Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo said the President's resolve to rid the country of drug offenders, corrupt government workers, and criminals remains “constant.”

“Constant pa rin kung ano ang kanyang sinimulan. Ganoon pa rin. Walang pagbabago. Patuloy ‘yun. Lahat iyan, walang pagbabago. Paulit-ulit lang sinasabi ni Presidente iyan (Everything that he has started is still constant. It's still the same. Nothing has changed. It continues. There are no changes in all that he does. That's what the President is repeatedly saying),” Panelo said Sunday in an interview with dzIQ.

The anti-narcotics campaign, which tops the President's agenda, has so far come to fruition following the seizure of a total of PHP40.39 billion worth of illegal drugs from the start of the drug war on July 1, 2016 to Nov. 31, 2019, according to the government's latest data released on December 12.

A total of 151,601 legitimate anti-drug operations conducted since Duterte assumed office until November 30 this year have also led to the arrest of 220,728 drug personalities and the deaths of 5,552 drug suspects.

Around 726 of 220,728 arrested individuals due to supposed links to rampant narcotics trade are government workers. Eighty-two of them are uniformed personnel, 297 are elected offi-

cials, and 347 are public employees.

About 485,295 drug offenders, meantime, have voluntarily surrendered to authorities and are now benefitting from the recovery and wellness program initiated by the Philippine National Police and other supportive community reformation centers.

The Duterte administration has also cleared 16,706 drug-affected villages nationwide. However, there are still 17,175 villages that need to be cleared of illegal drugs.

In a speech delivered on Dec. 20, the President said he needs to wage a war on drug offenders, whose goal is to “destroy the country.”

“My country is being flooded with drugs and I have to protect the next generation,” Duterte said. “I told you do not destroy my country because I will kill you. Nothing can be [clearer] than that.”

On Oct. 31, the President tapped Vice President Leni Robredo, leader of the opposition, as co-chairperson of the Inter-Agency Committee on Anti-Ilegal Drugs (ICAD), following the latter's claim that the drug war is “obviously not working.”

Robredo, who was supposed to serve as ICAD co-chair when her term ends on June 30, 2022, was fired by Duterte 19 days after her appointment due to her alleged “missteps” after meetings with foreign personalities and groups that have prejudged the drug war and her failure to present new measures in curbing the drug menace in the country.

Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) Secretary Martin Andanar said the government's anti-narcotics drive has the backing of most Filipinos.

“These undertakings [against illegal drugs] are backed and

supported by 82 percent of Filipinos [who] view our campaign against illegal drugs as highly satisfactory,” the Communications chief said, referring to Social Weather Stations’ (SWS) June 22 to 26 survey which showed that 82 percent of Filipinos are satisfied with Duterte's crackdown on illegal drugs.

To disprove the “inaccurate narratives” about Duterte's drug war, the PCOO released a one-hour documentary film titled “Gramo,” which tackles the accomplishments gained by the current administration in addressing the drug problem in the country.

Andanar's office also produced a 57-paged magazine titled “Saving the Future of A Nation: Countering Hard Drugs that features the key performance indicators on the government's anti-illegal drug campaign.

The public can expect Duterte doubling his efforts to stamp out the drug proliferation in his remaining years in office, Panelo said.

“Kung ano ang sinimulan ni Pangu-long Presidente sa kanyang presidency ay itutuloy niya ‘yun. Kagaya ng paulit-ulit niyang sinasabi, hindi siya titigil hanggang sa huling araw ng kanyang pamunuan, ang kaniyang pakikipag-digmaan sa droga dito sa ating bayan (President Duterte will continue what he has started. He has repeatedly said his war on illegal drugs will be relentless until his last day in office),” Panelo said.

## Drug war lowers crime incidence

Andanar believed that the war on illegal drugs has contributed to the significant drop in crime incidence in the country.

“With the campaign, crimes rates

have also gone down, with 5.6 percent of Filipino families being victimized by common crimes,” he said.

The SWS' September 27 to 30 poll revealed that families victimized by common crimes in the third quarter of 2019 fell to 5.6 percent or an estimated 1.4 million from June's 7 percent or an estimated 1.7 million posted.

The latest crime rate is the “lowest” registered since the 5.3 percent post in June, the SWS noted.

Andanar said Duterte's administration has also pushed for an “integrated and lasting means of achieving peace and order and countering insurgents, separatists, and terrorists.”

He said other government's initiatives to combat crimes include the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and the planned revival of peace negotiations with the communists.

“The Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) has been a means of institutionalizing governance in Muslim Mindanao and has empirically provided peace and order and development in Mindanao,” the PCOO Secretary said.

“Peace negotiations with the Communist Party of the Philippines – National Democratic Front has always been an option sought by President Duterte to halt armed conflicts. While relevant defense agencies continue to address threats and terrorism, we have also employed a whole-of-nation approach to end conflicts by addressing its root causes at the local level,” he added.

The BOL creates the BARMM which replaces the now-defunct Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. The new Bangsamoro Region enjoys expanded land and water jurisdiction, greater fiscal au-

tonomy, and increased share in national government resources, among others.

Meantime, the President on Dec. 3 sent Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III, former state chief peace negotiator, to the Netherlands to relay to communist founder Jose Maria Sison the government's plan to revive the moribund negotiations with communist leaders.

Pending the resumption of talks with the communist movement, local peace bodies are tasked by Duterte to negotiate with the insurgents in their respective areas.

## ‘Firing spree’ continues

Apart from his fight against illegal drugs and criminality, the Chief Executive has repeatedly ensured that zero tolerance for corruption remains the key policy of his administration.

Duterte's crackdown on corruption in government waged since he assumed office in July 2016 has either led to the firing or forced resignation of more than a 100 officials and employees suspected of graft and corruption.

One of Duterte's remarkable moves was the firing of over 60 corrupt personnel of the Bureau of Customs in August 2019 to clean the bureau mired in controversies.

The Presidential Anti-Corruption Commission has likewise investigated two Cabinet secretaries accused of being involved in corruption.

Duterte, however, has launched another probe against the two members of his Cabinet, but promised to fire them if evidence proves their involvement in corrupt activities.

Some of the public officials fired by Duterte due to corruption issues were friends and companions who helped him win during

the 2016 presidential race.

On Dec. 20, Duterte maintained that he would not give any preferential treatment to erring public officials and employees.

“I have fired about five whose friendship dates back to 1988 when I first became the mayor of Davao. These guys were with me and who helped me all throughout,” the President recounted.

“Pero ang sinabi ko, ‘pagka magsama tayo sa gobyerno and I have the power to appoint you, huwag mo akong hiyain because ayaw ko talaga ng corruption, ‘yung corruption sa gobyerno (But I said, when we are in the government and I have the power to appoint you, do not bring shame upon me because I do not really tolerate corruption, the corruption in government),” he added.

Andanar emphasized that the government's actions of investigating, suspending, and arresting corrupt government officials helped the country earned its “highest rank since 2013” in the latest Global Corruption Perception Index.

“This administration's tough stance on weeding out corruption and other forms of criminality have put our rank in the 99th place of the Global Corruption Perception Index,” he said.

## ‘Comfortable life’ for Filipinos

Andanar was elated that Duterte's fight against illegal drugs, corruption in government, and criminality has gained support from Filipinos, as reflected by the President's “very high satisfaction and trust ratings.”

“These consistent high marks from the public come from this administration's policy decisions and pronouncements, government programs, social services, and other po-

litical and societal milestones,” he said.

“These accomplishments have succeeded in making the life of every Filipino better each year, and 2019 is no exception,” the Communications chief added.

Pulse Asia's latest poll this month showed that public satisfaction with Duterte's work performance rose to 87 percent in December from 78 percent in September. Only 5 percent expressed disapproval over Duterte's work ethic.

Panelo believed that the “5 percent” who expressed dissatisfaction with Duterte's performance are “the opposition, the President's political enemies, and the state enemies.”

In a statement on Sunday, Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles said Duterte's high approval score is a “welcome news,” as it shows that “the people are feeling the positive effects of government programs and projects.”

Panelo said it was the President's desire to bring “lasting peace” in the country.

“Eh ang wish list ni Presidente, ever since ay bigyan ng kapayapaan, lasting peace ang ating bayan. ‘Yung mga kumokontra sa estado ay sumali na sa agos ng pag-akyat ng ating lipunan sa mataas na antas ng progress (The President's wish list ever since is to attain lasting peace in the country. So to the critics of this government, just join us in attaining the progress for the nation),” he said.

“Pangalawa, gusto niyang magkaroon ng kumportableng buhay ang bawat Pilipino. ‘Yun ang palaging wish ng Presidente taun-taon (Secondly, the President wants every Filipino to enjoy a comfortable life. That's the President's wish list every year),” Panelo added. (PNA)