

## **Australian Communities Unite to Condemn the Mass Murder of People Who Use Drugs in the Philippines**

*Since May 2016, it has been reported that over 3,700 people suspected of using and/or selling drugs have been murdered in the Philippines. These atrocities have been carried out with the explicit endorsement of Filipino President, Rodrigo Duterte: who has repeatedly encouraged the police and the general public to kill people suspected of being drug users and/or of dealing drugs. The bloodshed has drawn condemnation from the international community, including from here in Australia.*

“The mass slaughter currently being carried out in the Philippines is an appalling crime against humanity.” said Dr Angella Duvnjak, CEO of AIVL, the national peak body representing people who use drugs. “History tells us that killing people who use or deal drugs has never effectively solved any of the problems the community faces.”

“President Duterte has drawn a hard line in the sand and this is the latest horrendous episode of the war on people who use drugs,” Dr Duvnjak said. “While it is encouraging that our government has made a statement urging the cessation of extrajudicial killings, we can do much more within our own country to distance ourselves from the injustice of his so-called ‘Campaign Plan Double Barrel’.”

“One of the unique strengths of our highly successful national HIV response is the Partnership Model, which involves working together with key populations- including people who use drugs.” said Aaron Cogle, Executive Director of National Association of People With HIV Australia. “In this way, Australia has proven how the direct involvement of affected communities in addressing public health concerns produces the best outcomes. Punitive measures stigmatise and marginalise people and have the opposite effect.”

“The experience of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) communities demonstrates the progress that we as a society can make in addressing the stigma of criminalisation,” said Heath Paynter, Acting CEO of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations, “Let’s not forget that it’s been less than 20 years since the last Australian state decriminalised homosexuality- and look how far we’ve come in terms of the acceptance and treatment of LGBTIQ communities.”

“Regardless of a person’s circumstances, everybody deserves to have their basic human rights respected,” added Jules Kim, CEO of the Scarlet Alliance, Australia’s national sex workers association. “We know that excessive police enforcement and dehumanising policies, particularly against those who are most marginalised, have negative consequences not only for individuals, but also for the broader public and are a waste of money, community resources, and human life.”

“These crimes committed by the Filipino President against people who use drugs have an impact on everybody. Denying any part of our community access to due process and basic human, social, legal and political rights is a violation against us all,” Ms Kim said. “Whether we are a sex worker or someone who uses drugs, and regardless of our sexual orientation or gender identity, we are entitled to our rights.”

“It is timely for all of us to reflect on our own treatment of people who use drugs.” Dr Duvnjak concluded. “While Australia’s past achievements have been significant, critically examining the criminalisation of drugs, as well as being more open to new harm reduction initiatives, such as pill testing and prescription heroin, are urgently needed steps to continue our progress in meeting the challenges presented by illicit drugs in the community.”

“We stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the Philippines. We hope the broader Australian community stands with us.”

*The Global Week of Action (10th to 16th October) is a worldwide campaign to raise awareness of the current situation in the Philippines. More details can be found at: <http://www.inpud.net/en/global-week-action-crisis-people-who-use-drugs-philippines>*

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