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Philippines

Duterte's 'War on Drugs' Claims Many Lives

- News from around the world -

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At least 704 people have been killed for their involvement with drugs since Duterte came to power, according to data from the ABS-CBN Investigative and Research Group.

Since coming to power in May, Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte's "war on drugs" has claimed several hundred lives and forced drug users to publicly "surrender" and promise to give up drugs. The heavy-handed approach has drawn international criticism from many human rights advocates.

In a joint letter Monday, over 300 international NGOs and human rights groups called on the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Narcotics Control Board to condemn the ongoing "senseless killing."

The letter states that more needs to be done to stop the extrajudicial killings of those suspected of being involved in the drug trade and that the Philippines needed to uphold due process and fair trials and refrain from reinstating the death penalty.

Duterte has advocated the vigilante killings of drug-involved suspects and recently said that "rehab is no longer an option." Many drug users are being killed without proof of drug-trade involvement.

Thousands of drug users around the country have been forced to publicly "surrender" to authorities and pledge to give up drugs for good. Human rights advocates say that drug users are being forced into compulsory rehabilitation in military facilities, while having no other option due to the high costs of private rehabilitation clinics.

Users who do not surrender and renounce their behavior to authorities are then given a final warning, leaving them fearing for their lives.

While the violent drug policy has sounded international alarms, the approach has been popular within the Philippines, a country like many others suffering from crime, drugs and overcrowded prisons.

"The Punisher," as Duterte is often called, came to power on a populist, anti-crime platform promising to kill drug dealers, after previously cracking down on petty criminals as the mayor of Davao City, the Philippines' third largest city.