

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 24, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
White House
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Mr. President:

We write to urge you to delay your invitation to the White House to Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte until there are major improvements in his government's human rights record. Under the guise of a "war on drugs," President Duterte has presided over a brutal campaign of extrajudicial murders that has resulted in the deaths of thousands of drug users and low-level drug dealers. While the Philippines remains a vital U.S. ally, we are concerned that hosting President Duterte at the White House while this campaign of mass atrocities continues would send the wrong message. Instead, we urge you to denounce this reprehensible campaign, demand that it cease, and press Duterte to adopt an evidence-based approach to drug use based on public health.

Since President Duterte took office on June 30, 2016, Project Tokhang, his violent campaign to eradicate drug use in the Philippines, has resulted in at least 8,000 deaths.¹ In addition to directing police forces to carry out these killing, President Duterte has urged vigilantes, many of whom struggle with addiction themselves, to execute people who use illegal drugs. In September, President Duterte favorably compared his plan for murdering drug users to Hitler's genocide of the Jews, saying, "Hitler massacred 3 million Jews [sic]. Now there [are] 3 million...drug addicts [in the Philippines]...I'd be happy to slaughter them."²

The United States and the Philippines have been close partners for over one-hundred years, and treaty allies since 1951. Our relationship is based on deep historical connections, shared values, and mutual strategic interests. President Duterte's campaign of killing threatens the fundamental fabric of our relationship.³

Inviting President Duterte to the White House while this murderous campaign continues could be interpreted as an endorsement of his government's gross human rights abuses. Such a perception would undermine efforts to restrain Duterte's violent campaign, which would further call into question the legality and appropriateness of continued U.S. assistance to the Philippines' law enforcement agencies and security forces.

It would also reinforce the profoundly misguided approach to drug dependence that is embodied in Project Tokhang. Our own nation, and communities in all our states, have struggled

¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-drugs-idUSKBN16H1YV>

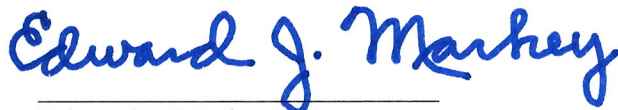
² <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/30/asia/duterte-hitler-comparison/>

³ Section 620 M of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended

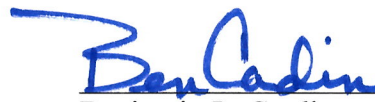
with the scourge of drugs as well. Prosecution of drug trafficking, consistent with the rule of law, is a critically important part of responding to illegal drug use, but appropriate access to public health programs for rehabilitation is critical to addressing this problem. Broad medical research concludes that drug addiction is a chronic disease rather than a moral failing. In April 2016, the United Nations identified the need for a balanced approach to drug control that puts the health and well-being of people, families, and communities at the center of all responses.⁴ Duterte's anti-drug campaign does precisely the opposite, and reveals an indifference to the human toll of drug addiction.

We encourage you to delay his visit to the White House until there are demonstrated improvements in his government's human rights record. In particular, President Duterte must stop this campaign of murder and adopt a comprehensive public health approach to drug addiction that centers on treatment. The United States, for its part, should stand ready to provide assistance and partnership for the development and implementation of these programs. While law enforcement has an important role in dealing with illegal drugs, extrajudicial killings are not a form of justice. We urge you to denounce these violations of basic human rights, and press President Duterte's government to change course.

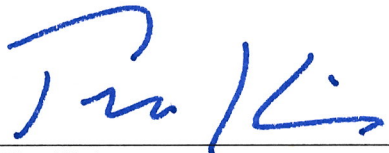
Sincerely,



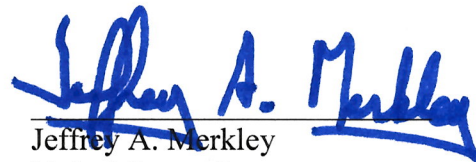
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

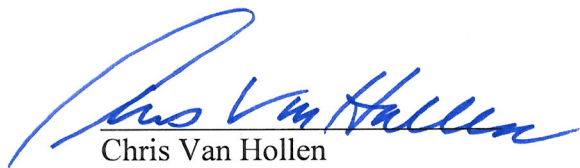


Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

⁴ UN General Assembly special session on the world drug problem, April 2016



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Al Franken
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator