

'The president kills us like dogs'

Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte wants to purge its people of drugs. And he isn't bothered by laws or practical objections. This report was made at an ordinary night in the slums of Manila, where the victims are piling up in the morgues.

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In the badly lit courtyard of a police station, a dozen journalists are waiting for a corpse. One that is not dead yet. But when the fatal shot will be fired, they will be the first ones to know.

The press gathers every night at the headquarters of the Manila Police District. They report on the war on drugs declared by Rodrigo Duterte when he became president. During the past 6 months more than 6 200 people were executed without trial, often by unknown assailants who will never be prosecuted.

Again tonight people will be killed. But where? The journalists are staring at their smartphones, keeping in touch with their informers. 'The waiting is boring', the local journalist Sherbien says. 'Sometimes I hope that someone gets killed quickly. But I should pray that it doesn't happen.'

'Once they have seen a dead body, they always want more.' Rica is a fixer. Tonight she is guiding documentary makers of Vice News from crime scene to crime scene. Like Sherbien she is here every night, because the demand of foreign media is big.

'I have proposed several other subjects. But since July they want only one thing: the drug killings. Death, blood and emotion. All the elements for a good story are here.'

Another night owl looking for stories appears at the police station. 'Are you from Belgium? Me too.' Peter Bouckaert, Human Rights Watch's emergencies director and an expert in humanitarian crises, has been documenting the killings already for a couple of months. 'We want to know what is really happening. In the cases that we researched, the police report was a complete fiction.'

Poor people

The antidrug campaign strengthens Duterte's popularity. But the people in the poverty-stricken slums pay the price. 'According to our investigation it's mainly very poor people that get shot. Sometimes they are users or small-scale dealers, but certainly never big criminals', says Bouckaert.

1:30 a.m. There is news from the homicide department. 'Crime scene', someone yells. The adrenaline takes over from fatigue. A race against the clock begins. The forensic team of the Scene of the Crime Operatives (SOCO) only needs half an hour to clean up a crime scene. Often they treat evidence carelessly. When the body is gone, there is no more story.

At a breakneck speed the press vehicles race to the dramatic location. Traffic lights are being ignored and accidents are barely avoided. The destination of this journalistic stuntteam is the barangay of Navotas, a shabby slum.

There is a lot of people in the alley for this time of night. Two geese frolic through the curious crowd. The atmosphere is almost relaxed, but appearances are deceptive. Behind police tape lays a body on the ground; long hair, colourful shorts and a bloodied shirt. The victim stares at the black sky with an open mouth. The body has three shot wounds in the chest and one in the face.

A forensic investigator with blue gloves is photographing the remains of Alvin Ronald de Chavez: 26 years old, jobless and transgender. In this neighbourhood she was called Heart. She was killed an hour ago by seven masked men. 'They were laughing when they left', her shocked mother recounts. It was the second murder in Navotas today.



According to mother Elena (61) Heart started a small trade in shabu - a strongly addictive methamphetamine - in November last year. 'She earned 500 pesos (10

dollars) a day, just enough to buy food for the family.' Then the alley hushes. The local residents

watch silently as the body of Heart is being put in a black bag. The only sound is that of the crying mother.

Fixer Rica is visibly moved. 'It is hard for the family to endure our interviews. Sometimes they get angry. But we really have to document what is happening every night. It's a bad night if we missed a murder. That story won't be told.'

Peter Bouckaert interviews a few witnesses. 'We can only investigate what happened. But the international community has to take action. Duterte has to understand that he can't murder thousands of people just like that.'

False evidence

When the last witness accounts are noted, journalist Sherbien goes to a wake in the infamous slum of Caloocan. In a coffin a beautified body is wearing a white suit, surrounded by chandeliers. Alicia Anas is being hugged by neighbours. Benedicto, her 57 year old husband, was murdered last night.

'In the middle of the night the door was smashed. Three masked men stormed into the room. They were nervous. We knew immediately why they were here.' Alicia talks fast and detailed, she wants to tell her story to better understand herself what has happened. 'Don't kill him. Kill me,' she begged while holding on to her husband. But she was pushed outside. For a short while there was nothing but silence in the alley. Then she heard 15 loud shots.

Alicia shows the bullet holes and blood stains in her small home. The alley in front of her door is no wider than the open sewer running through it. Curious children gather barefoot at her home. 'When the police arrived after the shooting, they found a bag of shabu and a gun next to the body. That is false evidence, left behind by the assassins. Benedicto had poor eyesight and was too weak for drugs. He sold saint statues, not shabu.'

According to the official report of the police drug dealer Benedicto Anas was caught red-handed. He was killed when he pulled a gun during his arrest. These fabricated statements have become everyday cut-and-paste work. The suspect is being declared guilty and the police officers are being acquitted. No investigation needed. Case closed. Next.

In the poor barangays of Manila a climate of fear reigns. 'They can come back any moment, nobody is safe. When someone bangs on the door, we know we will die', say the neighbours of Alicia Anas. 'We want to leave this place.'



Next to the coffin of Benedicto Anas a dozen men are playing pinta, a Spanish card game. They are betting large amounts. The winnings will finance the funeral, an expensive ceremony for poor slum

dwellers. 'Death to Duterte', someone says at the game table. 'The president is killing people like dogs. He has no pity. He has to resign or be murdered.'

Own fault

While leaving Caloocan, taxi driver Bogie says he approves of the antidrug campaign of his president. 'If you start with drugs, you know this can happen. What is the right choice? Kill or not? A drugdealer destroys the lives of ten people. Let it continue.' "On God's wheels" is printed in bold letters on his door.

The night is coming to an end. At the police station the media representatives are leaving one by one. Tonight six drug killings have occurred: Alvin Ronald de Chavez, Jerry Causapin, Rafe Diamante, Pablito Loberanes, Angelo Franchesco Ocampo and the unidentified suspect number 424 are added to the saddening statistics.

'As long as there is poverty, there will be drug related crime', Sherbien thinks. 'All dealers I know are from poor families. They have no job. Shabu is an escape from the slums. It's a way to survive, mentally and financially. It's inhumane to kill these people. Everyone should get a second chance.' But Duterte doesn't offer second chances. 'Nobody can stop me, I will slaughter them all.'

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