

# THE MANILA TIMES

## Do you hate President Duterte? Time to get real

By [RICARDO SALUDO](#) on December 15, 2016 [Opinion on Page One](#)



Ricardo Saludo

### **Last of two parts**

The first part of this column, published Tuesday, pointed out two realities that haters of President Rodrigo Duterte's cussing and confusing talk might bear in mind.

First, he's not going to change his colorful language, not with the masa cheering or accepting it, and certainly not for the elite he accuses of oligarchy and oppression.

Second, President Duterte's confusing pronouncements reflect sweeping changes he is driving on several fronts, from foreign, security, and law enforcement policies, to mining, labor, and transport. So instead of gasping at each headline-grabbing line, focus on what concrete government actions actually emerge from presidential soundbites.

Well, that brings this discussion to actual on-the-ground actions by the administration, which many find disturbing, if not appalling:

Extrajudicial killings, the so-called pivot to China in foreign affairs (to be covered next week), and most recently, the Marcos burial and the supposed plot to oust Vice-President Leni Robredo and replace her with Bongbong Marcos.

### **Robredo and Marcos reality checks**

Ladies first. People who believe VP Robredo's claim that the Duterte camp aims to strip her of her post would do well to look beyond her good looks and wholesome image, as well as the Marcos family's unsavory past, and think through what she and her camp are actually alleging.

Reality check: As lawyers like Robredo herself know, only two entities can remove her as VP — the Supreme Court, deciding Bongbong Marcos's election protest as the presidential electoral tribunal, and Congress by impeachment.

There's no whiff of any impeachable offense against Robredo, so her claimed ouster plot must be Marcos's PET case. So is Robredo saying the high court would conspire with Duterte and Marcos to unfairly uphold her rival's protest? If so, she should PETition suspect justices to recuse themselves — assuming she has solid ground for suspicions.

Absent such basis, VP Robredo should not cast baseless aspersions against the very tribunal she wishes to show fairness. After all, the Supreme Court had shown itself quite capable of resisting presidential and congressional pressure when it unanimously declared both pork barrel and the disbursement acceleration program unconstitutional.

And those getting all worked up over the purported plot against Robredo should exercise more brain cells and critically assess whether the accusation has any factual legs — or is just a ploy to ignite public anger should the PET find evidence to declare Marcos the true winner of the vice-presidential race.

The same critical thinking is needed in the controversy over the burial of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr., Bongbong's father and namesake, in the Libingan ng mga Bayani (cemetery of heroes). Here's a short reality check:

In 1989, three years after people power ousted him, Marcos Sr. died in Hawaii. Then-president Corazon Aquino barred his remains from the Philippines.

Her successor Fidel Ramos allowed the body to be flown direct to Marcos's home province of Ilocos Norte. But he and later presidents until Benigno Aquino 3rd did not allow interment in Libingan.

Still, no administration passed a law barring such burial, unlike post-war Germany's legislation prohibiting monuments or other honors to world War II leader Adolf Hitler. And in 2011, then-commander-in-chief Aquino didn't even object when the military added Marcos to its list of combat heroes.

This year, President Duterte gave permission for a soldier's burial in the Libingan, and the High Court allowed it, since no law forbade it.

Now, Duterte opponents want protests over the Marcos burial and the claimed ouster-plot. Go figure.

### **The one-sided killings controversy**

Perhaps the biggest reality uncheck is in the controversy over thousands of suspect killings in Duterte's anti-drug war. While media and critics constantly update the body count, hardly anyone cares to know and tell the crime and narcotics numbers underpinning the battle against lawlessness.

Probably alone among media, this column has repeatedly cited crime data from the Philippine Statistics Authority's Philippines in Figures yearbooks. They show the magnitude and gravity of lawlessness, and explain why most Filipinos agree with President Duterte that drastic measures are warranted.

During the Aquino years, crime tripled: from 324,083 incidents in 2010 to more than 1 million a year since 2013. Murders and rapes soared to nearly 10,000 a year each; robberies topped 60,000; and every year saw more than 200,000 physical injury cases.

This unprecedented escalation could only have happened because of syndicates, not random criminals. Abetting this organized lawlessness was rampant smuggling — also tripled from \$7.9 billion in 2009 to \$26.6 billion in 2014, based on International Monetary Fund data. Guns, narcotics and drug labs gushed in.

And the criminal justice system was woefully compromised, with drug trafficking done and run even in the national penitentiary. Plainly, if narcotics were rampant in prisons under police control, it could flourish anywhere.

Bottom line: should the Duterte administration do as predecessors have done and fight crime gangs and their narco-state protectors with bloodless due process, probably eliciting much laughter from the hoods?

Or should it mount a full-scale war to prevent thousands of murders and rapes, and tens of thousands of robberies, assaults, and addictions; and to prod countless drug users and pushers — more than 800,000 by the latest count — to surrender and reform?

For Duterte critics, many living in gated, guarded subdivisions and rarely walking crime-infested streets, he should stop the suspect killings, even if crime and drugs don't drop so fast.

But as surveys show, the great majority of Filipinos, facing lawlessness on the streets and in homes and work places, support his brutal campaign.

Where do you stand?

Yes, President Duterte violates common norms of decent behavior, established standards of presidential decorum, and strict parameters of the rule of law and the tenets of morality, in his zeal and urgency to address threats and challenges he and the nation face.

But rather than such dos and don'ts, it is the safety and quality of life under his watch which would ultimately determine whether Filipinos love or hate Rodrigo Roa Duterte.

*(The first part ran on Tuesday. The foreign policy shift will be discussed next week.)*