

DISMUN VIII

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Head Chair: Emily Lien (IIS)

Issue: (302) Addressing extrajudicial killings and accountability for human rights violations

Introduction

“Extrajudicial killings, or extrajudicial executions, happen when someone in an official position deliberately kills a person without any legal process.” (OMCT SOS-Torture Network). Based on legal processes, a state has the obligation to promote and protect the right to life along with prosecuting the perpetrators with a fair justice system. These acts strongly violate the right to life, which is a significant aspect of the legal process and the international human rights law that criminals face before being sentenced. These killings often target those with crimes, marginalized groups, or even political opponents, and a wide variety of members could be involved in the planning or execution of the victims, including militias, death squads, or even authorities.

“Unfortunately, the United Nations reports a rising number of “targeted killings” committed by States, often in response to terrorist threats: there is an increasing need to fight the practice of extrajudicial executions.” (Trial International). Many states, due to a variety of reasons, fail to successfully investigate, prosecute, or punish perpetrators, hindering their accountability to the damages they have caused. Not only has this issue impacted domestic safety as large-scale events result in significant casualties, it has also escalated to an international level concerning conflict zones that resulted in little to no justice given to the victims.

Although organizations such as the United Nations (UN) or the International Criminal Court (ICC) are able to provide trials in order to ensure perpetrators are accountable for their actions, several limitations such as jurisdiction and political will are still in place, making formal procedures by these international bodies difficult to execute. Therefore, member states should

protect the fundamental rights of individuals and prevent the ongoing cycles of violence and impunity by taking measures to resolve this issue immediately, otherwise the right to life would fail to guarantee the safety of victims.

Definition of Key Terms

Accountability

Accountability refers to the responsible actions of an individual and taking consequences if their actions violate ethical, moral, or legal obligations. Three key aspects of accountability include responsibility, answerability, and consequences. Responsibility is the general expectation for individuals to act according to legal standards and laws. Answerability is the duty to explain and justify individuals' actions or decisions to the affected parties. Consequences are the responsive measures to wrongdoings, such as reparations or other measures to correct perpetrator behaviors.

Chain of command

The chain of command is a formal structure of hierarchy that outlines the authority, responsibility, and structure of a communication system within an organization. In the legal system, the chain of command starts with the highest authority figure, which is the attorney general, and then reaches lower levels of authority. This system establishes a clear communication system and authority differences by specifying the power of officers of different rankings, along with ensuring that each authority is accountable for their actions and tasks.

Command Responsibility

Command responsibility is a doctrine in international law that holds superiors accountable for the actions of their subordinates, which include their failed attempts to punish perpetrators. This is often applied in extreme cases such as severe war crimes, genocide, and other crimes against humanity. The command responsibility ensures that superiors cannot escape accountability by showing ignorance to their subordinates' actions; instead, promoting the supervision of subordinates and their tasks, effectively preventing human rights abuses or other crimes from being committed.

Due Process

Due process refers to the government having to follow certain legal principles before depriving an individual of their right to life, freedom, or property. This is often known as a fair legal process that the accused has to go through before facing their trial. There are two types of due processes: the procedural due process and the substantive due process. The procedural due process states that the government must provide notice, initiate hearings, and appoint a third party decision maker who would be sentencing the accused. On the other hand, a substantive due process is the requirement for the government to provide a legitimate reason before infringing an individual's rights, instead of acting arbitrarily.

Extrajudicial killings

Extrajudicial killings are “the purposeful killing of someone by the government, or with the government's approval, when the killing has not been sanctioned by a court or official government process” (Mohn, 2025). This indicates that the executed did not go through a trial of any form, and no legal justification or any government proceedings prior to the execution have been present. The perpetrators of these killings usually involve police, military, death squads, with some cases involving non-state actors. Marginalized groups, political opponents, or criminals of severe war crimes and genocide are more likely to be targeted and experience extrajudicial killings. These killings are not legally justified in any way possible, therefore are considered different from self-defense, police action, or deaths in armed conflicts, which are often fully justified with reason.

Human rights violations

Human rights violations happen when a person's fundamental rights are stripped by the government without a fair legal process or legally justified in any form. This can include discrimination, censorship, torture, detention without legal justification, genocide, or exploitation. In the context of extrajudicial killings, executing an individual without going through a fair due process trial consists as a human rights violation, as a person's right to life is taken away by the perpetrators unfairly.

Impunity

Impunity refers to the freedom given even after committing a crime, meaning that the

criminals are not held accountable for their actions. These perpetrators often escape investigation, prosecution, and in some cases, are exempt from sentence. Impunity is common in extreme crimes such as extrajudicial killings, threatening public trust to the law, and could encourage future violations of the law without consequences given.

Right to Life

Right to life is a fundamental human right given to individuals. Every person born has the right to live and their life should not be deprived by any party without due process of law. Governments are obligated to protect individuals from unlawful deprivation of life which include extrajudicial killings or any form of murder. They should also take proactive steps to prevent violence, grant healthcare, or any other form that would better protect the right to life.

Rule of Law

The rule of law holds all individuals accountable for their actions before laws are formally announced, equally enforced, settled by an impartial third party, and consistent with human rights principles. There are five key elements in the rule of law: supremacy of law, equality before the law, legal certainty, fair and transparent process, and the protection of fundamental rights. These elements state that no one is above the law, all individuals are subject to the same law, laws should be clear over time, enforced impartially, and protect individuals' rights over arbitrary executions.

State Responsibility

State responsibility is a nation's obligation to protect its citizens' fundamental human rights. "States are liable for breaches of their obligations, provided that the breach is attributable to the state itself." (Britannica). States are also responsible for any direct violation of an international law or treaty, whether committed by a domestic organization or by the state government itself. The state should also be internationally responsible for activities conducted privately by its citizens and adopted by the government.

Background Information

History

“Extrajudicial killings have happened throughout history, but international condemnation of these killings became more prominent after World War II when organizations such as the United Nations (UN) formed.” (EBSCO). Even though governments initially used arbitrary killings and private executions to punish their criminals, the legal system has developed over time and governments began to adopt distinct laws on how criminals should be executed or what form of due process they should face. Although many nations today still allow death penalties, they are based on a comprehensive legal process and several restrictions are still in place to ensure that execution is carried out under legal justification. In 1948, immediately after World War II ended, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was signed, which sought to emphasize the right to life and protect the fundamental human rights of individuals. Apart from UDHR, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted by the UN in 1966, was also signed, which stated that no one should be arbitrarily deprived of their life.

Causes

Extrajudicial killings are often caused during political turmoil or when significant conflict occurs, and often happen in countries with authoritarian governments. The targets of extrajudicial killings are usually minority groups or parties in disagreement with the current political party in power, since they are considered a threat to the government itself. Police and members from the military are usually considered the executors in this case, as they are often the responsible personnel to commit extrajudicial killings. These murders are also covered up to frame other individuals who initially have no relation to the crime nor are guilty for any crime, or to frame the executed themselves of committing illegal activity, which legitimizes their death.

War and political unrest are also a leading cause to the sprout of extrajudicial killings, as this is a sensitive time when parties struggle for power. This trend has been evident in South Sudan when the increase in extrajudicial executions rose during the conflict between the South Sudanese government and the firing squads.

Approaches by International and Domestic Actors

“International law prohibits the arbitrary deprivation of life, which includes extrajudicial killing. This norm is codified in every major human rights treaty and has attained jus cogens status as a non-derogable norm in international law.” (Aceves, 2018). As the act of extrajudicial killings became a fundamental norm in international law, it is then highly prohibited by nations to carry out such executions. A non-derogable norm as stated above refers to a norm that is an international law or norm that cannot be set aside easily and must be followed at all times, as they are essential to promoting order in the international community. Apart from the international law, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has also criminalized the act of extrajudicial killings or other forms of arbitrary deprivation of life.

The UN has also adopted several resolutions to prevent extrajudicial killings from continuing and ensure that all actions nations take comply with international human rights standards. It is important to note that these resolutions recognize components of the crime that could amount to genocide or other crimes against humanity, emphasizing the importance of resolving the issue of extrajudicial killings. Apart from adopting resolutions, the UN has also established a position named the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions which consists of an individual human rights expert under the Human Rights Council. “The mandate of the Special Rapporteur was established in 1982 and has been renewed numerous times, most recently in June 2023 (HRC resolution 53/04).” (United Nations). With each renewal of the mandate, the Special Rapporteur gains a broader approach to executions that violate the right to life. “The mandate of the Special Rapporteur covers all countries, irrespective of whether a State has ratified relevant international Conventions.” (United Nations), which ensures that all member states are protected.

Domestically, the accountability of these criminals are pursued through criminal prosecutions, civil lawsuits, truth commissions, ombudsmen, or other national human rights commissions. Specifically, the ombudsman is an independent government official that investigates complaints from the public on any maladministration, unfair treatment, or human rights abuses conducted by the government. The main responsibilities of an ombudsmen is to resolve disputes while promoting fairness and ensure criminals receive accountability after their solutions are taken into consideration. Since ombudsmen operate individually, confidentially, and impartially from the government, they can also be targets of extrajudicial killings.

Key Issues

Lack of due process

Since extrajudicial killings are a direct human rights violation as outlined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the lack of due process and judicial guarantees in the legal system in many nations are also considered unlawful acts.

All accused should go through a comprehensive due process before being sentenced or deprived of their right to life, liberty, or property. A fair due process initiates with a notice sent to the accused, informing them about the charges pressed against them and allowing the accused to prepare for their defense. A chance of their case to be presented, including evidence and arguments, should be given, and the entire court process should be judged by a third party neutral figure. All criminals have the right to counsel, which guarantees them legal representation in court to defend their case. They are also given the right to confront and cross-examine witnesses, which provides them the opportunity to challenge evidence and question witnesses presented against them. After the hearing has elapsed, the judges must make decisions based on the facts and evidence presented and a right of appeal is given to the accused, which grants them the chance to review or appeal the decision to a higher authority or court.

Due process exists to ensure laws or actions do not arbitrarily infringe fundamental human rights or lead to extrajudicial killings. Due process also ensures the decision to deprive a person's right to life is based on judicial justification instead of procedural fairness only, while protecting individuals from laws that are vague, broad, or discriminatory in order to ensure a fair trial was taken before decisions are made.

However, such processes are often skipped by governments as an excuse for extrajudicial killings. Most victims are not given the chance to present their case in front of the court, nor receive the right to counsel, along with the inability to require another review by the court as outlined in the right of appeal. Instead, the victim is deprived of their right to life immediately after being accused, consisting of unfair treatment and an arbitrary act of deprivation of life, as this act has not been legally justified in any way possible.

State involvement and accountability

Extrajudicial killings are heavily state involved, as most of the perpetrators are police officials, members of the military, or even government officials. These individuals have the power to directly order or approve executions but often escape consequences afterwards due to their high-profile status in nations. Impunity plays a huge role in this case, as these perpetrators successfully escape punishment and do not face prosecution. Since extrajudicial killings are considered a non-derogable international norm, the accountability of individuals should be severe, as these crimes are considered alongside crimes of genocide and those against humanity by the international community.

State involvement is considered severe in extrajudicial killings, as government resources such as weapons, personnel, and vehicles are involved in order to conduct these murders. Police officials and military officials often collaborate with each other to coordinate and execute victims using government assets, and direct approval from government officials are granted. Furthermore, authoritarian governments tend to encourage the behavior of extrajudicial killings through vilifying certain criminal groups, such as drug dealers, political activists, or other minority groups and those that threaten their status. By promoting these violent enforcement strategies, an environment of non-tolerance and encouragement of extrajudicial killings are then created.

“Police and militia groups are not being held to account for their actions. This is a rejection of the government’s obligation to investigate violations of the right to life and the right to freedom from extrajudicial killing.” (Human Rights Measurement Initiative, 2011). Investigations are often absent when states are involved in these actions, and their inability to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions fosters impunity in the legal system. A common tactic that state officials do is they tend to deny responsibility for extrajudicial killings and try to justify their actions, such as stating that these are “accidents” caused by “crossfires.” Evidence is often fabricated, and information is also suppressed to avoid the public from being informed of their unlawful acts, hindering effective investigation efforts. Although these governments are often condemned by the international community, investigation can only be effective if states are willing to collaborate, leaving victims facing injustice and perpetrators in liberty to use extrajudicial killings against their next victim.

The importance of accountability calls for a duty to protect the right to life, investigate extrajudicial killings, prosecute perpetrators, and provide victims the justice they should be granted. Failure to do so breaches the principle of domestic and international legal obligations, while also eroding the trust of the public in governments and public institutions.

Challenges in documentation and reporting

As stated previously, although an ombudsman is usually in charge of researching the case of extrajudicial killings in nations, some nations do not have such bodies that provide an impartial approach towards such crimes. Since these nations lack the ability to form neutral investigative teams, investigations involving politically connected individuals as victims are often difficult and biased. These actions also hinder the effective documentation of such cases, since states have already lost their ability to conduct unbiased investigations, which could likely result in fragmented documentation or disinformation released simultaneously.

Furthermore, reporting and documentation has also brought significant threats to victims' family members along with witnesses for the case. They are subject to intimidation and different forms of threats, some even facing violence, when attempting to report or verify for one's actions. This repeated act of threatening and constantly facing violence puts these individuals in fear, lowering their will to serve as witnesses and provide evidence for the court, which decreases reporting and weakens the process of evidence collection. Protection mechanisms for these victims are often absent or inadequate, which increases the risk of them being involved in documentation and threatening their fundamental rights.

Evidence gathering could also be deemed difficult due to government officials' ability to tamper with or destroy physical evidence. Since evidence is withheld by government agencies during the investigation process, it is highly likely that these acts would be conducted if a politically connected individual is the victim or the perpetrator of extrajudicial killings. It is also highly likely that access to crime scenes are denied at all conditions in order to cover up evidence or grant an upper hand to the perpetrator. During the investigation process, evidence has an utmost importance in piecing up fragmented testimonies provided by witnesses; however, if they are tampered with or destroyed, then it is difficult to verify the accuracy of the witnesses' words, thus making it difficult to place a crime on the perpetrator.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved and Their Positions

United States of America

The USA has been a major actor in extrajudicial killings since the late 19th century. A special form of extrajudicial punishment called lynching was primarily used in USA from the 1880s to the 1920s. Lynching aims to exert racial control over the Black people through committing extrajudicial killings. Dating back to the American Revolution, lynching was the method of controlling former Black slaves as their enslavers see them as threats after the civil war. “Reports indicate that thousands of lynchings occurred, with official records from the Tuskegee Institute documenting 4,743 lynchings between 1882 and 1968, of which 73% were Black Americans.” (Paulson, 2024).

Victims of lynching do not go through any legal processes before they are murdered, with police severely involved in this process, consisting it an act of extrajudicial killing. In these charges, it can be observed that White women are subject to protection against Black people, who would then be lynched. “High-profile cases, such as that of Emmett Till in 1955, brought national attention to this violent legacy and played a significant role in galvanizing the civil rights movement.” (Paulson, 2024). He was allegedly flirting with a White woman during the time a witness walked past and reported him, violating one of the cultural taboos of the South, and therefore executed extrajudicially.

Nowadays, the police use of lethal force in the USA against Black people and other minorities have been described by several human rights organizations as another form of extrajudicial killings. However, the majority of these killings result in no criminal accountability, and “98.3% of killings by police from 2013 to 2020 have resulted in no accountability.” (CJA). Targeted killings abroad have also been observed as an act of the US government. One of the most infamous cases is the murder of Anwar al-Aulaqi, killed by a drone strike while in Yemen. Many have questioned the due process and legal justification behind this act, therefore considering it a form of extrajudicial killing. Killings conducted by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents at the US-Mexico border have also been considered a form of extrajudicial killings, since efforts to secure justice by victims’ families have failed, and no agent has been held accountable for their actions.

Even though US law, most significantly the Torture Victim Protection Act, defines extrajudicial killing, and aligns with international standards to prohibit such killings at all circumstances, these actions are still present in the US. Nevertheless, investigations and prosecutions are rare, and the US government has continued to argue that such killings are justified with national security needs.

Philippines

Since 2016, Philippines has gained attention on its increasing extrajudicial killings numbers. Former President Rodrigo Duterte launched a campaign against illegal drug production and supply, which led to thousands of criminals' death without due process, while targeting marginalized and minority communities. "Official sources report that 6,248 individuals were killed during Duterte's "war on drugs", while civil society organisations estimate the toll to be between 12,000 and 30,000." (OMCT, 2025). These killings were carried out by police officials and other armed groups with government approval of murder, but soon received widespread condemnation and backlash from the international community. This was then further referred to as the "war on drugs."

Hearings in 2024 was launched by the Philippines Congress to investigate the act of extrajudicial killings during the drug war and other related misuse of government funds to facilitate killings, with the Department of Justice underneath the government establishing a task force to be responsible for this investigation. However, even though investigation persists, rarely any police officials involved in this murder were convicted since 2018. The Philippines government has been heavily criticized for its inability to hold the government and police accountable for their actions, especially purposefully shielding those in the Duterte administration. In 2025, President Duterte was arrested by the International Criminal Court (ICC) and surrendered while facing the crime against humanity, marking a historic step of upholding accountability among involved individuals.

In 2022, when the new President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. was elected, although the number of extrajudicial killings due to drug crimes have decreased, the issue of extrajudicial killings is still at large. "Monitoring by Dahas shows that 332 were killed across the Philippines between January and November 15, 2024, with security forces responsible for more than 50 percent of the killings. Since Marcos took office on July 1, 2022, 841 have died in drug-related killings." (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Extrajudicial killings as a result of political violence and those

carried out by death squads have also increased their numbers before the 2025 mid-term elections.

However, ongoing harassment of its citizens and human rights defenders and extrajudicial killings have been continuing in the Philippines. Disappearances of human rights activists and their killings have been increasing, while the Philippines remain third globally for being responsible for the death of human rights activists.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has been known to conduct extrajudicial killings both domestically and abroad, with the significant cases often being the murder of high-profile individuals. In October 2018, journalist Jamal Khashoggi was murdered in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Upon investigation, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) concluded with “high confidence” that the murder was ordered by the crown prince Mohammad bin Salman. 15 Saudi agents were involved in this action, using state resources to conduct this killing, and were granted official cover from the government. Khashoggi’s remains were never found, and this case consisted as a breach against humanity, along with a clear example of Saudi Arabia’s use of lethal force against critics and political opponents. Saudi officials first denied their involvement in this case, but started shifting narratives when the investigation progressed, and conducted a secretive trial that did not meet international transparency standards. Executive officials escape the accountability of such actions after this trial, and little to no members involved were convicted for their crime.

The killings of migrants and asylum seekers in Saudi Arabia was also persistent. At their border with Yemen, significant numbers of African and Yemeni migrants were killed without due process while on their way to seek asylum in Saudi Arabia. Executions of criminals who were responsible for non-violent crimes were also common, and trials are extremely unfair, while minors and political opponents are often their targeted individuals to be facing extrajudicial killings. Security forces were directly involved in these cases, with explicit approval granted before the killings were carried out.

However, despite ongoing legal reforms in Saudi Arabia, the legal system used death penalties extensively and continues to execute criminals who were responsible for non-violent crimes. Arbitrary detentions and killings of critics, journalists, human rights defenders, political opponents still persist, and little to no members involved were actively prosecuted, convicted, or held accountable for their actions.

Syria

Syria has been a focal point of extrajudicial killings spanning decades. State violence, civil conflict, and recently an increasing number in killings of the collapse of the Assad regime in December 2024, all include extrajudicial killings. “2818 individuals were killed in Syria in the first half of 2025, including 201 children, and 194 women, as well as 17 victims of death due to torture.” (SNHR, 2025). Corpses were found in mass graves or other abandoned locations as an attempt to conceal the crime, and government forces, militias affiliated with the government, unregulated armed groups, etc., were criticized for being responsible for these killings.

Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, violence against Alawite communities escalated. Armed groups affiliated with the government were often found carrying door-to-door killings, starting with interrogating citizens and then executing them based on their identity. “Militias affiliated with the government, killed more than 100 people in the coastal city of Baniyas on 8 and 9 March 2025” (Amnesty International, 2025). Revenge killings against individuals who support the former regime, work for its military, or served as part of its intelligence operations was also observed, often carried out by armed individuals that are not documented, and killing both Sunnis and Alawites by punishing them for their past abuses. This creates a vicious cycle of violence and torture ongoing in Syria.

In Syria, the issue of impunity persists, with many perpetrators escaping accountability due to their political status or deep affiliation with the government or its military. With the investigation process being non-transparent, it is difficult to remain impartial during the process and ensure accountability is given to those guilty of the crime, further lowering public confidence in the newly established government.

International Criminal Court (ICC)

Since the act of extrajudicial killings directly violates fundamental human rights and constitutes a crime against humanity, the ICC has direct jurisdiction over individuals or states that commit this crime. According to the Rome Statute, the ICC is responsible for prosecuting and investigating crimes against humanity, and have since been heavily involved in investigation of such cases. Despite the Philippines’ withdrawal from the Rome Statute in 2019, the ICC still has their jurisdiction over the “war on drug” case since it is allegedly committed when they are still a member of the statute. Upon investigation, the ICC prosecutor applied for an arrest warrant

against former President Rodrigo Duterte for crime against humanity due to the extrajudicial killings committed in February 2025.

However, the ICC serves as a last resort for holding individuals accountable for extrajudicial killings, as it will only intervene when nations are unwilling to perpetrate individuals domestically or are unable to investigate impartially. Nevertheless, the ICC aims to hold high-profile individuals accountable for their actions when sufficient evidence such as state policies, any method of encouragement, or involvement in the case prove them guilty of organizing and executing extrajudicial killings.

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The OHCHR's main aim as established under the UN is "promoting and protecting the effective enjoyment of human rights." (Universal Human Rights Group). Since its establishment by the General Assembly, the OHCHR has dedicated themselves in "three main dimensions: standard-setting, monitoring, and supporting implementation on the ground." (Universal Human Rights Group). This includes the monitor, investigation, and reporting of extrajudicial killings, along with supporting the Special Rapporteur on making efforts to address these issues.

Different from the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), the OHCHR is the operational sector of the investigation process, including gathering evidence, supporting investigations conducted by countries domestically, preparing reports, and providing technical assistance and expertise on the prevention and investigation of such killings. Field offices were often directly engaged with involved countries and those affected to provide field presence. "In pursuit of this goal, the OHCHR has, over recent years, significantly increased its presence in the field (e.g. field offices, regional offices, country human rights advisors), allowing it to work more closely with governments, national human rights institutions, other UN actors and non-governmental organisations." (Universal Human Rights Group).

World Organization Against Torture (OMCT)

The key aim of OMCT is to end torture, arbitrary detention, disappearances, and extrajudicial killings worldwide, along with all other forms of inhumane treatments faced by individuals. Established in 1985 and based in Geneva, OMCT partners with over 200 organizations to compile a SOS-Torture Network, which have been useful in combatting crime and torture. The organization is also deeply engaged in documenting, reporting, and advocating

against such treatments, along with offering medical and personalized assistance to victims and their families who have been suffering from such torture. Direct support, appeals, and campaigns for the release of arbitrary detentions along with justice have been an important aspect of their organization, benefiting at-risk activists and communities globally.

Apart from those stated above, OMCT is also engaged in drafting and submitting reports to respective UN committees such as the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), International Labor Organization (ILO), African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Council of Europe, and more. They are also dedicated in helping victims attain justice by assisting them in bringing their cases to international forums, along with pressurizing the government to make legal reforms and end all forms of torture.

Timeline of Events

Time	Description
1880s - 1920s	Lynching was predominantly conducted in the US as a form of extrajudicial killings targeted against Black people and in favor of the White. 4,743 lynchings were recorded and the victims of 73% of them were Black Americans.
World War II (1939 - 1945)	State sponsored killings such as mass executions and genocide became widespread, which led to an emphasis on the right of life after the war.
December 10th, 1948	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. Most significantly, in Article 3, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person." This condemns the action of extrajudicial killings and serves as a fundamental human right.
December 16th, 1966	The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) was adopted. This protects fundamental human rights and political rights globally while enhancing the right to life and safety of individuals.

May 7th, 1982	The position of UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions was established. As an independent expert appointed by the UNHRC, the Special Rapporteur carries out investigations, issues reports, and communicates with states to improve human rights worldwide.
1985	The World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) was established, which led to the coordination of the SOS-Torture Network that contributed greatly afterwards.
2013 - 2020	US police use of lethal force against Black people increased significantly, and 98.3% of the extrajudicial killings carried out by US police have not held its perpetrators accountable.
July 2016 - June 2022	The Philippines “war on drugs” took place when former President Duterte took office. Over 6,200 fatalities were recorded in his attack against illegal drugs, while the estimated fatalities for human rights group activists exceed 30,000.
December 8th, 2024	The Assad regime officially collapsed in Syria, leading to a series of extrajudicial killings reported. “2818 individuals were killed in Syria in the first half of 2025, including 201 children, and 194 women, as well as 17 victims of death due to torture.” (SNHR, 2025).
March 11th, 2025	Former Philippines President Duterte was arrested by the Philippine National Police and members of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) under an ICC arrest warrant for the crime against humanity.

Important, Relevant Documents

Name of the Document	Date of Publication	Description of the Document
Universal Declaration of Human Rights	10 December 1948	In Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it explicitly states that “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.”, making extrajudicial killings a violation of international norms.
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	16 December 1966	This legally binding treaty prohibited the use of extrajudicial killings against individuals along with any form of arbitrary deprivation of life.
Effective prevention and investigation of extra-legal, arbitrary and summary executions	24 May 1985	This principles document specifically defines standards that prohibit extrajudicial killings, and outlines several methods of crime prevention against such arbitrary deprivation of life.
Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance	18 December 1992	This document calls upon member states to address disappearances that are linked to all forms of unfair treatments, including extrajudicial killings.
Extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions (A/RES/67/168)	20 December 2012	This resolution calls for the prevention of extrajudicial killings globally along with the compliance of member states to investigate such activities, along with recognizing the relationship between extrajudicial killings and international crime.

Previous Attempted Solutions

Domestic Laws and Projects

Many nations have specific laws, regulations, and projects to enforce regulations against extrajudicial killings. As states are expected to initiate a transparent investigative process along with prosecuting those behind extrajudicial killings, legal reforms are crucial and have been a key solution to the issue. Several areas are part of the legal reform process, such as the clarification on criminalization and its definitions, the liability of chain of command, the restrictions on the use of force against criminals, and some even including post-trial victim and witness protection.

However, such solutions meet multiple challenges and have inefficient outcomes. Even though clear definitions and penalties for conducting extrajudicial killings are already outlined, this stay enforced inconsistently in most countries. Command responsibilities are also often unaddressed or weakly implemented, leading to subordinates gaining power to conduct extrajudicial killings while their superior receives no accountability for their lack of oversight. Lethal forces are also excessively used, heavily linked with the issue of command responsibilities, as the lack of oversight is a grave factor in the excessive use of lethal force. Victim and witness protection methods can also be underresourced, both purposefully and unable to do so due to a multitude of factors. The weakened impact of these programs then result in targeted killings against witnesses and their family members since their identities are not kept anonymous, but rather exposed.

Therefore, in order to fully ensure legal reforms are successfully implemented, they should be enforced properly and effectively to ensure that no impunity could be observed. Legal institutions and their leaders should also be held accountable for their lack of oversight, along with cooperating with responsible government agencies in order to commit to combatting extrajudicial killings.

Public Awareness Campaigns

Public awareness campaigns have been a pivotal part of addressing the issue of extrajudicial killings. This includes the usage of social media to advocate for the prevention of extrajudicial killings, bring together different parties such as NGOs and the general public, and introduce diverse methods to educate the public on the issue of extrajudicial killings.

With the use of social media, hashtags that are soon accompanied with important activism events in regards to extrajudicial killings become universally understood, as social media is accessible globally. Social media is also vital to facilitating mass protests and communication among diverse groups of audiences, which sought to enable protests across borders to happen in close ties with advocacy.

Not only is social media part of public awareness campaigns, the offline actions such as in-person vigils are also of utmost importance. These actions can attract media coverage and attention, which assist in emphasizing the damage done through extrajudicial killings, and utilize the public's influence effectively to pressure nations into conducting legal reforms or prevent extrajudicial killings. Furthermore, campaigns can also be partnered between several organizations, such as sharing resources or combining both groups of audiences in events, which has a direct impact on advocacy and its influence towards how governments would respond to such voices.

However, even though the advantages of these campaigns far outweigh the disadvantages, multiple risks and limitations still exist. The most prevalent being the backlash activists may receive from their involvement in these campaigns, both online and offline. Harassment, violence, verbal assault, and all other methods of assault are often seen, which does not usually result in the prosecution of said offenders. Therefore, in order to ensure the safety of individuals participating in these campaigns, significant efforts should still be made.

NGO Monitoring and Documentation

NGOs are dedicated to the monitoring and documentation of extrajudicial killings as their main aim to uphold human rights, and they have made several efforts to ensure that these killings are prevented and offenders are prosecuted.

Field researchers are often deployed from the NGO itself to gather evidence of extrajudicial killings, partnering with impartial parties of a nation or the government itself. Through their interviews, forensic analysis, and review of official documents, they sought to verify the facts brought upon them by government officials about those cases of extrajudicial killings, and ensure that justice is brought to the victim. When a government official's report is found heavily not credible due to their research, NGOs would put into action to ensure the correct offender is prosecuted and pressure the government into conducting legal reforms or assist in their efforts to prosecute the perpetrators. Detailed reports are also published by the

NGOs to expose nations of their wrongdoings on conducting extrajudicial killings. These reports are then important pieces of evidence for international bodies, courts, and governments to issue action appeals on providing assistance to victims, their families, or other forms of intervention.

However, challenges persist in their actions, such as the safety of individuals, as their work often includes operating in dangerous conditions. Governments could easily harass, send threats, or conduct actions that are not legally justified towards those who work for NGOs due to their exposure of the nation's unlawful actions, and these retaliations are persistent challenges to NGOs' work and long-lasting impact.

Possible Solutions

Restrict Use of Lethal Force by Police

The use of lethal force should only be conducted when necessary, as agreed upon universally. It is often used to only avert an immediate threat, serious injuries, or the potential death of a hostage, fellow police officer, or others. It is also worth noting the importance of “instilling chain-of-command control in those organizations so that people in the lower levels of the organizations do not take it upon themselves to conduct extrajudicial killings” (Mohn, 2025). The criteria for the use of force should also be outlined clearly in laws and regulations, such as the proportionality between the use of lethal force and the threat. Such usage of arms must be legally justified at all times and only be used when non-lethal force is unfeasible to solve the matter at hand. Therefore, it is a police officer's responsibility to always prioritize the use of non-lethal force before deciding to use lethal force against a criminal.

However, if such laws are often violated by police officers, governments should consider eradicating all forms of lethal force usage, including all forms of arms that can result in the death of another individual, in order to prevent extrajudicial killings. Although police officers may still be allowed with arms when patrolling, all arms must be returned back to the police station or any responsible government agency, and should not be taken back to their private properties. It is also crucial to ensure that the chain of command is properly followed to ensure that all superiors understand the actions of their subordinates and face similar consequences for the actions they are accountable for.

Establish Independent Oversight Bodies

Independent oversight bodies are third-party, neutral, and impartial organizations that could be established in a nation to conduct investigations regarding extrajudicial killings, seeing that current investigation processes often fail to be impartial and transparent. The main aim of these bodies is to uphold human rights and to prevent the act of extrajudicial killings, along with ensuring justice is given to the victims and the perpetrators are receiving the accountability they deserve. These bodies would have the responsibility to monitor, investigate, and report upon any case of extrajudicial killings, along with cooperating with local human rights organizations and other NGOs to provide assistance to victims and their families. It is also feasible for these organizations to collaborate with UN bodies and their legal counterparts such as the ICJ or the ICC to prosecute perpetrators if a government fails to do so themselves.

Fundamental features of these oversight bodies include the utmost independence that they have, with no external influence from the government, the public, or any international bodies. They should also have clear authority to access court documents, reports, and have the ability to call upon witnesses, investigate, or make recommendations to the government in regards to legislation. Resources should also be given to these bodies, including sufficient funds that can be utilized for combatting extrajudicial killings, skilled personnel for research and running the agency, and legal experts for drafting amendments on a nation's laws and regulations. These bodies can ensure that due process is followed, as it is one of the key issues outlined previously, while ensuring that states receive accountability for their actions.

Family of the Victims and Witness Protection

Family of the victims and witnesses from extrajudicial killings should receive adequate protection to their safety and assistance should also be provided to help them reintegrate into the society and their previous lifestyle. These individuals are often under serious risk of retaliation from the perpetrators and may result in them still being the target of the next attacks planned. Therefore, secure accommodation, police protection, relocation, or a change of identity should be provided by international bodies. Additionally, witnesses and family of the victims can also be protected through not exposing their identity during the investigation process and in court. This can be done by having witnesses talking behind a screen and preparing pre-recorded statements, which enables individuals to testify for themselves safely and effectively.

After the court cases are carried out, witnesses and family of the victims should also receive psychological and potentially financial support from international bodies in order to ensure they can reintegrate to society successfully after suffering from the loss of a family member or being a witness. These include free access to professional psychologists that have assisted those that went through cases of extrajudicial killings, attending peer support groups for like-minded individuals to share their experiences, providing support workers that accompany these individuals to court or assist in investigation, and private crisis lines that are available for psychological first-aid measures.

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