

Philippine mayor on Duterte's 'drug list' shot dead by gunmen - 11th mayor killed

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Mariano Blanco of the town of Rondo was the 11th mayor killed since Duterte came to power in June 2016.

A town mayor, who had been accused by Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte of being involved in the drug trade, was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in a pre-dawn attack in Cebu province.

Mayor Mariano Blanco of the town of Rondo was killed by four unidentified attackers who arrived at the town hall on board a white van, police told local media.

According to the report, the gunmen ordered the two security escorts guarding Blanco's office to drop on the ground and then went into the mayor's office.

A burst of gunfire was heard shortly before the attackers made their escape.

The employees later found Blanco's lifeless body inside his office.

Blanco had been reportedly staying in his office as a security precaution since President Duterte linked him to the drug trade.

He had denied the allegations and expressed concern for his safety.

In July, two mayors and two vice mayors were also killed. The assassination of the two mayors gained media attention as the killings were caught on video.

According to news reports, Blanco was the 11th town mayor killed since Duterte came to power in June 2016.

At least six vice mayors were also killed during the same period, including Blanco's vice mayor and nephew, Jonnah John Ungab, who was shot dead in February.

Ungab was the lawyer of a top drug suspect, Kerwin Espinosa, whose father, Rolando Espinosa Jr, also a mayor of a town in the central province of Leyte, was killed while under police custody in 2016.

When he rose to power in 2016, the brash-talking Duterte expanded nationwide a deadly campaign against illegal drugs that he had implemented as a longtime mayor of the southern city of Davao.

Police said the current campaign has left more than 4,200 suspects dead in what they claimed were clashes with law enforcement, although human rights groups have blamed them for extrajudicial killings.

But opposition Senator Antonio Trillanes claimed in February that as many as 20,000 people have

already been killed in the drug war.

Duterte and the police have denied a policy of condoning illegal killings and cite the deaths of many policemen in clashes as proof of the danger posed by drug suspects.

The president has, however, often threatened drug suspects with death and promised he would never allow policemen to rot in jail for doing their work in speeches critics say have helped promote impunity and foster abuses.

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