

Philippines President Duterte says he may turn down Trump's White House invitation

Wednesday 3 May 2017, by [MINDOCK Clark](#) (Date first published: 1 May 2017).

Mr Trump has been criticised by human rights groups for extending the invitation in the first place.

Mr Duterte, who has pivoted his country away from its strong alliance with the United States in favour of an increased focus on ties with China and Russia, said that his busy schedule would keep him from making a stop in Washington even though a firm date had not been set for a trip to the US.

"I am tied up. I cannot make any definite promise. I am supposed to go to Russia, I am supposed to go to Israel," Mr Duterte told reporters when they asked if he planned on accepting the White House invite.

Mr Trump extended the invitation to Mr Duterte during a telephone call on Saturday. The White House released a statement about the call later in the evening, describing it as a "very friendly conversation." That call was criticised by human rights groups who have criticised Mr Duterte for a violent anti-drug campaign in his country that has resulted in over 7,000 killings at the hands of Philippine National Police officers and unidentified "vigilantes."

"By essentially endorsing Duterte's... war on drugs, Trump is now morally complicit in future killings," John Sifton, the Asia advocacy director of Human Rights Watch, told the *New York Times* about the call [1]. "Although the traits of his personality likely make it impossible, Trump should be ashamed of himself."

The White House defended the invitation amid criticism from human rights groups and others, saying that the phone call was one of several calls made after the administration began getting signals from leaders in Southeast Asia that they felt neglected by the president's focus on Japan and China because of increased tensions with North Korea. The White House said that Mr Trump also extended invitations to the leaders of Thailand and Singapore during phone calls on Sunday.

White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer, when asked about the Duterte invitation, said that a meeting with the Philippines leader would help the US isolate North Korea and that doing so would help to ensure the safety of American lives.

"Obviously there's a human rights component. It's a question of balance," Mr Spicer said. "Top priority is protecting the American people."

Though he said he may decline his invitation to come to Washington, Mr Duterte indicated that the relationship he has with the US has warmed since Mr Trump took office. Mr Duterte opened up a major rift between former President Barack Obama last year, telling the president then that he could "go to hell" and calling him a "son of a wh***."

Clark Mindock, New York

P.S.

* Independent.co.uk. Monday 1 May 2017 22:14 BST4:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-duterte-phillipines-president-white-house-invitation-may-be-turned-down-a7712046.html>

Footnotes

[1] https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/30/us/politics/trump-duterte.html?_r=0