

Philippines & Martial Law in Mindanao: Rodrigo Duterte jokes to soldiers that they can rape women with impunity

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‘If you had raped three, I will admit it, that’s on me’ Philippines president tells soldiers on Mindanao island where he has imposed martial law.

Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte has sought to reassure soldiers who might be accused of committing abuses under martial law and jokingly said that if any of them were to rape three women, he would personally claim responsibility for it.

Duterte is notorious for comments often deemed offensive and made the remark as a joke, reiterating that only he would be liable for any backlash over military rule on southern Mindanao island. He has, however, said he would not tolerate abuses.

“If you go down, I go down. But for this martial law and the consequences of martial law and the ramifications of martial law, I and I alone would be responsible, just do your job I will take care of the rest,” Duterte said on Friday, according to a president’s office transcript.

“I’ll imprison you myself,” he said, referring to any soldiers who commit violations, then he joked: “If you had raped three, I will admit it, that’s on me.”

Duterte made the remark in a speech to soldiers on Mindanao island, where he imposed martial law on Tuesday to try to crush Islamic State-linked rebels, who have been battling the military after laying siege to a southern city.

It was not the first time Duterte has made a joke about rape. He caused outrage in the lead-up to his presidential election win last year when he recalled a 1989 prison riot in which an Australian missionary was killed, and inmates had lined up to rape her.

In what was intended as a joke, Duterte said the victim was “beautiful” and as mayor of Davao city where the riot took place, he should have been first in line. He later apologised and said he did not intend to disrespect women or rape victims.

Duterte’s speeches are often loaded with profanity, threats and jokes about taboo subjects, which offend some, but are taken lightly by many Filipinos.

The president’s spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Duterte’s latest remarks about rape.

Duterte’s pledge of support for troops comes as human rights groups and some lawmakers criticise his decision to declare martial law as excessive, and say it could lead to abuses by security forces.

He also joked that he would join soldiers in the fight against extremists if he could, but he had arthritis.

He urged rebels to disarm and hold talks and said anyone not authorised to carry guns would be killed.

“My order to the troops is all people who are not authorised by government to carry arms and they resist, kill them, wipe them out,” he said.

Reuters

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* The Guardian. Saturday 27 May 2017 06.55 BST:

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