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Duterte Jokes About Rape, Again. Philippine Women Aren't Laughing.



President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines has routinely made international headlines for two reasons: a lethal crackdown on drug users and dealers, and a penchant for crass remarks.
Ted Aljibe/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

By Felipe Villamor

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MANILA — Women’s rights groups assailed President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines on Friday, after he made a crass joke suggesting that rape was inevitable as long as there were beautiful women.

In a rambling speech Thursday night in the central city of Mandaue, Mr. Duterte lashed out at his critics and defended his claims that he had eradicated crime in the city of Davao when he was mayor.

“They said there are many rape cases in Davao,” the president said. “As long as there are many beautiful women, there will be more rape cases.”

Mr. Duterte, who assumed power nationally in 2016, has routinely made headlines around the world for two reasons: a violent crackdown on drug users and dealers which has left thousands of people dead, and a penchant for [delivering remarks](#) that many people find offensive, including some about [violence against women](#).

“Instead of seriously addressing the problem, the misogynist Duterte has added insult to the scars of rape survivors,” a coalition of a women’s groups called #BabaeAko (I Am Woman), said in a statement.

Arguing that rape had nothing to do with physical appearance, the group accused Mr. Duterte of victim-shaming and of blaming women for their rapes.

“Rape is a heinous crime based on entitlement and on the false assumption that women are chattel, to be owned, to be punished according to the whims of men,” it said.

The president appeared in his comments to be referring to a recent report by the Philippine National Police, which found that Davao recorded the highest number of rapes among major cities in the Philippines in the second quarter of the year.

The police said 42 people had reported being raped in Davao between April and June period. Critics contend that the latest data alone shatter the myth being sold by the president that Davao was free of crime and the safest city in the country.

Harry Roque, Mr. Duterte’s spokesman, tried to limit the fallout from the president’s comments, suggesting he was not a misogynist because he had appointed several women to key positions in his government.

“I don’t think we should give too much weight on what the president says by way of a joke,” Mr. Roque said, adding that residents of the southern Philippines tended to be less easily offended than their compatriots in the capital.

“They’re not O.K. with rape jokes,” Mr. Roque said, “but let’s just say that perhaps the standard of what is offensive and what is not offensive is more liberal in the south.”

This was not the first time Mr. Duterte has appeared to demean women. During his presidential campaign, he joked about the gang rape of an Australian missionary during a prison riot, suggesting that because he was mayor he should have been given the first opportunity to assault the woman.

He called his own daughter, Sara Duterte, a “drama queen” when she confessed that she had been a victim of sexual assault.

He also ordered soldiers last year to shoot female communist guerrillas [in their vaginas](#) to discourage them from joining the New People’s Army, a communist rebel force that has been waging an insurgency since 1969.

The president has also claimed to have seen a sex tape of [one of his leading critics, Senator Leila De Lima](#), who is serving a prison sentence for what she says is a trumped-up charge of protecting drug lords.

“This country does not deserve a president who willfully breaks our laws and encourages others to do the same, because his notion of power stops at coercive force,” #BabaeAko, the women’s group, said.

“We call on all Filipinos to rise up against a president who spits on everything our ancestors fought and died for,” it added.