

UNTOLD STORIES

**Apple removes
games promoting
Duterte's war on
drugs.**

Summary

The Asian Network of People who Use Drugs (ANPUD) led a global petition demanding Apple Incorporation's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Mr. Tim Cook to urgently perform a formal review and remove all the apps made available by Apple immediately and issue an apology for hosting insensitive content. The letter was submitted to Mr. Cook on October 10, 2017. Our sincere thanks to the 131 organizations who supported the letter.

The petition was a successful advocacy effort in that the letter was able to generate huge media attention and some of the games were removed from the App Store. The case study is intended to document the story of victory and disseminate the detailed set of actions performed in the process. We hope that it will inform and inspire more advocacy actions from ANPUD as well as the community of people who use drugs facing challenges at different level.

Background

In June 2016, President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines waged his bloody war on drugs with a nation-wide campaign called "Oplan Tokhang" – a portmanteau of two words meaning 'to knock' and 'to plead'. The initially declared 90-days war, envisioned to end criminality, illegal drugs and corruption, was extended until 6 months, and yet it continued at the same scale even after a year with no sign of delivering the promised results to the people of the Philippines.

As of this document was being developed, it had been a political debate on whether the killings were extrajudicial and if it constituted a crime against humanity. However, it could not change the fact that more than 13,000 people – many of them children – ostensibly suspected of using or selling drugs had lost their lives.

The truth was that it had merely been a ‘War on Poor’ bringing destruction to millions of lives of people who use drugs, including to thousands who were imprisoned under inhumane conditions and to the families and children of those who were killed.

Amid such crisis, numerous apps were made available through Apple App Store that actively promoted the war on people who use drugs in the Philippines. Some of these games had been downloaded by over a million iPhone users. These games had to be removed immediately.

The Letter Drafting Process

It was mid-September 2017 when these insensitive games came into our attention. We immediately took some screenshots and shared it with the group of concerned regional community, human rights and drug policy reform groups/organizations called ‘Regional Response Team’, that was formed specifically to discuss issues pertaining to the Philippines war on drugs. The group members suggested ANPUD to take the lead on a joint statement or file a complaint to Apple.

Before even going forward with the letter we brainstormed within the secretariat on how the games were promoting or linked to the extrajudicial killings and war on drugs in the Philippines. Secondly, we studied the Apple App Store Review Guideline to identify languages in the guideline that could make the letter stronger.

On the same day we drafted a letter addressed to the Apple CEO Mr. Tim Cook and sent it out to a small group, including ANPUD Executive Board, the International People who Use Drugs (INPUD), International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC) and few Filipinos based in Bangkok to collect their comment and feedback. It took us about a week to collect and incorporate everyone’s suggestions into the letter. Three different versions of the letter are kept as annexes to provide an idea of the overall process of developing the letter – the original draft of the letter ([Annex I](#)); Draft Letter Work in Progress ([Annex II](#)); and the final version that was submitted to Apple CEO ([Annex III](#)).

The Sign-On Process and Submission to Apple CEO

The letter was aimed at the global community to collect at least 100 signatories and this would have never been possible without some helping hands. A call for sign-on page (Stand with ANPUD) was developed on the ANPUD website ([I](#)) and it was shared on Facebook, Twitter, ANPUD membership (e-group) and among country networks of people who use drugs. We also requested network/organizations with global coverage like INPUD, IDPC and StopTheDrugWar.org to share the letter (with the link to the sign-on page) on their mailing lists. The sign-on went on for around 20 days.

On October 10, 2017, the letter was submitted to the Apple CEO via email. A copy of the email was forwarded to all the signatories to inform them about the submission. We were quite uncertain if our email submission had landed on Mr. Cook’s inbox. Therefore, we immediately made the letter public with a media release to ensure one way or another

Apple Inc. received our message. The media release was sent out to the entire signatory organizations except this time we included media correspondents of Inquirer, Reuters and few freelancers.

Outcomes

The petition was signed by 131 organizations including community, human rights and drug policy reform groups from across 35 countries globally.

Signatory organizations included many community-led network/organizations of people who use drugs, human rights and drug policy reform organizations. It was really inspiring to have had received such level of support globally.

The media release had over 700 visitors and 178 shares solely from ANPUD's website. (2) It was featured by Philippines national and international online media like CNN Philippines, Philstar, Reuters, Inquirer, Mashable, ABS CBN News, Mac Rumors, Inside Manila and many more taking our coverage to the next level. (3-21)

For an instance, the news published by CNN Philippines alone reached 3.7K views, 283 shares and over 600 comments from pro-Duterte Filipinos. (3) Similarly, the video news featured by CNN Philippines had 17K views on Facebook. (4) Regional stakeholders commended ANPUD especially for bringing the Philippines war on drugs back into the attention of the global community through the sign-on and media coverage it was able to receive.

We did not receive a direct response from Mr. Cook or Apple Inc. however, most of the apps (games) no longer appear in the search result of app store. These games include 'Duterte knows Kung Fu: Pinoy Crime Fighter', 'Duterte Running Man Challenge Game', 'Fighting Crime 2', 'Tsip Bato: Ang Bumangga Giba!' that featured Duterte or Philippine National Police chief Bato De La Rosa shooting down criminals.

We at ANPUD realized that the success did not limit to the results of the initiative. We have established a connection with the great activists, organizations and media around the world. Having received the identity as the Asian Network of People who Use Drugs by the media, we strive to becoming one of the most influential network of people who use drugs.



Annex I – The Original Draft of the Letter

Mr. Tim Cook
Chief Executive Officer
Apple Incorporation

Re: Immediately remove apps that are promoting war on drugs in the Philippines.

We, the undersigned, would like to bring one of your company's terrible actions to your attention. We feel utterly disrespected and parodied at our sufferings after learning that a reputable company like Apple – who speaks of human values and connectedness – is promoting, through its App store, a deadly war on drugs pursued in the Philippines at present.

Mr. Cook, Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte is responsible for the murders of more than 13,000 people – many of them children - suspected of using or selling drugs since June 2016. He is responsible for destruction of millions of lives of people who use drugs, their families and children who were already the most marginalized in and vulnerable to the Philippines system.

Duterte has repeatedly incited public to murder any suspected drug users and has given the 'license to kill'. Alternatively, he has been running school campaign to threaten and brainwash children against illegal drugs that could potentially lead a child to rather become killers as they grow. Recently, his drug war hit a new level of brutality by killing 32 people in just one night of August, by targeting innocents and by ordering to shoot human rights activists. His message is - drug users are not human, they are zombies and, thus human rights do not apply or they should be killed.

Games in the picture below and many others that are currently available in the Apple App store (for both iPhone and iPad) are mere promotion of his incitements and messages that has led to one of the greatest human rights crisis in the history of war on drugs.

[Image of Apps]

In addition, these games are also violating the App Store Review Guidelines that explicitly mentions following points as objectionable content under the very first section related to 'Safety':

- Defamatory, discriminatory, or mean-spirited content, including references or commentary about religion, race, sexual orientation, gender, national/ethnic origin, or other targeted groups, particularly if the app is likely to humiliate, intimidate, or place a targeted individual or group in harm's way. Professional political satirists and humorists are generally exempt from this requirement.
- Realistic portrayals of people or animals being killed, maimed, tortured, or abused,

or content that encourages violence. “Enemies” within the context of a game cannot solely target a specific race, culture, real government, corporation, or any other real entity.

Mr. Cook, Duterte’s crimes against humanity in the Philippines has been condemned by United Nations, International Criminal Court (ICC), over 40 country governments and over 400 community and civil society organizations globally. Already 2 cases have been filed against him at the ICC.

Therefore, we demand Apple Incorporation to remove all the Duterte-related games immediately and issue an apology for hosting such insensitive content.

[Signatories]

Annex II – Draft Letter Work in Progress

Mr. Tim Cook
Chief Executive Officer
Apple Incorporation

Re: Immediately remove apps that are promoting {Suggestion: Add murder, extrajudicial killings, violence, and the}{Comment: Important to catch attention very quickly; their apps aren't allowed to promote murder and killing.} war on drugs in the Philippines.

We, the undersigned, would like to bring one of your company's terrible actions to your attention {Suggestion: Add: numerous apps which actively promote and endorse violence and killings of marginalized communities of people who use drugs. As organizations and networks representing these communities, we find these depictions and promotions extremely shocking, especially given their divergence from Apple's strict guidelines that pertain to your apps.} We feel utterly disrespected and parodied at our sufferings after learning that a reputable company like Apple – who speaks of human values and connectedness – is promoting, through its App store, a deadly war on drugs pursued in the Philippines at present.

Mr. Cook, Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte is responsible for the murders of more than 13,000 people – many of them children - suspected of using or selling drugs since June 2016. He is responsible for destruction of millions of lives of people who use drugs, their families and children who were already the most marginalized in and vulnerable to the Philippines system. {Suggestion: Where Apple is a staunch proponent of human values, community and connectedness, your promoting, through the App store, of the killing of people who use drugs is in clear contradiction of your values as an organization. Specifically, numerous apps are actively promoting the war on people who use drugs in the Philippines, a war that has resulted in the state-endorsed murders of more than 13,000 people – many of them children – ostensibly suspected of using or selling drugs since June 2016 (many of those killed have simply had the misfortune of being from impoverished communities). President Duterte of the Philippines is responsible for actively calling for these killings, and the resultant catastrophic affects these deaths have had on the communities in which those killed lived, millions of Filipinos' lives, {Suggestion: Insert one line on the thousands more that have become imprisoned in extremely inhumane conditions, eg. <http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2094273/142000-held-philippine-jails-built-20000-dutertes-drug-war>} their families and their children, people who were already the most marginalized in the Philippines.}

Duterte has repeatedly incited public to murder any suspected drug users and has given the 'license to kill'. Alternatively, he has been running school campaign to threaten and

brainwash children against illegal drugs that could potentially lead a child to rather become killers as they grow. Recently, his drug war hit a new level of brutality by killing 32 people in just one night of August, by targeting innocents and by ordering to shoot human rights activists. His message is - drug users are not human, they are zombies and, thus human rights do not apply or they should be killed. {Suggestion: The atrocities occurring in the Philippines are widely known, but bear repeating: as you probably know, Duterte has repeatedly incited the public and Filipino police to murder any people suspected of any drug offences with impunity and has given a clear 'license to kill'. Recently, his war on people who use drugs hit a new level of brutality in the killing of 32 people in just one night of August, targeting impoverished people, young people, and students, and has recently given a clear order to his authorities to shoot human rights activists. His message is clear: drug users are subhuman, they are zombies, they do not have the right to life.}

Games in the picture below and many others that are currently available in the Apple App store (for both iPhone and iPad) are mere promotion of his incitements and messages that has led to one of the greatest human rights crisis in the history of war on drugs.

{Suggestion: Games shown in the picture below (and many others that are currently available in the Apple App store) actively encourage, endorse, and promote Duterte's incitements that have led to one of the greatest human rights crises in recent history.}

[Image of Apps]

In addition, these games are also violating the App Store Review Guidelines that explicitly mentions following points as objectionable content under the very first section related to 'Safety':

- Defamatory, discriminatory, or mean-spirited content, including references or commentary about religion, race, sexual orientation, gender, national/ethnic origin, or other targeted groups, particularly if the app is likely to humiliate, intimidate, or place a targeted individual or group in harm's way. Professional political satirists and humorists are generally exempt from this requirement.
- Realistic portrayals of people or animals being killed, maimed, tortured, or abused, or content that encourages violence. "Enemies" within the context of a game cannot solely target a specific race, culture, real government, corporation, or any other real entity.

Mr. Cook, Duterte's crimes against humanity {Suggestion: Add more nuances to our allegation of crimes against humanity being committed (as no legal body has ruled on this yet) and qualify it by saying something like 'what appears to amount to crimes against humanity' or just say 'atrocities/atrocities'.} in the Philippines has been condemned by United Nations, International Criminal Court (ICC), over 40 country governments and over 400 community and civil society organizations globally. Already 2 cases have been filed against him at the ICC. {Suggestion: Add: It is entirely inappropriate for Apple to be promoting the actions, policies and discourses of a politician and state that have resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent people. It is also entirely incongruous with Apple's progressive and inclusive philosophies. We can only conclude that Apple is not aware that

these apps are available in your store.}

Therefore, we demand Apple Incorporation to remove all the Duterte-related games immediately and issue an apology for hosting such insensitive content.

[Signatories]

{**Comment:** Hi, I have a very basic question. I am not a gamer so I have not seen the actual games. Have you tried them? I asked a few friends to look at it and they said it is possible that many people will not find anything wrong (possibly including Apple and Google) with the games, as these mainly feature Duterte and the chief of police as gungho crime-busters. I was also told that there are computer games featuring other world leaders like Trump and Putin. I think the key message to drive is that the games valorize and normalize the emerging tyranny of Duterte's presidency and his government's disregard for human rights principles. In virtual reality these games may seem harmless and fun even, but when they are placed within the context of existing realities, of real murders of people and the impunity of law enforcement, then these games become offensive and distasteful. I also suggest calling them out for profiting off of people's unjust deaths and misery.

Reply to the Comment: Hi, Thank you for getting back with a real concern. I have tried a couple of them and yes your friends are correct that people might not see anything wrong. For an instance, the game 'Duterte vs zombie' - I have played similar games earlier with similar programming and backdrops. The only thing different in this game is that it has Duterte as the killer.

I think it is very important to include the message of normalization of killing happening in the reality via virtual means. I will add those lines in the letter.

And in the Apple's App review guideline, it says, "Professional political satirists and humorists are generally exempt from this requirement (objectionable content)". So, I'm guessing those Trump and Putin app must be directed towards them and not their victims. The app guideline empathizes protection of and respect for victims (enemies in their term), and shows objection to any content that encourage violence targeted towards specific groups.}

{**Suggestion:** To give more weight to the gravity of the situation, perhaps refer to repeated statements of concern by the UN High Commission for Human Rights and include a quote, such as from the one last week at the Human Rights Council (relevant paras copied below): <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Media.aspx?IsMediaPage=true>}

Annex III - Final version that was submitted to Apple CEO

[ANPUD Letterhead]

10 October 2017

Mr. Tim Cook,
Chief Executive Officer,
Apple Incorporation.

Re: Immediately remove apps that are promoting murder, extrajudicial killings, violence, and the war on drugs in the Philippines.

Dear Mr. Cook,

We, the undersigned, bring to your attention numerous apps, which actively promote and endorse violence and killings of marginalized communities of people who use drugs. As organizations and networks representing these communities, we find these depictions and promotions extremely shocking, especially given their divergence from Apple's strict guidelines that pertain to your apps. Where Apple is a staunch proponent of human values, community and connectedness, your promoting, through the App store, of the killing of people who use drugs is in clear contradiction of your values as an organization.

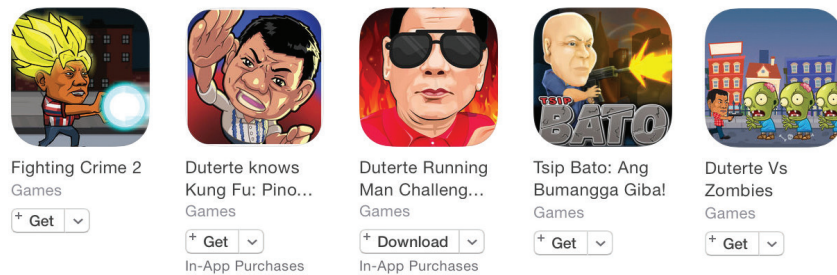
Specifically, numerous apps currently available through Apple are actively promoting the war on people who use drugs in the Philippines, a war that has resulted in the state-endorsed murders of more than 13,000 people (22) – many of them children (23) – ostensibly suspected of using or selling drugs since June 2016. Duterte's war on people who use drugs, that is often referred to as 'War on Poor' has brought destruction of millions of lives of people who use drugs, including thousands who are imprisoned under inhumane conditions, their families and children who were already the most marginalized in and vulnerable to the Philippines system.

On the Human Rights Council 36th session, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in his statement said, "In the Philippines, I continue to be gravely concerned by the President's open support for a shoot-to-kill policy regarding suspects, as well as by the apparent absence of credible investigations into reports of thousands of extrajudicial killings, and the failure to prosecute any perpetrator". (24)

The atrocities occurring in the Philippines are widely known, but bear repeating: as you probably know, Duterte has repeatedly incited the public and Filipino police to murder any people suspected of any drug offences with impunity and has given a clear 'license to kill'. (25, 26) Recently, his war on people who use drugs hit a new level of brutality in the killing of 32 people in just one night of August, (27) targeting impoverished people, young people, and students, and has recently given a clear order to his authorities to

shoot human rights activists. (28) His message is clear: drug users are subhuman, they are zombies, and they do not have the right to life.

To reiterate, numerous apps, including those in the picture below actively promote these atrocities occurring in the Philippines. These games valorize and normalize the emerging tyranny of Duterte's presidency and his government's disregard for human rights principles. In virtual reality these games may seem harmless and fun, but when they are placed within the context of existing realities, of real murders of people and the impunity of law enforcement, then these games become offensive and distasteful.



These games clearly violate the App Store Review Guidelines that explicitly mention following points as objectionable content under the very first section related to 'Safety' (29):

- "Defamatory, discriminatory, or mean-spirited content, including references or commentary about religion, race, sexual orientation, gender, national/ethnic origin, or other targeted groups, particularly if the app is likely to humiliate, intimidate, or place a targeted individual or group in harm's way. Professional political satirists and humorists are generally exempt from this requirement.
- Realistic portrayals of people or animals being killed, maimed, tortured, or abused, or content that encourages violence. "Enemies" within the context of a game cannot solely target a specific race, culture, real government, corporation, or any other real entity."

Mr. Cook, Duterte's war on people who use drugs in the Philippines has been condemned by United Nations, International Criminal Court (ICC), over 45 country governments and over 375 community and civil society organizations globally. (30-35) Already 2 cases have been filed against him at the ICC. (36) It is entirely inappropriate for Apple to be promoting the actions, policies and discourses of a politician and state that have resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent people. It is also entirely incongruous with Apple's progressive and inclusive philosophies. It is unacceptable that Apple is tolerant to making profit out of people's unjust deaths and misery. We can only conclude that Apple is not aware that these apps are available in your store.

Therefore, we urgently request a formal review of the apps made available by Apple, and demand that you remove all the abovementioned games immediately and issue an apology for hosting such insensitive content.

Yours,

[Names of 131 signatories and countries in an alphabetical order]

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Drug Users-led Initiatives: Untold Stories

Issue 1: Apple removes games promoting Duterte's war on drugs.

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The Asian Network of People who Use Drugs (ANPUD) is a regional community-led organization that works towards the enjoyment of equal human rights and opportunities for a better quality of life for people who use drugs.