



Philippine police promotions an affront to 'drug war' victims

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Newly Upgraded Police Chiefs Oversaw Units Implicated in Scores of Killings

By Carlos H. Conde, Researcher, Asia Division



Mourners display a streamer during a funeral march for Kian delos Santos, a 17-year-old student who was shot during anti-drug operations in Caloocan, Metro Manila, Philippines August 26, 2017. © 2017 Reuters

The Philippine National Police (PNP) has once again promoted rather than punished senior police officials who oversaw units implicated in extrajudicial killings linked to President Rodrigo Duterte's murderous "drug war."

On Tuesday, Senior Superintendent Chito Bersaluna, the police chief of Caloocan City, confirmed that on May 9 he had been [promoted](#) to police chief of Bulacan province, just north of Manila. The previous day, Chief Superintendent Roberto Fajardo, who had been the chief of the Northern Police District, which includes Caloocan City, [assumed](#) his new role as chief of the PNP Highway Patrol Group.

Caloocan City is part of Metro Manila's Camanava district, which many consider ["ground zero"](#) of the "drug war" in the capital. So many people have been killed there that in September 2017 then-

Metro Manila police chief Oscar Albayalde [sacked](#) the entire Caloocan police force – a [first](#). President Duterte [suggested](#) that many Caloocan officers were involved in the drug trade.

In August 2017 police officers under the supervision of Bersaluna and Fajardo killed 17-year-old [Kian delos Santos](#). Fajardo [defended](#) the actions of the police officers implicated in the alleged summary execution, accusing delos Santos without basis of being a drug runner.

Authorities also allege that Caloocan police killed another child, [Reynaldo de Guzman](#), 14, so he couldn't testify in the August 2017 [torture and murder](#) of 19-year-old Carl Anthony Arnaiz.

Delos Santos and de Guzman were just two of dozens of children [killed](#) by the police and their agents in the Philippines as part of Duterte's nearly two-year anti-drug campaign. Senior police officials have dismissed the deaths of children as "[collateral damage](#)" in the drug war.

Perhaps because of the widespread public outrage over the delos Santos killing, three police officers are facing [prosecution](#) for murder, torture and planting evidence on delos Santos' body. Neither Bersaluna nor Fajardo have been charged in connection with delos Santos, Arnaiz and de Guzman killings. However, no other police who were under their command have been charged with any "drug war" killings.

The Philippines' "drug war" has resulted in at least [12,000 deaths](#) since June 30, 2016. Daily monitoring by Human Rights Watch indicates that the killings continue unabated in many parts of the Philippines.

The high-level promotions of two senior police officers who oversaw one of the drug war's bloodiest locales are a cruel affront to the families of victims. They underscore the importance of an International Criminal Court [preliminary examination](#) into the killings and the need for a parallel [United Nations](#) investigation to ensure accountability for those deaths.

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