



## On The President's Orders

The searing story of President Duterte's bloody campaign against drug dealers and addicts in the Philippines, told with unprecedented and intimate access to both sides of the war - the Manila police, and an ordinary family from the slum.

Shot in the style of a thriller, this observational film combines the look and feel of a narrative feature film with a real life revelatory journalistic investigation into a campaign of killings.

The film uncovers a murky world where crime, drugs and politics meet in a deathly embrace - and reveal that although the police have been publicly ordered to stop extra-judicial killings, the deaths continue.

[Official Trailer](#)

[www.onthepresidentsorders.com](http://www.onthepresidentsorders.com)

A FRONTLINE and ARTE France production with Mongoose Pictures in association with BBC Storyville and Bertha Doc Society.

The film will be released theatrically by PBS Distribution in summer 2019. It will be broadcast in late 2019 on Frontline PBS, Arte France and BBC Storyville.

## Detailed Synopsis:

The slums of Manila have become a killing field. In 2017, dozens of bodies littered the streets every weekend: blood-stained victims, bound and gagged with duct tape, shot in the head or garrotted; cardboard signs around their necks serving as a warning to others.

Duterte's brutal war on drugs has, by some estimates, left more than seven thousand people dead. The police themselves admitted to four thousand killings over an 18-month period.

Duterte ran his presidential campaign in 2016 on the platform of mercilessly stamping out drugs, which he presented as the source of all evil in the Philippines. Duterte, after citing Hitler and the Holocaust, said he would happily kill three million drug addicts. Filipinos, jaded after years of corrupt and ineffectual rule, embraced the strong man and his populist rhetoric. The drugs war began on 30 June 2016 – the day Duterte came to power.

Duterte always claimed he did not “give a shit” about human rights, which he sees as a Western obsession that keeps the Philippines from taking the action necessary to clean up the country. While the war on drugs has drawn inevitable criticism at home and abroad, President Trump has boasted of a “great relationship” with Duterte.

But when the high profile killing of a teenager caught on CCTV hit the headlines in the fall of 2017 and led to protests, the entire police force was fired in Caloocan, one of the largest districts in Manila and the epicenter of the killings. Duterte promised to scale back the drugs war.

With unprecedented access to both the police and the slum they operate in, this film tells the story of what happened next. A new police chief was brought into Caloocan to clean up the area – Jemar Modequillo, a tough disciplinarian, with a thousand new officers brought in from surrounding areas under his control.





Filmed over almost a year, the film investigates the activities of Modequillo's force, as it gradually becomes clear that even as the cops promise to stop the extra-judicial killings, their activities may have just gone underground.

After Modequillo's arrival, the number of shootings carried out by police in uniform goes right down. He is praised as a great reformer; Caloocan is rated number one for achievements and public trust.

But something else is happening. Bodies start to appear again on the streets of Caloocan at night. In March there is a wave of "riding-in-tandem" hits, where two men on motorcycles approach the victims and kill them with two shots at point blank range like professional hit men. Many of the victims have connections to drugs.

The film-makers have exclusive access to Modequillo himself and two teams on his force, the Special Operations Unit (led by Will Cabrales) and the SWAT team (led by Octavio Demos).

Interwoven with the story of Modequillo's men will be the stories of local teenager Axel and his sister Fujiko. Their father, Arnold, who was on the police's drugs watch list, is shot dead in broad daylight. CCTV footage shows Axel arriving to see his father bleeding to death in the middle of the street.

The shooting was another professional hit. Axel and Fuji have no doubt who was behind their father's murder.

In late March, twelve shootings in a month catch the attention of Modequillo's superiors in the capital – and he is fired. The filmmakers follow him over the coming days as he packed up his office, said goodbye to his men, shocked, confused and defiant.

On their last shoot in summer 2019 the filmmakers confront Modequillo and his men about the wave of shootings. It's a chilling climax to the film as the officers reveal more than they had intended about who might be behind the killings.





*Credits*

**Directed by**  
JAMES JONES  
OLIVIER SARBIL

**Filmed by**  
OLIVIER SARBIL

**Produced by**  
JAMES JONES  
DAN EDGE  
RANEY ARONSON-RATH

**Edited by**  
MICHAEL HARTE

**Production Manager**  
PHILIPPA LACEY

**Composer**  
UNO HELMERSSON





### **Producer and Director:**

James Jones is an award-winning British director who makes documentary films for international television and theatrical release. His documentaries tackle important issues through powerful personal stories told in a filmic style and narrative. He has made films about police shootings in America, suicide in the military, wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and undercover investigations in Saudi Arabia and North Korea. His background in current affairs investigations means the films still have a hard journalistic edge while using the craft techniques of documentary.

His films have won two Emmys, three DuPonts, a Grierson, a Rory Peck, a Frontline Club, a Royal Television Society, a Broadcast Award, two Overseas Press Club of America, two Golden Nymphs, and a Venice TV Award, as well as being nominated five times at the BAFTAs. Recently, he co-directed the Emmy-winning Mosul with Olivier Sarbil.



### **Cinematographer and Director:**

Olivier Sarbil is an award-winning French documentary director and Emmy-winning cinematographer based in London. Over the past decade, he has covered conflicts and critical social issues across Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America. With strong visual storytelling, Olivier's films are intimate and human, conveying emotions through beautiful and cinematic imagery.

His work has been recognised with awards from a variety of organisations, including, Emmy for Outstanding Cinematography, duPont, Royal Television Society, One World Media, Overseas Press Club of America, Broadcast Awards, Bayeux-Calvados for war correspondents (twice), Golden Nymph, Rory Peck, Venice TV Award, Frontline Club, Grand Award and Gold Medal at the New York festivals International TV & Film. His imagery has also garnered a BAFTA Nomination for Best Cinematography.



**Producer:**

Dan Edge has produced and directed films from all over the world, in the main for FRONTLINE PBS, as well as for Channel 4, the BBC and HBO. His most recent film as a director, *Last Days of Solitary*, was a feature-length documentary telling the story of solitary confinement in US prisons. It was praised by critics as ‘revealing the dark truth of solitary’, ‘a harrowing visceral documentary’ and ‘unflinching and harrowing’. Before that he filmed, produced and directed *Outbreak* – made during the height of the West African Ebola epidemic. The film won a BAFTA, Emmy, Grierson and numerous other awards.

As a senior producer for FRONTLINE PBS, Dan has overseen *Mosul* (dir: Olivier Sarbil and James Jones) *Exodus* (dir: James Bleumel); *Children of Syria* (dir: Marcel Mettelsiefen); and many other films.



**Producer:**

Raney Aronson-Rath is the executive producer of FRONTLINE, PBS’ flagship investigative journalism series, and is a leading voice on the future of journalism. She been internationally recognized for her work to expand FRONTLINE’s reporting capacity and reimagine the documentary form across multiple platforms.

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