

Lone Gunman Sets Fire to Resorts World Manila, Killing 35

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At least 35 patrons and staff have died at Resorts World Manila after an armed bandit entered the property at midnight last night, triggering panic and fears of a terrorist attack. Most of the dead succumbed to smoke inhalation after the man set fire to gaming tables and carpets in the property.

Resorts World Manila remains closed to the public today as bodies are removed and the authorities investigate the attack, in which 54 people were injured as they attempted to flee, including some who jumped from the property's second floor, police and witnesses said.

The gunman later killed himself by setting himself on fire and shooting himself in a hotel room, police said, noting that he did not shoot anyone during the emergency.

Resorts World Manila chief operating officer Stephen Reilly told reporters that property security officers decided not to engage the gunman to avoid escalation.

"We had an armed intruder who entered into the property. He fired his firearm, he was in combat attire," Reilly said.

"They did not engage, because it was seen that that would escalate the situation," he said.

"Unfortunately, the situation did escalate a bit further moving towards gaming areas."

Police and the Office of the President said that the attack was not terror-related and unrelated to an [insurgent assault](#) led by pro-ISIS rebels in the city of Marawi in southern Mindanao, where martial law is in effect.

"This case is isolated and has nothing to do with any terror act that could possibly be a reason for a declaration of martial law," National Capital Region Police Office director Oscar Albayalde told ABS-CBN cable news.

President Rodrigo Duterte warned on May 24 that if ISIS gained a foothold in Luzon island, which includes the capital, he "might declare martial law throughout the country to protect the people".

Doubts about terror links to the attack continued to emerge this afternoon, however, with news outlet Rappler quoting secretary of national defence Delfin Lorenzana as saying the government is "not ruling out that this is ISIS".

The US-based jihadist threat monitor SITE Intelligence Group reported on its website today that a Filipino ISIS "operative" who "provides daily updates on the ongoing clashes in Marawi" said ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack and had identified the gunman. The operative said the "main objective" of the "lone wolf soldiers of Khilafah [caliphate]" was to "burn the casino inside", the report said.

Philippine media outlet News5 Aksyon quoted Resorts World Manila management as saying 22 guests and 13 employees died in the attack, in addition to the assailant.

Closed-circuit TV images of a stairwell released by the police and video footage from the casino floor showed a man dressed in black carrying what appears to be an assault weapon.

It remains unclear how he evaded the armed guards and metal detectors at the property's various entrances.

The incident has prompted the Philippine National Police to declare it will work with hotels and other facilities to tighten security measures amid an intensification of overall security in the Metro Manila area.

Initial reports overnight and eyewitnesses to the attack said a terrorist operation involving multiple assailants had been launched on the property. These were quickly fanned by social media, with even US President Donald Trump hinting at a “terror” attack in Manila.

However, at a press conference just before noon today, Office of the President spokesman Ernesto Abella said there was no connection between the resort attack and ongoing insurgent violence in Mindanao.

Albayalde told the press conference that the “mentally disturbed” suspect did not shoot anyone, instead he burned gaming tables with gasoline and filled a backpack with gambling chips worth 113m pesos (\$2.3m) as he swept through the property.

He described the suspect as “white” and English-speaking and suggested he may have been a regular patron at the casino.

Bodies of the victims were strewn around the casino area, he said.

In a statement early this afternoon, Resorts World Manila said it was a “sad day” for the company.

“As of this time, the company has extended medical assistance to the 54 individuals who were taken to nearby hospitals,” it said. “Our security team and [the] Bureau of Fire Protection are currently conducting search and rescue operations on all floors.

“This cowardly act of a deranged mind will not defeat the spirit on which Resorts World Manila was built. With your prayers, we will overcome this tragedy.”

Ben Lee, managing partner of gaming industry advisers IGamiX Management & Consulting, said the Resorts World Manila incident would likely affect foreign-sourced revenue for casinos in Entertainment City.

“This latest sad incident will unfortunately only reinforce the existing perception in the Asian VIP market that the Philippines is not as safe as other jurisdictions in Asia,” he said.

Spokespeople for Bloomberry Resorts Corp-owned resort Solaire and Melco Resorts & Entertainment’s City of Dreams Manila did not respond to Gambling Compliance requests for comment at publication time.

Several Western nations, including the US, the United Kingdom and Australia, issued travel advisories after the attack.

Meanwhile, the insurgent occupation of parts of Marawi continues to take lives in the south, with Office of the President spokesman Abella saying 19 civilians, 36 soldiers or other “government casualties” and 120 insurgents have been killed as of last night.

At least 59 civilians are missing and more than 3,000 remain trapped in the city, parts of which have been bombed by the Philippine air force, local authorities said.