

## PHILIPPINES

### JOURNALIST HARASSED TO SILENCE DISSENT

Maria Ressa, executive editor of the online news outlet Rappler and press freedom advocate, was arrested on 13 February 2019 over politically motivated “cyber-libel” charges (online defamation). Authorities held her overnight and then released her after she posted PHP100,000 (approx. 2,600CDN) in bail.

Rappler has been a consistent critic of President Rodrigo Duterte and his administration. The media outlet has published detailed investigations into some of the thousands of extrajudicial executions committed by police and other unknown armed persons during drug-related operations.

Maria Ressa’s arrest is the latest attack against her and Rappler and appears to be part of broader campaign to silence critics of the government. It follows the “tax evasion” charges in December 2018 against Maria Ressa and her company, Rappler Holdings Corp. These charges are still pending in court. Amnesty International believes these, too, are trumped-up charges that were designed to stifle criticism of the president and his ‘war on drugs’.



#### **Please send a message to Secretary Guevarra at the Department of Justice.**

Urge his office to act swiftly to uphold and protect the freedom of the press. You could name two specific ways to do that:

- \* Drop the charges against Maria Ressa and Rappler, which appear to be motivated only by political reasons.
- \* End the harassment of the media, journalists, and critics of the Duterte administration, and take measures to guarantee their right to freedom of expression and assembly.

#### **Write to**

Menardo I. Guevarra, Secretary  
Department of Justice  
DOJ Building, Padre Faura Street, Ermita  
Manila 1000, Philippines  
Email: [communications@doj.gov.ph](mailto:communications@doj.gov.ph)  
Postage: \$2.65  
Twitter: @DOJPH @mariaressa @rapplerdotcom  
Facebook: Department of Justice Philippines  
Salutation: Dear Secretary Guevarra

## **Please send a copy to**

Her Excellency Petronila Garcia  
Ambassador for the Republic of the Philippines  
130 Albert Street, Suite 900  
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5G4  
Fax: (613) 233-4165  
E-mail: [embassyofphilippines@rogers.com](mailto:embassyofphilippines@rogers.com)

Dante Gierran, Director  
National Bureau of Investigation  
NBI Building, Taft Avenue  
Ermita  
Manila 1000, Philippines  
Email: [director@nbi.gov.ph](mailto:director@nbi.gov.ph)

## **Additional information**

Since President Rodrigo Duterte was elected in 2016, the media outlet Rappler has consistently drawn attention to the deadly reality of the ‘war on drugs,’ and the thousands of unlawful killings of poor and marginalized people perpetrated in its name. Its persistence in documenting these abuses has attracted the wrath of the Philippine authorities. On 24 July 2017, in his annual State of the Nation Address, Duterte claimed Rappler was owned by foreigners, implying that the media outlet was violating the Constitution. In succeeding weeks, he repeated that claim. In January 2018, the Philippines Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) temporarily revoked Rappler's registration, finding that it had violated foreign ownership rules. In February 2018, a Duterte spokesman said that Duterte himself had ordered presidential security staff to bar Rappler reporter Pia Ranada and editor Maria Ressa from entering the presidential palace.

In December 2018, an arrest warrant was issued against Maria Ressa. Both Ressa and Rappler Holdings, of which she is the president, were charged with violating the tax code in 2015 in relation to funds received through Philippine Depositary Receipts (PDRs), a financial instrument that allows foreigners to invest in Filipino companies.

In early February 2019, the Department of Justice indicted Ressa and a former reporter of Rappler for “cyber-libel” (defamation online). The department was acting on a complaint filed by a businessman over an article published in 2012, months before the cyber-crime law was passed. Ressa was arrested on the evening of 13 February 2019, after bail offices had closed, which meant that the authorities were able to detain her overnight. Ressa was supposed to deliver a speech on press freedom that night. She posted bail the following morning, stating that the charges represented an “abuse of power” and the “weaponization of the law”.

Maria Ressa’s harassment is another example of how the Duterte administration singles out its most vocal critics for politically-motivated prosecutions. The attack on Ressa and Rappler follows the February 2017 arrest and detention of Senator Leila de Lima, another leading critic of the ‘war on drugs’, on politically-motivated charges. Senator de Lima has been in detention for two years now.

For more information see the following links:

[http://www.amnesty.org.ph/news\\_categories/news-and-updates/](http://www.amnesty.org.ph/news_categories/news-and-updates/)

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/philippines-end-harassment-prominent-duterte-critic-maria-ressa/>