

**WAN-IFRA is the World
Association of Newspapers
and News Publishers**

Its mission is to protect the rights of journalists across the world to operate free media, and provide its members with professional services to help their business prosper in a digital world and perform their crucial role in open societies.

With formal representative status at the United Nations, UNESCO and the Council of Europe, it derives its authority from its global network of leading news publishing companies and technology entrepreneurs, and its legitimacy from its 80 national association members representing 18,000 publications in 120 countries.

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President of the Philippines
Manila, Philippines

13 February 2019

Your Excellency,

We are writing on behalf of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum, which represent 18,000 publications, 15,000 online sites and over 3,000 companies in more than 120 countries, to express our serious concern at the prosecution of news website Rappler for "cyber libel" under legislation that was not enacted when the alleged libellous article was published.

On 5 February, the Department of Justice ordered the indictment of Rappler, its founder and executive editor Maria Ressa, and Reynaldo Santos Jr, a former reporter. The charges relate to an article written by Mr Santos Jr revealing businessman Wilfredo Keng's ties to a senior judge. Mr Keng filed the complaint in October 2017, more than five years after the story appeared.

We are seriously concerned that the charges are politically motivated and form part of a systematic campaign by the government to use the law as a weapon to silence Rappler's reporting, which has often been critical of your presidency. Rappler and Maria Ressa are currently facing numerous legal proceedings, ranging from an appeal against the Securities and Exchange Commission's decision to revoke the website's licence, to bogus charges of tax evasion and multiple libel complaints. Moreover, the most recent cyber libel charges have been brought against the advice of the National Bureau of Investigation's (NBI's) own lawyers, which is again indicative of political motivation.

We would also like to remind you that bringing charges for a crime that was not enacted at the time of the alleged infraction is not only a legal absurdity, it also risks rendering the Cybercrime Prevention Act unconstitutional, as it would become an 'ex post facto' law. It would also send a chilling message to all online publishers.

We respectfully call on you to take all possible steps to ensure that the NBI follows the advice of its own lawyers and withdraws the indictment for cyber libel. We also ask you to halt the apparent persecution of Rappler and Maria Ressa so that they may continue to play an active role in civic debate and carry out the watchdog function of the press.

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Golden
President
World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers



David Callaway
President
World Editors Forum

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