

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST ARRESTED TWICE IN 6 WEEKS

Maria Ressa, human rights defender and executive editor of online news outlet Rappler, was arrested again on 29 March for allegedly violating the Philippines' Anti-Dummy Law, which punishes Filipinos who allow their names or citizenship to be used to evade laws on the nationalization of certain rights, franchises or privileges. Ressa was released several hours later after posting bail of PHP90,000 (approx. USD1,700); this was the second time she has been arrested in a matter of weeks. Rappler has been a consistent critic of President Rodrigo Duterte and his administration, and Ressa's arrest appears to be part of broader campaign to silence critics of the government.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Menardo I. Guevarra
Secretary, Department of Justice
DOJ Building, Padre Faura Street, Ermita, Manila
1000 Philippines
(+632) 523 8482 to 98
communications@doj.gov.ph

Dear Secretary Guevarra:

I am writing to express my dismay at the arrest, yet again, of Maria Ressa, executive editor of news outlet Rappler, over alleged violations of the Philippine's Anti-Dummy Law. This comes only about a month and a half after her previous arrest on politically-motivated cyber-libel charges. Both of these prosecutions seem to be part of a continuing and broader campaign to silence critics of the Philippine government.

Rappler has been a consistent critic of President Rodrigo Duterte and his administration, publishing detailed investigations into some of the thousands of extrajudicial executions committed by police and armed vigilantes during drug-related operations. The arrest of Maria Ressa on 29 March 2019, for the alleged violation of the country's Anti-Dummy Law, is the latest attack against her and Rappler. It comes close on the heels of her previous arrest on 13 February 2019, on what appear to be politically-motivated charges of cyber-libel. Tax evasion charges were also brought in December 2018 against Maria Ressa and her company, Rappler Holdings Corp. – charges that 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.'

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. I urge your office to act swiftly to uphold and protect the freedom of the press. Specifically, I urge you to:

- Drop the charges against Maria Ressa and Rappler, which appear to be solely motivated by political interests;
- 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.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 29 March 2019, Maria Ressa was arrested by Pasig City police officers right at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport in Pasay City. She was charged with violating the Philippines' Anti-Dummy Law, which punishes Filipinos who allow their names or citizenship to be used to evade laws on the nationalization of certain rights, franchises or privileges. Also charged were Rappler's managing editor and five other members of Rappler's board. Ressa was released later that day after posting PHP90,000 (approx. USD1,700) in bail; the six others posted bail of the same amount each on 27 March 2019, ahead of the issuance of arrest warrants against them.

The Philippine National Bureau of Investigation initiated the complaint against Ressa and other Rappler executives, saying they violated the Anti-Dummy Law by issuing Philippine Depositary Receipts – a financial instrument that allows foreigners to invest in a Filipino company – to foreign investor Omidyar Network.

Ressa currently faces seven active court cases initiated since January 2018, after the Philippine Securities and Exchange Commission tried to shut Rappler down. Rappler, its directors, and staff are facing 11 active court cases.

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, and 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. 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.”

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.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 13 May 2019

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Maria Ressa, Her/She

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa35/9871/2019/en/>