

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Philippines: New President Must Protect, not Endanger Journalists**

Amnesty International is gravely concerned with recent comments by President-elect Rodrigo Duterte suggesting that killing of journalists in the Philippines is justified if they were corrupt or unethical.

In a press conference on 31 May 2016, Duterte implied that journalists who were killed had 'done something wrong'. Such statements add to an already dangerous climate for journalists and worsen the culture of impunity for attacks against the media in the Philippines. Instead of intimidating journalists, as he did again in a press conference on 2 June 2016, Duterte should provide leadership for his government to ensure accountability for suspected perpetrators of human rights violations against journalists and end impunity for their killings.

The right to seek, receive and share information and ideas, without fear or unlawful interference, is crucial for ensuring access to justice and enjoyment of all human rights. A free press is a vital part of a modern and democratic society.

Unlawful killings are never justified under international law. The Philippines has a bleak record on the safety of journalists and a long history of killing of journalists, including the Maguindanao massacre of 2009 which was the single deadliest event for journalists anywhere in the world.

In November 2009, 32 journalists along with civilians were killed by state-armed militias allegedly led by government officials. The case is still ongoing despite efforts by the Supreme Court to expedite proceedings. Witnesses and their relatives remain at risk of being killed or intimidated, although over 150 witnesses have testified and more than 100 of the 200 suspects have been arrested. At least eight witnesses and their family members have been killed since November 2009, but so far no conviction has been recorded.

In 2015, at least seven journalists were killed. According to the Centre for Media Freedom and Responsibility, if found to be work-related, over 150 journalists have been killed in the line of duty since 1986, when restrictions on freedom of expression were lifted after the end of the former President Marcos regime.

Despite this, only 15 people had been convicted in connection with the killings of journalists by the end of 2015.

## **Background**

Unlawful killings of journalists in the Philippines continued in 2015 and into 2016.

In January 2015, Newspaper reporter Nerlita Ledesma was shot near her house in Balanga City. In February, radio anchor Maurito Lim was shot outside a radio station in Tagbilaran City, as he arrived for his regular news program. According to news accounts, his reports had alleged official involvement in the illegal drug trade. Newspaper reporter Melinda Magsino was shot in the head near her apartment in Batangas City in April.

In August 2015, three journalists were killed in two weeks. Newspaper publisher Gregorio Ybanez was shot in front of his house in Tagum City. Radio presenter Cosme Maestrado was shot by four gunmen in Ozamiz City and radio anchor Teodoro Escanilla was also shot in front of his house in Sorsogon. Escanilla, a former political party chairman and spokesperson for a local human rights group, had regularly discussed human rights issues and criticised the military on his radio program.

In October, another radio reporter, Jose Bernardo, was shot at close range by two unidentified gunmen.

As of May 2016, at least one journalist had been killed since the beginning of the year.