

FR condemns arrest of Ressa

Written by Manuel Caballero
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Maria Ressa addresses the media in Manila prior to her arrest. (AFP)

The “Filipino Reporter” (New York) joins its colleagues worldwide in the journalism profession in condemning the Duterte government for the arrest and detention of Maria Ressa of Rappler, internationally respected journalist and Time Person of the Year.

“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

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reporting, which has often been critical of your presidency,” World Association of Newspapers (WAN-IFRA) and World Editors Forum said in a letter to President Duterte.

As a Filipino bar topnotcher posted in Facebook, “Weaponizing the law (aka prosecutorial abuse) is a dictator’s favorite tool to silence democratic dissent and stifle free speech.”

Popular TV journalist Christiane Amonpour of London said of the Ressa arrest, “You know a government is desperate when they arrest a journalist.”

(800,000 people reacted so far to this post.)

At mid-day in New York 18 hours after the arrest in Manila, The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN, BBC, Aljazeera and other major news centers around the world have either reported or condemned the Duterte government.

The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines: “The arrest of Rappler CEO Maria Ressa on the clearly manipulated charge of cyber libel is a shameless act of persecution by a bully government.”

We view the arrest as the President’s vengeance, as well as presidential whim and caprice.

It is worth citing that it was Ressa’s fearless criticisms of Duterte’s anti-drug policies during the early months of his presidency that gave rise to the phrase “extrajudicial killings,” which, in turn, caught the interest of international media on the nightly killings of suspected drug traffickers in Manila’s dark streets.

It appears there is no place for criticism in Duterte’s version of “democracy.”

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It seems primitive, bloody and cruel.

Duterte is under investigation by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity because of those reported extrajudicial killings numbering from 4,000 to 25,000 poor suspects which Ressa helped expose in Rappler.

While under arrest, courageous Ressa said that she and Rappler will not be intimidated by Duterte.

(Editorial note: A day after this editorial was written, Ressa was released after posting bail amounting to around \$1,900.)

