

WAN-IFRA Board Press Freedom Resolution – The Philippines

The Board of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), meeting in Estoril, Cascais, Portugal on 6th June 2017, on the occasion of the 70th World News Media Congress, calls on the government of President Rodrigo Duterte to cease its attacks on online news site, Rappler, and to do more to discourage its supporters from threatening the safety and security of its journalists, both online and off.

The Board of WAN-IFRA is dismayed to learn that officials in at least eight government agencies have attacked Rappler in what would appear to be a coordinated attempt to undermine both the legitimacy and integrity of one of the country's leading online news sources. The Board expresses its concern that these attacks appear to be in direct retaliation for Rappler's on-going critical coverage of the policies and actions of the government of the Philippines, particularly its response to the country's widespread drugs problem, law and order issues, and human rights.

The Board of WAN-IFRA notes that there are a number of open investigations and court decisions pending that place an inordinate amount of pressure on Rappler, its staff and management.

At the beginning of this year, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) revoked the license of Rappler Inc. and Rappler Holdings Corporation, claiming foreign ownership in violation of the Philippines constitution. Meanwhile, the Department of Justice has initiated an investigation into Rappler's supposed violation of the Anti-Dummy Law. The National Bureau of Investigation is also pursuing a cyber libel complaint, and the Bureau of Internal Revenue has filed a tax evasion case versus Rappler Holdings Corp.

The Board of WAN-IFRA acknowledges that Rappler vehemently denies any wrongdoing and stands in solidarity with the company as it attempts to fight the legal minefield being placed before it.

The Board of WAN-IFRA also notes that these judicial proceedings come on the back of a sustained, highly targeted and seemingly orchestrated campaign of online abuse directed at Rappler, its staff, and in particular co-founder, CEO and Executive Editor - and WAN-IFRA Golden Pen of Freedom Laureate - Maria Ressa. The Board is disturbed to learn that these attacks allegedly originate from government supporters and those with close ties to the administration.

The Board denounces all attacks against journalists, in whatever form they come online and off, and calls on the government of the Philippines to do more to discourage the harassment of journalists – particularly in the online space. It abhors the horrendous gender-based abuse of Maria Ressa and calls on the authorities to make clear their

condemnation of all forms of sexual harassment and demonstrate a clear commitment to doing more to eradicate it from society.

Furthermore, the Board of WAN-IFRA urges President Duterte to lift the ban on Rappler correspondents reporting from the presidential palace and official events, and to embrace a vocal, critical media as a necessary ingredient of a democratic, pluralistic society. The Board calls on the government of the Philippines to recognise the role of independent media in ensuring transparency and accountability, and to work with – rather than seek to undermine - the media as an essential partner for the advancement of society.