



NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS OF THE PHILIPPINES

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An affiliate of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

Quarterly Safety Report

March 2023 - May 2023

Philippines

The Philippines closed the March to May monitoring period — and the month of World Press Freedom Day — with the murder by two motorcycle-riding men of Oriental Mindoro broadcast journalist Cresenciano “Cris” Bundoquin (DWXR 101.7 Kalahi FM), the third journalist killed under the Marcos Jr. administration.

The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines documented 17 attacks against journalists from March to May 2023, with the shooting of Bundoquin before dawn on May 31 as the latest and bloodiest.

The Philippine National Police has formed a Special Investigative Task Group — the Calapan City Police Station with support from specialized units like the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group — to work on the case.

The Presidential Task Force on Media Security has also named two suspects in the killing, adding that the murder may have been related to illegal gambling and local politics “as both were severely criticized by Bundoquin in his radio program.”

The month of May also saw a resurgence of red-tagging — the malicious and baseless labeling of people and groups as communist “operatives”, rebels and enemies of the state — against NUJP, its members and its leadership.

Among those labeled as Communist Party of the Philippines-New People’s Army “operatives” were NUJP Chairperson Jonathan de Santos, Baguio City journalists Frank Cimatú (Baguio Chronicle) and Harley Palangchao (Baguio Midland Courier) who were photographed at a conference in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

The red-tagging was done on a TV show aired on the SMNI network, which is owned by a pastor identified with the Duterte and succeeding Marcos Jr. administrations and has a partnership agreement with the Philippine Army.

Meant to isolate and discredit activists, rights defenders and journalists, red-tagging has become a regular feature of the “Laban Kasama ang Bayan” show and has targeted individual journalists and entire newsrooms.

News reports on the red-tagging as well as statements of support from colleagues, partner organizations — including the organizations in this regional monitoring network — and institutions like the Philippine Commission on Human Rights have helped put the practice under scrutiny and show that the journalism community and allies of press freedom will not accept this in silence.

NUJP has also documented instances of surveillance — including by PNP personnel who took photographs of campus journalists who were covering a transport strike in March and attempting to get them to show IDs — during the monitoring period.



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In one instance in April, an editor for alternative news website Bulatlat reported being tailed by a motorcycle taxi rider as she was heading home. The rider eventually turned back after the editor changed course and started driving around the village to lose him.

News outlets have also had to contend with censorship on social media platforms: Meta took down a post by Bulatlat of an old article on late CPP leaders Benito and Wilma Tiamzon, citing community standards and restricted the Saksi Pinas page for posting “too fast”.

The Saksi Pinas Facebook page has been restored, Bulatlat’s dispute on the takedown of its post has been referred to Meta’s main office and is pending.

Although initial progress in the Bundoquin case is welcome, the killing still serves as a reminder that the Philippines remains a dangerous country for journalists despite improvements in the World Press Freedom Index.

Journalists in the Philippines also still have to contend with terrorist labeling as well as threats to their physical safety and attempts to curb their reach.

Report written by:

Jonathan De Santos

Chairperson, NUJP