



## NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS OF THE PHILIPPINES

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An affiliate of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

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### **Quarterly Safety Report**

**June 2023 - August 2023**

*Philippines*

Harassment by and incidents involving personnel of the Philippine National Police punctuated the monitoring period of June to August 2023, with one incident leading to a clarification of policy on media access to police blotter reports.

Local police in Iriga City, Camarines Sur arrested radio reporter Jose Rizal Pajares of Radyo Natin Iriga on August 2 for accessing the police blotter report – a log of incidents monitored by or reported to the police.

Police said this was a violation of the Data Privacy Act, saying information in the blotter reports are confidential unless access is given prior approval by the chief of police of the city.

In practice, however, journalists often have free access to the reports and the Data Privacy Act exempts access for journalistic works and purposes.

Pajares was held in detention for several days, reportedly because he had been advised to waive inquest proceedings and keep the case from going to court. He was charged with violating the DPA and was released after paying bail of P10,000 (\$179)

Media groups condemned the arrest and have been calling for the charges to be dropped. In a meeting on the incident, the Presidential Task Force on Media Security and partner media organizations agreed that access to police blotter reports will be coordinated with PNP public information officers.

### **Police harassment on coverage**

An altercation with local police in Pastrana, Leyte province on July 14 involving a media team from San Juanico TV who were covering a land dispute led to shots fired and the suspension of two police sergeants who were involved in the dispute.

A PTFoMS official sent to investigate the incident suggested that the SJTV news team settle with the police officers involved and not push through with filing formal charges.

They also said that groups were using the incident to create trouble between the media and police.

SJTV colleagues have since written to the Office of the Ombudsman to call for an investigation into the shooting incident. A consultation meeting with the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines has also led to the organization of a Leyte chapter.

Throughout July and up to August, staff of SJTV have reported being tailed and have reported unknown men showing up at their homes.

The harassment is believed to be related to the Pastrana incident and has led to the station suspending work. NUJP also helped the SJTV staffers find temporary relocation for their safety.



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### **Local governments flex their muscle**

Although local and national elections – when media attacks and incidents increase – are still in 2025, there have been incidents of local government officials going beyond their official mandate to attack media.

On August 4, MetroNEWS Bulacan reported being issued a “cease and desist” order from the provincial legal office over a supposedly “defamatory editorial post”.

The order was reportedly based on a complaint filed by Gov. Daniel Fernando, the provincial legal officer’s boss and whom the allegedly defamatory editorial criticized.

On August 15, Zaldy Advincula – vice mayor of Donsol, Sorsogon – allegedly mauled Wow Smile Radio reporter Mario Romero during an activity to prepare classrooms for the new academic year.

The mauling happened in the morning of August 15 in the Donsol government compound.

NUJP’s Albay chapter condemned the incident and reminded the vice mayor to be professional when dealing with media.

### **Manila Bulletin hacking highlights need for digital safety**

The website of the Manila Bulletin was hacked on August 5 and was inaccessible for several hours after images on the website were replaced with cat memes.

While cyber attacks are always concerning because these deprive the public of access to information, the hacking of Manila Bulletin is even more troubling because it is a large, mainstream media company.

NUJP and other press groups saw an increase in cyberattacks in the run-up to the 2022 elections, with Distributed Denial of Service attacks crossing over from the usual targets (alternative media, the community press and NUJP) to mainstream media websites.

The Manila Bulletin website has since been restored but the incident is a reminder, especially for for-profit media companies, that newsrooms allocate resources to cyber security as well as to training staff on basic cyber security and digital hygiene.

Newsrooms should also come up with basic digital safety and hygiene policies if they do not have them already.

### **Report written by:**

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Chairperson, NUJP