Annual Safety Report
November 2022 - August 2023
Philippines

Philippine media situation monitoring

The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines tallied 49 incidents of media harassment and attacks since January this year, with reports peaking at 14 in July, when colleagues from San Juanico TV in Leyte province reported surveillance by unknown men.

The surveillance, which included being tailed and reports of unknown individuals loitering near their homes, is believed to be related to a shooting incident that month that happened while San Juanico TV journalists were covering a land dispute.

Police officers are involved in the dispute and were on site during the shooting incident.

Surveillance and harassment were the most commonly reported incidents during the monitoring period, including three incidents in March involving staffers of campus publications Philippine Collegian and Manila Collegian.

The incidents in May involved members of the Philippine National Police, who tried to arrest one staffer of the Manila Collegian who was covering a rally commemorating International Working Women’s Day in Manila.

Police were also documented “taking pictures of the student journalists, and some even attempted to retrieve the identification of one staff member” during a transport strike in March.

While the police have the duty to ensure order and safety during public protests and other mass actions, the act of trying to identify student journalists who are only doing their jobs tend to cause undue tension, especially when they are clearly identified as members of the press and can readily be seen to be on coverage.

In any case, the Philippine Constitution guarantees freedom of assembly and attendees of protests should not have to be subjected to identification checks.

Most attacks against individual journalists

Broken down, incidents during the monitoring period were mostly against individual journalists (36) than against media entities or newsrooms (19). Because the incidents did not involve media outfits directly, official responses in support of their staff in the face of harassment and attacks were rare.

Because of this, condemnation and statements were left to media groups – including local press groups, the National Press Club and the government Presidential Task Force on Media Security. Notable exceptions were in the case of the killing of Cresencio Bundoquin in May and the harassment of San Juanico TV in July.

The lack of official responses from newsrooms and from media companies may indicate an attitude that the incidents are problems to be faced only by the journalists targeted.
It may also indicate a lack of knowledge on what to do in case staff members are subjected to harassment.

This is an organizing opportunity for NUJP to help start the conversation on how newsrooms can best respond to attacks and are an added reason for more workplace organizing.

Most incidents were against males; most attacks in Luzon

Most reported incidents targeted men (25) while there were eight incidents that targeted women and one against an LGBTQIA+ person. Victims in 21 incidents did not specify their gender.

It must be noted that while there were fewer incidents targeting women, online harassment of women journalists has been shown to be more vicious and more demeaning than those against men journalists. It is also possible that the actual number of victims is higher due to underreporting.

Geographically, more incidents were recorded in Luzon (31), against 15 in the Visayas and two in Mindanao.

This does not mean that Visayas and Mindanao are necessarily safer, as consultation with colleagues in Cebu City in early 2023 showed that some incidents were unreported because of local political dynamics.

This is a challenge for NUJP and for press groups in general to organize more in these areas to make reporting, as well as the provision of support services like legal aid and quick response easier.

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