



NUJP MEDIA SAFETY OFFICE

DECEMBER 2022 - FEBRUARY 2023

PHILIPPINE MEDIA GETS BREATHING ROOM BUT REMAINS AT RISK



PHOTO BY RAPPLER

Journalists in the Philippines have seen improvements in the media landscape — from the dismissal of lawsuits meant to harass and silence them, to the fact that they are no longer targeted in hostile presidential speeches — in previous months, but that does not mean that the media sector is safe from threats.

Recorded incidents against the press, at 13 from November 2022 to February 2023, are the same in the comparable period from the previous year.

According to documents obtained by the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, a Pasay City court in February dismissed libel cases filed against broadcasters Darcie De Galicia, Noel Alamar and others, saying commentary they made on air were not defamatory or malicious.

The court said prosecutors had failed to determine probable cause for the case filed by the governor of Quezon province to continue to trial.

In January, the Court of Tax Appeals dismissed tax cases against Maria Ressa and Rappler, saying prosecutors failed to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that they had failed to pay taxes on an investment made by the US-based Omidyar Network.



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That investment, and the government regulator's determination that it was tantamount to foreign ownership, is central to a government attempt to shut the independent news website down.

Despite that, the dismissal of the tax case has been hailed as a victory by Ressa, Rappler and the Philippine journalism community.

Although there have been victories, the journalism community remains challenged. Baguio journalist Frank Cimatu is, for example, appealing a libel conviction over a Facebook post that a former agriculture minister said had maligned him.

Alternative news website Bulatlat is also still pursuing a court case against the National Telecommunications Commission that ordered access to its page for unsubstantiated allegations of links to communist rebels.

The block order was based on Anti-Terrorism Council resolutions designating the Communist Party of the Philippines, New People's Army and National Democratic Front as terrorist organizations.

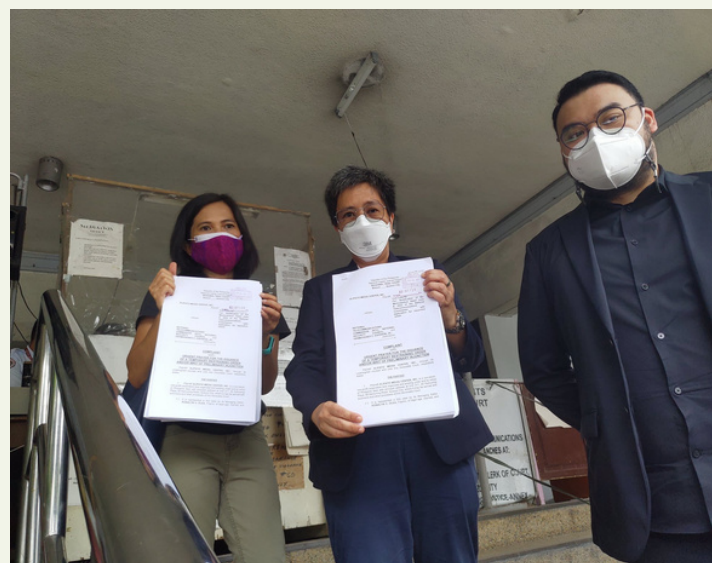


PHOTO BY BULATLAT.COM



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Bulatlat argues that it and other progressive groups affected by the block order are not designated organizations and that the order has no basis in fact or in the law.

While the block order is being questioned in court, Bulatlat reports being targeted by a new wave of cyber attacks.

Tacloban community journalist Frenchie Mae Cumpio remains in government custody and trial on a case of terrorist financing— based on questionable testimony from questionable witnesses —also began in January.



PHOTO BY KODAO PRODUCTIONS



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Niño Oconer, a correspondent for Baguio City-headquartered Northern Dispatch, has been charged with rebellion alongside six other activists and development workers, over an ambush on the military by the NPA in October 2022.

This latest charge is a continuation of the tactic of labeling journalists, activists and rights workers as rebels, terrorists or enemies of the state to justify charges against them. Many similar cases have been dismissed.

The terrorist labeling has also been used for the online harassment of journalists, including two colleagues from mainstream media newsrooms who were targeted by an anonymous Twitter account and accused of being agents of the CPP.

Throughout the monitoring period, personalities linked to the government's anti-communist task force, have continued to accuse activists groups, journalists and NUJP and its members of links to the CPP-NPA-NDF. The accusations, at one point aimed at the elected mayor of Baguio City, are done on the media network owned by a controversial pastor with close ties to the Marcos administration and the previous Duterte administration.

While it is true that President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has not made threats against the press and has said that his administration will respect and protect the media, these practices by government officials and their mouthpieces continue to put journalists at risk.