

IFEX Member Comments on the First Anniversary of the Maguindanao Massacre
23 November 2010

Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility

The massacre of 58 people in Ampatuan, Maguindanao, including 32 journalists and media workers, remains a cruel memory not only for the families who lost their loved ones but for the rest of the press community in the Philippines. One year later, a new government in the Philippines commits zealous efforts to bring the trial of the accused to a just verdict. The journalist community and advocates for press freedom renew their own resolve to be ever vigilant in their scrutiny of the trial and to continue the campaign to seek justice for journalist victims of the culture of impunity. We call on the rest of the world to join us in spirit on this day of commemoration.

For more information, please visit the Interactive Map on the Killing of Filipino Journalists/Media Workers Since 1986 at http://www.cmfr-phil.org/map/index_inline.html and for updates on the Ampatuan trial, kindly go to <http://www.cmfr-phil.org/ampatuanwatch/>

ARTICLE 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression

The right to freedom of expression and a free press in the Philippines and the world suffered a big blow a year ago when the single deadliest event for the press since 1992 took place in Maguindanao. The Maguindanao massacre is not an incidental tragedy. One year on, journalists across the world are still being violently attacked for the reports they write. ARTICLE 19 continues to call for the perpetrators of the Maguindanao massacre to be brought to justice, with the hope that this will send a clear message to the end of impunity for the use of violence to silent voices.

Canadian Journalists for Free Expression

On this first anniversary of the Maguindanao massacre in the Philippines the grim reality of the numbers of journalists killed with impunity on a yearly basis is brought to light.

The Aquino government must seize the opportunity to demonstrate true leadership by showing the world attacks on journalists will not be tolerated and ensuring real justice will be metered out to those responsible for the heinous murders that still remain unpunished.

Committee to Protect Journalists

CPJ remains greatly concerned that, with or without the government's best intentions, justice will not be carried out in the Maguindanao killings. Our fear is not that not only will the killers of more than 50 people, including 32 journalists and media workers, go unpunished, but that the aura of impunity that permeates the country will become an increasingly demoralizing reality for the people of the Philippines, and in particular its journalists.

Justice Secretary Leila de Lima has rightfully said the Maguindanao case is a "litmus test", but there is reasonable concern that the Philippines will ever be able rise to the challenge. In the coming years, we cannot lose focus on the need for justice in this case, or on the needs' of the victims' families.

Freedom House

Democratic institutions suffer enormously when governments do not hold accountable those responsible for threats to journalist and others expressing peaceful political dissent, particularly violent acts such as those that have occurred in the Philippines. Freedom House decries these appalling acts of brutality and the chilling effect

they inevitably have on the ability of citizens to enjoy their fundamental human rights and calls upon the government to put measures into place that ensure crimes like this do not continue to go unpunished.

Human Rights Watch

One year on, the Maguindanao massacre is a test case for government of President Benigno Aquino. While we welcome that the trial of the Ampatuans is going forward, far too many of the suspects remain at large.

President Aquino has to take further action to abolish abusive forces and pursue justice for serious abuses, rather than just making promises in this regard.

Index on Censorship

It was a shocking event for all of us here, not just for the scale of the brutality, but also because of the real risk at the time that the perpetrators might escape justice. It was inspiring to see IFEX colleagues from Asia and Europe working together so quickly to establish the facts on the ground, making a contribution to justice and challenging impunity. That kind of cooperation in hostile environments was a model for all of us in the freedom of expression advocacy community.

International Federation of Journalists

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and our 125 affiliates worldwide extend our deepest sympathy and heart-felt solidarity to all our colleagues in the Philippines as they prepare to commemorate one year since the Ampatuan Town atrocity.

We will not rest until the battle to end impunity for the barbaric murders of our colleagues in the Philippines has been won. With the global community of journalists and press freedom activists, we will do our utmost to achieve justice.

International Press Institute

The International Press Institute welcomes the commitment expressed by Justice Secretary Leila de Lima to reach a verdict on the Maguindanao massacre, which saw the death of 32 journalists, within President Benigno Aquino III's term, as reported by The Philippine Daily Inquirer on 17 November.

IPI is extremely concerned at the slow pace at which authorities in The Philippines have carried out investigations and their failure, one year after what is considered one of the greatest atrocities of the last century, to bring the perpetrators to justice.

IPI fears that if the process is prolonged without any progress in the prosecution of the perpetrators, the continued impunity will foster more violence against journalists

Talking about President Benigno Aquino's promise to stamp out corruption in The Philippines, IPI Acting Director Alison Bethel McKenzie said: "I hope that he lives up to his promises and the pro-democracy legacy of his mother, the first democratically-elected woman president of The Philippines and the woman who officially restored press freedom and other rights when she took office in 1986 after the assassination of her husband. He must address the serious issue of impunity for the murderers of journalists, politicians, human rights defenders, judges and lawyers."

Reporters Without Borders

Beyond the historical figure of murdered journalists, the tragedy of the Maguindanao massacre is without a doubt the assailants' criminal intent to wipe out all witnesses.

The massacre of 23 November 2009 was shocking for us all. The initial reports of the death toll were followed by disturbing revelations concerning the criminal nature of the Ampatuan clan. We must now join forces in

demanding that the authorities allocate sufficient resources in order to ensure that the trials of the key defendants take place within a reasonable time frame.

By keeping alive the memory of the victims of this massacre, all press freedom organisations can help encourage profound changes in the Philippines. Together we say, "Never again!"

Southeast Asian Press Alliance

On the eve of the first anniversary of the massacre of 32 journalists in Maguindanao in the Philippines on 23 November, the Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA) would like to call upon President Benigno "Noy" Aquino III to exert an all-out effort to expedite the trial of the suspected perpetrators and masterminds of this brutal crime and to ensure that key witnesses in these killings are fully protected against all forms of retribution and harassment.

SEAPA urges the President to use this occasion as a first major step to end impunity killings in the Philippines under his administration to fulfill the expectation of people who see him as a beacon of hope for genuine justice and law and order.

SEAPA also urges civil society organizations all over the world to join hands in fighting the culture of impunity.

Writers in Prison Committee- PEN International

One year after the Maguindanao massacre, PEN International joins its colleagues in Philippine PEN and the international community to express outrage and dismay that, one year after the Maguindanao massacre, the perpetrators have not been brought to justice and journalists continue to be targeted with impunity in the country. It calls upon the Filipino authorities to take immediate action to ensure that all acts of violence against journalists are vigorously investigated and prosecuted so that those responsible are brought to justice and journalists are able to practice their profession without fear of attack.

World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers

After the 23 November massacre, WAN-IFRA urged for an "unprecedented" government response in a country with a long history of violence against journalists and civilians. Instead, the past year has brought multiple instances of intimidation, violence and flaws of all sorts and we are concerned that justice will not be served fully.