The Ambassador

Republic of The Philippines

Oslo, Norway

Oslo, June 10, 2020

Your excellency,

The Members of the Norwegian National Committee of the International Press Institute (IPI), a global network of editors, media executives and leading journalists for press freedom, are writing to you to express our grave concern about the harassment and prosecution of Rappler founder and editor Maria Ressa, who is a member of the IPI Executive Board.

On June 15, the Manila Regional Trial Court will deliver a ruling in a cyber libel prosecution against Ms. Ressa. We are deeply alarmed that this case appears to be based on a trumped-up indictment,

in which the law has been applied retroactively to charge and intimidate Ms. Ressa.

As you must be aware, Ms. Ressa is an internationally acclaimed journalist, who has been recognized and hailed for her contribution to journalism because of her courage and resolve to uphold press freedom and speak truth to power.

Ms. Ressa’s contribution to journalism has been acknowledged around the world. She was one of four journalists named Time Magazine’s ‘Person of the Year’ for taking “great risks in pursuit of greater truth.” That same year Rappler received the IPI-IMS Free Media Pioneer Award.

In any democracy, independent journalists and media outlets play a key role as a watchdog. Investigative journalism brings to light the challenges and problems faced by the people, which help society and governments to resolve and remedy them.

Unfortunately, in the Philippines it appears that the government does not tolerate criticism of its actions. We are dismayed that the government has filed as many as 9 cases against Ms. Ressa in a blatant attempt to silence her and shut down Rappler. These legal cases, which are only aimed at criminalizing her reporting and carry combined sentences of more than 100 years in prison, include two libel prosecutions, two criminal cases alleging foreign ownership in Rappler and investigations of old tax returns.

We are aware that the cyber libel case is based on an investigative report that Rappler published on 29 May 2012 involving the former chief justice Renato Corona and a businessman. The businessman filed a libel complaint with the National Bureau of Investigations’ (NIB) cybercrime division in 2017 based on Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012, which became law four months after the story was published. Initially, in 2018 the NIB decided not to pursue the complaint, but the Justice Ministry reopened the case, applying the law retrospectively. Ms. Ressa was arrested on 13 February 2019 and had to spend time in detention before being released on bail.

The case has attracted international attention and criticism. The United States Senate has described persecution of Ms. Ressa as part of a pattern of “weaponizing the rule of law” to repress independent media in the Philippines. Similarly, top diplomats of Canada and the United Kingdom have criticized the harassment of Ms. Ressa.

The Norwegian National Committee stands in solidarity with our esteemed colleague Maria Ressa, a journalist of the highest calibre.

Your excellency, we urge you to press upon your government to withdraw all cases against Ms. Ressa, and uphold human rights, press freedom and democratic norms.

Yours sincerely

On behalf of The Board of the National Committee of the International Press Institute:

Ole Kristian Bjellaanes (Chair), Bjørn G. Sæbø