



Her Excellency Mrs Ma. Hellen Barber De La Vega
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cc: Senator the Hon Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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February 15 2019

Your Excellency,

re: Maria Ressa

We write to protest at the arrest this week of Maria Ressa, the chief executive officer of the news outlet Rappler by members of the National Bureau of Investigation on allegations of cyber libel.

Ressa was in a meeting at the Rappler offices in Manila when agents served her with an arrest warrant. She was charged with cyber libel over an article Rappler published seven years ago in 2012. The charges were made under the *Cybercrime Prevention Act (2012)*, despite that legislation not being enacted at the time the article was published.

She appeared before court and was initially denied bail.

Ressa's arrest comes after Rappler, Ressa and reporter Reynaldo Santos Jr. were indicted on libel charges on February 7. The indictment comes over a story that Rappler published during the impeachment trial of former Chief Justice Renato Corona.

We note that this unfortunately is not an isolated incident.

MEAA believes the arrest of Maria Ressa on the charge of cyber libel is a shameless act of persecution by the Filipino government. Ressa is recognised internationally as a great human rights defender and a strong press freedom advocate.

Journalists around the world stand as one in condemning the arrest of Maria. This arrest is a very serious threat to media freedom and journalists' safety.

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We urge the Filipino government to end the harassment of independent media.

Yours sincerely,

Marcus Strom
Federal President

Jane Canaway
Victoria Branch President

Karen Percy
Federal Vice-President

Terry O'Connor
Queensland Branch President,
Chair Ethics Committee

Michael Janda
Federal Vice-President

Martin Turner
Western Australia Branch President

Ben Butler
Victoria Branch Board Member

Samela Harris
South Australia Branch President

Martin Saxon
Western Australia Branch Board
Member

Don Cumming
ACT Branch President,
Deputy Chair Ethics Committee

Shauna Black
SA/NT, ACT, Tasmania Branches Board
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A. Mark Thomas
Tasmania Branch President

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