



His Excellency Rodrigo Duterte  
President of the Philippines  
Malacañang Palace Compound  
J.P. Laurel Street  
San Miguel, Manila  
Philippines

7 July 2020  
Brussels, Belgium

Dear President Duterte,

We, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament, are writing to you to express concern over the recent conviction on 15 June 2020 of Maria Ressa, editor of Rappler news website, and Reynaldo Santos, a former researcher at the outlet, of cyber libel by the Manila Regional Trial Court.

We are concerned that her conviction sends a strong message to journalists that critical reporting risks imprisonment.

We understand that the court ordered each journalist to pay 400,000 pesos (\$7,950) in fines and moral damages, and sentenced each to a minimum of six months and one day and a maximum of six years in jail.

We understand that the case was in relation to a May 2012 Rappler report that mentioned local businessman Wilfredo Keng's alleged ties to a former judge and purported links to drug and human trafficking rings, and was pursued under the 2012 Cybercrime Prevention Act, a libel law enacted in September 2012 (four months after the story in question was published).

The conviction is part of an orchestrated campaign of legal harassment against Maria Ressa and Rappler. In [January](#) 2018, the Securities and Exchange Commission ordered Rappler's registration

be revoked. In addition to the cyber libel complaint, the Filipino authorities have launched a succession of cases against Rappler and Maria Ressa which seek to criminalise their reporting and their work. They face seven other cases, and Ressa is exposed to almost 100 years in prison as a result of all of these cases.

We are worried that her arrest shows that the law in the Philippines is used against journalists perceived as being critical of the authorities.

Our letter follows statements by the [European External Action Service](#) and the [UN independent expert on freedom of expression](#) condemning her recent conviction.

We are calling on you to drop all charges against Maria Ressa and Reynaldo Santos, not oppose the appeal of her conviction in the cyberlibel case, and guarantee a free and independent press in the country.

#### **Members of the Media Working Group (European Parliament)**

MEP Alice Kuhnke, Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance

MEP Dace Melbārde, European Conservatives and Reformists Group

MEP David Casa, Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)

MEP Irena Joveva, Renew Europe Group

MEP Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová, European Conservatives and Reformists Group

MEP Magdalena Adamowicz, Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)

MEP Massimiliano Smeriglio, Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats

MEP Ramona Strugariu, Renew Europe Group

MEP Stelios Kouloglou, Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left

MEP Viola von Cramon-Taubadel, Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance