



One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
www.foreignaffairs.house.gov

February 28, 2019

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C., 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We urge you to raise U.S. concerns about the Duterte government's assault on civil society, media freedom, and human rights at every opportunity during your February 28 – March 1 trip to Manila, and to specifically press for justice in the cases of Maria Ressa and Senator Leila de Lima.

As you know, Philippine journalist Maria Ressa was arrested on February 13, pursuant to “cyber libel” charges against Rappler, an online news start-up for which Ressa is the Chief Executive Officer. Rappler has consistently reported on and criticized President Rodrigo Duterte's brutal antidrug war and extrajudicial killings that have resulted in the death of thousands of people. The outlet has specifically highlighted the involvement of local police in these killings, documenting indications that police were outsourcing extrajudicial killings to vigilante groups and paying for assassinations in the name of the war against drugs.

President Duterte has in the past made clear his disdain for journalists and even warned that reporters are legitimate targets for assassination.¹ More broadly, Duterte has systematically worked to silence domestic dissent. This February marks the second anniversary of the incarceration of Senator Leila de Lima, who was arrested on allegations of drug charges and corruption after her Senate-led investigation of the death squads in Davao City when Duterte was

¹ <http://time.com/4353279/duterte-philippines-journalists-assassination/>

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mayor. Ressa's arrest is yet another example of the Duterte government's efforts to crackdown on the freedom of press and speech and to intimidate others from speaking truth to power in the Philippines.

The U.S.-Philippine alliance is crucial for regional stability and U.S. national interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Our countries cooperate closely on issues ranging from counterterrorism and counter-narcotics efforts to freedom of navigation operations and economic development issues. However, our mutual respect for democratic norms and universal human rights is central to the U.S.-Philippine relationship, which makes Duterte's attacks on the institutions that underpin democracy in the Philippines particularly concerning.

We appreciate the State Department's decision to condemn Ressa's arrest on social media on February 14, and are encouraged by the public outcry that her arrest has generated in the Philippines. On your trip to Manila, we ask that you to continue to raise Ressa's case and that of Senator Leila de Lima, as well as broader concerns about the Duterte government's assault on civil society, media freedom, and human rights. The United States must not be silent in the face of democratic regression in the Philippines.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with you on this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



ELIOT L. ENGEL
Chairman
House Committee on Foreign Affairs



BRAD SHERMAN
Chairman
House Subcommittee on Asia, the
Pacific, and Nonproliferation



TED S. YOHO, D.V.M.
Ranking Member
House Subcommittee on Asia, the
Pacific, and Nonproliferation



STEVE CHABOT
Member of Congress
House Committee on Foreign Affairs