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STATEMENT

International Partnership Meeting Statement: Philippines

International freedom of expression groups, media support and development organisations and journalists' unions are calling on the Philippines Government to take urgent and concrete steps to respond and act on human rights abuses that continue to plague journalists and media workers operating in the country.

Twenty-eight organisations meeting this week to discuss international partnerships joined colleagues in the Philippines in remembering victims of the Ampatuan Town Massacre, in Maguindanao, Mindanao one year ago today.

The massacre, which saw 58 people including 32 journalists and media workers brutally murdered, is known as the world's single biggest atrocity against journalists and the lowest point in a decades-long culture of impunity for the killings of media personnel in the Philippines.

The groups meeting at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris marked the one-year anniversary of the massacre by issuing a call to national governments around the world to exert pressure on the administration of Benigno Aquino III so that perpetrators of human rights abuses in the Philippines face justice, regardless of their place or status within society or government.

Of 196 suspects in the massacre, 19 are now on trial while more than 100 remain at large. Of those at large, 10 are police and four are soldiers. Intimidation, bribery and compromised forensic evidence threaten the prosecution of the perpetrators. Meanwhile, journalists' and media workers' safety continues to be under threat, with another four journalists and media workers killed in the Philippines this year.

The meeting resolved that President Benigno Aquino III and his administration is falling short on his promise to seek justice in the Maguindanao killings, and other human rights abuses including the many victims of extrajudicial murders.

The organisations reminded governments around that world that ending the culture of impunity for the killings of journalists and media workers, which intensified under the administration of former President Gloria Arroyo, is a global responsibility, and one which requires decisive and urgent action.

The organisations endorsed the following recommendations, made by a number of international missions, advocacy and support work conducted in the Philippines over many years by organisations present at the Paris meeting.

To ensure a prompt, fair and transparent trial of all suspects implicated in the Ampatuan Town Massacre, Philippines President Benigno Aquino III and his administration should:

- Direct authorities and law enforcement agencies to provide all evidence in the massacre case to the prosecution;
- Support changes of trial venue to neutral and secure locations;
- Pursue the investigation, arrest and prosecution of all those responsible for bribes, threats, and violence towards witnesses and family members of the victims;
- Direct judicial authorities to nominate a timeframe for the arrest, trial and prosecution of all 196 suspects, and commit all required resources to achieving this goal; and
- Ensure adequate funding for the Department of Justice witness protection program.
- Beyond Maguindanao, the government must review and pursue policies to address impunity including:
 - The creation of rapid response teams composed of forensic and legal experts to handle all major crimes, including the murders of journalists and media workers;
 - Judicial and legislative reform to ensure that justice is delivered swiftly in all cases where media personnel are murdered, including compensation and counselling for families of victims; and
 - Take responsibility to lead a process of national reconciliation by conducting a series of public meetings and a public awareness media campaign in support of media freedom, democracy and human rights in the Philippines.

Endorsed by:

AMARC: World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters

Article 19

Belarusian Association of Journalists

Centre for Law and Democracy

Committee to Protect Journalists

Deutsche Welle

Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ)

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World Press Freedom Committee

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