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November 23, 2012

### **Ampatuan Massacre – Why no action?**

Dear President Aquino,

Three years have passed since the massacre of 58 people including 32 of our journalist colleagues near Ampatuan Town, Maguindanao.

Since your inauguration, on June 30 2010, you have failed to meet your election campaign promise to address the problem of impunity in the Philippines despite appeals from the national and international community.

We note that, as representatives of the international community of journalists and free speech defenders, we are deeply disappointed at your lack of any meaningful action.

Today's anniversary of the massacre serves to remind us all of how little has been done to bring justice for those who have been murdered and to end the decades-long culture of impunity that continues to stalk the Philippines. The proceedings to bring those responsible for the Ampatuan Massacre is moving extraordinarily slowly through the judicial system. Of the 196 accused, not one has so far been convicted. Otherwise, the statistics are not encouraging: 93 accused are still at large, one suspect has already died, only 76 accused have been arraigned, 55 accused have filed a petition for bail, and three witnesses have been killed.

It is estimated that, at its current pace and with the number of motions filed by the defence, the Ampatuan trial will take a minimum of 24 years before a result is achieved – a mockery of justice that insults the memory of the dead and seriously questions the resolve of the authorities to see that justice is done.

During your term as president, we have also seen a further 14 journalists murdered, at least five in direct connection to their journalism (the most recent was the murder of reporter broadcaster Julius Cauzo on November 8 in Cabanatuan City) as the culture of impunity thrives and ensures that those in power feel safe in the knowledge that nothing will ever stop them should they wish to forever silence journalists who are merely doing their job.

As a result, powerful wrongdoers in the Philippines feel safe in the knowledge that they are largely free to silence brave journalists for doing their job and exposing the wrongdoing. This is a crime not only against journalists, but also against all Filipinos, who are being denied their right to information.

We urge you to use this terrible anniversary as an opportunity to launch a new beginning, specifically in the form of a broad government effort to turn a page in the Philippines by ending the impunity that has plagued your country for decades. We join our colleagues in the Philippines in hoping for change and calling on you to find the resolve to make it happen.

With that goal in mind, we once again ask you to consider the Action Plan to end impunity submitted to your office in June 2010 by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and its affiliate, the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) (the original letter is attached and is available at: <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en/articles/ifj-action-plan-for-president-aquino-to-end-impunity-in-the-philippines>).

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1738 (2006) calls on governments to respect their international obligations in this area, including by actively protecting journalists and media workers at risk and by prosecuting those responsible when attacks do occur. This resolution is a reminder that your government is obliged to ensure the safety of media personnel.

We again call on you to ensure your government and police and security forces respect their responsibilities to bring the perpetrators and instigators of the November 23 atrocity to account, without further delay, and to act now to end the culture of impunity that has plagued the Philippines for so long.

We sympathise deeply with the families of the victims and our colleagues from the Philippines journalism community, and trust you will do all in your power to assist them to see justice is achieved.

Respectfully Yours,



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