

Philippines: Media groups hold indignation rally on Mendiola

Tuesday 1 December 2009, by [ANDRADE Jeannette](#), [ESGUERRA Christian V.](#) (Date first published: 1 December 2009).

MANILA, Philippines—The indignation rally of journalists at the Chino Roces Bridge (formerly Mendiola) near Malacañang had an unwanted guest.

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde was heckled Monday when he was sighted by activists who joined hands with media workers in demanding justice for 30 journalists who were among the 57 civilians slaughtered in Maguindanao last week.

Media watchdogs said the Maguindanao massacre was the world's deadliest single assault on journalists.

When Remonde stood on the pedestal of the statue of the late freedom fighter Joaquin "Chino" Roces to deliver a message at around noon, the crowd alternately chanted "terrorist" and "tuta" (puppy).

A member of a militant group was prevented from throwing a punch at the Malacañang official.

Flying kiss, crumpled paper

Remonde attempted to pacify the crowd by smiling and throwing flying kisses but the protesters pelted him with crumpled pieces of paper and bottle caps while surging forward to attack him.

The press secretary, a former radio broadcaster, was immediately pulled out of the rally.

Asked what he was planning to tell the protesters, Remonde said: "I was going to assure them that Malacañang is one with their call for justice. I was there to listen to their grievances. I thought that this could be discussed civilly."

Remonde, who was in a black shirt with armband, said his intention was sincere. "I do not take it against our colleagues (media men). Benny [Antiporda, National Press Club president] advised me not to go but I went here to convey to them that the President is one with them in condemning the barbaric act in Maguindanao. She is one with them in upholding press freedom."

Renato Reyes, secretary general of the militant Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan), described the incident as "unfortunate," adding that Remonde should not have gone to the rally.

"He was already advised not to proceed to the rally because emotions were volatile. The people reacted that way because they were surprised," Reyes said.

The indignation rally saw one of the biggest gatherings of journalists.

Some 3,000 media workers and their supporters, led by Antiporda, Malacañang Press Corps president Paolo Romero, National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, Philippine Center for Photojournalism, Alyansa ng mga Filipino Mamamahayag, and employees of the public service channel UNTV marched alongside some 2,000 activists, taking over the entire Quiapo-bound stretch

of España Boulevard and Morayta Street. The police placed the size of the crowd at 2,500.

Rage for the martyrdom of some 30 journalists and the other victims of the Maguindanao massacre radiated from their cry of "Ampatuan, et al. Usigin!" as they marched from the University of Santo Tomas to the Don Chino Roces Bridge.

Militant groups such as Bayan, Gabriela, the Promotion of Church People's Response, Solidarity Philippines, the People's Movement for Change and the Union of People's Lawyers bore three black coffins each bearing the word—Justice," "Press Freedom," and "Human Rights"—as they marched on the Chino Roces Bridge.

Police deployment

For the first time in recent years, no member of the civil disturbance management unit of the Manila Police District (MPD) confronted the marchers.

One policeman, who requested anonymity, told the Inquirer, "Even we police officers condemn that massacre." He pointed out that it was the reason there was hardly a deployment. Police shields lay on the other side of the barricades at the bridge.

As soon as the protesters reached the bridge, the monument of Don Chino Roces was draped in black cloth, pasted with pieces of paper carrying the names of the martyred journalists. Candles with black ribbons were lit at the foot of the monument.

A number of newspaper cutouts shaped like people and strewn with red paint were pasted on the pavement.

"This is the kind of crime that can only be cooked up in hell... They (the perpetrators of the carnage) have lost their humanity because of greed, because of power, because of riches," Solidarity Movement convenor Fr. Joe Dizon said, addressing the rally participants.

Dizon said the "massacre has struck the soul of the nation. This massacre has struck the heart of the nation. This massacre has struck freedom of expression. Unless justice is served, the country will not be at peace."

For her part, PMC convenor and movie director Bibet Orteza compared President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to an octopus, one of whose tentacles is the Ampatuan clan. "Do something... Admit that you owe the Ampatuans much," she said.

Asean journalists

Other Southeast Asian journalists showed their solidarity with Filipino journalists, with the attendance of Anbalagan Veerasamy, secretary general of the Malaysia-based Confederation of Asean journalists.

Veerasamy expressed his group's indignation at the massacre and appealed for the government to spare no effort in giving justice to the victims.

"Truly, the incident in Maguindanao has no parallel and has dwarfed the other incidents of violence against journalists in particular and the media in general in any part of the world," he read from a statement.

"If need be, we shall not hesitate like other foreign journalists, who are here with us today, to send

another bigger delegation from Asean to demand justice from the Philippine government,” Veerasamy added.

March in Bacolod

In Bacolod City, about 70 members of the Negros media, wearing black and red T-shirts with black armbands, marched through downtown to demand justice for the victims of the massacre.

Two of the journalists killed were from Negros Occidental—Bart Maravilla, 48, of Bombo Radyo Koronadal, who was from Barangay 6, Bacolod City; and Henry Araneta of dzRH Cotabato, who was from Barangay Canmoros, Binalbagan town.

“The accountability does not end with the Ampatuans. The accountability should be laid at the doorsteps of President Arroyo,” Bayan Muna party-list Rep. Neri Colmenares said at the balcony of the Negros Press Club, fronting the public plaza.

Other speakers included Edgar Cadagat, Negros Press Club president; Julius Mariveles, secretary general of the Correspondents, Broadcasters, Reporters Association-Action News Service; veteran journalist Rolando Espina; and Alfonso Espina, Bombo Radyo anchor.

Espina said Ms Arroyo was accountable for the actions of the warlords in Mindanao for granting them the power, the privileges and the arms supposedly to fight the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

Silver lining

Shortly after the rally in Manila, Ms Arroyo issued a statement condemning the killings and vowing to uphold press freedom in the country.

“If there is a silver lining to this very dark cloud, I hope it is to prick the conscience of the nation and to rededicate our nation to freedom of the press, freedom of political expression, and freedom to vote free from fear of violence and intimidation,” she said.

“We must all join hands to strengthen our resolve that never again will rogue political leaders take the law into their hands and violate the law of the nation and the laws of God,” she added.

At a media briefing in Malacañang, Antiporda expressed doubt over the government’s effort to arrest the people behind the killings.

The Belgium-based International Federation of Journalists on Friday wrote to Ms Arroyo saying that 75 journalists had been killed during her eight years in office—even before last week’s massacre—and that only four convictions of the killers have been secured.

By Jeannette Andrade, Christian V. Esguerra

With reports from Carla P. Gomez, Inquirer Visayas; and Reuters and Associated Press

P.S.

* From the Philippine Daily Inquirer. First Posted 03:53:00 12/01/2009.