

# Philippines: Statements of solidarity with Walden Bello charged with “libel” and “cyber libel”

Wednesday 10 August 2022, by [Movements in defense of Walden Bello](#) (Date first published: 9 August 2022).

**Anti-globalization activist Walden Bello is charged with « libel“and”cyberlibel," a charge that carries very heavy penalties in the Philippines.**

***More statements will be added.***

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## **Focus on the Global South: Speaking truth to power is not a crime: drop charges against Walden Bello, decriminalize libel & cyberlibel**

*On Monday, 8 August 2022, Dr. Walden Bello was arrested on two counts of libel and cyber libel filed by a former staff of Vice President Sara Duterte over statements made by Bello during the electoral campaign.*

We at Focus on the Global South condemn in the strongest terms the arrest of our founding director and co-chair of our Board, Dr. Walden Bello, over libel and cyberlibel charges filed by Jeffrey Tupas—former staff of current Vice President Sara Duterte—over statements made by Dr. Bello during the electoral campaign regarding Tupas’ reported involvement in a November 2021 drug raid conducted by the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) in the Province of Davao de Oro.

Yesterday, August 8, the warrant was issued at around lunchtime in Davao and was electronically transferred through email to the Quezon City Police District (QCPD). The warrant was served a few minutes past 16:00 yesterday and Dr. Bello was arrested in his residence in Quezon City. Since the said arrest was done late afternoon, there was not enough time for Dr. Bello’s legal team to post bail as government offices have shortly closed down for the day. Consequently, Dr. Bello spent the night in detention within the Camp Karingal Police Headquarters.

Today, August 9, although Walden was temporarily released on bail, there have been reported delays in the signing of the order of his release (more information and updates about the arrest and detainment of Dr. Bello can be found [here](#).)

It must be pointed out that we are still in the middle of the pandemic, daily cases are on the rise, and people are still vulnerable to being infected. Dr. Bello himself was only starting to recover from COVID-19 when the arrest warrant was served in his home. Overall, the timing of his arrest and the delays in the signing of the order of his release are all inconsiderate of vulnerabilities created by the pandemic and of Dr. Bello’s condition.

The charges and the consequent arrest of Dr. Bello are clear acts of political persecution intended to

intimidate, humiliate, and repress dissenters. Libel and cyberlibel have on numerous occasions been weaponized by those in power to silence individuals asserting truth, justice, freedom, and human rights.

Dr. Bello himself has for many decades been a fearless advocate for democracy, social justice, and human rights. As an activist-scholar, he has been at the forefront of exposing the injustices engendered by the elite-dominated political and economic systems both in the Philippines and internationally. His call for transparency in the November 2021 PDEA drug raid allegedly involving Tupas, is consistent with his stance to push for justice and accountability in the so-called “war on drugs” initiated by the Duterte administration. Since 2016, Dr. Bello has asserted that the government’s violent approach that narrowly seeks to eliminate alleged drug users and pushers will not address the root cause of the drug problem. Simply for demanding the truth, Dr. Bello was unjustly arrested.

In light of this, we demand the dropping of charges against Dr. Bello. We also call for the decriminalization of libel and cyberlibel, as criminal libel has often been used to undermine freedom of expression and of the press and has been weaponized to go against political opponents. Authorities must well be reminded that these freedoms, being enshrined in the Philippine constitution, are fundamental and therefore should have primacy: Without them, other rights cannot be realized.

Finally, we call on civil society and social movements to continue exercising vigilance as we expect the ruling elites to adopt the same if not a more intensified and systematic approach to repressing ordinary peoples’ fundamental rights and freedoms. The libel and cyberlibel charges against Dr. Bello constitute not just a legal but more importantly a political battle, and it is one among many cases of repression that would have grave consequences on the state of our already fragile democracy. As such, we must continue to forge stronger solidarities in asserting ordinary Filipinos’ rights amidst these threats and reprisals. We also express gratitude to the international community that has outpoured their support for Dr. Bello and condemned his arrest.#

SUPPORT THE STATEMENT (To endorse this statement, please click the link and sign on using this form):

<https://focusweb.org/statement-speaking-truth-to-power-is-not-a-crime-drop-charges-against-walden-bello-decriminalize-libel-cyberlibel/>

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## **Global Justice Now condemns the arrest of Philippines ex-VP candidate, Walden Bello, and calls for his immediate release**

Walden Bello, the world-renowned author, economic justice activist, former University of the Philippines professor and former member of the Philippines House of Representatives for the Akbayan Party (Citizens Action Party), was arrested in the Philippines on Monday 8 August on charges of ‘cyber libel’. The charges were filed by a former aide of incumbent vice president Sara Duterte. Libel is a criminal offence in the Philippines, rather than a civil offence, and the recently-introduced crime of cyber libel is punishable by up to eight years in prison.

The case against 76-year-old Bello was filed in the local court in Davao City where the Duterte political clan has been in power for more than three decades. Bello ran for vice president in the May 2022 election with Partido Lakas ng Masa (Party of the Labouring Masses), a democratic socialist party, and publicly criticised Sara Duterte for not attending televised vice-presidential debates.

Bello also raised the draconian anti-drug policy of former president Rodrigo Duterte, Sara Duterte's father, during the campaign. A UN report has condemned the policy as leading to "widespread and systematic" extrajudicial killings of likely tens of thousands of people.

Bello's arrest is a clear act of political persecution meant to sow fear amongst all those who might speak out against the vice president and the current government. The Philippines government is weaponising the new cyber libel law to harass political opposition in the country. This latest case is similar to the ongoing high-profile cyber libel charge against the CEO of Rappler and Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Ressa. What is at stake in both cases are the most fundamental democratic rights - freedom of expression and the right to criticise politicians.

We stand in solidarity with Walden Bello, and Maria Ressa, and call for these vindictive charges to be dropped.

8 August 2022

NOTES

Walden Bello is a Right Livelihood (Alternative Nobel prize) awardee and also a recipient of the International Sociological Association's Most Distinguished Sociologist Award.

This statement has been endorsed by the European ATTAC Network.

- <https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/news/global-justice-now-condemns-the-arrest-of-walden-bello/>

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## **Laban ng Masa**

Laban ng Masa (LnM) condemns in the strongest terms the filing of cyberlibel charges and the subsequent arrest today of its Chairperson, Dr. Walden Bello, by operatives of the Quezon City police. This is obviously a case of a state-sponsored persecution and repression of the right to free expression. That a highly-respected and world-renowned scholar-intellectual and activist like Dr. Bello has been victimized by this highhanded police operation speaks volumes on the state of democracy and freedom in the Philippines. It also serves as a warning to democracy and human rights advocates on what would befall them while standing up for the right to express one's views and criticize wrongdoings by the rich and powerful.

The cyberlibel case against Dr. Bello is clearly a proxy harassment with no less than Vice President Sara Duterte as the real protagonist. She uses a former aide as a cover for her own vindictive behavior. Just as Ms. Duterte and her running mate and now President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. had repeatedly cowardly refused to participate in debates with other candidates, so she is now running true to form by putting up a dummy to file the charge against Dr. Bello.

Laban ng Masa is a socialist coalition dedicated to the real transformation of Philippine society from an elite-centered and billionaire-controlled one to a truly democratic and worker-led system. We call

on all freedom-loving and democratic people in the country and internationally to denounce Dr. Bello's unjust arrest and to demand that all charges against him be dropped.

#FreeWaldenBello

#HandsOffWaldenBello

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**Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa - Sentro**  
@sentrolabor

### **Statement on Walden Bello's Arrest for Cyberlibel**

The freedom of speech, especially the ability to openly demand accountability from elected representatives and civil servants, is a pillar of a just society. Ordinary and prominent Filipinos alike must be allowed to speak their mind, whether the style be respectful, satirical, or irreverent, if it means speaking truth to power and exposing the hypocrisy of those in power.

The Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa (SENTRO) stands in solidarity with Walden Bello as he faces a cyberlibel complaint filed by Jefry Tupas, a former staff of now Vice President Sara Duterte. Together with other social movements, civil society organizations, and progressive groups, we call for Bello's immediate release and that the charges against him be dropped. We also demand the decriminalization of libel, which is used extensively to silence those that are not afraid to speak up against the abuses of the Philippine political and economic elite.

Bello's case is an excellent example of the double standard that plagues the justice system in the Philippines. Prominent progressives like Walden, who have for decades been part of movements pushing for social justice, economic democracy, and political freedom have often been the target of state-sanctioned harassment. Under the pretext of libel and cyberlibel, Philippine authorities have intimidated activists, academics, as well as other individuals that are vocal against the many injustices in Philippine society.

On the other hand, members of the country's ruling elite enjoy special treatment, even if they have been accused or are proven guilty of committing crimes. Take the example of Imelda Marcos, who had been convicted for graft by the Sandiganbayan. Unlike Bello who was arrested in his home and detained in a police station wearing handcuffs, Imelda had not even been taken to jail despite her conviction.

For SENTRO, Bello's arrest provides us a glimpse of what we can expect for the next 6 years: impunity for the powerful and well connected, legal harassment for those that fight for popular empowerment. In this situation, the Marcos Jr. administration can expect nothing less than the intensified push by the country's progressive movements to resist repression and transform Philippine elite democracy. They may be able to arrest Bello and many more activists, but the government will never be able to stop the mobilization and organization of the many Filipinos that refuse to accept the current realities in our country.

Free Walden Bello! Decriminalize Libel! Uphold the freedom of speech!"

• <https://www.facebook.com/391201547669676/posts/pfbid02A6G1JMt77RnD1xJawFnD3mgvgTq4PnhSv9YEmaNLVigs2PXAtZc52MaDCTQFLkzvl/?d=n>

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### **Partido Manggagawa : Free Walden, decriminalize cyber libel**

We condemn in strongest terms the arrest of former Akbayan Representative and Laban ng Masa Chair Walden Bello this afternoon by the Philippine National Police (PNP) based on a warrant issued by a regional trial court Judge of Davao City, in connection with the cyber libel case filed against him by former Davao City information officer Jefry Tupas.

Although cyber libel is a bailable offense and Walden can defend himself before the courts, the recurrent use of this law to silence critics under the previous administration is a major setback on freedom and human rights wherein government is mandated to protect, restore when broken, and uphold to the max.

We likewise believe this Tupas case was neither without color nor political backing as Walden was a fierce critic of Mr. Duterte and his daughter, now Vice President Sara Duterte who was the complainant's former boss.

Also, to recall, when opposition to the criminalization of libel on the internet was simply ignored by lawmakers, it was widely believed that the law shall benefit those in power rather than those in the margins. Indeed, its weaponization is most insidious from the highest levels of power.

We therefore call on the new administration to revisit this law and take corrective measure like introducing amendments to the law or the ultimate decriminalization of cyber libel. Absent any initiative, it's only right to assume that today's rulers would utilize the same weapon thus everyone need to stay vigilant. ###

#freewaldenbello  
#decriminalizecyberlibel

#### PRESS STATEMENT

Partido Manggagawa

08 August 2022

Reference:

Renato Magtubo

PM Chairperson

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### **Europe solidaire sans Frontières: For a definitive end to the prosecution of Walden Bello on charges of "libel" and "cyberlibel"**

Walden Bello, with whom we have shared many struggles, was arrested on August 8 in Manila-Quezon City on charges of "libel" and "cyberlibel", and later released on bail.

The charge of "libel" (and more particularly "cyberlibel") is commonly used in the Philippines by people in positions of power to silence opposition, or simply to exact revenge. This is clearly the case this time, with the accusation being made by Jefry Tupas, a former collaborator of Sara Duterte, herself former mayor of Davao City (territorial base of the family clan), daughter of the previous president Rodrigo Duterte and current vice president.

An incisive critic of Rodrigo Duterte's murderous regime (extrajudicial killings have claimed tens of thousands of lives), Walden Bello, himself a vice presidential candidate in last May's elections, had challenged Sara Duterte to a televised debate - she retaliated by declaring him persona non grata in Davao City, accusing him of being a narco politician and of cyberlibel.

A former parliamentarian for the Akbayan (Citizen Action Party), Walden Bello (76) is internationally known for his involvement in the anti-globalization movement. He has been awarded the Right Livelihood Award (the alternative Nobel Prize) and the Most Distinguished Sociologist Award from the International Sociological Association. His arrest is a message to anyone who attacks the vice president and the government: not even fame will protect you.

The penalties for being charged with defamation are very high (up to eight years in prison), as this is a criminal charge in the Philippines, not a civil one, as it often is in other countries. What is at stake are the fundamental freedoms of expression, of the press, of investigation, of criticism - freedoms that are increasingly challenged by the new law against cybercrime.

The international solidarity association Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières (ESSF) stands against the persecution of Walden Bello and demands the definitive end of the proceedings against him.

August 9, 2022

**Europe solidaire sans Frontières** (Europe in Solidarity Without Borders, ESSF), France

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## **IDefend: In Defense of Human Rights and Dignity Movement**

Is this administration hell-bent on making an example out of Dr. Bello, to discourage any and all criticism of the Marcos - Duterte administration? Cyber libel has been weaponized in this country against those exercising the right to freedom of expression, in order to hold the government to account, expose graft and corruption and defend human rights. Dr. Bello's politically motivated arrest following charges brought against him by no less than the Vice President's former aide reveals the Duterte playbook which the Marcos government now wields on anyone who dares to speak up.

Dr. Bello was a Vice Presidential candidate in the 2022 national polls who called out Marcos and Duterte's constant absence in the Presidential and Vice Presidential debates. He had been widely critical of the Duterte administration and is an internationally known human rights defender.

#HandsOffWaldenBello #FreeWaldenBello

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## **IPAM, le CEDETIM and Intercoll (France)**

IPAM, le CEDETIM and Intercoll stands in solidarity with Dr. Walden Bello, and condemns the arrest he was subjected to by the Quezon City police.

We consider it a high-handed act that puts us on alert about the state of democracy and freedom in the Philippines.

All our solidarity with Dr. Walden Bello and with all those people, organizations and movements that fight for dignity, the defense of democracy and freedom of expression.

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