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High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission
Federica Mogherini

Brussels, 19 February 2019

Dear Ms Mogherini,

We would like to bring to your attention the case Maria Ressa, a Philippine journalist and co-founder of Rappler, who was arrested on 13 February 2019.

Although Ms Ressa was released on bail the following day, she has been politically harassed for some years now, with the objective of intimidating journalists and undermining press freedom. Since 2017, President Duterte has publicly attacked the news company Rappler by propagating fake information, saying it is owned by Americans. This launched an official investigation into the news outlet for six months, which ended in a license revocation (that did not hold up in court). Some months later, an investigation on tax evasion begun and in November 2018 a warrant was issued for Ms Ressa, who turned herself in and posted bail - the case is still ongoing. Finally, in February a new lawsuit was filed against the journalists, for alleged cyber-libel.

Everything seems to indicate that these attacks are purely political, since Rappler is not only one of the most read newspapers in Philippines, but also one that criticises the government and sheds lights on important issues, such as fake news, pro-Duterte “troll armies” and human rights abuses.

We therefore urge you and the EEAS to monitor the case closely and to call for all charges against Maria Ressa and fellow journalists to be dropped. Media freedom is fundamental for democracy and the European Union needs to stand by it unequivocally.

Best regards,

Brando Benifei (S&D)

David Casa (EPP)

Jean-Marie Cavada (ALDE)



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