

February 7, 2024

**HON. JESUS CRISPIN C. REMULLA**

Secretary, Department of Justice

Padre Faura St., Ermita

1000 Manila

JOINT LETTER SIGNED BY ALTERMIDYA NETWORK, THE NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS OF THE PHILIPPINES, AND THE COLLEGE EDITORS GUILD OF THE PHILIPPINES

Dear Secretary Remulla:

We the undersigned advocates for human rights and freedom of the press and expression are writing your office to express our profound concern over the prolonged detention of journalist Frenchie Mae Cumpio and human rights advocates Mariel Domequil and Alexander Philip Abinguna.

Today, 7 February 2024, distressingly marks four years since their detention on charges related to terrorism financing, following a circuitous legal battle that had their families and legal counsel appearing in various courts in the past years. Their continued detention and the prolonged litigation process underscore the urgency for action.

The recent visit and observations made by the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of the freedom of expression and opinion Irene Khan have brought to light the unjust state of their prolonged detention, begging an immediate review and dismissal of the charges against them, should evidence be lacking. We emphasize that this call aligns with the Department of Justice's commitment to "only file cases with a reasonable certainty of conviction," as stated in various memoranda and correspondence your office recently released. We thus implore your office to undertake a comprehensive review of their cases, aiming for their prompt dismissal.

We also note the worrying fact included in the 2023 Global Prison Census of the Committee to Protect Journalists<sup>1</sup>: Ms. Cumpio is the only journalist remaining in prison in the Philippines, a fact that severely tarnishes the country's commitment to press freedom. This state of affairs also necessitates a significant policy shift within the Prosecution Service of the DOJ to address and rectify the following critical concerns:

**1. Impartial and thorough investigation of law weaponization:** We urge the DOJ to conduct an impartial and thorough investigation into how state prosecutors and various government instrumentalities – at the national and local level – have been weaponizing laws to attack journalists and perceived critics. We also perceive the practice of public prosecutors allowing themselves to be used in the government's counter-insurgency operations even if due process and the rule of law are sacrificed. It is notable that illegal possession of guns and explosives charges has become standard complaints against government critics, buttressing doubts as to the credibility of the service and the Department itself. It is imperative that such practices, which undermine democracy and human rights, are ended immediately.

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<sup>1</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists. (2024, January 19). 2023 prison census: Jailed journalist numbers near record high; Israel imprisonments spike - <https://cpj.org/reports/2024/01/2023-prison-census-jailed-journalist-numbers-near-record-high-israel-imprisonments-spike/>

**2. Promotion of press freedom:** The DOJ must fulfil its obligations to promote, respect, and protect human rights by taking meaningful steps to foster an environment that enables press freedom in the Philippines. This includes not only addressing individual cases but also ensuring systemic changes that support the freedom of expression and opinion.

**3. Advocate for the repeal of repressive laws:** We call upon the DOJ to lead the way in reviewing and advocating for the repeal of existing laws and policies that have been used to harass journalists and human rights defenders, which include Republic Act No. 11479 or the “Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020.” In the same breath, we call on your esteemed office to support the call for enacting the Human Rights Defenders Bill, a proposed legislation UNSR Khan also expressedly advocated. Such legislative reforms are crucial for safeguarding the principles of freedom and justice.

The prolonged detention of Cumpio, Domequil, and Abinguna, coupled with the broader issues of law weaponization and attacks on press freedom, highlight the need for immediate and decisive action from the DOJ. The DOJ can demonstrate the Philippines' genuine commitment to upholding human rights and freedom of expression by addressing these concerns.

We trust that the DOJ will take swift and just action under your leadership to review and hopefully dismiss the charges against Ms. Cumpio, Ms. Domequil, and Mr. Abinguna. Furthermore, we hope to see significant strides towards creating a more transparent, fair, and enabling environment for journalists and human rights defenders in the Philippines.

Thank you for your attention to these pressing issues. We stand ready to engage in further dialogue and provide any assistance necessary to facilitate these crucial changes.

*For Philippine press freedom,*

**(Original signed)**

Raymund Villanueva  
Chairperson  
Altermidya Network

**(Original signed)**

Jonathan De Santos  
Chairperson  
National Union of Journalists of the Philippines

**(Original signed)**

John Ray Luciano  
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