



JOINT STATEMENT ON THE PROMINENT JOURNALIST GERRY ORTEGA'S MURDER CASE AND THE PENDING TRIAL OF SUSPECTED MASTERMIND JOEL T. REYES

Manila, March 1, 2024 - The "A Safer World for the Truth" initiative - a coalition of three international press freedom organisations - met with the Philippine Department of Justice (DoJ) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) to provide new and actionable information that could lead to the arrest of the alleged mastermind behind the 2011 murder of radio journalist Gerry Ortega.

Representatives from Free Press Unlimited (FPU), Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) met with the DoJ's Assistant Secretary Jose Dominic F. Clavano IV on Thursday in Manila to discuss the slow progress in the case and expressed hope that the Philippine judicial system would finally bring justice to Ortega's family after 13 years of his murder.

The coalition also met with PNP Chief Benjamin Acorda Jr. on Friday on the same matter. The DoJ pledged to deal with the matter with urgency while the PNP chief vowed to implement the warrant of arrest against the alleged mastermind.

Ortega reported on corruption within the administration of former governor of Palawan province Joel T. Reyes before he was murdered in 2011. The three international organisations have investigated the case since 2020. Despite damning evidence implicating Reyes as the mastermind, the former governor has to this day continued to evade arrest and remains at large.

During the meeting with the DoJ, the coalition offered information - gathered during its continued independent investigation of the case - that points to the current location where the former governor is hiding. The coalition urged the DoJ, the PNP, and other law enforcement agencies to act upon this significant piece of information to arrest Reyes, who is facing a non-bailable charge of murder.

The coalition also expressed concerns about Reyes' latest attempt to transfer the trial to Quezon City regional trial court, which could hamper a prompt trial. The coalition called on the Philippine government to exhaust all legal remedies to effect the immediate arrest of Reyes and compel him to face trial before the proper courts for the murder of Ortega.

The mission was supported by the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP).

Jos Bartman, lead investigator, Free Press Unlimited (FPU), states:

"We welcome the Philippine authorities' commitment to ensure justice is delivered in the case of Gerry Ortega. Achieving justice in the case of Gerry Ortega could set an example around the globe and show that prosecuting masterminds of journalists' murder is not impossible."

Beh Lih Yi, Asia Program Coordinator, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), states:

"Gerry Ortega is not forgotten. His case is emblematic of the entrenched impunity when it comes to journalist killings in the Philippines. Until the real mastermind is brought to justice, his case will continue to create a chilling effect on the media in the country."

Cédric Alviani, RSF Asia-Pacific Bureau Director, states:

“The information we have given to the Department of Justice and the Philippine police provides all the keys to finding and arresting Joel T. Reyes, the alleged mastermind of the murder of Gerry Ortega. It is now the responsibility of the country's authorities to do everything possible to arrest the former governor and bring justice to the journalist's relatives, 13 years after this shocking crime.”

Ronalyn Olea, NUJP secretary general, states:

“We thank the international community for their solidarity and for their persistent efforts in pushing for justice for our slain Filipino colleagues. We hope that the Philippine government steps up its efforts in arresting Joel T. Reyes, resolving other cases of media killings and addressing impunity.”

For more details, please see A Safer World for the Truth report about the Gerry Ortega's case published in 2022: <https://www.saferworldforhetruth.com/investigations/gerry-ortega.html>

Note for editors:

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