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# A Dangerous Profession:

Press freedom under fire in the Philippines



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF JOURNALISTS  
MISSION TO THE PHILIPPINES 23 JANUARY - 1 FEBRUARY 2005

**A Dangerous Profession: Press freedom under fire in the Philippines**  
**International Federation of Journalists Mission to the Philippines**  
**23 January - 1 February 2005**

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## Introduction

The IFJ mission to the Philippines was organised by the Asia-Pacific office of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in the wake of the IFJ's annual report for 2004, released in early January 2005. The report identified the deaths of 129 journalists throughout the globe during the year, with Iraq being the single most dangerous place for journalists to operate. Unexpectedly, however, the Philippines appeared next on this grim league table with 13 deaths recorded in 2004. Since the fall of the Marcos regime in 1986, there have been at least 66 recorded cases of the violent deaths of journalists working in the Philippines.

The IFJ's Philippines affiliate, the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) and the IFJ's Asia-Pacific office organised a fact finding mission to allow the IFJ to assess the Philippines situation, discuss the violent deaths with the families of the dead journalists and consider recommendations which might assist in bringing to an end or at least stemming the bloodshed.

The mission visited the Philippines over an eight-day period from 23 January to 1 February 2005.

Its international membership comprised Gerard Noonan, a former editor of the daily *Australian Financial Review* and now senior writer with the broadsheet newspaper the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and Rustam F. Mandayun from Jakarta, former executive editor of Indonesia's mass circulation weekly news magazine *Tempo*, which publishes in English and now head of the general affairs, human resources, legal and public relations divisions of PT Tempo Inti Media in Jakarta.

The Philippines' representation involved the secretary general of the NUJP, Carlos Conde, freelance journalist; NUJP chair, Inday Espina-Varona, who edits *Philippine Graphic* magazine in Manila; Diosa Labiste NUJP director and correspondent with the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the *Women's Feature Service*, and editor in chief of the weekly *Visayan Examiner* based in the regional city of Iloilo; Rowena Carranza-Paraaan, NUJP director and managing editor of the on-line news site *Bulatlat* and May Rodriguez, NUJP treasurer and freelance journalist.

The mission aimed to visit at least three quite geographically and developmentally different regions in the Philippines other than the capital Manila in order to get a better feel for the factors which might have been contributing to the deaths. It visited General Santos City in the southern island of Mindanao, Cebu City and Iloilo in the Visayas region of central Philippines and Legazpi in the Bicol region. In all, it had the opportunity of discussing the situation with 11 families of slain journalists as well as regional officials, including police and prosecutors, local lawyers, the governor of one province and the regional director of the Philippines Human Rights Commission as well as scores of local journalists across the country and in Manila.

In advance, through the IFJ's Asia Pacific office in Sydney, IFJ President Christopher Warren had formally written to the Philippines President Gloria Arroyo and ranking Senator Mr Joker Arroyo seeking a meeting with the delegation representatives.

### The visits: General Santos City, Iloilo, Legazpi

The delegation visited General Santos City, a regional city of some 500,000 residents, on 25-26 January. During the visit,



the delegation met with the widows and children of three journalists, all radio broadcasters - Edgar Damalerio (killed May 2002), Juan "Jun" Pala (Sept 2003) and Eliseo "Ely" Binoya (June 2004). The delegation also discussed the professional and security situation with approximately 15 local journalists, some of whom were regional officeholders of the NUJP. The delegation was told that the local police chief in General Santos City would attend the meeting, but was informed towards the end of the session that he had been called away on other urgent business.

In each case the widows told their stories, mainly in English, though sometimes in a mixture of English and the Philippine national language Tagalog. Mr Conde or Ms Labiste translated for the delegation.

This set a pattern for each of the regional visits - to Iloilo (26-27 January) where the siblings, children or widows of Eddie Suede (died 1985), Josef Nava (Oct 1988), Severino Arcones (Oct 1989), Rolando Ureta (Jan 2001) and Herson Hinolan (Nov 2004) spoke with the delegation and in Legazpi (28-29 January) where the families of John Villanueva (April 2003), Ruel Endrinal (Feb 2004), and Joy Militante (Aug 1997) met with the delegation.

The delegation was greatly assisted by a detailed file on each of the 63 murders of journalists - including the 13 in the past year - since the fall of the Philippines dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. In some cases, it was clear that the file maintained by the NUJP, often containing police reports and witness statements, was more extensive than that maintained by the local police. In one case a widow from Iloilo said that the fact-finding mission resulted in



Inday Espina-Varona, Gerard Noonan, Carlos H. Conde and Rustam F. Mandayun speak to the press in Manila about the findings of the IFJ International Fact-Finding & Safety Mission. The mission visited the Philippines between 23 January to 1 February to assess the situation and to make recommendations to bring an end to the violence aimed at journalists. The mission travelled across the country and spoke with 11 families of slain journalists, regional officials, local lawyers, the governor of one province, the regional director of the Philippines Human Rights Commission and scores of local journalists.



The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines holds a press freedom exhibit in Davao on 3 May 2004, commemorating the deaths of 55 journalists who have been killed since 1986. It also highlighted the culture of violence and impunity perpetuated by Government officials, by failing to bring the murderers to justice.

police approaching her for the first time since the murder of her husband. The Asia-Pacific office of the IFJ has more than 800 pages of documents relating to these deaths.

No two stories were exactly the same, although a broad pattern did emerge.

Typically the journalists worked for a local radio station where they reportedly broadcast very robust commentaries about events and prominent personages in their city or region. In a number of cases they were so-called 'block timers' - a term used to describe the practice of journalists buying periods of broadcast time (typically one, two or three hours) from radio station owners then on-selling it to either advertisers or sponsors. This practice will be discussed later in this report.

### Death threats and murder

The broadcasters had often been warned by their friends or wives (almost all journalists killed were male) that their commentaries would get them into trouble. In a number of documented cases, they had received death threats, either anonymous telephone calls or via text messages on their cell phones.

On leaving their place of work, often en route to home, they would be stopped at a set of traffic lights when an unidentified motor cycle with a pillion passenger would pull up, unleash a volley of shots and speed off. There have been some variations.

Take the case of Ely Binoya, killed on 17 June 2004 by four shots in the back by a pillion passenger on a motorcycle with a Colt 45 revolver while he was riding on the national highway on the outskirts of General Santos City. The pillion passenger assassin reportedly stepped off the motorcycle, approached the prone body lying in a ditch at the side of a road and fired three more shots directly into the mouth of the dying broadcaster.

In another, the victim, Reynaldo Bancairin, was gunned down while broadcasting in his radio studio DXLL on 29 March 1998 in the southern city of Zamboanga. In yet another, witnesses described how an area of their city - a poor neighbourhood - had been unexpectedly closed off by local authorities with road blocks just minutes before the murder, suggesting collusion between police and the killers.

Several other cases involve senior local police as suspects in the murders. In one case brought to the attention of the IFJ delegation, the police chief of a local town is presently cohabiting with the widow of a murdered broadcaster.

In Legazpi, the delegation was told by local journalists attending a press conference following interviews with the families of five murdered journalists from the region that the market for 'hit men' was a flourishing one and that US\$100 would buy a killer. A separate source suggested the price was as low as US\$80 in poorer regional areas.

### Justice denied

An examination of the 55 cases unearthed a most disturbing factor: over a period of almost 20 years, there had only been one conviction for murder. This was the murder of Frank Palma in Bacolod City on 25 April 1999. In every other case the killer or killers and those implicated in the murders in some way have remained at large.

When this statistic was raised with police (police investigator Eldy Bibit attended a delegation meeting in



Aphrodite Hinolan (centre), wife of slain broadcaster Herson Hinolan, meets with National Union of Journalists in the Philippines' (NUJP) director Diosababe Labiste and IFJ representative Gerard Noonan.

Iloilo while Provincial Police Chief Sr. Supt. Roque Ramirez and Regional Police Spokesman Supt. Jaime Milla met with the delegation in Legazpi) the response was that, as far as police were concerned, almost all of the cases had been 'solved'. They pointed out that, after the preliminary investigation of a murder, if a suspect had been identified and the file delivered to the office of the prosecutor, the matter was regarded as 'file closed' by the investigating police. It was rare for a suspect at that point to be arrested or held in detention.

This anomaly has led to a public exchange between NUJP officials Carlos Conde, Inday Espina-Varona and Ignacio Bunye, press secretary to the Philippines President Gloria Arroyo late last year when Mr Bunye disputed the claim that Philippines government had done little to deal with the murders. At the time Bunye claimed the government had achieved a highly successful clean-up rate - a claim repeated

### Apolinario "Polly" Pobeda

Apolinario "Polly" Pobeda was gunned down by two unidentified gunmen on motorcycles on 17 May 2003 as he made his way to work as a hard-hitting broadcaster on dwIT, a radio station in Lucena City, 70 km south east of Manila.

Pobeda, who had broadcast his program for the previous five years, had regularly criticised Lucena City mayor Ramon Talaga Jnr - using a fictional figure in his commentary - accusing that figure of corruption and involvement in the illegal drug trade.

He had received several death threats before his murder, according to his common law wife Rowena Morales, who'd asked him to tone down his broadcasts.

Five days after his murder, police arrested two suspects, brothers Eloy and Eric Patulay, who had other murder charges outstanding elsewhere in the Philippines. When the two were identified as bodyguards of the mayor's son Romano Talaga who is also a city councillor, the mayor insisted they were only 'volunteer campaign companions'. Three weeks later a third suspect was arrested, whom police said fired the shots that killed Pobeda.

The case has still not reached court.



NUJP Secretary General Carlos Conde addresses journalists during the IFJ Mission 2005. Journalists in the Philippines earn meagre salaries. Approximately 70 percent of those polled by the NUJP earned between US\$60 – US\$120 a month. The NUJP also monitored at least three major radio stations in Manila that laid off 200 staff only rehire them as volunteers, encouraged to solicit advertising from interview subjects.

by Chief Supt. Ramirez in Legazpi who insisted that in the six provinces for which he was responsible, more than 2,400 of the 2,600 cases of violent crime in the past year had been 'solved' - a clean up rate calculated at 89.7 percent Supt. Ramirez acknowledged that a case was 'solved' if the police had identified a suspect and had handed the file to the office of the Prosecutor. At that same meeting, the governor of the Albay province, Fernando Gonzales noted wryly: "The activity of the criminal justice system needs improvement - there have been some improvements but they have been far from successful."

Both Supt Ramirez and Governor Gonzales noted several recurring themes: poorly equipped police with inadequate forensic support and a difficulty in obtaining witness statements, which would hold up in a later court hearing.

There is a witness protection program in the Philippines - lauded by the government in Manila as part of its armoury in dealing with violent criminal activity - but it is so impractical as to be dangerously impotent in the view of the IFJ delegation.

To be part of the program in which a witness receives a small stipend, the witness is actually taken into police protective custody and kept there until a trial begins. In most cases, people can simply not afford to be in this position for weeks, months or even years before a matter possibly comes before the courts. In addition, with suspicion that corrupt police will provide unauthorised access to witnesses by representatives of the accused intent on silencing them, it is little wonder the system is seen as a sham. As if to underscore the dangers of this situation, three days after the delegation left the Philippines, a 42 year old school teacher and broadcaster Edgar Amoro, who was one of two remaining witness in the case of the May 2002 murder of Pagadian editor of the *Zamboanga Scribe* and *Mindinao Gold Star* and broadcaster on radio network DXKP Edgar Damalerio was gunned down. The other remaining witness and Damalerio's widow Gemma also fear for their lives.

Yet there is a deep-seated wish for a competent policing and judicial system, which is able to deliver a measure of competent resolution to these heinous crimes. The delegation was struck by the attitude of most widows or siblings of



Members of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines march in September 2003, protesting against the growing culture of violence towards journalists. Since 1986, there have been 66 recorded cases of the violent deaths of journalists working in the Philippines – 13 of these killed in 2004. In almost 20 years there has been only one conviction for murder. Journalists, also subjected to ambush, torture and illegal detention, believe the authorities' tolerance of this culture of violence is to blame for its escalation. One journalist told the IFJ mission that a local police chief had ordered the journalist to eat a copy of his own paper after he published a story criticising local officials.

murdered journalists that their main preoccupation, sometimes many years after the deaths of their loved ones, was not to receive monetary compensation for their loss but to achieve some form of justice. In the present circumstances in the Philippines, the delegation is pessimistic that their understandable yearnings can be satisfied.

### Hunter squads and a culture of violence

A chilling development emerged during the period the delegation visited the Philippines. The Mayor of Davao City in Mindanao, Rodrigo Duterte was reported in the local media as encouraging the formation of what are known as 'hunter groups' - in common parlance 'death squads' or 'vigilante squads'. Mr Duterte was reported as saying that if anyone wanted to form a hunter squad to clean up unruly elements in his city, he would 'turn a blind eye'. This supposedly tough "law and order" approach was reportedly mimicked by Tomas Osmena, mayor of the country's second largest city Cebu City within days.

At one media conference organised by the IFJ delegation on 26 January 2005, the tolerance of a culture of violence - even involving public officials such as mayors - was mentioned as a possible underlying cause of the upsurge in violence not only towards journalists but in the Philippines generally. *The Sun.Star*, a respected newspaper in Iloilo, reported the following week (6 Feb) that Mayor Duterte had lambasted the IFJ representatives, calling them 'idiots'. *The Sun.Star's* report continued: "Duterte advised the IFJ not to meddle with the city's internal affairs saying these foreigners have not contributed anything for the welfare of the Dabawenyos. The mayor then challenged the IFJ representatives to personally visit Davao City to see for themselves the so-called culture of violence existing in the city. 'Let them come to Davao and maybe they will become part of it,' Duterte said."

Elsewhere, a journalist from a small town outside the city of Legazpi in the central Philippines travelled for four hours to meet the delegation. His reason was simply to tell his story that the local police chief had forced him recently to eat a copy of his own newspaper which contained a report criticising local officials. The delegation has no way of verifying such an allegation but in the circumstances



prevailing in the Philippines, the story appeared to contain a grain of truth.

Other instances of unsavoury practices were brought to the attention of the delegation. Some journalists alleged their employers expected them to 'bend the rules' even to the point of accepting bribes or income from news sources. As Ms Espina-Varona noted: "An employer who encourages or allows their employees to do such things won't look after them when things go wrong."

### Economic conditions

By the standards of many comparable countries, the pay and conditions of journalists working in the Philippines media are variable and often meagre. A survey by the NUJP of experienced journalists in the provinces indicated that around 70 per cent of those polled earned between 3,500 and 7,000 Philippines pesos per month (US\$60-US\$120 per month). A number of journalists working for local papers reported to the delegation that their salaries were typically months in arrears, sometimes up to a year. Some newspapers employed mainly casual contributors and stringers. In radio - the medium by which most people in the Philippines receive news and current affairs, especially in regional areas - the situation is worse. Some reporters or 'talents' do not get paid at all but are told to hustle for advertisements from which they can charge a small commission. This situation is not confined to the provincial areas. Over the past three years, the NUJP has monitored at least three major radio stations in Manila, which have laid off 200 staff and then rehired them as 'volunteers' who are then encouraged to solicit advertisements from the subjects of their interviews.

### Block radio

At each place the delegation visited, it heard a similar story about the use and abuse of block timing on radio. As mentioned earlier, this practice involves journalists or broadcasters buying periods of time from radio station owners and reselling the time on commission to sponsors or advertisers. In one case in Albay, a station leased practically all its operational hours to blocktimes. The journalist or broadcaster is in effect a contractor, whose income is entirely or mainly dependent on the volume of advertising

or value of personal sponsorship he or she can generate. Typically the radio station owner or network takes 60 per cent of the amount with the remainder paid to the broadcaster. The likelihood that journalists' ethical standards will be placed under serious stress is high. It is very difficult to accept that a broadcaster/journalist whose income is dependent on pushing the merits of a particular public figure - albeit often in a creative and entertaining way - will be able to resist the pressure to offer partisan or biased coverage to the radio station's audience.

It should be pointed out that the Philippines radio medium is not alone in grappling with this pernicious problem. At a number of media conferences held during the mission, the delegation noted that other countries faced similar tensions. In Australia, for instance, there has been a continuing scandal known as 'cash for comment' where prominent radio personalities in Sydney had received more than US\$1 million for promoting or going soft on major corporate sponsors, without disclosing these payments to their listeners. While the delegation was visiting the Philippines, a similar scandal erupted in the United States where one Washington commentator for a prominent US publication was paid US\$10,000 to promote the political line enunciated by US President George Bush Jnr. As one journalist commented wryly at the briefings, the excesses of 'block radio' might make the dangers worthwhile if the level of remuneration was so high.

### An owner's responsibility

The media-owning umbrella organisations Philippines Press Institute (covering print) and Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (radio and TV) have claimed in numerous exchanges with the NUJP that their mandates from their constituents are restricted to handling ethical issues and they do not have the authority to deal with welfare or economic issues for their staff. In anyone's language, especially given the pernicious environment in which many journalists find themselves, this hardly represents a responsible or acceptable stance to adopt. The widespread practice of block radio and its built in conflict of interests is a particularly insidious factor which appears to have contributed to the culture of violence which has affected the profession in the Philippines.

At least one radio station, DZRC, Albay province does not produce its own programming and instead leases its operational hours to block timers.

### Conflicts of interest

In several cases which the delegation examined, the issue of conflict of interest over block radio was certainly an emerging problem. One broadcaster in Legazpi who was killed last year had in fact been a former deputy mayor of the city and had been prominent on radio in attacking policies of the incumbent mayor with whom he had apparently fallen out. According to journalists who discussed the matter with the delegation, the broadcaster/journalist was very robust in his criticisms of many prominent people in local and regional government. On two occasions, police representatives implied that the dead journalists had been involved in criminal activities or had close associations with the New People's Army or the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the membership of both organisations is classified as illegal

by the Philippines authorities. The delegation was in no position to test such hypotheses, and the glib assurances of the police were unconvincing.

While it was evident that not every single violent death of a journalist in the Philippines was the result of persecution of the individual involved because of their adherence to an internationally recognised code of ethics, the delegation consistently stressed to all government officials, police and journalists it met that the NUJP and the IFJ would, and could never, accept that the resolution of a difference of opinion or dispute should be through violence.

### Gun culture

The Philippine National Police, in response to pressure from journalists, announced on 6 August 2004 that laws would be

#### Edgar Damalerio

On 13 May 2002, Edgar Damalerio had left a press conference, travelling along a major road in Pagadian City in Zamboanga in the southern Philippines with two friends in his open vehicle. The friends had been accompanying the 32 year old for a week as a result of death threats he had recently received. Damalerio was



an award winning TV and radio broadcaster and editor of the *Zamboanga Scribe* newspaper (Golden Dove for best TV provincial public affairs in 2001). He had written and broadcast tough commentaries on local politicians, the provincial governor and police over graft and the failure to crack down on illegal drugs and gambling rackets.

Just after 8pm, a gunman travelling as a pillion passenger on a motorbike pulled up alongside the vehicle and shot him five or six times in the body and head. He was rushed to hospital in a police car, which attended the scene. He was dead on arrival. The two friends later identified a local policeman Guillermo Wapile as the assailant. Wapile worked in intelligence in the Pagadian city police station. Since then, Damalerio's wife Gemma has waged a campaign to bring the killers to justice. While other suspects were first arrested, Wapile was eventually arrested, kept under house arrest, then disappeared from police barracks and was reported to be living in Malaysia in 2003.

One of the two men who were with Damalerio when he died - a school teacher who was the main witness in the case - was shot dead outside his school in February 2005. The couple had a young daughter.



Gemma Damalerio, widow of Edgar Damalerio an award winning TV and radio broadcaster and editor of the *Zamboanga Scribe* newspaper.

relaxed to allow journalists to carry firearms in order to protect themselves from attacks.

The IFJ and the NUJP condemned this as irresponsible and counter-productive. The IFJ and the NUJP maintain that journalists are independent observers and should not be encouraged to be active combatants in an increasingly dangerous domestic environment.

The dangers facing journalists in many parts of the country has led some to the practice of carrying weapons, typically handguns, as self protection in the event of an attack. It is difficult to determine how widespread this practice is, but its evident inadequacy is indicated by at least one graphic instance shown to the delegation of the corpse of one journalist in police photos taken immediately after the murder. Clearly evident is a handgun stuck in the waistband as the body lies sprawled in a ditch. In Legazpi, the delegation was told by the regional police spokesman Milla, that carrying weapons was an uncommon practice and that his officers were under instruction to enforce a strict policy to deter citizens - including journalists - from carrying weapons. Only citizens who were members of registered gun clubs were allowed to bear weapons and then only under strict rules, he told the delegation.

At the same gathering where this conversation took place, a member of the delegation discussed this and other issues with the journalists present. One, a prominent and outspoken local radio commentator, indicated two bodyguards he had brought along to the meeting and then showed the delegation member a handgun under a loose-

fitting shirt, tucked into his trouser waistband. He said he never travelled without it and felt more secure as a result of his approach.

Elsewhere, in Cebu City, where the matter came under discussion at a meeting of journalists and managers at the *Sun.Star* newspaper, one highly respected younger journalist debated the issue strongly, arguing his right to carry arms in self defence. He said it was as much directed at common criminals such as thugs or muggers as against politically inspired vendettas. His stance clearly divided opinion among his newspaper colleagues with some supporting his approach and others arguing strongly against such a practice.

At each of the public hearings the delegation reminded all journalists present that the IFJ position on this issue was unambiguous: that the carrying of guns was not acceptable as a means of self defence or for any reason. The delegation pointed out that the Geneva conventions relating to war provided a special role and set of protections for civilians and journalists reporting conflict. However the conventions specifically exclude protection for journalists who carried arms or were dressed in military uniform.

The delegation was sympathetic to the plight of many journalists in the Philippines who face real dangers unimaginable in many other parts of the developed and the developing world. While it is understandable that journalists who feel threatened going about their daily lives will seek to minimise the dangers, the carrying of arms is not sanctioned by the wider community of journalists. It is clearly the task of the civil authorities in the Philippines to provide the sort of protections being sought by the journalists. On the evidence before the delegation, there is widespread unease and a sense among the Philippines journalist community that such confidence is misplaced.

### Ruel Endrinal

Ruel Endrinal broadcast political commentaries in Legazpi City, in the eastern Philippines. He was especially critical of the Governor of Albay province Francis Bichara. Just 50 metres from his home on 11 January 2004, as he walked to work to begin his early morning radio show on station dzRC, he was accosted



by two assailants who shot him in the body and five times in the mouth. According to his wife Mina, Endrinal had received death threats before the murder, which she linked to local politicians in Legazpi City.

The threats had been made through Endrinal's cell phone. Endrinal was a publisher of the *Bicol Metro News* and was a 'block time' radio journalist - a widespread practice whereby journalists are obliged to buy blocks of hours of radio time and on-sell the time and their talent to sponsors and advertisers. It is associated with many of the conflicts of interest which lead to violence. Governor Bichara denied being involved in the murder, confirming however he had been preparing a libel case against the broadcaster at the time of his death. The two assailants have not been found. The case is in limbo.

### Chilling effect

The general secretary of the IFJ, Aidan White has written about what he terms 'the chilling effect' that violence and the threat of violence have on proper journalistic practice. With little or no confidence that any perpetrators of the murders of journalists in the Philippines - whether killed for work-related issues or not - will be brought to justice, it is clear this chilling effect is at play. It is a tribute to the stoicism and professional integrity of so many journalists in the Philippines that their newspapers, radio, television and web-based news and current affairs coverage remains so robust in the face of such malevolent forces.

This apparent tolerance of a culture of violence was raised a number of times in meetings the delegation had with the families of dead journalists and other journalists who attended those meetings or media conferences. During the period the delegation was in the Philippines, the media coverage of the delegation's visit was considerable, with a number of major newspapers publishing prominent articles about the situation facing journalists and the activities and comments made by delegation members. While difficult to gauge accurately, there were somewhere in excess of 100 stories published in newspapers and scores of radio and television items and interviews broadcast in the 10 days leading up to and including the delegation's visit. Some of this material inevitably criticised government inaction or apparent tolerance towards the pervading culture of violence.



NUJP members march in Davao in September 2003 after more of their colleagues are targeted and killed. "It is a tribute to many journalists that continue to publish and broadcast hard-hitting reports criticising officials in the face of such malevolent forces," says the IFJ delegation.

### An opportunity missed

As noted earlier, the IFJ President had written to the office of the President of the Philippines prior to the delegation arriving. The letter sought an opportunity to discuss the issues with the government. During 2004, the President had inaugurated "Task Force Newsmen" in response to the murder of a journalist and had also, through the office of her press secretary Ignacio Bunye, promulgated a bounty which the government promised would be paid to anyone providing evidence which led to the conviction of a killer of a journalist.

During the visit, the office of the chair of the NUJP, Inday Espina-Varona received a telephone call from Mr Bunye's office indicating he planned to meet with the delegation on 1 February 2005. However on the morning of the meeting, the last day of the delegation's visit, Ms Espina-Varona's office received a call from Mr Bunye's office cancelling the planned meeting. The head of the delegation Mr Noonan spoke to an undersecretary in Mr Bunye's office who, noting the adverse coverage in the media that morning, offered regrets for the cancellation and added: "The Palace gives its assurance that we will not stop until the culture of violence is erased."

The delegation was deeply disappointed not to have been able to meet with a senior representative of the government on a matter of such importance. Noting that there are always competing demands on the time of public figures, it nevertheless expresses its concerns that the international delegation was not able to hear directly from the government or able to bring an international perspective to this matter. As the delegation had noted constantly, being

### A wife's tale

Grace Binoya's world shattered shortly after 2pm on 17 June 2004. Her husband Eliseo - whom everyone called Ely - was riding home on the national highway on the outskirts of General Santos City 400 km south of Manila. A red motorcycle weaved through the early afternoon traffic behind him. The pillion passenger pulled out a Colt 45 revolver and shot him four times in the back.

"He was not afraid to speak out," Mrs Binoya told the IFJ delegation. "He told me he'd been getting death threats but he didn't say from whom - I warned him to slow down, to tone down his commentaries, because it was dangerous."

When police arrived at the scene of the murder, Binoya's papers were strewn over the road. They were court documents - he'd been on his way back from the Prosecutor's office where he'd just lodged a formal complaint about being bashed by thugs allegedly employed by the local mayor Teodorico Padernillo. Binoya's tough commentaries on Radio Natin - part of the Manila Broadcasting Company -



Grace Binoya, widow of Ely Binoya, and the couple's son Eleazar speak with the IFJ mission about Ely's murder and how it has affected them.

had targetted Padernillo and corrupt local police officials.

"It's difficult to be without a husband. He was the breadwinner and I have no work right now. I don't know where to look for help."

Her son Eleazar, 15, sat quietly beside her. He is still at school, but without any family income, his educational options have come crashing down with his father's motorcycle.

The boy touched his mother gently on the shoulder as a single tear began to trickle down her cheek. "Eleazar looked up to him as an idol," she said simply. "We miss him - he was brave but a simple man."

Two hitmen, one a former police intelligence official, were arrested in August. The mayor has protested his innocence.

so highly-placed on a grim international list of journalist murders was no place for a country with the democratic credentials of the Philippines.

## Recommendations

The journalists and media community in the Philippines are looking to the international journalists community for solidarity and support. We must continue to supply it. We recommend the following:

1. THAT the IFJ urge all affiliates and colleagues to pressure the Philippines Government and on the unacceptable performance of the Philippines court and judicial system in prosecuting the 66 cases of killed journalists since 1986. We particularly urge affiliates whose country hosts a Philippines embassy to protest to the embassy.
2. THAT the IFJ Asia-Pacific office work with the NUJP to develop ongoing project support for the establishment of a safety office. The office would be responsible for: detailing and documenting actions taken in relation to existing murders; compiling information about new cases and drawing national and international attention to these despicable acts; lobbying at all levels of the Philippines governmental process and developing and delivering training programs for journalists on ethics, human rights, self-protection and how to cover hostile environments.
3. THAT the government widen its membership of the Task force Newsmen by considering the appointment of an outside party, such as a representative from the Philippines Commission on Human Rights, to ensure the organisation does not simply become a convenient inter-governmental agency to blunt the pressure when new incidents occur or already stalled progress on existing cases worsens.
4. THAT Philippines media employer organisations including the Philippine Press Institute (PPI) and the Kapisanan ng mgn Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP) do the following to protect their employees and their contributors; adopt a code of conduct, provide adequate training and insurance to their employees. A workable model code of practice developed by a responsible publisher can be found at [www.ifj-asia.org](http://www.ifj-asia.org)
5. THAT the KBP review the practice of 'block time' payments and the KBP and PPI take a more professional and responsible approach towards remuneration of their employees and contractors.
6. THAT the NUJP promote and journalists in the Philippines use - the NUJP hotline established to register threats of violence, including death threats, which have in many documented cases occurred prior to the murders of journalists.
7. THAT the Philippines Government closely engage in the promotion of appropriate grievance procedures for the public regarding the media, including the consideration of establishing a workable Press Council comprising representatives of the media proprietors, journalists and independent public members.
8. THAT the IFJ Asia-Pacific office develop ongoing project support to strengthen the media and journalists' rights in the Philippines.
9. THAT the IFJ consider providing assistance to journalists and their families through the Safety Fund and through the NUJP freedom fund.
10. THAT the IFJ Asia-Pacific office work with the NUJP to secure funding to translate *Live News: A Survival Guide for Journalists* into Tagalog.

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## Journalists killed in the Philippines since 1986

Name	News Organisation & City	Date of death	Name	News Organisation & City	Date of death
1 Pete F. Mabazza	Manila Bulletin	24 April 1986	39 Candelario 'Jhun' Cayona	DXLL Radio, Zamboanga City	30 May 2001
2 Wilfredo "Willy" Vicoy	Reuters	24 April 1986	40 Joy Mortel	Mindoro Guardian, Mindoro	31 May 2001
3 Florante "Boy" de Castro	DXCP Radio, General Santos City	1986	41 Benjaline "Beng" Hernandez	CEGP, Davao	5 April 2002
4 Dionisio Perpetuo Joaquin	Olongapo News	12 April 1987	42 Edgar Damalerio	DXKP, Zamboanga Scribe, Mindanao Gold Star, Pagadian City	13 May 2002
5 Narciso Balani	DXRA Radio, Davao City	27 August 1987	43 Sonny Alcantara	Kokus, Celestron Cable TV, San Pablo City	22 August 2002
6 Rogie Zagado	DXRA Radio, Davao City	27 August 1987	44 John Belen Villanueva, Jr.	DZGB Radio, Legazpi City	28 April 2003
7 Leo Palo	DXRA Radio, Davao City	27 August 1987	45 Apolinario "Polly" Pobeda	DWTI Radio, Lucena City	17 May 2003
8 Martin Castor	Pilipino Ngayon	28 August 1987	46 Bonifacio Gregorio	Dyaryo Banat, Tarlac	8 July 2003
9 Ramon Noblejas	DYVL Radio, Tacloban City	28 August 1987	47 Noel Villarante	The Laguna Score, DZJV	19 August 2003
10 Noel Miranda	Mindanao Scammer	29 March 1988	48 Rico Ramirez	DXSF Radio, Butuan City	20 August 2003
11 Ruben R. Manrique	Luzon Tribune, Bataan	12 August 1988	49 Juan "Jun" Pala	DXGO Radio, Davao City	6 September 2003
12 Josef Aldeguer Nava	Visayan Life Today, Iloilo	30 October 1988	50 Nelson Nadura	DYME Radio, Masbate City	2 December 2003
13 Severino Arcones	DYFM-Radyo Bombo, Iloilo	17 October 1989	51 Ruel Endrinal	DZRC Radio, Legazpi City	11 February 2004
14 Eddie Telan	Newscaster, Manila	1 December 1989	52 Eliseo "Ely" Binoya	Radyo Natin, General Santos City	17 June 2004
15 Reynaldo Catindig, Sr.	Northern Sierra Madre Express, Isabela	15 May 1990	53 Roger Mariano	DZJC-Aksyon Radio, Laoag	31 July 2004
16 Jean Ladrangan	Southern Star, General Santos City	8 July 1990	54 Arnnel Manalo	DZRH Radio, Bulgar, Batangas	5 August 2004
17 Nesino Paulin Toling	Panguil Bay Monitor, Ozamiz	14 April 1991	55 Jonathan Abayon	RGMA Superadyo, General Santos City	8 August 2004
18 Danilo Vergara	Philippine Post	1 July 1992	56 Fernando Consignado	Radio Veritas, Laguna	12 August 2004
19 Ladjid Ladja	Prensa Zamboanga	3 July 1992	57 Romy Binungcal	Remate, Bataan	29 September 2004
20 Rev. Greg Hapalla	DXAS Radio, Zamboanga	21 September 1992	58 Eldy Gabinales (Eldy Sablas)	DXJR-FM, Tandag, Suriago del Sur	19 October 2004
21 Gloria Martin	DXXX Radio, Isabela Basilan	30 December 1992	59 Gene Boyd Lumawag	MindaNews, Jolo, Sulu	12 November 2004
22 Romeo Andrada Legaspi	Voice of Zambales	11 January 1993	60 Herson Hinolan	Bombo Radyo, Kalibo Aklan	13 November 2004
23 Rosauro Lao	Cotabato News	22 November 1993	61 Michael Llorin	Freelance photojournalist, Manila	13 November 2004
24 Ding Sade	Cotabato News	22 November 1993	62 Allan Dizon	Freeman Cebu & Banat News, Cebu	27 November 2004
25 Ferdinand Reyes	Press Freedom, Dipolog City	12 February 1996	63 Stephen Omaois	Guru News Weekly, Kalinga	1 December 2004
26 Alberto Berbon	DZMM Radio, Manila	15 December 1996	64 Edgar Amoro	Freelance broadcaster, Pagadian City	2 February 2005
27 Evelyn Joy Militante	GMA Channel 2, Legazpi City	August 1997	65 Arnulfo Villanueva	Asian Star Express, Balita	28 February 2005
28 Daniel J. Hernandez	People's Journal Tonight, Manila	3 June 1997	66 Marlyne Garcia Esperat	Midland Review, Tacurong City	24 March 2005
29 Regalado Mabazza	Polaris cable network	17 December 1997			
30 Odilon Mallari	DXCP Radio, General Santos City	February 1998			
31 Rey Bancairin	DXLL Radio, Zamboanga City	29 March 1998			
32 Nelson Catipay	DXMY Radio, Cotabato	16 April 1998			
33 Dominador "Dom" Bentulan	DXGS Radio, General Santos City	30 October 1998			
34 Frank Palma	Bombo Radyo, Bacolod	25 April 1999			
35 Vincent Rodriguez	DZMM Radio, Pampanga	23 May 2000			
36 Olimpio Jalapit	DXPR Radio, Pagadian City	17 November 2000			
37 Rolando Ureta	DYKR Radio, Kalibo, Aklan	3 January 2001			
38 Muhammad Yusop	DXID Radio, Pagadian City	24 February 2001			

Note: This list is based on the databases of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, Bulatlat, the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, and the defunct Philippine Movement for Press Freedom, which monitored press freedom violations in the '80s. The list contains only those journalists who were killed – or were most likely killed – because of their journalism work. In cases where it is not clear whether the death was work-related, or when the authorities could not ascertain the motives behind the killing, NUJP shall assume that the killing was work-related, unless future evidence points to the contrary.

The International Federation of Journalists Safety Fund is the only solidarity fund of its kind in the world. The fund was established by journalists to provide humanitarian and legal assistance to colleagues and their families, who are often victims of violence and oppression. Recently the Fund supported the IFJ mission to the Philippines and a safety workshop for Filipino journalists. It is helping journalists and their families who have been victims of torture in Nepal and has provided direct humanitarian support to journalists and their families affected by the Asian tsunamis.

The IFJ will only be able to maintain this high level of assistance through continued donations to the IFJ Safety Fund. For more information on the Fund and how to donate please visit [www.ifj.org](http://www.ifj.org)





The IFJ is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation that promotes coordinated international action to defend press freedom and social justice through the development of strong, free and independent trade unions of journalists. IFJ Asia-Pacific coordinates IFJ activities in the Asia-Pacific region. The IFJ works closely with the United Nations, particularly UNESCO, the United Nations Human Rights Commission, WIPO and the ILO, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the European Union, the Council for Europe and with a range of international trade union and freedom of expression organisations. The IFJ mandate covers both professional and industrial interests of journalists.

Visit [www.ifj-asia.org](http://www.ifj-asia.org) or [www.ifj.org](http://www.ifj.org) for more information.