

A person is kneeling on the ground at night, surrounded by several lit candles. They are wearing a white t-shirt with the text 'STOP KILLING JOURNALISTS' printed on it. The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the flames of the candles. The person's hands are visible near the candles, and they appear to be participating in a vigil or protest.

The IFJ-NUJP Media Safety Office

THE FIRST EIGHT MONTHS
(November 2005 - June 2006)



The IFJ-NUJP Media Safety Office

THE FIRST EIGHT MONTHS

- Safety training
- Campaigning against state violations of press freedom
- Lobbying for journalists' safety
- Safety information for journalists
- Monitoring the safety situation of journalists
- MAY 31: Media in Black Day
- Researching for alternative ways of resolving complaints against media
- Organization
- Problems and resolutions

The IFJ-NUJP Media Safety Office

The establishment of a Media Safety Office was one of the recommendations of the international fact-finding mission sent by the International Federation of Journalists to the Philippines from January 23 to February 1, 2005. The mission, led by senior Australian journalist Gerard Noonan and Indonesia's Rustam F. Mandayun, visited Manila, General Santos, Cebu, Iloilo and Legazpi. It met with families and colleagues of 11 slain journalists, representatives of the police, the prosecutors' office, the local government, and the Commission on Human Rights.

The mission found that a culture of violence

and impunity – both tolerated and exacerbated by the Philippine government – has contributed to the murders of journalists since the fall of the Marcos regime in 1986.

A Safety Office, it deemed, is needed to deal with the attacks and implement safety training for journalists, as well as promote alternative ways of dealing with complaints against media.

Thus, the IFJ-NUJP Safety Office was formally set up in November 2005 under NUJP's Commission for the Protection of Journalists. It is generously funded by the Norwegian Union of Journalists and the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance of Australia.

The past eight months were unnerving and exhilarating months for Philippine media.

Unnerving because we saw a Manila-based newspaper raided, two critical radio programs closed down, major networks deployed with platoons of soldiers, and cabinet, military and police officials blatantly threatening media from airing and printing reports critical of the Arroyo government.

The year 2005 also ended with another appallingly high number of Filipino journalists (11) being murdered, and with the first half's figure showing that the trend has not abated.

They were exhilarating because despite the brazen attempts by government to stifle press freedom, we also saw the active response of journalists and their determination to protect this right.

Not unexpectedly, the NUJP was pushed to the forefront because of its credibility and independence that enabled it to work with various media groups; and its nationwide reach that allowed it to immediately respond to emergency situations.

Indeed, as events showed, the IFJ-NUJP Media Safety Office could not have been established at a better time.



SAFETY TRAINING

AMONG THE MAJOR ACTIVITIES LAUNCHED BY THE Safety Office was the Safety Trainors' Training held last April, participated in by 12 journalists. Three were from TV, five from print, three from online, and one from radio. There were six men and six women participants. Mike Dobbie of IFJ served as trainor.

The training led to the formation of a Safety Trainors' Pool whose members represent the different media sub-sectors (TV, radio, print and online). They also represented the major regions of the archipelago – Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. The trainors' pool is expected to help lighten the load of NUJP officers and allow intensive training schedules because of the availability of trainors. In the process of building the trainors' pool, the NUJP was able to tap journalists who were previously not part of its network.

A Safety Training Module was drafted prior to the training and parts of it were tested in the trainors' training workshop. This provided opportunity for the module to be critiqued and improved.

The Safety Module is divided into three major sections. Part one provides an overview of Philippine media, discusses the rights of journalists and the relationship of media ethics and safety. Part two focuses on practical safety tips during various types of coverage – disaster, street protests and armed conflict. Part three discusses the steps to be taken when a journalist is the deliberate target of an attack. Part four is all about responses: the correct emergency medical response; recognizing and overcoming work trauma; and how to document killings and threats and launch media safety campaigns.



(From top) Members of a workshop group prepare their report; IFJ trainor leads in assessing the workshop outputs; Participants discuss the safety training module deep into the night

The most significant feature of the Safety Module is how it takes into account the Philippine media situation, the actual problems that Filipino journalists confront during coverage, and the socio-political context under which we do our work – things that foreign security groups that conduct media risk awareness and safety trainings, no matter how professional, would not be able to fully grasp.

CAMPAIGNING AGAINST STATE VIOLATIONS OF PRESS FREEDOM

WITH NUJP'S UNCOMPROMISING STAND ON THE killings of journalists and other issues, it was but natural for it to lead the protest when the Arroyo government declared a state of national emergency on February 24 this year. (Ironically, it was also the 20th anniversary of the People Power revolution that toppled the Marcos dictatorship and restored democracy in the Philippines.)

Arroyo's Proclamation 1017 specifically blamed media for allegedly "recklessly magnifying the claims" of those who want to topple the Arroyo presidency.

Two days after Arroyo's declaration, the NUJP held the first of a series of nationwide consultations and fora attended by journalists. The jam-packed meeting resulted in unifying the Manila-based media on the threats posed by the state of national emergency.

Similar activities were held in the following areas:

LUZON: Baguio City in northern Philippines, Angeles City in Pampanga (Central Luzon), Lucena City, Quezon (Southern Tagalog), Legazpi City and Sorsogon City (Bicol region);

VISAYAS: Tacloban, Iloilo, Cebu and Bacolod, all major cities in provinces in central Philippines;

MINDANAO: Davao City, Cagayan de Oro, Pagadian, Dipolog and General Santos City.

These activities not only helped to educate the members of the industry on the perils of

Proclamation 1017 but enabled the Safety Office to gather information on how the emergency declaration has directly affected journalists in their work (the so-called chilling effect) and to document outright attendant violations. An example is the suspension of a radio broadcaster in Sorsogon because he interviewed a guerrilla leader during the state of national emergency. More common were the threats by military leaders against reporters who extensively cover the legal and underground opposition.

The NUJP was also among the several media groups that initiated the filing of a petition before the Court of Appeals holding several executive officials – Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita, then Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Arturo Lomibao, National Telecommunications Commission head Ronald Solis and Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez – responsible for pronouncements and issuances that seek to impose restrictions on the media.

Through NUJP's nationwide network, many individual complainants were able to join the petition.

Together with other organizations, the Safety Office



also supported the holding of a concert dubbed “Never Again! A Concert for Freedom” held March 16 at the University of the Philippines in Quezon City. Protest concerts are a popular form in the Philippines, the Filipinos being a race that loves music. It was attended by over 20,000 people, including a significant number of media practitioners.

The quick response of the NUJP to Proclamation 1017 and the subsequent assaults, helped in no small measure by the support of international media groups including the International Federation of Journalists, helped to create an uproar against the press freedom and civil liberties violations, leading to the lifting of the state of national emergency.



Columnist Conrado de Quiros speaks during the NUJP forum on the state of national emergency held February 26 at the Newsdesk Cafe in Quezon City. Sitting in the panel are (L-R) former UP Mass Communication dean Luis Teodoro, political analyst and columnist Manuel Quezon III, Leah Navarro of MediaNation, Karl Wilson of the Foreign Correspondents' Association of the Philippines and NUJP's Carlos Conde (only half-shown)

LOBBYING FOR JOURNALISTS' SAFETY

THE NUJP THROUGH THE SAFETY OFFICE

maintained an active communication line with the Philippine National Police. Its representatives have attended several formal and informal dialogs on media killings with the PNP. This has led to the government acknowledgement that there have indeed been 46 journalists killed since 2001, the year when President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo assumed presidency.

The PNP has also finally agreed to qualify their use of the word “solved” when reporting on the murder of journalists which in the past has led to misleading impressions of high conviction rate.

The Safety Office also coordinated with the Department of Justice in cases where the DOJ's witness protection program is needed. These were in the cases of the Demalerio, Amoro, Esperat and Agustin killings.

MAY 31: MEDIA-IN-BLACK DAY

WHEN PALAWAN BROADCASTER

Fernando “Dong” Batul was gunned down early morning of May 22 this year, the Safety Office dispatched a quick reaction team to Puerto Princesa City, Palawan to investigate and document the killing. When Batul was laid to rest a week later, it initiated simultaneous candle-lighting ceremonies in the country’s major cities in memory of Batul and other slain colleagues. All journalists were enjoined to wear black t-shirts as their way of expressing grief and outrage at the murder of another journalist.



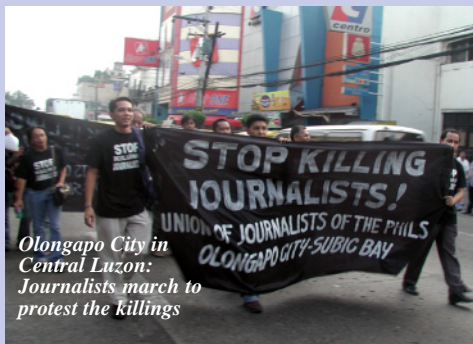
Manila:
79 candles for 79
slain journalists



The popular
broadcaster
Dong Batul,
wearing his
favorite shirt



Batul: Dead on
arrival at the
local hospital



Olongapo City in
Central Luzon:
Journalists march to
protest the killings



General Santos
City in Mindanao:
Calling for peace
and justice



Baguio City in
Northern Luzon:
Not even the rain
could keep the
protest candles
from being lit



Candles were lit at the site
where Batul was felled by
assassin's bullets

MONITORING THE SAFETY SITUATION OF JOURNALISTS

DOCUMENTATION. The Safety Office monitored and documented during the period 47 incidents of threats against journalists. Most were reported to the worldwide community through “Alerts” and statements which the IFJ and other international media organizations and institutions help disseminate. Some cases though, depending on their nature, are not projected but quietly documented. This is when publicity would put the concerned person at greater risk or when investigation of the case may be jeopardized.

QUICK REACTION TEAM. The Safety Office

dispatched Quick Reaction Teams (QRT) to investigate the killings of Tarlac journalist Orlando Mendoza, Manila photojournalist Albert Orsolino, Palawan broadcaster Fernando “Dong” Batul, Kidapawan journalist couple George and Macel Vigo, and Digos broadcaster Armando Pace.

HOTLINES. The NUJP hotlines continue to serve as a quick and effective way of informing the Safety Office of any attack or threat against journalists. One hotline each for Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao has been established, handled by responsible NUJP officers, to ensure quick

RAZED TO THE GROUND

Armed men wearing ski masks burned down radio station Radyo Cagayano dwRC 90.1 FM in Cagayan province last July 2.

Eight unidentified men, brandishing M-16 rifles and .45 caliber handguns, bound and gagged the radio station's six staff before pouring gasoline on the radio equipment and setting the place on fire. They wore combat boots, military type fatigues, and divers' watches.

Five of the six staff sustained injuries from the attack.

The NUJP, together with the World Association of Community Broadcasters, joined Radyo Cagayano's station manager in a press conference to condemn the attack on the community radio station which was set up by a local farmers' group.

The structure housing the station was itself built by farmers who took turns working on the building and contributed construction materials.

(L-R) Radyo Cagayano staff shows burns sustained from the attack; Charred remains of the station equipment; NUJP's Jose Torres Jr. condemns the incident as an attack against press freedom



Video grab of a local provincial official assaulting a journalist in full view of other members of media. The Safety Office released an alert and condemned the incident



response by the nearest chapter. Alerts are immediately issued once a report has been received and verified, as well as statements, if necessary. NUJP then coordinates with the responsible government agency, including the Police, DOJ and Commission on Human Rights.

ASSISTANCE TO JOURNALISTS UNDER ATTACK.

There have also been instances when the Safety Office has provided financial assistance and assisted in finding a safe haven for journalists at risk in their area, such as in the case of the broadcast journalists of the Cagayan radio station

burned down by elements believed to be army soldiers.

MONITORING OF CASES. The Safety Office, through its executive coordinator and NUJP chapter chairpersons, monitored active court cases of journalist killings. In the cases of the Agustin, Mariano, Hinolan and Damalerio trials, NUJP officers were present during the hearings.

SAFETY SITUATION REPORT. A quarterly safety situation report will be released by the Safety Office starting last quarter of 2006.

CLOSE MONITORING

Philip Agustin, publisher of the weekly community newspaper *Starline Times Recorder*, was gunned down in Dingalan town, Aurora province on May 10, 2005. A witness identified Dingalan town mayor Jaime Ylarde as the mastermind. Reports say Agustin was killed due to his report on the alleged disappearance of municipal calamity funds.

Despite this, the prosecution at first failed to include him in the murder charges. The family

and media groups protested, resulting in Ylarde being charged as co-conspirator. When the hearings started, observers saw the presiding judge's obvious bias in favor of Ylarde. A petition was filed before the Supreme Court to transfer the case from Baler, where the accused enjoys considerable political influence, to Manila.

The Safety Office closely monitored the case. When it seemed the judge would allow Ylarde to post bail, NUJP and the Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists attended the hearing, wearing black to express concern over the suspect's possible release.



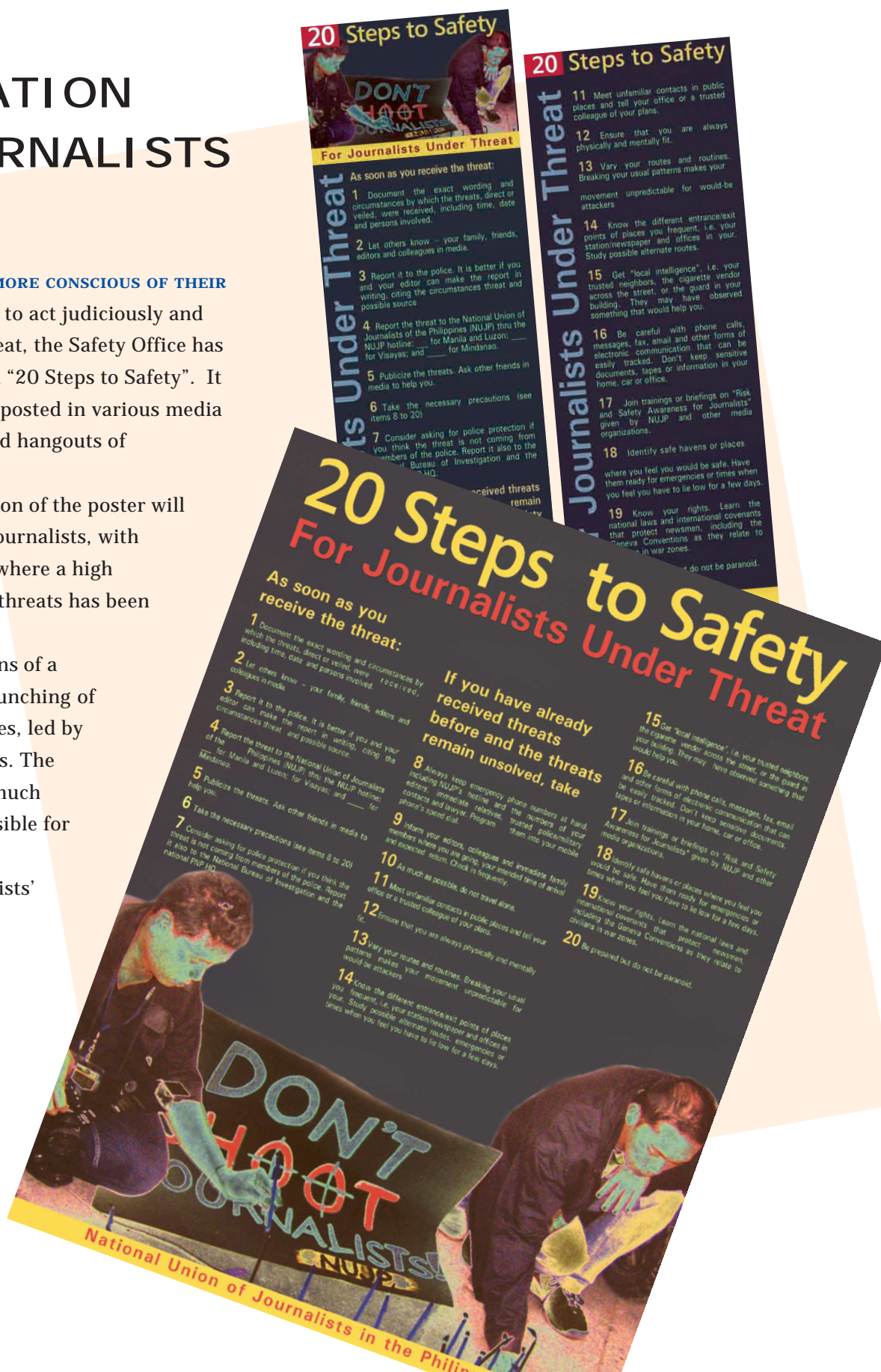
(L-R) Prosecutor argues with the judge during one of the hearings in Baler before the case was transferred to Manila; Baler reporters interview the main suspect; Journalists wear black during the hearing.

SAFETY INFORMATION FOR JOURNALISTS

TO MAKE JOURNALISTS MORE CONSCIOUS OF THEIR safety and enable them to act judiciously and calmly when under threat, the Safety Office has designed a poster titled “20 Steps to Safety”. It will be distributed and posted in various media offices, press offices and hangouts of journalists.

A wallet-size version of the poster will also be distributed to journalists, with priority given to areas where a high number of attacks and threats has been documented.

There are also plans of a simultaneous public launching of the poster in major cities, led by the local NUJP chapters. The objective is to gain as much media attention as possible for wider dissemination of information on journalists' safety.



RESEARCHING FOR ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF RESOLVING COMPLAINTS AGAINST MEDIA

THE SAFETY OFFICE HAS STARTED A STUDY ON the existing mechanisms to resolve complaints against the press. Initial discussions among the NUJP directors have been made on feasible

models to implement. Assessments of existing press councils have been gathered so as to study the failures and successes of similar initiatives.

ORGANIZATION

THE IFJ-NUJP MEDIA SAFETY OFFICE WAS formally set up in November 2005 under the supervision of NUJP's Commission for the Protection of Journalists. It is manned by an executive coordinator (former associate editor of a newsweekly and with extensive background on human rights NGO work) and a campaign staff (with Law education), assisted by the NUJP directors and chapter officers.

A system of documentation has been put in

place, with documentation forms on various types of violations designed. But while the national officers and the Safety Office personnel are already familiar with the system, there is a need to conduct a documentation and alerts reporting training, with each chapter sending at least one representative. This will help level off the understanding of NUJP members on how to document and report alerts and make the work of the Safety Office more efficient.

PROBLEMS AND RESOLUTIONS

- To maximize the nationwide network of NUJP and for greater efficiency in documentation, an alerts reporting and documentation training is recommended.
- Come out with quarterly reports on the safety situation, to be disseminated to the public, national and international.
- Improve the website as one the primary information and education tools for journalists' safety.
- Closely coordinate with IFJ for alerts.
- Send quarterly reports to IFJ, the Norwegian Union of Journalists and the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance.

Officers of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, 2006-08

Chairperson	:	Jose Torres Jr., managing editor of GMA-News.tv
Vice chairperson	:	Sonny Fernandez, executive producer of Sentro (primetime news), ABC-5
Secretary- General	:	Rowena Carranza-Paraan, coordinator of the International Federation of Journalists-NUJP Manila Safety Office; former associate editor of Philippine Graphic magazine
Deputy Secretary-General	:	Nonoy Espina, editor, INQ7.net
Treasurer	:	May Rodriguez, freelance journalist
Auditor	:	Artemio Dumlao Jr., Baguio correspondent of Philippine Star and Associated Press; chairperson of NUJP-Baguio

Other members of the National Directorate:

- Inday Espina-Varona, editor in chief, Philippine Graphic magazine
- Nestor Burgos, correspondent for Iloilo, Philippine Daily Inquirer; chairperson of NUJP-Iloilo (Visayas)
- Maureen Japzon, reporter, Eastern Times (Leyte)
- Diosa Labiste, correspondent for Iloilo (Visayas), Philippine Daily Inquirer
- Grace Albasin, correspondent for Cagayan de Oro (Mindanao), Philippine Daily Inquirer
- Bobby Labalan, correspondent for Sorsogon (Southern Luzon), Philippine Daily Inquirer; chairperson of NUJP-Sorsogon
- Rommel Rebolledo, correspondent for General Santos City (Mindanao), Philippine Star; chairperson, NUJP-General Santos
- Marlon Ramos, correspondent for Laguna and Batangas (Southern Luzon), Philippine Daily Inquirer; Secretary-General of NUJP-Laguna
- Ansbert Joaquin, correspondent for Subic/Olongapo (Central Luzon), Philippine Daily Inquirer

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