

24 September 2025

Dear President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.,

We, 255 journalists and representatives from news and media organisations around the world, respectfully urge you to take decisive action to end the persecution of Filipino journalist Frenchie Mae Cumpio, and uphold press freedom in the Philippines, in a case that has become symbolic of the struggle for independent journalism worldwide.

For more than five years, Cumpio has been held in detention on trumped-up charges of illegal possession of firearms and financing terrorism that could see her sentenced to 40 years in prison. She remains in prison even though she has not been convicted of any crime. Serious flaws have been documented in her case, including her court testimony that weapons were planted by local authorities to justify her arrest. She is also facing additional fabricated “double murder” charges in another case marred by irregularities and baseless accusations. At 26, Cumpio embodies the courage and determination of a new generation of Filipino journalists. Despite surveillance, harassment, and threats in the months leading to her arrest, she fearlessly reported on military abuses and human rights violations. Her ordeal highlights the deeply troubling practice of “red-tagging,” whereby journalists are branded as subversives or terrorists simply for covering sensitive issues.

As her trial nears its conclusion, with the next hearing scheduled for 29 September 2025, the urgency to act has never been greater. We share the concerns on her case expressed by the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, as well as UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression Irene Khan, who denounced her prolonged detention. These calls have been further amplified by the #FreeFrenchieMaeCumpio coalition, composed of international and Filipino press freedom organisations.

Mr. President, in April 2024, you stated that “*national interest is better served by a press that is critical rather than a press that is cooperative.*” Cumpio exemplifies precisely this vision: a journalist committed to exposing abuses in order to strengthen democracy. Her continued detention is not only a denial of justice but also a contradiction of your stated commitment to press freedom.

Cumpio is currently the only journalist imprisoned in the Philippines for her work. As the country prepares to assume the ASEAN chairmanship in 2026, demonstrating the highest respect for human rights is both urgent and necessary.

That is why we, 255 journalists from the Philippines and across the globe, urge you to use your authority to direct the Department of Justice (DoJ) to drop all charges against Cumpio and immediately restore her freedom.

Signed by:

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5. Adrian Puse, News Producer, Altermidya (Philippines)
6. Adrienne Fichter, Investigative Tech-Reporter, Republik (Switzerland)
7. Agatha Rabino, Manila Today (Philippines)
8. Aika Rey, Data Journalist (Philippines)
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17. Andrea Jobelle Adan, Editor, Pinoy Weekly (Philippines)
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36. Beth Frondoso, Rappler (Philippines)
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39. Carlo Manalansan, Photo Editor, Bulatlat (Philippines)
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56. Diego Delfino Machin, Director, Delfino (Costa Rica)
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58. DJ Yap, Newsdesk Chief, Inquirer (Philippines)
59. Dominic Gutoman, Community Manager, Bulatlat (Philippines)
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61. Dwight de Leon, Rappler (Philippines)
62. Elessar Sarmago, Contributor, Bulatlat (Philippines)
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64. Elly Burhaini Faizal, Online Editor, Jakarta Post (Indonesia)
65. Emmanuel Bacarra, Reporter, Kodao Productions (Philippines)
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89. Irsyan Hasyim, Journalist, Tempo (Indonesia)
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126. Kath Cortez, Reporter, Davao Today (Philippines)
127. Kenneth Guda, Contributing Editor, Altermidya (Philippines)
128. Kim Quitasol, Managing Editor, Northern Dispatch (Philippines)
129. Klarenz Palomer, Manila Today (Philippines)

130. Kyle Enero, Editor, Aninaw Productions (Philippines)
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136. Lotfullah Najafizada, Founder and CEO, Amu TV (Afghanistan/United States)
137. Lu Min Lwin, Data Journalist (Myanmar)
138. Lucelle Bonzo, Executive Director, Davao Today (Philippines)
139. Luviana Ariyanti, Editor-in-Chief, Konde.co (Indonesia)
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141. Ma. Victoria Conde Bulatlat Contributor and BicoldotPH Lead of Content Operations (Philippines)
142. Macel Ingles, Pinoy Portal Europe Editor-in-Chief (Norway)
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197. Rey Anthony Ostria, Editor-at-Large, Bicol dot PH (Philippines)
198. Reynard Magtoto, Editor, Baretang Bikolnon (Philippines)
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211. Roy Barbosa, Manila Today (Philippines)
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246. Voltaire Tupaz, Co-founder, FYT Media (Philippines)
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250. Yasmin Coles, Freelance Journalist (Philippines)

251. Ye Aung Thu, World Press Photo Award-winning Journalist (Myanmar)
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