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[Foundation for Media Alternatives' statement on press freedom and free speech](#)

The Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA) condemns all attempts to suppress press freedom in the Philippines. As advocates of human rights and communication rights, FMA believes that freedom of the press and of expression are fundamental to civil liberty and must be upheld especially at a time when the very foundations of democracy are under threat.

On January 15, 2018, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) [revoked the registration](#) of Rappler, an online media organization in the Philippines. The next day, a subcommittee at the House of Representatives [proposed to amend](#) Article III, Section 4 of the 1987 Constitution to specify “responsible exercise” as a qualifier for constitutionally protected speech. These two incidents come at the tail end of a series of attacks against Philippine media. In numerous occasions, President Rodrigo Duterte himself has directly [threatened to block the renewal](#) of ABS-CBN’s franchise. In one instance, [Duterte offered to arrive at a compromise](#) provided that ABS-CBN promotes federalism. Even the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, which has been a staunch critic of Duterte’s war on drugs, was not spared and the renewal of its broadcast franchise [was left to languish in Congress](#) after it expired. This, while the administration builds [a close circle of bloggers and opinion makers](#), a select few favored, accredited and resourced by government agents.

Thus, the defense that the Rappler lockdown is an isolated case simply cannot stand. The government has made its message loud and clear: support our agenda or lose your right to operate.

It is time we reclaim our voices and speak back.

Mass media is often referred to as the Fourth Estate, watchdogs against tyranny and a pillar of democracy. It is a major piece in the elaborate system of checks and balances established to prevent abuse of power. Without a free press, without a public sphere that encourages difference and dissent, individual forces increase their capacity to manipulate and monopolize public opinion. Such is exactly how authoritarian regimes are born. This is why we cannot let any attempt to curtail press freedom—however small or “isolated” they may be—simply come to pass.

FMA has always been resolute in its commitment to [uphold the freedom of the press](#), and we will continue to do so. Under international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Republic of the Philippines is bound to protect the freedom of expression and of the press. But when the State itself emerges as a threat to these freedoms, it is up to civil society and the public to defend them.



We, at FMA, therefore call on the Filipino public to continue to stand its ground against the creeping crackdown of the free press masked as legitimate regulation of mass media ownership. This constitutes indirect media censorship masked as regulatory oversight, with a sinister objective of silencing dissent and free expression. #

#StandWithRappler #DefendPressFreedom

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