



JOINT STATEMENT ON THE UNSOLVED MURDER OF PROMINENT PHILIPPINE JOURNALIST GERRY ORTEGA

September 11, 2024 - A coalition of three international press freedom organizations on Wednesday called for a swift and impartial trial after fugitive ex-governor Joel T. Reyes [surrendered himself](#) to the authorities in connection with the 2011 murder of Philippine broadcast journalist Gerry Ortega.

“This is long overdue. Former governor Joel T. Reyes has evaded justice for more than 13 years, there must be a swift and impartial trial now without any further delay,” said the coalition, consisting of Free Press Unlimited (FPU), the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), and Reporters Without Borders (RSF), in a statement.

“We hope this new development brings justice a step closer for the Ortega family and call on the Philippine authorities to do everything they can to ensure justice is delivered for this senseless murder. The international community will be watching the trial closely, as the Ortega murder is emblematic of the entrenched impunity in media killings in the Philippines.”

Ortega, an environmental journalist based on the island of Palawan in the Philippines, reported on corruption within the administration of ex-Palawan governor Reyes before he was murdered in 2011. Reyes had been in hiding despite an arrest warrant issued against him in 2023.

Reyes' surrender came after a successful legal bid to have his trial transferred to a court in Quezon City, near the capital Manila. The Ortega family had wanted the trial to stay in Palawan, but a Philippine court recently rejected the family's legal plea. No date has been fixed for the start of the Reyes trial in Quezon City.

The three press freedom groups - who together form the 'A Safer World for the Truth' initiative - [met with](#) the Philippine authorities in Manila earlier this year to present new leads that could lead to the arrest of Reyes. The coalition has investigated the Ortega case since 2020 which showed damning evidence of Reyes' role in the journalist's murder. Since 1992, 96 journalists have been [killed](#) in connection with their work in the Philippines.

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Spokespeople are available for interviews in English:

Free Press Unlimited (Amsterdam): Jos Bartman bartman@freepressunlimited.org

Committee to Protect Journalists (Frankfurt/New York): Beh Lih Yi, lbeh@cpj.org; press@cpj.org

Reporters Without Borders (Taipei/Paris): Aleksandra Bielakowska, abielakowska@rsf.org

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A Safer World For The Truth is a collaboration between Free Press Unlimited (FPU), Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). We investigate murders through a series of cold case investigations to push for justice on the national level, and we organize the People's Tribunal on the Murder of Journalists to put a spotlight on states' obligation to protect journalists and to investigate all attacks against them. To learn more about the project, visit our website <https://www.saferworldforthetruth.com/>.

Please see [A Safer World for the Truth report](#) about Gerry Ortega's case published in 2022.

About the partners:

Free Press Unlimited (FPU): Free Press Unlimited is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Free Press Unlimited helps local journalists in conflict areas to provide their audience with independent news and reliable information. The information that people need to survive and give shape to their own future. – freepressunlimited.org

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ): The Committee to Protect Journalists is an independent, nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide. Based in New York, we defend the right of journalists to report the news safely and without fear of reprisal. – cpj.org

Reporters Without Borders - known internationally as Reporters sans frontières (RSF) - is an international non-profit organisation at the forefront of the defence and promotion of freedom of information. RSF acts globally for the freedom, pluralism, and independence of journalism and defends those who embody those ideals. Recognised as a public interest organisation in France since 1995, RSF has consultative status with the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and the International Organisation of the Francophonie (OIF). Founded in 1985 and headquartered in Paris, RSF has 13 country sections and bureaus, including a bureau in Taipei and section in Berlin, and a network of correspondents in more than 130 countries.