

Manila Editors Discuss Media's Role and Performance in Reporting Human Rights

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Eleven print, online, and broadcast editors and officials of national media organizations were brought together in Quezon City on June 24 to discuss human rights coverage in Philippine journalism.

Participants included Joy delos Reyes, editor-in-chief of Malaya; Nora Gamolo, senior desk editor of the Manila Times; Malou Mangahas, executive director of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ); Jaileen Jimeno, PCIJ deputy executive director; Gina Abellera, research group manager of DZMM; Malou Bartolome, senior news editor of GMA Network; Jose Pavia, executive director of the Philippine Press Institute; Rey Hulong, executive director of the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas; Jose Torres, editor/OIC of GMA News.TV and the chairperson of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP); Raffy Jimenez, GMA News.TV city editor; and Rowena Paraan, NUJP secretary general and Philippine Human Rights Reporting partner.

While sound instances of reporting were cited, the consensus was that improved awareness and training on human rights were needed alongside better reporting skills generally.

"In our organization, we recognize the need to improve on how we report, whether on human rights, economy or other issues," KBP's Hulong said. "We agree that there is a problem in reporting but we need to identify where the key challenge is. Is it in content, skill or the manner of reporting?"

The editors agreed that improved sources on human rights stories were needed. Since these are not necessarily spot or hard news stories, media should develop closer links with civil society and those groups which represent and speak for ordinary people, particularly marginalized groups.

Project director Alan Davis suggested a core challenge was not to make human rights stories appear contrived so much as root as an integral part of daily media coverage across the country.

He said that given the government and the NGO community hold fully contrasting views on the state of human rights adherence in the Philippines, people at home and abroad look to the media to try and find out the degree to which implementation and protection of human rights is actually occurring and to highlight instances where there are both problems and improvements.

On big issues or themes like alleged massacres, extra judicial killings or enforced disappearances, he said, the media should provide an ongoing narrative to find out what is happening on the cases and to help counter the prevailing sense of impunity.

The editors recommended the following to further improve human rights reporting:

- continue debates and dialogues such as this to identify gaps and solutions
- come up with an instructive guide on human rights reporting especially on the areas of sourcing and verification
- document experiences in covering human rights in the Philippines and the subjects covered

The editors agreed that despite problems in human rights reporting, there is still room for improvement. Journalists in many parts of the country are hungry for training to raise standards in ethics and professionalism in the media, they said.