

(Open Letter)

23 May 2010

Her Excellency Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo

President

Republic of the Philippines

Hon. Juan Ponce Enrile

President of the Senate

Republic of the Philippines

Hon. Prospero Nograles

Speaker of the House of Representatives

Republic of the Philippines

In a few weeks, the Philippines will see a newly elected government formally proclaimed. We congratulate the Philippines for the orderly conduct of the recently concluded national elections.

Before the government is formally turned over to new leadership, there is one crucial act that we, organizations and individuals from around the world, would like to support your leadership on. As advocates of freedom of expression, of the press, and of information, we have been following closely the Philippine movement for the passage of the Freedom of Information Act. We view the adoption of legislation giving effect to the right to information as fundamental to the respect of all human rights, as well as to democracy. Transparency in the public sector enables meaningful participation, promotes accountability, mitigates corruption, and contributes to the realization of personal and collective goals.

Article III, Section 7 of the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines guarantees this key right, and we understand that this constitutional guarantee has been used in the Philippines to give direct effect to this right. At the same time, experience around the world demonstrates that implementing legislation is needed to give full effect to the right, including by spelling out procedures for its exercise and by describing the exceptions in detail.

We support you and the Filipino people in your effort to pass the proposed Freedom of Information Act, as approved by the bicameral conference committee of the Philippine Congress. If passed, this will be a historic piece of legislation. In Southeast Asia, only Thailand and Indonesia have enacted a right to information law. Should the Philippine push succeed, this will not only benefit Filipinos but will also provide direction and momentum to the whole Southeast Asia region.

As the term of Congress and of the Presidency enter its "home stretch", however, we are also aware that the window of opportunity for passing the FOI Act is fast closing. We join Philippine groups advocating for the passage of the FOI Act in looking to your leadership as President of the Republic, Senate President, and Speaker of the House of Representatives, respectively, to ensure the ratification of the bicameral conference committee report when Congress resumes session on 24 May, and the signing of the FOI Act into law by the President immediately thereafter.

The international movement for free expression, press freedom, and the right to information assure you of our support. We are in solidarity with the Filipino people in anticipating your success in adopting the Freedom Information Act. This will no doubt put the Philippines solidly along the path of strong democracy and enhanced governance, and allow for the greater participation of all Filipinos in true nation-building.

Thank you very much.

Respectfully yours,

(Organizations)

1. ARTICLE 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression
2. Acces-info Center (Moldova)
3. Access Info Europe
4. Access to Information Programme (Bulgaria)
5. Alliance of Independent Journalists (Indonesia)
6. Analytica Montenegrina (Montenegro)
7. Arab Freedom of Information Network
8. Associação Brasileira de Jornalismo Investigativo
9. Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression of Egypt
10. Association of Civil Rights (Asociación por los Derechos Civiles)
11. Association of Independent Electronic Media
12. Bahrain Center for Human Rights
13. Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC)
14. Campaign for Freedom of Information (UK)
15. Canadian Journalists for Free Expression
16. Cartoonists Rights Network International
17. Center for Independent Journalism (Romania)

18. Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility
19. Center for Media Studies & Peace Building
20. Centre for Independent Journalism (Malaysia)
21. Centre for Law and Democracy (Canada)
22. Centro de Acceso a la Información de Uruguay
23. Citizens' Campaign for Right to Information (Nepal)
24. Ethiopian Freepress Journalists' Association
25. Exiled Journalists Network
26. Freedom Forum (Nepal)
27. Freedom House
28. Freedom of Information Center (Armenia)
29. Fundacion Pro Acceso
30. Fundar, Centro de Análisis e Investigación, A.C.
31. Globe International
32. Independent Journalism Center
33. Index on Censorship
34. Information First (Nepal)
35. Institute for Information Freedom Development (Russia)
36. Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety
37. Institute for the Studies on Free Flow of Information (Indonesia)
38. International Federation of Journalists
39. Institute of Mass Information
40. International Press Institute
41. Lebanese Transparency Association
42. Legal Aid Foundation (Indonesia)
43. Media Foundation for West Africa
44. Media Institute of Southern Africa
45. Media Rights Agenda
46. Mizzima News
47. National Security Archive (USA)
48. Network for Affirmation of NGO Sector - MANS (Montenegro)

49. Network for Reporting on Eastern Europe
50. Observatoire pour la liberté de presse, d'édition et de creation
51. Pacific Freedom Forum
52. Pacific Islands News Association
53. Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms
54. Privacy International
55. PRO MEDIA (Macedonia)
56. Public Association "Journalists"
57. Reporters Without Borders
58. South African History Archives
59. Southeast Asian Press Alliance
60. Sustentia, Spain
61. Transparência Brasil
62. Transparency International (Philippines)
63. Transparency International – Secretariat
64. Transparency Program of OSI-AF (Azerbaijan)
65. Water Governance Institute (Uganda)
66. West African Journalists Association
67. World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters

(Individuals)

Amin Shabana from Visi Anak Bangsa (VAB), Jakarta, Indonesia.

Atmakusumah Astraatmaja, Senior Journalist, Magsaysay Award Awardee

David Goldberg

DR. T. Mulya Lubis, Senior lawyer, Human rights activist

Goenawan Mohamad, Senior journalist

Heru Hendratmoko, Journalist, Program Director, Radio News Agency 68H

Hon Andreas Parera MP, Parliament member, Indonesia (Ret.)

Hon Helmy Fauzi MP, Parliament member, Indonesia

Hon Nursyahbani Katjasungkana MP, Parliament member, Indonesia (Ret.)

Irawan Saptono, Executive Director, ISAI

Jaleswari Pramodawardhani, Military expert, Indonesian Institute of Sciences

Johnny Simanjuntak, Commissioner, National Commission of Human Rights (Indonesia)

Kyu Ho Youm, School of Journalism and Communication, University of Oregon

Nezar Patria, Journalist, Chairman, AJI

Patra M. Zen, Lawyer, Human Rights activist, Chairman, Indonesian

Santoso, Journalist, Chief Executive Director, Radio News Agency 68H

Tanti Budi Suryani, Tifa Foundation, Indonesia

Tedjabayu, Deputy Executive Director, ISAI

Walter Keim, Norway

Wiratmo Probo, Program Director, ISAI

Yosep Adiprasetyo, Commissioner, Vice chairman, National Commission of Human Rights (Indonesia)