

12 AUGUST 2021 - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Maria Ressa's Legal Team Welcome Dismissal of Libel Charge against Maria Ressa in the Philippines**

On behalf of the international legal team representing award-winning journalist Maria Ressa, Amal Clooney and Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC welcomed the dismissal of a spurious libel prosecution that had been filed against her. This development follows the dismissal of another libel charge [just two months ago](#).

This latest case arose out of public interest reporting by Rappler.com concerning whistleblower reports of alleged corruption at a leading university - De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde - in Manila. The university issued a statement at the time of the article confirming that it was itself investigating the allegations. Full details of the comprehensive fact-checking undertaken by the report's author, Rappler journalist Rambo Talabong, can be found in [a previous press release concerning this case](#). Ms Ressa herself had no involvement in the writing, editing or publication of the report, and indeed recused herself as she sat as a member of the Board of Trustees of the College, a fact she disclosed to her editors to avoid a potential conflict of interest.

At a short hearing this week, on Tuesday 10 August 2021, the court dismissed the case "with prejudice," meaning that the complainant, Mr Pineda, cannot file a new claim in respect of Rappler's report. The dismissal followed Mr Pineda's indication that he no longer wished to pursue the claim.

Yet, Ms Ressa and Rappler still face a barrage of seven separate criminal and civil proceedings launched in response to their public interest journalism, including [a remaining sentence of up to 6 years for libel](#) that is currently on appeal.<sup>1</sup> Together, they expose Ms Ressa to a lifetime behind bars and have provoked international condemnation, including from the USA, the UK, Canada, the UN, the EU and the [Media Freedom Coalition of States](#).

In December 2020, Ms Ressa was [specifically identified by the US Congress](#) for protection under legislation directing the imposition of sanctions on foreign government officials involved in the intimidation of independent journalists, and the US Department of State's most recent Report on the Philippines has [expressed concern](#) that Rappler "*continued to be a target of substantial pressure*" from the authorities in Manila. Just last month, in an [open letter to the US Secretary of State](#), a number of US Senators condemned the cases against Ms Ressa and Rappler as "*lay[ing] bare the systemic and coordinated attempts to silence journalists, political opposition, and human rights defenders*." In June 2020 the European Union External Action Service [raised concerns](#) that the treatment of Ms Ressa "*raised serious doubts over the respect for freedom of expression as well as for the rule of law in the Philippines*" and, in a joint motion for a resolution in September 2020, the European Parliament also [called for](#) all "*politically motivated charges*" against Ms Ressa and her colleagues to be dropped. The UN [has highlighted](#) "*the staggering cost of the relentless and systematic assault on the most basic*

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<sup>1</sup> Until these two recent dismissals, Ms Ressa and Rappler were facing nine separate sets of criminal and civil proceedings, with a further criminal libel charge [dismissed by prosecutors](#) back in 2019 for lack of probable cause.

*rights of Filipinos at the Government” and the need for “robust intervention” by the international community.*

Responding to the latest dismissal, Ms Clooney said:

*“Two down, seven to go. The cases against Maria have been piling up for years, each one as baseless as the other. It is a vindication to see a Philippine court dismiss this latest libel case with prejudice, and by doing so restore faith in the rule of law. Let’s hope that this sets a precedent for judges protecting freedom of the press in other cases as well.”*

Ms Gallagher QC said:

*“Independent journalism in the Philippines is needed now more than ever, but it is also under threat like never before. Maria Ressa and other brave journalists face intimidation, imprisonment, violence and threats simply for doing their jobs. The dismissal of this baseless cyberlibel prosecution against Ms Ressa is a welcome chink of light in this otherwise dark picture. Now is the time for the international community to take robust, concrete action to ensure all other proceedings against Ms Ressa are halted, and the Philippines is held to account.”*

Ms Ressa said:

*“Another criminal case against me and our reporter has been dropped. It's a temporary relief, but the ongoing campaign of harassment and intimidation against me and Rappler continues. These ridiculous cases remind us all of the importance of independent journalism holding power to account. Now we at Rappler can focus on what we do best - journalism.”*

The international legal team now reiterates its call for the remaining abusive cases against Ms Ressa and Rappler to be dropped.

Ms Clooney and Ms Gallagher QC lead the international counsel team acting for Ms Ressa, working with fellow barristers Can Yeginsu and Claire Overman. The team is also working closely with Peter Lichtenbaum, Stephen Rademaker, Rani Gupta and Lisa Peets of Covington & Burling LLP, as well as Ms Ressa’s counsel team in Manila.