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**Honorable Irene Khan**  
**UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression**  
**United Nations**

To the Hon. Irene Khan:

Warm greetings from the Altermidya Network in the Philippines!

We are a national network of independent media in the Philippines, and we would like to bring attention to the plight of our detained colleague, **Frenchie Mae Cumpio**.

Frenchie Mae, a 24-year-old community journalist based in Eastern Visayas, was arrested on February 7, 2020 over charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives; terrorist financing; and a civil forfeiture case filed by the anti-money laundering council.

Prior to her arrest, Frenchie Mae was the executive director of the online news outfit Eastern Vista and radio anchor of the program Lingganay han Kamatuoran aired over DYVL 819khz Aksyon Radyo Tacloban. She was also an active regional correspondent for our news organization, Altermidya Network.

Similar to cases of hundreds of other journalists and human rights defenders under former Pres. Duterte's term, Frenchie Mae was accused of being a high-ranking communist leader and was charged with criminal cases.

She remains detained at the Tacloban City Jail with Mariel Domequil and Alexander Abinguna. They are part of the 'Tacloban 5' who were arrested at midnight raids conducted by the police and military under the Duterte administration.

According to the police, they found high-powered guns and explosives on top of Frenchie's bed during the raid – a claim we consider highly implausible.

In 2021, Frenchie was listed as one of six women on the list of "ten most urgent" cases compiled by the One Free Press Coalition, a group that safeguard journalists persecuted for

pursuing the truth. Despite this, the court proceedings in the three separate courts where her cases are filed are moving very slowly. Her firearms case, for instance, is still hearing the prosecution's presentation.

More concerning are the witnesses being presented by the prosecution: a long list of police and military assets who have vilified Frenchie Mae, and depicted her as a "gun-running" criminal.

Moreover, the proceedings of her ongoing civil forfeiture case has been declared by the court as confidential, which makes it difficult for journalists and human rights defenders to monitor the trial.

Inasmuch as we want to bring focus to the urgent case of Frenchie Mae, we want to emphasize that her situation is not an isolated case in the Philippines. The red-baiting of independent journalists and the use of the lawfare against them are a concerning trend in the country's increasingly narrowing civic space.

It is widely known that former Pres. Duterte has been hostile against the media and government critics, as seen by the cases filed against Rappler CEO Maria Ressa and the closure of the largest broadcast network under his term. For six years, the Philippines witnessed rising authoritarianism and a diminishing space for free expression, which unfortunately persists at present under the new administration of Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

We have provided several links as reference to Frenchie Mae's situation.

It has been a difficult time our colleague since her detention three years ago; she has busied herself in jail by launching livelihood projects and teaching basic skills to fellow inmates. It is our prayer, nonetheless, that her case be given consideration in your report.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Rhea Padilla  
Board secretary  
Altermidya Network

Noted by  
Raymund Villanueva  
Altermidya national chairperson

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