



## **#FreeFrenchieMaeCumpio: International coalition calls for Philippine community journalist's release as trial enters crucial stage**

March 24, 2025 - A coalition of international and local press freedom organisations call for the immediate and unconditional release of Philippine community journalist Frenchie Mae Cumpio, who has been held in detention for more than five years, as she wrapped up her court testimony today. Her case raises serious concerns about unjustifiably long pretrial detention and allegations that authorities had planted the weapons that led to her arrest.

The 26-year-old journalist has been [behind bars](#) since she was [arrested](#) in February 2020, [along with](#) four human rights defenders. As executive director of the Eastern Vista news website and a radio news anchor, Cumpio [frequently covered](#) alleged police and military abuses as well as community welfare issues prior to [her arrest](#).

On Monday March 24, Cumpio took the stand at the Tacloban Regional Trial Court for the third time and concluded her testimony to defend herself [against retaliatory charges](#) of illegal firearms possession and terrorism financing, which she denies. If convicted, she faces up to 40 years in prison.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and the Department of Justice must take immediate action to [end](#) the journalist's prolonged detention and have the charges against her dropped, said the coalition which consists of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines and AlterMidya in Manila, as well as three global press freedom groups - the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and Free Press Unlimited (FPU).

The groups have been monitoring Cumpio's trial since she began testifying in November 2024 - nearly [half a decade](#) after she was first arrested.

In her testimony, the journalist and her defence team have pointed out grave [violations of her constitutional rights](#), and that she and her co-accused were [dragged outside](#) and made to face away from their room during the 2020 house raids that led to their arrest. The

weapons had been placed on their beds and around the room when they were brought back, Cumpio said in her defence.

Her case highlights the disturbing practice of “[red-tagging](#)” in the Philippines, used to label journalists as “subversive” or even “terrorists” when they cover issues deemed sensitive by the government.” The journalist testified that she had been subjected to months of surveillance and harassment prior to the raid.

Irene Khan, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and opinion, has [called for justice](#) for Cumpio and expressed dismay at the unjustifiably long pretrial detention. The U.N. envoy visited Cumpio in prison in January 2024 during a country visit.

The judge adjourned the trial to April 14, 2025, when her co-accused Marielle Domequil will take the witness stand, followed by two other witnesses. No date has been set for the verdict, but it is expected that the trial will continue for several more months.

**Beh Lih Yi, Asia Program Coordinator, [Committee to Protect Journalists \(CPJ\)](#), states:**

*“Frenchie Mae Cumpio’s case is emblematic of the criminalisation of journalists worldwide - punished for daring to report the truth. The prolonged detention of this young female journalist is indefensible and inhumane. The Philippine government can - and must - end this grotesque injustice without further delay.”*

**Aleksandra Bielakowska, Advocacy Manager, [Reporters Without Borders \(RSF\)](#) Asia Pacific Bureau, states:**

*“Frenchie Mae Cumpio is a talented journalist who, through her unwavering courage, embodies the future of investigative journalism in the Philippines. Her prolonged detention on bogus charges is merely a ploy to intimidate her, and deter all fellow journalists from reporting on topics of public interest. The Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and the Department of Justice must now drop the outrageous charges against her and release the journalist without further delay.”*

**Rhea Padilla, News Director, [AlterMidya](#), states:**

*“Frenchie Mae’s prolonged detention proves that community journalists in the Philippines continue to be denied justice. Meanwhile, numerous stories of poverty, human*

*rights violations, and aspirations of marginalized communities continue to be untold because journalists like Frenchie Mae are forced to be silent."*

**Jonathan De Santos, Chairman, [National Union of Journalists of the Philippines](#) (NUJP), states:**

*"Frenchie's imprisonment is proof that journalism remains dangerous in the Philippines. It also shows how the anti-terror laws are used against journalists and human rights defenders."*

**Jos Bartman, [Free Press Unlimited](#) (FPU) Research Coordinator, states:**

*"Frenchie Mae's prolonged pre-trial detention is unjustifiable. It sends a message to other journalists in the Philippines that journalists can pay a high price just by speaking truth to power. The detention of Frenchie Mae is therefore not just an attack on herself, but also on the wider public, who depend on journalists being able to do their work without interference. Without journalists like Frenchie Mae being able to do their job, people cannot fully exercise their democratic rights."*

###

Spokespeople are available for interviews in English/Filipino:

National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (Manila): Jonathan De Santos, [secretariat@nujp.org](mailto:secretariat@nujp.org)

AlterMidya (People's Alternative Media Network, Manila): Rhea Padilla, [rhea@altermidya.net](mailto:rhea@altermidya.net)

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

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

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

###



Photos from Eastern Vista, Alexander Abas/Tanglaw, Bulattlat