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**TITLE:** The Magnitsky Human Rights Awards 2019 – Maria Ressa

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**SPEAKER**

AMAL CLOONEY - A

MARIA RESSA: M

A: Good evening, everyone. Thank you very much for the invitation to be here tonight amongst so many incredible people. In too many places around the world journalists face an awful choice. Tow the government line and be safe or risk your life to do your job. We are here tonight to honour people who have chosen to take the risk, but they should not have to do it alone. A week ago a radio reporter, Dindo Generoso was shot to death in the Philippines suspected of being murdered by the police. The Committee for Protection of Journalists has reported that the Philippines is at the very top of the world's impunity index with the highest number of journalist murders going on un-investigated and unpunished. The president of the Philippines has called journalists spies and said they are not exempt from assassination. His team calls them prostitutes and incites a relentless online campaign designed to wear them down. This is the environment in which Pilipino American journalist, Maria Ressa, is forced to operate. Maria was the CNN Bureau Chief in South Asia before she decided to team up with three female colleagues and set up her own website called Rappler.

Rappler quickly became one of the most influential online news sites in the Philippines and like any journalist worth their salt Maria's news site examined the performance of the government. This meant that she had to author reports revealing President Duterte's weaponisation of social media to silence his critics. Her team uncovered corruption by the Duterte administration and her site criticised the president's support for the death squads that have reportedly murdered more than 27000 Pilipino's in the name of a so-called 'war on drugs'. In response the president has mocked Maria's reporting as fake news in an address to the nation. Her reporters have been banned from attending presidential events, her new site has its operating licence revoked and now the government is pursuing Maria through a series of prosecutions. She faces two libel charges for her site's reporting and an accusation that Rappler sold stock to an American investor and reported this incorrectly to the authorities, for this she faces a maximum sentence of 63 years in prison.

According to Maria's local lawyers this is the first time in recent history that such laws have been used to target a journalist in the Philippines, one of Asia's oldest democracies, but these bogus charges are a sign of things to come. This is why Maria has told me she has to defend the charges against her. When Maria asked me to be her lawyer she was out on bail as she is now, you will see her shortly and so I asked her whether there was any judge in the Philippines who would be fair or independent enough to acquit her or any of the charges against her. I asked whether anyone other than President Duterte would ultimately have the power to pardon her if she were convicted on all these charges. Her answers were not encouraging yet despite the odds she insists she will go home and so, of course, I took the case because as Maria explained she is holding up the ceiling for her reporters, for all journalists in the Philippines and anyone else who dares to speak the truth. Maria's struggle against the abuse of power is one that defines our times.

We are seeing a greater number of journalists around the world imprisoned and killed since the reporting of this began. We see leaders from every continent determined to change the world for the worse by abusing human rights, putting people against each other and then trying to muzzle speech that seeks to expose

the truth. These leaders have every advantage in their battle against those they seek to intimidate yet people like Maria refuse to be silenced. Maria has described what the authorities are doing to her as a cautionary tale, if they are able to silence her others will understand what they must give up in order to survive, but in this room tonight are great lawyers and judges and human rights defenders, journalists from all over the world. So my hope is that we can join forces to create our own cautionary tale. One that signals to the autocrats of this world that when they try to silence journalists they will hear from all of us because we will defend those who are holding up the ceiling for a free press, for independent voices and the rule of law.

Maria, I am grateful for your talent and utterly humble by your courage. So it is my great pleasure to present to you with an award that could not be more deserved, the award for Outstanding Investigative Journalist of 2019. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in honouring Maria Ressa.

M: It's been intense in the last few days in London starting with a meeting in Downing Street with Amal and Keegan Gallagher who is also here. They lead our international team and then moving onto the dinner last night with Bill and the other awardees. This is an incredible room full of people who are fighters. I see them at every table. So thank you, thank you. Thank you. I think the question that we have had to face and we talked amongst ourselves about this, we talked at the press conference it's a simple question. What are you willing to give up? What are you willing to sacrifice for truth? And I think this is the question all of us are asking for this time. I have never really felt this kind of urgency at this moment that you need to define that for yourself because these times will demand it from you, right, and for me I first came face to face with this when Time Magazine and it is really nice to see the fiancée of Jamal Khashoggi here because this is the third or further time that Jamal and I have been honoured in the same place or awarded in the same place and the guardians of truth, there were four of us on the time person of the year last year.

The journalist murdered at the Capital Gazette, Jamal; this brutal murder that rippled through all of the global community of journalists. The Reuters journalist that Amal helped release from a Myanmar prison, they were in a prison then and I was the fourth one and actually Time didn't tell me about it. So when I first heard, I took the tweet, I heard about it from Twitter and sent it to my social media team and asked if it was fake news and then CNN called and I realise, oh, my God, I had a sinking feeling in my stomach because I realised this Guardians of Truth, is this what is demanded of journalists today, do we have to give up so much to be a good journalist. In 2018 the Philippine Government filed 11 pieces against me and Rapper that's almost a case a month and I had to post bail eight times in order to be here. I have posted more bail than [8:58] been convicted in four different countries. I have done nothing wrong, but to be a journalist. So what we have lived through in Rappler really forced us to draw the line, three years ago we were fighting against impunity.

We started doing investigative stories on impunity in two fronts. One is against a private company, Facebook, which was enabling the propaganda war this three part series we published in 2016 about the impact of Facebook's algorithms on

democracy. The second was against our country, the Philippine Government which had begun a brutal drug war that human rights groups, our Philippine Commission on Human Rights puts the death toll at 27000, at least 27000 killed since July 2016. This has forced us to define who we are and how much we will sacrifice because you really don't know who you are until you are forced to fight for it. So many at the tables have fought for, have taken a position. So I am willing to give up some of my freedoms. I have to post bail, I have to post bond, I can't change my flight after the court approves it and it took Amal to tell me exactly how many years I could go to prison because the 11 cases were handled by different lawyers and they were passing through me. We don't have a chief corporate council and then I realised, oh, my God, 63 years, but I still have it way better than most people who are fighting this fight.

Also at the launch of Trial Watch, Jason Rozian who was on the panel with me this afternoon that was the first time, April last year was the first time I began to think I could actually go to jail and then he gave me his book, which I read all in one chunk and I tried to place myself, he was in jail for 544 days and I tried to think could I do this. Is it okay, can I continue doing stories because you have to be okay with 544 days? And my takeaway from his book was that in order to keep himself physically fit he exercised, but the room was so small that in order to exercise he walked around in a circle and then after he was released after 544 days he was out in a mall in Germany and he walked around in a circle. Today on the panel he said he still tries to stop himself from doing that. There are costs and this time will leave a mark on us. And then, of course, there's Daphne, Daphne's sons, Paul and Matthew were here, Matthew and I were on a panel this afternoon, Matthew described how we was in the house when the car bomb went off and that he has to pass through the driveway twice a day.

His mom did nothing, but be a great investigative journalist to hold power to account and Matthew was first on the scene, well he ran out and when he talked about it this afternoon it's tough to go through that. He turned away and when he turned to me I thought it was probably the most emotional I had ever gotten because I also remembered something that he told me after I first got arrested. He said, "Maria, you remind me of my mom," and it's kind of like the Time Magazine moment, right. It is what does that really mean? The fact that Paul and Matthew and the family are working with Keelan to fight for justice, to demand justice now gives me tremendous hope like the Magnitsky Act. It provides hope that all of our battles will converge and that we can hold power, great power to account, that we are not foolish because we're not, right. We're not foolish, every report on press freedom globally has dismal findings, Freedom House Chronicles, this downward spiral for over a decade, Reporters without Borders, she was the anchor for our panel this afternoon shows how fear has increased because of authoritarian regimes and how they use technology to incite hate against journalists.

The things that Daphne and her family went through four years before she was targeted mortally are the same things that are being used against us in the Philippines, incite to hate, create an enemy of the people. Use social media exponentially and then have it come top down. We're not alone in this, other journalists are facing this and then Amal quoted, the committee to project journalists the 2019 global impunity index, which says that Philippines had the

most number of unsolved journalist killings. Press freedom is the foundation of every single freedom guaranteed in our democracies. So now more than ever we know that information is power, now more than ever we need the rule of law. This is an existential moment not just for journalism, but for democracies around the world. The Battle for Truth, the Time Magazine, the Guardians for Truth, the battle for truth is the battle, it is our battle. It is something we must win because technology acting as an accelerant makes a lie pounded a million times a fact, if you don't have facts how can you have truth, without truth you can't have trust, without these three then we don't have democracy.

That's the moment we're living through. So, thank you, Bill for this untiring work, a tragedy that inspired one man to pull a room full of people that will ripple across time, that will give us more weapons to fight with for recognising also that the courage these times demand is impossible for one persona alone, it's impossible for one journalist. It is something that we must collectively fight together. Journalists can't do this alone. So please ask yourselves again, ask your friends and family what are you willing to sacrifice for the truth? What are you willing to sacrifice then please think about it and like Bill do it because now is the time to act. Our battle cry in Rappler is hashtag hold the line, hashtag shine the light, we must demand accountability and I'm positive with the people in this room we will do it together. Thank you.

**END OF TRANSCRIPT**