

Not available for publication
before 1 p.m. on 10
December, 2021.

THE
NOBEL
PEACE
PRIZE

Nobel Lecture

given by
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2021
Maria Ressa

Oslo, 10 December, 2021.

Copyright © The Nobel Foundation, Stockholm, 2021.

General permission is granted for the publication in newspapers in any language.
Publication in periodicals or books, or in digital or electronic forms, otherwise than in summary,
Requires the consent of the Foundation. On all publications in full or in major parts the
above underlined copyright notice must be applied.

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Distinguished Members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests

I stand before you, a representative of every journalist around the world who is forced to sacrifice so much to hold the line, to stay true to our values and mission: to bring you the truth and hold power to account. I remember the brutal dismemberment of Jamal Khashoggi, the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta, Luz Mely Reyes in Venezuela, Roman Protasevich in Belarus (whose plane was literally hijacked so he could be arrested), Jimmy Lai languishing in a Hong Kong prison, Sonny Swe, who after getting out of more than 7 years in jail started another news group ... now forced to flee Myanmar. And in my own country, 23 year old Frenchie Mae Cumpio, still in prison after nearly 2 years, and just 36 hours ago the news that my former colleague, Jess Malabanan, was shot dead.

There are so many to thank for helping keep us safer and working. The #HoldTheLine Coalition of more than 80 global groups defending press freedom, and the human rights groups that help us shine the light. There are costs for you as well: in the Philippines, more lawyers have been killed - at least 63 compared to the 22 journalists murdered after President Rodrigo Duterte took office in 2016. Since then, Karapatan, a member of our #CourageON human rights coalition, has had 16 people killed, and Sen. Leila de Lima - because she demanded accountability, is serving her 5th year in jail. Or ABS-CBN, our largest broadcaster, a news room I once led, which, last year, lost its franchise to operate.

I helped create a startup, Rappler, turning 10 years old in January - our attempt to put together two sides of a coin that shows everything wrong with our world today: an absence of law and democratic vision for the 21st century. That coin represents our information ecosystem, which determines everything else about our world. Journalists, the old gatekeepers, are one side of the coin. The other is technology, with its god-like power that has allowed a virus of lies to infect each of us, pitting us against each other, bringing out our fears, anger and hate, and setting the stage for the rise of authoritarians and dictators around the world.

Our greatest need today is to transform that hate and violence, the toxic sludge that's coursing through our information ecosystem, prioritized by American internet companies that make more money by spreading that hate and triggering the worst in us... well, that just means we have to work much harder. (hold up t-shirt) In order to be the good, we have to BELIEVE THERE is GOOD in the world.

I have been a journalist for more than 35 years: I've worked in conflict zones and warzones in Asia, reported on hundreds of disasters - and while I have seen so much bad, I have also documented so much good, when people who have nothing offer you what they have. Part of how we at Rappler survived the last 5 years of government attacks is because of the kindness of strangers, and the reason they help - despite the danger - is because they want to, with little expectation of anything in return. This is the best of who we are, the part of our humanity that makes miracles happen. This is what we lose when we live in a world of fear and violence.

The last time a working journalist was given this award was in 1936, and Carl von Ossietzky never made it to Oslo because he languished in a Nazi concentration camp. So we're hopefully a step ahead because we're actually here!

By giving this to journalists today, the Nobel committee is signalling a similar historical moment, another existential point for democracy. Dmitry and I are lucky because we can speak to you now, but there are so many more journalists persecuted in the shadows with neither exposure nor support, and governments are doubling down with impunity. The accelerant is technology, at a time when creative destruction takes new meaning.

We are standing on the rubble of the world that was, and we must have the foresight and courage to imagine what might happen if we don't act now, and instead, create the world as it should be - more compassionate, more equal, more sustainable.

To do that, please ask yourself the same question my team and I had to confront 5 years ago: what are you willing to sacrifice for the Truth?

I'll tell you how I lived my way into the answer in three points: first, my context and how these attacks shaped me; second, by the problem we all face; and finally, finding the solution - because we must!

In less than 2 years, the Philippine government filed 10 arrest warrants against me. I've had to post bail 10 times just to do my job. Last year, I and a former colleague were convicted of cyber libel for a story we published 8 years earlier at a time the law we allegedly violated didn't even exist. All told, the charges I face could send me to jail for about 100 years.

But, the more I was attacked for my journalism, the more resolute I became. I had first-hand evidence of abuse of power. What was meant to intimidate me and Rappler only strengthened us.

At the core of journalism is a code of honor. And mine is layered on different worlds - from how I grew up, when I learned what was right and wrong; from college, and the honor code I learned there; and my time as a reporter, and the code of standards & ethics I learned and helped write. Add to that the Filipino idea of utang na loob - or the debt from within - at its best, a system of paying it forward.

Truth and ethical honor intersected like an arrow into this moment where hate, lies, and divisiveness thrive. As only the 18th woman to receive this prize, I need to tell you how gendered disinformation is a new threat and is taking a significant toll on the mental health and physical safety of women, girls, trans, and LGBTQ+ people all over the world. Women journalists are at the epicenter of risk. This pandemic of misogyny and hatred needs to be tackled, now. Even there, we can find strength. After all, you don't really know who you really are until you're forced to fight for it.

Now let me pull out so we're clear about the problem we all face and how we got here.

The attacks against us in Rappler began 5 years ago when we demanded an end to impunity on two fronts: Duterte's drug war and Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook. Today, it has only gotten worse - and Silicon Valley's sins came home to roost in the United States on January 6 with mob violence on Capitol Hill.

What happens on social media doesn't stay on social media.

Online violence is real world violence.

Social media is a deadly game for power and money, what Shoshana Zuboff calls surveillance capitalism, extracting our private lives for outsized corporate gain. Our personal experiences are sucked into a database, organized by AI, then sold to the highest bidder. Highly profitable micro-targeting operations are engineered to structurally undermine human will - a behavior modification system in which we are Pavlov's dogs, experimented on in real time with disastrous consequences in countries like mine, Myanmar, India, Sri Lanka and so many more. These destructive corporations have siphoned money away from news groups and now pose a foundational threat to markets and elections.

Facebook is the world's largest distributor of news, and yet studies have shown that lies laced with anger and hate spread faster and further than facts on social media.

These American companies controlling our global information ecosystem are biased against facts, biased against journalists. They are - by design - dividing us and radicalizing us.

Without facts, you can't have truth. Without truth, you can't have trust. Without trust, we have no shared reality, no democracy, and it becomes impossible to deal with our world's existential problems: climate, coronavirus, the battle for truth.

When I was first arrested in 2019, the officer said, "Ma'am, trabaho lang po," (Ma'am, I'm only doing my job). Then he lowered his voice to almost a whisper as he read my Miranda rights. He was clearly uncomfortable, and I almost felt sorry for him. Except he was arresting me because I'm a journalist!

This officer was a tool of power - and an example of how a good man can turn evil - and how great atrocities happen. Hannah Arendt wrote about the banality of evil when describing men who carried out the orders of Hitler, how career-oriented bureaucrats can act without conscience because they justify that they're only following orders.

This is how a nation – and a world - loses its soul.

You have to know what values you are fighting for, and you have to draw the lines early - but if you haven't done so, do it now: where this side you're good, and this side, you're evil. Some governments may be lost causes, and if you're working in tech, I'm talking to you.

How can you have election integrity if you don't have integrity of facts?

That's the problem facing countries with elections next year: among them, Brazil, Hungary, France, the United States, and my Philippines - where we are at a do or die moment with presidential elections on May 9. 35 years after the People Power revolt ousted Ferdinand Marcos and forced his family into exile, his son, Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. is the front runner - and he has built an extensive disinformation network on social media, which Rappler exposed in 2019. That is changing history in front of our eyes.

To show how disinformation is both a local and global problem, take the Chinese information operations taken down by Facebook in Sept 2020: it was creating fake accounts using AI generated photos for the US elections, polishing the image of the Marcoses, campaigning for Duterte's daughter, and attacking me and Rappler.

So what are we going to do?

An invisible atom bomb exploded in our information ecosystem, and the world must act as it did after Hiroshima. Like that time, we need to create new institutions, like the United Nations, and new codes stating our values, like the universal declaration of human rights, to prevent humanity from doing its worse. It's an arms race in the information ecosystem. To stop that requires a multilateral approach that all of us must be part of. It begins by restoring facts.

We need information ecosystems that live and die by facts. We do this by shifting social priorities to rebuild journalism for the 21st century while regulating and outlawing the surveillance economics that profit from hate and lies.

We need to help independent journalism survive, first by giving greater protection to journalists and standing up against States which target journalists. Then we need to address the collapse of the advertising model for journalism. This is part of the reason that I agreed to co-chair the International Fund for Public Interest Media, which is trying to raise new money from overseas development assistance funds. Right now, while journalism is under attack on all fronts, only 0.3% of ODA is spent on journalism. If we nudge that to 1%, we can raise \$1bn a year for news organizations. That will be crucial for the global south.

Journalists must embrace technology. That's why, with the help of the Google News Initiative, Rappler rolled out a new platform two weeks ago designed to build communities of action. Technology in the hands of journalists won't be viral, but like your vegetables, they'll be better for us because the north star is not profit alone, but facts, truth, and trust.

Now for legislation. Thanks to the EU for taking leadership with its Democracy Action Plan. For the US, reform or revoke section 230, the law that treats social media platforms like utilities. It's not a comprehensive solution, but it gets the ball rolling. Because these platforms put their thumbs on the scale of distribution. So while the public debate is focused downstream on content moderation, the real

sleight of hand, happens further upstream, where algorithms of distribution have been programmed by humans with their coded bias. Their editorial agenda is profit driven, carried out by machines at scale. The impact is global, with cheap armies on social media tearing down democracy in at least 81 countries around the world. That impunity must stop.

Democracy has become a woman-to-woman, man-to-man defense of our values. We're at a sliding door moment, where we can continue down the path we're on and descend further into fascism, or we can each choose to fight for a better world.

To do that, you have to ask yourself: what are YOU willing to sacrifice for the truth?

I didn't know if I was going to be here today. Every day, I live with the real threat of spending the rest of my life in jail just because I'm a journalist. When I go home, I have no idea what the future holds, but it's worth the risk.

The destruction has happened. Now it's time to build - to create the world we want.

Now, please, with me, close your eyes. And imagine the world as it should be. A world of peace, trust and empathy, bringing out the best that we can be.

Now let's go and make it happen. Let's hold the line. Together.