



Prot. 2020-093

## **DEFY FEAR. COURAGE.**

**ABS CBN signed off at 7:52 pm, 05 May 2020, Tuesday.**

This was a death of a media icon that everyone anticipated from day one of President Duterte's election as President when he accused the television station of unfair election coverage. Thus, when the renewal of the station's franchise was raised in 2018, the probability of the station staying afloat was diminished and the franchise renewal became its Achilles heel.

The government agencies involved in the renewal of the media network's franchise had years to prepare their legal homework – the House of Representative, the Senate, the Department of Justice, the Office of the Solicitor General and the National Telecommunications Corporation. There were differences in legal opinions, but, finally, many months after heated debates on the fate of the ABS-CBN, the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) on March 2020, declared they were amenable to a legislative proposal filed in the House of Representatives and assured the media company that a provisional authority to operate would be issued pending the renewal of its broadcast license by Congress.

A critical political decision for ABS-CBN was overtaken by the corona virus pandemic. Yet, with undue diligence on its part, the NTC, on May 4, 2020 issued the ABS-CBN a closure order. Picture this scenario against a global pandemic where millions of people are sick and dying from the virus and hundreds of thousands dead. Diligence? The rule of law? Law not made for the common good, but for the caprice or neglect of someone or the abovementioned institutions or for its own sake at the detriment of many?

From the beginning of the global pandemic, as with other media networks, ABS-CBN continued providing vital information to the Filipinos on the health crisis, risking their lives. The ABS-CBN Foundation has also distributed 300,000 food packs, medicines, masks and protective suits. Now countless Filipinos are also deprived of the much needed entertainment provided by this channel, to maintain their sanity.

Should the Filipinos care at all over the fate of ABS-CBN?

**Yes.**

Information, the life blood of media and journalism, at any time in a democracy, especially during a national and world crisis, is the nation's connection to life and freedom. ABS-CBN, in varied media forms, projected the stories of poor people, the heroism of Filipinos, the injustices on faceless Filipinos.

**Yes**, because the closure order is an affront to the Filipino's Constitutional right as stated in the Bill of Rights, under Article III, Sections 1 and 4 of the 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines:

Section 1. No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor shall any person be denied the equal protection of the laws.

Section 4. No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, of expression, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances.

Are these not violations of our Constitutional rights to life and liberty? Eleven thousand paid employees of ABS-CBN now without work... Retired Winston Ragos, a soldier with post-traumatic stress disorder, shot dead for violating quarantine rules, tens of thousands of alleged drug users shot in cold blood by unknown assassins, China encroaching on the islands in the West Philippine Seas.

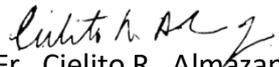
Therefore, we, the Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines, call on the elected leaders of this country to uphold and guarantee the peoples' Constitutional rights under the 1987 Constitution:

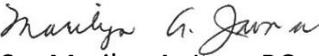
- Reverse the closure of ABS-CBN
- Respect the democratic and sovereign rights to life of all Filipino citizens

These are dangerous times for democracy which call for courage and vigilance. We wait for the resurrection of the ABS-CBN.

*"We need courage to reject false and evil stories. We need patience and discernment to rediscover stories that help us not to lose the thread amid today's many troubles. We need stories that reveal who we truly are, also in the untold heroism of everyday life." – Pope Francis*

Signed:

  
Fr. Cielito R. Almazan, OFM

  
Sr. Marilyn A. Java, RC

AMRSP Co-chairpersons

8 May 2020