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Introduced by Senator Loren Legarda

A RESOLUTION

DIRECTING THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC INFORMATION AND MASS MEDIA TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE ARREST OF JOURNALISTS DURING THE SIEGE OF RENEGADE SOLDIERS AT THE MANILA PENINSULA HOTEL, WITH THE END IN VIEW OF RECOMMENDING REMEDIAL MEASURES TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF MEDIA PRACTITIONERS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THEIR PROFESSION

WHEREAS, on November 29, 2007, renegade soldiers barricaded themselves at the Manila Peninsula Hotel in Makati City to protest against President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo;

WHEREAS, the incident led to a six-hour standoff wherein journalists and media crew have been holed up inside the Manila Peninsula Hotel, along with the renegade soldiers and civilian supporters, to provide media coverage of the unfolding event of significant public interest;

WHEREAS, attempts of law enforcers to end the crisis and arrest the initiators of the siege have led to an assault of the hotel's premises which included throwing of teargas while some journalists and media crew are still inside the hotel:

WHEREAS, according to Philippine National Police Director General Avelino Razon, at least 101 persons were arrested inside the hotel;

WHEREAS, authorities have reportedly arrested some 40 journalists covering the Makati standoff which includes TV reporters, news anchors, radio reporters and media technical crew;

WHEREAS, journalists were loaded onto a bus in handcuffs and brought to Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig for "processing" either as "witnesses or suspects";

WHEREAS, Police spokesperson Senior Supt. Samuel Pagdilao reportedly stated that the police has to "process" the media men because it is part of the standard operating procedures (SOP);

WHEREAS, authorities have justified the detentions, saying police wanted to make sure none of the rebels escaped by posing as members of the media. They also said that journalists were properly warned to leave the Manila Peninsula hotel before troops and police stormed it in a flurry of gunfire and tear gas;

WHEREAS, the police explanation that the "processing" is part of SOP has been questioned as no journalist has been taken to police station for "processing" in past coup d'etats since the time of President Aquino;

WHEREAS, Philippine and foreign media groups slammed the arrests, saying security forces "simply went overboard." Furthermore, media groups have roundly condemned what they said were the illegal arrests of journalists who covered the Makati standoff, saying that such actions by the government posed a serious threat to press freedom and the public's right to know.

WHEREAS, legislation may be needed to guide actions of law enforces in crisis situations to ensure that the rights of media practitioners to responsibly inform the public on events of national significance is not abridged;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, for the Senate Committee on Public Information and Mass Media to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the arrest of journalists during the siege of renegade soldiers at the Manila Peninsula Hotel, with the end in view of recommending remedial measures to protect the rights of media practitioners in the performance of their profession.

Adopted

LOREN LEGARDA

Senator