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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Philippines: Brutal Killing Undermines Freedom of Expression**

**ARTICLE 19 joins the international community in condemning the Maguindanao attack and calls on local and international authorities to take swift action to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.**

At least 39 people were viciously killed when a convoy they were travelling in was attacked in the Philippines on 23 November. The convoy was intercepted by approximately 100 men in Ampatuan town whilst on its way to register Ishmael ‘Toto’ Mangudadatu as a candidate for provincial governorship elections, Ampatuan is the home town of the incumbent governor Andal Ampatuan, and there are strong indications that the attack was politically motivated. According to the local media, Mangudadatu belongs to a clan that has been engaged in a long-running feud with the Ampatuan family, which has intermittently governed the region since 2001. This attack represents a troubling development in the Mindanao region, where Muslim rebels have been fighting for self-rule in the predominantly Roman Catholic nation.

As many as 13 journalists that were reporting on Mangudadatu’s registration are feared dead. If confirmed, this would be the largest group of journalists killed in a single event ever.

Such brutal criminal behaviour will have a chilling effect on journalists covering the elections. There are already reports that some journalists have refused to travel to the area to report on the incident, for fear of further violence.

Free and fair elections cannot take place when the right to free expression is seriously threatened. This includes the right of everyone to express their political viewpoints and of journalists to report on political activities without intimidation.

ARTICLE 19 calls on the local authorities to conduct an immediate and impartial investigation, with a view to identifying and prosecuting those responsible, as well as to ensure that the election can take place safely and freely. We also call upon the international community to assist in these efforts.

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name

from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.