



Her Excellency Mrs Ma. Hellen Barber De La Vega  
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7 May 2020

Your Excellency,

#### **Closure of the ABS-CBN network**

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance, the union and professional association for Australia's journalists, is deeply concerned at the failure of the Philippines' Congress to renew the licence of the country's major broadcast network ABS-CBN.

The closure of the network has led to almost 11,000 people being put out of work at a key time when the provision of information about COVID-19 is a vital service to the Filipino community.

It is apparent that some of the motivation behind the failure to renew is political. President Rodrigo Duterte has made no secret of his disdain for public interest journalism. He has also openly complained about the network since he ran for office in 2016.

The closure of ABS-CBN is clearly an assault on press freedom.

The loss of ABS-CBN also hurts the Filipino people for no reason. It silences the service they rely on for news and information. It puts an enormous strain on the broadcast services that remain to try to fill the gap after the loss of the biggest broadcaster in the market. It puts thousands of people out of work and means their families will struggle unnecessarily during the current lockdown.

There has been no satisfactory evidence presented for why the Congress has moved so slowly to renew the ABS-CBN franchise. The deadline for renewal crept ever closer but lawmakers failed to act. It is more than ironic that President Duterte has thanked the network for its essential service role during the pandemic.

We urge the Duterte Administration to act swiftly to restore ABS-CBN to the air by ensuring the closure order issued by the National Telecommunications Commission is lifted and that Congress resolves quickly to renew the network's licence. To do otherwise merely harms the Administration's reputation around the world at a time of global crisis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MS', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Marcus Strom  
Federal president  
MEAA Media