



MANIFESTO

We, media organizations and news outfits, call on law enforcement units to immediately end the continued practice of requiring journalists to sign as witnesses to the inventory of contraband and other items seized during anti-drug operations.

And to ensure that this practice is ended once and for all, we urge Congress to craft legislation to this effect.

We have consistently opposed this practice from when it was made a legal requirement under **Section 21 (1) of Republic Act No. 9165, or the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002**, which mandated:

"The apprehending team having initial custody and control of the drugs shall, immediately after seizure and confiscation, physically inventory and photograph the same in the presence of the accused or the person/s from whom such items were confiscated and/or seized, or his/her representative or counsel, a representative from the media and the Department of Justice (DOJ), and any elected public official who shall be required to sign the copies of the inventory and be given a copy thereof..."

Although this provision has since been amended by Republic Act No. 10640, enacted on July 15, 2014, which made media witnesses optional, colleagues throughout the country report that law enforcement units continue requiring them to sign on as witnesses, often as a condition for being allowed to cover operations. Worse, there are reports that they are made to sign even if they did not actually witness the operation or the inventory of seized items.

Those who decline can find their sources or the normal channels of information no longer accessible.

Aside from the condemnable coercion and attempts to control information of vital interest to the public, our opposition to this practice also stems from the fact that it unnecessarily places journalists at risk of retaliation from crime syndicates, on the one hand, and exposes them to prosecution for perjury and other offenses in the event of irregularities in the conduct of anti-drug operations, on the other.

We wish to invite the **Philippine National Police** and **Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency** to discuss guidelines, ground rules and other procedural issues concerning coverage of their operations. We extend the same invitation to lawmakers to discuss the proposed legislation.



JOURNALISTS and MEDIA WORKERS
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STUDENTS and SUPPORTERS
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