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### **Keynote Address**

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Thank you. I have you for roughly 20 minutes and I want to show you three things.

First, What's the problem and why should you care?

The second point is why the Philippines? Let's look at this country halfway around the world that has been for the fourth year running the social media capital of the world. We spend the most time on social media globally, and for the third year running we've spent the most time on the internet – an average of 10 hours a day. As Christopher Wiley, the Cambridge Analytica whistleblower, said, long before Cambridge Analytica there was a company called NCL, and they test tactics of manipulation in the Philippines because of its hundred million people and because it is a tech-savvy capital. If it doesn't work, no problem, in the Philippines there's impunity. But if it does work, then they take that tactic and they port it over to the United States and to the West. That's why the Philippines.

And then finally, the last point is, I don't want to depress you in the middle of the day, so let's look at potential solutions and my own appeal to those of you here in this room.

So let me say state the problem. And it's in one slide only, something I said three years ago. This was a graphic made by Al Jazeera and it's what I saw happening in the Philippines in 2016: "If you can make people believe lies are the facts, then you can control them."

This was at the end of last year. If you know this guy, his name is Tim Snyder. If you please pick up his book, it's called *On Tyranny*, it's only 150 pages long, but it's a great way of looking at history and putting in context what is happening to *your* world today and what is that context. He says it best: If you want to rip the heart out of a democracy you go after facts. That's what modern authoritarians do. Step one, you lie all the time. Step two, you say it's your opponents and the journalists who lie. Step three, everyone looks around and says, What's truth?

There is no truth. That end goal is to make you not even look for the truth. And then finally, resistance is impossible, the game is over. If you have no facts, you have no civic engagement. And what we're seeing happening everywhere around the world is when you say a lie a million times, it becomes fact. It replaces facts. And these are part of the reason we have so many – and Kellyanne Conway talked about it first – alternative realities. This is why there are so many of them.

Let me take you to the second point, why the Philippines as a case study, and why me? If you are a journalist and you want to hold the line, if you want to protect the rights in a country like the

Philippines, it requires a lot more today than it ever did when I was with CNN 30 years ago. In 14 months, the Philippine government filed eleven cases against me and Rappler; in a five-month period, I posted bail eight times. And early this year, in just a little over a month and a half, I was arrested twice and I was detained once. I could have done without that, you know? All that does is make me angry, and so I've had to deal with anger management, and the only way I really deal with it is by looking at data. How do you fight back? You fight back by knowing what reality is.

Let me show you the case study of the Philippines. Some of you guys will have seen this because I've been talking about this for three years. I really feel like Cassandra. This is the global phenomenon: if you've heard the phrase "patriotic trolling," it's been used by a researcher, a feminist researcher who's looking at disinformation networks. It is state-sponsored online hate and harassment campaigns to silence and intimidate.

Instead of just censoring, like in the old days, preventing it from coming in, now they flood the information ecosystem with lies. If you flood with lies, you have no idea what's fact or fiction. And on social media platforms, Facebook, for example – did I mention, by the way, that one hundred percent of Filipinos on the internet are on Facebook. Facebook is our internet. So this little place, Palo Alto, actually has brought so much positive and lately negative things to my country, to the Global South. Flood the market with lies. That's what's happened.

Our data shows us that women are a favorite easy target ten times more than men. And I'll show you three steps in the Philippines through the case of Leila de Lima – she's a senator who's been in prison for more than two years with roughly six days in court. She hasn't been convicted, but she was charged with a non-bailable offense. And the same tactics used against me, so I speak from personal experience. The first step is to attack the credibility of that person, regardless. Just say they're corrupt. You don't need evidence. If you repeat a lie a million times, it becomes a fact.

If you work for traditional power, you will be told, "don't engage on social media." That is the wrong tactic, because if you don't engage social media wins, the lie will win. So the first is attack exponentially. Repeat a lie a million times. Then it becomes fact. Without facts you can't have truth, without truth you cannot have trust, without any of these three democracy as we know it is dead. The public sphere is dead. And what I hope you will see is that what's happened to my country, to the Philippines, our dystopian present is your dystopian future, if nothing significant is done.

Tactic number two is sexual violence, particularly against women. You inflame the biases. In the case of Leila de Lima, a doctored video of her in a sexual act went through social media in the Philippines, spread like wildfire, no bounds. And when you're attacked sexually as a woman, your credibility goes out the door. It's an easy, easy peg.

Third, they trended hashtag #ArrestLeiladeLima roughly three weeks to a month before she was actually arrested. So think of what's happening on social media as bottom up attacks, astroturfing. This is like fertilizer, softening the ground. Then power comes top down and repeats the same account. In Leila de Lima's case, when she was arrested, everyone expected it.

They tried to trend hashtag #ArrestMariaRessa in May 2017, two years before I was actually arrested. It didn't trend, that's probably why it took two years to arrest me. Let me show you some of this

example. May 2017, hashtag #ArrestMariaRessa. This is one of the main content creators (there are only three at the beginning). This is the account that's in charge of creating content for the middle class. It was at the time of the first conversation between Duterte and Trump. Rappler got a transcript, we published it along with The Washington Post and The Intercept. But look at what's written about us: "Rappler just made the Philippines a legitimate target of North Korean nuclear missiles." Laughable, right? But people took it seriously.

Then from here, that's the first time the hashtag was used, #ArrestMaria Ressa on May 24th. And he just happened to be in Moscow on a state visit with President Duterte. From there, it jumped to Twitter. This is one of the campaign accounts on Twitter, trending "call her to the Senate, hashtag #ArrestMariaRessa." I was called to the Senate more than a year later. And then from there it jumps to a real person, an overseas Filipino worker: "I can smell an arrest and possible closure of @RapplerDotCom hashtag #ArrestMariaRessa." Then we move to the sexual violence and it's picked up by this guy: "Maybe Maria Ressa's dream is to become the ultimate porn star in a gangbang scene." It's not [laugh]. And then from there, it jumps to another guy. And this is on Rappler's Facebook page by a college senior: "Make sure Maria Ressa gets publicly raped to death when martial law expands to Luzon, it would bring joy in my heart."

When I posted this – because my only defense is to shine the light – his school contacted me and wanted us to talk to each other. What do I talk to him about? My worry is that these kinds of astroturfing has an impact on the values of the future. And that's actually what you're seeing happen in the public sphere now, not just in our country, but here, all around the world. It's systematic, and I want to show you how systematic it is.

What we did at Rappler, as our data privacy laws allowed us to and because we're one of Facebook's Alpha partners, we were able to take our data and create a database. We call it the "shark tank," and this is the database of disinformation networks. We're one of Facebook's fact checking Filipino partners. And what we do is we fact check for the lie. But beyond the lie, we look at the network that spreads the lie. If you guys are spreading a lie and you do it repeatedly, we then tag. It's like a terrorist network for me.

Look at this, from January 2015 to April 2017, you can see when the campaigns began and our president, Duterte, was elected in May of 2016. The drug war began in July of 2016. And you can see how the weaponization of social media happened. You pound a fractured line of society, you pound it repeatedly, and you can see here the two words I focused on is *bayaran*, which means corrupt and *bias* (I always add ed, *biased*). And it's an attack on mainstream media. The reason why you don't trust traditional media is not just because of media's fault. It's because it's a very deliberate strategy to make you doubt any institution that tries to tell the truth.

Now we have more than a terabytes of data. And what we did to help our social media – because Rappler is a startup, we began in 2012, and part of the reason I don't want Facebook to leave, I just want them to clean up, is because I know the positive part of its power. It is empowering. You're nodding because you know the positive aspect of what Facebook can do in a country like the Philippines, where institutions are weak. But we also know what happens when Facebook does the wrong thing and institutions are weak. So what we did here is we took that database and I put it in one chunk for our social media team. These are the URLs that spread the lies, so this is inside Google's

purview, and then these are the Facebook pages that spread the lies that live on these URLs. And then if it's reposted more than 10 times it turns red.

I gave the data to Facebook in August of 2016. I gave them a month and a half to come back to me with either action or data. I didn't get anything. Rappler did our first propaganda war series, which we published on October 1 of 2016. The minute we did that, I got slammed with an average of 90 hate messages per hour. And I want to take you to what that looks like today.

This is October of 2016. This is what my social media team would do, see how patterns turn red. We would go to the page of "Sally Mattei," because she attacked all of traditional media, and if you look at what she writes—I say "she," but obviously this is a fake account—when you look at how many times she posts in a day and from which groups, you can see this is the activity of this Facebook account, this is a cut-and-paste account. I think we can all agree this is not authentic behavior. So this is what my team can see. And when they see this, they'll block it or they'll report it.

Another attack – and I want to show this to you again, because these are networks of disinformation – is an attack on our Vice President, who is a woman, Leni Robredo. Unlike the United States, our Vice President comes from the opposition party. This is January 2017. When you see the data per se this doesn't give you much, unless you're really a math geek. But when we put it in a network analysis map, it looks like this, showing the same network that attacks journalists, that attacks me, that attacks Leila de Lima, that attacks activists, that attacks opposition politicians.

It is so organized that these three content creators are broken down by demographic: a pseudo intellectual account for the supposed thinking class; "thinking Pinoy" is an account that caters to the middle class – I showed you that he was the one to try to trend hashtag #ArrestMariaRessa two years before I was arrested; and finally, this is the main account: she's a singer-dancer, like a more aggressive Spice Girls. This is the foundation of the information ecosystem in the Philippines. How else does it move? From here it jumps to traditional media, and the newspaper they tend to jump to is *The Manila Times*, one of the oldest newspapers, but it's now owned by a man who was named the Head of International Public Relations three years ago. *The Manila Times* is where they came out with what they called *The Matrix* and I was named as a coup plotter. From there, this attack on Leni Robredo then jumped to state media. If you read Rappler, you will see that state media not only did this in April of 2017, they've actually now said that Russia Today (RT) will be training state media. Welcome to my world.

And then finally, let's close that loop by taking this mass base account, this singer-dancer who campaigned for the president. In April of 2017 she was put in charge of social media for the entire government. She held that post until December 2018, when she ran for Congress. She lost, but she's now just been given a government position for overseas Filipino workers. That's my world today. You have your own version of it.

We also have historical revisionism, and historical revisionism, like here in the United States, is not just making you vote one way, it's not a one-off thing. It's death by a thousand cuts. Think about disinformation, about this landscape, as feeding you drugs. It was a KGB chairman who actually said this: that disinformation isn't so bad the first one or two times you take it – you can go back to being who you are. But if you take it all the time, it's like drugs. When you become an addict, then you're no

longer the same person. So think about our body politic as that: we're drugged, we're addicted. This is part of the reason we're having the problems with democracy that we're having now.

I have five minutes, so I'm going to quickly go through this. This is using natural language processing on everything written on the internet when I was presented with the first arrest warrant. You can see 34 percent of the stories of my warrant came from the Philippines, 27 percent from the United States. But what's most interesting is if you topic-cluster, that is, take the topic out and you'll see this: you'll see that of the stories written in the Philippines, 27 percent was basically the government's press release. That's the impact of fear. But 17 percent of this, who carried stories of the Duterte rights crackdown – what you see in red – is from the United States. This is part of the reason I'm speaking to you, because you can speak plainer than we can.

And then finally, this is one of the last chunks. This is what our information ecosystem looks like today. You can see that anti-Duterte communities are there, they're very small. The size of the circles are based on Eigenvector centrality. But our information ecosystem has been taken over by pro-Duterte and pro-Marcos communities. They're extremely powerful.

Here's the upside of it. It basically became 50-50 the day I got arrested, which is February 13th. My team jokes all the time, they said I should have stayed in detention longer [laughs]. So look at what's happening right there. The anti-Duterte clusters share traditional media. But the pro-Duterte, pro-Marcos clusters – and you'll see *The Manila Times* and the Philippine News Agency here – they actively avoid sharing traditional media and they're actively looking for their Alex Jones.

Coming up on my last point, which is that there's hope. So let's talk about Rappler's financial performance. As I told you, we're a startup. We aimed to break even in our fifth year, 2016. We did hit positive net income in April 2016. President Duterte was elected in May and our attacks began in July of 2016. Despite that, we did hit positive net income. And you can see the toll that the attacks took on us. What happens when 11 cases are filed against you? 49 percent of your advertisers drop. The end goal was attrition – kill Rappler by filing so many cases that they won't be able to deal with it. But guess what? We were able to pivot. We found a sustainable business model, and in 2019 we aim to not just break even, we aim to cross across and hit positive net income.

Here's the part that I think is critically important for news groups today: you need to have a diversified revenue stream. And what we've found is – and again, because we're talking about the future of journalism – this was something we were forced to create, a B2B model using data and research against disinformation networks. We've grown that and we've diversified into programmatic, we've strengthened our platform, and we plan to roll out a new platform beginning next year.

Let me end with this. This is all connected to geopolitical power. In December of last year, when the U.S. Senate and the House Intelligence Committee hearings released all this data about Russian disinformation and the internet research agency, we found our connection to it bottom up, and I'll tweet the link to that article if you haven't read it. We're now seeing Chinese disinformation networks coming into our ecosystem. This happened maybe four months ago and is strengthening. We're being fed poison. Another way to think about it is: there's a virus that's being pumped into the body politic and we are slowly dying.

So what do we do? The first thing is our world today. I started with Tim Snyder. Here's what we have in the Philippines, online and offline violence creates fear. People are afraid. Anyone who questions a brutal drug war supports those who fight for truth. They're attacked with the full force of the Philippine government. Our law, in addition to social media, is weaponized. These are cautionary tales for anyone demanding the truth. I'm a cautionary tale. I don't think the Philippine government knows what to do with me right now, which is why I keep talking.

And then finally, what do we need to do? I say we start with our area of influence. Demand accountability from power. Stand up against bullies, report the lies. Tell your family and friends. Courage spreads. We take care of what's in front of us. But the systematic solutions, in the long term it's education; medium term may be media literacy, but in the short term, it's this little area in Palo Alto, where, please, push tech platforms and social media to do something to stop the lies from spreading. Lies laced with anger and hate spread faster than facts, because, as you know, facts are kind of boring.

Despite this, journalists are holding the line. The baton was passed to me at a really difficult time and sometimes I really wish it wasn't my time right now. But I have no choice. I'll walk one foot in front of the other. But I want you to hear other Filipino journalists who are holding the line. This is about a minute and a half:

[showing a video interview]

*Q: Have you ever been harassed because of your work?*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: Have you been threatened online?*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: Have you been called bias?*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: Have you been called stupid?*

*A: Yes, many times, by idiots.*

*Q: Have you been called disrespectful?*

*A: Yes.*

*Have you been accused of corruption?*

*A: Yes.*

*Have you been called ugly as a response to any story?*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: Have you been called fake news?*

*A: Oh yeah. Anything that's critical is fake.*

*Q: Have you been accused of being an imperialist spy?*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: Have you been accused of being a communist operative?*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: Have you been accused of working for the CIA?*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: Have you been sexually harassed as a journalist?*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: Has your family been threatened, harassed or alluded to?*

*A: Yes. Specifically, my daughter, when she died, there were a lot of people who made fun of that.*

*Q: Have you been threatened with rape?*

*A1: Yes.*

*A2: Yes.*

*A3: Not me, but my family.*

*Q: Have you been threatened with violence?*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: Have you been threatened with death?*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: Have you been told how you're going to be killed?*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: Has the violence been described to you?*

*A: Yeah. Blow my head off or bury me alive.*

*Q: What will stop you from reporting?*

*A1: Nothing.*

*A2: Nothing.*

*A3: Nothing.*

*A4: Death.*

*A5: They'll have to kill me.*

[video ends]

[Ressa]

Fight for your rights. Thank you.

[Applause].