Police offer guns to Filipino journalists at risk
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It seems that Filipino policemen take their profession seriously when it comes to journalists facing threats. If a journalist receives a death threat, they will proactively pay him or her a visit, register the complaint, and offer a weapon for self-defense.

This may not seem like a typical, or even reasonable, police response to a crime report, but at least it can show that the police are taking action, and help dispel their image of being passive and incompetent.
When Stella Estremera, editor-in-chief of the Sun Star Davao, and her news editor Gigie Agtay received threatening messages on Agtay's phone, they made them public by publishing a story in their newspaper. In an email, Estremera described her decision to publish the story, saying, the "story is for our protection; the wider the story can reach, the greater our protection."

Journalists writing news in which they themselves are the news is not an uncommon scenario in parts of the Philippines. They cannot afford to treat threats lightly. The Philippines is notorious for killings of human rights and political activists and also journalists. By February 2009, at least 78 journalists had been murdered since the fall of the Marcos regime in 1986.

Davao City, where Estremera and Agtay work, is notorious for the "Davao Death Squad," a shadowy group accused of numerous vigilante killings. The Sun Star and its sister newspaper, the Super Balita, have been reporting the cases of vigilante killings in Davao City. They are among the newspapers considered independent and credible.

The two editors were accused of being biased in local politics by the person who threatened them, although he failed to mention what bias he was referring to. The editors could not ascertain who could have made the threats, which story was considered biased, or who wanted them dead. Of course, some journalists and activists have been killed for reasons that were never made clear.

When Estremera and Agtay first received the threats, neither thought it a priority to go to the police to make a complaint or ask for police assistance or protection. About two days after the threats against them were made public, city and regional police officers phoned them both and asked for a meeting. They would not do this for ordinary persons.

When the policemen met the editors at the newspaper office, they brought along the police register and entered a complaint. They then asked the two women if they wanted guns to protect themselves.
The police suggestion appeared benevolent, but it fell short of the logic and professionalism required from a police force. Arming journalists is not a solution to crime. Rather than protecting them, it could put them in harm's way.

For the police of course, it is much more convenient to arm people rather than offer them police protection.

Ironically, arming civilians is a Philippine government policy. Firearms are issued to people facing threats, and also to civilians loosely trained as auxiliary police in communities where the government considers certain groups to be a threat. Then there are the militias, which are notorious for committing human rights violations. If they are given arms, why not journalists?

Some journalists agree to become "police assets" to justify having firearms issued to them, but the two editors rejected the offer. "I just don't like guns," Estremera explained as she refused the offer.

The police should ask themselves why these women did not seek their assistance when they found themselves in danger. Why did they not promptly register a complaint with the police? Like most people, journalists—among the best informed individuals in the community—have no confidence that the police would be able to help or protect them.

Is this any surprise, when all the police can offer is a do-it-yourself solution?