

Philippines Massacre

Author: [IWPR](#)
[Reporters](#)

With mass killings in Maguindanao, Philippines now ranks as world's most dangerous country for journalists. Photographs by Jes Aznar (27-Nov-09).

The bodies of 57 political activists, lawyers, journalists and local government employees have been found by the authorities in Maguindanao Province in the southern Philippines. An armed militia of up to 100 people reportedly abducted and massacred the civilians on November 23 as they were traveling in a convoy to register a candidate for next year's local and national elections.

Twenty-six of the dead were journalists who had joined Evelyn Mangudadatu, the wife of Buluan vice mayor Toto Mangudadatu who was traveling along with several female relatives and female lawyers to file candidacy papers on behalf of her husband who had decided to stand in the elections. Evelyn was raped and her body very severely mutilated, according to her husband. The authorities confirmed that several of the women were heavily pregnant. The Mangudadatu family had reportedly been warned against trying to contest the elections.

Fearful of attacks against any male members of the extended Mangudadatu family while trying to file papers, they decided only to send female members. Local media representatives and lawyers were invited to join the convoy in a bid to ensure its safety.

A suspect in the case, Datu Unsay mayor Andal Ampatuan Jr, surrendered to the authorities and was flown to Manila on November 26 but denies all responsibility for the killings - the worst incident of its kind in recent Philippines history. The Philippines now ranks as the world's most dangerous country for journalists.

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