

## RIP Freedom of Expression

*Newsletter SY 2012-2013*



What used to be a country admired for its relatively free internet use is now at the mercy of political tyranny. The Revised Penal Code and other laws such as RA 8792 contain provisions that regulate computer and internet activities. These laws however, do not specifically criminalize crimes committed by computer users. Therefore, online crimes go unpunished.

There had been cases of such crimes in the past. One of the most memorable is the ILOVEYOU computer worm, which is created by Onel de Guzman, a Filipino. Although it was an undeniable criminal act, de Guzman went punished since at the time of his arrest, there exists no legal basis for him to be charged.

Similar and related incidents of computer hacking and trafficking pushed our lawmakers to impose a law that will criminalize online crime.

October of last year, the Aquino administration has signed RA 10175, or more famously known as the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012. The said law imposes a harsher punishment to internet crimes, including fraud, internet hacking, child pornography and much to the dismay of the majority of Filipinos, online libel. Although this new law promises a safer online environment for all users, the definition it provides for online libel is dangerously vague.

For instance, a simple 'liking' of a defamatory status can send a facebook user in prison for 12 years--6 years longer than a person who actually commits libel. Retweeting the message will earn an equal punishment. If everything comes to the worst, who could say that internet activity will not go unmonitored?

In a country where graft and corruption is associated with public service, citizens have perfectly developed their keen eyes and sharp tongues. Any hint of malicious act by any government official will earn a barrage of online innuendos, majority of which will definitely not be 'nice'.

Social networking sites play a major role as a medium where Filipinos express their sentiments in every issue , including but not limited to showbusiness, politics and everything that lies in between.

Imposing a law that prohibits netizens to express their personal view on social matters is a direct violation of the freedom of speech and expression. The publication staff remains in unison that the country is indeed in need of a cybercrime prevention law. The present form of the law, however, is something that we as campus journalists condemn.

We believe that a person has the freedom to say what he believes to be right.

We believe that this freedom must not be sacrificed only to deter the incidence of online crimes. As long as the much dreaded provision on online libel exists, the government will never be at peace.