

Philippines: Activist, former VP bet Walden Bello arrested for cyberlibel

Monday 8 August 2022, by [VALMONTE Kaycee](#) (Date first published: 8 August 2022).

MANILA, Philippines (Update 2, 7:45 p.m.) — Quezon City police served former vice-presidential candidate Walden Bello a warrant of arrest at around 4 p.m. on Monday in relation to the cyberlibel charges filed against him by a former Davao City employee.

Bello is facing two charges and his team said they plan on posting bail of P48,000 for each count. Speaking to the media present during his arrest, Bello said he is “innocent of the charge.”

Press freedom and freedom of expression advocates have long called for the decriminalization of libel, which is often used to harass and silence journalists and dissenters.

In a Facebook post on Sunday, Bello recalled meeting a supporter at a neighborhood McDonald’s and called the encounter a “good omen to begin the week,” just before he is served the “long-awaited warrant of arrest for cyberlibel.”

Bello is facing charges filed by former Davao city information officer Jefry Tupas in March this year after Bello called her a “drug dealer.”

Tupas was working under for Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte-Carpio — since elected vice president — when she was relieved from her post at the local government. She was found attending a party in Davao de Oro in November last year, where P1.5-million worth of illegal drugs were later seized in the raid.

Tupas said she had already left the party when the arrests happened.

Meanwhile, Laban ng Masa — the socialist coalition that Bello leads — said the filing of charges and his arrest on Monday “speaks volumes on the state of democracy and freedom in the Philippines.”

“It also serves as a warning to democracy and human rights advocates on what would befall them while standing up for the right to express one’s views and criticize wrongdoings by the rich and powerful,” the coalition said in a statement.

Laban ng Masa said Vice President Duterte used her former aide as a front for her own actions. The coalition maintained that the cases filed against Bello is a form of harrassment by the vice president herself.

Espiritu: It was commentary on drug raid

Lawyer Luke Espiritu, a candidate under the Laban ng Masa slate led by labor leader Ka Leody De Guzman and by Bello, said in a tweet that the former vice-presidential candidate had merely commented on reports that Tupas was among those arrested in the raid but was allegedly released.

“Ang insidenteng ito ay nagbungsod sa tanong na sa kabila ng pinapangalandakan ng ama ni Sara Duterte na siya ay galit sa droga, bakit nasasangkot sa isyung droga ang mismong malapit kay Meyor Sara Duterte at bakit nangyayari ito sa mismong balwarte ng mga Duterte,” he also said on his Twitter account.

(That incident prompted the question of why — despite Sara Duterte’s father’s declarations that he hates drugs — a person close to Mayor Sara Duterte was linked to a drug issue and why it happened in the Dutertes’ bailiwick)

Bello, a former congressman for Akbayan party-list, filed a counter affidavit in April and called the charges “politically motivated, frivolous, and inconsistent with facts.”

He was recently declared “persona non grata” in Davao City for calling it a “drug center of the South.” In campaign debates this year, he constantly brought up the non-attendance in public debates of the winning presidential and vice presidential tandem of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Duterte.

On Monday, Bello was taken to the Quezon City Police Station 8, but was transferred to Camp Karingal on the instructions of Police Brig. Gen. Remus Medina, district director.

De Guzman, Bello’s running mate in the May polls, went to Camp Karingal to support his former vice-presidential bet. The two ran under Partido Lakas ng Masa in the 2022 national elections.

Kaycee Valmonte

P.S.

• Philstar. August 8, 2022 | 7:15pm:
<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2022/08/08/2201211/activist-former-vp-bet-walden-bello-arrested-cyberlibel>