

## **This Is The Matrix**

### **A Free Public Forum**

7 May 2019 (Tuesday), 2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Second Floor Lobby, Palma Hall, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy  
University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City

President Rodrigo Duterte's words were: "Tell them to ask me." This is what Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo told the Malacañang Press Corps during the 22 April 2019 media briefing when probed for an explanation about the one-page "matrix" containing organizations and names of lawyers and journalists who are allegedly involved in an "oust-Duterte" plot. The journalists were not able to hide their frustration and disbelief, as Panelo kept saying, "It's common sense!," "I don't know!," that is, until he supposedly quoted Duterte, effectively ending the discussion. The oust-Duterte "matrix" is not the first exposé of the president. And his exposés have, for the most part, been in the form of lists that outlined and linked together names of disparate groups and individuals who were decisively his administration's next "target." In these lists, contexts and evidence are irrelevant. The president's declarations should be enough. As per Panelo: "Galing kay Presidente kaya paniwalaan n'yo." This is despite the fact that even some government offices under the president have no knowledge of how these lists came about, from the PNP, the AFP, sometimes all the way to the office of the defense secretary—or even if some information on these lists were blatantly false. If one ever wanted to ask a question about these lists, one has to go ask the president himself. And when the media would indeed go to Duterte the usual response is circuitous and invective-filled. Or worse, they are banned from covering the president and Malacañang-organized events. Then he would come up with a new iteration of his ever-evolving lists and matrices to line up individuals and groups that state forces should go after in retribution for their temerity to ask him a question or challenge his positions with facts, figures, and well-studied policies. For the Duterte administration, there is no opposition; there are only shifting conspiracies that it must relentlessly crush. When the highest office in the land will not bother with explanations and expects its constituents to take at face value any and all information it espouses as truth, what is the media for in its commitment to pursue truth and freedom? When the president construes all forms of critique as simply leftist propaganda, how can human rights organizations and groups of legal advocates fulfill their commitment to justice and democracy? This forum will bring together members of the academe and actors from these maligned organizations to answer one key question as we chart the life of our democratic polity under Duterte: How does one respond to a government that persecutes institutions of citizenship that ask for truth and transparency from its leaders?

#### **Speakers:**

Ellen Tordesillas, Vera Files - confirmed

Maria Ressa, Rappler

Malou Mangahas, PCIJ

Edre Olalia, NUPL

Rene Saguisag, San Beda Law

Bomen Guillermo, Faculty Regent, UP System - confirmed

Luis Teodoro, Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility - confirmed