



HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE

HOPE COMES FROM ACTION

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Wow. Daunting. Hello all the way in the back! It's a profound honor to stand before you today, in this sacred space, as we kick off this Jubilee - a time of grace, of reflection, and of recommitment to the values that bind us together as a global community.

It comes just in time because we are living through a profound transformation of our world. The last time something like this happened, when new technology enabled the rise of fascism, was 80 years ago. That was roughly around the last time a journalist was named for a Nobel peace prize, except Carl von Ossietzky couldn't accept it because he was languishing in a Nazi jail. For many years now, I've sounded the alarm: just like in Hiroshima, an atom bomb exploded in our information ecosystem.

In pursuit of power and money, technology enabled insidious manipulation at the cellular level of a democracy: of us - the voters - microtargeting fear, anger & hate; seeding metanarratives that destroyed trust. It created what the US surgeon general called an epidemic of loneliness, turning neighbor against neighbor, and rewarding mob rule - rewarding the worst of who we are as people.

Journalists were the first attacked: if you want power, tear down our credibility. I know this first-hand because my government targeted me with an average of 90 hate messages per hour. Like fertilizer,

#ArrestMariaRessa trended on social media 2 years before I was actually arrested.

What seems impossible, with repetition, becomes possible.

I was arrested and first posted bail on Valentine's Day in 2019. In a little over a year, my government filed 10 arrest warrants against me. I didn't know what was going to happen, but Rappler and I did what was right. And now nearly a decade later, those 10 criminal charges are down to 2. But until today just for doing my job as a journalist, I've lost some freedom - I have to ask the PH Supreme Court for approval to travel. The sad part? It's now happening faster in other parts of the world.

This Jubilee comes at a time when the world is upside down: when what's right is wrong; and what's wrong is right. I remember an old cartoon when I was growing up and learning about making decisions of conscience.

On your right, you have the devil egging you on, "Do it. Do it. Do it!" On your left, there's an angel, reminding you of the golden rule - Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Telling you not to be selfish. To share. To fight your worst instincts.

Well, what social media did was to flick the angel off your shoulder, grow the devil, and connect him directly to your nervous system.

Big Tech transformed social media from a tool of connection into a weapon of mass behavioral engineering. These platforms are not

neutral technologies; they are sophisticated systems designed to exploit our deepest psychological vulnerabilities. They monetize our outrage and hate; amplify our divisions; and systematically erode our capacity for nuanced thinking and empathy.

In 2018, an MIT study showed that lies spread 6 times faster on social media. MUSK You tell a lie a million times, it becomes a fact. If you make people believe lies are facts, then you can control them.

Without facts, you can't have truth. Without truth, you can't have trust. Without these three, we don't have a shared reality, let alone solve existential problems like climate change. We can't have journalism; we can't have democracy.

The business model of Big Tech - surveillance capitalism - is built on a fundamental betrayal of human dignity - where data privacy has become a myth, and AI and algorithms have cloned and manipulated us:

- Creating echo chambers that exacerbate existing biases;
- Prioritizing conflict over understanding;
- Monetizing human attention at the expense of social cohesion.

This is not an accident. It is a deliberate design, an architecture for profit that brings in hundreds of billions of dollars a year to these companies.

Of course, what happens on social media doesn't stay on social media. There's only one you - living in both the virtual and real worlds. Big Tech hacked our biology, changed the way we feel, the way we see the world - which changed how we act. Do we still have individual agency?

We can see the trend: as of last year, V-Dem said that 71% of the world is under authoritarian rule. We are electing illiberal leaders democratically. After all, how can we have integrity of elections if we don't have integrity of facts? It's like we're standing on wood infested by termites that could collapse at any moment.

But something changed last year. In December, Romania became the first country to void an election because of Russian manipulation of social media. Imagine if the UK or the US did that in 2016?

Electoral protests are happening all over the world. From Venezuela to Mozambique, to Georgia, where large scale protests began in April but became daily starting December - and today is the 60th day - with journalists and activists beaten and jailed. The journalists carried my book in those protests, its title - HOW TO STAND UP TO A DICTATOR. Investigative journalist Mzia Amaglobeli is today on her 14th day of hunger strike from jail.

For years now, I've shown data from different countries around the world that Technology is the match that set the world's dry kindling on fire. Move fast, break things, said Mark Zuckerberg - and Big Tech broke democracy. And it's going to get worse after he announced that Facebook is giving up on facts. It's not a free speech issue, it's about safety.

How many more people will have to die? The UN and Meta's own team independently went to Myanmar and found that Facebook enabled genocide in 2018. Yet, no one has been held accountable.

Online violence is real-world violence. With the two feeding into each other. From Myanmar to Ukraine to Gaza, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and many other forgotten battlegrounds. These wars are fought not just with missiles and tanks, but with algorithms, disinformation, and the systematic destruction of truth, and our communities of trust.

Information warfare, geopolitical power play, is exploiting these platforms' design. Remember, the goal is not to make you believe one thing; it's to make you doubt everything so you're paralyzed.

Globally, there are two main fracture lines of society pounded open, regardless of country or culture. That's gender and race - and the attacks are often fueled by religion. Sexism that turns into misogyny; and racism that finds its way into constitutions like Hungary, where it's called white replacement theory. You hear it in the news as immigration or inflation, but dig deeper, and you will see gender and race.

We need to build a public tech stack for the virtual world, where real people can have real conversations without being manipulated for power and money. We at Rappler began building that and rolled out a matrix protocol chat app a little more than a year ago. Our vision is a federation of global news organizations. My colleague Paterno Esmaguél will tell you more about that. I'll post the link for you to try it on X, Facebook, and BlueSky.

Because we're at the Vatican, I want to point out 3 things: first, technology rewards lies. As I told Pope Francis, this is against the 10 Commandments; 2. The men who control this transformative technology wield god-like power, but they are not God. They are only men, whose arrogance, lack of wisdom and humility is taking the world down a dark path. Increasingly, by their own definitions and words, their unchecked and unaccountable power is resembling a cult.

Which is why religion, faith, becomes more important today. In HOW TO STAND UP TO A DICTATOR, I write about how the golden rule - "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" has guided me throughout my life.

It helped define COURAGE for me in a world increasingly shaped by lies: the courage to speak when silence is safer; the courage to build bridges when walls seem easier; and the courage to stand for truth even when it feels like the entire world is against you.

I like the South African word UBUNTU - "I am because we are" - an antidote to many of our problems today. It's a universal truth that our faith communities embody. The pain of one is the pain of all.

When Big Tech rewards the worst of who we are, UBUNTU teaches us that our fates are interconnected; that the fight for truth, justice, and peace is not someone else's battle; IT IS OURS.

So what can YOU do? I have 4 suggestions:

1. **Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate** - build and strengthen trust now to close the fracture lines of society that information operations will try to pound open, pitting us against each other;
2. **Speak Truth with Moral Clarity** - silence in the face of injustice is complicity. Whether it's systemic racism, economic inequality, or the erosion of democratic norms, people of faith must reclaim their prophetic voice. Demand transparency and accountability from those who control our public information ecosystems - from governments to Big Tech to media;
3. **Protect the Most Vulnerable** - Support journalists, human rights defenders and activists who risk their lives. Remember the Martin Neimoller quote from Germany? Here's our PH version - published by our largest newspaper after my first arrest: "First they came for the journalists. We don't know what happened next."
 - a. Your networks can be powerful shields for marginalized communities. Support immigrants, religious minorities, the LGBTQ+ and others who face discrimination. Our collective vigilance can prevent **the normalization of hate**.
4. **Recognize Your Power** - Building peace is not reserved for heroes; it's the collective work of people who refuse to accept and live lies. Rappler would not have survived without the help of our community, always reminding me of the goodness of human nature. You are powerful and can be part of a tidal wave of change for the good. That is powered by love.

Let me repeat them again: Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate; Speak Truth with Moral Clarity; Protect the Most Vulnerable; and Recognize Your Power.

Even at the worst of times, **hope is not passive**; it's active, relentless and strategic. Our faith traditions carry centuries of resilience; we need to share those stories of transformation.

Finally ...

There's this TS Eliot quote I love about "the present moment of the past." It's the idea that the latest novel you read is affected by the fact that you read Shakespeare, but your understanding and appreciation of Shakespeare will be affected by the latest novel that you read.

In this present moment of our shared past, we have a choice - and it will create our future as much as change how we look at our past.

We can allow the fracture lines in our society to break open. Or we can work to heal the growing divides.

Because this is it. This time matters. What you choose to do matters.

There are so many of us in this room. Imagine if we all worked together. We just might stem the tide and heal our world.

Thank you.