



# Society of Environmental Journalists

1629 K Street NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20006  
Phone: 202-558-2055 • [sej@sej.org](mailto:sej@sej.org) • [www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org)

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January 22, 2020

Mahendra Siregar, Ambassador  
The Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia  
2020 Massachusetts Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20036 U.S.A.

Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St.  
Washington, D.C., 20520 U.S.A.

Carolyn Zander, Human Rights & Labor Officer  
Global Program, Office of Programs, Bureau of Democracy  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St.  
Washington, D.C., 20520 U.S.A.

[zanderc@state.gov](mailto:zanderc@state.gov)

Dear Ambassador Siregar, Secretary Pompeo and Ms. Zander:

The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) condemns the arrest and imprisonment of journalist Philip Jacobson, an editor with the international nonprofit news organization *Mongabay*, and urges the Government of Indonesia to release him immediately.

SEJ is the world's largest professional organization dedicated to supporting environmental journalism, with more than 1,400 members in 46 countries.

We share the concerns expressed by *Mongabay* founder and CEO Rhett Butler that Indonesian immigration officials have taken exceedingly harsh action against Mr. Jacobson. We can't help but note that immigration authorities seized his passport shortly after he attended a meeting between provincial officials and representatives of the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN), which advocates for indigenous people's rights in Indonesia.

Employees of the news media should be free to work in Indonesia without fear of arbitrary detention. Actions like those taken against Mr. Jacobson harm the health of Indonesian democracy and the country's global reputation. We note that, in a recent report, the Indonesian Alliance of Independent Journalists counted 53 incidents of violence against journalists in the country last year, including five criminal cases.



CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN  
International Prize 2010

We understand that authorities allege Mr. Jacobson committed a visa violation. If there is any validity to the charge, this matter should be handled administratively, not criminally. Deportation would be a far more appropriate response than incarceration.

We urge all parties, including the U.S. State Department, to work for Philip Jacobson's prompt release from prison, the lifting of any charges, and the return of his passport.

Sincerely,



Meera Supramanian, President  
Society of Environmental Journalists

CC: David R. Stilwell, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Anne Benjaminson, Senior Country Officer, Indonesia

Michelle Warren, Country Officer, Indonesia

U.S. Department of State