

**Presidential Communications Operations Office  
News and Information Bureau**

**INTERVIEW WITH PCOO ASSISTANT SECRETARY ANA MARIE BANAAG  
AND VERA FILES PRESIDENT ELLEN TORDESILLAS  
BY PINKY WEBB – THE SOURCE, CNN PHILIPPINES  
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**PINKY WEBB:** It was a very interesting hearing last Tuesday. But I want to start with this: Do we have a concrete definition? Ellen, of what fake news is?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Nothing. Nothing has been adapted officially. Like I think, anong dictionary ba ang nag-adapt na ng definition ng fake news?

Pero sa amin kasi, ako, fake news are lies masquerading as truth. At saka mayroong ano 'yun, element of deception. 'Yung sinadya mo.

**PINKY WEBB:** Asec.?

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** Well, one of the points that they raised during the hearing was if legislators would opt to legislate on fake news. They might as well come up with a definite definition because it might be intrusive to pick opinion, personal opinion or satire or anything like that that is encouraged in the Constitution.

**PINKY WEBB:** In fact, it was Ellen that said at some point, I think, Ellen sabi mo it can be subjective. Hindi ba? How I see news could be different from the way Asec. sees the news. So, news, fake news, at that, could be subjective as well. So do you believe that there should be a clear cut definition on what fake news is?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** I don't think that's possible. For you to really define 'yung what...

**PINKY WEBB:** Fake news is?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Yeah. In fact di ba sabi ko, even the term is oxymoron. Kasi 'pag sinabi mong news that's supposed to be truthful.

**PINKY WEBB:** 'Yon na 'yon, 'di ba? Tapos nilagyan mo ng fake. But... so you don't agree that there could be a clear cut definition of fake news?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Sa... I don't know if—As far as legislation is concerned, saka there's no need... di ba, ang common stand is there's no need for a new legislation.

**PINKY WEBB:** So ano ang kailangan? Regulation?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Education talaga.

**PINKY WEBB:** ‘Yon na nga. Kasi even regulation, you’re not... you’re not... Hindi ka payag sa regulation...

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** It might infringe on press freedom. It might nga... ‘yung ano pa... We might be coming up with a cure that is worse than the disease.

**PINKY WEBB:** Yes. ‘Yon ‘yung sinabi mo during the Senate hearing. Asec, what about you? Should, should the senators look into regulating the social media, for example?

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** Not at all.

**PINKY WEBB:** Hindi din?

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** Hindi din. The PCOO’s stand is no to another law that would regulate, especially so that we believe na kapag may opinyon ka and you want it out there no matter how... how ugly. For so as long as you don’t malign another persons, you don’t impute a crime. Then that’s okay.

**PINKY WEBB:** So you’re okay to express your opinions?

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** Yes.

**PINKY WEBB:** There was a senator... I think it was a senator from New York. It was President Barrack Obama who said this during an interview, he said that - attributing this to the New York senator - that you’re entitled to your opinion, but you’re not entitled to your own truth. What do you think of that? Kasi ‘di ba sinasabi ninyo, “Okay, I respect your own opinion, you’re entitled to your own opinion but you’re not entitled to your own truth.”

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** Yes.

**PINKY WEBB:** Oo. ‘Di ba? Isa lang naman ‘yung truth ‘di ba?

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** Oo.

**PINKY WEBB:** Pero ‘yun na nga... Kasi, kaya... That’s why I’m... Naiiwan ako sa topic na ‘to, Ellen, Asec., kasi you’re the one that already said that your truth could be different from my truth. Your truth could be different from Asec. Banaag’s truth.

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Mayroon naman tayong facts to—Dapat mayroon tayong facts to support whatever claims that may we—

**PINKY WEBB:** Let's use a classic example, Ellen, as a Vice President muna, unahin natin kasi... Kasi two people/personalities na sinasabing... who are purveyors, who spread fake news are the top government officials. According to Ellen Tordesillas, it's the President. According to Usec... Usec.? Usec. Badoy, it's Vice President Leni Robredo. Let's listen again to what Ellen said on that hearing last Tuesday.

**(SOUND BYTE OF ELLEN TORDESILLAS):** And the worrisome part of this is that most of the sources of disinformation is being perpetrated by the government officials on tax payers' money. And the number one source of fake news as... is the President Duterte himself. In just one speech sometimes, he would... say more than one falsehood. Social media is a vehicle and the problem about that is that most of the inaccurate data that he has... are basis of policies.

**PINKY WEBB:** Were you sure? Nag-atubili ka ba, Ellen, when you wanted to say that the President is the number one source of fake news?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** No, Pinky. Because 'di ba we have kasi a... project. 'Yung fact check project. We tracked... sa Vera Files, we track falsehoods, false statements by public personalities, officials, and other personalities not necessarily na public as long as they have... they... are influencers.

**PINKY WEBB:** Lumabas sa news, may sabihin sila.

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** So we track them and debunk them with factual evidence. So ang dami talaga sa Presidente. So I'm... We're confident about him being a source of fake news.

**PINKY WEBB:** Hindi lang source. Number one, sabi mo, source. Isn't that what you said?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Yeah.

**PINKY WEBB:** Number one source.

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Kasi talagang sa ano namin, siya talaga ang pinakamarami.

**PINKY WEBB:** Asec.? What do you think of that? Do you even check Vera Files also because, I'll admit, I do check Vera Files. In fact in the show, Ellen, I've used Vera Files as... I attribute it to their study or their research in a number of our interviews. Do you guys check what they say?

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** Actually, Secretary Martin Andanar—Actually that was the second time that... Ma'am Ellen said that. Because during the first hearing, I was just not able to answer that one.

The second... last time, the other day, Secretary Martin Andanar said you're welcome to come to my office and let's... pagbanggain natin, tingnan natin kung saan... Kung nagkulang man si Presidente halimbawa sa isang numero or dalawa o tatlo, baka pwede naman naming i-eksplika 'yan. Kasi... napapagod din 'yung tao. Nag-i-speech every... like, in a day, tatlong speech sa isang araw. Sometimes may mga nababanggit ho ang ating Pangulo.

And I'd like to comment on the Vice President. Because this is what I think Undersecretary Badoy was trying to point out. Last March 2017, Vice President Robredo made a video message for human rights challenge something? And she was actually saying na ang daming extrajudicial killings sa aming bansa, ito 'yung numbers ng mga namamatay na, 'yung parang sobrang... may mga, parang halos... 'pag papakinggan mo 'yun parang may mga slaughtered along the streets already. Kapag papakinggan mo lang, you're not from the Philippines parang maniniwala ka.

**PINKY WEBB:** So she painted, ang sabi nga ata ni Usec., she painted a very bleak picture I think. Or gloomy—

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** She used numbers also. And with that, we came up with the numbers. We asked our enforcement agencies na let's come up with numbers that can be verified. Data that people can go to if they wanted to ask for some things. So since anti-illegal drugs campaign started and mula pa noon before that, ang PDEA po ang depository ng lahat ng mga data ng anti-illegal drugs programs.

**PINKY WEBB:** And Oplan Tokhang? Included there?

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** Oplan Tokhang is partly included there. Oplan Tokhang is the PNP's. But for all data that we can get, we get it from PDEA. Kaya kung minsan may kukunin dito sa PNP, hindi nagta-tally kasi nga ang PDEA, andoon na rin ang Bureau of Customs, ang

NBI, 'yung mga operations po nila. So ganoon po. So that was the... that was the line na gustong sabihin ni Usec. Badoy during the Senate hearing.

**PINKY WEBB:** Okay—

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Alam mo we've had that. And mali—and 'yun nga, hindi lang si Presidente Duterte pina-fact check namin. Ang finact check namin si Vice President doon. Mali siya. Sabi niya 7, 000—

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** At least there is something that we agree on. (*laughs*)

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Dinagdagan pa 'yon ng kaniyang spokesman the next... nung after that. Ginawa niyang 8,000. Si Attorney Ibarra 'di ba? Actually, mga 4,000 lang yata.

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** During that time, it was not yet. Because that was March and we actually—

**PINKY WEBB:** So hindi pa umabot ng 4,000? Is what you're saying at that time?

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** Hindi pa. During, we started—we launched the Real Numbers in May 2017 and every month then on, we update it.

**PINKY WEBB:** But can we be truthful about this? The Vice President's speech that time, she gave out a number. Ano ba 'yung number na binigay niya? 7,000 'di ba?

But, Ellen, Asec., hindi ba 'yon din ang numerong ginagamit ng iba? Hindi ba? So it's not like the Vice President -- and this is not to defend her -- plucked it out of nowhere. It was what was going around. Hence, kung nagkamali, or if there was something wrong, wasn't it up to the PCOO to already tell PDEA, "Please bring out the real numbers because everyone is using the 7,000 number."

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** That's why we came up with the launching of the Real Numbers. Yes. And of course, after that, wala namang apology na... or to correct that fact na you know, you go outside of the country, you taint your country... 'Di ba? I mean, if there's something siguro, it is her because she has the capacity to call on the PNP, the PDEA because she is a public official. So pwede naman po talaga.

**PINKY WEBB:** Okay. Ellen, what are your thoughts on that? So in fact check n'yo nga siya and mali nga si Vice President doon.

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Oo, dapat talaga. Vice President siya. She should you know. She should not play around with numbers.

**PINKY WEBB:** So hindi ka rin sang-ayon doon sa ginawa ni Vice President in that video message. Before we go on a break, just to give context to this. Let's play that sound byte of Usec. Badoy regarding the Vice President.

**(USEC. LORRAINE BADOY/ SOUND BYTE):** In fact, the Vice President is one of the primary purveyors of fake news. Okay. And that the President is maybe an even bigger victim than she is. She paints a gloomy picture of the country at the time in our history when all the important numbers for our country are looking up.

**PINKY WEBB:** Is that a fair assessment, the primary purveyor of fake news?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Sa amin kasi sa Vera Files, talagang si Presidente talaga 'yung number one source. So I am saying—in fact, gumawa kami ng ano, itong weekender namin like 'yung claim ni Presidente that the shabu is only used by the poor? He repeated it 22 times. Kasi palaging nasa speech niya. That's not true.

**PINKY WEBB:** Kasi ang tinatawag kasi sa shabu is... tama ba, it's the poor man's drug?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Hindi ano... all studies, hindi lang talaga pang-poor ang gumagamit—

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** At least he's not painting the country with the, you know, something that you alleged na... Ito ganito kadumi 'yung country mo—

**PINKY WEBB:** Ganito karami 'yung namatay.

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** Ganito 'yung namamatay and things like that. Kung mayroon mang mga bagay man na nagkukulang si Presidente, kung minsan, when he talks in his speeches, mabilis lang. Mabilisan lang kasi. So we don't know the context doon sa kaniyang iniisip kung ano bakit niya nabanggit 'yon.

**PINKY WEBB:** And Asec, I think it's fair to say that the President says what he wants to say.

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Twenty two times niya sinabi?

**PINKY WEBB:** Twenty two times niyang sinabing...

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Sa mga speeches niya...

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** Yes but then, let's look at it at this way. The President is very open, very transparent. What you see is what you get. He talks just like the ordinary mayor in Davao City na—

**PINKY WEBB:** Okay. But are we going to... Babalik ba tayo't babalik doon dahil Mayor siya dati, ganoon siya magsalita. Presidente na siya ngayon.

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** Not necessarily. Ang sinasabi lang natin is that, he delivers speeches, he gets to events thrice, four times a day. And it's all out there in social media. Very transparent, very open.

**PINKY WEBB:** Ellen? Go ahead, before we go on a break.

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Ang isang pinaka magandang example, sinasabi niya 'di ba palagi na Iloilo is the most 'shabulized' city, 'di ba? Kaya, because of that he ran after the officials there. Hindi totoo iyon. Ang number one, according to PDEA—

**PINKY WEBB:** O ayan, galing na sa PDEA 'yan.

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Number one is Caloocan City. Number 51 lang 'yung Iloilo City, number 20 Davao.

**PINKY WEBB:** Okay. So—and that's coming from the PDEA. So, in fact it's a really sometimes good to... Parang repository na nga 'yan?

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** Actually, yes Pinky. In fact, sabi nga ni Secretary Martin Andanar and siguro baka maging assignment ko na rin 'yun, ma'am. 'Di ba na i-check ko 'yung mga binabanggit niyo po and...

**PINKY WEBB:** Fact check.

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** And kailan po, kailan po talaga nasabi ng ating Pangulo.

**PINKY WEBB:** In fact, it's almost like a thank you. 'Di ba? Dahil kayo na 'yung gumagawa ng trabaho.

We'll be taking a short break. This is The Source on CNN Philippines.

Coming up: should social media be regulated? Asec. Anna Marie Banaag and journalist Ellen Tordesillas will still be with us after the break. And later, take a look at how netizens see the super blue blood moon. That's for today in focus.

*(COMMERCIAL BREAK)*

**PINKY WEBB:** You are watching The Source on CNN Philippines. Our guests today Communications Assistant Secretary Anna Marie Banaag and Vera Files President Ellen Tordesillas.

Okay, let us talk about how and what is your office doing as PCOO to stop the spread of fake news?

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** Yes, Pinky—

**PINKY WEBB:** Is there anything new you're doing?

**ASEC. ANA MARIE BANAAG:** Yes. We go to the countryside. We go to the provinces, we network with the information officers of local government units, of cooperatives, water districts and NGOs, and NGAs in the provinces. So we go there—we've been going around since August last year. And in February 19, 20 and 21, we'll be launching the Provincial Communications Officers Network at the first National Information Convention in Davao City.

**PINKY WEBB:** So how's that supposed to stop the spread of fake news?

**ASEC. BANAAG:** We would be sharing some techniques, some strategies on how—

**PINKY WEBB:** Stop?

**ASEC. BANAAG:** How to counter fake news and how to be more circumspect and how to be more discerning when you see an information that's out there in social media. Do you have to believe right away—

**PINKY WEBB:** In fact that's what Ellen said, you said social media literacy is vital. Hindi ba iyon iyong sinabi mo, because you're obviously not for regulating social media. Ang sabi mo, it's education and information. Iyon lang iyon, wala na bang iba?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** 'Di ba you counter truth—you counter lies with truth, iyon nga. So wala—like iyong education talaga. Kaya sa amin sa Vera Files, part of our Fact Check Project is go around schools all over the country din and we conduct seminars, ganoon din you—we—mostly sa mga students.

**PINKY WEBB:** But remember during the hearing, let's bring—Kasi siguro for some who may have missed parts of the hearing. Ellen, you were saying that umiikot kayo. And there was one time na papunta kayo sa isang auditorium that was sponsored by—is it the—

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Venue lang ang pinovide ng PSC—Metro Manila schools iyon. It was organized by the Philippine Press Institute. Si—sila ang partner namin during our campus tours. And when we were preparing of our presentation, nakita ng mga PIA that our examples iyong kay Presidente, iyong ganoon. Tapos yeah, they asked us to tone down the presentation, cut na. Halos buong presentation na—matatanggal lahat ng slides doon.

**ASEC. BANAAG:** Bakit wala si Vice President—

**PINKY WEBB:** Was the Vice President there?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Kasama rin—

**PINKY WEBB:** Kasama rin. Pero ang problema kasi I think, Asec., mas marami iyong kay Presidente according to Ellen.

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Ang problema nga kasi talaga basis kasi iyon ng policy. Like iyong sinasabi niya iyong the reason why he is very hard on—harsh iyong kaniyang anti-drug campaign kasi marami siyang sundalo na—madami ng law enforcement officers na namamatay. Primero, nag-umpisa siya sa one or two, naging three and four hanggang naging 7 to 8 na. Alam mo hindi totoo iyon, 80 lang—according to PNP and ano—80 lang ang—

**ASEC. BANAAG:** We have data on that. We have data on that.

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Kasi kung 7 to 8 everyday aabot ng 3,000 iyan.

**PINKY WEBB:** Asec., do you submit that sometimes there's really nothing you can do when the President says something?

**ASEC. BANAAG:** The best defender of the President is the President himself. And when he goes out, he's open. He says what he wants to say and—

**PINKY WEBB:** Kahit na mali? Kahit na hindi tama?

**ASEC. BANAAG:** Hindi naman, kumbaga may reason kung bakit sasabihin ng ating Pangulo—

**PINKY WEBB:** Kasi iyon ang akala niyang tama?

**ASEC. BANAAG:** Kasi iyon ang alam niya and he's convinced na iyon ang tamang sasabihin. I mean, as a leader ito -- sa amin -- and for the President. In fairness to all government agencies, there's just so much going on. There's just so much good news. So there's no reason na kailangan mong to make up something para may maibalita ka lang.

**PINKY WEBB:** But you know let's be fair about this. Every President will say that there's so many good news going around and yet ang binabalita or ang lumalabas ay hindi masyadong magandang balita. Hindi ba Ellen?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Ako kasi there's no such thing as a good news or bad news—

**PINKY WEBB:** It's news [laughs].

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Only news. As long as it is true, it's good 'di ba? Anything that is not true is bad.

**PINKY WEBB:** So I wanna get to this, because this is also the meat of conversation is Asec. Mocha Uson. Okay, nandoon na tayo. Sabi ni Secretary Andanar mayroon siyang ano talaga, mayroon siyang captured market, OFWs, C-D-E and you know good for her. But with that comes, you know, a huge responsibility. I wanna go back very briefly to—a supposed victim, iyong naging collateral damage ni Asec. Mocha - at least to him, si Senator Bam Aquino. Let's

listen to that exchange—well the statement of Senator Aquino during the hearing last Tuesday.

(SOUNDBYTE OF SEN. BAM AQUINO)

**PINKY WEBB:** Asec., do you agree - that's misinformation?

**ASEC. BANAAG:** That's according to Senator Bam. And of course, I cannot speak for Asec. Mocha cause I was not able to read the particular blog. That's—

**PINKY WEBB:** So after that hearing, hindi mo pa rin binasa iyong blog?

**ASEC. BANAAG:** I went through, I went through the blog and I did not—I was not able to ask Asec. Mocha kasi she's in Italy. So I wasn't able to ask her kung bakit, bakit niya nasabi iyon—

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Bakit ninyo tinawag na Pagpag Bill?

**ASEC. BANAAG:** Yes. Kasi like I said, there are things that they say, there are 'lingo,' may mga lengguwahe sila na sinasabing sila -- ang social media that I don't really understand. Not that I don't want to understand, but then it has to explained to me that I would really appreciate.

**PINKY WEBB:** Does Pagpag Bill sound good to you or not? Frankly?

**ASEC. BANAAG:** I don't understand. I don't really understand.

**PINKY WEBB:** Sige Ellen ikaw?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Ano ba iyong Pagpag Bill? Iyong mga leftovers?

**PINKY WEBB:** I guess the point is this, to the Senator, he says, it's a good bill para iyong mga leftover na pagkain goes somewhere na hindi siya masasayang. And yet siguro naiba—mahirap, kasi I can't also speak for her. At least kay Senator Aquino kasi iyon ang sinabi niya na troll daw siya at ngayon in limbo dahil doon sa sinabi supposed to be ni Asec. Mocha Uson.

So sige let's drop that because that's between them. You know, hindi din natin alam exactly kung anong ibig sabihin ng 'Pagpag.' Baka naman sa ibang tao hindi ganoon kasi ang

Pagpag. But ganito na lang, Ellen, Asec... should a government official such as Asec. Uson, dapat ba itigil na niya talaga iyong blog niya kapag siya ay isang government official? Ellen...

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Alam mo, dapat alam lang niya kasi iyong difference ng—like you can have a blog, a government official can have a blog. You can blog ‘di ba about your dog ‘di ba... about your...

**PINKY WEBB:** Can you blog about the President if you’re working for government? About the administration’s gains?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** You can blog, but then you should feel responsible about it ‘di ba, iyong policy ninyo na whatever you’re saying there, dapat ano iyon—

**PINKY WEBB:** Backed up...

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Oo, backed up iyon. Tapos ‘yan puwede kang... puwede ‘yan papasok under ethical standards you know.

**PINKY WEBB:** Okay. So you don’t think dapat itigilna niya iyong blog niya?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Hindi, ayusin lang niya iyong mga sinasabi niya doon ‘di ba, iyong... huwag niya ilipat iyong Mayon Volcano sa Naga (*laughs*) ‘di ba, iyong ganoon lang, ayusin lang niya.

**PINKY WEBB:** Iyong mga ganoon... Papaano iyong—sandali lang Asec. Ha. Papaano iyong... when she hits on opposition senators, is that okay also in her blog?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Kung mapapanindigan ba niya, ‘di ba?

**PINKY WEBB:** Basta may ebidensiya, parang ganoon?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Oo...

**PINKY WEBB:** Okay. Asec., what about you?

**ASEC. BANAAG:** You know what I’ve discovered this morning? May dalawang puntos kaming pinag-a-agreehan ni Ellen. Pangalawa ‘to na, it doesn’t mean to say na ‘pag public official ka, you let go of your blog. And I agree na mas responsable ka lang – actually kahit hindi ka opisyal, all the more ‘pag opisyal ka. And in fairness to Asec. Mocha, she apologizes readily kapag nagkakamali siya. And for the past months since the time na after ng first na hearing, she was more careful with the things that she blogs, the things that she puts on her blog. And before she entered public service, she was already a blogger.

**PINKY WEBB:** Yeah. But, do you buy that excuse just because before you enter public service ganoon ka na, kaya hindi mo pakakawalan iyon?

**ASEC. BANAAG:** Ah no—

**PINKY WEBB:** In fact when you become a public official, hindi ba there's a law there dapat—oo...

**ASEC. BANAAG:** Yeah, the more. She's more careful now, in fairness to her.

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** I mean, there's no excuse for spreading lies 'di ba – whether you're a government official—

**PINKY WEBB:** Or not...

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** But the more if you're government official, kasi you are being paid—

**PINKY WEBB:** Yeah. And especially her, because she has a lot of followers 'di ba?

**ELLEN TORDESILLAS:** Oo, iyon...

**ASEC. BANAAG:** Yes, yes... Pinky and ito, Asec. Mocha is not exempted from the law. Nakasuhan din naman siya, 'di ba? So dito, hindi natin sinasabi na dahil public official ka, hindi ka makakasuhan. If someone thinks that—if anybody would think that I maligned anyone, then...

**PINKY WEBB:** Yeah, and there's the Cybercrime Law of 2012 as well.

**ASEC. BANAAG:** Yes...

**PINKY WEBB:** Asec. Banaag and Ellen Tordesillas, thank you. I wish we had more time, pero ubos na oras natin. Maraming salamat sa inyong dalawa. 'Til the next hearing, thank you.

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