



## JOINT STATEMENT

2 November 2024

### **Commemorating the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists (IDEI) 2024 - Stop All Forms of Violence and Fear Against Journalists**

The Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ), National Union of Journalists Peninsular Malaysia (NUJM) and Gerakan Media Merdeka Malaysia (GERAMM) commemorate the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists (IDEI) on 2 November 2024 by stressing that the crimes, neglect and violence in all forms committed against journalists cannot continue. To end impunity against journalists means we must stop this exemption from punishment from the consequences of these injurious actions against journalists. We stand in solidarity with the journalists across the world affected by these issues and urge everyone to unite to preserve media freedom by protecting these journalists as agents of democracy.

In light of Malaysia's recent drop in Reporters Without Borders' 2024 World Press Freedom Index, it is critical to recognise the pressing need to address the declining state of media freedom in Malaysia. It is clear, even in 2024, that excessive censorship and the continued existence of oppressive laws also consistently pose a threat to media freedom and journalists' right to freedom of expression as enshrined within Article 10 of the Federal Constitution.

A growing concern that threatens Malaysia's media landscape recently has been economic violence in the form of low wages, unsafe working conditions, and job insecurity. Recently, multiple issues have exacerbated the economic sustainability of journalists in Malaysia's media landscape. Namely, these include restructuring and layoffs in several major online portals including Free Malaysia Today, Malay Mail and the Scoop. We have also seen The Vibes, The Malaysian Insight and GETARAN failing to pay the wages of a group of journalists in their organisation. As agents of democracy that prop up the media, the fourth estate of democracy, the untenable economic condition of journalists is unacceptable. To carry out their role effectively as such, they must be provided with fair remuneration and decent and safe working conditions.

Further, the lack of accountability for the actions taken against journalists throughout their careers has long gone unaddressed in Malaysia. In August, three Malaysiakini journalists were called in for investigation under the Communications and Multimedia Act regarding their sources on an article about an alleged reshuffle of top police officers. This is an affront to the internationally recognised principle of source protection which allows journalists to carry out their role of informing the public with effectiveness, thus jeopardising both their ability to do their job and the people's right to accessible information.

Lack of political will to initiate constructive law reform also continue to foster a culture of fear as laws like the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) 1984, the Sedition Act 1949, Official Secrets Act

and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act continue to promote self-censorship due to fear of legal repercussions and institutional red tape.

Recognising the importance of the media and preserving their place in our society must be held to the utmost highest order within all institutions in Malaysia.

We urge that the Malaysian Media Council (MMC) as an independent, multistakeholder self-regulatory body for the industry be established, without further delay, and be given the mandate to have the powers to protect journalists – legally, physically, economically, and socially – and the integrity of our media landscape.

Therefore, in conjunction with IDEI, CIJ, GERAMM, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) are hosting a Media Solidarity Festival on **16 November 2024** to shed light on these issues. All events, including the live performances, bazaar, live podcast, speakers' session, and exhibition will fully feature journalists and former journalists in order to support their businesses as well as highlight their economic struggles and the plights of journalists on the job.

IDEI and the Media Solidarity Festival are an urgent call to policymakers and heads of media companies: this neglect of journalists' labour rights, the harassment of agents of democracy carrying out their duty and the threat to our media landscape shall no longer continue.

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