

[For Immediate Release]

26 February 2025

Press Statement

Civil Society In Support of the Passing of the Malaysian Media Council Bill

We, the undersigned civil society organisations working on freedom of expression and media freedom, support the passing of the Malaysian Media Council Bill 2024 in Dewan Rakyat today. The establishment of the Malaysian Media Council (MMC) marks a significant step towards fostering an independent, multi-stakeholder regulatory and accountable media ecosystem.

We hope this legislative milestone will safeguard media freedom, uphold journalistic integrity, and promote and gain public trust in Malaysia's media landscape. By setting ethical standards, implementing a grievance and dispute resolution mechanism, and promoting professional development, the MMC will empower journalists and media practitioners to operate freely while adhering to the highest journalistic principles and practices.

It is envisioned that the MMC will continue to uphold and enhance confidence in the media and strengthen our information and freedom of expression ecosystem, especially in an environment too often marked by self-censorship, the spread of disinformation and hate content, unethical reporting driven by racism, bigotry, misogyny or xenophobia, and the abuse of artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithms to maximise profit and economic viability.

As the local media industry continues to face economic challenges, we are seeing an increasing number of retrenchment and downsizing exercises by media organisations. These have caused concerns surrounding job insecurity, delayed salaries and poor work conditions. We hope that the MMC will also prioritise the welfare of media workers and hold media owners accountable for unfair labour practices. The MMC should ensure that media companies uphold ethical employment standards, protect journalists' rights, and ensure a sustainable, fair, and responsible media industry in Malaysia.

We aspire for an institution that serves to create a sustainable environment to meet and uphold Article 10 of the Federal Constitution, that enshrines freedom of expression - and media freedom as an extension - for all in Malaysia.

There are still some concerns about the Bill

Nevertheless, even as we support the passing of the Bill, we still emphasise the need to address key concerns in the Bill to ensure it fully serves its intended purpose. In this regard, we maintain our fundamental objection to having government representatives in the Board of the MMC as it undermines the object and purpose of an independent self-regulatory body. However, the Deputy Minister of Communications during the debate in Dewan Rakyat today, reiterated that the two government representatives would be those within or familiar with the media industry such as

from Bernama and RTM. We hope that this promise is a way forward in ensuring the commitment of the government to promote media independence and place the interest of the public as the top priority rather than for political expediency.

Further, to ensure that this is not just a symbolic gesture to appease the media and the public, the government must now empower and resource the MMC adequately to fulfil its intended reform mandate. These would include non-negotiable commitments by the government to repeal oppressive laws such as the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) 1984, Sedition Act 1948, Official Secrets Act 1972, Section 211 and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act (CMA) 1998, Section 114A of the Evidence Act 1950, and Section 203A, Section 499 and Section 500 of the Penal Code (criminal defamation) as well as amend other laws like the Whistleblower Protection Act 2010. Without simultaneous and immediate legal reforms, the effectiveness of the MMC will be undermined and the MMC is likely to become another ineffective institution in Malaysia. We urge the government to present a clear roadmap and timeline for media law reform to achieve true media freedom in Malaysia.

Ensure the effectiveness of MMC.

Malaysia has already dropped 34 places on the World Press Freedom Index, from 73rd in 2023 to 107th in 2024, according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), reflecting Malaysia's poor track record in preserving media freedom. In this regard, we recognise that a free and responsible media, as the fourth estate, is the cornerstone of democracy. As such, it is hoped that the MMC will play a vital role in empowering the media in its role as this cornerstone, thus positioning Malaysia as a progressive nation and improving our global standing in press freedom.

Finally, we call upon all stakeholders, including policymakers, media, journalists, civil society organisations and the public, to rally behind this initiative and ensure its successful implementation with necessary improvements for the betterment of Malaysia's media landscape and democratic future. We urge all media organisations to join the MMC and stand together to preserve the integrity of the media as the fourth estate, collectively.

Issued by:

- 1) Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ)**
- 2) ARTICLE 19**
- 3) Gerakan Media Merdeka (GERAMM)**
- 4) Justice for Sisters (JFS)**
- 5) Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)**
- 6) Sinar Project**
- 7) Amnesty International Malaysia**
- 8) Malaysian Centre for Constitutionalism and Human Rights (MCCHR)**
- 9) National Union of Journalists Peninsular Malaysia (NUJM)**
- 10) KRYSS Network**

Endorsed by:

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- 2) Pusat Komus**
- 3) Gabungan Pilihan Raya Bersih & Adil (Bersih)**
- 4) SIUMAN Collective**
- 5) Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER)**
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- 7) Development of Human Resources for Rural Areas (DHRRA), Malaysia**
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