



PRESS STATEMENT

2 November 2025

International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists: A Safe Working Environment for All Journalists

The Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) commemorates the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists (IDEI) today as we reaffirm the urgent need to create safe working environments for journalists to carry out the civic duty of informing the public with accurate information.

In line with this year's theme of **"Chat GBV: Raising Awareness on AI-facilitated Gender-Based Violence against Women Journalists"**, CIJ highlights that while Malaysia has seen encouraging developments, especially through the establishment of the Malaysian Media Council (MMC), media freedom remains fragile amid continued hostility and gender-based violence, both online and offline.

The intersection between online and offline harms has made gender-based violence (GBV) in Malaysia more pervasive and continues to pose threats to the nation and media freedom in Malaysia. The recent surge in online harassment and sexual violence reflects how digital tools can amplify real-world misogyny. We are seeing a rise of demeaning portrayals of women in the media, and coupled with the recent cases of femicide and sexual violence, brings new fears for all women, including journalists, in all spaces around Malaysia. With the rise of **AI technologies** such as deepfakes and generative content, these threats are becoming more sophisticated—eroding the safety, credibility, and dignity of women journalists.

This relatively new issue is compounded with persisting issues of labour threats, economic violence, censorship and crackdown on media freedom. Although we may see the rise of tech-facilitated GBV as a new threat, it also builds upon pre-existing fears within Malaysia of unsafe working environments for women as well as the intersection of AI, information disorder and suppression by authorities.

Women journalists continue to face disproportionate risks. In July 2024, we saw the case of a woman journalist being sexually harassed whilst covering the Sungai Bakap by-election, exemplifying the unsafe environment for women media practitioners who face undue targeting due to their gender, deterring them from doing the duty conferred onto them. In a situation where action needed to be taken to showcase adequate protections and deterrent measures against the perpetrators, the police classified the case as no further action (NFA).

The design blunder of the Jalur Gemilang from Sin Chew in April this year underscores the urgent need for clear AI governance in newsrooms, including specific requirements for human oversight in the use of generative AI. While human oversight remains critical, the punitive response of fining Sin Chew RM100,000 and the suspension of both of its editors highlights the lack of respect of international human rights standards of proportionality, legitimacy and necessity when it comes to restricting media freedom. It reinforces a climate of fear and self-censorship rather than promoting ethical and responsible innovation.

Hostility toward journalists also persists at the highest levels. The recent incident involving Housing and Local Government Minister Nga Kor Ming publicly chiding an Utusan Malaysia journalist for asking a legitimate question reveals an ongoing culture of intimidation. Such behaviour undermines the government's own efforts to build a freer and more accountable media environment through the MMC.

As these problems continue to persist, along with economic and labour threats – looking at the affected employees of The Malaysian Insight, The Vibes, and Getaran who had to demand for their unpaid wages and statutory contributions from Petra News Sdn Bhd – we must look for solutions that balance allowing technological progress and access to information through the media whilst preserving a safe environment for media practitioners to carry out their civic duty.

While CIJ welcomes the formation of the Malaysian Media Council as a step toward independent self-regulation and protection of journalists, the Council must be empowered to act autonomously and uphold ethical journalism without political and government interference. As an independent, multistakeholder body, allowing this will give them the mandate and ability to meet the public interest, a responsibility that should be held in the highest regard and the primary guiding principle, superseding arbitrary laws with the potential of weaponisation. The MMC's success will depend on its ability to safeguard journalists, particularly women, from both institutional and AI-facilitated harm.

As such, CIJ recommends several measures to create this environment:

1. Repeal and reform the laws that suppress media freedom and continue to promote self-censorship due to fear of legal repercussions and institutional red tape, such as the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) 1984, the Sedition Act 1949, Official Secrets Act 1972 and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998.
2. The government must empower the Malaysian Media Council (MMC) to independently ensure ethical standards of journalism are upheld and protect journalists so that they may carry out their role.
3. In promoting the highest standards of ethical reporting, the MMC is called upon to push for multistakeholder action regarding the regulation of the use of AI in newsrooms. This includes the establishment of clear, comprehensive guidelines on the use of AI in newsrooms, with the public interest at its center, whilst taking into account the intersectional impact of algorithmic biases on women portrayed in media.
4. The government must adopt a holistic whole-of-society-approach to create tangible protections for all women – including women media practitioners – in all spaces, as well as start awareness and educational programs that would guide all in Malaysia on how to use technology ethically, treating public interest and root causes for harm in the media as its first priority.

Malaysia, again, stands at a crossroad. The establishment of the MMC offers a genuine chance to strengthen media freedom and accountability while centering media as the fourth pillar of democracy. Yet, this progress could be undermined if journalists, especially women, can work without fear of harassment, retaliation or institutional silencing.

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The Centre for Independent Journalism is a non-profit organisation that aspires for a society that is democratic, just and free where all peoples will enjoy free media and the freedom to express, seek and impart information.