

## **PRESS STATEMENT**

**17 January 2026**

### **CIJ Condemns The Arrest of Ex-FMT Journalist; Hostile Environment for Journalists**

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The Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) condemns the arrest of Rex Tan, former journalist at Free Malaysia Today under Section 4(1) of the Sedition Act, Section 505(c) of the Penal Code and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act today. This arrest was made following a recent line of questioning posed by the journalist at a public lecture titled “Gaza Exposes the Complicity of International Actors” on January 12 in Kuala Lumpur.

As a result of his line of questioning, the journalist faced harassment, intimidation and doxxing online, having had his personal details shared publicly. As such, we find this arrest highly concerning, proving to be both an excessive and hostile action towards the journalist, especially after an internal inquiry was conducted by Free Malaysia Today and the journalist’s own apology and subsequent resignation in light of his actions.

In light of these remedies to the journalist’s actions, taking action to arrest the journalist clearly failed to follow international standards of the three-part test of proportionality, necessity and legitimacy. This is further compounded by the already significant backlash faced by the journalist after his line of questioning went viral online.

This sets a dangerous precedent for journalists as the authorities not only fail to protect their safety and privacy - as no amount of dissatisfaction should warrant compromising these - it establishes an even more chilling environment, the authorities reprimanding and threatening the safety of the journalists themselves, using laws that utilise vague language and archaic notions.

Despite promises for reforms, including one to improve media freedom by the Prime Minister, we see this hostile legal and cultural environment for the media persisting, discouraging young journalists from asking questions of a sensitive nature and preventing critical discourse, in fear of both public backlash and legal repercussions. The persistence of this environment allows editorial censorship to prevail over public interest news.

Moreover, the decision and arrest by the authorities undermines the mandate and spirit of the Malaysian Media Council, a multistakeholder institution meant to represent the public interest and serve as the interface between the public and media, uphold ethical reporting standards

and to address grievances. Given the Malaysian Media Council has also offered its services to facilitate conciliation in good faith, we must question why the authorities have not allowed them to reconcile this matter as is their role. Its position and the abilities it has been equipped with would allow them to deal with this matter in line with international standards whilst meeting the public interest.

Therefore, we must urge the police to release the ex-FMT journalist with no further delay and instead to focus on investigating the issue of the violation of his privacy, harassment and intimidation. Any further redress needed from the journalist should be overseen by the Malaysian Media Council, following international standards of proportionality, necessity and legitimacy. This must be a call for reforms to happen urgently, both culturally and legally, to create a safe environment for journalists and a Malaysia that is able to engage in critical discourse without fear.

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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.*