

PRESS STATEMENT

1 July 2026

CIJ Condemns Actions of Sabah Authorities for Barring Bersih Director from Entering Sabah

The Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) condemns the actions of the Sabahan authorities in barring Bersih Director, Asraf Sharafi Azhar, from entering Sabah and his following deportation to Kuala Lumpur on 30 June 2025, preventing him from seeing his family - his wife and two children. This not only serves as an act of intimidation against human rights defenders, but a direct affront of one's right to freedom of movement and by extension, his freedom of expression.

As a human rights defender, these actions taken against him can be construed as a threat to his private life and personal affairs. As these actions pose a threat to Asraf, it is clear that this is an act of intimidation that can prevent him from carrying out his role as a human rights defender (HRD), this prohibition from seeing his family serving as disincentive to carry out his role as a HRD. This is especially salient as it comes after Asraf and other activists marched to Parliament to hand over a memorandum urging the government to establish a royal commission of inquiry to investigate the "corporate mafia" allegations involving the MACC.

Further, no valid reason has been given by the Sabahan government as to why he was placed on a warning list. This lack of transparency goes against the public interest as HRDs are voices representing the public's needs.

As such, we urge Sabahan authorities to lift this ban immediately as we stand in solidarity with Asraf for his fundamental liberties to be restored to him. Barring this, we call for clear justifications and valid reasoning behind the suppression of basic human rights by any authority, with the public interest being at the center of any actions taken.

17 January 2026

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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.