



MEDIA STATEMENT

28 September 2026

International Day for Universal Access to Information: Malaysia Must Expedite the Political Will to Guarantee Peoples' Right to Know

On the [International Day for Universal Access to Information \(IDUAI\)](#), the Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ), ARTICLE 19 and the Center to Combat Corruption and Cronyism (C4 Center) call on the Malaysian Government and Parliament to make the right to access information a meaningful and accessible right, and not merely a promise of reform.

The United Nations has designated this year's theme as **"Upholding Information Integrity in the Digital Age: The Role of Access to Information in Addressing Information Disorder."** Reliable, timely and credible public information is essential to informed participation, accountability and trust in public institutions.

Malaysia stands at a critical juncture. Parliament is considering the nation's first Federal Freedom of Information (FOI) law, while serious questions remain about the transparency, legal basis, and implementation of Najib Razak's conditional pardon and house arrest.

These are not separate transparency failures. They expose the same problem: Malaysians cannot hold institutions accountable when the government makes decisions behind a wall of secrecy.

We acknowledge the Government's decision to introduce a Federal Freedom of Information Bill and welcome its referral to a Parliamentary Special Select Committee (PSSC) following its first reading in July 2026. However, as our organisations have [stated](#), the FOI Bill, as tabled, falls far short of what Malaysians should expect from landmark transparency legislation. The [Centre for Law and Democracy's](#) assessment subsequently gave the Bill **47 out of 150 points** under its Right to Information Rating methodology, highlighting the extent to which the proposed framework needs improvement.

The FOI Bill must be strengthened into an enforceable right to know act, consistent with Article 10(1)(a) of the Federal Constitution, international law and standards and the recommendations of Malaysian and international civil society.

Malaysia must **end the culture of secrecy that continues to shield the exercise of power from public scrutiny**. The government cannot credibly champion transparency while limiting the public's access to information about decisions of profound public interest, including from the laws governing access to information itself. The government must demonstrate its political will and commitment to transparency by applying these principles across the board and not letting them remain mere lip service to garner votes.

On this International Day for Universal Access to Information, we call on the Government and Parliament to act.

The Government and Parliament must:

- 1) **Strengthen the FOI Bill**, currently under the purview of the Parliamentary Special Select Committee (PSSC), into an enforceable right to know act, consistent with international laws and standards and the recommendations from Civil Societies. It must:
 - Uphold the **constitutional guarantee under Article 10(1)(a)** of the Federal Constitution and guarantee freedom of information as a pre-condition to the realisation of the freedom of expression and speech.
 - **Make disclosure the rule and secrecy the exception**, with narrowly defined exemptions based on demonstrable harm and subject to a strong public-interest override.
 - **Ensure the FOI law cannot be undermined by existing secrecy provisions**, including the Official Secrets Act.
 - **Remove unnecessary restrictions on who can request information** and ensure everyone can exercise the right without having to demonstrate a particular interest or purpose.
 - **Establish an FOI Commission as an independent oversight body**, with the power to review refusals, order disclosure and monitor the implementation of the FOI law.
 - **Require proactive disclosure** of information and documents of significant public interest.
 - **Make the parliamentary FOI process transparent and participatory**, including publication of submissions, recommendations and the revised Bill.
- 2) Guarantee **prompt disclosure and publication of the documents necessary for the public to understand the decision regarding the conditional pardon of Najib Razak**, as demanded by [CIJ](#) and other [civil society organisations](#), including:
 - the relevant **Pardons Board minutes**;
 - the **Attorney General's written submission**, subject only to narrowly justified redactions;

- the **full conditions governing the house-arrest arrangement**;
- the **legal basis** for implementing house arrest and its relationship with existing laws;
- the mechanisms for **monitoring and enforcing compliance**; and
- significant **public expenditure** associated with the arrangement.

These demands do not challenge the constitutional existence of the power of pardon. They demand transparency about the exercise and implementation of authority's power.

Constitutional powers are not a licence for institutional secrecy.

The Government has repeatedly committed itself to institutional reform, good governance and restoring public confidence. The test of those commitments is whether transparency is upheld when disclosure is difficult, politically sensitive or institutionally consequential.

We believe that, a Freedom of Information law that leaves the underlying culture of secrecy intact will not deliver meaningful reform.

In the spirit of IDUAI, we call on Malaysia to move from promises of transparency to a legally enforceable culture of openness.

Malaysians have the right to know. Disclosure of information held by government and public authorities is necessary to scrutinise the exercise of public power. This ensures that no institution is beyond legitimate public accountability.

The right to information is not a concession from government. It is a foundation of accountable government. This legislation is essential to guarantee the public's collective right to be informed by public authorities about important aspects of their functioning; the right to seek or request information; and the right to be informed and to receive information about various aspects of the public sphere.

We are also pleased to launch our campaign demonstrating the level of support from our Members of Parliament (MPs) for the guarantee of a robust FOI Bill. Look out for more information on our social media in the coming days.

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