CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM
Advocating Media Freedom and Access to Information

PRESS STATEMENT

2 November 2026

CIJ Calls for Proportionate Action Against Journalists and Calls for the Use of the Malaysian Media Council as a Platform for Grievances

On the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists (IDEI), the Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) calls for an end to disproportionate actions against journalists and urges the use of the Malaysian Media Council (MMC) as an independent platform for addressing grievances concerning journalistic practices and media content.

This year's IDEI theme, "Threats Evolve. Impunity Endures", highlights how advances in technology, alongside the use of new weapons and tactics, are changing the ways journalists are threatened and attacked. Yet, as UNESCO has highlighted, a persistent feature of these crimes is that those responsible are rarely held accountable. Impunity not only denies justice to journalists and their families, but also undermines press freedom by creating an environment in which journalists may fear the consequences of reporting on matters of public interest.

In Malaysia, while threats to press freedom do not always manifest into physical violence, journalists continue to face legislative and judicial pressure, online harassment, intimidation and threats of legal action. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked Malaysia 95th out of 180 countries in its 2026 World Press Freedom Index, down from 88th in 2025, reflecting ongoing concerns about the enforcement of restrictive laws and judicial pressure on the media.

While there is no large-scale numerical count of physical violence, isolated physical and online intimidation tactics have emerged. Journalists are now exposed to the risks of online harms, including digital doxxing and online threats of physical harm, particularly female journalists and those investigating politically sensitive topics, environmental issues, or "3R" elements. Though not prevalent, investigating sensitive matters carries the risk of escalation to physical assault.

For instance, sports journalist Haresh Deol was physically assaulted by two men last year, allegedly in connection with his reporting on the Football Association of Malaysia's player documentation scandal. In January this year, journalist Rex Tan was arrested and detained for half a day in Kuala Lumpur during a police investigation involving the Sedition Act and Section 505(c) of the Penal Code, after having received numerous verbal and online threats. Journalists in Malaysia continue to see the continued use of alleged Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP), which can place significant financial and legal burdens on journalists and media organisations. Such lawsuits risk discouraging scrutiny of powerful individuals and institutions, even when reporting on matters of legitimate public interest.

At the same time, the changing information landscape, powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI), as it becomes increasingly integrated into news production, presents new challenges for journalistic accountability, professional integrity and accuracy, transparency and public trust, including the potential to impact the economic plight of journalists.

The Malaysian media ecosystem must also future-proof itself from the current global experiences where AI is increasingly being weaponised to threaten, intimidate and silence journalists. AI-generated deepfakes, manipulated images and fabricated audio or video are being used to discredit journalists, undermine their credibility and fuel coordinated harassment. At the same time, generative AI enables the rapid production and amplification of targeted threats, misogynistic abuse and disinformation campaigns. AI-powered surveillance and facial recognition technologies also heighten the risks of identifying, tracking and monitoring journalists, particularly those reporting on corruption, environmental issues, human rights abuses and politically sensitive issues.

While the tools of intimidation may be changing, the underlying objective remains the same: to instil fear, suppress critical reporting and shield those in power from accountability. We stress that any grievances concerning media coverage should be addressed through proportionate, transparent and accountable mechanisms, rather than intimidation, harassment or the alleged disproportionate use of legal action. The MMC must play an important role in strengthening public trust in the media, upholding professional standards and encouraging accountability without compromising editorial independence or the media's ability to report on matters of public interest.

On this International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, CIJ calls on the government, corporations and individuals to uphold press freedom and ensure that grievances against journalists are addressed through fair and transparent processes following international standards of (i) legality; (ii) legitimate aim; and (iii) necessity and proportionality. This includes safeguarding journalists from violence and intimidation, refraining from the disproportionate use of legal action to silence reporting, and supporting the MMC as a meaningful avenue for resolving disputes.

Journalists must be able to report on matters of public interest safely, independently and ethically, without fear of retaliation. Protecting this ability is essential not only to press freedom, but also to the public's right to know and to a society in which those in power can be held accountable.

2 November 2026

Wathshlah G. Naidu
CIJ Executive Director

For further inquiries, please contact Natasha at comms@cijmalaysia.net

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.