



**MEDIA RELEASE: SOUTH EAST ASIA**

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### **SEAJU calls for release of political cartoonist**

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the South East Asia Journalists Union (SEAJU) today strongly criticize the increasing suppression of freedom of expression in Malaysia through the use of the Sedition Act, mostly recently in the arrest of a Malaysian cartoonist. The IFJ and SEAJU have called for his immediate release and described it as yet another example of sedition laws violating press freedom.

On Tuesday, February 10, cartoonist Zulkifi 'Zunar' Anwar Uljaqur was arrested by five police officers. Current court orders say that he will remain in police custody until tomorrow, February 14, though this may be extended. Prior to his arrest, Zunar released a cartoon criticizing the conviction of Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim on sodomy charges. Zunar was not yet been charged, but if he convicted under the Sedition Act 1948 he could face a maximum of three years in jail.

Anwar was sentenced to five years in prison on sodomy charges on February 10 with the ruling received widespread international condemnation. A public backlash to the arrest was fanned after Malaysian police threatened action against those deemed to have breached the Sedition Act. Two other critics are also under investigation include Member of Parliament NgaKor Ming, who tweeted for the public to oppose the 'despotic regime' and RafiziRamli for a cartoon he drew of the judge.

According to [Article 19](#), more than 20 people have been arrested with sedition since August 2014, when the Malaysian government started cracking down on freedom of expression. The Sedition Act 1948 criminalises any conduct that has a 'seditious tendency', including to 'excite disaffection' or 'bring into hatred or contempt' against the ruler or government. The prosecution is not required to prove intent and the maximum penalty is three years in jail.

Zunar is a regular critic of the government and author of several volumes of political cartoons. In January his offices were raided, and in 2010 and 2014 he was investigated by police under the Sedition Act. In September, 2014, [Susan Loone](#), a *Malaysiakini* journalist was detained for four days under the Sedition Act after she published seditious comments from a politician following an interview.

SEAJU said: "The Sedition Act is becoming a tool for the Malaysian government to punish critics and the subsequent arrests are intended to create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation among journalists and political opponents. We call on the Malaysian government to cease the misuse of this legislation to suppress freedom of expression and criticism, both of which are key elements of democratic nations."

SEAJU urge the Malaysian authorities to immediately release Zunar without charge and cease investigations all investigations under the Act.

The IFJ and SEAJU call for the repeal of the Sedition Act and cease its use a tool of oppression and punishment against freedom of expression.

**For further information contact IFJ Asia-Pacific on +61 2 9333 0946**

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