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TO ALL NEWS EDITORS

PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Malaysia: Amendments to the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 must not restrict the right to freedom of expression online

THE National Union of Journalists Peninsular Malaysia (NUJ) expresses its grave concern over the proposal to amend the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (CMA).

NUJ considers it best to bring up the right to reporting and freedom of press since online news now play a bigger role in informing the public. Clamping down on online reporting will not only maim freedom of information but also removes the democratic rights of the people.

The proposed amendments will include mandatory registration of "political" bloggers and online news portals, and an increase in penalties for offences under the CMA.

The proposed amendments have yet to be publically shared with Malaysian civil societies, among others the human rights bodies, Journalistic organisations and the Malaysian Bar Human Rights Committee. The lack of transparency in this process is undemocratic and emblematic of a larger trend in recent years of the government amending laws to further crackdown on free speech rather than promote and protect the right.

On the basis of information available NUJ expresses its concerned that amendments to the CMA include:

- the registration of political blogs and websites,
- an increase in penalties for offences related to undesirable content,
- broader powers for the Internet regulatory body - the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) - to take down online content without proper oversight.

To stand alongside other concerned parties, NUJ is ill at ease that the proposed changes, if introduced and passed by Parliament, would have the effect of entrenching censorship in an environment already heavily regulated for the media and publishing.

We call on the government to refrain from adopting any of the proposed amendments (if confirmed), in line with the international principles on freedom of expression, which are part of customary international law and to adhere to the practice of democracy which the country has sworn to uphold.

NUJ Executive Council