



30B, Jalan Padang Belia  
50470 Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
T:603 22742867 F: 603 22744776  
Web: [nujm.org/nuj](http://nujm.org/nuj)  
email: [nujmsia@gmail.com](mailto:nujmsia@gmail.com)



43400 UPM Serdang,  
Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia  
Tel: +603-8947 2051 / 6003  
Fax: +603-8943 1296 / +603-8948 7273  
Web: [upm.edu.my](http://upm.edu.my)

## **WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY MAY 3, 2014**

### **INTRODUCTION**

World Press Freedom Day was established by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 1993 as an outgrowth of the Seminar on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press. This seminar took place in Namibia in 1991 and led to the adoption of the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting Independent and Pluralistic Media.

The Windhoek Declaration called to establish, maintain and foster an independent, pluralistic and free press. It emphasized the importance of a free press for developing and maintaining democracy in a nation, and for economic development. World Press Freedom Day is celebrated annually on May 3, the date on which the Windhoek Declaration was adopted.

Although World Press Freedom Day has only been celebrated since 1993, it has much deeper roots in the United Nations. Article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights states that everyone "has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers".

Thus every year, May 3 is a day to remember and uphold the fundamental principles of press freedom and freedom of speech. It serves as an occasion to inform citizens about the violations of press freedom globally – as in many countries around the world journalists continue to face perilous situations in the carrying out their duties. And newspaper publications are being censored, fined, suspended or face closures.

The 2014 World Press Freedom Index spotlights the negative impact of conflicts on freedom of information and its protagonists. The ranking of some countries has also been affected by a tendency to interpret national security needs in an overly broad and abusive manner to the detriment of the right to inform and be informed. This trend constitutes a growing threat worldwide and is even endangering freedom of information in countries regarded as democracies. Finland tops the index for the fourth year running, closely followed by Netherlands and Norway, like last year. At the other end of the index, the last three positions are again held by Turkmenistan, North Korea and Eritrea, three countries where freedom of information is non-existent. Despite occasional turbulence in the past year, these countries continue to be news and information black holes and living hells for the journalists who inhabit them. This year's index covers 180 countries, one more than last year. The new entry, Belize, has been assigned an enviable position (29th). Cases of violence against journalists are rare in Belize but there were some problems: defamation suits involving demands for large amounts in damages, national security restrictions on

implementation of the Freedom of Information Act and sometimes unfair management of broadcast frequencies.

## **ASIAN AND PACIFIC DEMOCRACIES**

The past year showed that certain governments in the Asia-Pacific region, even democratic ones, can be extremely sensitive to criticism. This was evident from the many judicial proceedings, often resulting in disproportionate sentences, that were initiated against journalists under pressure from government agencies or officials.

The Thai government uses *lèse-majesté* charges as an effective weapon for intimidating or silencing those who are disrespectful. The suspended jail sentence imposed on Chiranuch Premchaiporn (also known as **Jiew**), the editor of the online newspaper *Prachatai*, for “comments critical of the monarchy” and the 11-year-jail sentence given to Somyot Prueksakasemsuk, editor of the *Voice of Thaksin* bimonthly, were noteworthy examples. These sentences had a deterrent effect on the entire Thai media.

In South Korea, independent journalists **Kim Ou-joon** and **Choo Chin-woo** were accused of broadcasting “false information” and “defamatory content” about President Park Geun-hye’s brother and father in their satirical podcast “Naneun Ggomsuda.” In Tonga and Papua New Guinea, four journalists were fined or sanctioned for “criticizing” their respective prime ministers.

The Asian democracies also have “forbidden areas” where news is subject to blackouts or censorship. In northern India’s Kashmir region and in Indonesia’s West Papua province, the work of journalists is handicapped by draconian news control policies. In Kashmir, the authorities impose [curfews](#) and often [block the Internet](#) and mobile phone networks.

The situation of the media worsened last year in Malaysia, which is ranked 147th out of 180 countries in the 2015 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index. According to a top United Nations human rights official, a series of amendments to Malaysia’s 1948 Sedition Act risk seriously undermine freedom of expression and opinion throughout the country, and he urged the Asian state to bring its legislation in line with international human rights standards. However the discussion of the forum today is whether the Sedition Act would undermine press freedom, what are the implication of the Act to the Press and also to provide a better understanding of what the scope of the Act to the media workers.

## **IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVES**

Commemoration of World Press Freedom Day is aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- What is the definition of "sedition" in view of the Act?
- To create deeper awareness among media practitioners and general public on the implication of the 1948 Sedition Act in view of a democratic society and its implication on press freedom and the role the press plays to further advance a democratic process;

- To make available a platform to the participants to exchange critical views on the responsibility of the press, which will result in a better understanding of the significance of freedom of expression.
- To exercise media freedom to advance the democratic development of a county.
- To magnify and preserve the gains on freedom of expression created by social media, and on the internet more broadly.

## **PROJECT ACTIVITIES**

A Forum will be organized which will comprise a Panel Discussion. The members of the panel will comprise Malaysian senior journalists, Academician from University of Technology PETRONAS, The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM), the Bar Council, NUJ Past General Secretary as well as prominent human rights / press freedom advocates. A detailed programme will be attached.

## **VENUE / DATE**

The event will be held at Dewan kampus UPM Serdang on May 9, 2015, from 9.00 am to 1.00 pm.

## **ORGANISERS**

The National Union of Journalists Peninsular Malaysia has been hosting this event since 1990s. We are collaborating the forum with the Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Serdang, Selangor. This event will be marked by bringing together a broad array of media professionals, journalists, communicators, academicians, human right activists, students, and the public on a theme that addresses the status of media freedom helping to transform societies faced by media in our rapidly changing world.

\*\*\*\*\*