

Civil society groups tell Utusan to call off inquiry
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More have joined in the chorus demanding that the Utusan Malaysia daily call off the domestic inquiry against the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) chairperson.

In a joint statement by Centre for Independent Journalism, Charter 2000-Aliran, Writers' Alliance for Media Independence and 1 Muted Malaysia, they had called the disciplinary action on Hata Wahari (right) as an "attack" on freedom of expression.

"We view any attempt to sack the union president for expressing his opinion in defence of journalistic integrity as a serious attack on the freedom of expression and media freedom," they said.

"The management of Utusan Malaysia is as free to make a public rebuttal if it disagreed with Hata. It should not penalise Hata by subjecting him to a domestic inquiry that may result in him being fired.

"We note that this is the first time in a long while since an NUJ leader has spoken up against unethical media practices, which he correctly blamed on the lack of media independence due to political interference and restrictive laws.

"We believe that Hata was not only speaking up for the integrity of the profession, but for the right of all Malaysians to have a media that will put the people as their first loyalty, and truth as their first obligation, which means allowing as many different perspectives as possible so that the people can judge and decide for themselves what is truth.

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Hata is facing eight counts of misconduct for issuing statements to news portals Malaysiakini, The Malaysian Insider and Merdeka Review, and The Sun newspaper between Sept 21 and Oct 14 last year.

The notice said he stands accused of insulting the company's management and tarnishing the company's image following his comments that appeared in several publications.

Hata is a senior journalist with Utusan Malaysia and was elected NUJ president last September.

Since then, Hata has criticised Utusan several times for publishing pro-Umno propaganda and blamed its editorial policy for the daily's dwindling circulation.

If sacked, Hata would be the third Utusan employee to face the boot for his union activities. Former NUJ president Yazid Othman as well as the NUJ-Utusan chairperson Amran Ahmad had previously been dismissed during their tenure in office.

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