

**Groups urge Umno to lift online media AGM ban  
Malaysiakini.com  
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Media freedom advocacy groups have urged Umno to lift the ban preventing reporters from *Malaysiakini* and other alternative news portals from covering its ongoing AGM.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) both stressed that Umno should allow all media fair coverage.

"(Umno must) return to the status quo, so that all media organisations can continue coverage without hindrance," said NUJ president Hata Wahari in a media statement today.

Holding Umno president Najib Abdul Razak accountable for the matter, the union urged Najib to issue a directive to its secretary-general Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor to that effect.

He added that the issue is not only limited to alternative media portals as he has received complaints from NUJ members that several journalists from the mainstream press has also been denied press passes to the event without a reasonable explanation.

Hata said that the union feels saddened by Umno chasing away journalists from the media centre set up for the event and condemned the move as going against media freedom.

"The actions of Umno have shown that it is not media-friendly and is not aligned with Najib's speech just yesterday while closing the International Media Forum on the importance of the media's role in fighting extremism.

The tragedy, he said, is that the Malay party headed by its president Najib does not pay heed to the principles that they themselves are claiming to espouse.

"This is proven by their actions in shoing away *Malaysiakini* reporters from being in the media centre," he said.

Ban a disservice

CIJ executive officer Masjaliza Hamzah said that Umno's ban is actually a disservice to the public at large.

"The public who follow politics, especially the youth, no longer read print media and depend on online media to follow developments. Umno is a major party and the public may want to know about its general assembly which may impact national policies."

"It is okay to have press passes and to limit the number of reporters from each organisation, but not so to be selective in targeting the online media and to control which media is 'appropriate' to report on the AGM," said Masjaliza

She also agreed that the incident paints a bad picture of our country, especially given that Malaysia's press freedom ranking has slipped to its lowest in nine years.

"At a time when our media freedom ranking has slipped, we should be doing things to improve our standing and not add more incidents which may cause us to slip further next

year," she said.

Told to leave

The online news portal's reporters were booted from the media centre earlier today despite being told that they were to be allowed to use the facilities by an Umno official prior to this.

While the party's secretary-general had promised media passes when he was interviewed by the portal recently, the portal's application was not approved.

Malaysiakini was not the only media organisation whose applications for passes were not entertained. Several other online media faced the same problem, though they too had been allowed to use the media centre before the expulsion.

Several auxiliary police officers have been posted at the entrance of the media centre, making checks to ensure that only those with media passes are allowed in.

As at press time, reports have confirmed that other online reporters have also been ejected from the media centre by Umno officials.

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