

Drop charge against Zunar, PM urged
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International cartoonists group Cartoonist Right Network International (CRNI) has petitioned the prime minister to safeguard the freedom of expression in the country and to drop any move to charge political cartoonist Zulkiflee SM Anwar with sedition.

In a statement signed by 1,386 cartoonists worldwide, CRNI urged Najib Abdul Razak to stop harassing Zulkiflee, popularly known as Zunar, and to drop restrictions on his publications.

"Censorship rears its ugly and futile head when states start to fail and leaders begin to fear their own inability to govern.

"Healthy democracies have nothing to fear from criticism," CRNI executive director Robert Russell said in the letter.

cartoon-o-phobia zunar press conference in malaysiakini 1 Zunar landed in hot water following the publication of his third comic compilation titled 'Cartoon-o-Phobia', that touched on issues such as the murder of Altantuya and the second sodomy case against Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim, topics said to be taboo to those in power.

Just before the launching ceremony of 'Cartoon-o-Phobia' on Sept 24, police raided Zunar's office and detained him for two days.

He is now being investigated under the Sedition Act and the Printing Presses and Publications Act, both of which carry a punishment of up to three years in jail.

Cartoon-o-phobia sets foot in US

CRNI said that instead of banning Zunar's newest publication, the government should treat it as a "powerful device" that advocates good governance and anti-corruption.

"We find it contradictory that Zunar's rather pointed, yet affectionate, cartoons would be thought to encourage sedition. They rather encourage accountability, transparency and are really very powerful anti-corruption devices.

NONE"Anyone fighting against these political qualities cannot be for democracy and must be for tyranny," Russell said in the letter.

The letter was scheduled to be submitted to the Prime Minister's Office today.

Meanwhile 'Cartoon-o-Phobia' made its international debut at the 23rd Cartoons and Cocktails dinner in Washington in the United States recently, where it was one of 150 comic books from around the globe to be put on auction.

Delighted to win support from the international community, Zunar hopes the prime minister will pay serious attention to the CRNI letter.

"The support from fellow cartoonists is very important. It is a morale booster for me to continue the fight against censorship and for freedom of expression," he said.

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