

**CIJ : stop the blame game**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**Aug 19, 2008**

A media watchdog today expressed its disappointment with the attitude of political parties in playing the blame game in the recent incident where two press photographers were assaulted during the Permatang Pauh by-election.

MCPX

The Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) said that the political parties - be it from Barisan Nasional or Pakatan Rakyat - have shown little concern towards the safety of journalists and photographers in doing their work.

CIJ press freedom central market 030508  
CIJ's executive director V Gayathry (left) said all political parties must censure their members and supporters who inflict harm and injury to journalists and photographers.

She added that the parties must also enforce greater respect for media workers.

"All cases of attacks against media workers must be properly investigated and the wrong doers brought to justice," she said in a statement today.

She was referring to the incident which happened on Aug 16 when a group of supporters, allegedly from PKR, had assaulted New Straits Times Press (NSTP) photographer Mohamad Sairien Mohamad Nafiz and French photojournalist Halim Berbar.

Mohamad Sairien was taking pictures of several people, believed to be PKR supporters, harassing a passing vehicle belonging to the BN when he was set upon by the crowd.

NST journalist reporter photographer attacked in Permatang Pauh 170808  
PKR denied that its supporters were involved in the incident and promised to investigate the matter and take appropriate action against the wrong doers, if they are party members.

### **A rare voice of disapproval from BN**

BN leaders however have taken the opportunity to lambast the opposition parties for their failure in controlling their rowdy supporters.

The police meanwhile said that they have identified 30 people for being involved in the assault and have asked them to come forward to give statements.

Gayathry said the blame game being played out by the political parties was disappointing.

"The incident drew responses from the government's senior leadership, including Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"Both the BN and PKR are now accusing each other as being behind the incident," she said.

She noted that it was a rare occasion for the government leaders to come in support of the assaulted photographers when in the past they have been silent when the alleged attacks were perpetrated by BN supporters.

She said that no one from the BN made any noise in 2007 when two Tamil press photographers were allegedly abused by an official of the BN component party MIC.

The same was the case, she said, when another Tamil press journalist was beaten to coma after receiving death threats for writing critically against MIC and a Guang Ming daily photographer assaulted by an Umno member when covering opposition politician Tan Kok Wai.

She added that the safety of journalists and photographers to perform their duties was of paramount importance and cannot be compromised by the acts of irresponsible, emotional and aggressive individuals.

### **Effective crowd management measures**

Speaking on the same issue, Klang member of parliament Charles Santiago also condemned the assault on two photographers and spoke of the blame game being undertaken by the political parties.

klscsh launch civil society award 191207 charles santiago"Free and independent media are the core fundamentals of democracy. It is appalling when violence is used against press workers to intimidate them. It is even more shocking when the media is targeted to satisfy a political agenda," he said in a statement today.

He said the police should implement an effective crowd management measures to ensure such untoward incidences do not happen in the future, especially during the Aug 26 by election in Permatang Pauh.

"The police and security forces must ensure that journalists are free to carry out their duties without fear of harassment and assault," said the DAP MP.

He said that Malaysia has earned quite a reputation for cracking down on the media, shutting down publications by refusing to renew printing licenses and jailing reporters.

"It is high time that we appreciate the role played by the media in the development of the country.

"It is imminent that the press workers are treated with respect for they put themselves on the line to report on important stories," he added.