



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO MALAYSIA

The Role of Media to Promote and Protect Human Rights in ASEAN

AICHR Workshop

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Remarks by H.E. Luc Vandebon

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[Check against delivery]

H.E. Edmund Bon Tai Soon, Representative of Malaysia to AICHR,
H.E. Phoukhong Sisoulath, Chair of AICHR 2016,
H.E. Dato' Dr. Sharifah Zarah Syed Ahmad, Secretary-General,
Ministry of Communication & Multimedia Malaysia,
Mdm. Rodziah Abdul, Secretary of Human Rights Commission of
Malaysia (SUHAKAM),
Dear members of the media,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Free, diverse and independent media are essential in any society to promote and protect freedom of opinion and expression and other human rights. By facilitating the free flow of information and ideas on matters of general interest, and by ensuring transparency and accountability, independent media constitute one of the cornerstones of a democratic society. Without freedom of expression and freedom of the media, an informed, active and engaged citizenry is impossible.

Journalists' work in uncovering abuses of power, shining a light on corruption and questioning received opinion often put them at specific risk of intimidation and violence. Such attacks and intimidation represent an attack not only on the victim, but may also limit the ability of the public to receive information and ideas. Efforts to protect journalists should not be limited to those formally recognised as such, but should also cover support staff and others, such as "citizen journalists", bloggers, social media activists and human rights defenders, who use new media to reach a mass audience.

The Internet and digital technologies have expanded the possibilities of individuals and media to exercise the right to freedom of expression and freely access online information. Any restriction that prevents the flow of information offline or online must be in line with permissible limitations as set out in international human rights law.

In this respect, the European Union is concerned regarding the announcement of upcoming amendments to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Act, including plans to introduce a licensing regime for online news portals and blogs. We are concerned that the new legislation will erode freedom of expression online.

The EU would like to remind the Government of Malaysia of its pledge to investors in the Multimedia Supercorridor Bill (MSC) of Guarantees "to ensure no censorship of the internet." We strongly urge the Government of Malaysia to maintain this commitment, and ensure that all its laws fully respect freedom of expression, including the free flow of ideas online.

We are hopeful that all stakeholders will be adequately consulted prior to tabling any amendments, not the least because of the considerable economic implications of such legal changes.

Last but not least, this workshop is partly funded through the EU READI Facility. The EU stands ready to explore further possible legal or technical assistance and collaboration with our ASEAN partners in this field, including combatting the misuse of the internet.

I wish you fruitful discussions during the next two days.

Thank you for your attention.