

Malaysia: UN Human Rights Office welcomes acquittals of Government critics as first step in observing freedom of expression

BANGKOK (2 August 2018) - The UN Human Rights Office for South-East Asia welcomes the acquittal of political cartoonist Zulkiflee SM Anwar Ulhaque (Zunar), member of parliament R. Sivarasa and lawyer N. Surendran by the Malaysian Session Court on Monday. All three men were charged under the Sedition Act in relation to statements made criticizing the prosecution and conviction of former opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim in 2015.

Since 2014, hundreds of individuals have been investigated, charged or convicted under the 1948 Sedition Act. The Act is not in line with international standards and has often been applied in an arbitrary and selective manner against members of parliament, politicians, human rights activists, journalists, lawyers, professors and students in Malaysia, with the aim to curtail freedom of expression, notably on matters of public interest related to governance and corruption.

We are encouraged by this positive development and are hopeful that the Government of Malaysia will move forward with its election commitment to repeal the Sedition Act. We urge the Government to take this opportunity to withdraw charges against those currently facing prosecution for their legitimate right to freedom of opinion and expression under the Sedition Act and other national legislation that adversely affects freedom of expression.

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This year is the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN on 10 December 1948. The Universal Declaration – translated into a world record 500 languages – is rooted in the principle that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” It remains relevant to everyone, every day. In honour of the 70th anniversary of this extraordinarily influential document, and to prevent its vital principles from being eroded, we are urging people everywhere to Stand Up for Human Rights: www.standup4humanrights.org

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