



MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS
AND MULTIMEDIA MALAYSIA

PRESS STATEMENT

CALL FOR MODERATION OF COMMENTS ON PORTALS NOT MEANT TO CURTAIL CIVIL LIBERTIES, PRESS FREEDOM OR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION BUT INSTEAD TO ENHANCE RESPONSIBLE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

I have received many complaints concerning the use of social media particularly in relation to comments on portals which also include news portals.

Many suggestions have been put forward as to how to deal with such comments. There is a suggestion that there should be moderation of comments by the portals and there has also been suggestions for legislation to deal with it.

I personally don't find anything wrong with people expressing a concern over these matters. To me, these are genuine and pressing concerns and there is a need for us to discuss and decide how we need to deal with it.

The PH government is committed to press freedom and freedom of expression. This is evidenced by the repeal of the Anti-Fake News Law in the Dewan Rakyat in August 2018 although this bill was defeated later in the Senate.

I am of the view that there must be freedom for everyone to discuss topics openly and frankly on social media. This is important and we need to retain it. At the same time, we want to make sure that the essence of the discussion is not lost and that social media is not abused to the extent that it violates laws, causes social unrest or undermines national security.

All freedoms must be accompanied by a responsible use of that freedom. This is why I said that portals which include news portals must be responsible for what appears on their portals which must include comments published therein. As such, I support the call of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong in Parliament yesterday for responsible use of social media.

Today's portals provide news and also an avenue for people to exchange views on news reports. While social media and online news portals do benefit society, there is a need to exercise proper decorum on these platforms.

It is in this context that I called for our news portals to self-regulate through moderating their news and the comments posted on their sites.

It is not meant to curtail civil liberties but rather to maintain decorum and avoid expression which promotes inflammatory remarks which may impact on the security of our nation which we increasingly see today.

Freedom of expression is not meant to promote lewd, vulgar or sexist comments. Neither should we condone physical threats or threats of bodily harm on social media.

Such posts or comments should be avoided and this can be achieved through self-regulation and help from the portals themselves.

Having said that, I am of the view that asking portals to moderate the content in their commentary sections is not unreasonable. In essence, it reinforces the fact that we uphold the right to free speech but reiterates also at the same time the need for responsibility to be attached to it.

So, as I said earlier, we need to discuss this further. I intend to sit with all concerned, including my friends in the media to find a way in which we can discuss this, develop a framework and agree to some mechanism by which we can deal with the complaints I have received.

In the meanwhile, again, I reiterate the call for all of us to be cautious in what it is we post on social media. Whilst we respect freedom of expression and freedom of the press, we must remember, that this freedom is not absolute but subject to laws applicable necessary to preserve public order in our country.

I look forward to continuing this dialogue with the relevant stakeholders. I will also seek the views and recommendations from the to-be-formed media council on this matter and also how to better promote responsible use of social media while providing the space for freedom of expression in this country.

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MARCH 12, 2019