



Call for Expressions of Interest (Eoi) for

Malaysia Media Reform Program and Media Council Mission

Project: Strengthening Malaysia's Media for Change

Program Title: Developing a Malaysian Strategy for Media Reform and Literacy

Role: Project Sub-Grant – implemented by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and funded by the European Union (EU).

Location: Malaysia

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) is calling for proposals for a six-month national media pilot program to further support the development and strengthening of Malaysia's first media council, including a sub-regional media council visitation mission, the development of a media reform blueprint report to present to government and a pilot media literacy training program.

Program Description:

The EU Strengthening Media for Change project objective (2020-2025) is to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations to instigate and lead sustainable media development in Malaysia. Quality journalism is the bedrock of democracies and a defender of the rights and interests of civil society and the interests of media workers specifically. Through this action, the IFJ is supporting media CSOs, journalists and media organisations to take a strategic role in promoting and advancing a strong, independent and diverse media in Malaysia. This includes enhancing and building the capacity of Malaysian media unions and CSOs to contribute to governance and development process in Malaysia to drive a media reform agenda in Malaysia. It is intended the outlined project activities will drive an industry program that advocates that necessary legal amendments are backed by institutional reforms while also ensuring that press freedom is protected from future political power changes.

Call for Proposals:

Applications for funding will be accepted until July 15, 2024, from Malaysian organisations and CSOs. One national partner will be chosen to deliver the sub-grant independently or as part of a consortia. Proposals are encouraged from applicant organisations based in Malaysia with a strong background in media development work, research and advocacy. Applications will make clear their careful consideration of effective use of existing resources and previous expertise in this space will be prioritised. Proposed co-funding is desirable by which to amplify/expand the scope of the action. The action must conclude by January 2025.

Background:

Malaysia's holds a pivotal place in South East Asia as a thriving and robust economy. But Malaysia's democratic and civil society space, however, has been vastly impeded by decades of overt and covert political pressure, controls and repression under Malaysia's ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) government. Malaysia's mainstream media has endured decades of ever-tightening controls and ongoing violations of free speech and repressive laws, while government registration of media and publications severely

restricted diversity and alternative voices. Many of Malaysia’s major media outlets have historically erred on the side of caution or alternatively served as the mouthpieces of political owners for survival.

Despite the promise of media reform with a change in government in 2019, the fortunes and fluctuations of the media industry have been heavily impacted by digital disruption, massive job losses, overt political influence under the Covid-19 pandemic and excessive controls over freedom of expression. Placed at 150 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders) in 2018, the country began to edge back up the scales after political transition to 73rd position in 2023, before dropping again in 2024 to 107.

IFJ-SEAJU surveys of media workers in Malaysia have found that media ownership remains the single biggest driving influence on the declining safety situation for journalists, with their livelihoods dependent on the fortunes of political parties either by direct ownership or government advertising.

A further IFJ 2022 analysis of Malaysia’s media said: “An overhaul, repair and amelioration of the current situation in Malaysia requires different sectors must come together to improve the media landscape. The four key stakeholders needed in this effort are (i) civil society, (ii) media companies and practitioners, (iii) the National Union of Journalists and (iv) the government itself.”

Among the IFJ report’s recommendations outlined the case for:

- Civil society to nurture platforms for activist-led journalism and the establishment of a code of conduct or guidelines for covering political issues.
- The need for continued media monitoring and mapping freedom of speech violations.
- Enhanced awareness among media companies to push for a goal of wider critical legislative reforms to improve media freedom and freedom of expression. With the broader goal that a conducive, sustainable ecosystem for investigative and public service journalism must be entrenched within the larger media company mindset.
- The need for government accountability and support for the coverage of underreported stories, with a media fund or grant administered or overseen by the industry to encourage issue-based journalism, with the grant body given explicit consent to continue functioning and receiving state funds regardless of which party is in power.
- The facilitation of the formation of an independent and self-governing Malaysian Media Council established through an Act of Parliament and include representatives from the media as well as civil society. It must include a grievance mechanism and engage with all relevant stakeholders to ensure transparency and impartiality.
- Enact a Freedom of Information law for Malaysia to create a more transparent and open environment.

The draft bill of the Malaysia Media Council is being updated by government and awaiting release to stakeholders. It has been heavily delayed despite government promises to bring into effect. Malaysia’s Communications Minister, Fahmi Fadzil, announced in February 2024 that the Cabinet had approved the Malaysian Media Council (MMC) Bill, which would be tabled in Parliament as soon as June 2024 – but it is as yet to be tabled. The announcement indicated that the ‘Bill will outline a code of conduct and

dispute resolution procedure for public complaints against the media and establish a budget for the Council.

Malaysian civil society, journalists and media outlets, have been advocating for improving press accountability and better self-regulation in Malaysia for more than three decades. In the past five years under the Pro-Tem committee umbrella, they have continued to lobby respective Malaysian governments to move towards a model of industry self-regulation, rather than allow the law to be abused for political gain.

Such ongoing collaborations and developments led by media CSOs is critical and should be supported. By supporting the development of media and CSOs in the policy shift process in Malaysia, importantly a strengthened community of journalists, media and CSOs will have greater capacity at a second level to drive national media literacy programs and engage with the public as actors of governance to address the development issues needed to support Malaysia's future sustainable growth.

Objectives:

The project aims to:

1. Engage with the Pro-Tem committee to develop a strategy to enhance the capacity of members to continue engagement with the Malaysian government on the establishment and creation of an independent media council that best reflects the needs of the media industry.
2. Identify the key stakeholders, organisations, issues and advocacy opportunities of an enhanced media reform strategy for Malaysia and secure buy-in to the program principles and objective and to create alliances between journalists' unions, associations and CSOs working to support media workers and independent journalism in Malaysia.
3. Examine the current legal and industrial framework governing media operations and the work of journalists and media workers in Malaysia.
4. Conduct desk research into the current context of Malaysia's media industry including media viability issues, ownership and impacts on independence and diversity, journalist wages and working conditions in different sectors, industrial relations frameworks and the capacity for media workers to form unions and collectively bargain, key cases and examples of threats to media independence and the functioning of media operations, and the overall environment impacting media professionals.
5. Conduct key interviews with key industry, government, civil society and legal stakeholders.
6. Build engagement between media council representatives from the South East Asia and/or Oceania region to build understanding of media council models and their efficacy.
7. Identify emerging themes and suggest actionable interventions and recommendations for government, media owners, unions, legislators, unions and civil society advocates.
8. Advocate for the swift establishment of a media council as an independent arbiter of media and journalism in Malaysia.

9. Create national dialogue and lobbying engagements with national actors, including the government.

Key Activities

1. Media Context Review

- Conduct a thorough desk review to inform the first stage of consultations and engagement and form the background context of a draft media reform blueprint.

2. National Consultation and Alliance Building

- Conduct interviews with 15 media, law and government stakeholders identified with the assistance of the Pro-Tem committee and IFJ.
- Facilitate consultation meetings with the Pro-Tem committee.
- Conduct outreach and research in all Malaysian provinces as well as the capital.

3. Regional Media Council Mission

- Develop framework and emerging themes for analysis and mission discussion – outlining the justifications for the target countries chosen.
- Organise a delegation of 6-8 representatives to conduct a fact-finding mission to 2 countries in the South East Asia and/or Oceania Region with established and functioning press/media councils.
- Foster alliances and the creation of MOUs between Malaysia’s media and journalist representative bodies with the broader media council and media union network in the South East Asia and/or Oceania region.

4. Media Literacy Framework

- Use available IFJ project research, including the national study on Public Trust in Media in Malaysia, and other research on media and media mis/disinformation to explore key challenges to creating a more robust environment for a strong and independent media.
- Present three case studies of media literacy education approaches internationally that could be applied in the Malaysia space.
- Development of a draft national media literacy framework approach and recommendations.
- Creation and preliminary testing of a draft media literacy training module to be presented to government and civil society.

5. Media Reform Blueprint

- Develop framework and emerging themes for analysis and mission discussion.

- Collaborate with the IFJ editorial committee for the review of the analysis and media reform blueprint writing.
- Review the draft with the IFJ editorial panel and incorporate their feedback into the final report.
- Research and drafting of at least four case studies from the international media space to support key elements of the reform blueprint findings, including the formation of a Malaysian media council.

6. Final Media Reform Blueprint

- Prepare and submit the final edited and designed research report, including:
 1. Foreword
 2. Executive summary
 3. Four to six chapters on emerged themes
 4. Recommendations with an indicative action/intervention plan
 5. Infographics summarizing the main findings
 6. At least three case studies on media literacy examples internationally
 7. At least four case studies on media council experience internationally

7. National Media Summit

- Hosting of a national media summit to launch the media reform blueprint and dialogue with 100 industry and national stakeholders, in cooperation with key project partners including the National Union of Journalists (Peninsula Malaysia).

Expected outputs and deliverables:

- i. Brief inception report with agreed upon methodology and work plan after orientation session with IFJ.
- ii. Primary desk research report: A comprehensive assessment report and primary analysis in the form of a document that presents the media context in Malaysia (at least XXX) as well as a list of proposed stakeholder interviews and questions.
 - i. Key information interviews (KIIs): Conduct KIIs with pre-approved list of key experts.
 - ii. Media mission and report: Completion of a media council fact finding mission and submission of an activity report of the mission describing the number and type of engagements and important insights from discussions and promotion/visibility of the mission.
- iii. Media literacy framework: Creation of a media literacy proposed framework and discussion paper for wider consultation and a draft media literacy training module.
- iv. Media reform blueprint report: The document will be finalised after review and incorporating feedback IFJ and other agreed stakeholders and aligning with the requirements set out.
- v. Final report: A detailed document that includes the findings and recommendations, as well as the issues, ideas and opportunities for media reform in Malaysia based on the KIIs and the

media council fact finding mission. The report will be finalized after review and incorporating feedback from IFJ and presented as a final designed report for online dissemination.

- vi. A media summit and campaign on media reform: Industry dialogue to include 100 participants.

Overall outcomes sought:

- i. Establishment of a Media Council for Malaysia
- ii. Insight and reporting on Malaysia’s capacity to achieve SDG 8.8, 8.8.2 to ensure national compliance of labour rights.
- iii. Government commitment to endorse and implement the IFJ-led International Convention on the Safety and Independence of Journalists and Other Media Professionals.
- iv. Commitments or steps by Malaysia’s government toward the country’s capacity to achieve SDG 16.10 through the implementation of Access to Information law

Project Reporting:

- i. One mid-term narrative and financial update.
- ii. One final narrative and financial report.

Budget

A budget should be presented for all activities – outlining coordination costs, consultant costs, in-person meetings and pilot trainings, international travel, design and promotion of the media reform blueprint and campaign.

Application Requirements

Interested organisations should submit an expression of interest, including:

- i. Organizational and/or consortia profile
- ii. A short statement describing the approach/methodology.
- iii. Total fee for the completed delivery of all stated outputs, with a breakdown of costs.
- iv. Evidence of required qualifications and experience.

Evaluation Criteria

- Proposals will be evaluated based on cost-effectiveness and quality of work (as shown in the proposal and methodology adopted to achieve the desirable).
- Adherence to the principles of the EC Strengthening Malaysia’s Media for Change.
- Capacity to provide some components of co-funding to the action.

Additional Information

The project partner will be responsible for reporting to IFJ (and ultimately the EU) must consult and respond swiftly on any issues or requests relating to the activities and the narrative and financial reporting.



Timeline

- **Application Deadline:** 15 July 2024
- **Start Date:** 1 August 2024
- **Completion Date:** 31 January 2025

Submission Instructions

Please send your expression of interest by 15 July 2024 to jane.worthington@ifj-asia.org with the subject "Pilot Project Sub-Grant: Developing a Malaysian Strategy for Media Reform and Literacy " Note that only successful applicants will be contacted.