



**Joint Media Statement (5 January 2011): "Utusan" must respect NUJ leader; call off domestic inquiry**

We are four civil society groups speaking up in support of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) president Hata Wahari, who is facing a domestic inquiry by his employer, "Utusan Malaysia," for being critical of political interference in the newspaper.

We echo the words of NUJ general secretary V Anbalagan that Hata was speaking in his capacity as a union official and thus merely exercising his rightful duty and fulfilling his national obligation. The management of "Utusan Malaysia" is as free to make a public rebuttal if it disagreed with Hata. It should not penalise Hata by subjecting him to a domestic inquiry that may result in him being fired.

According to Hata, the domestic inquiry notice followed two show-cause letters from the management – on 14 October 2010 and 14 November – in response to his first statement as NUJ president on 21 September. The domestic inquiry letter was dated 23 December, and received on 27 December.

Hata has been speaking out since he was elected to the top union position in September, and appears to be implementing his election manifesto, which includes engaging in efforts to abolish the draconian Printing Presses and Publications Act as well as promoting ethical reporting on religious and race issues. He also aimed to monitor newspapers that contravene journalism ethics in this regard ( <http://nujstar.org/?p=92> ). His first statement took to task senior editors of the much-criticised “Utusan Malaysia” for failing to advocate media freedom in their quest to serve the agenda of their political masters UMNO. His new year statement cited racist rhetoric in the same paper as the reason for the daily’s declining sale, and urged the authorities to act against the editors for inciting racial hatred.

We note that this is the first time in a long while since an NUJ leader has spoken up against unethical media practices, which he correctly blamed on the lack of media independence due to political interference and restrictive laws.

We believe that Hata was not only speaking up for the integrity of the profession, but for the right of all Malaysians to have a media that will put the people as their first loyalty, and truth as their first obligation, which means allowing as many different perspectives as possible so that the people can judge and decide for themselves what is truth.

We view any attempt to sack the union president for expressing his opinion in defence of journalistic integrity as a serious attack on the freedom of expression and media freedom.

We call on all journalists, unionised or not, to stand behind Hata and urge for the domestic inquiry, rescheduled to 17 January, to be called off.

Similarly, all Malaysians who want a free media must now speak up and stand in line together with the journalists.

**Jointly issued by:**

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*Charter 2000-Aliran*

*Writers' Alliance for Media Independence (WAMI)*

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