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The Alliance of Independent Journalists

URGENT, May 3, 2008

PRESS RELEASE AJI-Indonesia

Don't Let Press Freedom Get Robbed

“When a journalist is imprisoned, the rights for public information are questioned in court, women and faith believers are harassed, then the days of darkness will arrive...”

Today, May 3, 2008, the world's press community commemorated the World Press Freedom Day. The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) warned that violence against the press and threats of prosecution could threaten press freedom and the broad rights for public information.

From May 2007 to May 2008, the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) Indonesia recorded 60 cases of violence against journalists in various forms. During the period, there were seven cases of threats, five cases of harassment, seven cases of eviction or expulsion, three cases of imprisonment, four cases of news censorship, 21 cases of physical assaults and eight cases of lawsuits. Based on the regions, most violence occurred in Jakarta Special Region Province (13 cases), followed by East Java and Madura with 11 cases, and West Java and Depok with eight cases. From the aspect of perpetrators, the violence against the press and journalists was committed mostly by mobs and thugs, followed by government apparatus, military and police personnel.

For example: Two television reporters and a radio journalist were attacked by a mob in the town square of Bojonegoro because of resentment about some press coverage (30/4). Previously, on April 2, two TV-One journalists, who were being on duty, were abused by Navy personnel, who were “working” in the Cikarang business area in Bekasi. In East Nusa Tenggara, Expo NTT journalist was abused by the Ende regional secretary (16/2) and later, four thugs attacked a Pos Kupang reporter over press coverage (17/2).

Non-Physical Violence

Besides physical, direct violence, press freedom in this country has been threatened by a few numbers of people who use their power, money or position. In September 2007, Tempo journalist Metta Darmasaputra, who was investigating alleged tax manipulation by PT Asian Agri owned by tycoon Sukanto Tanoto, was wiretapped and threatened to be prosecuted by the Jakarta Metropolitan Police personnel. The fact shows that journalists who carry out their social control functions properly often face threats and dangers.

Law enforcers, ranging from the attorney offices to the Supreme Court, also commit indirect violence. A series of cases of lawsuits, publication banning and prosecution by court occurred from May 2007 to May 2008. Risang Bima Wiyaja (Radar Yogya), Dahri Uhum (Oposisi Tabloid - Medan), Time Magazine (Asia), and Edy Sumarsono (Investigasi Tabloid - Jakarta) were among those who had been forced to face lawsuits and prosecution because of their press coverage. They are the victims of criminalization by the state even when Indonesia has already had the Law Press Number 40 Year 1999, which is *lex specialis* in nature.

The latest development is that the state apparently wants to express its wish to regain control over the life of the public and press through legislations, which are potential to harm and prosecute the press. Among them are the Law on Information and Electronic Transaction, the Law on the Transparency of Public Information, the Draft Bill on General Elections and the Draft Bill on Criminal Code, which contain threats of imprisonment and fine, particularly for the press and public that violate the legislations. Meanwhile, there have been many victims among the press who face the articles of insult (310, 311, and 207 of the Criminal Code). If such a situation is allowed, Indonesia may return to the era, where the press and its people could be dragged to court by the authorities in the name of secrecy and insult. In coincide to the World Press Freedom Day on May 3, 2008, AJI expressed its deep concerns over various violent acts against the press... The situation describes the decline of public respect to the press and the lack of understanding among government apparatus over the real roles and functions of the press. Again, AJI Indonesia reminded that press freedom is guaranteed by the Constitution and the Law Number 40 Year 1999 on the Press.

Therefore, the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) Indonesia stated as follows:

1. Urging the law enforcers for not prosecuting journalistic works anymore and participating in the efforts to stop violent acts against the press and journalists.
2. Inviting all parties to use the mechanisms provided by the Law No. 40 Year 1999 on the Press when facing a dispute over a journalistic work, such as the rights to response, the rights to make correction and complaints to the Press Council.
3. Calling all journalists to improve their professionalism and obedience to the journalistic code of ethics, avoiding improper practices that can ruin the general image of the press and journalists.

Let us unite our steps to face the threats of press freedom, which have been getting obvious.

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