

2015 World Press Freedom Day Statement of the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI)

Police is a Threat to Our Press Freedom

Once again, we commemorate World Press Freedom Day (WPFDD) on May 3, 2015. Collectively with journalist organizations around the world, this celebration is a momentum to AJI, to relive the significance of promoting and defending press freedom. This commemoration is also an occasion to demand that a number of cases of violence toward journalists, which some are murder cases, be finalized.

Since 1992, there have been 1,123 journalists around the world killed for their journalistic activity. Nineteen of them were murdered in 2015. While in Indonesia, since 1996 there have been 8 unsolved death cases of journalists, plus 37 violence cases that took place between May 3, 2014 and May 3, 2015. Eleven out of these 37 violence cases had police officers as the perpetrators, 6 cases involved unknown executors, 4 violence cases committed by security officers, 4 cases by mobs, and the rest involved perpetrators of various professions. All of the cases involving police officers had been terminated before they got to legal course of action.

This disreputable record of the police force had an additional 'achievement' with the legal case against the Chief Editor of The Jakarta Post daily Meidyatama Suryodiningrat in December 2014. Suryodiningrat was named as suspect in the caricature publishing case, which in fact had been taken care of by the Press Council. The status of Suryodiningrat as suspect has not been cleared up though, even with the statement of Press Council affirming that the case is the domain of the Press Law.

The atrocious demeanor of the police had impacted also on Tribun Lampung journalist Ridwan Hardiansyah. Hardiansyah, who is also Secretary of AJI city branch of Bandar Lampung, was arrested and his house was searched, on March 4, 2015, without any warrant. Later it turned out that the police had picked a wrong person. Unfortunately, this mishap had done damaged to Hardiansyah's mental. He was traumatized to see the police, and this has certainly disturbed his journalistic works.

August 2014 had also left a shameful record on police reputation. It has been 18 years since the murder of Yogyakarta's Bernas daily journalist Muhammad Fuad Syafrudin alias Udin, with the perpetrator untouched by the police. High rank police officials had stated their guarantees that they would reinvestigate the Udin case, but until the deadline of the case expiration -which is 18 years- there had been no police follow ups.

In total, up until today, eight journalist murder cases were left undisclosed, with no investigation on the suspects. The other seven journalists are Naimullah (journalist of Sinar Pagi daily, West Kalimantan, murdered on July 25, 1997), Agus Mulyawan (Asia Press journalist, murdered in East Timor -now Timor Leste- on September 25, 1999), Muhammad Jamaludin (TVRI journalist in Aceh, killed on June 17, 2003), Ersa Siregar (RCTI tv journalist, killed on December 29, 2003), Herliyanto (journalist of Delta Pos

tabloid, killed on April 29, 2006), Adriansyah Matra'is Wibisono (Merauke's local TV journalist, killed on July 29, 2010), and Alfred Mirulewan (journalist of Pelangi tabloid, Maluku, who was found dead on December 18, 2010).

The police has also smeared the area of citizens' freedom of expression with their ill-reputed track. According to the record of the Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, since 2008 it has been more than 80 cases of criminalization --using the Law of Information Technology and Electronic Transaction (ITE Law)-- against citizens expressing their opinions on the Internet. These victims of criminalization are citizens with a wide range of occupations: housewives, students, activists, journalists, and lawyers. The lawsuits have grown anxiety among news sources in a number of cities. They became hesitate to be interviewed by online media because of the "bendable articles" of the Law of ITE.

AJI is therefore, for 2015, awarded the 2015 title of Enemy of Press Freedom to the Police Force. AJI said that the police has failed to reform themselves as public servant and guardian. Since the first time AJI endowed the award of Press Freedom Enemy in 2007, this is the fourth time that the institution --which has authority level directly under the President-- is honored as "the Enemy of Press Freedom". It is only obvious that President Joko Widodo should take a huge measure to widely reform the police force, banishing their obstinacy to evolve.

In particular, AJI also observed that even until 2015, press freedom in Papua has still been constrained. A clearing house is used to limit access to any foreign journalist assigned to Papua. Moreover, every foreign journalist receiving permit to cover Papua would have a hard time doing their public duties since they would be followed or closely watched during their works. Local journalists also receive intimidations and there were even a number of murder cases of journalists.

AJI stated that the access limits to journalists in Papua would have a worse impact on the people of Papua, and further on Indonesia. The limitation would only triggered new websites spreading so-called news that are not based on journalism principles such as verification and confirmation. Unstoppable information speeding through the Internet cannot be verified while journalists also face obstacles with their duty because of this limitation. By disclosing access to journalists in Papua, the public will receive a more credible and reliable information. And they will also function as the trustworthy eyes and ears for the Indonesian government.

The theme for this year's celebration of World Press Freedom Day is: "Let Journalism Thrive! Towards Better Reporting, Gender Equality, & Media Safety in the Digital Age." Global commemoration of WPFDF is centered in Riga, Latvia, May 2-4, 2015. WPFDF was declared by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1993, as a result of the recommendation on press freedom that was adopted in the 26th session of UNESCO General Conference in 1991. The recommendation was a response to African journalists' call in 1991 that resulted the Windhoek Declaration, stating pluralistic and media sovereignty principles.

Press freedom is the freedom of the people. Let us celebrate our freedom.

President of AJI

Suwarjono