



THE Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) views with great concern the death threats against Azwan Ismail, a participant of video project “It Gets Better in Malaysia”. According to the project’s coordinators from Seksualiti Merdeka, the videos were made “in response to accounts of suicides and attempted suicides by LGBT teenagers and adults”. They were intended to give hope to those who may be overwhelmed by feelings of loneliness, fear or hopelessness, telling them that “it gets better”.

CIJ supports the video participants’ right to express themselves and to make their opinions and feelings known. CIJ also supports the right of those who disagree with the participants to express their contrary views. However, in expressing those views, it is vital that no threat of or actual violence is perpetuated against those whom they disagree with. Due to the threats of violence, Seksualiti Merdeka has made the difficult decision of removing Azwan's video from their account out of concern for his safety.

CIJ also views with concern the way the issue has been portrayed in some of the Malaysian

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Written by straits-mongrel

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print media. While we recognise newspapers' prerogative to report quotes calling for action to be taken against gay Muslims, we are critical of the lack of balance in the news reporting on this issue.

There appears to have been little or no attempt to obtain Azwan or Seksualiti Merdeka's response to the criticism that has arisen; nor have other human rights and civil society groups been asked for their informed opinions. With the exception of "theSun", it appears that most newspapers did not contact Azwan or Seksualiti Merdeka directly for their response. Several relied on international news agencies such as the Associated Press (AP). While it is common to rely on such international agencies, it is puzzling why newspapers chose to rely on an AP quote for a local who is based here without contacting him themselves.

CIJ calls for all threats of violence to cease. We also call for newspapers to write news reports in a fair and balanced manner. The video project was intended to give hope, especially to young teenagers who are at risk of committing suicide. It is important that news reports are not skewed to put them at even greater risk.

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