

'Playboy' court ruling threatens press freedom, says expert

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Leading free-speech attorney Todung Mulya Lubis warned on Tuesday that press freedom was in peril following a Supreme Court ruling that found Playboy Indonesia guilty of indecency, despite the relatively mild nature of the publication's content.

"One fundamental flaw of the court ruling is that it shoved aside the press law and instead used the Criminal Code to prosecute the Playboy Indonesia editor," Todung told a media conference.

"If it can happen to Erwin Arnada, it could happen to anyone," Todung said, referring to his client.

Erwin began his two-year prison term on Saturday after the Supreme Court overturned the 2007 South Jakarta District Court not-guilty verdict, saying the magazine contained "soft pornography" for which the editor should be held responsible.

"It's only a matter of time before other editors will be prosecuted on criminal charges," he said.

Earlier on Tuesday, Todung filed for a case review with the Supreme Court on behalf of his client.

"We need your support to get this case heard and settled as soon as possible," Todung said at the conference attended by editors of major publications and TV networks.

"This is not only about defending Erwin. This is about defending press freedom."

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The Press Council, supporting Erwin's case, said the number of cases of criminalization of the press had been increasing in recent years.

Todung said the long years of struggle by journalists to make sure courts used the 1999 Press Law instead of the Criminal Code had now been undermined.

"This is not only about defending Erwin. This is about defending press freedom," Todung said.

He also requested that major news outlets in Indonesia and around the world support the cause by signing a memorandum of "friends of the court" that he plans to circulate.

Later, the editors, including the heads of the Indonesian Journalists Association (PWI) and the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), signed a statement of concern about the growing "criminalization" and use of violence against media workers.

The Press Council said it had written to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, requesting his attention on the plight of journalists without the benefit of state protection against violence and criminalization stipulated in the 1999 Press Law.

The Council is also in discussion with the National Police in efforts to ensure adequate protection for journalists doing their job, including a commitment from the police to refer to the press law rather than the Criminal Code in all disputes involving the press.

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/10/13/%E2%80%98playboy%E2%80%99-court-ruling-threatens-press-freedom-says-expert.html>

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