

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“Death By Cyberbullying Is Almost Equivalent To Manslaughter”, Say Winners Of WSPD Exhibition Debate

Harassing others online while hiding behind the screen is a grave offence committed by cyberbullies who should face the repercussions of their actions



KUALA LUMPUR, 28 SEPTEMBER 2022 – An exhibition debate organised by the Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia (Content Forum) and University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) was recently held at the Hospital Canselor Tuanku Muhriz (HCTM) in conjunction with World Suicide Prevention Day (WSPD), observed on September 10 every year.

The dialogue was co-hosted by the Psychiatry Department, Faculty of Medicine at Hospital Canselor Tuanku Muhriz (HCTM), UKM, and the Content Forum, in collaboration with Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), the UKM English Debate Team, Zero Suicide Sarawak, and several lived experience NGOs in Malaysia.

The event was timely, as cyberbullying is an epidemic that continues to rage on in our society. According to a United Nations Children’s Fund report, Malaysia ranked second in Asia for

cyberbullying among youths in 2020, where three out of 10 young Malaysians have fallen victim to cyberbullying.^[1]

With the motion 'This House Would Hold Cyberbullies Accountable for the Suicide of their Targets', the debate sought to increase public awareness of suicide prevention advocacy, particularly the impact and consequences of cyberbullying on mental health and overall well-being.



Fareez Zahir at the podium, acting as Prime Minister for the Government's side.

Fareez Zahir, former international debater and IUM alumnus who acted as Prime Minister on the Government side of the debate, said, "We don't think that cyberbullying is something that should be taken lightly. We believe that the law should protect victims of cyberbullying and that bullies should be punished to the full extent of the law.

"It is pernicious and has been going on for far too long for the Government to turn a blind eye and sweep it under the rug. Cyberbullying that leads to suicide is almost equivalent to manslaughter.

"Although bullies may not have the direct intention of murder, the acts of targeted, persistent, and pernicious bullying potentially lead towards the death of an individual," he said.

Fareez added that there are anti-trafficking, anti-sexual harassment, and child protection laws, but there are no laws to protect people suffering from mental health issues like depression.

“Why is there a gap between mental health and bodily harm? I believe it is the government’s role to enact laws to protect such individuals and punish cyberbullies,” he stated while proposing that the perpetrators should face imprisonment if found guilty.



Suresh Gnasegarah, acting as leader of the Opposition team, at the podium.

The Opposition, represented by its leader, Suresh Gnasegarah, also a former international debater and an MMU alumnus, refuted their argument and highlighted that the Government side could refine its approach to combat the issue.

“The Government wants to take a retribution-based, punitive approach on perpetrators, which will not move the needle as it targets the wrong subset of society. We believe that cyberbullying is an issue that involves our society at large, and targeted measures as proposed by the Government will only cause more harm than good,” he said.

He further elaborated that, in most cases, cyberbullying involves waves of comments from many individuals targeting the victim, which is why the legislation proposed by the Government cannot stand.

“The cause of suicide cannot be boiled down to one single factor. It is more than just one person’s comment or harassment; it is a multitude of factors contributing to the act of suicide, like the environment and societal values that the person was raised in, their mental vulnerability, peer pressure, and so on,” he added.



(from left) Jivan Rajendra Kumar, Audrey Teoh, and Fareez Zahir from the team acting as Government.

After an eye-opening debate session, the Government team emerged victorious, bringing home the grand prize worth RM2,000 awarded by the Content Forum. Their winnings will be donated to the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO). The prize money worth RM1,000 awarded to the Opposition team will be donated to Befrienders KL.



(second from left) Suresh Gnanasegarah, Erina Durani, and Kuhanesvaren Elangovvan, who acted as the Opposition, with their prize.

In his closing remarks, Kenny Ong, Chairman of the Content Forum, stated that depression is real, and people dealing with it are often driven into situations that lead them to make life-or-death decisions.

“Content and industry professionals also have a role to play, especially in the responsible reporting of suicide events. Sensationalising death by suicide and its repeated projections in the media is a cause for concern,” Ong stated.



Kenny Ong, Chairman of the Content Forum of Malaysia at his closing speech.

The media should use available guidelines on reporting suicides and exercise self-regulation to uphold responsible and sensitive reporting.

The Content Forum believes it takes a concerted effort from society, including content and industry professionals, to watch out for and protect our community. In this respect, the Content Forum has recently revised the Content Code to reflect current societal values.

Head over to www.contentforum.my to find out more.

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[1] <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2022/01/14/malaysia-is-2nd-in-asia-for-youth-cyberbullying>

ABOUT THE CONTENT FORUM

The Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia (Content Forum) is an independent self-regulatory industry body registered under the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) and designated by the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (CMA'98) to oversee and promote self-regulation of content over the electronic networked medium. The Content Forum consists of key players of the content industry i.e., advertisers, advertising agencies, broadcasters, content creators/distributors, audiotext hosting services providers, advertising agencies, internet service providers and civic groups.

Aimed at facilitating self-regulation, which provides an additional layer of consumer protection that complements the legal framework, the Content Forum is committed to govern and promote the creation, distribution and consumption of electronic-networked content.

As an industry self-regulatory body, the Content Forum comprises key members of the communications and multimedia content industry, including broadcasters, advertisers, content creators, internet access service providers and civic groups. This dynamic and robust representation of industry practitioners ensures that content standards continue to be developed with the objective of establishing a level playing field in the industry.

The Content Forum is responsible for the implementation and enforcement of the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Content Code ("the Content Code"). The Content Code was prepared by the Content Forum and first registered with MCMC on 1st September 2004. The Content Code is the principal source for industry self-regulation as it contains governing standards and best practices for content dissemination within the communications and multimedia industry in Malaysia. The main objective of the Content Code is to outline procedures of self-regulation that provides the platform for creativity, innovation and healthy growth of a fast-evolving industry.

The Content Forum houses a Complaints Bureau that is empowered to address all complaints relating to content disseminated over electronic networks. The Complaints Bureau is empowered to investigate possible breaches of the Content Code, mediate disputes, adjudicate cases, publish orders and impose sanctions where necessary. The Complaints Bureau accepts complaints from industry players and the general public. Additionally, it plays an advisory role to any party that requires guidance on electronic content matters.

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