



Media statement by the Content Forum on Harmful Reporting of Crime Involving Children

CYBERJAYA, 7 JULY 2023 — We, at the Content Forum are deeply concerned about a recent news report regarding a crime allegedly committed by a child, which not only highlights the incident but also includes a family photo and other identifying information. As an organisation dedicated to self-regulation in ensuring the content ecosystem is safe, we believe it is crucial to address the issue of media responsibility when covering crimes involving children.

While the media plays a vital role in disseminating news and raising awareness, it is equally important to exercise caution when reporting on crimes, especially those involving children. Journalistic integrity should always be balanced with the need to protect the rights and dignity of individuals, particularly innocent children who may not fully comprehend the consequences of their actions.

This requirement for protection is also enshrined in the Children's Act 2001 Part IV, Section 5, regarding restrictions on media reporting and publication. This law clearly states that any mass media report "shall not reveal or include any particulars calculated to lead to the identification of any child" involved in any way with a crime.

The publication of the family photo (even if blurred) and personal identifiers in this particular news report not only infringes upon the child's privacy but also exposes them and the other children in the family to severe negative consequences, including psychological trauma, stigmatisation, and hindering prospects for rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

We must ensure that the actions and welfare of children are protected at all times. The media must exercise ethical judgment when reporting on crimes involving children, paying careful attention to respect their rights and consider the potential long-term consequences of sensational coverage. Irresponsible coverage will not only harm the child involved, but it may also discourage other young individuals from seeking help or support when they need it most.

We therefore urge media outlets, journalists, and reporters to adhere to the following key guidelines when covering crimes involving children:

1. **Protect the Child's Identity:** Strictly avoid publishing identifiable information, such as family names, addresses, or personal photos that could compromise the child's safety, well-being, and future prospects.

2. Exercise Sensibility and Compassion: Be cautious when discussing the details of the crime. Gratuitous sensationalism can have irreversible consequences for the child, exacerbating their trauma and hindering their recovery and growth.
3. Responsible Reporting: Engage in balanced reporting that presents the facts objectively without undue exaggeration or distortion. Avoid language or descriptions that can further stigmatise the child and their family.

Furthermore, we earnestly request the public's cooperation in joining us to protect the rights of children. Avoid sharing or spreading sensitive news reports involving children, especially those accompanied by images or identifying information. Such actions only perpetuate the harm inflicted upon the child and their family.

The Content Forum stands ready to collaborate with media organizations, civil society, and government agencies to develop guidelines and conduct training that can enhance responsible reporting practices concerning crimes involving children. The Content Forum also welcomes the opportunity to work with everyone for a better understanding of these guidelines and other best practices through our Content Code 2022. Collectively, we all have a shared responsibility to support the well-being and healthy development of all children, including those who may have committed crimes or conducted themselves contrary to societal norms.

Together, we can shape a future where the media becomes an instrument for positive change, and foster empathy and understanding within our communities.

Kenny Ong
Chairman, Content Forum
7 July 2023

ABOUT THE CONTENT FORUM

The Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia (Content Forum) is a self-regulatory organization and industry forum 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 of 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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