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Paris, 15 September 2008

HE Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar
Minister for Internal Security and Home Affairs
Blok D2, Parcel D, Pusat Pentadbiran Kerajaan Persekutuan,
62546 Putrajaya

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Dear Minister,

Reporters Without Borders, an organisation that defends press freedom worldwide, would like to express to you its concern about the consequences for press freedom in Malaysia of your use of the Internal security Act (ISA). The detention without trial since 12 September of blogger **Raja Petra Kamarudin**, journalist **Tan Hoon Cheng** of the Chinese-language daily *Sin Chew* and opposition parliamentarian **Teresa Kok** have highlighted the abuses that are possible under this law.

Mr. Raja Petra, the creator of the news website *Malaysia Today* (mt.m2day.org/, www.malysiatoday.com), whose closure you ordered on 26 August, is not guilty of disrupting public order, as you have claimed. His website offers news reports and a place where Malaysians concerned about their country's future can exchange views. Ordering its closure and arresting its editor without grounds were clearly intended to silence him. We ask you to set him free.

Ms. Tan was arrested under the same law for reporting comments by Ahmad Ismail, one of the regional leaders of your party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), which were regarded as racist. He referred to Malaysians of Chinese origin as "squatters." You have nonetheless said that she was arrested not because of what she reported but in order to protect her, as she had been getting threats.

Ms. Kok, who was arrested as she was returning home, is alleged to have called for an end to the broadcasting of the call to prayer from mosques in Kota Damansara, Sri Serdang and Puchong Jaya. She denies this.

The staff of your ministry have had recourse to this same law for these very different allegations. Section 73 (1) of the ISA allows for a person to be arrested without charge and to be held for 60 days without offering grounds for their detention. Mr. Raja Petra and Ms. Kok have still not been allowed to speak to their lawyers. We urge you to ensure that they are able to have legal representation. You have said you are unable to intervene. Yet you are in charge of the police.

You are of course aware that the minister in charge of legal affairs, Zaid Ibrahim, has submitted a resignation letter in protest against the use of the ISA. As well as violating press freedom, the use of this law is undermining Malaysia's political harmony.

I am confident that you will appreciate the importance of maintaining freedom of expression in Malaysia.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Ménard', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Robert Ménard
Secretary-General