

MALAYSIA: JOINT LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA ON THE PROPOSED SOCIAL MEDIA BAN FOR UNDER-16s.

A REFORM AGENDA TO PRIORITISE THE PROTECTION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF CHILDREN – AND EVERYONE - ONLINE

YAB Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim,

We, the undersigned civil society organisations (CSOs) and individuals, urge the government to immediately withdraw plans to ban social media for children under 16.

We understand that public concerns are at a peak, and there is no denying that social media companies have increasingly posed challenges to the wellbeing of children and all social media users in recent years. We also understand that the government's aim to protect children and young people from online harm and the negative impact of social media on their wellbeing is consistent with [Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#), which requires States to take measures to protect children from violence (both physical and mental), abuse and maltreatment.

While framed as a protective measure, this proposed blanket ban on social media for children under 16, expected to be [implemented by June 2026](#), is misguided and disproportionate, and it risks undermining the privacy and freedom of expression of all social media users, both adults and children. It does not address the systemic and structural drivers of harm in digital spaces and may ultimately prove ineffective. Far from solving the problem, it threatens to entrench it. It is critical that we adopt evidence-based, rights-respecting regulations grounded in nuance, rather than a total prohibition on children under 16 from participating in the digital world. Children do not need to be excluded from digital spaces; instead, they need protection within them, along with the skills and safeguards to participate safely and meaningfully.

Malaysia stands at a critical juncture for reform. The government must reject simplistic, punitive restrictions and instead pursue a rights-based, evidence-driven agenda that confronts the root causes of online harm: platform design, exploitative business models, invasive data practices, and weak regulatory accountability.

It should be noted that the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its recent [Concluding Observations on Malaysia](#) (February 2026), expressed concern that the government's steps to ensure inclusive digital access for children remain inadequate. The Committee raised that ***‘there is a lack of digital literacy and a significant digital divide; age-based prohibition and control over access to social media, as limiting children’s access to age-appropriate information and online child-friendly platforms; and limited guarantee of privacy protection.’*** The Committee also recommended that Malaysia ***‘adopt a child rights-based approach to the implementation of the Online Safety Act 2025.’***

A. WE RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING REFORM AGENDA FOR MALAYSIA, AND URGE THE GOVERNMENT TO IMMEDIATELY:

- 1) **Withdraw the proposed blanket ban on social media for children under 16 and ensure all reforms undergo full parliamentary scrutiny and meaningful and inclusive public consultation.**
- 2) **Introduce comprehensive and robust platform regulation aligned with constitutional and international human rights standards, including the Federal Constitution (Article 8 and 10), Child Act 2001 (Preamble), and Malaysia’s commitments under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and the International Covenant on the Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), amongst other international measures.**
- 3) **Mandate Human Rights Due Diligence and [Child Rights Impact Assessments \(CRIAs\)](#) for digital services, to identify and mitigate any risks associated with their services, including specifically on children’s rights and consider which regulatory mechanisms can be used to enforce action based on identified risks.**
- 4) **Adopt a whole-of-society approach that not only looks at social media in isolation but also proactively engages with civil society, children, children with disabilities, parents, women’s rights groups, children’s rights groups, disability rights groups, health services, educational settings, and other pertinent stakeholders. By collaborating with these groups, the government can gain valuable insights, develop comprehensive strategies, and implement impactful measures to safeguard children and individuals from online harm.**

B. OUR MAIN CONCERNS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. Any such ban must be subject to the full legislative process and should not bypass parliamentary scrutiny

The government is looking to introduce the social media ban through a [Child Protection Code \(CPC\)](#), under section 80 of the [Online Safety Act \(ONSA\)](#).

However, as we have [stated previously](#), the ONSA lacks clarity and lacks strong safeguards for fundamental rights, including freedom of expression. We believe that any legislation aimed at regulating social media companies must prioritise transparency, human rights, independent oversight and accountability.

Crucially, the ONSA **does not provide any legal basis for a blanket ban on users under 16**. On the contrary, Section 18 of the ONSA presumes children's access to digital platforms and focuses on making those environments safer.

Imposing a ban via [subsidiary legislation](#) that appears to **contradict the Parent Act** raises serious concerns of **executive overreach**.

(a) **Bypassing Parliament's scrutiny:** Any measure that significantly restricts human rights must be enacted through clear primary legislation, subject to parliamentary scrutiny and democratic debate. Circumventing this process **undermines legitimacy and public trust**.

(b) **Tokenistic consultation:** The consultation period conducted by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) on the proposed regulatory framework for the [Online Safety Plan \(OSP\)](#), [the Draft Risk Mitigation Code](#), and [the Draft Child Protection Code](#), from 12 February to 31 March 2026, is manifestly insufficient. It fails to meet basic standards of inclusivity, transparency, and evidence-based policymaking, particularly given the scale of impact on millions of users, including children.

2. The ban undermines children's human rights

The proposed ban represents a profound regression in the protection of children's rights. Children have rights and protections under the UNCRC, including to safety, privacy, protection from exploitation, and the freedoms of expression and information, all of which apply fully in the digital environment, as affirmed by [General Comment 25 \(2021\)](#). States are obligated to uphold these rights online,

and businesses must respect them. These protections are further reflected in the ICCPR and the UDHR, which guide Malaysia's human rights framework, including under the [Human Rights Commission of Malaysia Act 1999](#).

Children face real risks online, including through the dissemination of inciting content, disinformation, addictive features, and exploitative data practices. These risks are driven by the architecture, [design and business and operating models](#) of the platforms, not simply by children's presence on them.

A blanket ban:

(a) Shifts responsibility away from the government and digital platforms and onto users, thus likely to violate international human rights standards, including legality, necessity, and proportionality.

(b) Suppresses children's rights to learn, communicate, express themselves and participate meaningfully in society. Digital platforms are now integral to education, social connection, political and civic engagement; excluding children risks deepening inequality and social [isolation](#) and would inherently impact their autonomy, agency and self-development.

(c) Will likely drive children to [migrate](#) to less regulated and potentially more dangerous online spaces, including 'the dark web'.

(d) Erodes [privacy](#), due to the intrusive age verification mechanisms, which would [eliminate](#) online anonymity and lead to an increase in processing and potential exploitation of the personal data of children.

(e) Fails to address tech companies' harmful business models and practices, nor does a ban create better or safer spaces for children. Instead, these approaches may disincentivise tech companies, both those within and beyond the restriction's scope, from providing age-appropriate and rights-respecting digital experiences for children, as required under the ONSA.

(f) Ultimately, a ban creates a dangerous ['cliff-edge' phenomenon](#), where children are suddenly exposed to high-risk environments at 16, with insufficient preparation. Consequently, removing opportunities for gradual, supported engagement would not cultivate resilience; rather, it would merely defer the onset of risk.

3. Enforcing the social media ban through age verification undermines the rights of all users

Enforcing a blanket ban would require intrusive, large-scale age-verification or age assurance systems, likely based on sensitive personal data. The government's proposal that all social media platforms operating in Malaysia be required to adopt mandatory [electronic Know Your Customer \(e-KYC\)](#) verification using government-issued documents, such as MyKad, passports, and MyDigital ID, inherently involves expanding surveillance technology and personal data collection processes by proprietary actors. It is likely to be exploited by government, private corporations and malicious actors alike. Such measures risk normalising mass data collection, privacy invasions and eroding anonymity online.

Linking age-verification to government-issued documents and overly broad identity verification systems is likely to lead to [exclusion](#), discrimination or reinforce existing barriers to access, particularly for individuals and at-risk communities without recognised identity documents and who are already facing disproportionate levels of structural discrimination.

Age assurance should be used to provide children with [age-appropriate](#) digital experiences and must be lawful, rights-respecting, privacy-preserving, risk-based, and proportionate. This means that the government should use the least restrictive approach to achieve the legitimate aim of protecting children from harm; these approaches should be preferred over a blanket prohibition or ban. It also must be designed to minimise data collection and prevent misuse, and not be a blunt instrument for exclusion.

Notably, in March 2026, over [400 security and privacy scientists and researchers from 32 countries](#) called for a moratorium on the use of age-assurance technologies until there is substantial evidence of their effectiveness and societal implications. While protecting minors is crucial, implementing blanket identity checks across the internet is too dangerous and counterproductive. Malaysia should heed this warning rather than rush into high risk, unproven systems.

4. Building resilience through a whole-of-society approach

The government must shift from a “move fast and break things” mentality to one that prioritises empowering young people with the skills, knowledge, and support to navigate digital environments safely and with resilience.

We urge the government to invest in sustainable solutions that empower children, particularly via:

- 4.1 Digital literacy and critical thinking education;
- 4.2 Accessible and affordable mental health and support services;
- 4.3 Ongoing engagement with children, parents, educators, and civil society.

C. CONCLUSION

We reiterate that the proposed blanket social media ban does not address the root issues of social media companies' business models and services. Children should not be prohibited from accessing the digital world; they should be able to do so safely and in ways that protect their rights.

It is the platforms and their business models that exploit children, and which should be regulated and held accountable.

We stand ready to engage constructively with the government to advance a reform agenda that is rights-based, evidence-driven, and fit for the evolving digital age.

Respectfully,
Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

Endorsed by:

Malaysian Civil Society Organisations:

1. ARTICLE 19
2. Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ)
3. Sinar Project
4. Advocates for Non-Discrimination and Access to Knowledge (ANAK)
5. All Women's Action Society (AWAM)
6. Association of Women Lawyers (AWL)
7. BERSIH Sabah
8. Beyond Borders
9. Borneo Komrad
10. Buku Jalanan Chow Kit
11. Cahaya Society
12. Child Rights Coalition Malaysia (CRCM)
13. Childline Foundation

14. CRIB Foundation (Child Rights Innovation & Betterment)
15. ECPAT Malaysia
16. Family Frontiers
17. Federasi Pemuda Kebangsaan
18. Filsufi. & Co
19. Freedom Film Network
20. Gabungan Bertindak Malaysia (GBM)
21. Gabungan Pilihan Raya Bersih dan Adil (BERSIH)
22. Gerakan Belia Sepunjabi Malaysia (GBSM)
23. Gerakan Media Merdeka (Geramm)
24. Greater Equitable Measures (GEM)
25. Hayat
26. Initiative to Promote Tolerance and Prevent Violence (INITIATE.MY)
27. JEJAKA
28. Justice for Sisters
29. Kembangan Kolektif
30. KL Queer Space
31. Lawyer Kamek, Sarawak
32. Liga Rakyat Demokratik
33. MANDIRI
34. MonstersAmong Us (MAU)
35. Movement for Change, Sarawak (MoCS)
36. North South Initiative
37. OCSEA Working Group
38. Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM)
39. PEN Malaysia
40. Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER)
41. Persatuan Pemangkin Daya Masyarakat (PPDM)
42. Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor (PSWS)
43. Project Stability and Accountability for Malaysia (Projek SAMA)
44. PurpleLily Social Association Kuching
45. Pusat KOMAS
46. Relate Mental Health Malaysia
47. Reformartsi
48. SIS Forum (Malaysia)
49. SIUMAN Collective
50. Squimp Tech Solutions
51. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)
52. TawauKini
53. The OKU Rights Matter Project
54. The Talisman Project
55. Vanguard4Change
56. Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)
57. Yayasan Chow Kit

Regional and International Civil Society Organisations:

1. 5Rights Foundation
2. Aliansi Jurnalis Independen (AJI) Indonesia
3. ALTSEAN-Burma
4. ASEAN SOGIE Caucus
5. Asia Freedom Network
6. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
7. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
8. Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA)
9. Child Rights International Network (CRIN)
10. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
11. Community Legal Education Center (CLEC), Cambodia
12. Cracked But Unbroken
13. Digital Rights Nepal (DRN)
14. Engage Media
15. Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA)
16. KontraS (Indonesia)
17. National Union of Journalists Philippines (NUJP)
18. Progressive Voice
19. PurpleCode Collective
20. Sitt Nyein Pann Foundation, Myanmar (Burma)
21. Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SAFEnet)
22. Tech Global Institute
23. Tifa Foundation, Indonesia
24. Timor Leste Journalists' Association (AJTL)
25. UP Internet Freedom Network
26. YAPPIKA-ActionAid

Individuals

1. Dato' Dr Amar-Singh HSS, Consultant Paediatrician, Child-Disability Activist
2. Dr. Mahyuddin Ahmad Abdul Rahman
3. Jesse Adam Halim, Human Rights Defender
4. Rizlan Bin Ghazali, Lawyer