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**SUHAKAM CALLS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY, DUE PROCESS AND IMMEDIATE REVIEW OF
RESTRICTIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

KUALA LUMPUR (15 OCTOBER 2026) - The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) expresses serious concern over the arrest of human rights defenders Amir Hariri Abdul Hadi and Dobby Chew, associated with MANDIRI and HAYAT respectively, and the reported freezing of bank accounts and imposition of travel restrictions affecting them and their organisations. These developments raise serious questions concerning due process, the proportionality of enforcement measures and the protection of democratic space in Malaysia.

SUHAKAM notes that both individuals have since been released. Nevertheless, concerns remain over the restrictions imposed and their implications for fundamental rights. While SUHAKAM acknowledges the authorities' responsibility to investigate suspected criminal offences, we wish to reiterate that investigative powers must be exercised in accordance with the rule of law, constitutional guarantees and the principles of necessity and proportionality. The presumption of innocence must be respected, and enforcement measures must not become instruments of intimidation or punishment before criminal liability has been established.

Political education, policy advocacy and criticism of government policies are legitimate activities in a functioning democracy. Civil society organisations and human rights defenders play an essential role in promoting public participation and holding institutions accountable. Such activities must not be criminalised or subjected to intimidation merely because they challenge government policies or decisions.

In this regard, SUHAKAM emphasises that the Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorism Financing, Anti-Restricted Activity Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001 (AMLA) must not be used to undermine legitimate civil society activities. Investigations under Section 4(1) must be supported by credible evidence and conducted in accordance with the law. The mere receipt of funding from a legitimate international foundation does not, in itself, constitute criminal wrongdoing. Furthermore, the exercise of powers to freeze bank accounts under Section 44(1) must be justified, proportionate and subject to appropriate safeguards, particularly where no criminal charges have been brought.

SUHAKAM recalls Article 13 of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which recognises the right of individuals and organisations to seek, receive and utilise resources for the peaceful promotion and protection of human rights. This principle is consistent with the fundamental freedoms of expression and association protected under Article 10 of the Federal Constitution, while Article 13 of the Constitution safeguards against deprivation of property except in accordance with law. Financial restrictions must therefore be exercised within the law and subject to appropriate safeguards, and must not be used to undermine legitimate human rights activities or impose undue hardship before criminal liability has been established.

Malaysia's participation in the United Nations Human Rights Council and its engagement in international human rights cooperation should be reflected in its domestic commitment to protecting civic space. SUHAKAM therefore calls on the authorities to immediately review the bank-account freezes and travel restrictions, provide clear legal justifications and ensure access to funds for essential living expenses and legitimate organisational operations. Any restrictions that cannot be adequately justified under the law should be lifted without delay.

The rule of law must safeguard both the integrity of criminal investigations and the fundamental freedoms of those under investigation. Human rights defenders and civil society organisations must be able to carry out their legitimate work without intimidation, undue interference or misuse of enforcement powers.

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**Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM)
15 October 2026**