

# Safety of Journalists in Sierra Leone

A Study on the State of Safety of Journalists' Policies and Practices in Media Houses in Sierra Leone



**October, 2020**

Supported by:



Embassy of the Kingdom  
of the Netherlands in Ghana

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study examined the Safety of Journalists' Policies and Practices in Media Houses in Sierra Leone' in forty-four media outlets (radio stations, television stations, newspapers and online media) spread across Sierra Leone. The key issues assessed are the trends of safety of journalists' issues in Sierra Leone (including types of violations, perpetrators, gender of victims), number of media outlets that have a safety policy or manual, and number a specific policy for female journalists, what the practices are etc.

The study adopted the qualitative approach. The study targeted Managers, Managing Editors, Proprietors, Publishers, Editors of radio stations and television stations, newspapers and online media spread across Sierra Leone to solicit information and gather data on whether their media institutions do have safety and security policies. The forty-four media houses were targeted across the country with all districts and regions (Southern, Eastern, Northern, North-West and Eastern Regions) captured. An interview guide was prepared and used to interview the media practitioners. The semi-structured approach was used to get additional information based on the responses of the interviewees. Ethical considerations were adhered to throughout the research process.

The findings generally show that majority of the media houses studied lacked a safety and security policy. There is no specific safety and security policy in those media institutions, although most of them stated that such issues are addressed in their editorial policy. Many journalists are not knowledgeable about tips on how to keep themselves safe in their line of duty and they exposed themselves to dangers when covering riots or demonstrations. They named most popular perpetrators of those violations as police officers, military personnel, politicians, civil servants, and community stakeholders/people.

The study recommended the development of a template of a Safety and Security Policy which the media institutions can use to develop their own. Media institutions should develop and operate with safety and security policies in the interest of the safety of journalists.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2 November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists in 2013. Resolution 68/163 deals with “The safety of journalists and the issue of impunity.” The UN condemns unequivocally all attacks and violence against journalists and media workers, such as torture, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and arbitrary detention, as well as intimidation and harassment in both conflict and non-conflict situations. It also urges Member States to do their utmost to prevent violence against journalists and media workers, to ensure accountability through the conduct of impartial, speedy and effective investigations into all allegations of violence against journalists and media workers, and to bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice and ensure that victims have access to appropriate remedies.<sup>1</sup>

Sierra Leone is among countries where concerns about the safety and security of journalists have been flagged. From 2018 to May 2020, the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG), with support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in the United States of America, has been monitoring and publishing reports on the exercise and legal guarantees of press freedom and freedom of expression issues in Sierra Leone; including intimidations, attacks, assaults, police invitations, arrests, detentions and prosecution of journalists and free expression activists. The project also tracks media performance. The last report on ‘Press Freedom in Sierra Leone’ released in May 2020 showed that of the 26 cases monitored, 21 had to do with journalists who were intimidated, attacked, arrested or charged to court.<sup>2</sup>

Part 5 of the Public Order Act of 1965 is the main law that hindered media freedom in the country. It created three separate offences of defamatory libel (Sections 26 and 27 of the Act), publication of false news (Section 32) and seditious libel (Section 33). They are:

*Section 26. Any person who maliciously publishes any defamatory matter knowing the same to be false shall be guilty of an offence called libel and liable on conviction to imprisonment for any term not exceeding three years or to a fine not exceeding one thousand leones or both.*

*Section 27. Any person who maliciously publishes any defamatory matter shall be guilty of an offence called libel and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding seven hundred leones or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding two years or to both such fine and imprisonment.*

*Section 32. (1) Any person who publishes any false statement, rumour or report which is likely to cause fear or alarm, to the public or to disturb the public peace shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction*

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 2013 [on the report of the Third Committee (A/68/456/Add.2)] <http://undocs.org/A/RES/68/163>

<sup>2</sup> MRCG’s Press Release “MRCG intensifies calls for safety and security of journalists on ‘International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, 2nd November, 2020.

Report on Press Freedom in Sierra Leone, December 2019 to May 2020, produced by Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) with support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED)

*to a fine not exceeding three hundred leones or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding twelve months, or to both such fine and imprisonment.*

*(2) Any person who publishes any false statement, rumour or report which is calculated to bring into disrepute any person who holds an office under the Constitution, in the discharge of his duties shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding five hundred leones or to imprisonment not exceeding two years or both.*

*(3) Any person who publishes any false statement, rumour or report which is likely to injure the credit or reputation of Sierra Leone or the Government shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding three hundred leones or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding twelve months or both.*

*Section 33. (1) Any person who—*

*a) does or attempts to do, or makes any preparation to do, or conspires with any person to do, any act with a seditious intention; or b) utters any seditious words; or c) prints, publishes, sells, offers for sale, distributes or reproduces any seditious publication; or*

*d) imports any seditious publication, unless he has no reason to believe that it is seditious,*

*shall be guilty of an offence and liable for a first offence to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years, or to a fine not exceeding one thousand leones or to both such imprisonment and fine, and for a subsequent offence shall be imprisoned for a term not exceeding seven years, and every such seditious publication shall be forfeited to the Government.*

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020, the Parliament of Sierra Leone unanimously repealed Part 5 of the Public Order Act of 1965. Subsequently, on the 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2020, President Julius Maada Bio signed the Public Order (Amendment) Act 2020 as a fulfilment of his campaign promise to repeal criminal and seditious libel provisions in the country's laws. Section 1 of the Public Order (Amendment) Act 2020 provides that "The Public Order Act, 1965 is amended by the repeal of Part V- DEFAMATORY AND SEDITIOUS LIBEL."

This move was welcomed by media organisations and practitioners as most of the arrests were based on criminal and seditious libel law offences in Part 5 of the Public Order Act of 1965. Not surprisingly, in the latest *The Global Expression Report 2019/2020: The state of freedom of expression around the world*, published by the global free expression organisation, Article 19, Sierra Leone was ranked among the top five countries in Africa for facilitating and supporting freedom of expression.<sup>3</sup>

Amidst the campaign to repeal the law, COVID-19 came to the country. The index case of COVID-19 in Sierra Leone was announced by President Maada Bio on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2020.<sup>4</sup> The Coronavirus struck the world, grinding every development activity to a halt. The

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<sup>3</sup> Statement By His Excellency, Dr. Julius Maada Bio, President of The Republic Of Sierra Leone on the Occasion of the Repeal Of Part V of the Public Order Act. Freetown, State House, 28 October 2020

<sup>4</sup> <https://statehouse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Statement-by-His-Excellency-Dr-Julius-Maada-Bio-President-of-the-Republic-of-Sierra-Leone-at-the-Second-Press-Conference-on-COVID-19.-State-House-Freetown-31-March-2020.pdf>

pandemic came with restrictions limiting many freedoms, although they differ from country to country.<sup>5</sup> In Sierra Leone, such restrictions were seen in the area of freedom of movement. There was the declaration of a State of Emergency by the President pursuant to Section 29 (1) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, Act. No. 6 of 1991. This was to be followed by “regulation” pursuant to Section 29 (5) of the Constitution “During a period of public emergency, the President may make such regulations and take such measures as appear to him to be necessary or expedient for the purpose of maintaining and securing peace, order and good government in Sierra Leone or any part thereof.”

There were no COVID-19-specific laws, regulations or legislative instruments /executive instruments, introduced or promulgated during the month of review.

In Kenema District, Eastern Region of Sierra Leone, journalist Fayia Amara Fayia was beaten by security personnel. According to a press release issued by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) on 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2020, “Fayia was mob-beaten by about nine military officers allegedly led by one Major Fofana and arrested on Wednesday, 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2020 in Kenema in the line of duty.” The SLAJ press release also stated that on 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2020, the Police charged Fayia with ‘disorderly behaviour and obstruction of security services’; and that on 9<sup>th</sup> April, 2020, Fayia appeared at the Kenema Magistrate Court No. 1, where he reportedly collapsed. SLAJ stated that Fayia was subsequently granted bail in the sum of Thirty Million Leones (Le 30,000,000.00), equivalent to US\$3,000 plus two sureties.

The State of Public Emergency declared in the country from the 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020 for a period of twelve months to address the “threat that the corona virus disease poses to the lives of the people and the economy of Sierra Leone...”<sup>6</sup> restricted some rights. There were inter-district and national lockdowns. There were some concerns that with the declaration of a State of Emergency by the President pursuant to Section 29 (1) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, Act. No. 6 of 1991, there were restrictions on some rights of citizens, including freedom of expression and of the press. During this reporting period, The Minister of Information and Communication stated that the government was contemplating passing a law to crackdown on fake news. “Fake news is definitely undermining the fight against COVID-19....,” he added. The Independent Media Commission (IMC), the country’s media regulatory body, engaged media institutions about the danger of publishing and broadcasting fake.

In September, 2020, the MRCG and the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) in Ghana with funding support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ghana organised a capacity building workshop on Safety of Journalists in Sierra Leone. The training sought to equip journalists with requisite skills on how to protect themselves in the

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<sup>5</sup> SLAJ @ 49, Statement by the President, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2020

<sup>6</sup><https://statehouse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Declaration-of-a-State-of-Public-Emergency-by-His-Excellency-Dr.-Julius-Maada-Bio-President-of-the-Republic-of-Sierra-Leone-%E2%80%93-24-March-2020.pdf>

line of duty such as covering events and reportage. That training broadened the discourse on issues relating to the safety and security of journalists in the country.

This study, therefore, examined the ‘Safety of Journalists Policies and Practices among media houses in Sierra Leone’ in 44 media outlets (radio stations, television stations, newspapers and online media) spread across Sierra Leone. The key issues assessed included the trends of safety of journalists’ issues in Sierra Leone (including types of violations, perpetrators, gender of victims), number of media outlets that have a safety policy or manual, and number with a specific policy for female journalists, and what the specific safety practices are. The study generally shows that majority of the media houses targeted lacked a safety and security policy. The report includes a discussion on the quality of the policies that exist in the few media house that have them and how they are being used; whether the safety policies meet international standards, and what the practices are within these media house. Flowing from these, the study draws ends with conclusions and makes recommendations on how the safety and security of journalists can be enhanced in Sierra Leone.

## **2. METHODS**

The study adopted the qualitative approach. The study targeted Managers, Managing Editors, Proprietors, Publishers, Editors of radio stations and television stations, newspapers and online media spread across Sierra Leone; to solicit information and gather data on whether their media institutions had safety and security policies. Forty-four media houses were targeted across the country with all districts and regions (Southern, Eastern, Northern, North-West and Eastern Regions) captured. Aside the heads of the media institutions, twenty reporters from various media houses were also contacted on issues relating to their safety and security.

A semi-structured interview guide was prepared and used to interview the media practitioners. This enabled the standardization of questions posed, and the possibility of comparing responses across media platforms and personalities. At the same time, the use of probe questions allowed the interviewer to elicit additional responses according to the tenor of individual interviews. The semi-structured approach was used to get additional information based on the responses of the interviewees.

Documentary analyses and reviews were done on major publications relating to media freedom.

### 3. FINDINGS

This section of the study discusses the demographic characteristics of the informants interviewed. Representatives of 44 different media houses across the country were interviewed. Tables 1 and 2 below present a summary of the demographic data on these informants.

**Table 1: Gender of Interviewees for the heads of media institutions**

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Male	35	80%	80%	80%
Female	9	20%	20%	20%
Total	44	100%	100%	100%

Sierra Leone's media landscape is mostly dominated by males. Management and senior positions in most of the media houses are occupied by men. This explains, and is reflected in, the preponderance of male respondents in the data provided.

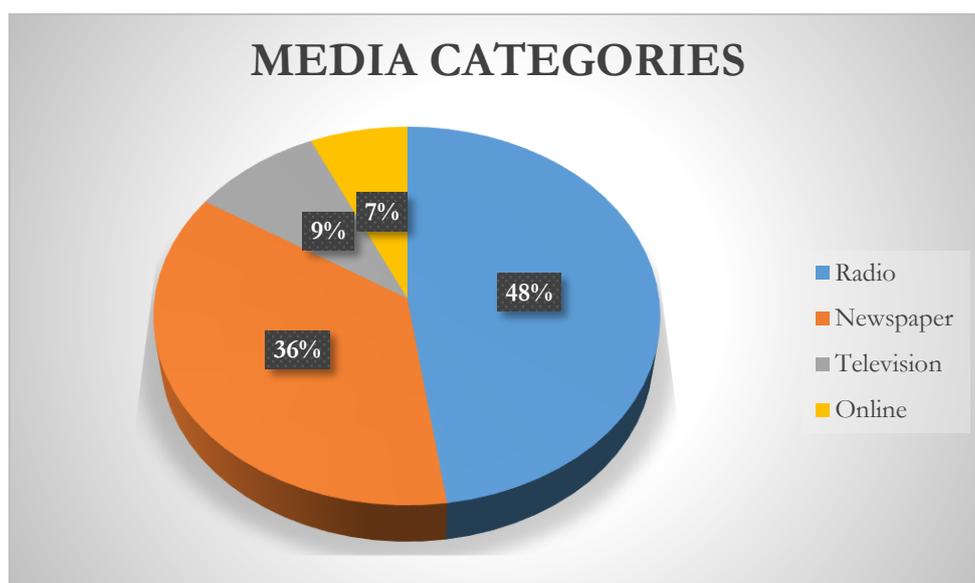
**Table 2: Participating Media Houses**

Item	Media House	Types	Designation	District	Region
1	Salone Jamboree	Online	Proprietor	Freetown	Western Area Urban
2	Radio Moa	Radio	Station Manager	Kailahun	Eastern Region
3	Radio New Song	Radio	Station Manager	Kono	Eastern Region
4	Radio Kolenten	Radio	Station Manager	Kambia	North-West Region
5	Kiss Radio	Radio	Production Manager	Bo	Southern Region
6	Voice of Women	Radio	Production Manager	Bonthe	Southern Region
7	Radio Bintumani	Radio	Station Manager	Koinadugu	Northern Region
8	Northern Times	Newspaper	Managing Editor	Bombali	Northern Region

9	Radio Gbaft	Radio	Station Manager	Tonkolili	Northern Region
10	Radio Bankasoka	Radio	Production Manager	Port Loko	North-West Region
11	Galaxy Radio	Radio	Station Manager	Port Loko	North-West Region
12	Radio Maria	Radio	Production Manager	Freetown	Western Area Urban
13	New Chapter Newspaper	Newspaper	Editor	Freetown	Western Area Urban
14	Watch Newspaper	Newspaper	Managing Editor	Freetown	Western Area Urban
15	New Age Newspaper	Newspaper	Editor	Freetown	Western Area Urban
16	Open Space Newspaper	Newspaper	Editor	Freetown	Western Area Urban
17	Executive Newspaper	Newspaper	Editor	Freetown	Western Area Urban
18	Focus Newspaper	Newspaper	Managing Editor	Freetown	Western Area Urban
19	Public Review Newspaper	Newspaper	Managing Editor	Freetown	Western Area Urban
20	Voice of Faith	Radio	Production Manager	Bo	Southern Region
21	Radio Modcar	Radio	Production Manager	Moyamba	Southern Region
22	Zimmi Radio	Radio	Station Manager	Pujehun	Southern Region
23	International Newspaper	Newspaper	Reporter	Freetown	Western Area Urban
24	Gola Agric Radio	Radio	Station manager	Kenema	Eastern Region
25	Shalom Radio	Radio	Station Manager	Koinadugu	Northern Region
26	Awe Media	Online	Administrator/editor	Bombali	Northern Region
27	Culture Radio 104.5 FM	Radio	Station Manager	Freetown	Western Area Rural

28	FrontPage	Newspaper and Online	Managing editor	Freetown	Western Area Rural
29	Sierra Leone News Agency	Newspaper and Online	Editor	Freetown	Western Area Urban
30	Beyond Borders Newspaper	Newspaper and Online	Editor	Freetown	Western Area Urban
31	Politico Newspaper	Newspaper and Online	Editor	Freetown	Western Area Urban
32	Calabash Newspaper	Newspaper and Online	Proprietor/Managing Editor	Freetown	Western Area Urban
33	Gbla TV Online	Online TV	CEO/Proprietor	Freetown	Western Area Urban
34	Believers' Broadcasting Network	Radio	News editor	Freetown	Western Area Rural
35	Concord Times Newspaper	Newspaper and Online	Reporter	Freetown	Western Area Urban
36	Awoko Newspaper	Newspaper	Managing Editor	Freetown	Western Area Urban
37	Citizen FM	Radio	Station Manager	Freetown	Western Area Urban
38	Afri Radio	Radio	Head of Radio	Freetown	Western Area Urban
39	Eastern Radio	Radio	General Manager	Kenema	Eastern Region
40	Star Line Radio	Radio	Station Manager	Kenema	Eastern Region
41	Star TV/Radio	TV/Radio	Station manager	Freetown	Western Area Urban
42	African Young Voices Empire (AYV)	TV/Radio	Executive Editor	Freetown	Western Area Urban
43	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)	TV/Radio	Deputy Director General	Freetown	Western Area Urban
44	Freetown Television Network (FTN)	Television	Head of News and Current Affairs	Freetown	Western Area Urban

*Figure 1: Media categories representation*



Out of the 44 media houses that were included in the study, 21 were radio stations, 16 newspapers, 3 online media and 4 television stations in Sierra Leone. All districts and regions were captured in the study so as to have a data that is nationally representative.

### **3.1 TRENDS OF SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS' ISSUES IN SIERRA LEONE (INCLUDING TYPES OF VIOLATIONS, PERPETRATORS, GENDER OF VICTIMS)**

On types of safety and security issues that journalists are faced with in Sierra Leone, almost all the responses showed that media houses and practitioners have been faced with at least one of the following violations:

- Intimidation
- Harassment
- Humiliation
- Arrest
- Detention
- Physical Attack

A writer and reporter for the *Concord Times* newspaper said that “journalists are sometimes arrested by the police in the line of duty as this happens mostly during protests. I have also been attacked during a civil unrest.” The news editor of *BBN Radio*, Ishmael Saidu Kanu, said that journalists also faced “unlawful detentions and assaults.” Similarly, the station manager for *Shalom Radio* said he and other colleagues had been harassed and intimidated by the police and politicians in their line of duty. Beyond the police/security operatives and politicians, however, there are incidences of intimidation and harassment of community

media by local level actors: “We get intimidated by community stakeholders who think they have the powers to influence our operations,” explained the station manager of *Radio Zimmi* in Pujehun District.

Respondents named the following categories of people as the perpetrators of those violations, with the Sierra Leone Police and politicians being the most culpable perpetrators of those violations:

- Sierra Leone Police
- Politicians
- Chiefs/Community stakeholders/people
- Military personnel
- Civil servants
- Members of the public

On the issue of a possible gender dimension to these violations, there were mixed responses. Some informants said it were females; others said it was males; and some said both genders were proportionately victimised. On the whole, however, it would seem that the question of gendered abuse is tied to the nature of the abuse. For instance, as the station manager for *Gola Agriculture Radio* in Kenema explained, “Our female journalists at times do face harassment from some politicians and civil servants they go to interview. Some of the people they go to interview make sexual advances or propose relationships to them.” On the other hand, the station manager for *Zimmi Radio* in Pujehun said they sometimes received threats from community stakeholders when their community was in the news for the “wrongs reasons.” In this case, the violation would be notwithstanding, rather than because of, the gender of the victim.

As a way of generally addressing issues of safety and security in media institutions, all respondents indicated that they normally engaged staff members in the event of a threat or an impending high-risk activity. This means that media houses address safety issues as and when they arose. The informant for *Avoko* newspaper said they provided “guidelines for staff, do in house coaching, and provide safety tips as and when things go ugly so as to protect themselves”. For *Afri Radio*, they said they provided internal trainings as they had “an MOU with a company that provides training on the use of fire extinguishers and other measures.” Informants for *Star TV* and *AYV TV* also said they did provide internal trainings and orientation for their staff.

According to responses reported, media houses had similar approaches for ensuring the safety and security of staff in their line of duty. Popular among them are that they:

- provide resources and safety equipment for their staff on a regular basis;
- provide advice and mentorship for their staff frequently;
- organise trainings on safety and security issues for all their staff.

The data from a post workshop evaluation survey administered at a training program organised by MRCG with support from the MFWA in September 2020 for journalists on safety issues in Sierra Leone showed that many journalists had low knowledge and understanding on: producing responsible, fact-based coverage while staying safe; the basics of safety in journalism: risk awareness and physical safety; identifying safety mechanisms available to journalists; and working with security agencies. With such an outlook, there is a high tendency for journalists to face dangers and risks in their line of duty especially in a country where freedom of expression is still in deficit.

Results from the MRCG Bi-annual Press Freedom report that started in March 2018 provide data and information on the assault, harassment, intimidation, arrest and detention of journalists. The first edition to the fourth edition published from June 2018 to June 2020 recorded a total of 26 cases; which included assault, harassment, arrest, detention and/or intimidation of journalists and civil society activists by security forces or political parties' operatives. From the fourth Press Freedom report, twelve were concluded, settled, resolved, dropped or abandoned because of lack of progress; five were in court; and nine were still under police investigation, were inconclusive or had stalled.

From the MRCG fourth Press Freedom report, below are some excerpts on the assault, intimidation, harassment, arrest and detention of journalists: <sup>7</sup>

1. The alleged attack on the then Editor of the *Awareness Times* newspaper, John Koroma on September 29, 2018, during a by-election in Tonko Limba, Kambia District, Northern Sierra Leone, allegedly by a team of Sierra Leone Police officers and persons who openly identified themselves as SLPP supporters: Mr. Koroma said after visiting the police for about three times, but with no positive response, he decided to stop following up on his matter. The police claimed that Koroma has not been able to identify his alleged attackers; and as such, they had been unable to arrest any suspect. However, the police said they would continue to follow-up on the matter.
2. The arrest and detention of the Managing Editor of the *Times SL* newspaper, Sallieu Tejan Jalloh (Sal Tee) in Freetown by the police on 11th November 2019 in connection with an SMS text message that he sent to the Chief Minister at State House, Prof David Francis, enquiring about an alleged payment of \$ 1.5 million into the Chief Minister's private ECOBANK account by SL Mining Ltd, which license had been cancelled by the State: The matter is still at the CID.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://mrcgonline.org/media/attachments/2020/08/20/press-freedom-report-final-copy-2020-1.pdf>

3. In March 2020, students of the Limkokwing University staged a peaceful protest over fee subsidies by the Government of Sierra Leone. A journalist from Radio Democracy, Chernor Jalloh and another from *Concord Times*, Yusuf Bangura were arrested by police, while covering the protest. But with the intervention of Sierra Leone Association of Journalist (SLAJ), the two journalists were released from police detention on the same day.
4. In April 2020, there was a report on the assault of journalist Fayia Amara Fayia of *Star Radio* and *Standard Times* newspaper by military officers in Kenema and his subsequent arrest and detention by Police in Kenema. According to a press release issued by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) on 10th April, 2020, “Fayia was mob-beaten by about nine military officers allegedly led by one Major Fofana and arrested on Wednesday, 1st April, 2020 in Kenema in the line of duty.” The journalist and his colleagues were refused entry into a potential quarantine venue at Dama Road, Kenema that was barricaded and secured by the military ‘while other people were allowed accesses. The release stated that Fayia was mob-beaten because he attempted to take snapshots of a truckload of rice being offloaded within a barricaded area after he and a colleague were denied entry into the venue. The journalist decided to take photos of the scene with his phone from a distance, when Major Fofana allegedly stepped forward and grabbed his mobile device from him and later ordered his colleagues to beat him up. “On Saturday, 4th April, 2020, Fayia was whisked off to the Kenema Police Station on the pretext of only to obtain statement from him, but was held in custody afterwards. He spent the entire three-day national Corona Virus Pandemic response lockdown under detention, despite his deteriorating health condition,” stated a SLAJ Press release. The release also stated that on 8th April, 2020, the Police charged Fayia with ‘disorderly behaviour and obstruction of security services’; and that on 9th April, 2020, Fayia appeared at the Kenema Magistrate Court No. 1, where he reportedly collapsed. SLAJ stated that Fayia was subsequently granted bail in the sum of Thirty Million Leones (Le30,000,000.00), equivalent to US\$3,000 plus two sureties; and the matter adjourned to 15th April, 2020. The matter is yet to be concluded.
5. On 5th April 2020, journalist Stanley Sahr Jimmy, station manager of *Wusum Radio* 88.5 FM, Makeni, was allegedly “mob-beaten” by five police officers at the Mena Police Station. According to SLAJ, he went to report an alleged breaking into his Radio Station, but an argument ensued in the process between some of the police officers and him, which allegedly resulted to his beating and ‘forcefully dispossessed’ of his phone. “Jimmy reportedly sustained injuries to his lower abdomen, mouth and left eye. A medical report has been tendered to the CDIID while he is responding to treatment,” stated the SLAJ press release.
6. In May 2020, police arrested and detained Adeyemi Jackson of *Universal Radio* at the CID Headquarters in Freetown. He was arrested and detained on 21st May 2020

after reportedly requesting an interview with Dr Ibrahim Bundu, a medical doctor attached to the Connaught Hospital in Freetown, in relation to an alleged sexual assault matter. The journalist was released on the next day, 22nd May, 2020 after the intervention of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ).

### 3.2 MEDIA OUTLETS THAT HAVE A SAFETY POLICY OR MANUAL

Majority of the 44 media houses lacked a safety and security policy or manual. Below is an analysis of the responses from informants. Some said they responded to safety issues as and when they arose. The reporters stated that they used and relied on their own personal judgements and gut feelings in their line of duty. Only about three media institutions stated that they had safety and security policies. However, most of the media houses confirmed that safety and security policies are addressed in their editorial policies.

The table below provides data on the responses of media houses about having a specific safety and security policy or manual; printed copy being available; or it being addressed in their editorial policy.

**Table 3: Indication of safety and security policy in media institutions**

No	Media House	Type	Availability of specific safety and security policy or manual		Availability and accessibility of printed copy		Safety and security issues addressed in their editorial policy	
			Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	Awe Media	Online		No		No	Yes	
2	Salone Jamboree	Online	Yes		Yes		Yes	
3	Radio Moa	Radio		No		No	Yes	
4	Radio New Song	Radio		No		No	Yes	
5	Radio Kolenten	Radio		No		No	Yes	
6	Kiss Radio	Radio		No		No	Yes	
7	Voice of Women	Radio		No		No	Yes	
8	Radio Bintumani	Radio		No		No	Yes	
9	Northern Times Newspaper	Newspaper		No		No	Yes	
10	Radio Gbaft	Radio		No		No		No
11	Radio Bankasoka	Radio		No		No		No
12	Galaxy Radio	Radio		No		No		No
13	Radio Maria	Radio		No		No	Yes	

14	New Chapter Newspaper	Newspaper		No		No	Yes	
15	Watch Newspaper	Newspaper		No		No	Yes	
16	New Age Newspaper	Newspaper		No		No		No
17	Open Space Newspaper	Newspaper		No		No	Yes	
18	Executive Newspaper	Newspaper		No		No	Yes	
19	Focus Newspaper	Newspaper		No		No	Yes	
20	Public Review Newspaper	Newspaper		No		No	Yes	
21	Voice of Faith	Radio		No		No	Yes	
22	Radio Modcar	Radio		No		No	Yes	
23	Zimmi Radio	Radio		No		No	Yes	
24	International Newspaper	Newspaper		No		No		No
25	Gola Agric Radio	Radio		No		No	Yes	
26	Shalom Radio	Radio		No		No	Yes	
27	Culture Radio 104.5 FM	Radio		No		No	Yes	
28	Concord Times Newspaper	Newspaper and Online		No		No	Yes	
29	Sierra Leone News Agency (SLENA)	Newspaper and Online	Yes			No	Yes	
30	Beyond Borders Newspaper	Newspaper and Online		No		No	Yes	
31	Politico Newspaper	Newspaper and Online		No		No	Yes	
32	Calabash Newspaper	Newspaper and Online		No		No	Yes	
33	Gbla TV Online	Online TV		No		No	Yes	
34	Believers' Broadcasting Network	Radio		No		No	Yes	
35	FrontPage	Newspaper and Online		No		No	Yes	

36	Awoko Newspaper	Newspaper		No		No	Yes	
37	Citizen FM	Radio		No		No	Yes	
38	Afri Radio	Radio		No		No	Yes	
39	Eastern Radio	Radio		No		No	Yes	
40	Star Line Radio	Radio		No		No	Yes	
41	Star TV/Radio	TV/Radio		No		No	Yes	
42	African Young Voices Empire (AYV)	TV/Radio	Yes, occupational and health safety policy		Yes		Yes	
43	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)	TV/Radio		No		No	Yes	
44	Freetown Television Network (FTN)	Television		No		No	Yes	

### 3.3 SPECIFIC POLICY FOR FEMALE JOURNALISTS

Out of the 44 respondents, only six had a specific policy for female journalists. The *Calabash* newspaper allowed females to leave the office at or before 17:00 GMT so as to reach home on time. *Culture Radio* prioritised female reporters. This is not surprising because the station had a female as station manager.

Below are the media houses that had specific policies for female journalists.

- Kiss Radio
- New Chapter Newspaper in Freetown
- Voice of Faith Radio in Bo
- Shalom Radio in Koinadugu district
- The Calabash Newspaper in Freetown
- Culture Radio

On the practices and issues that the specific policy for female journalists addressed, the production manager for *Kiss Radio* in Bo said for their media house, it addressed “females’ dress codes, their integrity and their behavior when on the field”. For the *New Chapter* newspaper in Freetown, their policy addressed sexual harassment against females. For the *Voice of Faith* radio in Bo, their production manager stated that their code addressed issues of “dress codes, attitude at work place and towards authorities”. For *Shalom* radio in Koinadugu District, according to their station manager, a female, their female policy addressed “Sexual harassment, dress codes, attitude at the work place and their working relationships internally and externally”. On dress code, staff are encouraged to dress decently and responsibly. While there are no laid down maternity policy in media houses, most of the female reporters said that their colleagues are given maternity leave by their media institutions.

### 3.4 QUALITY OF POLICIES IN THE MEDIA HOUSE

The study also sought to assess the quality of policies that may exist and whether they met international standards.

Majority of the media institutions do not have safety and security policies or manuals. The three that said they had a safety and security policy generally addressed issues around safety gears for staff and precautions to be taken in their line of duty. However, many media practitioners’ houses rely mostly on their own personal judgements and instinct as they mostly handle safety and security issues as they arise. Since no safety and security policy or manual was made available, there was no way an analysis of what was missing or present in them could be done to know whether they matched international standards. However, most of the media houses do address safety and security issues in their editorial policy though they are not detailed. Looking at the practices which the media manager explained that they embarked on, some of them do have elements provided for in the UNESCO Safety Policy and Protocols (February, 2016)

The UNESCO Safety Policy and Protocols<sup>8</sup> (February, 2016) urges media organisations to, among other measures:

- Establish clear habits, routines, protocols and systems (including insurance and regular training) to enhance safety, with clear responsibilities from the media organization and the reporter;
- Institutionalize daily check-ins and provide back-up for reporters on dangerous assignments;
- Have conversations between editors and correspondents to understand mutual responsibilities and what should be done if something went wrong;

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<sup>8</sup> [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ideas\\_for\\_news\\_organisations\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ideas_for_news_organisations_en_0.pdf)

- Provide trainings for media editors and managers to sensitize them on safety issues;
- Provide training and mentoring to staff, fixers and freelance journalists on a variety of topics, such as:
  - i. Conducting security assessments;
  - ii. Security in hostile environments;
  - iii. Kidnap prevention;
  - iv. Medical care;
- Adapt universal training manuals to local circumstances.

### **3.5 PRACTICES BY MEDIA HOUSES: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES**

As a way of generally addressing issues of safety and security in media institutions respondents explained that they normally engaged and advised their staff members to always prioritise their safety and keep out of harm. This means that even though they did not have a specific safety and security policy or manual, media houses addressed safety issues as and when they arose.

As the station manager of *Shalom Radio* in Koinadugu explained, “We handle safety and security issues as they arrive and we prioritize and make use of the media laws in the country in ensuring the safety and security of our staff.” Most of the media managers stated that they organized internal trainings and mentorship for their staff in ensuring their safety and security. They also mostly discussed safety issues in their editorial meetings. This was expressed by the managing editor of the *Watch* newspaper as follows: “We always advise them to put their safety first.”

In ensuring the safety and security of journalists in their line of duty, the CEO of *Gbla TV* online, Abdulai Gbla, said that “we study the situation on the ground and see if it is safe. Then we go and gather information. But if the ground is unsafe, based on what we know, we will wait and try to get the story via other safer means.” Some of the other responses were that some media houses provided resources and safety equipment for their staff on a regular basis; as well as frequently provided pieces of advice and mentorship for their staff.

Table 4 shows the safety practices by media institutions, ranging from provisions of first aid kits, Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), fire extinguishers and ID cards for staff. The ones that were mostly available in media houses, according to respondents, were ID cards for staff. Also, with the COVID-19 pandemic yet to be fully defeated, some media houses also gave face masks and hand sanitizers to reporters and other staff members.

**Table 4: Table of safety mechanisms available to media houses**

No	Media House	SAFETY MECHANISMS AVAILABILITY IN MEDIA HOUSES							
		ID card for staff		Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) for staff		Fire extinguisher		First aid kit	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	Awe Media	Yes			No		No		No
2	Salone Jamboree	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
3	Radio Moa	Yes		Yes		Yes			No
4	Radio New Song	Yes		Yes			No		No
5	Radio Kolenten	Yes		Yes			No		No
6	Kiss Radio	Yes		Yes			No	Yes	
7	Voice of Women	Yes		Yes			No		No
8	Radio Bintumani	Yes			No		No		No
9	Northern Times	Yes		Yes			No	Yes	
10	Radio Gbaft	Yes		Yes			No		No
11	Radio Bankasoka	Yes			No		No		No
12	Galaxy Radio	Yes			No		No	Yes	
13	Radio Maria	Yes			No		No		No
14	New Chapter Newspaper	Yes			No		No	Yes	
15	Watch Newspaper	Yes		Yes			No		No
16	New Age Newspaper	Yes			No		No		No
17	Open Space Newspaper	Yes			No		No	Yes	
18	Executive Newspaper	Yes		Yes			No		No
19	Focus Newspaper	Yes		Yes			No	Yes	
20	Public Review Newspaper	Yes			No		No		No
21	Voice of Faith	Yes		Yes			No		No
22	Radio Modcar	Yes		Yes			No		No
23	Zimmi Radio	Yes		Yes			No		No
24	International Newspaper	Yes		Yes			No		No
25	Gola Agric Radio	Yes		Yes		Yes			No
26	Shalom Radio	Yes			No		No		No

27	Culture Radio 104.5 FM	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
28	Believers' Broadcasting Network	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
29	Sierra Leone News Agency	Yes			No		No		No
30	Beyond Borders Newspaper	Yes			No		No		No
31	Politico Newspaper	Yes			No		No		No
32	Calabash Newspaper	Yes			No		No		No
33	Gbla TV Online	Yes			No		No		No
34	Concord Times Newspaper	Yes			No		No		No
35	FrontPage	Yes			No		No		No
36	Awoko Newspaper	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
37	Citizen FM	Yes			No		No		No
38	Afri Radio	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
39	Eastern Radio	Yes			No			Yes	
40	Star Line Radio	No			No		No		No
41	Star TV/Radio	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
42	African Young Voices Empire (AYV)	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
43	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)	Yes		Yes		Yes			No
44	Freetown Television Network (FTN)	Yes			No	Yes		Yes	

Since there were no specific safety and security policies or manuals by a majority of the respondents, they relied mostly on ad hoc interventions in the handling of issues of safety and security when they arose.

Without a safety policy or manual there is not much advantage on their practice as media houses are not actually guided as to how and when to respond and address issues of safety and security of their staff. By way of disadvantage, without a safety and security policy or manual, their staff are at risks and mostly when they face dangers or accident in the line of their duty, they are left to deal with the consequences individually as many media houses are ill-equipped, logistically and financially, to provide insurance for their staff.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

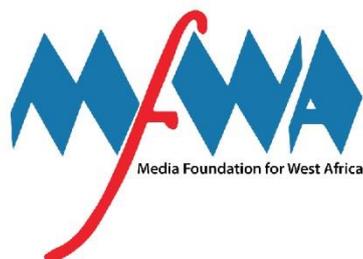
The study examined the ‘Safety of Journalists Policies and Practices in media houses in Sierra Leone’ in 44 media outlets (radio stations, television stations, newspapers and online media) spread across Sierra Leone. The key issues assessed were the trends of safety of journalists’ issues in Sierra Leone (including types of violations, perpetrators, and gender of victims), number of media outlets that had a safety policy or manual, number that had a specific policy for female journalists, and what the practices were. Generally, there was no specific safety and security policy in the majority of media institutions. Many journalists were knowledgeable about tips on how to keep themselves safe in their line of duty, but they still exposed themselves especially to dangers; when covering riots or demonstrations. There is the need for media institutions to develop and operate with safety and security policies in the interest of the safety of journalists.

The following recommendations are made in that regard.

- i. There is a need to develop a template of a Safety and Security Policy which the media institutions can use to develop their own, in accordance with their peculiar circumstances and needs.
- ii. The Independent Media Commission (IMC) and the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) should add and intensify issues of safety and security of journalists in the Media Code of Practice and the Code of Ethics.
- iii. Massive training of journalists on safety and security is required
- iv. Support for the monitoring and reporting of safety and security issues in the country would be imperative.

## REFERENCES

- General Assembly Resolution 68/163. The safety of journalists and the issue of impunity. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 2013 [on the report of the Third Committee (A/68/456/Add.2)] <http://undocs.org/A/RES/68/163>
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- Report on Press Freedom in Sierra Leone - December 2019 to May 2020, produced by Media Reform Coordinating Group ( MRCG) with support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED)MRCG Press Freedom Report- fourth edition: <http://mrcgonline.org/media/attachments/2020/08/20/press-freedom-report-final-copy-2020-1.pdf>
- Statement By His Excellency, Dr. Julius Maada Bio, President Of The Republic Of Sierra Leone on the Occasion of the Repeal Of Part V of the Public Order Act. Freetown, State House, 28 October 2020
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