



## MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- SEPTEMBER 2021

The monthly 'Media Freedom Review' is a publication of the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) produced from the monitoring and reporting on freedom of expression, media freedom, internet, digital and online rights and safety and security of journalists in Sierra Leone.

In September 2021, the MRCG followed incidents and activities on the status of the arrest and detention of a journalist, Independent Media Commission's (IMC) ruling on complaints it received, the West African Parliamentary Press Corps (WAPPC) letter to the Clerk of Parliament of Sierra Leone and IMC, SLAJ and BBC Media Action's regional validation of the revised Media Code of Practice.

In a follow up on the matter of journalist Osman Hardy Jalloh and Magistrate Joseph Toby of Magistrate Court Number 2 in Kenema, Deputy Director, Regional Service East of the Human Rights Commission Sierra Leone, Sylvester Kallon, said they had sent the complaint received from the journalist to the Directorate of Complaints, Investigation and Legal Services for preliminary investigations.

On August 11, 2021, Yaya Sidi Turay on behalf of Vimetco SMHL filed a complaint with the Independent Media Commission (IMC) against the Public Review Newspaper in connection with publications dated June 29 and July 6, 2021 titled: **"For Sheer Negligence...Vimetco in Drowning Scandal...1 Confirmed Dead"** and **"Drowned Victim Found at Vimetco Site...After Days"**. The matter received two hearings- August 31 and September 7, 2021, attended by both parties. The Committee found that the publication was inaccurate as it failed to adequately publish Vimetco's response to their enquiry. **The Board of the IMC at its meeting held on Wednesday September 22, 2021 fully endorsed the recommendations of the Complaints Committee that** the Newspaper, for breach of the accuracy provision of the Media Code of Practice be fined Le 1,000,000 (One Million Leones equivalent to USD 100), publish a retraction with due regards to equal space and time, publish the ruling and Vimetco SMHL **be warned** to take their safety standards seriously.

On August 30, 2021, Head of Admin/HR, Saidu M. Conteh, on behalf of Dangote Cement Factory, filed a complaint to the Commission against Voice of Salone Newspaper in connection with a publication dated August 27, 2021 titled: **"With Over \$ 12m In Limbo.... Dangote Cement Factory to Fold Up"**. One hearing was conducted on this matter on Tuesday September 14, 2021, attended by both parties. The Committee found that the Newspaper could not provide any evidence to confirm the claim that the company intended to fold-up or that its productions were to be suspended and the Managing Editor admitted that all that was published was inaccurate. **The Board of the IMC at its meeting held on Wednesday September 22, 2021 fully endorsed the recommendations of the Complaints Committee that** the Newspaper publish a retraction with due regards to equal space and time rule.

On August 31, 2021, Jessie Olu John filed a complaint with the Commission against the Salone Compass Newspaper in connection with their publication dated August 16, 2021 titled: **"Land Conflict at Kerry Town community –Former Headman Implicated"**. The Committee's findings were that the article lacked balance as the publication failed to make reference to the documentary evidence forwarded to them and that the Newspaper did not provide any evidence, but instead relied on mere allegation. **The Board of**

**the IMC at its meeting held on Wednesday September 22, 2021 fully endorsed the recommendations of the Complaints Committee that the Newspaper be fined le 1,000,000 (One Million Leones equivalent to USD 100) for breach of the accuracy provision of the IMC Media Code of Practice, retract its publication, presenting the facts with due regard to the equal time and space rule, and to publish the ruling of the IMC.**

On September 9, 2021, the West African Parliamentary Press Corps (WAPPC) wrote to the Clerk of Parliament of Sierra Leone, Hon. Paran Umar Tarawally, registering their dissatisfaction of Parliament's interference into the activities and operations of the Sierra Leone Parliamentary Press Gallery (SLPPG). The letter indicated that the involvement of Parliament in the reconstitution of the Press Gallery leadership in the absence of any election, violates Article 32 of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance entered into by Member States.

On September 27, 2021 the Independent Media Commission (IMC) with support from BBC Media Action, started the regional validation process of the reviewed 2007 Media Code of Practice in Kenema, Eastern Region, and continued in other regions across the country. The review of the Media Code of Practice 2007 was necessitated by the IMC Act of 2020.

The details of the cases and issues will be published in the MRCG Bi-Annual Press Freedom Report for June to November 2021.

The MRCG's freedom of expression, media freedom and internet and digital rights initiative is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in the United States of America. The MRCG seeks to strengthen democratic dialogue and accountability, consolidate peace and ensure development through professional, independent and sustainable media, based on the right to freedom of expression and of the press.