



MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- FEBRUARY 2022

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 and of the press, internet freedom, digital and online rights, and safety and security of journalists in Sierra Leone.

In February 2022, MRCG followed incidents of an alleged physical assault on a journalist and the arrest and detention of another; a matter between a journalist and the Sierra Leone Police; matters between a journalist and a magistrate in Kenema, a pastor versus the State, an entertainer and an ethnic group; the invitation and detention of main opposition spokesperson in relation to comments made during a radio program;; and the launch of a Journalism Welfare Fund.

Alusine Antha of *Eagle Africa FM 91.3* was alleged to have been physically assaulted by seven youths in the Waterloo Community on 17 February 2022. The journalist said he had gone to the community to cover a story dealing with a land issue when seven youths physically attacked and assaulted him. He said his mobile phone, tape recorder and money in his possession were forcefully taken away from him during the incident. He reported the matter to the Waterloo Police Division. The police had arrested the seven suspects and charged the matter to court. The matter came up on 19 February 2022 at the Waterloo Magistrate Court but owing to the absence of the suspects, it was adjourned to 14 March 2022.

On 7 February 2022, two officers from the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) in Freetown went to Bo and 'ordered the arrest' of Solomon Joe, a journalist of KISS 104 FM in Bo for a broadcast concerning a transaction between two businessmen in Bo. After a statement was obtained from him in Bo, he was taken to Freetown where he spent one night in police custody. On 8 February 2022, the journalist was released on conditions that he retracted his story and apologized to the businessman. **"I am not going to retract the story because I stand by my story. My request now is for the CID to close the file against me in their record since they did not find me wanting, to avoid future arrest,"** said Solomon.

In a follow up on the alleged physical assault and detention of Ransford Wright, a staff (camera operator) of *AYV Media Empire* by Police on 13 December 2021, police said the matter was still under investigation. Ransford told the MRCG that the police summoned him and some of his senior colleagues from the *AYV Media Empire* to a meeting and promised to compensate him. He said the police were yet to call him for a dialogue meeting they had promised. The President of SLAJ, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, said the police told him that they had suspended the officials who were involved in the incident, promised to pay for the journalist's missing pieces of property and to officially write SLAJ when they concluded the investigation.

In a follow up of the complaint at the Human Rights Commission for Sierra Leone (HRCSL) made by journalist, Osman Hardy Jalloh, against Magistrate Joseph Toby of Magistrate Court Number 2 in Kenema on his arrest and detention, Deputy Director, HRCSL Regional Service East, Sylvester Kallon, said that the Commission had sent a copy of the admissibility study to the complainant for him to verify,

sign and send it back to them to take the next step. He said the Commission is waiting for the response from the complainant.

In a follow up on the court matter of Pastor Septimus Yambasu who was charged to court for insulting conducts against President Julius Maada Bio, contrary to Section 3 (1) of the Public Order Act of 1965, Magistrate Sahr Kekura of the Pademba Road Magistrate Court No. 1 discharged the matter on 25 January 2022. Pastor Yambasu's vehicle which was impounded by the police was returned to him.

In a follow up on the matter of Ahmed Doyle Kamara's (aka Tazmo Sliz), an entertainer in Makeni, Northern Sierra Leone for allegedly insulting and attacking the Fullah Ethnic group in a Facebook live video in December 2021, the matter was discharged from court on 28 February 2022 by Magistrate Sahr Kekura of Pademba Road Magistrate Court No 1 in Freetown after Tazmo Sliz on 21 February 2022 in a Facebook live video apologized to the Fullah community and the people of Sierra Leone. (<https://fb.watch/bjuD6zsjdh/>).

Acting spokesperson of the main opposition All Peoples Congress Party (APC), Sidi Yayah, Tunis was invited and detained at the CID in Freetown on 8 February 2022 for alleged 'inciting utterances' he made during a program on *Radio Democracy 98.1 FM* on Monday 7 February 2022. The Inspector General of Police, Ambrose Sovula, said Mr. Tunis was invited because his utterances were deemed as 'inciting statements' that had the tendency to disrupt or undermine the safety and security of the State. Mr. Tunis was later released on bail and the matter is under investigation.

SLAJ on 14 February 2022 launched the Golden Jubilee Journalism Welfare Fund in Freetown. President of SLAJ, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, said the Fund was to support journalists in their work and to help minimize the financial, social and psychological challenges which they go through in line of their duties.

The details of the cases and issues will be published in the MRCG Bi-Annual Press Freedom Report for December 2021 to May 2022.

The MRCG's freedom of expression and of the press, internet freedom, digital and online rights, and safety and security of journalists in Sierra Leone 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.

MRCG is the coordinating Secretariat for media reform, research and capacity building. It comprises Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Independent Radio Network (IRN), Guild of Editors (GoE), Women in the Media Sierra Leone (WIMSAL), Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU), Sport Writers Association of Sierra Leone (SWASAL), Mass Communication (Fourah Bay College), Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC), Independent Media Commission (IMC) and the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC).