



## MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- APRIL 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 April 2022, MRCG followed incidents of an alleged assassination attempt on a journalist and civil society activist; the arrests and detention of a man reportedly suffering from ‘mental illness’ and a businesswoman for allegedly insulting President Bio, a teacher just outside *Africa Young Voice’s (AYV)* premises after taking part in a television programme and two other teachers in Bo, Southern Region; the matter between a journalist and a magistrate in Kenema, Eastern Region; the temporal shutdown of a radio station in Freetown; and the National Media Viability and Investment Conference.

Journalist Gibril Gottor who resides in Kambia District, Northern Sierra Leone on 29 April 2022, reported to the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and the Sierra Leone Police of an ‘assassination attempt’ on him and his family through a ‘suffocating smell of petrol’ in their house. According to Gibril, the family discovered a plastic bag in the ventilation pipe on their roof dripping petrol, and their back door painted with the highly inflammable liquid. The journalist and civil society activist said the incident occurred at a time he was investigating major corruption activities involving some business tycoons, military personnel, and a host of other influential people in the district. SLAJ in its 30 April 2020 press release called on the Sierra Leone Police for their swift intervention to ensure the safety and security of the journalist. (<https://www.facebook.com/100063807305798/posts/383887097081531/?app=fbl>). Gibril told the MRCG that the police were yet to institute investigation into the matter.



Mohamed Mansaray, popularly known as ‘Blacker’, who reportedly suffers from mental illness and roams the streets of Freetown, and Kadiatu Yankaday Kamara a trader, were both sent on remand at the Freetown Correctional Centres on 28 April 2022 for allegedly insulting President Bio. The two accused persons appeared before Magistrate Alpha Rashid Jalloh at the Pademba Road Magistrate Court No. 4 on one count charge of public insult and provocation contrary to Section 2 of the Public Order Act No. 46 of 1965. They were refused bail initially, but were granted bail on 29 April 2022. The matter was adjourned to 9 May 2022. <https://fritongpost.com/court-remands-blacker-for-insulting-president-bio/>

The Sierra Leone Police (SLP) on 26 April 2022 arrested Mohamed Khan, the Interim Chairman of Teachers Solidarity, just outside *AYV’s* premises after he had appeared on the ‘*AYV’s* Wake Up Salone TV program’ as a guest to discuss teachers’ concerns and their conditions of service. The police said Khan was arrested for inciting teachers to withhold their services from the State using an illegal platform called ‘Teachers Solidarity’ while the Government of Sierra Leone and the Sierra Leone Teachers Union are engaged in negotiations’. AYV and SLAJ were concerned that such an act of arrest by the SLP has the potential to scare off potential critical guests that AYV Media and other media houses may want to invite to their programs. SLAJ called on

the SLP to respect people's right to free expression at all times and to adopt less hostile ways of holding citizens accused of incitement other than arresting them. (<https://www.facebook.com/100063807305798/posts/382693913867516/?app=fbl>). Police said after Mr. Khan's questioning at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) he was later released on the same day.

Also, the SLP on 28 April 2022 arrested and detained Lahai Jah and Joseph C Kailie at the Bo West Police Station for convening a protest without police clearance according to Deputy Media and Public Relations of the SLP, Superintendent Samuel Saio Conteh. The Sierra Leone Bar Association (SLBA) 28 April 2022 press release expressed 'serious concern' on their arrest and detention 'after allegedly requesting a clearance to convene a meeting of "The Teachers Solidarity Movement."

In a follow up on the complaint at the Human Rights Commission for Sierra Leone (HRC SL) made by journalist Osman Hardy Jalloh, against Magistrate Joseph Toby of Magistrate Court Number 2 in Kenema on his arrest and detention, the new Deputy Director, HRC SL Regional Service East, Tom Sandi, said that the complainant was still yet to sign and send the admissibility study to the Commission. Mr. Jalloh acknowledged receipt of a copy of the admissibility study.

In a press statement on 28 April 2022, the Independent Media Commission (IMC) as part of its mandates temporarily shut down the operations of *Justice Radio* in Freetown for 10 hours. The decision of the IMC Complaint Committee was connected to an alleged unprofessional conduct, proprietorship and management issues that posed serious confusion to the operations and activities of the radio station. The ban was lifted that same day.

The Ministry of Information and Communication (MIC) together with SLAJ with support from the BBC Media Action Sierra Leone PRIMED project on 21 and 22 April 2022 organized a two-day Media Viability and Investment Conference in Freetown that sought to address the economic and other systemic challenges that have faced the media industry in Sierra Leone over the years. SLAJ called on the Government to **allocate 3% of the National Budget to the media** as part of its commitment to media viability and development.

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 is concerned that while the country is making progress in press freedom rankings, the general climate for freedom of expression for everybody in society leaves much to be desired. Institutions that implement, interpret and enforce the law should do so within acceptable democratic standards. The government cannot guarantee press freedom without freedom of expression, which in fact is the overall standard the country should guarantee, the MRCG notes.

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).**