



MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- MARCH 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 March 2022, MRCG followed an incident regarding journalists being denied access to cover a tribunal; matters between a journalist and the police, a journalist and youths in Waterloo and a journalist and a magistrate in Kenema. It also monitored consultation on the draft Data Protection and Privacy Bill.

The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) on 17 March 2022, in a press alert called on the Judiciary of Sierra Leone to allow media access to cover the opening session of a tribunal set up to investigate the suspended Auditor-General, Mrs Lara Taylor-Pearce and her deputy. This was as a result of a complaint from some journalists who were reportedly denied entry to the proceedings. SLAJ President, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, said in the interest of transparency, the tribunal should be opened to all media so that the public would follow the process and not just a selected few. In response to the alert, the Communication Unit of the Judiciary in a press release said the SLAJ allegations were 'untrue and inaccurate.'



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, it was found out that the matter was still under Police investigation.

The follow up on the alleged physical assaulted of journalist Alusine Antha of *Eagle Africa FM 91.3* in February 2022 by seven youths in the Waterloo community in connection with a land saga showed that the matter was still in court.

Also, in a follow up on 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 back to them before they took the next step of action. He said the Commission was waiting for the response from the complainant. Mr Jalloh acknowledged receipt of a copy of the admissibility study.

The Ministry of Information and Communications in collaboration with the National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA) on 22 March 2022 organized a two day Bench Marking and Experience sharing exercise on the Draft Data Protection and Privacy Bill. The consultative workshop was to compare the Bill to both local and international best practices to ensure universal acceptability of the proposed law. The Minister of

Information and Communications, Mohamed Rahman Swaray, said that the workshop was part of fulfilling the desire of the government to ensure that Sierra Leone was transformed into a digitally inclusive country. (<https://www.facebook.com/mic.gov.sl/videos/1950356275351992/>).

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).