



## MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- JUNE 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 June 2022, the MRCG monitored the alleged physical assault of a journalist in the Well of Parliament; the work of Sierra Leone's Cyber Investigative Directorate (CID); and the enactment of the National Electronic Communication Act 2021. The MRCG followed up on the matter of a journalist who was under police custody; the alleged 'assassination attempt' on a journalist, and the matter between a journalist and a magistrate in Kenema.

Journalist Abdulai Gbla, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of *Gbla TV Online* on 28 June 2022 wrote a letter of complaint to the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) regarding an alleged 'physical assault' on him by a Member of Parliament (MP), Hon. Abdul Muniru Lansana of Constituency 121. Mr. Gbla in his complaint said "he [Hon. Lansana] physically assaulted (pushed) me in the Well of Parliament and knocked my gadget (Samsung Galaxy Note 20 ULTRA) on the floor with the intent of destroying it to prevent me from videoing a scuffle that All Peoples Congress (APC) and the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) MPs were having in the Well of Parliament immediately after the Parliamentary proceedings at about 7:09 PM, on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 2022." Hon. Abdul Muniru Lansana in response told the MRCG that he 'did not assault' the journalist as he had alleged, but rather 'hit his phone to stop filming the incident' after he had previously asked the journalists not to film since the parliamentary sitting had been adjourned. He said the journalist had entered a place in the 'Well' where only dignitaries and accredited persons were allowed and not journalists. SLAJ President, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, acknowledged receipt of the letter of complaint from the journalist, and promised to write a letter to Parliament to investigate the alleged assault and take appropriate action.

Superintendent Samuel Saio Conteh, who was the Deputy Media and Public Relations of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), was transferred to Rotifunk Police Station, according to a transfer notice issued by the Directorate, Human Resource Management of the SLP on 21 June 2022. There were various comments on social media platforms that the transfer of Superintendent Saio Conteh was connected with an interview he granted on *AYV Media Empire* on 15 June 2022 on the arrest and detention of popular artist Alhaji Amadu Bah, aka LAJ in which he reportedly stated "**no police officer has the right to shave off the hair of an alleged suspect.**" (<https://www.facebook.com/sulaiman.janneh/video/782581956486107/?app=fbl>). In response to the transfer of Superintendent Saio Conteh, the Head of Media and Public Relations of the SLP, Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Brima Kamara, said transfers or redeployments in the Sierra Leone Police are routine and normal; and they are "an opportunity to provide a police officer with extensive policing knowledge and thereby helping him/her become an all-round police officer, who can operate wholesomely." It is basically part of career development, he added.

Sorie Saio Sesay, of *Okentuhun Radio, FM 94.0*, who was arrested by police in Makeni on 26 May 2022 for allegedly 'publishing false information' on social media about an incident between the Sierra Leone Police

(SLP) and commercial bike riders in Makeni, was released on bail on 31 May 2022 with the intervention of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ). Sorie told the MRCG that even though the police had released him, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) still has his phone. The Director of Crime Service at the CID headquarters in Freetown, AIG William Fayia Sellu, said that the Cyber Unit of the SLP was still investigating the content of the phone of the journalist as a way of following procedures, and once the investigation was completed and nothing found, his phone would be returned and the matter resolved.

In a follow up on the alleged ‘assassination attempt’ on journalist Gibril Gottor and his family in Kambia, Gibril told the MRCG that the police were yet to provide him and his family with security and to institute investigation into the matter. “I still have not returned to my house. My family and I are still staying in separate places for our safety. I pass the nights at different places,” he said. Police said that they had deployed personnel to patrol Gibril’s house, but cannot provide him with personal security as they do not have enough manpower to do so.



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 Pujehun Magistrate Court (formerly of Magistrate Court Number 2 in Kenema) on his arrest and detention, the Deputy Director, HRCSL Regional Service East, Tom Sandi, said the complainant was still yet to sign and send the admissibility study to the Commission. Al Mansaray, the owner of TV-News24, who was the lead complainant on the matter, told the MRCG that he had received email from HRCSL’s Eastern Region office and that he was going to respond to it because he was preparing a lawsuit against Magistrate Joseph Toby, the Judiciary, and the Government of Sierra Leone.

President Julius Maada Bio on 22 June 2022 commissioned Sierra Leone’s first Cyber Investigative Directorate (CID) that gives the SLP the capability to investigate and prosecute cybercrimes and crimes committed using the internet. The Cyber Forensics Unit complies with Sierra Leone’s Cyber Security and Crimes Act of 2021. <https://snradio.net/sierra-leone-institutes-1st-cyber-investigative-directorate/>

Sierra Leone’s Parliament on 22 June 2022 enacted the Bill entitled: “The National Electronic Communication Act, 2021.” The Act established the National Communications Authority (NCA) and provided for the licensing and regulation of electronic communication operators and other related matters. [https://www.parliament.gov.sl/uploads/press\\_release/pdf/PARLIAMENT%20DEBATES%20THE%20NATIONAL%20ELECTRONIC%20COMMUNICATION%20ACT,%202021.%209th%20FEBRUARY,%202022.pdf](https://www.parliament.gov.sl/uploads/press_release/pdf/PARLIAMENT%20DEBATES%20THE%20NATIONAL%20ELECTRONIC%20COMMUNICATION%20ACT,%202021.%209th%20FEBRUARY,%202022.pdf)

The details of the cases and issues will be published in the MRCG Bi-Annual Press Freedom Report for June to November 2022. The MRCG would like to restate that while the country was making progress in press freedom rankings, the general climate for freedom of expression for everybody should be guaranteed.

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).**