



MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- SEPTEMBER 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 September 2022, the MRCG monitored the alleged assault on and beating of a journalist, and alleged attack on a radio station in Kono District. The MRCG also followed up on the physical assault on a journalist; the alleged ‘assassination attempt’ on a journalist; the matter between a journalist and a magistrate in Pujehun and other engagements.

The Managing Editor of *Night Watch Newspaper*, Emmanuel Christian Thorli was allegedly assaulted and beaten in Waterloo on 11 September 2022 by staff of Njala University. The fracas reportedly ensued from a tribute reportedly given by the journalists at the New Life Ministries International Fellowship Church to his late colleague Ralph Simeon Sesay, who was the former Editor of *Night Watch Newspaper*. An aspect of the tribute did not go down well with staff of the university and the journalist told MRCG that he was ordered by the staff to return to the church and withdraw it. The Assistant Public Relations Officer, Njala University, Ayuba Koroma, denied the allegation, stating that the journalist was not assaulted by any staff of the University, but confirmed that the University staff peacefully told the journalist to return to the Church and withdraw his tribute. He, however, said that the University has instituted an investigation into the matter. The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) in a press release dated 12 September 2022, condemned the alleged assault and beating of the journalist and called on the administration of Njala University to speedily investigate the unfortunate incident and to take appropriate actions. The Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) in a press alert on 12 September 2022 joined SLAJ to call for an immediate investigation into the alleged assault on the journalist.



https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0BMttDZGaCMVEzrEcBiU3eDvWTHowfhq2RhZJ1hJcayrGygVEEQTMm2VCJUrwhJCsl&id=100001182651239

SLAJ in a press release dated 13 September 2022, received a complaint from *Citizen Radio FM 107.5* in Kono, Eastern Sierra Leone of an alleged attack and disruption of a paid-for program by a Member of Parliament (MP) Hon. Saa Emerson Lamina on 3 September 2022. SLAJ condemned the alleged attack on the media institution and called on the local authorities to protect journalists and their media institutions in Kono District from intimidation, threats and attacks by politicians and members of the public. SLAJ

informed members of the public who feel aggrieved with the work of journalists to report them to the SLAJ Disciplinary Committee or the IMC. <https://www.facebook.com/100001182651239/posts/pfbid031Chz58WjpKv1xBjE7Ad9Svjc6Rd9E7d3vmF7xSZnpJ2vZjcN3dcm8J1vkjwAop3AI/?app=fbl>. Hon. Saa Emerson Lamina denied the allegation and pointed out issues of unprofessionalism exhibited

The Independent Media Commission (IMC) on 16 September 2022, in a press release informed the public that they had launched an investigation into the alleged incident at *Citizen Radio* in Kono and promised to further inform the public on the outcome of the investigation.

In a follow up on the matter of Maada Jesse Jengo, a journalist working for *Voice of Peace and Development Radio FM 96.5 (VOPAD)* in Waterloo, Western Area Rural who was physically assaulted by ‘four officers of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF)’ on 2 July 2022, the Station Manager, *VOPAD radio*, Joseph Lamin, told the MRCG that they have held another meeting with the management of the radio, the journalist’s family, some Waterloo community stakeholders and the perpetrators to settle the matter. He confirmed that 90% of the matter had been settled and that the perpetrators agreed to do a public apology to the journalist in October 2022. Director of Public Relations and Information, RSLAF, Col. Abu Bakarr Bah, confirmed to MRCG that RSLAF has ensured progress with the matter which would be resolved soon.

In another follow-up on the alleged physical assault on journalist Abdulai Gbla of *Gbla Online TV*, by an MP, Hon. Abdul Muniru Lansana of Constituency 121 on the 28 June 2022, Abdulai Gbla told MRCG that after the Executive of SLAJ had met with the Clerk of Parliament, Hon. Paran Umar Tarawally on 5 July 2022 nothing had been done by Parliament to further investigate the matter and none of the parties have reached out to him. SLAJ President, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, told MRCG that they were yet to have another meeting with the Clerk of Parliament on the issue, but confirmed that investigations were still ongoing, and that they have asked the journalist to exercise some patience.



In another follow-up on the alleged ‘assassination attempt’ on journalist Gibril Gottor and his family in Kambia, Northern Sierra Leone, Gibril told MRCG that since he filed his complaint to the police in Kambia months ago, nobody had spoken to him, hence he is dropping the matter and will relocate to Freetown. “God has my vengeance,” he said. On their part the Police said that there was no witness to substantiate the complaint made by Gibril that will support the police’s investigation into the matter. “But we have kept the case in view, maybe we will find some evidence to continue the matter,” said the Local Unit Commander (LUC) of Kambia, Chief Superintendent of Police, Abu Bakarr Magona.

The case of journalist Osman Hardy Jalloh at the Human Rights Commission for Sierra Leone as a result of a complaint against Magistrate Joseph Toby of Pujehun Magistrate Court (formerly of Magistrate Court

Number 2 in Kenema) is yet to be concluded. The journalist was arrested and detained. Al Mansaray, the owner of *TV-News24*, who was the lead complainant on the matter, told the MRCG that they are planning to take legal action against Magistrate Toby; however, he is still looking for a trusted lawyer to argue the case when it would get to the court.

On 12 September 2022, the Independent Media Commission (IMC) ruled on the complaint from Alpha Ibrahim Sesay against the *Standard Times Newspaper* in connection with publications of the newspaper in September and October, 2021. The Commission fined the newspaper NLe8,000.00 (Eight Thousand Leones) in line with the Media Code of Practice dealing with accuracy and instructed that it published one retraction of all the inaccurate publications on the front pages with equal prominence.

The newly-elected National Executive of SLAJ on 12 September 2022 paid a courtesy visit on the Minister of Information and Communications at the Ministry's Conference Room Youyi Building Freetown. The Information Minister, Mohamed Rahman Swaray noted that government understands the critical role of the media in national development, for which the government would continue to support media development in the

country.

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SLAJ on 27 September 2022 paid a courtesy call on the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) at the Commission's Tower Hill Office. SLAJ called on the Commission for cooperation on Access and Information Integrity on the June 2023 election.

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In commemoration of the International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI), the Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC) on 28 September 2022 organized a one-day symposium at the Family Kingdom Resort, Aberdeen Freetown, on the theme 'e-Governance and Open Data: Pathway to Access Information' (<https://fb.watch/fPW8IM5g-V/>).

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'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).