



MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- FEBRUARY 2023

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 2023, MRCG followed up on the alleged verbal threat on a journalist by a police officer in Kambia; suspension of the station manager of a radio in Koinadugu; the alleged physical assault and alleged ‘assassination attempt’ on a journalist; the matter of former Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) boss lawyer Ady Macauley; alleged physical assault on a journalist; alleged attack on a radio station in Kono; the matter between a journalist and a magistrate in Pujehun and other media engagements.

In a follow up on the verbal threat made by a police officer against Gibril Gottor, a freelance journalist in Kambia while covering a story at Malal Police Checkpoint in Magbema Chiefdom, Kambia District, the journalist told MRCG that even though he reported the matter to the Local Unit Commander (LUC) of Kambia Police Division, Chief Superintendent Abu Bakar Magona, no action had been taken by the police. The LUC told MRCG that journalist Gibril just explained the scenario to him in an informal way and did not file any formal report on the matter to the police, so no action was taken.



On the suspension of the Station Manager of **Radio Bintumani 93.1** FM by the Office of National Security (ONS) District Coordinator of Koinadugu, Mr Lawrence Kpangu, after a District Security Committee (DiSeC) meeting, the IMC has reportedly concluded the matter, but is yet to publish the findings.

On the matter between Maada Jessie Jengo of **Voice of Peace and Development Radio (VOPAD) FM 96.5** and officers of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), the matter is yet to reach its final conclusion. Station Manager for **VOPAD radio**, Joseph Lamin maintained that since the officers apologised to the journalist and his family, they were yet to refund the medical bills of the journalist, pay for the items that got missing during the incident and do a public apology on the Radio, as promised.



On the ‘assassination attempt’ on journalist Gibril Gottor and his family in Kambia, he told MRCG that nobody had yet spoken to him. The Police also maintained that they had not yet got a witness or evidence to substantiate the complaint made by Gibril to aid their investigation of the matter.

The matter between journalist Abdulai Gbla of *Gbla TV Online* and Honourable Muniru Lansana was still pending. Mr Gbla told MRCG that till date he had not received any update either from SLAJ or Parliament



on the matter. SLAJ President Ahmed Sahid Nasralla said that SLAJ had contacted the Clerk of Parliament on the matter, but he was also yet to get any update from him on the status of the investigation.

The matter of the former Anti-Corruption Commissioner, Lawyer Ady Macauley, who was arrested and detained at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) for expressing his legal opinion on the Public Order Act 1965 in relation to freedom of assembly in October, was still at the Directorate of Public Prosecution awaiting legal advice.

On the matter between the Managing Editor of *Night Watch Newspaper*, Emmanuel Christian Thorli, and the staff of Njala University, Mr Thorli told MRCG that since he reported the matter to the Police, he had not received any information either from the police or from any staff of Njala University on the matter. As at the time of writing this report, the MRCG again made reasonable efforts to get the side of the Public Relations Unit of the Njala University on the status of the matter, but there was response from them.

On the complaint made by management of *Citizen Radio 107.5 FM* in Kono to SLAJ and the IMC against Hon. Saa Emerson Lamina on 3 September 2022, on his alleged attack and disruption of the radio's live paid-for program, IMC told MRCG that they were yet to publish their findings on the matter.

The case of journalist Osman Hardy Jalloh at the Human Rights Commission for Sierra Leone (HRCSL) on a complaint against Magistrate Joseph Toby of Pujehun Magistrate Court (formerly of Magistrate Court Number 2 in Kenema), Al Mansaray, the owner of TV-News24 and lead complainant on the matter maintained that he was no longer going to update any institution associated with SLAJ for personal reasons. In an interview, Tom Sandi, Deputy Director of Regional Service of the Human Rights Commission (HRCSL)-East also said that the lead complainant (Al Mansaray) had not yet responded to the email containing the incident summary form from the Commission to append his signature on, so that HRCSL would take the next line of action.

Alimamy N'Jai Sesay, who was charged with five counts of various offences in the Cyber Security and Crime Act No. 7 of 2021 for sharing Abdul Will Kamara, alias Adebayor's audios on social media, was refused bail. The matter had been committed to the High Court for trial.

MRCG on 13 February 2023 joined one of its constituent member organizations, the Independent Radio Network (IRN) to commemorate World Radio Day across Sierra Leone. (<https://www.facebook.com/2226750424106118/posts/pfbid02oKTMM3Sd9Qax6ntYrtRFAk8Ztt7MXEkoPjqQViknBHxtwHKipKTahj4jUv9kmRzBl/?app=fbl>).

On 27 and 28 February 2023, the National Cybersecurity Coordination Centre (NCCC) held a 2-day National cyber security symposium at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Freetown to foster a common understanding of Sierra Leone's Cybersecurity and Crime Act, 2021. As social media users increased in Sierra Leone from 360,000 in 2018 to 2.68 million in 2022, it is imperative for the nation to protect the privacy and security of citizens on the cyber space. (<https://www.facebook.com/100067197161961/posts/pfbid0PpdFQaqpVHsHQzfiYA4WHXap6ad6kurR5QyQKSmTneuDCbyeJgTeaXRQW9T9Aww9l/>)

The details of the cases and issues will be published in the MRCG Bi-Annual Press Freedom Report for December 2022 to May 2023. 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).