



MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- AUGUST 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 August 2023, MRCG monitored the online ‘death threat’ against a journalist, followed up on the assault on a journalist, the alleged destruction of property of a journalist in Freetown while on duty, the alleged assault on a journalist in Moyamba district, the alleged verbal threat against a journalist by a police officer, the alleged physical assault of two journalists and the alleged ‘assassination attempt’ on a journalist in Kambia district, the matter of former Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) boss lawyer Ady Macauley, the alleged physical assault on a journalist in Waterloo, the matter between a journalist and a magistrate in Pujehun, and other media engagements.



Journalist Musa S. Kamara, working for radio *Democracy 98.1 FM* reportedly received ‘death threats’ online from anonymous individuals on 20 August 2023. This followed an exclusive interview he had conducted with the United States of America’s Ambassador to Sierra Leone, David Reimer, on the current post-election crisis in the country. Musa told MRCG that the online death threats against him were related to the interview he had done with the Ambassador, which some anonymous individuals didn’t want him to broadcast. President of the Sierra Leone Association of

Journalists (SLAJ), Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, said that Musa brought to the attention of SLAJ the online death threats against him and advised him to further report the matter to the Sierra Leone Police. The Head of Media and Public Relations, ACP Brima Kamara, told MRCG that Musa had officially reported the matter and the SLP had begun its investigations into the matter.



On the matter of the *BBC* Correspondent in Sierra Leone, Umaru Fofana, who was attacked by supporters of the All People’s Congress (APC) party during the party’s press conference at the New Brookfields Hotel in Freetown on 14 June 2023, Umaru told MRCG that after the incident happened, he received several calls from top executive members of the APC party, who apologized to him and assured him that they would investigate the matter and take necessary actions against the perpetrators, but he is yet to see such being done by the APC party. The National Publicity Secretary of the APC, Sidi Yayah Tunis, told MRCG that investigation is still ongoing as they would want to put out a credible outcome of the investigation and then punish those found wanting.



On the complaint by Ibrahim Alusine Kamara, Managing Editor of *Salone Compass Newspaper*, against some security officials who allegedly assaulted him, endangered his life and vandalized his vehicle during an incident at the APC's press conference on 25 June 2023 at the party's headquarters in Freetown, he told MRCG that since he reported the matter to the Inspector General of Police (IGP), nothing has been done by the SLP regarding the matter. The Head of Media and Public Relations of the Sierra Leone Police, ACP Brima Kamara, said that the investigations were still in progress.

There is still no new development on the alleged attack and assault of the Station Manager of *Fountain of Peace Radio (FOP)* in Moyamba District, Alie Tokowa that happened on 28 March 2023 at the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) office in Moyamba by the party's supporters on the instruction of the outgoing District Council Chairman Mr. Joseph Gbogba. Journalist Alie Tokowa told MRCG that the State had withdrawn the matter from the police. Local Unit Commander of police in Moyamba, Assistant Superintendent, Franklyn Bawoh, told MRCG that the matter was with the State Counsel, Ballah Sesay.



There had been no progress relating to the verbal threat made by a police officer and the 'assassination attempt' on Gibril Gottor, a freelance journalist in Kambia. The Police 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.

There is also still no new development 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). Station Manager for *VOPAD radio*, Joseph Lamin, who had told MRCG that since the officers apologized to him 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.

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 1965 Public Order Act (POA) in relation to freedom of assembly in October, is still at the Directorate of Public Prosecution awaiting legal advice.



There is still no new development on the matter between journalist Abdulai Gbla of *Gbla TV Online* and Honorable Muniru Lansana. Mr. Gbla told MRCG that till date, he had neither received any update from SLAJ nor from 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 Honourable was not re-elected in the last parliamentary elections and hence, did not make it to the Sixth Parliament.

On the matter between the Managing Editor of *Night Watch Newspaper*, Emmanuel Christian Thorli and the staff of Njala University, Mr Thorli said the matter was still at the police station for investigation. He said that on 15 August 2023, the police invited him in relation to the matter, but he was yet to honor their

invitation. The Acting Public Relations Officer for Njala University, Ayuba Koroma, told MRCG that they had amicably resolved the matter. Police said they were still investigating the matter.

On the case of journalist Osman Hardy Jalloh at the Human Rights Commission for Sierra Leone (HRCSL) concerning 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*, in March 2023, had posted on his channel that he had filed a legal paper against the United States Government through the U.S. State Department for failing to take appropriate action when he alerted them about the abuse of power and unprofessional conduct of Magistrate Toby. The MRCG is still monitoring the matter.

The matter of 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 had been committed to the High Court for trial. The matter came up on two dates in August 2023 at the High Court. The accused is still remanded.

Huawei on 17 August 2023, handed over the National Fiber Backbone Phase 2 project to LEONECOM to the Ministry of Communication, Technology and Innovation. The initiative of the project was to establish a robust and state of the art telecommunications network across the country with the aim of boosting internet connectivity. The Minister of Communications, Technology and Innovation, Salima Bah, said that the initiative was a pivotal step in ensuring convenient internet access for the people of Sierra Leone. <https://fb.watch/mzga632Xk8/?mibextid=Nif5oz>

The Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC) on 22 August 2023, received a complaint from Lawyer Augustine Sorie-Sengbeh Marrah for the Commission to review the decision of the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone's (ECSL) on his request for the disclosure of certified summary results of all sixteen districts of the Presidential and general elections held on 24 June 2023. RAIC as per mandate, wrote to ECSL asking them to respond to the request of Lawyer Marrah within 7 working days, which ECSL granted on 30 August 2023, by referring the requester to its website for the available pieces of information. According to RAIC, as at the time of writing this report, the requester was reviewing the letter sent by ECSL to RAIC.

The Minister of Information and Civic Education, Chernor Bah, on 30 August 2023 met with staff of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) to discuss the challenges faced by the institution. The Minister in his concluding statements announced government's decision to effect a 50% salary increment for all staff of the SLBC effective 1 September 2023. <https://x.com/strategiccomm/status/1696907265167515933?s=46>

On 1 and 7 August 2023, U.S Embassy in Freetown conducted training on countering disinformation, misinformation, and fake news at the Kissy American Corner for over 40 young people within the Kissy Community in Freetown and at the Africell American Corner in Bo. The trainings were facilitated by the Press and Media Coordinator of the U.S. Embassy, Alhassan Jalloh and journalist Richard Ngevaio in Bo, with the aim of equipping participants with the knowledge on how to identify fake news and counter disinformation and misinformation. <https://www.facebook.com/100064911993175/posts/pfbid0BnDhyrJ8ViC89CbfN6djoPMDDanDCVPTNjHaueAffi12ixr6XMcrb2reExAXXRGol/?mibextid=K8Wfd2>

The details of the cases and issues will be published in the MRCG Bi-Annual Press Freedom Report for June to November 2023.

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).