



MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- JULY 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 July 2023, MRCG followed up on the assault on a journalist, the alleged destruction of property of a journalist in Freetown while on duty, the complaint from the Inspector General of Police, William F. Sellu, against a radio and journalist in Freetown, 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.



In a follow up 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 APC, Sidi Yayah Tunis, told MRCG that they had instituted investigation into the matter, but that it is challenging for them, as none of the senior members of the party was at the exact crime scene. He, however, noted that investigation was still ongoing and promised that upon completion, the party would come up with a statement on their findings and action on the issue.



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 officially reported the matter to the Inspector General of Police (IGP), nothing has been done by the Sierra Leone Police regarding the matter. He continued that in a meeting facilitated by the former Minister of Information and Communications, Abdul Rahman Swaray, the IGP told him that his men did not beat him well enough. The Head of Media and Public Relations of the Sierra Leone Police, ACP Brima Kamara, refuted the journalist’s claim, stating that the IG would not have said so. He said the matter was being investigated.

In a follow up on the complaint made to the Independent Media Commission (IMC) by Inspector General of Police (IGP), William F. Sellu, against Alex Lawrence Koroma, Producer **Radio Democracy 98.1 FM**, on a

radio broadcast against his person on ‘*Good Morning Salone*’ Show on 22 May 2023, the IGP filed a civil defamation lawsuit at the High Court of Sierra Leone on the matter. The High Court of Sierra Leone in July 2023 delivered its first judgment in default of defence in the civil defamation matter brought before it by the IGP after the repeal of the Criminal and Seditious Libel Laws in the country in 2020. Hon. Justice Alhaji Momoh-Jah Stevens entered Judgment for the Inspector General, pursuant to ‘Order 22 Rule 3 of the High Court Rules 2007.’ The Court ordered damages against the radio and Mr. Koroma, retraction of the broadcast, and apology to the Inspector General. The Court also ordered the lawyer for the Inspector General ‘to file a separate Notice of Motion for assessment of damages after the High Court vacation in October 2023.’



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, 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, had told MRCG that since the officers apologized 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.

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 still maintained that since he reported the matter to the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), he had neither received any information from the police nor the staff of Njala University on the matter. There is still no response from Njala University on the status of 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 trial of the matter commenced at the High Court on 15 May 2023 with Justice Ivan Sesay as the presiding judge. The matter is still at the High Court.

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).