



## MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- JUNE 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 June 2023, MRCG monitored the assault on a journalist and the alleged destruction of property of a journalist in Freetown. It also followed up on complaint from the Inspector General of Police, William F. Sellu, against a 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.



The BBC Correspondent in Sierra Leone, Umaru Fofana, 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. He was officially invited by the APC to cover the event. According to Umaru, the perpetrators’ hostility persisted as they pursued him to the hotel’s car park, where they continued to subject him to further indecent

languages and gestures, and was threatened physically. In a press release dated 15 June 2023, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), condemned the alleged attack on the former president and called on the party’s leadership to take prompt actions. The National Publicity Secretary of the APC, Sidi Yayah Tunis, confirmed receipt of a complaint from Umaru, and promised to take it up with the party’s leadership.



MRCG on 26 June 2023, received a copy of a letter of complaint from Ibrahim Alusine Kamara, Managing Editor of *Salone Compass Newspaper*, stating that security officials 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 he had also officially reported the matter to the police, but the police

were yet to neither acknowledge receipt of the letter, nor take an action. The Head of Media and Public Relations of the Sierra Leone Police, ACP Brima Kamara, told MRCG that the police have received the complaint and would soon institute an investigation into the matter.

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, is still under investigation at the Commission. However, the Board Chairman of radio *Democracy FM 98.1*, Dr. Julius Spencer, in the ‘*Good Morning Salone*’ flagship program on 13 June 2023, publicly apologised to the IGP for the unprofessional broadcast made against him by their staff and promised to take necessary actions.



In a follow up 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, 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, confirmed to MRCG that the State Counsel, Ballah Sesay, had withdrawn the file from the police and the matter was now with State Counsel.



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. Gibril told MRCG that he had left Sierra Leone

because he feels his life is no longer safe in the country.

There is 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 session of Parliament had officially ended.

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 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 ongoing at the High Court.

SLAJ on 5 June 2023, launched the 2023 Media Manifesto titled ‘The Media We Want’ at the New Brookfield Hotel, Freetown. The Manifesto presented a comprehensive roadmap of achievable actions and strategies aimed at advancing media freedom, professionalism, viability, gender equality, inclusivity, journalist safety, and media literacy in Sierra Leone. [https://slaj.sl/slaj-launches-media-manifesto-2023-the-mediawewant/?fbclid=IwAR2pMZOWt5HnFREehJrDe1ybxuC4Fr4sa7Iy1Ef4oaxoWnV20X7wsfxo1WM\\_aem\\_AQxM2eSmeaNgaAlhyHRjffJXUHkZQHPnRZzxpWwyv3s3ESwnpBcIpMEF4rWzROKTDBo&mibextid=Zxz2cZ](https://slaj.sl/slaj-launches-media-manifesto-2023-the-mediawewant/?fbclid=IwAR2pMZOWt5HnFREehJrDe1ybxuC4Fr4sa7Iy1Ef4oaxoWnV20X7wsfxo1WM_aem_AQxM2eSmeaNgaAlhyHRjffJXUHkZQHPnRZzxpWwyv3s3ESwnpBcIpMEF4rWzROKTDBo&mibextid=Zxz2cZ)

The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and MRCG with support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands in Ghana on 6 June 2023, organized a training on Digital Literacy Skills and Women’s Rights Online Issues for female journalists in Sierra Leone. Participants were introduced to ChatGPT and other AI tools to enhance their journalism skills and also their online privacy issues. <https://fb.watch/lnYiTbmZm6/?mibextid=afzh1R>

MRCG with support from the International Media Support (IMS) in June 2023 organized capacity-building training on elections reporting and safety and security of journalists during elections and media-police dialogue. The forums brought together media practitioners and senior police officers from all regions to discuss issues bothering on journalists’ safety and ways to strengthen the existing relationship between the <https://twitter.com/mrcgsl/status/1671548075914014721?s=46>

SLAJ, MRCG, Independent Media Commission (IMC) and the BBC Media Action on 19 June 2023, officially launched the National Fund for Public Interest Media Sierra Leone (NaFPIM-SL). The initiative took its cue from the perception that the media in Sierra Leone is faced with tough economic challenges which have limited their ability to produce contents that serve the public interest. [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid02fq5sJK2pwjvcbZJF9d4UhPAgP\\_XZcyvNnaVwjmTS4jBJYRzhGeA2zdwE4CGctUdPPI&id=100044389155390&mibextid=Nif5oz](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02fq5sJK2pwjvcbZJF9d4UhPAgP_XZcyvNnaVwjmTS4jBJYRzhGeA2zdwE4CGctUdPPI&id=100044389155390&mibextid=Nif5oz)

MRCG with support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), on 23 June 2023, launched its Media Situation Room (MSR) in Freetown. The Situation Room was established to monitor the country’s media performance during the elections, as part of its efforts to promote professional media coverage and conflict sensitive reporting of the 2023 general elections in Sierra Leone. [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid02JZ1cUdok3bvHvniydmAd7b4wqoF5ZP1e5eeQgcaMVCrJpHPBeJJGRhPAVw2CJR6W1&id=100093211373119&mibextid=qC1gEa](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02JZ1cUdok3bvHvniydmAd7b4wqoF5ZP1e5eeQgcaMVCrJpHPBeJJGRhPAVw2CJR6W1&id=100093211373119&mibextid=qC1gEa)

The Independent Media Commission (IMC) in line with Section **14 (1), (2) and (3)** of the **IMC Act No. 5 of 2020** on 27 June 2023, suspended **Justice Radio FM 98.5** and Justince Boima from hosting, moderating or participating in any radio program, for offensive audio broadcast by the radio on Monday 26 June 2023.

Upon investigation, the Commission also found that allegations of bias levied against the Independent Radio Network (IRN) by *Justice FM 98.5* were baseless and misleading.

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).**