



## MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- MARCH 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 March 2023, MRCG monitored the alleged assault on a journalist in Moyamba; followed up on the alleged verbal threat against a journalist by a police officer; 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.



The MRCG monitored 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 its supporters on the instruction of the outgoing District Council Chairman Mr. Joseph Gbogba. In an interview, Tokowa said that he was invited by one Haja Simbo, for him to do an Outdoor

Broadcast (OB) of the party’s nomination event at the SLPP party office, adding that while at the SLPP Office on the assignment, arguments ensued during the deliberation among supporters of the aspirants. He continued that the former District Council Chairman, Mr Gbogba spotted him taking a video of the argument and instructed his boys to beat him and take his phone from him. In an interview, the former District Council Chairman, Joseph Gbagbo denied instructing anyone to attack the station manager of *FOP Radio*. The Head of Media and Public Relations of the SLP, ASP Brima Kamara, told MRCG that the SLP was waiting for the victim to return from the hospital in Freetown to file in a complaint and an investigation would be instituted into the matter. SLAJ in a press release dated 31 March 2023, condemned the attack on the journalist and called on local authorities to protect journalists and their media houses from intimidation, threats, and attacks by politicians and members of the public who feel aggrieved about their work. SLAJ also called on the Police to impartially investigate the matter and bring to book the alleged perpetrators.



There had been no progress in the matter relating to 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 in January 2023.

There is 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 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 is 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 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 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 are 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, on 16 March 2023, he posted on his channel that he had filed a legal paper against the United State Government through the U.S. State Department’s for failing to take appropriate action when he alerted them about the abuse of power and unprofessional conduct of Magistrate Toby. ([https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid02XcmPW5g6P1ut5MujDS1KiuSVCKbaUXzy868cRQHwBe48vmQPKmk9vFSWv4AAjWrMI&id=100064114087736&mibextid=Nif5oz](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02XcmPW5g6P1ut5MujDS1KiuSVCKbaUXzy868cRQHwBe48vmQPKmk9vFSWv4AAjWrMI&id=100064114087736&mibextid=Nif5oz))

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. The matter which had been committed to the High Court for trial. The matter is expected to commence in the May sessions.

In March 2023, the MRCG with the renewed support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) trained over 100 journalists from the Western Region and the North and Northwest Regions on Promoting Professional Media Coverage and Conflict Sensitive Reporting in Freetown and Makeni respectively. The training workshop specifically targeted editors and station managers from different media institutions in a bid to improve the capacity of editors and station managers on how to professionally do media coverage

and conflict sensitive reporting of the 2023 general elections in Sierra Leone.  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRCGinSL/videos/1025546688832695/?mibextid=j8LeHn>

On 24 March 2023, The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) officially launched a project to combat disinformation around Sierra Leone's 2023 public elections at the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) conference hall, Tower Hill, Freetown. The project, which was supported by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), was aimed at ensuring the integrity of the information landscape during the electoral cycle and promoting free, fair, and non-violent elections. **“The project will monitor, identify, pre-bunk, and debunk disinformation and its engendered forms, including hate speech. It will also build SLAJ's capacity to counter disinformation, increase citizens' awareness of disinformation trends, and improve access to credible information on national political processes,”** said SLAJ President, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla.  
<https://www.facebook.com/100001182651239/posts/pfbid0xU1uKnvpDmEDUv6L2rT5VzZXSnszYUvCMBE1zdqogW1jmUY6uLzmaHdUon7aoCPhl/?app=fbl>

The Independent Media Commission (IMC) with funding support from the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) on 27 March 2023 launched the Print and Electronic Regulation 2022 and IMC Elections (Coverage and Reporting) Regulations 2022, at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Freetown.  
<https://www.facebook.com/100067197161961/posts/pfbid02jVLgSFg89LMQL9sN3GMpqXnL7D7twynw dWdFukA4CdamqnGphoVuDsy4oVAsFViwl/>

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).