



## MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- MAY 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 May 2023, MRCG monitored a Complaint from the Inspector General of Police, William F Sellu, against a journalist in Freetown. It also followed up on 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; the matter between a journalist and a magistrate in Pujehun and other media engagements.



The Inspector General of Police, William F Sellu, made a complaint against Alex Lawrence Koroma, Producer *Radio Democracy 98.1 FM*, on a radio broadcast against his person on ‘Good Morning Salone’ Show Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2023. The Independent Media Commission (IMC) Complaints Committee on 24 May 2023 conducted hearing on the matter. Restating the complaint on behalf of Mr. William F Sellu, Assistant

Commissioner of Police (ACP) Brima Kamara said that on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 2023, Alex Lawrence Koroma on “Good Morning Salone Show” on *Radio Democracy 98.1*, smeared the character and person of Mr. William F Sellu without getting his own side of the story. Responding to the complainant, Alex Lawrence Koroma, said the broadcast was never meant to destroy the good image of Mr. William F Sellu, and that it was a mistake. He pleaded with the Complaints Committee to give him time to do a retraction with equal prominence as soon as possible.



The MRCG followed 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 its supporters, on the instruction of the outgoing District Council Chairman Mr. Joseph Gbogba. Alie Tokowa told MRCG that the State Counsel in Moyamba had concluded investigation on the matter and had sent it to the police for the matter to be charged to court.

The Local Unit Commander (LUC) of police in Moyamba, Assistant Superintendent Franklyn Bawoh, confirmed that the State Counsel had concluded legal investigation and had advised that the matter be charged to court. He added that he was going to invite both parties and inform them about the development.

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.



There had been no progress relating to the verbal threat made by a police officer and the ‘assassination attempt’ on Gibril Gotton, a freelance journalist in Kambia. 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 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, was 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 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 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 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 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, 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 accused is still in remand. The matter was adjourned to 1 June 2023.

MRCG and its constituent member organizations on 3 May 2023 joined other press freedom groups around the world to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World Press Freedom. As this year’s theme is “Shaping a Future of Rights: Freedom of expression as a driver for all other human rights,” MRCG continues to call on the Government of Sierra Leone and other sector players to at all times guarantee the safety of journalists and to ensure a conducive environment for freedom of expression and of the press to thrive, especially as the country approaches its 24<sup>th</sup> June general elections.

<https://www.facebook.com/2226750424106118/posts/pfbid02vhqCQLFMsj6VJMKgdeEgmkDstYThyfA44rJNmWXJv2PCSHfxt9zgSn8J5UcXeGrpl/?mibextid=afzh1R>

The MRCG and Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) on 19 May 2023 organised a Forum on Media Professionalism and Safety of Journalists in Sierra Leone. The Forum catered for journalists, representatives of media associations, the judiciary, the security sector, political parties and civil society organisations. The initiative of the forum was to highlight safety and security issues relating to journalists particularly as the country approaches its general elections in June 2023 and to increase awareness among stakeholders on the safety and protection of journalists in their line of duty. <https://www.facebook.com/100068664878685/posts/pfbid02jEWxq9opeyVGST2gbYMMzpWSFkLAJzzMw5K4wJgXc7m3AhZgmvr8FRcq9LxJjK4Bl/?d=w&mibextid=qC1gEa>

SLAJ on 31 May 2023 validated and endorsed the Media Manifesto titled ‘The Media We Want’. The media manifesto identified eight priorities within the media industry which included; promoting and protecting media freedoms, safety and security of journalists, access to information, gender equality and women’s empowerment, professionalism and capacity building, media sustainability and viability, media literacy and welfare of journalists.

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).**