



SIERRA LEONE COMMUNIQUE

REGIONAL POLICE-MEDIA DIALOGUE FORUM ON ELECTIONS

PREAMBLE

The Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) with funding support from the International Media Support (IMS) organized Police-Media Dialogue sessions in Freetown (for the Western Urban and Rural Areas), Makeni (for the North and Northwest Regions) and Bo (for the Southern and Eastern Region) from the 19th to 21st June 2023. The three sessions were attended by 150 stakeholders, including senior police officers and media practitioners across the country. The sessions followed a National-Capacity Building for Journalists on Safety and Security during Elections Coverage organized on the 17th June 2023.

The initiative is a rapid response intervention aimed at ensuring the safety of journalists and media workers, so they are able to produce reliable and professional reporting that will contribute to credible and peaceful elections in Sierra Leone.

The journalists and editors across the country and senior police officers from the Sierra Leone Police brainstormed security and safety issues as they relate to journalists and the professional and responsible policing of the 2023 multi-tier elections without fear or favor. The rationale was to pitch possible partnership and cooperation between the police and the media, information sharing and general coordination during the 2023 elections.

OBSERVATIONS

The participants observed that there has been a marked improvement between the journalists and the police following the outcome of the first police media dialogue held in 2018 with the support of the IMS. This is evident in the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and the Security Sector Institutions.

The police in particular have improved on their channels of communication, cooperation and collaboration with the media. The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) has not been facing the ordeal of going to police stations to secure the release of journalists arrested by the police.

However, participants during the discussions raised several questions bordering on security and safety issues of journalists and policing of the elections. There were concerns about need for more collaboration between the police and journalists in the discharge of their duties. There were few reports of some police officers hindering the work of journalists, as well as, reports of some

journalists refusing to adhere to police orders in certain situations. It was observed that there was a need for mutual respect and trust between the police and journalists.

Noting the discussions and points made at the sessions, including the timeliness and necessity of the forums; we the participants, the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Independent Media Commission (IMC), Guild of Newspaper Editors (GoE), Women in the Media Sierra Leone (WIMSAL), Independent Radio Network (IRN), Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) and Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU) made the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Journalists should be very professional in covering and reporting on the elections;
2. A forum of communication should be created for effective flow of communication between the top management of the police and the media;
3. Political parties should sign a pledge and ensure the protection of journalists during and after their press conferences and other public gatherings;
4. There should be mutual respect between the police and journalists;
5. Journalists should ensure that they get the necessary accreditation and identification cards for the coverage of the elections;
6. There should be full and effective implementation of the MoU signed between SLAJ and the Security Sector Institutions;
7. The police should have or improve on their communication to ensure a proactive and timely dissemination of information;
8. There should be continuous joint capacity building trainings for the police and journalists as a way of fostering collaborative and good working relationship;
9. The police should ensure the safety and security of journalists at all times, including during the elections.
10. The journalists and police should develop and or improve on systems and channels of communication that will help to address any possible misunderstanding between the two institutions.

Dated 22nd June 2023.