



MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- OCTOBER 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 October 2023, MRCG monitored the attack on the office and staff of a radio in Makeni, Northern Sierra Leone and the court appearance of the Organising Secretary of the All Peoples Congress (APC) Party of Bonthe District. It followed up on issues, including the High Court order for assessment of damages, online ‘death threat’ against a journalist, assault on a journalist, alleged destruction of property of a journalist in Freetown while on duty, alleged assault on a journalist in Moyamba district, alleged verbal threat against a journalist by a police officer, alleged physical assault of two journalists, 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.



MRCG on 23 October 2023, monitored the attack on the office and staff of *Hope FM 93.3* in Makeni, Northern Sierra Leone, by a group of thugs allegedly sent by the landlord of the premises housing the radio. Mr. Stanley Bangura, proprietor of the radio, told MRCG that he had reported the matter to the police. In its press release dated 23 October 2023, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) vehemently condemned the attack and called on the authorities to do a thorough investigation and bring the culprits to book. According to the release, the attackers forcefully entered the radio station, vandalised equipment and physically manhandled the members of staff and assaulted the proprietor, Mr. Stanley Bangura Jr. The North-East Regional Commander, AIG Aiah Edward Samadia, also told MRCG that the police had conducted their investigation and had sent the findings to the State Counsel, who would advise to charge the matter to court.



On the judgement delivered by the High Court of Sierra Leone in July 2023 in a civil defamation matter between the Inspector General of Police (IGP) William F. Sellu and The Society for Radio Democracy FM 98.1 and Alex Lawrence Koroma, Producer *Radio Democracy 98.1 FM* concerning a defamatory broadcast on 23 May 2023, the matter is now expected to commence in November 2023 for assessment of damages. The High Court had ordered the lawyer for the IGP to file a separate Notice of Motion for assessment of damages in October 2023 after its vacation. The matter which was to be heard in October 2023 for assessment of damages was now scheduled for November 2023.

The Organizing Secretary of the opposition, All Peoples Congress (APC) party in Bonthe District, Robert Kamara, was on 4 October 2023, arraigned before Principal Magistrate Lyoud Jusu of Court Number One in Bo, for allegedly insulting Dr. Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone. The accused was charged with 3 counts ranging from Cyber Bulling to Sending False Message by Means of Computer System and Sending Insulting Message by Means of Computer System, all contrary to Section 44 of the Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021. The accused was denied bail during his first and second appearances on 4 and 9 October 2023 and the matter was adjourned to 7 November 2023.

On the matter of journalist Musa S. Kamara, a journalist working for *Radio Democracy 98.1 FM*, who reportedly received online ‘death threats’ from anonymous individuals on 20 August 2023, following the exclusive interview with Ambassador Reimer, Musa told MRCG that he received calls on 3 and 5 October 2023 from the United Nations Senior Human Rights Adviser, Uchenna Emelonye, and the Human Rights Commission for Sierra Leone respectively, asking for his consent to report his story, which he agreed. But said that he had not received any other update from anyone on the matter. Police say they are still investigating the matter.

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, Mr. Fofana told the MRCG that he had called on the leadership of the APC in which they promised to put out a press release condemning the actions but were yet to do so. The National Publicity Secretary of the APC, Sidi Yayah Tunis, told MRCG that the matter was still under investigation.



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, his lawyers, Marrah and Associates, had on 18 October 2023 requested the police to urgently investigate the matter pursuant to regulation 3 Sub regulation 1 (c) (d) and (h) of the Independent Police Complaint Board (IPCB) Regulations 2003. Police told MRCG that investigations on the matter were ongoing and that when they were finished with their investigation, they would inform all parties, including MRCG.

There is still no new development on the alleged attack and assault on the Station Manager of *Fountain of Peace Radio (FOP)* in Moyamba District, Alie Tokowa that happened 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 maintained that the State had withdrawn the matter from the police, with no progress. 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.

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), the Station Manager for *VOPAD radio*, Joseph Lamin, told MRCG on 30 October 2023, that the matter has been resolved. Journalist Jengo also confirmed that with the intervention of his Station Manager, Joseph Lamin and other community stakeholders, they had resolved the matter.

The matter of the former Anti-Corruption Commissioner, Ady Macauley Esq, 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 2022, is still at the Directorate of Public Prosecution (DPP) awaiting legal advice.



There is still no new development on the matter between journalist Abdulai Gbla of *Gbla TV Online* and former 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.

On the matter between the Managing Editor of *Night Watch Newspaper*, Emmanuel C Thorli and the staff of Njala University, Mr Thorli, in October 2023, told MRCG that the matter was still at the police station for investigation, even though he had not honored the police invitation. The Acting Public Relations Officer for Njala University, Ayuba Koroma, still maintained that they had resolved the matter. Police said they were still investigating the matter, although the journalist was yet to honor their invitation.

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 matter was adjourned to 2 November 2023 with the accused still in remand.

The Independent Media Commission’s (IMC) Complaint Committee on 11 October 2023, presided over a letter sent by *Citizen Radio FM 103.7*, requesting the IMC to lift the suspension of phone-in programs that was imposed on the radio during the electioneering period. The Commission had imposed suspension of phone-in programs on *Citizen Radio*, *Tumac Radio* and *Justice Radio* in May 2023. The Monitoring Unit after reassessing the Radio Stations reported that *Citizen Radio* fully complied with the suspension and that *Tumac Radio* on the other hand complied up to September, but started the phone-in program again without the consent of the Commission. When the Commission engaged them, they stopped the program. The Committee recommended the following: that since *Citizen Radio* had fully complied with the conditions of the suspension, the Commission should lift the suspension on them; and that *Tumac Radio* should write to

the Commission for a reassessment, like *Citizen Radio* had done, for the Commission to consider lifting the suspension on them also.

The IMC's Complaint Committee on 11 October 2023, presided over the matter of ER Vicky Bhushan of G. Shankerdas & Sons against *Heroes Media Newspaper* for publication dated 17 February, 2023 titled: "Despite the Long Existing Years, G. Shankerdas & Sons in Boil Water." The Committee recommended as follows: a fine of NLe 3,000 (Three Thousand New Leones) is levied on Heroes Media Newspaper for each of the two hearings that they failed to attend. This is in line with Regulation 34(3) (a) of the Print and Electronic Media Regulation 2022; a fine of Le 1,000 (One Thousand Leones) is levied for the breach of the accuracy principle within 30 days upon receipt of this ruling; and that the Newspaper publishes a retraction with equal prominence immediately upon receipt of this ruling.

The IMC's Complaint Committee on 11 October 2023, presided over the matter of ER Vicky Bhushan of G. Shankerdas & Sons against *Future Newspaper* for publication dated 24 February 2023 for harassment and blackmail. The Committee recommended that: a fine of 3,000 thousand Leones be instituted against the publisher of the future newspaper for failing to attend the Complainants sitting; and a fine of Le 5,000 (Five Thousand Leones) be instituted against the publisher of the Future newspaper for harassment and intimidation under sub regulation (9) of the IMC Print and Electronic Media Regulation 2022.

SLAJ on 18 October 2023, in a meeting with the new Director General of the National Telecommunications Authority (NTCA), Amara Brewah, to reduce license fees for Community radio stations and un-peg such fees from the US dollar in light of the current challenging economic situation in the country which is negatively impacting operational costs.
<https://www.facebook.com/100001182651239/posts/pfbid0Y3uGzQy7HDdsbZgNaWEJnx2m4xc9Bhbp3S1bPiZGKtUqqxSrbVDeC9WcaHYWiBF8l/?mibextid=K8Wfd2>

The Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC) on 17 October 2023, held a one-day capacity building workshop for public information officers from various Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs), CSOs and non-state actors on the RAI Regulations 2022 (Statutory Instrument No. 9 of 2022). The workshop aimed at empowering professionals with comprehensive understanding of the legal frameworks, good practices and practical tools related to the right to access information.
<https://www.facebook.com/100001182651239/posts/pfbid02yAeWMabz6acovE8JsE9kgZGcCATwguYNV1to9xFk2ffkF228T834j8LeE1Eac6sVI/?mibextid=K8Wfd2>

The MRCG on 31 October 2023, convened the first National Inclusive and Anti-Conflict Journalism Awards at the 50-50 Hall in Freetown, on the theme "Raising Public Awareness of the Interconnections between Conflict, Migration, Climate Change and Minority Exclusion." The Awards was part of the project "Engaging Media and Minorities to Act for Peacebuilding (EMMAP) Programme."
https://fb.watch/ob5Vc5_3qc/?mibextid=qC1gEa

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).