



MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- SEPTEMBER 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 September 2023, MRCG followed up on issues including, shutdown of a radio in Freetown, 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.



In August 2023, there was a shutdown of **Radio Democracy FM 98.1’s** broadcast of its flagship ‘Good Morning Salone’ program. The Station Manager, Michael K Jamiru, told MRCG that the shutting down was because of power outage at their transmitting facility on Leicester Peak. **“Africell mobile company, which provides the radio with electricity to transmit from Leicester Peak, told us during the shutdown that they had a technical issue from their power plant at Leicester Peak, which caused the sudden shutdown of our morning broadcast,”** he said. The government was accused of shutting down the radio station to stop the broadcast of an interview the then United States of America’s Ambassador to Sierra Leone, David Reimer, containing critical comments on the outcome of the country’s elections. The government through the Minister of Information and Civic Education, Chernor Bah, denied the allegation.

On the same matter of journalist, Musa S. Kamara, **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 had not received any update from the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) since he reported the matter to them. Police said 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, the National Publicity Secretary of the APC, Sidi Yayah Tunis, told MRCG that investigation was still ongoing, and once they were done, they would publish their findings and take appropriate actions. Umaru told MRCG that he was yet to receive any update from the party on the progress of their 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, Police told MRCG that investigations on the matter were ongoing and that when they had finished with their investigation, they would inform all parties, including MRCG. Mr. Kamara told MRCG that since he wrote the complaint letters to the Inspector General of Police (IGP) and the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) on 26 June 2023, there had been no progress on the matter, adding that if both parties failed to take actions anytime soon, he would take legal actions.

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.

There is also 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, who had told MRCG that since the officers apologized to him 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 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 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 Honourable was not re-elected in the last parliamentary elections and hence, did not make it to the Sixth Parliament.

On the matter between the Managing Editor of *Night Watch Newspaper*, Emmanuel C Thorli and the staff of Njala University, Mr Thorli said the matter was still at the police station for investigation. He said that on

15 August and on 11 September 2023, the police invited him in relation to the matter, but he was yet to honor their invitation. The Acting Public Relations Officer for Njala University, Ayuba Koroma, told MRCG that they had amicably resolved the matter, a statement the journalist had refuted. The President of SLAJ, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, told MRCG that both parties (the journalist and the Acting Public Relations Officer for Njala University), met at SLAJ headquarters in Freetown, in August 2023, where he tried to mediate between them to settle the matter as soon as possible, but did not confirm whether they yielded to his mediation. Police said they were still investigating the matter, as 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 12 October 2023 with the accused still remanded.

The MRCG in partnership with the Ministry of Information and Civic Education on 7 September 2023 convened a workshop to review the draft national media and information policy at Dohas Hotel in Bo. The aim for reviewing the draft policy was to reform the information ecosystem in Sierra Leone and for the policy to match new developments.

<https://www.facebook.com/100093211373119/posts/pfbid0k5xJjX66Up6kjDTVCpBe3B5RLL2znptjkAgvQmLMvjmvJcbQazDa9gswyHE2EQiXI/?mibextid=K8Wfd2>

Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) on 8 and 9 September 2023 organized its Annual General Meeting (AGM) on the theme: Role of Journalists in Promoting Dialogue, Sustainable Peace and National Cohesion in Post-Election Sierra Leone at Dowaila Inn and Suites, Kenema, Eastern Sierra Leone. The occasion was graced by statements made by partners of SLAJ who emphasized the critical role of the media in sustaining peace and promoting democracy after the June 24th general elections. (<https://www.facebook.com/100001182651239/posts/pfbid021ELEwHLisj3Gq3Uw4R4DZjw6ymS76pc3gVFYYLLgTQuS7fe5QdAqxMQksLq6yqqLl/?mibextid=K8Wfd2>).

Safe Sisters Fellowship, in collaboration with INTERNEWS (US), on 9 September 2023, conducted a one-day training program to educate over 30 young women and girls on digital safety and online environment in Freetown.

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid08SP6WrDF9r9MEDd25RZ1A9YnNb7CysQ43p6Gw1nMjV7SiMucEhDkCJMug43zLxrMI&id=100044389155390&mibextid=Nif5oz

The Independent Media Commission (IMC) with support from the Chinese Embassy on 14 September 2023, organized a capacity building training for station managers of community and commercial radio stations in Sierra Leone on the theme ‘Media Governance, Media Management, Media Digitalization and Ethics.’ The training was geared towards community media management techniques, media governance for development

democracies, ethical considerations in media management/governance-the 2020 IMC Act, digitalizing the electronic and print media-attractive investment.

BBC Media Action Sierra Leone with SLAJ- i-Verify, Independent Radio Network (IRN) Sierra Leone and UNDP in Sierra Leone on 14 and 15 September 2023, organized a two-day lesson learnt workshop where they reflected on the effort by the ongoing SLAJ i-Verify project and their collective efforts to tackle misinformation and disinformation and increase media literacy through i-Verify Sierra Leone. <https://www.facebook.com/100064242657078/posts/pfbid02EPbfsr4nXusuoKpzGtuFsaYjZWTzsknTWyr2YQDjcM4z2PTKCT6sz8E3KxBaVKwLI/?mibextid=K8Wfd2>

The Media Reform Coordinating Group - Sierra Leone (MRCG) with support from the BBC Media Action Sierra Leone, through PRIMED and in collaboration with other media stakeholders on 18 and 19 September 2023 conducted a two-day post Media Viability and Investment Conference Workshop at Companero Resort, Bureh Village, Western Rural. The workshop was to review the implementation of the National Action Plan and to develop a new strategy for the implementation of the seven (7) recommendations derived from the National Media Viability and Investment Conference held in April 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/100093211373119/posts/pfbid02McCcAfxvyKN1KA8c5ZMbwww8Xth1YD1FsZczUVmMmD84Y441DHqETB79gGKxyP3Jl/?mibextid=K8Wfd2>

The MRCG with support from the International Media Support (IMS), on 29 September 2023 convened a one-day Police, Political Parties, CSOs and Media National Dialogue Forum with key stakeholders to share experiences gained and challenges encountered during the June 2023 elections and proffer possible solutions that will continue to strengthen the media-security relationship in the country. <https://x.com/mrcgsl/status/1707797085175664759?s=48&t=EnWiOXzLLmGuETWmTRCiA>

The Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC) on 28 September 2023 held a one-day symposium to commemorate International Day for Universal Access to Information on the theme: Online Space and Access to Information <https://fb.watch/nl4eELxk7F/?mibextid=Nif5oz>.

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).