



MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- NOVEMBER 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 November 2023, MRCG monitored the judgment on a defamatory matter. It followed up on 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 also followed up on various 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.

The spokesperson for the Judiciary of Sierra Leone, Elkass Sannoh, confirmed to MRCG their Twitter post, which stated that Justice Momoh Jah Stevens on 21 November 2023, ordered Kutubu Koroma, a resident in Maryland, USA to pay NLe 1,500,000 (approximately USSD 63,291.14) as compensation to John Akar Foundation and Yada Williams Esq. He noted that the judge also ordered Mr. Kutubu to apologize for his libelous and defamatory publications on social media. As at the time the report was put together, Mr. Kutubu could not be reached.



In a follow up on 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 the matter was in court, adding that the defendants pleaded with him, Ahmed Sahid Nasrallah, Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) President and Umaru Fofana, for an out of court settlement of the matter. He continued that he agreed on one condition, which was for the defendants to reinstate the radio’s tenancy and pay for the damaged pieces of office property.

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 commenced in November 2023 for assessment of damages, in which the High Court asked the defendant to present the cost of damages.



On the matter of the Organizing Secretary of the opposition, All Peoples Congress (APC) party in Bonthe District, Robert Kamara, who was arraigned before Principal Magistrate Lyoud Jusu of Court Number One in Bo on 4 October 2023, for allegedly insulting President Dr. Julius Maada Bio, the National Organising Secretary of the APC, Sidi Yayah Tunis, told MRCG that their party and the Government of Sierra Leone in the 'peace dialogue' had agreed to release all political detainees for alleged election and civil protests. He said the release process had begun, but currently on hold due to the 26 November 2023 incident across Sierra Leone. The accused was denied bail on 7 November 2023 and is still in remand.

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 was yet to receive any update from the police regarding the investigation. Police said they were 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 not received any update from the APC Party on its said investigation. The National Publicity Secretary of the APC Party, Sidi Yayah Tunis, maintained that the Party was investigating the matter.



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, the police said they had commenced investigation into the matter. The journalist told MRCG that police started investigating the matter only after his lawyers had requested the Independent Police Complaint Board (IPCB) on 18 October 2023 to investigate the matter pursuant to the IPCB Regulations 2003. He continued that the Board had obtained statements from him and two witnesses, and had requested all receipts of his expenditures for the maintenance of his car that was vandalized during the incident, noting that upon providing all requested documents, the police had proceeded to the next stage of the investigation.



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. In November 2023, the police maintained that

they had still 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, 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 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 honoured 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 honour 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 7 December 2023 with the accused still in remand.

In commemoration of the International Day to end Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, the MRCG on 2 November 2023 intensified calls for the safety and security of journalists in the country. MRCG’s press release dated 2 November 2023, highlighted that safety of journalists extends beyond encounters with politicians and security officers, but also noted reports of attacks on journalists by local authorities, youth, and members of the public. In the release, MRCG continued to urge the Government of Sierra Leone, politicians, media organizations, media owners and managers, civil society organizations, and the public to ensure the safety and security of journalists at all times. [Click here to read.](#)

The Ministry of Information and Civic Education (MoICE) on 21 November 2023, held an inaugural meeting with stakeholders including the MRCG, SLAJ, RAIC among others, on the Policy and Regulatory Framework of the Information and Civic Education Sector. The meeting, which took place at the Ministry’s conference room in Freetown, was to achieve the following objectives: to examine all policies and regulatory policies instrument in relation to the Information and Civic Education Sector; to identify existing gaps and

challenges; to align all policies and regulatory instruments in the sector and to propose new policies and regulatory instruments where necessary.

The European Union (EU) Sierra Leone, in collaboration with Salone Fact-Checker, MRCG and SLAJ on 23 and 24 November 2023 organised a two-day national training workshop on disinformation and fact-checking for journalists and bloggers/influencers at Family Kingdom, Aberdeen, Freetown. The aim of the workshop was to arm journalists and bloggers with basic skills and knowledge in countering disinformation.

[Click here to read.](#)

The Independent Media Commission (IMC) in a press release on 29 November 2023, informed the public that they had instituted an investigation into a social media audio which was purported to have been broadcast by *Tumac Radio FM 89.3* and *Citizen Radio FM 103.7* on 26 November 2023 during what had been described as a failed coup attempt. According to the press release, the said broadcast was believed to have breached a provision in the IMC Act of 2020 and its Print and Electronic Media Regulations 2022. The Commission promised to update the public with findings after the completion of the investigation.

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).