



REPORT ON PRESS FREEDOM, INFORMATION, INTERNET AND DIGITAL RIGHTS IN SIERRA LEONE



**Press Freedom in Sierra Leone
June to November 2023**

Eleventh Edition

Produced by Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG)

with support from

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED)

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Acronyms & Abbreviations	Meaning
APC	All Peoples Congress
AYV	Africa Young Voices
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporations
BBC-MA	British Broadcasting Corporations Media Action Sierra Leone
CID	Criminal Investigations Department
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
ECSL	Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone
IGP	Inspector General Police
IMC	Independent Media Commission
LUC	Local Unit Commander
MDAs	Ministries Departments and Agencies
MoICE	Ministry of Information and Civic Education
MRCG	Media Reform Coordinating Group
MP	Member of Parliament
MFWA	Media Foundation for West Africa
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MNOs	Mobile Network Operators
NaTCA	National Telecommunications Authority
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
ONS	Office of National Security
PPRC	Political Parties Regulation Commission
RAIC	Rights to Access Information Commission
RSLAF	Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces

SLAJ	Sierra Leone Association of Journalists
SLBC	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation
SLRU	Sierra Leone Reporters Union
SLP	Sierra Leone Police
SWASAL	Sport Writers Association of Sierra Leone
WIMSAL	Women in the Media Sierra Leone
VOPAD	Voice of Peace and Development

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report, which addresses issues on ‘Freedom of Expression and of the Press, Access to Information, and Internet Freedom and Digital Rights in Sierra Leone,’ is the eleventh in a series produced by the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG). It is a component of a project titled, “**Enhancing Press Freedom and Media Reforms**”, supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in the United States of America. The Report which covers the period June to November 2023 is the outcome of the monitoring of the exercise and legal guarantees of freedom of expression and of the press, and internet freedom and digital rights issues in Sierra Leone, including invitations, intimidations, attacks, assaults, arrests, detentions and prosecution of journalists and other citizens; and also tracks media performance.

This edition is mainly divided into the following areas: Thematic Issues- Freedom of Expression and of the Press (focusing mainly on the assault, arrest and detention of journalists and other citizens); Right to Access Information, Internet Freedom and Digital Rights; Media and Good Governance; Performance of Media Institutions; Positions of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists and the Government on the said issues; Status of Media and Communication Laws in Sierra Leone; Conclusion, Recommendations, References and Appendices.

The Report has been produced from the monitoring of issues relating to freedom of expression and of the press, internet freedom and digital rights broadcast on radio and television stations, published on newspapers and posted on social media platforms. Interviews were conducted, where necessary, with individuals who were either reportedly attacked or arrested. Officials of institutions named in some of the issues reported were also interviewed.

The cases and issues covered in this Report are:

1. The launch of the 2023 Media Manifesto titled ‘The Media We Want’ at the New Brookfields Hotel, Freetown by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) on 5 June 2023.
2. The attack on the **BBC’s** Correspondent in Sierra Leone, Umaru Fofana, 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.
3. The complaint from Ibrahim Alusine Kamara, Managing Editor of *Salone Compass Newspaper*, stating that security officials 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.
4. The complaint made to the Independent Media Commission (IMC) by Inspector General of Police (IGP), William F. Sellu, against Alex Lawrence Koroma, Producer **Radio Democracy 98.1 FM**, on a radio broadcast against his person on ‘*Good Morning Salone*’ Show on 22 May 2023.
5. The civil libel lawsuit by the Inspector General of Police, William F. Sellu, through his Lawyer, Demba Barrie, against Radio Democracy FM 98.1 (First Defendant) and Producer Alex Lawrence Koroma (Second Defendant) for a defamatory broadcast in May 2023.
6. The online ‘death threat’ against journalist Musa S. Kamara, working for radio **Democracy 98.1 FM**

from anonymous individuals on 20 August 2023.

7. The shutdown of *Radio Democracy FM 98.1's* broadcast of its flagship 'Good Morning Salone' program, in August 2023.
8. The review of the draft National Media and Information Policy by the MRCG in partnership with the Ministry of Information and Civic Education on 7 September 2023.
9. The matter of the Organizing Secretary of the opposition, APC Party in Bonthe District, Robert Kamara, who was 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 On 4 October 2023.
10. 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, on 23 October 2023.
11. The High Court's ruling on the matter between Kutubu Koroma, a resident in Maryland, USA and John Akar Foundation and Yada Williams Esq.

The MRCG data showed that for the reporting period, eight (8) cases were monitored and three (3) issues were covered. All the eight cases were inconclusive. They are the matters of: Umaru Fofana, a BBC Correspondent in Sierra Leone; Ibrahim Alusine Kamara, Managing Editor of *Salone Compass Newspaper*; William F. Sellu, Inspector General of Police (IGP) (both at the media regulator, IMC and High Court); Musa S. Kamara, working for radio *Democracy 98.1 FM*; the office and staff of *Hope FM 93.3* in Makeni, Northern Sierra Leone, Organizing Secretary of the opposition, APC Party in Bonthe District and Kutubu Koroma, a resident in Maryland, USA and John Akar Foundation and Yada Williams Esq..

The MRCG notes that there were still inconclusive cases as at the end of the reporting period on cases in the first edition of the Press Freedom Reports (June to November 2018), second edition (December 2018-May 2019), third edition (June to November 2019), fourth edition (December 2019 to May 2020), seventh edition (June to November 2021), eighth edition (December 2021 to May 2022), ninth edition (June to November 2022), tenth edition (December 2022 to May 2023) and eleventh edition (June to November 2023). From the First to the Eleventh Edition of the Press Freedom Report, **seventy six** cases were monitored. **Fifty** of them were concluded, settled, resolved, dropped or abandoned, because of lack of progress; **nine** were in court; and **seventeen** under police investigation/inconclusive/stalled. See details in the appendices.

According to the World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in 2023, Sierra Leone ranked 74 out of 180 countries. In 2022, the country was ranked 46 out of 180 countries. Sierra Leone signed the Global Pledge on Media Freedom on 22 November 2021 as a commitment by the government to improving media freedom domestically and working together internationally with the Media Freedom Coalition.

While the MRCG urges media practitioners to abide by the ethical and legal standards of the journalism profession, it is also calling on the Government, media organizations, civil society and the public to ensure the safety and security of journalists across the country at all times.

As the world observed the ‘International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists’ on 2 November 2023, the MRCG would like to remind the Government of Sierra Leone that there were still concerns on journalists’ safety and security. The MRCG also notes with concern that issues relating to the safety and security of journalists go beyond politicians and the police, as there had been reports of attacks on journalists from local authorities, youth and members of the public. The MRCG reminds media owners and managers that one of its reports shows that majority of the media houses lacked a safety and security policy and there were concerns about addressing the welfare of journalists.

The MRCG is a coordinating Secretariat comprising Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Faculty of Communication, Media and Information Studies (Fourah Bay College), Independent Media Commission (IMC), Ministry of Information and Civic Education (MoICE), Guild of Editors (GoE), Women in the Media Sierra Leone (WIMSAL), Independent Radio Network (IRN), Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU), Sport Writers Association of Sierra (SWASAL) and the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC).

1. INTRODUCTION

This Eleventh report, produced by the **MRCG**, is one of the components under a project titled, “**Enhancing Press Freedom and Media Reforms**”, supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in the United States of America (USA). The activity continues to track media performance and monitor the exercise and legal guarantees of press freedom and freedom of expression in Sierra Leone, including attacks, intimidations, assaults, arrests, detentions and prosecutions of journalists and civil society activists, internet and digital rights.

The report covers a six-month period; June to November 2023. It is divided into the following areas: Thematic Issues focusing mainly on the cases/issues of Freedom of Expression and of the Press; Right to Access Information; Internet Freedom and Digital Rights; Media and Good Governance; Performance of Institutions Dealing with Freedom of Expression and of the Press, Information, Internet Freedom and Digital Rights; Performance of Media Institutions; Position of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists on Freedom of Expression and of the Press, Information, Internet Freedom and Digital Rights; Government’s Position on Freedom of Expression and of the Press, Information, Internet Freedom and Digital Rights; Status of Media and Communication Laws in Sierra Leone; Conclusion; Recommendation; References; and Appendices.

Eight cases and issues have been addressed on freedom of expression and of the press. In addition, this report follows up on cases from the first to the tenth edition, from June 2018 to May 2023 that were still inconclusive cases. From the First to the Eleventh Edition of the Press Freedom Report, **seventy six** cases were monitored. **Fifty** of them were concluded, settled, resolved, dropped or abandoned, because of lack of progress; **nine** were in court; and **seventeen** under police investigation/inconclusive/stalled. See details in the appendices.

Sierra Leone as a country, has specific statutes (Acts) containing laws, regulations, policies and institutions governing the media space in Sierra Leone. The major laws used to regulate the media are the Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991 (Section 25 (1) and Section 11), the Independent Media Commission Act, 2020, the Defamation Ordinance, 1961 and the Independent Media Commission (Print and Electronic Media) Regulations, 2022. On the professional aspect, there is the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) Code of Ethics.

There is the Right to Access Information Act, 2013, that provides for access to certain information held by public bodies, and the Right to Access Information Regulations 2022, which enhances the work of the Commission. There is also the Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021. The Act, among other things, provides for the prohibition, prevention, detection, prosecution and punishment of cybercrimes; and protection of privacy rights.

The report is produced from the monitoring of issues relating to freedom of expression and of the press. Two monitors contracted by the MRCG take daily records of major issues relating to freedom of expression and of the press, right to access information; internet freedom and digital rights by tracking radio, television and newspaper contents, as well as following up on issues on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. Interviews were conducted where necessary, with some individuals who were reportedly attacked, intimidated or arrested. Officials of institutions named in some of the issues were also interviewed. The MRCG thanks NED for funding the project. Special thanks also go to the authors of the monthly reports, Osman Sesay and Ishiaka Sannoh, and their supervisor, Augustine S. James. This eleventh biannual report was written by Francis Sowa (Ph.D.) and Augustine S. James.

2. THEMATIC ISSUES

2.1 Freedom of Expression and of the Press

The MRCG monthly media monitoring reports from June to November 2023 documented the following cases.

On 2 June 2023 the Inspector General of Police, William F. Sellu, through his Lawyer, Demba Barrie, instituted an action against Radio Democracy FM 98.1 (First Defendant) and Producer Alex Lawrence Koroma (Second Defendant). According to a press release from the Judiciary of Sierra Leone, an appearance was entered by The Tanner Legal Advisory on behalf of the defendants, but “failed to file a Defence to the action” as provided for in the country’s High Court Rules 2007. The High Court of Sierra Leone in July 2023 delivered its first judgment in default of defence in a civil defamation matter after the repeal of the Criminal and Seditious Libel Laws in the country in 2020. The matter between the Inspector General of Police and The Society for Radio Democracy FM 98.1 and Alex Lawrence Koroma concerns a defamatory broadcast in May 2023. Hon. Justice Alhaji Momoh-Jah Stevens entered Judgment for the Inspector General pursuant to Order 22 Rule 3 of the High Court Rules 2007. The Court ordered damages against the radio and Mr. Koroma, retraction of the broadcast, and apology to the Inspector General. The Court ordered the lawyer for the Inspector General “to file a separate Notice of Motion for assessment of damages after the High Court vacation in October 2023.” The matter was expected to commence in November 2023 for assessment of damages. The matter which was to be heard in October 2023 for assessment of damages was rescheduled for November 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 13 June 2023, the Board Chairman of radio *Democracy FM 98.1*, Dr. Julius Spencer, in the ‘*Good Morning Salone*’ flagship program, publicly apologised to the Inspector General of Police (IGP) William Fayia Sellu, for the unprofessional broadcast made against him by their staff, Alex Lawrence Koroma, Producer at *Radio Democracy 98.1 FM*, on a radio broadcast against his person on ‘*Good Morning Salone*’ show on 22 May 2023, and promised to take necessary actions. This follows a complaint to the Independent Media Commission (IMC) by the Inspector General of Police, William Fayia Sellu. The Commission’s Complaints Committee on 24 May 2023 conducted hearing on the complaint by the Inspector General of Police against Alex Lawrence Koroma, Producer Society for Radio Democracy 98.1 FM, on a radio broadcast against his person on ‘*Good Morning Salone*’ Show Monday 22 May 2023. Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), Brima Kamara, who restated the complaint on behalf of the Inspector General, said that on Monday 22 May, 2023, Alex Lawrence Koroma on “*Good Morning Salone Show*” *on Radio Democracy 98.1 FM*, smeared the character and person of the Inspector General, Mr. William F Sellu, on a land related issue and did not get 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.

On 14 June 2023, the *BBC* Correspondent in Sierra Leone, Umaru Fofana, was attacked by supporters of the All Peoples’ Congress (APC) party during the party’s press conference at the New Brookfields Hotel in Freetown. He was officially invited by the APC to cover the event. According to Umaru, the perpetrators’ hostility persisted as they pursued him to the hotel’s car park, where they continued to subject him to further indecent languages and gestures, and was threatened physically. In a press release dated 15 June 2023, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) condemned the attack on its former president and called on the party’s leadership to take prompt actions. The National Publicity Secretary of the APC, Sidi Yayah Tunis, confirmed receipt of a complaint from Umaru, and promised to take it up with the party’s leadership. In

November 2023, Mr. Fofana told 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 26 June 2023, Ibrahim Alusine Kamara, Managing Editor of *Salone Compass Newspaper*, complained that that security officials 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. He told MRCG that he had also officially reported the matter to the police, but the police were yet to neither acknowledge receipt of the letter, nor take an action. The Head of Media and Public Relations of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), ACP Brima Kamara, told MRCG that the police had received the complaint and had instituted an investigation into the matter. In subsequent follow ups on the matter, due to delay in the investigation, Mr. Kamara's lawyers, Marrah and Associates, in October 2023, wrote a letter to the police and requested an urgent investigation of the matter, pursuant to regulation 3 Sub regulation 1 (c) (d) and (h) of the Independent Police Complaint Board (IPCB) Regulations 2003. In November 2023, 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.

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, Cherner Bah, denied the allegation.

On 20 August 2023, Musa S. Kamara, working for radio *Democracy 98.1 FM* reportedly received "death threats" online from anonymous individuals. This followed an exclusive interview he had conducted with the United States of America's Ambassador to Sierra Leone, David Reimer, on the current post-election crisis in the country. Musa told MRCG that the online death threats against him were related to the interview he had done with the Ambassador, which some anonymous individuals didn't want him to broadcast. President of SLAJ, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, said that Musa brought to the attention of SLAJ the online death threats against him and he advised him to further report the matter to the SLP. The Head of Media and Public Relations of the SLP, ACP Brima Kamara, told MRCG that Musa had officially reported the matter and the police had begun its investigations into the matter. In subsequent follow ups, 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 Right 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, including the police. Police said they were still investigating the matter.

On 4 October 2023, the Organizing Secretary of the opposition, APC Party in Bonthe District, Robert Kamara, was 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, 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 was adjourned to 7 November 2023. 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, which had been described as a ‘failed coup attempt.’ The accused was denied bail on 7 November 2023 and was still in remand.

On 23 October 2023, the office and staff of *Hope FM 93.3* in Makeni, Northern Sierra Leone, Mohamed S. Bangura, Ishmail S. Bangura, Mahmood Fofana, Mohamed John Kanu and Serefiana Kargbo were attacked 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, 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. The North-East Regional Commander of the SLP, Assistant Inspector General of Police (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. In November 2023, the proprietor of the radio, told MRCG that the matter was in court, adding that the defendants pleaded with him, Ahmed Sahid Nasrallah, 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. The matter was still in court.

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.

2.2 Right to Access Information

The Chairman and Information Commissioner of the Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC), Dr. Ibrahim Seaga- Shaw, told MRCG that rapid popularisation of the Commission’s new Regulations had commenced since it was enacted in February 2023, adding that the Commission in September 2023 held a symposium to commemorate International Day for Universal Access to Information on the theme: Online Space and Access to Information, and also 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), with the aim of empowering professionals with comprehensive understanding of the legal frameworks, good practices and practical tools related to the right to access information. “Generally, there is progress in the compliance rate in information disclosure since our recent engagements with authorities, there is also a high compliance rate in the Proactive Disclosure of Information (PDI),” he said, noting that fifty-two (52) MDAs had submitted their PDI publication scheme, for which thirty (30) met the threshold set out by the Commission as compared to the previous years.

He noted that the Commission usually caution defaulters before instituting fines and litigations, and all those cautioned, normally do comply with the Commission's laws. In the case of the information request by Augustine Marrah Esq, from the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (ECSL), he noted that the Commission reached out to the ECSL, encouraged them to release the information requested and advised them to state clear reasons if they were not releasing the said information.

He went on to say that the public has started to make better information requests in addition to CSOs and journalists, pointing out that data from the Commission indicates that more requests originate in the country's north and western regions. "We have provided records management trainings and recurring website upgrades to public institutions who occasionally fail to proactively provide information. This has aided the Commission in achieving remarkable progress in terms of the rate of information supply and demand," he stated.

He ended saying that RAIC still has a matter at the High Court of Sierra Leone between the Bank of Sierra Leone and the Commission. In 2020, a journalist, Martha Kargbo made a request to the Bank of Sierra Leone pursuant to the RAIC Act of 2013, but was reportedly denied the information requested. The matter awaits ruling.

2.3 Internet Freedom and Digital Rights

Since the enactment of the Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021, there have been arrests made pursuant to breach of its provision(s). The Act, among other things, provides for the prohibition, prevention, detection, prosecution and punishment of cybercrimes; and protection of privacy rights. Sierra Leoneans who use social media and mobile phones to communicate may risk being criminally prosecuted for cyberstalking and/or cyberbullying, based on Section 44 of the Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021, if they share information or opinions perceived to be abusive, harassing, insulting, or detrimentally affects other people. [Click here to read.](#)

2.4 Media and Good Governance

MRCG on 23 June 2023 launched the Media Situation Room (MSR), at its secretariat in Freetown, to monitor the country's media's performance during the 2023 general elections. The MSR relied on information from print and broadcast media contents from around the country gathered by MRCG's media monitors. The data were processed and analysed to provide real-time information on the performance of the media in reporting on elections and conflict sensitive issues. The data added to MRCG's reports to show the media's coverage and reportage on the elections and their adherence to ethical standards set out in the Independent Media Commission (Print and Electronic Media) Regulations, 2023. The MSR daily reports were produced by media professionals and academics. It was generally observed that for TV and radio, there were some issues of poor moderation, and programme production, as some of the presenters were 'relatively new and inexperienced in media and journalism.' Hate speech was evident on social media, especially against the Chairperson of National Elections Watch (NEW), Marcella Samba-Sesay, whose organization had projected a Run-off in the Presidential Elections. There were issues of misleading/false information, divisive and inciting messages.

The MRCG together with the Ministry Information and Civic Education (MoICE), with support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) on 7 September 2023 convened a workshop at Dohas Hotel in Bo, to review the draft National Media and Information policy. The workshop brought together 21 media stakeholders including representatives from, the Ministry of Information and Civic Education, the Sierra

Leone Association of Journalists, the Independent Media Commission (IMC), the Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC), the British Broadcasting Cooperation Media Action (BBC-MA), Law Officers Department, the Sierra Leone News Agency (SLENA), Association of Communication, Journalism and Media Educators (ACJME), and other senior journalists and media stakeholders in Sierra Leone. The draft national policy document was a compilation of discussion on key issues that could inform future policy decisions. The policy, upon completion, would serve as a critical role of a well-defined information policy in reducing confusing and enhancing coordination and improved information flow in Sierra Leone. The policy would also address digital age, particularly in addressing issues of misinformation, disinformation, and cyber security.

MRCG and the BBC Media Action on 16 and 17 September 2023, convened a two-day post-media viability-and-investment-conference workshop which brought together participants from the media, government and CSOs, with the aim of tracking the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations agreed on at the National Media Viability and Investment Conference, reviewing the draft implementation plan for the Roadmap/National Action Plan developed at the Conference, and developing a strategy for the implementation of the Roadmap/National Action Plan. The workshop employed an interactive approach, combining presentations and small group discussions on the draft documents and proposed strategy. At the end of the two-day session, participants reviewed the document on the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations agreed on at the National Media Viability and Investment Conference. The draft implementation plan for the Roadmap/National Action Plan reviewed and updated, and a new strategy for the implementation of the Roadmap/National Action Plan was reviewed with clear timelines and monitoring evaluation mechanisms set.

3. PERFORMANCE OF INSTITUTIONS DEALING WITH FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND OF THE PRESS, INFORMATION, INTERNET FREEDOM AND DIGITAL RIGHTS

On 27 June 2023, the IMC in line with Section 14 (1), (2) and (3) of the IMC Act No. 5 of 2020, suspended *Justice Radio FM 98.5* and Justice Boima from hosting, moderating or participating in any radio program, for offensive audio broadcast by the radio on Monday 26 June 2023. Upon investigation, the Commission also found that allegations of bias, levied against the Independent Radio Network (IRN) by *Justice FM 98.5* were baseless and misleading.

On 11 October 2023, the IMC's Complaint Committee presided over a matter regarding 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

On 11 October 2023, the IMC's Complaint Committee 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 Le 3,000 (Three Thousand 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.

On 11 October 2023, the IMC's Complaint Committee, 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 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.

On 29 November 2023, the IMC in a press release, 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.

Established by an Act of Parliament in 2013, the Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC) provides for the disclosure of information held by public authorities or by persons providing services for them and to provide for other related matters. The Commission's key responsibilities are to facilitate and promote the supply and demand of public information in the country with requests from an individual or a body.

The Chairman and Information Commissioner of RAIC, Dr. Ibrahim Seaga-Shaw, told the MRCG that upon request, the said public institutions are obliged by the Commission's Act of 2013, to comply with the request of releasing information, hence the information requested does not endanger national security, citizens personal data and patients' medical records.

The Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC) on 22 August 2023, received a complaint from Lawyer Augustine Sorie-Sengbeh Marrah for the Commission to review the decision of the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone's (ECSL) on his request for the disclosure of certified summary results of all sixteen districts of the Presidential and general elections held on 24 June 2023. RAIC, as per mandate, wrote to ECSL asking them to respond to the request of Lawyer Marrah within 7 working days, which ECSL granted on 30 August 2023, by referring the requester to its website for the available pieces of information. According to RAIC, as at the time of writing this report, the requester was reviewing the letter sent by ECSL to RAIC

There is the SLAJ Disciplinary Committee established pursuant to Article 14 (3) of its constitution responsible to adjudicate upon matters of indiscipline and professional misconduct of individual members of SLAJ. Under the reporting period, the Committee Chairperson, Claudia Anthony, told MRCG that the Committee did not receive or adjudicate on any complaint from members of the public against any journalists in their line of duty.

The Cyber Security and Crime Act, 2021 provides for the effective, unified and comprehensive legal, regulatory and institutional framework for the prohibition, prevention, detection, prosecution and punishment for cybercrimes; prevention of the abusive use of computer systems; to provide for the establishment of structures to promote cybersecurity and capacity building; to provide for the timely and effective collection of electronic evidence for the purpose of investigation and prosecution of cybercrime; to provide for the protection of Critical National Information Infrastructure and the protection of computer systems and networks, electronic communications, data and computer programs, intellectual property and privacy rights to provide for facilitation of international cooperation in dealing with cybercrime matters and to provide for other related matters.

The National Telecommunications Commission (NaTCOM) now National Telecommunications Authority (NaTCA), was established by an Act of Parliament in 2006. The main function of the Commission is to license and regulate the activities of telecommunications operators to promote efficiency, fair competition, expansion of investment in the sector, development of the sector and the protection of users of telecommunications networks and services.

4. PERFORMANCE OF MEDIA HOUSE AND SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

There are improvements in the outputs of media institutions. This is reflected in their contents and programming. However, there were major concerns that a number of media institutions continued to publish and broadcast contents that breached ethical standards or were in contravention of the country's media laws, the IMC Act and Media Code of Practice, especially during the elections period.

On 5 June 2023, SLAJ launched the 2023 Media Manifesto titled 'The Media We Want' at the New Brookfields Hotel, Freetown. The Manifesto presented a comprehensive roadmap of achievable actions and strategies aimed at advancing media freedom, professionalism, viability, gender equality, inclusivity, journalist safety, and media literacy in Sierra Leone. [Click here to read.](#)

On 6 June 2023, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and MRCG with support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands in Ghana, organized a training on Digital Literacy Skills and Women's Rights Online Issues, for female journalists in Sierra Leone. Participants were introduced to ChatGPT and other Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to enhance their journalism skills and also to address their online privacy issues. [Click here to read](#)

On 17 June 2023, MRCG with support from the International Media Support (IMS) organized a one-day capacity-building training on elections reporting and safety and security of journalists during elections. The event was graced by journalists especially from community media and those that have had issues with security sector personnel. During the workshop, there were brief presentations on international documents (the UNESCO Framework on Safety and Security of Journalists and national studies and reports (MRCG's press freedom reports) on safety and security of journalists, and was climaxed with an intense discussions, group work and presentations on ways to ensure safety and security of journalists. [Click here to read.](#)

On 19 June 2023, SLAJ, MRCG, Independent Media Commission (IMC) and the BBC Media Action, officially launched the National Fund for Public Interest Media Sierra Leone (NaFPIM-SL). The initiative took its cue from the perception that the media in Sierra Leone is faced with tough economic challenges which have limited their ability to produce contents that serve the public interest. [Click here to read.](#)

From 19 to 21 June 2023, the MRCG with support from IMS held a joint Police-Media Dialogue Forum in Freetown, Makeni and Bo respectively to help ensure collaboration between the media and the police. The Forum brought together senior police officers and media professionals from across the country who discussed and identified concrete modalities for Police-Media collaboration and mechanisms for ensuring safety of journalists in the electioneering period. [Click here to read.](#)

On 23 June 2023, MRCG with support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), launched its Media Situation Room (MSR) in Freetown. The Situation Room was established to monitor the country's media performance during the elections, as part of its efforts to promote professional media coverage and conflict sensitive reporting of the 2023 general elections in Sierra Leone. [Click here to read.](#)

On 17 August 2023, Huawei handed over the National Fiber Backbone Phase 2 project to LEONECOM to the Ministry of Communication, Technology and Innovation. The initiative of the project was to establish a robust and state of the art telecommunications network across the country with the aim of boosting internet connectivity. The Minister of Communications, Technology and Innovation, Salima Bah, said that the initiative was a pivotal step in ensuring convenient internet access for the people of Sierra Leone. [Click here to read](#)

On 30 August 2023, the Minister of Information and Civic Education, Chenor Bah, met with staff of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) to discuss the challenges faced by the institution. The Minister in his concluding statements announced government's decision to effect a 50% salary increment for all staff of the SLBC effective 1 September 2023. [Click here to read.](#)

On 1 and 7 August 2023, U.S Embassy in Freetown conducted training on countering disinformation, misinformation, and fake news at the Kissy American Corner for over 40 young people within the Kissy Community in Freetown and at the Africell American Corner in Bo. The trainings were facilitated by the Press and Media Coordinator of the U.S. Embassy, Alhassan Jalloh and journalist Richard Ngevao in Bo, with the aim of equipping participants with the knowledge on how to identify fake news and counter disinformation and misinformation. [Click here to read.](#)

On 8 and 9 September 2023, SLAJ 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 24 June 2023 general elections in Sierra Leone. [Click here to read.](#)

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

On 14 September 2023, the IMC with support from the Chinese Embassy 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.

On 14 and 15 September 2023, BBC Media Action Sierra Leone with SLAJ- i-Verify, Independent Radio Network (IRN) Sierra Leone and UNDP in Sierra Leone, 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. [Click here to read.](#)

On 18 and 19 September 2023, the MRCG with support from the BBC Media Action Sierra Leone, through PRIMED and in collaboration with other media stakeholders 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. [Click here to read.](#)

On 29 September 2023, the MRCG with support from IMS, convened a one-day post-election Police, Political Parties, CSOs and Media National Dialogue Forum with key stakeholders to share experiences gained, challenges encountered during the June 2023 elections and to proffer possible solutions that will continue to strengthen the media-security relationship in the country. [Click here to read.](#)

On 28 September 2023, RAIC held a one-day symposium to commemorate International Day for Universal Access to Information on the theme: Online Space and Access to Information [Click here to read.](#)

On 18 October 2023, SLAJ in a meeting with the new Director General of the National Telecommunications Authority (NTCA), Amara Brewah, told him 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. [Click here to read.](#)

On 17 October 2023, RAIC 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. [Click here to read.](#)

On 2 November 2023, in commemoration of the International Day to end Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, the MRCG 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 that safety and security of journalists at all times. [Click here to read.](#)

On 21 November 2023, MoICE 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.

On 23 and 24 November 2023, the European Union (EU) Sierra Leone, in collaboration with Salone Fact-Checker, MRCG and SLAJ 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 train journalists and bloggers with basic skills and knowledge in countering disinformation. [Click here to read.](#)

5. POSITION OF THE SIERRA LEONE ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND OF THE PRESS, INFORMATION, INTERNET FREEDOM AND DIGITAL RIGHTS

June to November 2023 has been a very busy period for SLAJ, with the Association convening its Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Kenema in September, emphasizing on the role of the media in supporting the mediation efforts after the June 24 general elections in Sierra Leone and deepening advocacies for journalists' safety and media freedom. At the SLAJ AGM in Kenema, SLAJ launched a pioneering Gender Equality Policy aimed at fostering diversity and inclusivity within journalism associations, news outlets, and journalists across the country. The Policy was among the first major initiatives specifically targeted at the news media in West Africa and the African continent at large. SLAJ recognizes the urgent need for a more gender-inclusive media landscape. The GEP was designed to empower women and gender-diverse individuals by addressing systemic biases and promoting opportunities for their growth and leadership within the media sector. It further demonstrates SLAJ's commitment to take proactive steps to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment in line with the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Act 2022. SLAJ's President noted that the Policy represents a significant stride towards that ambition to foster a media landscape that reflects the diverse realities and aspirations of all practitioners, irrespective of their gender. It seeks to address equality and equity within the media ecosystem. Through this policy, SLAJ affirmed its dedication to promoting gender sensitivity, not as an isolated endeavor, but as an integral part of responsible journalism. The shared objective is to contribute to a society where the media is a catalyst for positive change, where narratives are rooted in empathy and respect, and where the full spectrum of gender identities finds a dignified place in the spotlight.

After the general elections, there were expositions of deep political division which fast crept into the country's social, cultural, and educational constructs. The main opposition, All People's Congress (APC) party had grievances about the outcome of the elections and for some time refused to participate in the governance of the State. International partners sang from the same hymn on the call for independent investigations into the conduct of the elections, to which the Government expressed the desire to engage in a political dialogue to resolve the situation. During the course of the mediation process, SLAJ played a critical role in promoting peace by: providing balanced and objective coverage of the crisis, avoiding inflammatory language or bias, offering a platform for politicians and community leaders to discuss their grievances and seek common ground, collaborating with international organizations to fact-check information and counter false rumors and hate speech, and actively monitoring hate speech on social media and reporting it to relevant authorities. It was imperative that the media promote Dialogue, Sustainable Peace, and National Cohesion. SLAJ did not run the risk of thinking and believing that everything was right as regards the country's current political climate. Certainly, the outcome of the elections had affected, if not, deepened the national divide and affected the national cohesion programs all citizens were supporting over the years. The peace of the country was also affected. Even the security sector institutions continue to put out notices suggesting and indicating that some people plan to engage in activities and programs that will affect the peace of the country. The only way out, was a dialogue that will lead to sustainable peace and national cohesion.

During the June 24 elections, SLAJ President, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, noted that social media continued to be a concern for the spread of disinformation, fake news, hate speech and political propaganda, especially during the elections. SLAJ constantly condemned the rampant spread of dis/misinformation of elections results from sources that did not have the authority to do so, and reiterated that only the Elections Commission of Sierra Leone has that constitutional authority. On sustainability of the media in Sierra Leone, since advertising is the lifeblood of the media and the small private sector is continuing to decline, the economic position facing the media is intolerable on a daily basis. Prices of raw materials utilized by print media continue to spike uncontrolled. The country's economy, and consequently every industry, including the media, has suffered

greatly as a result of the coronavirus outbreak and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Literally fighting for their lives, media companies have slashed staff and scaled back operations. Africell, Orange, Mercury International, and a few banks provided consistent advertising support; without which, the majority of media outlets would have shut down. The majority of journalists and media workers continue to have inadequate pay and working conditions when it comes to their welfare. In actuality, media outlets are unable to provide what they lack. But now that the new Independent Media Commission (IMC) Act of 2020 is in existence, media outlets are required by law to pay their employees at least not below the national minimum wage in addition to their social security obligations. The IMC will not renew media companies' annual licenses if they do not comply.

SLAJ President believes journalism is facing a crisis in West Africa and has urged media development bodies and journalists' unions in the region to collaborate with relevant institutions/organizations, not excluding governments, to guarantee press freedom, ensure and assure the safety and security of journalists at all times, and strengthen the civic space to ensure democracy, rule of law, freedom and human rights thrive. Participating in two panel discussions on 'Regulations and Spaces for Press Freedom Advocacy' and 'Media in West African Elections: Observation, Reporting and Polling', Nasralla said with the emergence of digital and social media the traditional media has lost four critical functions which are rendering it irrelevant in performing its fundamental role of informing, educating, and entertaining in a factual, credible, and responsible manner: the gate-keeping role; the exclusive right of content creation; control over reaching more audiences; and probably the most important of all, is the role of agenda-setting.

SLAJ President noted that citizen journalism is gaining prominence, with ordinary citizens' actively reporting and sharing news which often, if not always, comes with concerns about the reliability and credibility of information. Apart from the usual threats, intimidation, and assaults perpetrated by security personnel, Nasralla said that there is an emerging threat from political supporters and traditional authorities/leaders in local communities. Another concern is new regulations/legislations with the motive to narrow the media and civic space. He said countries in West Africa have constitutions that guarantee a free press but, being wary of the excesses of digital and social media, are now passing laws curtailing those fundamental freedoms guaranteed in their national constitutions. He made reference to the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone which provides for the obligation of the media to hold the government to account in Section 11; freedom of the media in Section 25(i); limitations of the media in 25(ii); and Contempt of Court in Section 95. He further mentioned the IMC Act 2020; the Public Order Amendment Act 2020, and the Civil Defamation Act 1961. One year after the historic repeal of the criminal libel law, the government passed the Cyber Security and Crime Act, 2021 which has been used in some instances to curtail free speech.

In the area of safety and security, SLAJ continues to make some remarkable progress, but there is still a lot more to be done. Following the repeal of the criminal libel law, SLAJ signed an MoU with the security sector under the umbrella of the Office of National Security (ONS). The MoU seeks to promote mutual understanding, respect, collaboration, and support between the media and the security sector to minimize incidents of physical assault of journalists in the line of duty. Beyond that, SLAJ and the MRCG have conducted several training and workshops on the safety and security of journalists in the country. These have led to the formulation of a national framework/policy and the establishment of a National Coordination Committee for the Safety and Security of Journalists in Sierra Leone, comprising representatives from media stakeholders, civil society organizations, the security sector, religious and traditional leaders, and the Judiciary of Sierra Leone. Aside all these efforts, there are still growing concerns on the safety and security of journalists in Sierra Leone. From June to November 2023, SLAJ and MRCG have monitored about four (4) major incidents on journalists' safety and had called on the necessary authorities to take prompt actions.

6. GOVERNMENT'S POSITION ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND OF THE PRESS, INFORMATION, INTERNET FREEDOM AND DIGITAL RIGHTS

The key highlights of the government's position on Freedom of Expression and of the Press, Right to Access Information, Internet Freedom and Digital Rights are; the demonstration of the President, Julius Maada Bio and his government's commitment to enhance freedom of expression and of the press by ensuring safeguards recommended during the repeal process were implemented, including the review and enactment of the IMC Act 2020, the review and operationalization of the codes for print and electronic media and the elections coverage regulations, and among others. The Acting Director of Information at the Ministry of Information and Civic Education, Emmanuel AB Turay, said that, as stated in the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) 2023 Manifesto, freedom of expression commitment is the cornerstone of the country's healthy, functioning democracy, and its being demonstrated by the value the Government has placed on the importance of the right to speak freely and present views through speech, art, literature, and other means of expression. Noting that, that was the reason no journalist has been imprisoned for carrying out his professional duty since the repeal in 2020.

Since June this year, the Government has sought to provide incentives to make this freedom meaningful by providing funding support to SLAJ, to undertake training and other enabling programs for its members as well as supporting capacity building for community radio stations and reaffirming its commitment to provide the National Funds for Public Interest Media (NaFPIM) the promised counterpart funding as matching grant to enhance its objectives. Mr. Turay noted that the Government, through the Ministry of Information and Civic Education (MoICE) has continued to give the political will through its engagements with media stakeholders including SLAJ and other key partners like MRCG, BBC Media Action, CSOs, to proffer actions for the implementation of Recommendations of the first National Media Viability and Investment Conference, which was held in April 2022. "An implementation plan has been set up by relevant stakeholders to ensure the implementation of these recommendations through partner mapping and relevant support," he said.

On the Draft National Media and Information Policy, he assured MRCG that the draft Policy is at an advance stage for its consultative process and validation, with the Ministry taking the lead in enhancing these action plans, ensuring that other sector partners were also doing their bits with clear time frame set.

Mr. Turay continued that, SLAJ and its partners had signed Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) including the Sierra Leone Police, Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and among others, in a bid to enhance freedom of expression and of the press. Similarly so, the Government, as part of the International Media Freedom Coalition (IMFC) has issued several press statements and communiques on press freedom and violations in other parts of the world. On safety and security of journalists, Mr. Turay said that the Government would continue to demonstrate its commitment to protecting the work of the press by vigorously defending journalists from verbal harassment online and offline, and from physical threats, assaults, and harm. He noted that "public authorities are expected to thoroughly and swiftly investigate all attacks on journalists, in line with international commitments on the safety of journalists as part of ensuring journalists' safety in the country."

Also, he stated that the increase in the total number of registered media institutions and the rise of internet users through social media as a vehicle for expression, are all indicators of freedom of expression. Mr. Turay also said that the Government would continue to create the conducive environment for the enjoyment of freedom of expression, by ensuring that policies and practices affecting freedom of expression are consistent with our local and international laws and principles protecting media freedom and pluralism, as well as the

rights to expression, information, and opinion. Government bodies, including our law enforcement and security institutions will be entreated to be transparent, robust, and to provide effective oversight to ensure that their actions are consistent with human rights and freedom of expression and of the press.

On the implementation of the Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021, he noted that the Government would ensure that the regulation of social media and online spaces are consistent with international human rights standards, and that it would ensure the fight against misinformation and disinformation was not used to restrict freedom of expression. Government will continue to support institutions that defend human rights and press freedom, he added. He assured MRCG that the Government would continue to enhance capacity building for journalists through training and education; support for and advice on improving the legal and business environment for media; and promote efforts to improve the sustainability of existing outlets.

7. STATUS OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION LAWS IN SIERRA LEONE

For the reporting period, all media and communication laws and codes remain the same. The Data Protection and Privacy Bill developed by the Ministry of Information and Communication (now Ministry of Information and Civic Education) has not been passed into law.

Table 7.1: Specific Acts containing Media Laws and Regulations still in Force

No.	Specific Statutes on Media Laws/Regulation - Acts of Parliament	Year	Status of the law
1.	Undesirable Publications Cap 113 of the Laws of Sierra Leone, 1960	1961	In force
2.	Undesirable Advertisement Ordinance - Cap 114 in the Laws of Sierra Leone, 1960	1960	In force
3.	Defamation Ordinance - Act No. 32	1961	In force
4.	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation Act, 2009 (Act No. 1 of 2010).	2010	In force
5.	The Independent Media Commission (IMC) Act, 2020 (Act No. 5 of 2020)- It repealed and replaced the Independent Media Commission (IMC) Act, 2000 (Act No. 12 of 2000) as amended in 2006 and 2007	2020	In force
6	Cybersecurity and Crime Act 2021	2021	In force

Source (Sowa & Kapuwa, 2015 and updated regularly¹)

¹ Francis Sowa and Joseph Egbenda Kapuwa, Media Laws and Regulations: Review and Update on Sierra Leone's Statutory and Self-Regulatory Models (2015)

Table 7.2: Other Statutes (Acts of Parliament) relating to Media Regulation still in Force

No.	Other Statutes (Acts of Parliament) with laws relating to media regulation	Year	Status of the law
1.	The Treason and State Offences Act, 1963	1963	In force
2.	Criminal Libel - The Public Order Act, 1965 (Act No 46 of 1965)	1965	Repealed
3.	Publication of False News - The Public Order Act	1965	Repealed
4.	Seditious Libel - The Public Order Act	1965	Repealed
5.	Constitution of Sierra Leone - Freedom of Expression and of the Press	1991	In force
6.	Constitution of Sierra Leone - Public Emergency Law	1991	In force, but under review
7.	Constitution of Sierra Leone - Law of Contempt of Parliament	1991	In force
8.	The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	1995	In force
9.	Pharmacy and Drugs Act	2001	In force
10.	The National Electronic Communication Act, 2022 (Act. No. 16 of 2022) repealed and replaced the Telecommunications Act 2006 as amended	2021	In force
11.	The Child Rights Act 2007 (No. 7 2007)	2007	In force
12.	The Anti-Corruption Act, 2008 (Act No No. 12 of 2008) as amended in the Anti-Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2019 (Act No. 9 of 2019).	2008, as amended in 2019	In force
13.	The Copyright Act, 2011 (No. 7 of 2007)	2011	In force
14.	The Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (Act No 00 of 2012) as amended	2012 as amended in 2019	In force
15.	The Right to Access Information Act, 2013 (Act No No. 2 2013)	2013	In force
16.	Public Order (Amendment) Act, 2020 (Act. No 4 of 2020)	2020	In force
17.	The Law on Contempt of Court	Common Law	In force

Source (Sowa & Kapuwa, 2015; updated regularly)²

Table 7.3: Codes Dealing with Media Regulation Still in Force

No.	Codes	Year	Status of the law
1.	Code of Conduct of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists	2000 (reviewed 2014/2015)	In force.
2.	The Independent Media Commission (IMC) Media Code of Practice	2007	The section on Advertising is still applicable.
3.	Right to Access Information Regulations 2022 (Statutory Instrument No. 9 of 2022)	2022	In force.
4.	Independent Media Commission (Print and Electronic Media) Regulations, 2022 (Statutory Instrument No. 11 of 2022)	2022	In force.
5.	Independent Media Commission Elections (Coverage and Reporting) Regulations, 2022 (Statutory Instrument No. 17 of 2022)	2022	In force.

Source (Sowa and Kapuwa, 2015; updated regularly)³

8. CONCLUSION

The issues covered in this report relate to freedom of expression and of the press, Information, Internet Freedom and Digital Rights and the safety and security of journalists. The MRCG will continue to re-echo one of the provisions in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report, which says: “Freedom of expression is the lifeblood of a democracy. A culture of public debate and tolerance for dissenting ideas is the sign of a vibrant and healthy democracy. Restrictions on the freedom of expression represent a fearful state; it reflects a State that has no confidence in its ability to promote and disseminate its doctrines in the marketplace of ideas.”

The MRCG continues to monitor the implementation and the popularization of the various pieces of legislations: Right to Access Information Regulations 2022 (Statutory Instrument No. 9 of 2022); Independent Media Commission (Print and Electronic Media) Regulations, 2022 (Statutory Instrument No. 11 of 2022); and the Independent Media Commission Elections (Coverage and Reporting) Regulations, 2022 (Statutory Instrument No. 17 of 2022) by the RAIC and the IMC. The laws have introduced new regulations on the right to access information, media ethics and coverage and reporting of elections respectively.

The MRCG still looks forward to the speedy enactment of the Data Protection Law which will guarantee the privacy and safety of citizens’ data both online and offline, and implementation of the Cybersecurity and Crime Act 2021 in a way that it does not hinder freedom of expression and of the press.

The MRCG commends the government and media stakeholders for the steps taken to implement recommendation made at the first ever media viability and investment conference, and the efforts made to implement the other recommendations. With reference to the MoU SLAJ signed with the Security Sector, the MRCG hopes that with safety of journalists still being an issue, SLAJ will continue to engage the security sector to address issues of press freedom and to forge a good working relationship with the security sector especially the police and the military as the country prepares for the its general elections. Safety and Security of journalists is at the heart of MRCG; the organization therefore hopes that the government, media owners and security sector will guarantee the safety of journalists in their line of duty. The MRCG also calls on the SLP to speedily investigate all matters before it, as delay in justice delivery is as denial of justice.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The SLP to speedily investigate all matters involving journalists.
- Government, SLAJ and partners to continue to implement the other recommendations from the Media Viability and Investment Conference.
- Government to speedily enact the Data Protection Law to fully promote citizen's digital rights, protect citizen's data, consumer protection and block potential loopholes to data exploitation by private entities and government agencies.
- Government to ensure that journalists and citizens continue to enjoy their rights to freedom of expression, including press freedom and assembly without the fear of being intimidated, harassed, assaulted, arrested or detained and prosecuted.
- The Government to look into the Media Manifesto and implement the recommendations for the development of the media landscape of the country.
- Government officials should stop stone-walling and be willing and ready to respond to requests from journalists to cross-check their information.
- The Sierra Leone Police to speed up and conclude investigations of all cases against journalists and civil society activists, including those who were assaulted or threatened and those who had been invited and/or detained, but released without charge.
- Media owners and managers to develop their in-house safety policy from national safety policy for journalists that was developed by MRCG to ensure their safety.
- The MRCG, SLAJ and other media groups to train and build the capacity of journalists to match international best standards of practice through the support of non-governmental organizations by supporting mentorship and fellowship programs for journalists.

10. REFERENCES


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11. APPENDICES

11.1 Reported Cases in the First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, Tenth and Eleventh Editions Respectively of the Press Freedom Reports

The table below shows the cases, dates of attack/arrest or invitations and their current status.

The cases in the ‘gold columns’ have been concluded, settled, resolved, dropped or abandoned. 

Those in ‘blue columns’ are in court. 

Those in the ‘red columns’ are under police investigation/inconclusive/stalled. 

From the First to the Eleventh Edition of the Press Freedom Report, **seventy-six** cases and issues were monitored. **Fifty** of them were concluded, settled, resolved, dropped or abandoned, because of lack of progress; **nine** were in court; and **seventeen** under police investigation/inconclusive/stalled.

Table 11.1: Status of cases monitored by MRCG from March 2018 to November 2023

No	Cases Reported in the First Edition	Date of Attack/Arrest /Invitation	Status of Cases
1	Attack on a reporter of <i>Concord Times Newspaper</i> , Patrick Jaiah Kamara by thugs allegedly on the instruction of former Mayor of the Freetown City Council, Herbert George Williams, Sanusi Bruski and other All Peoples Congress (APC) Party members during the 31 March 2018 Presidential run-off election	During the 31 March 2018 Presidential run-off Election	Matter resolved out of court after few appearances.
2	Attack on the late Editor of <i>New Age Newspaper</i> , Ibrahim Samura by the then ruling APC party members and supporters allegedly on orders of former Freetown Mayor of the APC, Herbert George Williams, and the APC Public Relation Officer, Abubakar at a polling station in Lumley during the 31 March 2018 Presidential run-off election who later died at the 34 Military Hospital at Wilberforce on 6 June 2018.	31 March 2018 Presidential run-off Election	The two accused had been acquitted and discharged for murder and conspiracy to commit grievous bodily harm by Justice Augustine Musa of the High Court of Sierra Leone in Freetown as the jury returned a verdict of not guilty.
3	Arrest and detention of a civil society activist, Edmond Abu, Executive Director of Native Consortium and Research Centre, by the Sierra Leone Police for staging a peaceful protest in Freetown against the increments in fuel pump price.	17 July 2018	Released on bail and matter not charged to court.
4	Invitation of the Leader and Chairman of the Alliance Democratic Party (ADP), Mohamed Kamarainba Mansaray and Abdul Fonti Kabia, formerly of <i>AYV</i> , to CID for interview he granted in response to allegation relating to the alleged publication of false news, contrary to the Public Order Act of 1965.	22 July 2018	All charges dropped and matter terminated.

5	Invitation of journalist to Parliament to answer to some questions in connection with a story broadcast on <i>African Young Voices TV</i> , titled “Caught on Camera”, involving a member of parliament, Hon. Veronica Kadie Sesay and two others in a land matter.	September 2018	The <i>AYV</i> Director of News and Current Affairs, Samuel Wise Bangura, appeared before Parliament and was asked to retract and apologize. But he refused/declined and nothing happened after that.
6	Attack on the publisher of <i>The Elephant Newspaper</i> , Nimalty Kamara, allegedly by youth of the ruling Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) for allegedly criticizing the new regime of President Julius Maada Bio.	10 September 2018	Matter was still at the Kenema High Court. Nimalty told MRCG that there was no progress on the matter.
7	Attack on <i>AYV TV</i> journalist, Ransford Metzger, while investigating an alleged corruption matter at the St. Joseph Secondary School in Freetown.	September 2018	Alleged perpetrators arrested and held at the CID, but were released after the journalist and <i>AYV</i> management accepted the apology of the perpetrators.
8	Attack on the former Editor of <i>Awareness Times Newspaper</i> , John Koroma, during a Bye-Election in Tonko Limba, Kambia District, Northern Sierra Leone, on 29 September 2018, allegedly by a team of Sierra Leone Police officers and persons who openly identified themselves as SLPP supporters.	29 September 2018	Matter still with the police and no arrest effected. John Koroma said he availed his witnesses to the police and that statements were obtained from them individually. He said the police had promised to get on to him but have not done so since and that he is gradually forgetting the matter. The police said that Koroma had not been able to identify those that attacked him; and as such, they were constrained to arrest any suspect. They however said that the matter had been kept in view.
9	Arrest of Fayia Amara Fayia of <i>Star Radio and Standard Times Newspaper</i> by CID officers outside the <i>AYV</i> media on what the CID said was a post on his Facebook page containing defamatory words against His Excellency the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, Julius Maada Bio.	29 September 2018	Police said since Part 5 of the Public Order Act of 1965 has been repealed, the file has been closed.
10	Harassment of Alhassan Jalloh, Editor of the <i>Unique Newspaper</i> , by police officers attached to the Lumley Police Station in the West end of Freetown, while investigating a fracas between Leonco Filling Station at Lumley and a mosque.	5 November 2018	Mr. Jalloh said the matter was not progressing and he has dropped it and moved on.

No	Cases Reported in the Second Edition	Date of Attack/Arrest/Invitation	Status of the matter
11	Arrest and detention of Emmanuel C Thorli, Managing Editor of <i>the Night Watch Newspaper</i> by the Sierra Leone Police on 14 January 2019 on the allegation of publishing false information that several diplomatic passports were illegally given to families of the ruling government officials.	14 January 2019	Police said the matter has been closed because of the repeal of Part 5 of the Public Order Act of 1965.
12	Attack on two <i>AYV</i> journalists, Augusta Ethel Turay and Bockarie Samai, on the 16 January 2019, allegedly by supporters of the opposition All People's Congress Party (APC), while covering the visit of officials of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to the home of former President Ernest Koroma in Makeni, Bombali District.	16 January 2019	<p>Matter stalled as police claim complainants were yet to return with their endorsed medical reports; hence they could not take any further action. But Augusta Ethel Turay, said they submitted their medical reports as was requested by the Police; yet there was no progress on the matter.</p> <p>“We submitted the medical reports at the Mena Police Station in Makeni as requested, but up to date, the police did not call us, neither discharged the matter nor charged it to court and so we stopped following the matter.” The police said that they were still waiting for the journalists to take their endorsed medical forms to the police headquarters.</p>
13	Death threat against the <i>BBC's</i> Umaru Fofana apparently by a member or supporter of the opposition APC in an audio circulated on social media, after an interview he conducted with Sierra Leone's former Vice President, Victor Bockarie Foh.	17 January 2019	<p>Matter still under investigation according to the Police. However, Umaru Fofana said the Police investigating the matter disclosed the identity of his key witness and he eventually lost confidentiality in them and hence, he has stopped following up on the matter.</p> <p>The police in their response said that the matter had been kept in view.</p>

14	Attacks on and intimidation of civil society leaders, including the Executive Director of Campaign for Good Governance (CGG), Madam Marcella Samba-Sesay, who had publicly expressed critical views on the media about the governance challenges.	3-6 May 2019	Matter ended after several press releases condemning the attack on her.
15	Attack on a civil society activist, Morlai Conteh, President of the National Youth Coalition of Sierra Leone, allegedly by a group of military officers of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) after the main opposition All People's Congress (APC) party did a walkout protest of the ceremony marking the Presidential State Opening of Parliament on 2 May 2019.	2 May 2019	Mr. Conteh said his moves to further the case were fruitless; so he decided to drop it.

No	Cases Reported in Third Edition	Date of Attack/Arrest /Invitation	Status of the matter
16	Arrest and detention of four local journalists- Sallieu Tejan Jalloh, Publisher of the <i>Times SL Newspaper</i> ; David Johnson, Editor of <i>Times SL Newspaper</i> ; Mustapha Sesay, General Editor, <i>Standard Times Newspaper</i> ; and Abu Bakarr Kargbo (Father Bakish), a Senior Staff Writer of <i>Standard Times Newspaper</i> - in Freetown on Friday 28 June 2019. They were charged with eight-count for allegedly publishing defamatory articles in the <i>Times SL Newspaper and the Standard Times Newspaper</i> respectively against Pa Momoh Fofanah Esq, a Barrister and Solicitor of the High Court of Sierra Leone.	28 June 2019	Journalists discharged.
17	Assault on two female sport journalists (Francess Bernard-Bundor and Easter Marie Samura) of <i>SLBC</i> by Officers of the Sierra Leone Presidential guard on Sunday 8 September 2019 at the National Stadium, during the FIFA 2022 World Cup Preliminary return-leg match between Sierra Leone and Liberia.	8 September 2019	Action taken against the presidential guards. Government refunded the medical expenses by the journalists and their property destroyed or stolen paid for.
18	Arrest and detention of Mahmud Tim Kargbo on 20 September 2019 for allegedly publishing a defamatory article against Hon Justice Miatta Samba', an Appeal Court Judge, titled 'Justice Redefined by Miatta Samba', which is said to have accused the judge of corruption and incompetence.	20 September 2019	Granted bail after tendering an apology letter to Hon Justice Miatta Samba; matter was still in Court.

19	Arrest and detention of the Managing Editor of the <i>Times Newspaper</i> Sallieu Tejan Jalloh (Sal Tee) on 11 November 2019 in Freetown, by plainclothes police officers in connection with an SMS text message that he sent to the Chief Minister of Sierra Leone, Prof. David Francis enquiring about an alleged payment of US\$ 1.5 million into his private ECOBANK account by SL Mining, which license had been cancelled by the state.	11 November 2019	Police said the matter has been closed because of the decriminalization of Part 5 of the Public Order Act of 1965.
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No	Cases Reported in Fourth Edition	Date of Attack/Arrest /Invitation	Status of the matter
20	Attack on three local journalists – Ibrahim Manasaray, aka ‘Hebro’ of <i>SLBC</i> , Makeni, Abdul M. Jalloh of <i>Amzas Radio</i> , Makeni and Foday Moriba Conteh of <i>Calabash Newspaper</i> , Tonkolili Districts – in the Northern Region of Sierra Leone.	January 2020	The matter was under police investigation as police said journalists are yet to corroborate their witnesses. One of the victims, Abdul M. Jalloh of Hamzas Radio, said there was no progress on the matter and hence they had decided to move on with their different jobs. Police said that the matter had been kept in view for lack of evidence and witness.
21	Alleged threat by the former Inspector General of Police to arrest Alex Lawrence Koroma, a producer of <i>Radio Democracy FM 98.1</i> ‘Good Moring Salon Programme’, for a programme he produced on the state of security.	23 February 2020	Arrest not affected.
22	Arrest and detention of Chornor Jalloh, Reporter, <i>Radio Democracy</i> , Yusuf Bangura, Reporter, <i>Concord Times</i> , and a civil society activist, Thomas Moore Conteh, Executive Director of Citizens Advocacy Network (CAN) by police during a Limkokwing University protest over fee subsidies by the Government of Sierra Leone	5 March 2020	The two journalists were released, while the matter of Mr. Moore was dismissed by the Court.
23	Invitation of the Managing Editor/Publisher of the <i>Nationalist Newspaper</i> , Mohamed Sankoh (AKA, One Drop) by the police in connection with an opinion piece he authored titled ‘Is the Catholic Church in a Mess?’	20 March 2020	Police dropped case against Mr. Sankoh as they said it was a mistaken identity as they mistook Mr. Sankoh for another person.

24	Assault on journalist Fayia Amara Fayia of <i>Star Radio and Standard Times Newspaper</i> , allegedly by military officers in Kenema and his subsequent arrest and detention by Police in Kenema.	4 April 2020	The matter is still at the Magistrate Court No. 1 in Kenema. Fayia Amara Fayia told the MRCG that after the intervention of SLAJ, MRCG and MFWA by issuing a petition letter to His Excellency the President, Julius Maada Bio (through the Minister of Information and Communication), the ‘matter had died down and I have moved on.’ The court is yet to officially discharge the matter and I have not been called in connection with the matter.
25	Assault on Stanley Sahr Jimmy, Station Manager, <i>Wusum Radio FM 88.5</i> in Makeni, allegedly by five police officers at the Mena Police Station.	April 2020.	The police said four of the officers were seriously reprimanded in the presence of the complainant and that there was no case against one of the officers. The police said the matter has been closed. Mr. Jimmy confirmed to MRCG that the matter has been settled out of police.
26	Arrest and detention of Adeyemi Jackson of <i>Universal Radio</i> by police in Freetown after reportedly requesting an interview with Dr. Ibrahim Bundu, a medical doctor attached to the Connaught Hospital in Freetown, in relation to an alleged sexual assault matter.	21 May 2020	Police said the matter has been closed.
No	Cases Reported in Fifth Edition	Date of Attack/Arrest /Invitation	Status of the matter
27	The arrest and detention of Dr. Sylvia Blyden and Hussain Muckson Sesay by CID in Freetown, because of her alleged critical and controversial publications and postings on social media. She was later charged with 10 counts of various offences, ranging from seditious libel, to publication of false news, and defamatory libel, among others	1 May 2020	The matter rendered, “Nolle Prosequoi”, as the Government of Sierra Leone dropped all charges against them on the 16 November 2020

28	On the Police harassing and intimidating the Manager of <i>Lunsar Radio</i> , Mr. Alhaji Foday Labay to produce a recording of a radio program he hosted Prof Sheikh Umaru Kamara, the Community Relations Officer of Sierra Leone Mining Company in Lunsar on 23 April 2020 which led to a strike action calling for the Resignation or replacement of their Paramount Chief.	12 June 2020	The matter has been dismissed.
29	Supreme Court of Sierra Leone ordering the arrest of Lawyer Augustine Sorie-Sengbe Marrah for publishing information on social media about the ruling on the qualification of lawyers in holding certain offices, which have political undertones and allegedly had the tendency to put the legal profession into disrepute as his post was rated as demeaning to the apex court of the land.	28 October 2020	The matter ended when he complied with the Supreme Court ordering him to do a retraction of the said post in an article and write a letter of apology to the judiciary and the presiding judges; and also publish the said letter of apology in the front pages of two widely read newspapers in Sierra Leone.

No	Cases Reported in the Sixth Edition	Date of Attack/Arrest /Invitation	Status of Cases
30	The verbal attack, insult and intimidation of <i>BBC</i> reporter, and Former President of SLAJ Umaru Fofana in December 2020, from social media for his alleged “biased reports on political events in Sierra Leone” from people claiming to be members of the main opposition All Peoples Congress (APC) party.	December 2020	Umaru Fofana said he has decided to move on as he receives such threats frequently. “I find it very harassing and sort of bullying that they can dedicate so much time to attacking and seeking to intimidate me. And the fact that APC party doesn’t distance itself from it, let alone condone, it is irksome. Failing to condemn it is akin to condoning it.”
31	The arrest and detention of Emmanuel C. Thorli, a reporter for the <i>Night Watch Newspaper</i> on 7 February 2021, by the Sierra Leone Police for allegedly taking snapshots of the 7 February 2021 Jui demolition exercise carried out by the police at Jui Junction, Western Area Rural.	7 February 2021	Police said the matter has been closed.

32	The invitation and detention of the Editor-in-Chief and Proprietor, Joseph Turay and Ezekiel Dumbuya, News Editor of the <i>Public Review Newspaper</i> , on 22 March 2021, by officers of the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) in Freetown for more than five hours, over a matter involving land dispute in the Western Rural Area which police claimed that the newspaper had reported erroneously on.	22 March 2021	The police said none of them was detained. “They were only at CID for statement making; maybe, according to them, they see it as detention,” said the police. Police said the matter has been closed.
33	The arrest and detention of Hassan Gbessay Koroma, a <i>Concord Time Newspaper</i> journalist on 6 May 2021 by the Sierra Leone police for allegedly taking pictures of the Minister of Internal Affairs, David Panda Noah at the Siaka Stevens Street during an operation of him and police chasing commercial bike riders off the Central Business District (CBD) area, an operation that is said to clean the CBD of commercial motor bikes.	6 May 2021	The matter has been closed.
No Cases Reported in the Seventh Edition		Date of Attack/Arrest /Invitation	Status of Cases
34	The arrest and detention of Osman Hardy Jalloh of <i>TV-News24</i> for the second time by Magistrate Joseph Toby of Court No.2 in Kenema on 10 June 2021 for allegedly publishing a story relating to a matter between an Imam and a female chief in Blama.	10 June 2021	<p>The matter is still at the Human Rights Commission-Kenema for further investigation. The new Deputy Director, HRCSL Regional Service East, Tom Sandi, said the complainant was yet to sign and send the admissibility study to the Commission. The owner of TV- News24, who was the lead complainant on the matter, told MRCG that “Hardy is no longer affiliated with Tv-News24, so I can’t speak on his intentions on this matter.” Journalist Osman Hardy Jalloh told MRCG that “my former boss, owner of TV- News24, was pursuing the matter on my behalf; but I am no longer affiliated with the organization. I don’t have the finance to pursue the matter on my own. So, if my former boss said he was no longer pursuing it, then so be it.”</p> <p>Al Mansaray, in March 2023 posted on his channel that he had filed a legal paper against the United State Government through the U.S. State Department for failing to take appropriate action when he alerted them</p>

			about the abuse of power and unprofessional conduct of Magistrate Toby. However, there had been no new development on the said matter.
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35	The alleged verbal attack on BBC Sports Journalist Mohamed Fajah Barrie by the Adviser to Sierra Leone's Sports Minister, Alie Kadar for publishing a story on his Facebook timeline relating to Leone Stars players spending several hours at the Sierra Leone-Guinea border crossing point after they were refused entry into Guinea by the Guinean Immigration Authorities for lack of COVID-19 test results	13 June 2021	The Minister of Sports intervened, mediated and settled the matter between both parties.
36	The dismissal of Phebian Swill-Randall from the Sierra Leone Board of Entertainment and Investment by the Ambassador of Entertainment and Investment, Amara Dennis Turay commonly known as 'Kao De Nero' for a Facebook post she made on increment in the pump price of fuel in the country.	12 August 2021	Phebean Swill-Randall accepted her dismissal and did not apologize to be reinstated.
37	The arrest and detention of 10 of Star Radio's journalists for allegedly obstructing the Sierra Leone Police as they went to the media house to investigate alleged illegal electricity connection, a complaint made by the Electricity Distribution and Supply Authority (EDSA)	5 October 2021	Station Manager of Star Radio, Abdul Rahman Kamara told the MRCG that the matter had been discharged from court and their meter returned to them.
38	The intimidation of and death threat against Journalist Salieu Tejan Jalloh of Times Newspaper as a result of his publications exposing perpetrators behind the 'alleged attempted ritual murder of the six virgins.'	8 October 2021	The matter had been settled as the alleged anonymous callers contacted and apologized to the journalist.
39	The raiding of the Editor of Voice of Salone Newspaper , David Johnson on the grounds of 'insulting statements' via WhatsApp by the Sierra Leone Police, a complaint filed by Sydney Campbell Esq. On 29 November 2021, the matter came up at the Ross Road Magistrate Court No. 3. The editor was charged with 5 counts.	22 November 2021	The matter had ended as the journalist did a retraction and apologized to Sydney Campbell Esq.

No	Cases Reported in the Eighth Edition	Date	of Status of Cases
		attack/arrest	
		/Invitation	

40	The invitation of the National Chairman and Leader of the National Grand Coalition (NGC) Party, Dr. Dennis Bright to the Police Headquarters in Freetown by the Inspector General (IG) of Police due to an interview he granted Radio Democracy 98.1 FM in connection to the proposed 2021 Mid- term Census which the NGC and the Coalition of Progressive Political Parties (CoPP) objected to.	7 December 2021	He was released on the same day after a closed door interview in the presence of his lawyers for close to two hours.
41	The physical assault and detention of Ransford Wright, a journalist of the <i>AYV Media Empire</i> by the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) in Freetown.	13 December 2021	The journalist told MRCG that he received the sum of one million Leones (Nle one thousand Leones) from the police as compensation and he, through the advice from family members moved on. The Police said the matter had been resolved.
42	The verbal attack and insult against Asmaa James, station manager of <i>Radio Democracy 98.1 FM</i> by Alhaji Amadu Bah, a popular artist known as LAJ in a Facebook live video circulated on social media platforms as a result of a report aired by <i>Radio Democracy</i> on a bench warrant ordered by a magistrate for LAJ.	13 December 2021	The matter had ended after LAJ apologized to Asmaa James and the women of Sierra Leone as he expressed regrets and took full responsibility for his actions. On 22 December 2021, Asmaa James in a Facebook post said she had forgiven LAJ and let go of the matter after some moments of prayers and fasting.
43	The arrest and detention of the 2018 presidential aspirant for the Unity Party, Femi Claudius-Cole at the CID for an alleged negative comment she made on <i>Radio Democracy 98.1 FM</i> in relation to the 2021 mid-term housing and population census.	13 December 2021	The matter had ended as she was later released.
44	The verbal attack and threat to the entire editorial team of <i>Salone Compass Newspaper</i> from unknown members of the general public through phone calls.	14 December 2021	The proprietor, Ibrahim Alusine Conteh told the MRCG that the police did nothing towards the issue. He said SLAJ had also not done anything about the official complaints made to them. Police said the matter had been kept in view.

45	The arrest and detention of Pastor Septimus Yambasu for allegedly using obscene and insulting words against President Julius Maada Bio. He was charged for insulting conduct contrary to section 3 (1) of the Public Order Act of 1965 at the Pademba Road Magistrate Court No 1 in Freetown.	14 December 2021	The matter had been resolved and discharged from court and Pastor Yambasu's vehicle returned to him.
46	The arrest and detention of Ahmed Doyle Kamara popularly known as Tazmo Sliz, an entertainer in Makeni, Northern Sierra Leone for allegedly insulting and attacking the Fullah Ethnic group in a Facebook live video.	18 December 2021	On Monday 28 February 2022, Magistrate Sahr Kekura of Pademba Road Magistrate Court No 1 in Freetown discharged the matter from court after the complainant, Mohamed Salieu Jalloh on behalf of the Fullah Community accepted Tazmo's apology.
47	An official complaint by Hawanatu Konneh Fofanah at the CID in December 2021 against an anonymous individual who allegedly attacked her personality on Facebook	25 December 2021	Hawanatu said there was no headway on the matter and that she decided to move on with her life. Police said the matter had been kept in view.
48	The intimidation and humiliation of Amadu Lamrana Bah, Head of Digital Media of the <i>Africa Young Voices (AYV)</i> and the President of the Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU), by Airport officials allegedly acting on the orders of 'someone' at the Lungi International Airport as a result of a Facebook post by the journalist on series of difficulties they had encountered at the airport on their flight to Cameroon for the Africa Cup of Nations.	10 January 2022.	The matter had ended as the journalist later boarded the flight to Cameroon.
49	The arrest of Solomon Joe, a journalist working for <i>KISS 104 FM</i> in Bo by two officers from the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) in Freetown. They went to Bo and 'ordered the arrest' of the journalist for a broadcast concerning a transaction between two businessmen in Bo. He spent one night in police custody.	7 February 2022.	The journalist was released on 8 February 2022 with conditions. That he retracted his story and apologized to the businessman. " I am not going to retract the story because I stand by my story, " said Solomon.
50	The invitation and detention of the Acting Spokesperson for the main opposition All Peoples Congress Party (APC), Sidi Yayah Tunis at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in Freetown for alleged inciting utterances he made during an interview he granted on <i>Radio</i>	8 February 2022	The matter had ended as he was released from the CID.

	<i>Democracy 98.1 FM</i> on Monday 7 February 2022.		
51	The alleged physical assault of Alusine Antha, a journalist working for <i>Eagle Africa FM 91.3</i> by some youths in the Waterloo community in connection with a land saga he had gone to cover.	17 February 2022.	The matter was still in court.
52	SLAJ 17 March 2022 press alert calling on the Judiciary of Sierra Leone to allow media access to cover the opening session of a tribunal set up to investigate the suspended Auditor-General, Mrs. Lara Taylor-Pearce and her deputy after complaint from some journalists that they were denied entry to the proceedings.	17 March 2022	The matter had ended as both parties settled the issue.
53	A complaint from Independent Media Commission's Monitoring, Research and Projects Unit (MRPU) against <i>Justice FM Radio</i> in connection with its program, 'Justice Show' which was aired on 27 April 2022.	27 April 2022	The Independent Media Commission temporarily shut down the operations of <i>Justice FM Radio</i> in Freetown for 10 hours connected to an alleged unprofessional conduct, proprietorship and management issues that posed serious confusion to the operations and activities of the radio station.
54	The arrest and detention of Mr. Mohamed Khan, the Interim Chairman of Teachers Solidarity, by police just outside <i>AYV's</i> premise after Mr. Khan had appeared on their 'Wake Up Salone' television program as a guest; and the arrest and detention of Lahai Jah and Joseph C Kailie at the Bo West Police Station by police after allegedly convening a protest without police clearance to convene a meeting of "The Teachers Solidarity Movement".	26 and 28 April 2022 respectively	The matter had ended as they were released on the same day of arrest.
55	The arrest and incarceration of Mohamed Mansaray popularly known as 'Blacker' who reportedly suffers from mental illness and roams the streets of Freetown, and Kadiatu Yankaday a trader, at the Freetown Correctional Centers on 28 April 2022 for allegedly insulting President Bio.	28 April 2022	Presiding Magistrate Rashid Jalloh had discharged the matter from the Pademba Road Magistrate Court No. 4 as no evidence was proffered against the accused. Legal Link, a human rights organization, helped to secure the discharge verdict for 'Blacker'.

56	An alleged 'assassination attempt' on journalist Gibril Gottor and his family through a 'suffocating smell of petrol' in their house in Kambia, Northern Sierra Leone.	29 April 2022	Gibril Gottor told MRCG that "I am ok and I have taken over my security myself." In an interview with MRCG, the Police also maintained that they had not yet got a witness or evidence to substantiate the complaint made by Gibril to support their investigation into the matter, so the matter has been kept in view.
57	Alleged Cyber Stalking and Bullying on President Julius Maada Bio by former APC Minister of Transport and Aviation, Kemoh Sesay. He was alleged to have 'willfully and repeatedly' communicated directly to President Bio in a manner that he knows to be false, for the purpose of causing danger, insult, injury, hatred, criminal intimidation or needless anxiety to the president. He was charged with one count charge of Cyber Stalking and Bullying, contrary to Section 44 (2) (b) of the Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021.	9 May 2022	The matter was acquitted and discharged from court.
58	The arrest and detention of journalist Sorie Saio Sesay of Okentuhun <i>Radio FM 94.0</i> by police in Makeni, Northern Sierra Leone for allegedly "publishing false information" on social media about an incident between the SLP and commercial bike riders in Makeni.	26 May 2022	Sorie was released on bail on 31 May 2022 with the intervention of the SLAJ. He told the MRCG that even though the police had released him, the CID still has his phone. The Director of Crime Service at the CID headquarters in Freetown, AIG William Fayia Sellu, said that the Cyber Unit of the SLP was still investigating the matter.
No	Cases Reported in the Ninth Edition	Date of Attack/Arrest/Invitation	Status of Cases
59	The alleged physical assault of journalist Abdulai Gbla of <i>Gbla TV online</i> , by a Member of Parliament (MP), Hon. Abdul Muniru Lansana of Constituency 121, in the well of parliament.	28 June 2022	There is still no new development on the matter between journalist Abdulai Gbla of <i>Gbla TV Online</i> 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.
60	The physical assault of journalist Maada Jesse Jengo, a journalist working for <i>Voice of Peace and Development Radio FM 96.5 (VOPAD)</i> in Waterloo, Western Area Rural by ‘four officers of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF)’	2 July 2022	The Station Manager for <i>VOPAD radio</i> , Joseph Lamin, in an interview, 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 officers had apologised to the journalist and his family. In a press release issued on 8 July 2022, the Office of the Directorate of Defence, Public Relations and Information, Ministry of Defence (MOD) stated that “the MOD regrets the unfortunate occurrence which does not represent the RSLAF core values of good discipline and selfless service.”
61	The physical assault on the Managing Editor of <i>Night Watch Newspaper</i> , Emmanuel Christian Thorli by staff of Njala University, in Waterloo on 11 September 2022.	11 September 2022	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.
62	The arrest and detention of Ady Macauley Esq. former Anti-Corruption Commissioner at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).	6 October 2022	The matter was still at the Directorate of Public Prosecution awaiting legal advice.
63	Alimamay N’Jai Sesay on 17 October 2022 appeared before Magistrate Mark Ngegba of Pademba Road Magistrate Court No.1 in Freetown for allegedly sharing Abdul Will Kamara alias Adebayor’s audios on social media. He is charged with five counts of various offences in the Cyber Security and Crime Act No. 7 of 2021.	17 October 2022	Police alleged that the accused person between 1 July 2022 and 10 October 2022, through social media, sent insulting messages created by Abdul Will Kamara alias ‘Adebayor’ against the Government of Sierra Leone by means of computer system and network with intent to provoke the breach of peace. The matter is

			ongoing at the High Court.
64	The suspension of the Station Manager of <i>Radio Bintumani 93.1</i> FM by the Office of National Security (ONS) District Coordinator of Koinadugu, Mr Lawrence Kpangu, after a District Security Committee (DiSeC) meeting.	November 2022	IMC's Complaints Committee Secretary, Fatmata Kamara, told MRCG that they have concluded their ruling on the matter but are yet to publish their findings.
No	Cases Reported in the Tenth Edition	Date of Attack/Arrest/Invitation	Status of Cases
65	The online harassment of Amadu Lamarana Bah, a journalist working for the <i>Africa Young Voices television (AYV)</i> who also doubles as the President of the Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU), by the State House Communications Director, Myk Brewa.	19 December 2022	The matter had ended as the journalist moved on with his work and did not make any formal complaint to the police.
66	The arrest and detention of the Executive Director of Native Consortium and Research Centre, Edmond Abu Jnr., for twenty one (21) days at the Pademba Road Correctional Centre, in relation to social media publications and utterances he made on a radio regarding the court matter between his organization and Mobile Network Operators and the National Telecommunications Authority (NatCA).	10 January 2023	The activist was later released from the Pademba Road Correctional Centre in Freetown. On 26 February 2021, the Court granted an Order, restraining Mr. Abu from publication and comments on the case as it was ' <i>sub judice</i> '
67	The complaint by the Inspector General of Police, William F Sellu against Alex Lawrence Koroma, Producer <i>Radio Democracy 98.1 FM</i> , on a radio broadcast against his person on 'Good Morning Salone' Show Monday 22 nd May 2023 to the Independent Media Commission (IMC).	May 2023	The matter was not concluded as there was a plea by the radio station's producer to be given time to do a retraction. As at the time the Independent Media Commission was to publish its report, the matter was sub judice.
68	The alleged 'verbal threat' on journalist Gibril Gottor, a freelance journalist in Kambia by a police officer at Malal Police Checkpoint in Magbema Chiefdom, Kambia District, Northern Sierra Leone.	18 January 2023	The matter is yet to be concluded as the police still maintained that they have not yet got a witness or evidence to substantiate the complaint made by Gibril to aid their investigation of the matter. Gibril told MRCG that he had left Sierra Leone because he feels his life is no longer safe in the country.

69	The alleged attack and assault on Alie Tokowa, the Station Manager of <i>Fountain of Peace Radio (FOP)</i> in Moyamba District, Alie Tokowa, on 28 March 2023 at the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) office in Moyamba district by its supporters.	28 March 2023	Journalist Alie Tokowa maintained that the State had withdrawn the matter from the police, with no progress. Police had investigated the matter. State Counsel had withdrawn the file from the police and the matter was now with State Counsel.
No	Cases Reported in the Eleventh Edition	Date of Attack/Arrest/Invitation	Status of Cases
70	The attack on the <i>BBC</i> Correspondent in Sierra Leone, Umaru Fofana, by supporters of the All People's Congress (APC) party during the party's press conference at the New Brookfields Hotel in Freetown.	14 June 2023	Mr. Fofana told 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.
71	The complaint from Ibrahim Alusine Kamara, Managing Editor of <i>Salone Compass Newspaper</i> , stating that security officials 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.	25 June 2023	Mr. Kamara's lawyers, Marrah and Associates, had in 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. The journalist later 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.

72	Civil libel action by the Inspector General of Police, William F. Sellu, through his Lawyer, Demba Barrie, instituted against Radio Democracy FM 98.1 (First Defendant) and Producer Alex Lawrence Koroma (Second Defendant) on the 2nd June, 2023.	13 June 2023	The High Court in July 2023 ordered damages against the radio and Mr. Koroma, retraction of the broadcast, and apology to the Inspector General. The Court ordered the lawyer for the Inspector General “to file a separate Notice of Motion for assessment of damages. The matter is still in court.
73	The online “death threat” against journalist Musa S. Kamara, working for radio <i>Democracy 98.1 FM</i> from anonymous individuals.	20 August 2023	Musa told MRCG that he was yet to receive any update from the police regarding the investigation. Police said they were investigating the matter.
74	The matter of the Organizing Secretary of the opposition, APC Party in Bonthe District, Robert Kamara, was 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.	October 2023	The matter is still court
75	The attack on the office and staff of <i>Hope FM 93.3</i> in Makeni, Northern Sierra Leone, by a group of thugs allegedly sent by the landlord of the premise housing the radio.	23 October 2023.	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 is for the defendants to reinstate the radio’s tenancy and pay for the damaged pieces of office property.
76	The ruling delivered by Justice Momoh Jah Stevens on a matter between Kutubu Koroma, a resident in Maryland, USA and John Akar Foundation and Yada Williams Esq.	21 November 2023	Justice Momoh Jah Stevens 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. and to apologize for his libelous and defamatory publications on social media.