



## MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- DECEMBER 2023

The monthly ‘**Media Freedom Review**’ is a publication of the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) produced from the monitoring and reporting on freedom of expression and of the press, internet freedom, digital and online rights, and safety and security of journalists in Sierra Leone.

In December 2023, MRCG followed up on the attack on the office and staff of a radio in Makeni, Northern Sierra Leone and the court appearance of the Organising Secretary of the All Peoples Congress (APC) Party of Bonthe District. It also followed up on various issues including the High Court order for assessment of damages, online ‘death threat’ against a journalist, assault on a journalist, alleged destruction of property of a journalist in Freetown while on duty, alleged assault on a journalist in Moyamba district, alleged verbal threat against a journalist by a police officer, alleged physical assault of two journalists, alleged ‘assassination attempt’ on a journalist in Kambia district, the matter of former Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) boss lawyer Ady Macauley, the alleged physical assault on a journalist in Waterloo, the matter between a journalist and a magistrate in Pujehun and other media engagements.

In a follow up on the attack on the office and staff of *Hope FM 93.3* in Makeni, Northern Sierra Leone, by a group of thugs allegedly sent by the landlord of the premises housing the radio in October 2023, Mr Stanley Bangura, proprietor of the radio told MRCG that the defendants pleaded with him, Ahmed Sahid Nasrallah, President of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), and Umaru Fofana, for an out-of-court settlement of the matter. But he added that the defendants were yet to comply with the management’s demands, which are to reinstate the radio’s tenancy and to pay for the damaged pieces of office equipment. The matter is still in court.



On the judgement delivered by the High Court of Sierra Leone in July 2023 in a civil defamation matter between the Inspector General of Police (IGP) William F. Sellu and The Society for Radio Democracy FM 98.1 and Alex Lawrence Koroma, Producer *Radio Democracy 98.1 FM* concerning a defamatory broadcast on 23 May 2023, the matter commenced in November 2023 for assessment of damages, in which the High Court had ordered the defendant to present the cost of damages, which is yet to be done.

On the matter of the Organizing Secretary of the opposition, All Peoples Congress (APC) party in Bonthe District, Robert Kamara, who was arraigned before Principal Magistrate Lyoud Jusu of Court Number One in Bo on 4 October 2023, for allegedly insulting President Dr. Julius Maada Bio, Magistrate Jusu of Court Number One on 14 December 2023 found the accused guilty and sentenced him to eight (8) months in prison for three counts charge ranging from Cyber Bulling, contrary to Section 44 (1) (a) of the Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021, Sending False Message by Means of a Computer System, contrary to section 44(2) (a) of the Cyber Security Act 2021, to Sending Insulting Message by Means of Computer System, contrary to Section 44 (2) (b) of the Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021.



On the matter of journalist Musa S. Kamara, working for *Radio Democracy 98.1 FM*, who reportedly received online 'death threats' from anonymous individuals on 20 August 2023 following the exclusive interview with Ambassador Reimer, Musa told MRCG that he was yet to receive any update from the police regarding the investigation. Police said they were investigating the matter.

On the matter of the *BBC* Correspondent in Sierra Leone, Umaru Fofana, who was attacked by supporters of the All People's Congress (APC) party during the party's press conference at the New Brookfields Hotel in Freetown on 14 June 2023, Mr. Fofana told MRCG that he had not received any update from the APC Party on its said investigation. The National Publicity Secretary of the APC Party, Sidi Yayah Tunis, still maintained that the Party was investigating the matter and would update the public once they were done with the investigation.

On the complaint by Ibrahim Alusine Kamara, Managing Editor of *Salone Compass Newspaper*, against some security officials who allegedly assaulted him, endangered his life and vandalized his vehicle during an incident at the APC's press conference on 25 June 2023 at the party's headquarters in Freetown, the Police said that they had commenced investigation into the matter. The journalist told MRCG that he was invited by the police early in December 2023 to assist them with further investigation. **"I escorted them to the crime scene, where they took photos of the scene and obtained some statements from me"** said journalist Ibrahim Kamara.



There is still no new development on the alleged attack and assault on the Station Manager of *Fountain of Peace Radio (FOP)* in Moyamba District, Alie Tokowa that happened on 28 March 2023 at the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) office in Moyamba by the party's supporters on the instruction of the outgone District Council Chairman, Mr. Joseph Gbogba. Journalist Alie Tokowa maintained that the State had withdrawn the matter from the police, with no progress. Local Unit Commander of police in Moyamba, Assistant Superintendent, Franklyn Bawoh, told MRCG that the matter was with the State Counsel, Ballah Sesay.

There had been no progress in relation to the verbal threat made by a police officer and the 'assassination attempt' on Gibril Gottor, a freelance journalist in Kambia. In December 2023, the police maintained that they had still not yet got a witness or evidence to substantiate the complaint made by Gibril to aid their investigation of the matter.



The matter of the former Anti-Corruption Commissioner, Ady Macauley Esq, who was arrested and detained at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) for expressing his legal opinion on the 1965 Public Order Act (POA) in relation to freedom of assembly in October 2022, was still at the Directorate of Public Prosecution (DPP) awaiting legal advice.

There is still no new development on the matter between journalist Abdulai Gbla of *Gbla TV Online* and former Honorable Muniru Lansana. Mr. Gbla told MRCG that till date, he had neither received any update from SLAJ nor from Parliament on the matter. SLAJ President, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, said that SLAJ had

contacted the Clerk of Parliament on the matter, but he was yet to get any update from him on the status of the investigation.

On the matter between the Managing Editor of *Night Watch Newspaper*, Emmanuel C Thorli and the staff of Njala University, Mr Thorli, in December 2023 told MRCG that the matter was still at the police station under 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; a claim which Mr. Thorli denied. Police said investigations on the matter were still ongoing.

On the case of journalist Osman Hardy Jalloh at the Human Rights Commission for Sierra Leone (HRCSL) concerning a complaint against Magistrate Joseph Toby of Pujehun Magistrate Court (formerly of Magistrate Court Number 2 in Kenema), Al Mansaray, the owner of *TV-News24*, in March 2023, had posted on his channel that he had filed a legal paper against the United States Government through the U.S. State Department for failing to take appropriate action when he alerted them about the abuse of power and unprofessional conduct of Magistrate Toby. The MRCG is still monitoring the matter.

The matter of Alimamy N’Jai Sesay, who was charged with five counts of various offences in the Cyber Security and Crime Act No. 7 of 2021 for sharing Abdul Will Kamara, alias Adebayor’s audios on social media had been committed to the High Court for trial. The matter is still in court with the accused still in remand.

The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) on 21 December 2023 held an engagement with the new United Nation Development Program (UNDP) Resident Representative in Sierra Leone, Frederick Hans Ampiah and team at the UNDP office in Freetown. The essence of the engagement was to discuss and forge potential partnership between the two institutions and to strengthen the media in Sierra Leone. The UNDP Resident Representative, Frederick Hans Ampiah, expressed his desire to work with SLAJ and the media through supporting capacity building in line with specialized reporting, development journalism, and promoting media sustainability initiatives in the country. [Read full article here.](#)

The details of the cases and issues will be published in the MRCG Bi-Annual Press Freedom Report for December 2023 to May 2024.

The MRCG’s freedom of expression and of the press, internet freedom, digital and online rights, and safety and security of journalists in Sierra Leone initiative is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in the United States of America. The MRCG seeks to strengthen democratic dialogue and accountability, consolidate peace and ensure development through professional, independent and sustainable media, based on the right to freedom of expression and of the press.

**MRCG is the coordinating Secretariat for media reform, research and capacity building. It comprises Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Independent Radio Network (IRN), Guild of Editors (GoE), Women in the Media Sierra Leone (WIMSAL), Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU), Sport Writers Association of Sierra Leone (SWASAL), Mass Communication (Fourah Bay College), Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC), Independent Media Commission (IMC) and the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC).**