



MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- JANUARY 2024

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 January 2024, MRCG made follow up on the attack on the office and staff of a radio in Makeni, Northern Sierra Leone, the 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, Ady Macauley Esq., 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 they had reached an agreement to settle the matter out of court and the landlord had agreed to extend the tenancy of the radio. He, however, said that they were still negotiating the compensation for both the damage and the assault.



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 and the High Court had ordered the plaintiff to present the cost of damages, but that was still yet to be done.

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 his exclusive interview with United States (US) Ambassador Reimer, Musa told MRCG that he was still yet to receive any update from the police regarding the investigation. Police said they were still investigating the matter.



On the matter of the *BBC* Correspondent in Sierra Leone, Umaru Fofana, who was attacked by supporters of the All Peoples Congress (APC) party during the party’s press conference at the New Brookfields Hotel in Freetown on 14 June 2023, Mr. Fofana again told MRCG that he had not received any update from the APC Party on its said investigation since June 2023. The National Publicity Secretary of the APC Party, Sidi Yayah Tunis, still maintained that the Party was investigating the matter and would update Mr. Fofana and 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, Mr. Kamara, told MRCG that after he was invited by the police in December 2023 to assist them with further investigation, no new developments had been made and he had also not received any update from them.



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 which happened on 28 March 2023, at the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) office in Moyamba, by the party's supporters on the instruction of the outgoing District Council Chairman, Mr. Joseph Gbogba. Journalist 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 January 2024, 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.



There has been no progress on 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. The matter 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 severally 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 told MRCG that the matter was still at the police station under investigation with little or no progress and that he was still yet to honour the invitation from the police. The Acting Public Relations Officer for Njala University, Ayuba Koroma, still maintained that they had resolved the matter with the journalist; 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 and still in court with the accused still in remand. There had been one bail application when the matter initially commenced at the magistrate court, which was denied, and no bail application since it was committed to the High Court.

The MRCG’s Programs Officer, Augustine James, on 25 January 2024 officially presented the Draft National Media and Information Policy to the Ministry of Information and Civic Education (MoICE), at a stakeholder meeting convened by the ministry. The draft policy, which was reviewed in Bo in September 2023 by MRCG in partnership with MoICE, is geared towards enhancing commitment to media freedom and freedom of expression in the country and creating a platform for discourse on national issues which citizens can appreciate and utilise.

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).