



## MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- MARCH 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 March 2024, MRCG monitored the online intimidation of a journalist. It also followed up on various issues including the invitation and detention of two journalists in Freetown, 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, the alleged physical assault on a journalist in Waterloo, the matter between a journalist and a magistrate in Pujehun and other media engagements.



Amadu Lamrana Bah, a journalist working for the Africa Young Voices television (AYV) who also doubles as the President of the Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU) faced series of online threats, abuses and harassments against him for a post on his Facebook and X’s accounts titled ‘Guess who has added to his fleet of brand-new SUVs...’ where he also asked the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) about the various asset declaration categories the Commission has for government officials. The online threats, abuses and

harassments were mainly from people who identified themselves as supporters of the ruling SLPP government. In an interview, Mr. Bah told MRCG that he has no intention to report the matter to the police for investigation. The MRCG viewed such act as a serious setback to press freedom, which should not be allowed to exist in a country that has committed itself to ensuring media freedom. In a press briefing hosted by the Ministry of Information and Civic Education (MoICE), the Minister, Hon. Chernor Bah, joined the Sierra Leone Association of Journalist (SLAJ) to condemn the attack on the journalist by people believe to be supporters of the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP). [Facebook](#). “I strongly condemn attacks on the Fourth Estate and I sympathize with Amadu Lamrana Bah of AYV who faced attacks for performing his duties but I must emphasize the need for factual reporting and professionalism among journalists,” said the Minister. [Twitter](#).

In a follow up on the matter of journalist Alie Bai Kamara, station manager of *Citizen Radio 103.7* who was invited, detained and released after spending a night at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on 8 February 2024 in Freetown, in relation to the broadcast the radio did during the 26 November 2023 ‘failed attempted coup’, the journalist said the matter has been resolved at the CID. Police confirmed that the matter has been resolved.



On the matter of journalist Emmanuel C Thorli, Managing Editor of *Night Watch Newspaper*, who was arrested and detained at the CID in Freetown, allegedly for his news article titled ‘**We Cannot Wait For Bio To Continue In Power Until 2028**’, which was published on 21 February 2024, Mr. Thorli told MRCG that he was still reporting to the CID every day. Police said the matter was under investigation.

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 reportedly 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 caused and the assault.



On the online ‘death threat’ against Musa S. Kamara, a journalist working for radio *Democracy 98.1 FM*, the matter is still under police investigation. Musa still maintained that he was yet to hear from the police regarding their investigations. Police said they were still investigating the matter.

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, Demba Barrie, lawyer who represented the Inspector General of Police, told MRCG that *Radio Democracy FM 98.1* and the other parties involved had in March 2024 apologized to the plaintiff and confirmed that the matter had been dropped.

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 Secretary General of the APC, Lansana Dumbuya Esq., maintained that the matter was still under investigation.

On the alleged destruction of Ibrahim Alusine Kamara’s car, Editor of *Salone Compass Newspaper*, during a press conference at the APC Headquarters on 25 June 2023, the journalist told MRCG that he had not yet received any update from Independent Police Complaint Board (IPCB) on the matter. The investigating officer at IPCC, Hawalyn Kamara, again told MRCG that a joint force wearing balaclava was deployed the day the incident occurred and therefore their investigation into the matter had stalled due to lack of identification of the exact security officials that assaulted journalist Ibrahim Alusine Kamara. The journalist told MRCG that his next line of action was to soon take the leadership of both the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) to court.

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’s) 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, ASP Franklyn Bawoh, told MRCG that the matter was with the State Counsel, Ballah Sesay.



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.

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 he had reported the matter to the police and the police at the Waterloo Police Division had taken his statements and that of his witnesses. He said that the police had neither invited nor reached out to Njala University for the investigation. The Acting Public Relations Officer for Njala University, Ayuba Koroma said that the University had never received any police invitation regarding the matter, since it happened, but told MRCG that he was still convinced that they had settled the matter with the journalist. Police said the matter was still under 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. He was released, but the matter is still at the Directorate of Public Prosecution (DPP). The Director of Operations at CID, Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), Dr. John Martin Senesie, told MRCG that the

Directorate of Public Prosecution told them to put the investigation on hold.

There has been no progress on 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, and the matter is still at the High Court for trial 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 matter came up on 7 and 14 March 2024, but the accused was not present in the court on both days. The court Clerk, Felix Will, told MRCG that the accused must have been part of the detainees and prisoners who escaped during the November 26 'failed attempted coup' and had not turned himself in.

The MRCG with support from BBC Media Action Sierra Leone, on 20 March 2024 convened a follow up [engagement](#) with heads of various media organisations and associations in Sierra Leone on the implementation of the National Action Plan developed at the Post Media Viability and Investment Conference. At the meeting, three working groups were inaugurated and commenced work on specific recommendations for their groups. Subsequently, with support from BBC Media Action, MRCG on 25 and

26 March 2024 held a two-day [retreat](#) at Companero Resort, Freetown to monitor the progress made in the implementation of the National Action [Plan](#).

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).**