



## MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- MAY 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 the safety and security of journalists in Sierra Leone.

In May 2024, MRCG monitored the arrest warrant for the CEO of **Justice FM** and the verbal threat against a freelance journalist in Bo. It also followed up on various issues, including the invitation and detention of a journalist in Kenema, 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 physical assault of two journalists, 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.

The Criminal Investigations Department (CID) on 23 May 2024 issued a warrant of arrest for journalist Justice Boima, CEO of **Justice FM and TV**, for alleged offences relating to cyberstalking and bullying. The journalists told MRCG that his warrant of arrest was in connection with his [online publication](#) on alleged land grabbing by the Deputy Minister of Mines and Mineral Resources, Napoleon Koroma, and the Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Richard P.G. Robert, Head of Criminal Investigations Department. According to him, the Deputy Minister and the Head of CID conspired to grab the property of Honourable Hawa Rosaline Saffa, a Member of the Sixth Parliament of Sierra Leone. In an interview with the Deputy Minister, he denied all allegations made by the journalist, including the journalist’s several audios accusing him of land grabbing, and told MRCG that he was taking legal action against the journalist. ASP Amos Lansana, an officer attached to the Cybercrime Unit at the CID Headquarters and in charge of the matter, confirmed the warrant of arrest for the journalist and said that they were still searching for him to start a proper investigation of the matter.



Alie Badara, a freelance journalist in Bo on 28 May 2024, allegedly received verbal assaults and threatening remarks through a phone call from an unknown individual for a Facebook post he made on the excesses of the police in their fight against the drug called “Kush” and other illegal substances in Bo, Southern Sierra Leone. The journalist told MRCG that he had been investigating the allegations that the drugs that are being seized by the police officers in their raids, marked as exhibits, are being sold by some of the same officers. He stated that his Facebook publications ([post one](#) and [post two](#)) regarding the matter irritated some group of individuals for which they planned to attack him physically and set his house ablaze. Inspector Moses Tommy Ganda, a police officer attached to the Cyber Unit at the

Bo East Police Division, told MRCG that they received the journalist's complaint and started investigations.

In a follow-up on the matter of Patrick Kai, a journalist working for *Calabash newspaper* who was invited for questioning on 16 April 2024 at the Kenema police division in relation to an alleged cybercrime committed against Eastern Technical University (ETU), the journalist told MRCG that he had stopped reporting at the police station, but the matter was still under investigation. Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Detective Tamba David Alpha also said that the matter was still being investigated but that the journalist had been directed to cease reporting at the police station.

There is still no new development 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, again told MRCG that after reaching an out-of-court settlement in February 2024, they were still yet to be compensated for the damages. He said they would leave the premises of Mr. Alie Benson Conteh (the landlord) by the end of July 2024.

There is still no new development on the alleged attack and assault of the Station Manager of *Fountain of Peace Radio*, Alie Tokowa, in Moyamba District on 28 March 2023. It was alleged that supporters of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), on the instruction of Mr. Joseph Gbogba, the former District Council Chairman at the SLPP's party office in Moyamba, Southern Sierra Leone, attacked journalist Tokowa whilst on duty. Mr. Tokowa again maintained that since the State withdrew the matter from the police, no progress has been made on the matter. He said he had recently reached out to some human rights organizations to solicit help to take legal actions against his attackers but had not received any positive response from them. Local Unit Commander of Police in Moyamba, ASP Franklyn Bawoh, told MRCG that the matter was still with the State Counsel. As at the time of writing this report, the MRCG again made every effort to reach out to Ballah Sesay, the State Counsel in Moyamba, on the status of the matter, but there was no response.

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. States Department for failing to take appropriate action when he alerted them about the abuse of power and unprofessional conduct of Magistrate Toby. The Deputy Director of Regional Service of the Human Rights Commission (HRCSL) East, Vandi Saidu, still maintained that the chief complainant, Al Mansaray, owner of TV-News 24, had not responded to the Commission's email containing the incident summary form sent to him. Al Mansaray again told MRCG that he would no longer update any institution associated with SLAJ on the matter for personal reasons. The MRCG is still monitoring the matter.

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**', published on 21 February 2024, Mr. Thorli told MRCG that he had stopped reporting at the police station, as instructed by one of the officers in-charge of the matter. Police said the journalist had stopped reporting at the station, but the matter was still under investigation.

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 told MRCG that he wished there was a line of action for him to take, “but it’s an exercise in futility. I don’t think the attackers acted alone. So the party won’t take any action against them. Sadly, not even to publicly condemn the action. And I don’t trust the police either. The Secretary General of the APC, Lansana Dumbuya Esq., told MRCG that the matter was still being investigated.



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. The Acting Public Relations Officer for Njala University, Ayuba Koroma, still maintained 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 AYV Television on the 1965 Public Order Act (POA) 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 investigation was still on hold.



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, he told MRCG that he had not yet received any update from the Independent Police Complaint Board (IPCB) on the matter. The investigating officer at IPCB, Hawalyn Kamara, again told MRCG that a joint force ‘wearing balaclava’ was deployed to the scene 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 the journalist. The journalist told MRCG that he is still preparing to, through his lawyers, take the leadership of both the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) to court.

On the online ‘death threat’ against Musa S. Kamara, a journalist working for radio *Democracy 98.1 FM*, the matter was still under police investigation. Musa still maintained that he had not heard from the police regarding their investigations. Police said they were still investigating the matter.

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. The matter had come up on 7 and 14 March 2024, but the accused was not in court on both

days. The court Clerk, Felix Will, told MRCG that the accused might have been part of the detainees and prisoners who escaped during the November 26 'failed attempted coup' and had not turned himself in. He continued that the court has yet to schedule a hearing date because the Justice in charge of the matter was not in town.

On 3 May 2024, the President of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, made a clarion call to the Government and the general citizens to stop the online attack on journalists during the commemoration of World Press Freedom [Day](#). He reinforced the call towards the government and the security sector to ensure the safety and security of journalists in the country at all times. The MRCG, in a press release on World Press Freedom Day, called on the Government and other development partners to commit to the public interest media initiative as it was one of the recommendations of the Media Viability and Investment Conference held in April 2022.

The United States Ambassador to Sierra Leone, Ambassador Bryan David Hunt, and the Chief Executive Officer of Africell, Shadi Al-Gerjawi, launched a feasibility study, funded by the U.S. Government through the U.S. Trade and Development Agency, to expand internet access throughout Sierra Leone, alongside the Minister of Communication Technology and Innovation, Salima Bah.

The President of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) Ahmed Sahid Nasralla and the National Coordinator of the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG), Dr Francis Sowa from 15-17 May 2024, attended the 3rd African Media Convention ([AMC](#)) in Accra, Ghana. The annual AMC, which serves as a nexus for journalists, editors, policymakers, academics, civil society and media development partners to convene and deliberate on pertinent issues shaping the media landscape in AU Member States, was a collaborative effort supported by the African media stakeholders, to reflect on the fundamental role of journalism on the continent, celebrate the basic principles of press freedom, and deliberate on measures to safeguard media freedoms and promote access to information, the safety of journalists and media viability in African Union (AU) Member States.

In its 10th anniversary celebration of continuous advocacy for press freedom, the safety of journalists, media reforms, capacity building, and media developments in Sierra Leone, the MRCG, on 22 May 2024, launched two major reports on [Journalists' Welfare](#) and a [Compendium](#) of Media and Communication Laws and Regulations in [Sierra Leone](#). The event was graced by representatives from MRCG's local partners, media stakeholders, and government representatives and was climaxed with a video [documentary](#) on the journey of MRCG in their quest to transform the country's media landscape.

On 27 and 28 May 2024, the Media Foundation for West Africa, in partnership with the MRCG, engaged 50 female journalists and activists on [digital literacy and skills](#) in Bo. The training addressed issues relating to women's rights online and fact-checking and verification. The digital literacy training for women was aimed at reducing incidents of online harassment against women and increasing the use of digital tools by women and participation in online engagement.

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).**