



## MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- DECEMBER 2024

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

In December 2024, MRCG monitored the alleged threat against a journalist in Freetown. It also followed up on the dismissal and harassment of a journalist in Makeni, Northern Sierra Leone, the verbal threat against a freelance journalist in Bo, Southern Sierra Leone, the attack on the office and staff of a radio in Makeni, the assault on a journalist, alleged destruction of property of a journalist in Freetown while on duty, an alleged assault on a journalist in Moyamba 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, Independent Media Commission's (IMC) Complaint rulings and other media engagements.

The Editor of *Salone Times Newspaper*, Thomas Dickson, allegedly received threat of arrest from the Inspector General (IG) of Police, William Fayia Sellu, following a Facebook post criticizing the IG for allegedly revoking a court bail which the journalist described as the unnecessary use of "orders from above" to keep people in detention. The IG, in an interview denied all social media reports that the police were looking out for or harassing journalist Dickson. He said he had not given instructions to any officer to either invite, arrest, or harass Thomas Dixon adding that he had been advised by some senior journalists to make a formal complaint against the journalist to the IMC if he felt offended by his post. The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) issued a [press statement](#) on the matter, explain its intermediary role to ease the tension at the time. In some press releases, SLAJ, MRCG, and the Guild of Editors condemned the alleged threat and called on the SLP to address the issue amicably and ensure the journalist and his family's safety. In the same effort, SLAJ met with the IG on 31 December 2024 to resolve the matter. During the meeting, the alleged threats involving the IG and Dixon were reviewed, and the matter was amicably resolved. The Inspector General assured SLAJ that there was never any threat to the safety and security of Thomas Dixon, who had since returned home with his family after they went into hiding following concerns about his safety. Dixon, in turn, agreed to voluntarily remove his Facebook post referring to the IG as "arrogant." between the journalist and the IG.

On the matter of journalist Umu Thoronka, who was dismissed from work and allegedly attacked and harassed on social media regarding a TikTok [video](#) she posted about a contribution of a lady at the Presidential Town Hall Meeting in Freetown on 23 July 2024, there had been no further progress on the matter. The journalist told MRCG that no action had been taken by the concerned authorities on her matter and that she was tired of the delay. SLAJ told MRCG that it had transferred the matter to the Independent Media Commission for further investigations. The IMC said the matter is still under investigation.



On the matter of Alie Badara, a freelance journalist in Bo, who allegedly received verbal assaults and threatening remarks in May 2024 through a phone call from an unknown individual for a Facebook post he had done 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 maintained that since the matter was reported to the police and the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), there had been no progress from the police and the ACC on the matter. Moses Tommy Ganda, the police officer attached to the Cyber Unit at the Bo East Police Division, maintained that they were still investigating the matter. The investigated and forwarded the matter to the Inspector General of Police in September 2024 for his intervention, but actions are still yet to be taken. The journalist has vowed to remain relentless and would pursue the case until he gets the justice he deserves.

Concerning 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, there had been no further progress regarding payment of compensation to the radio. The proprietor still maintained that he was waiting on the landlord to settle the radio or further actions would be taken. The landlord is based in the USA, and at the time of writing this report, the MRCG could not get his side.

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 who was allegedly assaulted on 28 March 2023 by 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. MRCG could not get any update from the journalist as he was unresponsive to the follow-ups of MRCG on his matter. The Local Unit Commander of Police in Moyamba, ASP Franklyn Bawoh, told MRCG that the matter was still with the State Counsel.

On the case of journalist Osman Hardy Jalloh at the 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, said the chief complainant, Al Mansaray, owner of TV-News 24, has not responded to the Commission’s email containing the incident summary form sent to him. As such, the Commission cannot take any further action on the matter without the complainant's cooperation. The Chief complainant, Al Mansaray, has consistently refused to respond to the MRCG and SLAJ regarding the matter. The MRCG is still monitoring the matter.



On the matter of 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, police said the matter had been kept in view. On his other matter with the staff of Njala University, there has been no progress on the issue, and the journalist he was yet to take further

steps, which he had earlier promised, to bring his attackers to book. Police maintained that the matter had also been kept in view.

There is still no progress on the case of the former Anti-Corruption Commissioner, Ady Macauley Esq., who was arrested and detained at the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) in October 2022 for expressing his legal opinion on *AYV Television* on the 1965 Public Order Act (POA). He has been released, but the matter is still at the Directorate of Public Prosecution (DPP). MRCG continues to monitor the matter.



Concerning the alleged destruction of a car belonging to Ibrahim Alusine Kamara, the Editor of *Salone Compass Newspaper*, during a press conference at the APC Headquarters on 25 June 2023, there has been no progress by the Independent Police Complaint Board (IPCB) and the journalist's legal team on the matter. The journalist maintained that his lawyers were yet to complete the necessary documentation to take the leadership of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) to court. The Investigating Officer at IPCB, Hawalyn Kamara, had previously 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

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. The matter is still at the High Court for trial, with the accused 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 was yet to schedule a hearing date on the matter. MRCG continues to monitor the matter.

In a follow-up on the arrest warrant for journalist Justice Boima, CEO of *Justice FM and TV*, for alleged offenses relating to cyberstalking and bullying, Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Amos Lansana, an officer attached to the Cybercrime Unit at the CID Headquarters and in charge of the matter, maintained that the journalist had neither reported to the CID nor been arrested and that they were still searching for him to start their investigation of the matter.

The MRCG's initiative on freedom of expression and the press, internet freedom, digital and online rights, and the safety and security of journalists in Sierra Leone 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 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).