



## MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- JANUARY 2025

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 January 2025, MRCG monitored a matter involving a reality tv star, the murder of a journalist in Waterloo, the barring of a journalist from entering Sierra Leone's Parliament and the verbal threat against a journalist in Kono, Eastern Sierra Leone. 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, and the alleged physical assault on a journalist in Waterloo.

Hawa Madiana Hunt, a reality TV star who was charged to court on 8 January 2025, on two count charges in the Cyber Security and Crime Act No. 7. of 2021, for allegedly sending insulting messages via computer system against President Julius Maada Bio and First Lady Madam Fatima Bio on social media, was on diverse dates in January 2025 denied bail by Magistrate Santigie Bangura of Court No 2 at the Pademba Road Magistrate court in Freetown. The Magistrate dismissed the no-case submission filed by the defendant and on 22 January 2025 committed the matter to the High Court for further hearing.

The Speaker of Sierra Leone's Parliament, Rt. Hon. Segepoh Solomon Thomas, on 10 January 2024, barred journalist Melvin Tejan Mansaray, a member of the Sierra Leone Parliamentary Press Gallery (SLPPG), from accessing the precincts of parliament on allegations of 'malicious criticism.' The Hon. Speaker Thomas said that his ruling on barring the journalist will remain in force until Parliament takes the necessary actions against the journalist for insulting conduct against Members of Parliament (MPs). According to the journalist, he was barred from the precincts of parliament due to his [criticism](#) of a program regarding the procedure on which the former Auditor-General, Lara Taylor Pearce, was removed. The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and Sierra Leone Parliamentary Press Gallery (SLPPG), in their press releases dated 10 January 2025, called on Parliament to reconsider its decision. SLAJ, in a subsequent engagement with the Speaker of Parliament over the journalist's ban, agreed upon the following resolutions: Parliament to consider SLAJ's proposal to revoke the ban on the journalist, Parliament to submit a formal complaint to the Independent Media Commission (IMC) outlining their grievances against journalist Melvin Tejan, SLAJ to collaborate with Parliament to facilitate the election of an executive to manage the affairs of the SLPPG and provide regular training and capacity-building initiatives for journalists reporting on parliamentary activities.

Journalist Samuel Brima Mattia, Deputy Station Manager of *Voice of Peace and Development (VOPAD) radio FM 96.5*, was on 16 January 2025 reportedly murdered by the Station Manager, Joseph M Lamin, and others in Waterloo, Western Rural of Freetown. In a press release dated 16 January 2025, SLAJ condemned the killing of the journalist and called for a swift police investigation, urging the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) to undertake a comprehensive and prompt investigation surrounding the murder. The police received a report of the remains of a person whom family and community members subsequently identified as journalist

Samuel Brima Mattia. Upon police investigation and further inquiries, the Station Manager, Joseph M Lamin, confessed to orchestrating the killing of his deputy, Samuel Brima Mattia, because of disputes between them. Police have arrested the alleged hired killers and are helping with further investigation.

Journalist Tamba Steven Ngauja, on 26 January 2025, allegedly received a verbal threat from the Chairman of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) in Kono District, Sahrfeai Moiwa, following a comment he made regarding the unfulfilled promises by the ruling SLPP to provide basic amenities to the people of Kono during the 2023 general elections campaign in Kono. The journalist told MRCG that after he had commented on an event attended by First Lady Fatima Bio, the Chairman threatened to hire thugs to physically beat him, saying that the journalists in Kono were in the habit of disrespecting His Excellency the President, Julius Maada Bio. The journalist said he and his colleagues were preparing to file a report to the police concerning the threat. Chairman Sahrfeai Moiwa denied threatening to hire thugs to assault any journalist, including Ngauja.

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 the concerned authorities had taken no action 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 was still under investigation.



There is still no progress on the matter of Alie Badara, a freelance journalist, who reportedly 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” in Bo, Southern Sierra Leone, 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, the alleged attack and assault of the Station Manager of *Fountain of Peace Radio*, Alie Tokowa, in Moyamba District on 28 March 2023 by supporters of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), on the instruction of Joseph Gbogba, former District Council Chairman at the SLPP's party office in Moyamba, Southern Sierra Leone.

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).