

MEDIA REFORM COORDINATING GROUP-SIERRA LEONE
MRCG-SL
NEWSLETTER, 2024
FIRST EDITION



**MRCG-SL
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The MRCG restates that while the country is making progress in press freedom rankings, the general climate for freedom of expression for everybody should be guaranteed.



Statement from the National Coordinator, Dr. Francis Sowa

This first edition of the MRCG Newsletter covers January to June 2024. The MRCG continued implementing its activities on the projects Enhancing Press Freedom and Media Reforms and Engaging Media and Minorities to Act for Peacebuilding. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

During the reporting period, MRCG also implemented project activities for the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and the BBC Media Action for engagement on the implementation of the National Action Plan. The MRCG also engaged diplomatic missions on the activities of the National Fund. Under the reporting, we also celebrated our 10th anniversary as an organization with a reflection on key achievements since 2014.

To ensure that the media covered the elections well, MRCG established a media situation room (MSR) to monitor the country's media performance during the 2023 elections. The MSR relied on raw information from print and broadcast media content gathered by the MRCG media monitors in the regions and in Freetown. The information was processed and analyzed to provide real-time information on the media's performance in reporting on elections and conflict-sensitive issues.

The MRCG would like to thank its donors, NED, DDP, and MRGA, and partners, MFWA, for providing the funds used to implement its programs and activities. We continue to look forward to fulfilling the key priorities and objectives of the MRCG in its Media Development Strategy, which will end in 2024.

Thanks and appreciation to the Board and Secretariat staff for their support and commitment to the MRCG's work. We will continue improving on our gains as an institution.

"Investing in the media is for the good of our industry and our nation." Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, President of Sierra Leone Association of Journalist

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MRCG HELD A SESSION ON PRESS FREEDOM AT THE AMERICAN SHELF, FOURAH BAY COLLEGE



On 17 January 2024, MRCG's Head of Programs, Augustine James, engaged students from various departments of Fourah Bay College on its work on press freedom in Sierra Leone at the American Shelf, Fourah Bay College.

He discussed the establishment of the organization and all projects being implemented by MRCG. He mentioned the repeal of Part 5 of the Public Order Act of 1965 in 2020 as the organization's major impact, as it led the advocacy together with other media stakeholders for the repeal process. He also talked about the several capacity-building opportunities created for journalists and advocacy for media reforms in Sierra Leone by the MRCG. [Click here](#)

MRCG ENGAGED UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN MILE 91 AND IN BO.



As part of its public and outreach engagements, the MRCG on 8 and 9 February 2024 successfully engaged over 200 media and communications students from three diverse colleges in Mile 91 and in Bo. The Deans of faculties and Heads of departments from the three universities appreciated the MRCG for their timely engagements with their students, as the lessons learnt from these public engagements will help broaden the knowledge of their students and expose them to practical issues of media freedom, reforms, and capacity building in Sierra Leone. The

objective of the training was part of MRCG's aim to expose and introduce students to its works over the years. [Click here](#)

MRCG CELEBRATED WORLD RADIO DAY 2024



On 13 February 2024, MRCG together joined one of its member organizations, the Independent Radio Network (IRN), and all radio journalists across the country to celebrate World Radio Day on the theme "Radio: A Century of Informing, Entertaining and Educating."

MRCG noted that several studies, including its own study on Information Pollution Mapping in 2020, had shown that the radio is and will continue to be the most trusted source of information across the world. It also stated that in all of its capacity-building opportunities, radio journalists have always benefited a lot.

For over 100 years, radio has shaped the minds of hundreds of people across the world by being the most trusted source of information. [Click here](#)

MRCG ENGAGED HEADS OF VARIOUS MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS IN SIERRA LEONE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN



On 25 and 26 March 2024, the MRCG, with support from the BBC Media Action, convened a follow up engagement with heads of various media organizations in Sierra Leone on the Implementation of the National Media Action Plan, and held a two day retreat at the Companero Resort to monitor the progress made and the successes achieved in the implementation of the

National Action Plan, which comprise the recommendations from the first ever Media Viability and Investment Conference held in 2022. [Click here](#)

MRCG AND NaFPIM CONVENED ENGAGEMENTS WITH DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS AND KEY INSTITUTIONS IN SIERRA LEONE



With support from the International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM), the MRCG and the National Fund for Public Interest Media (NaFPIM) on 24 April 2024, engaged the diplomatic missions and key institutions in Sierra Leone on the operations of NaFPIM. Launched in June 2023, NaFPIM is targeted at fighting media poverty and supporting media independence, viability, and sustainability of independent media in the country. Setting up the Fund was one of seven recommendations that emerged from the various media stakeholders' consultations aimed at addressing the challenges encountered by media outlets in the country.

IFPIM's Regional Director for Africa and the Middle East, Mohamed Makmid Kamara, said 'We are willing and committed to continue supporting NaFPIM.'

The Director of Information at the Ministry of Information and Civic Education, Emmanuel Turay, also registered the government's commitment to supporting investment in the country's media industry. SLAJ President, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, highlighted the importance of the Fund and the critical role of a vibrant and independent media in a thriving democracy which he mentioned as the media play an important role in nurturing the sustenance of democracy.

The engagement was climaxed with a presentation made by the Fund's Manager, Dr. Francis Sowa. He highlighted the progress made in the implementation of NaFPIM and the other recommendations, adding that working groups have already been set to tackle different recommendations with clear guidelines. He assured the participants of the

Fund's accountability and transparency in the disbursement of funds, when they would have finally decided to do so. [Click here](#).

MRCG AND SLAJ COMMEMORATED WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY, 2024



At the commemoration of World Press Freedom Day on 3 May 2024, MRCG commended all journalists for contributing to the consolidation of the country's democracy and stood in solidarity with all pressmen and women who have faced both online and offline violations in their lines of work. Against this backdrop, MRCG joined the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and other media and press freedom organizations across the world to commemorate the day. [Click here](#)

MRCG AND MFWA TRAINED 50 FEMALE JOURNALISTS ON DIGITAL LITERACY SKILLS IN BO



On 28 and 29 May 2024, MRCG and Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) concluded a two-day intensive digital literacy and skills training for 50 female journalists from across Sierra Leone. The training was held in Bo, Southern Sierra Leone, with support from the Embassy of the Netherlands in Ghana.

MFWA's Program Director, Dora Mawutor, said that similar initiatives had been carried out in Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. She emphasized the importance of empowering women with digital skills, noting the opportunities the internet offers.

MRCG's National Coordinator, Dr. Francis Sowa, noted that the training had previously been held in Freetown for three consecutive years and was moved to Bo to reach female journalists in the provinces. He stressed the importance of continuous professional development and urged participants to take the sessions seriously, particularly the session regarding online harassment and intimidation.

The participants learnt about digital rights, women's online rights, gendered disinformation, social media privacy, and dealing with online abuse, fact-checking, and using online tools for verification. The training concluded with participants expressing appreciation for the facilitators and committing to sharing their new knowledge with other female journalists. [Click here](#)

MRCG CELEBRATED 10th ANNIVERSARY AND LAUNCHED A STUDY ON JOURNALISTS' WELFARE IN SIERRA LEONE



The MRCG celebrated its 10th anniversary with the launch of 'The Welfare of Journalists in Sierra Leone.' The report offers a comprehensive analysis of the working conditions and welfare standards experienced by journalists across the nation.

Dr. Francis Sowa, the National Coordinator for MRCG, reflected on the organization's ten (10) years long journey and thanked past coordinators, sponsors, partners, and dedicated staff members who have contributed significantly to MRCG's success.

The MRCG's ten-year documentary of key projects, work, and activities was showcased, displaying the organization's commitment to promoting ethical journalism, fostering press freedom, and its role in development.

SLAJ President Ahmed Sahid Nasrallah emphasized the need for fair compensation for journalists, while Mohamed Jaward Nyallay, Secretary General of Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU), reiterated the union's commitment to advocating for journalists' welfare.

Eastina Taylor, President of WIMSAL, emphasized the urgency of addressing challenges outlined in the report to safeguard press freedom and promote quality journalism in launching the report.

Khalil Kallon, Executive Secretary of the IMC, reiterated the Commission's commitment to journalists' welfare while acknowledging challenges in obtaining accurate information about their working conditions.

One of the report's recommendations was the call for media institutions to adhere to minimum wage standards, provide basic allowances, and fulfill social security obligations. It also urges the IMC to enforce legal provisions protecting journalists' welfare and emphasizes the importance of educating journalists about their rights under labor laws. [Click here](#)

MRCG-SL COMPLETED A TWO-DAY STAFF CAPACITY TRAINING ON DIGITAL SAFETY AND SECURITY



On 21 and 22 June 2024, the MRCG, with support from the Digital Defenders Partnership (DDP), completed a two-day staff capacity training on digital safety and security. The objective of the training was to capacitate staff with new ICT skills to aid them in their work and to also keep abreast with current trends on digital safety and security. The staff

learnt various new skills on the safety and security of online data protection. [Click here](#)

MRCG ORGANIZED SECOND INCLUSIVE & ANTI-CONFLICT JOURNALISM AWARDS



The MRCG, in collaboration with the Minority Rights Group (MRG), held the second Inclusive and Anti-conflict Journalism Award 2024 at the 50-50 Group Hall in Freetown on 2 July 2024. The call for applications for the award was launched in June 2024 to honor journalists working on inclusive and anti-conflict stories of the minorities in Sierra Leone.

The application received positive responses from journalists across the country for their efforts, knowledge, and outstanding performances in the course of the year. Three eminent evaluators developed and used the criteria they considered to be appropriate and shortlisted six (6) journalist awardees from the applications received, which were announced on the 30 of June 2024.

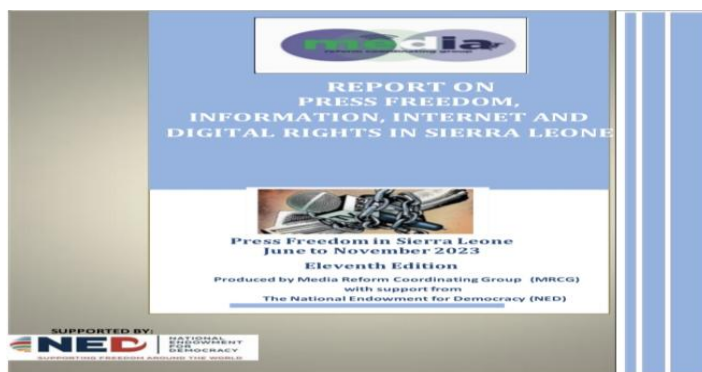
MRCG's National Coordinator, Dr. Francis Sowa, gave an overview of the EMMAP project, which aimed at empowering journalists and activists in Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Ghana to advocate for minority groups through storytelling. He thanked all participants and highlighted the legacy of the project upon its completion, pledging continued support and partnership to sustain its impact in Sierra Leone. He also said that the award marked the end of the EMMAP project and expressed his happiness that Sierra Leone emerged successfully in its implementation of the project.

Chairman of the Evaluation Committee Joshua Nicol thanked and appreciated the participants for their

tireless efforts to strengthen minority rights issues. He noted that the selection process of the awardees was very rigorous, considering the competitiveness and the high quality of the proposals, noting that the evaluators valued originality, depth of research, practical knowledge, and the overall impact in making a judgment.

[Click here](#)

MRCG PUBLISHED TWELFTH EDITION PRESS FREEDOM REPORT 2024



With support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), MRCG launched the Twelfth Edition Press Freedom Report 2024. The report examines the state of press freedom, access to information, internet freedom, and digital rights in Sierra Leone from December 2023 to June 2024, highlighting various incidents, including harassment, arrest, and assault of journalists, and provides a critical assessment of media performance in the country. It covers thematic areas such as freedom of expression, right to information, internet freedom, and the media's role in governance.

The report also discussed the positions of key stakeholders like the SLAJ and the government, and reviewed relevant media and communication laws. The findings were based on monitoring media content across radio, TV, newspapers, and social media, alongside interviews with affected individuals and institutional representatives. Key incidents include the attack on BBC correspondent Umaru Fofana by APC party supporters and the assault on Ibrahim Alusine Kamara of Salone Compass Newspaper. The report concludes with recommendations to improve the media landscape in Sierra Leone.