



# Table of Content

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction.....                        | 2  |
| Methodology .....                        | 3  |
| Incidents of Violations.....             | 4  |
| Countries and Incidents Violations ..... | 5  |
| Perpetrators of Violations.....          | 9  |
| Targets/Victims.....                     | 11 |
| Redress for Violations .....             | 12 |
| Some Key FOE Developments .....          | 13 |
| Conclusion.....                          | 14 |
| Recommendations.....                     | 15 |

## Executive Summary

The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) has been monitoring and reporting on violations of freedom of expression (FOE) rights in all 16 countries in West Africa. The monitoring reports highlight incidents of violation, redress of violations, introduction, review or reform of laws affecting freedom of expression rights and other positive developments. It also calls on the appropriate authorities to take action to forestall future violations.

Since 2014, the findings of these monitoring activities are collated and analysed into quarterly publications titled, the West Africa Free Expression Monitor.

This edition is a consolidation of the quarterly reports for 2018, January-December, 2018. The year recorded 152 violations ranging from killing to kidnapping, physical attacks, arrests and detentions and freedom of assembly violations. The figures show a slight deterioration of the freedom of expression environment compared to 2017 which recorded 140 violations.

Nigeria recorded 21 violations, the highest number, followed by Ghana (18), Guinea (18), Senegal (15), Niger (13). Benin, Burkina Faso and Guinea Bissau recorded two each. There was no recorded incident of violation in Cape Verde.

State actors made of security agents and state officials accounted for 83 violations recorded, individuals (26), political party affiliates (17), state officials (14), organised groups (8), regulators (4).

Besides the increase in the incidence of violations, impunity for such attacks on freedom of expression remains entrenched. This is rather disturbing for one of Africa's relatively tolerant regions where all countries have democratically-elected governments operating under national constitutions that guarantee freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly.

The monitoring also recorded some positive developments as the Lower Chamber of Parliament in Liberia approved a bill scrapping criminal libel from the country's statutes.

## Introduction

West Africa has witnessed significant improvements in press freedom and freedom of expression environment over the past two decades. This progress has been in tandem with the democratic transformation of the countries in the region from the military dictatorships of the 1960s - 1980s to multi-party democracy beginning in the 1990s.

The new dispensation has seen the proliferation of independent media outlets, thus helping to expand spaces for civil discourse. In line with these democratic changes, the constitutions of all the countries in West Africa guarantee press freedom. Consequently, media pluralism is the norm across the sub-region, with divergent political views largely tolerated as evidenced by a vibrant array of talk shows especially on radio.

Criminal libel has been repealed in most of the countries, but only partially in Guinea and The Gambia. Liberia, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Mali and Guinea Bissau remain the only countries whose laws allow criminal prosecution for defamation and libel. Liberia was on the verge of scrapping its criminal defamation laws at the time of producing this report while President Julius Maada Bio has made a firm commitment to doing same in Sierra Leone. All other countries in the sub-region have scrapped criminal proceedings, prison terms and detention for press offences.

Additionally, nine countries in the sub-region have given their citizens the legal right to access public information by adopting Right to Information laws. These countries are Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Togo, Benin, Niger and Guinea.

The progressive legal environment is however, not to be taken for granted as some formidable challenges to freedom of expression still persist in a number of countries. For example, Public Order and Cyber Crime laws are often used to restrict press freedom and freedom of expression generally. In Mauritania for example, a blasphemy law has been used to deter any serious public discourse on sensitive subjects about the Islamic religion, slavery and ethnic discrimination.

Other challenges to press freedom and freedom of expression range from physical assault on journalists, outspoken citizens and activists to arbitrary arrests, detentions, kidnapping, denial of the right to peaceful assembly and even killing. Critical media organisations are censored, shut down or handed excessive fines or damages in criminal or civil libel suits in an attempt to cripple them. Some governments try to break the will and the limbs of peaceful demonstrators by unleashing on them security forces who often use excessive force, sometimes leading to fatalities.

This report highlights the above threats to freedom of expression and of assembly as part of the MFWA's advocacy efforts to help push back the repression. It is also intended as a reference tool for advocacy by other Freedom of Expression (FOE) rights organisations.

A total of 152 violations in 11 categories were recorded during the year under review, and they were carried out by six types of perpetrators. Security agents accounted for 83 violations or nearly 55%; individuals (26); political party affiliates (17) state officials (14); organised groups (8); regulator (4).

Unfortunately, most of these violations have not been redressed, because of lack of political will, lack of solidarity among media organisations and journalists, among other factors.

## Methodology

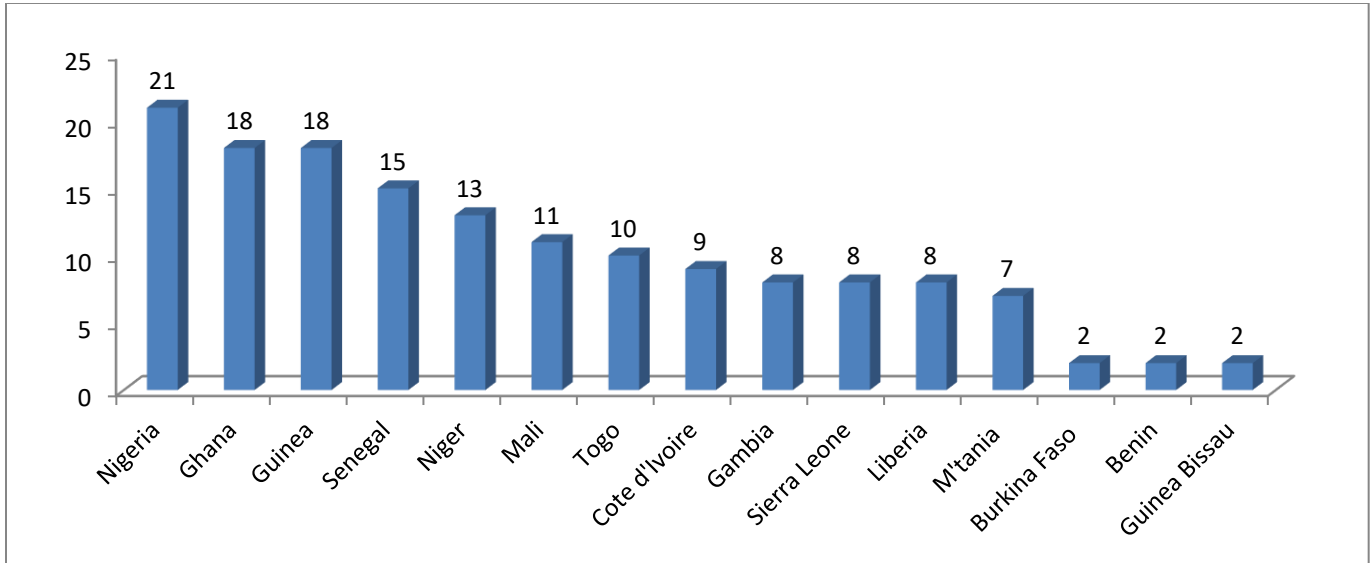
This report is a consolidated analysis of the four quarterly FOE Monitors published by the MFWA in 2018, which are based on reports from our correspondents in the various countries in West Africa. The reports from the correspondents are complemented by other reports on the FOE situation in the region published by fellow member organisations of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX).

This annual report presents findings under seven sections: incidents of violations recorded, countries and violations recorded, perpetrators, targets/victims of violations and redress for violations. It also highlights the issue of impunity as well as major developments within the FOE space. The report concludes with a number of recommendations to stakeholders urging them to address the FoE challenges in the region.

## Incidents of Violations

The violations were recorded in 15 out of the 16 countries in West Africa, with Cape Verde as the only exception. Nigeria recorded the highest number of violations (21) followed by Ghana (18), Guinea (18), Senegal (15), Niger (13), Mali (11), Togo (10), Cote d'Ivoire (9). The Gambia, Liberia and Sierra Leone recorded eight violations each. Mauritania recorded seven, with three countries – Benin, Burkina Faso and Guinea Bissau recording two violations each. The frequencies of incidents of the various violations are presented in **Figure 1** below:

## Countries and number of violations



## Countries and Incidents of Violations

Fifteen countries recorded incidents of freedom of expression violations. Physical attacks (61), arrests and detentions (34) and seizure/destruction of equipment (21) being the dominant type of violation.

A total of 152 violations were recorded from January - December, 2018. This represents a 7% increase compared to the 140 violations recorded in 2017. A breakdown of the violations is as follows: physical attacks (61), arbitrary arrests and detentions (34), seizure/destruction of equipment (21); threats (11) killing (8) shutdown (5); freedom of assembly violation (3); censorship (2), suspension (2) and kidnapping (1).

Twelve citizens were killed in eight separate incidents in 2018 as against 20 people killed in 2017, including four journalists in Nigeria. Despite the reduction in fatalities, the spate of killing of citizens, mostly during demonstrations, is still quite disturbing. Table 1 below gives further details about the types and number of violations recorded in each country.

## Countries and Types of Violations

| Country              | Types of Violation |          |                 |                   |                 |                     |                              |          |           |          |           |            |
|----------------------|--------------------|----------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------|------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|------------|
|                      | Killing            | Kidnap   | Physical Attack | Arrest/ Detention | Ban/ Suspension | Freedom of Assembly | Seizure/ Damage of equipment | Sentence | Shut-down | Censor   | Threat    | Total      |
| <i>Nigeria</i>       |                    |          | 10              | 7                 |                 |                     | 1                            |          | 1         |          | 2         | 21         |
| <i>Ghana</i>         |                    |          | 11              | 2                 |                 |                     | 1                            |          |           |          | 4         | 18         |
| <i>Guinea</i>        | 4                  |          | 7               | 2                 | 1               |                     | 2                            |          |           |          | 2         | 18         |
| <i>Senegal</i>       | 1                  |          | 7               | 3                 |                 |                     | 4                            |          |           |          |           | 15         |
| <i>Niger</i>         |                    |          | 2               | 6                 |                 | 1                   | 2                            | 1        | 1         |          |           | 13         |
| <i>Mali</i>          |                    | 1        | 5               | 2                 |                 |                     | 2                            |          | 1         |          |           | 11         |
| <i>Togo</i>          | 2                  |          | 3               | 2                 |                 | 2                   | 1                            |          |           |          |           | 10         |
| <i>Cote d'Ivoire</i> |                    |          | 4               | 3                 |                 |                     |                              | 2        |           |          |           | 9          |
| <i>The Gambia</i>    | 1                  |          | 3               | 2                 |                 |                     | 2                            |          |           |          |           | 8          |
| <i>Sierra Leone</i>  |                    |          | 5               | 1                 |                 |                     | 2                            |          |           |          |           | 8          |
| <i>Liberia</i>       |                    |          | 3               | 0                 |                 |                     | 1                            |          | 1         |          | 3         | 8          |
| <i>Mauritania</i>    |                    |          |                 | 2                 |                 |                     | 3                            |          |           | 2        |           | 7          |
| <i>Burkina Faso</i>  |                    |          |                 | 1                 |                 |                     |                              | 1        |           |          |           | 2          |
| <i>Benin</i>         |                    |          |                 |                   | 1               |                     |                              |          | 1         |          |           | 2          |
| <i>Guinea Bissau</i> |                    |          | 1               | 1                 |                 |                     |                              |          |           |          |           | 2          |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>8</b>           | <b>1</b> | <b>61</b>       | <b>34</b>         | <b>2</b>        | <b>3</b>            | <b>21</b>                    | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b>  | <b>2</b> | <b>11</b> | <b>152</b> |

As indicated in the above Table, there were cases of physical attacks and arrests/detentions in nearly every country featured in this report. Below are highlights of violations recorded during the year:

### Nigeria

Local authorities in Oyo State in South Western Nigeria on August 19, [demolished](#) the building housing Fresh FM, a radio station based in State capital Ibadan. The action was in spite of a pending suit by the owner, Yinka Ayefefe.

Nigeria, the federal broadcast regulator, Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC), closed down the Broadcasting Service of Ekiti State (BSES), a public radio and television service on July 14 for

violating the code on electoral reporting. The measure exceeded the sanction provided for by the law.

On July 21, bodyguards of Nigerian musician, David Adeleke, popularly known as Davido, assaulted Adekanmbi Damilola, CEO of the online entertainment channel *NoStory TV* during a concert in Ibadan. His equipment was also destroyed.

Disgruntled thugs suspected to be members of the ruling All Peoples Congress (APC) party on July 16 attacked journalists covering a press conference called by some members of the Working Committee of the party in Osun State.

Military officers in Nigeria [arrested](#) and detained for two days a reporter with *ThePunch* newspaper. Friday Olorok, during a swoop on residents of a community in Jos, Plateau State, on October 6, 2018.

Anayo Onukwugha, Port Harcourt correspondent of Leadership Newspaper was [assaulted](#) by a soldier on November 1, 2018, while covering the commissioning of a project at Port Harcourt International Airport.

## Ghana

There were series of attacks on journalists by political party affiliates and security forces in Ghana. On May 6, 2018 (two days after that country hosted the World Press Freedom Day), an activist of the ruling New Patriotic Party, Hajia Fati, attacked Ohemaa Sakyiwaa, a journalist with Adom FM at the party's headquarters in Accra.

A group of supporters of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), Ghana's main opposition party, on August 16 [attacked](#) a cameraman of Multimedia Broadcasting Group, Jonathan Adjei. The reporter was covering the commissioning of a polyclinic.

Emmanuel Sackey, a journalist with Accra-based Top FM, was also attacked at the NDC party's Youth and Women's Congress on October 27, 2018 by a vigilante linked to the party, "the Hawks."

A security guard of Ghana's former President, John Mahama, also [assaulted](#) Kwesi Parker Wilson, a reporter of Accra-based Joy FM on October 29, 2018 in Accra. The reporter was covering the former President's campaign to be elected his party's candidate for Ghana's presidential polls in 2020.

A cameraman of Accra-based GHOne TV, Reynold Dadzie, was [beaten and left unconscious](#) by some youth of Asawase, a suburb of Kumasi in the Ashanti region. The journalist was filming a violent demonstration by the youth on July 19, 2018.

On November 14, 2018, a journalist with Okwahu FM, Ebenezer Ofori Agyei, popularly known as Odiasempa, was arrested and kept in police custody for a total of seven days over a news report he had filed to his station. The report featured an audio recording in which drivers in the District accused the police officer of extortion.



A reporter for Accra-based Multimedia Group, Latif Idris, was [beaten](#) to near death by police officers on March 27. The journalist was covering a rowdy scene at the headquarters of the Ghana Police Service.

A pastor, Reverend Prophet Isaac Owusu Bempah, who was being interviewed on Accra-based Hot FM, on December 13, 2018, got upset by one of the questions posed by the host. He vandalized an apple computer and a microphone in a fit of rage.

## Guinea

Four incidents of attacks on demonstrators resulted in the killing of five citizens. In one incident, Alimou Diallo and Mamadou Bela Baldé, aged 26 and 30 respectively, were [killed](#) by anti-riot police on November 7.

A commercial motorcycle driver, Mamadou Cellou Diallo, also fell victim to fatal shooting by policemen dispersing a crowd of protesters on October 30.

In two separate incidents which occurred on September 5, 2018, two young men aged 17 and 25 were shot and killed after security forces used live ammunition to disperse the residents of the towns of Boke and Kamsar who were protesting against power and water cuts respectively.

There was also a series of attacks on journalists and media houses in Guinea which compelled the MFWA and its partner organization in Guinea, AGEPI, to issue a [statement](#) demanding a stop to the violations.

## Togo

Two people were [killed](#) when the security forces clashed with opposition protesters in Togo's capital, Lome on December 8, 2018. Another crackdown on demonstrators in Sokode on December 10 left two more [dead](#).

The fatal crackdown continued in The Gambia with the police [killing two people](#) in Faraba Village during protests on June 18 against destructive sand-winning by a private firm.

## Senegal

The country recorded the [death](#) of one student protester at the hands of the police. Senegal's slump into the ranks of the worst violators in 2018 cannot escape attention, given the country's impressive record of tolerance for press freedom and respect for other civil liberties. In fact Senegal recorded only a single violation in 2017; the passage of a [repressive](#) press law which increased fines and prison terms for press offences. The sharp deterioration in 2018 is all the more disturbing because the country is gearing up for elections in 2019, which requires a free space for the media and citizens to contribute to the pre-election discourse.

## Niger

There was a [wave of violations](#) in Niger on March 25 as the police went on the rampage against protesters and civil society activists. Security officers attacked and arrested 23 of the demonstrators and four prominent civil society leaders.

On the same day, the government closed down the privately-owned Labari Television station which had hosted a lawyer and critical civil society activist, Abdourahamane Lirwana. The General Manager of the station, Ali Idrissa, was also arrested.

Three more civil society activists [were arrested](#) and detained on April 15 while a court [sentenced](#) 18 of the detainees to various prison terms on July 24.

## Mali

There was the shutdown of a media house, Radio Renouveau, by a mayor, although the order was later reversed by the media regulatory authority. A soldier, who is also the Secretary of Mali's truth and Reconciliation Commission, brutalised a journalist for criticizing the work of the Commission.

## Liberia

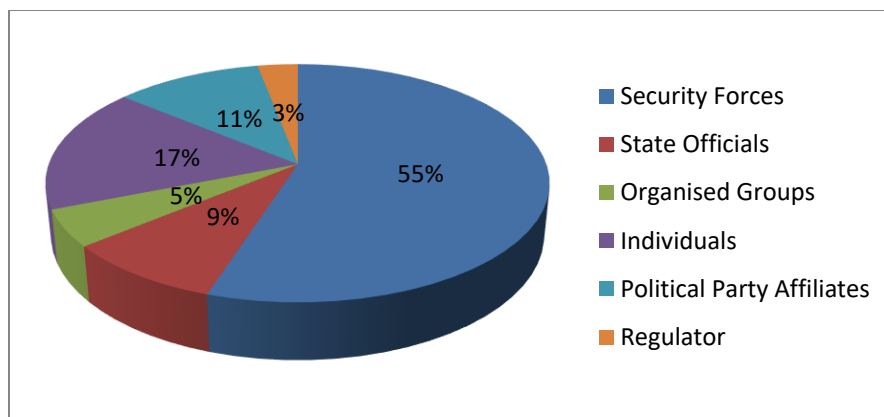
A Member of Parliament, Solomon George, while speaking on the floor of Parliament on November 19, 2018, accused two journalists, Musa M. B. Kenneh of Truth FM and Trojan Kiazulu of Fabric Radio of denigrating the house. He then threatened to call guards to flog the two reporters, who were covering the session.

On April 9, bailiffs also [locked up](#) the offices of the FrontPageAfrica newspaper and carried away its staff to a civil court in Monrovia. The action followed a suit against the paper by a group of people who complained that an advertisers' announcement defamed them.

On August 15, 2018, a lawyer, Charles Abdullai, [threatened](#) to kill Bettie Johnson-Mbayo, a journalist with the Frontpage Africa newspaper, as well as kidnap one of her children if she did not stop publishing stories about his client.

## Perpetrators of Violations

The 152 violations were carried out by six different types of perpetrators. Security agents were the worst culprits, carrying out 83 (55%) of the violations recorded during the year under review. Security agents were also responsible for all eight incidents brutal crackdowns on demonstrators (Guinea 4; Togo 2; The Gambia 1; Senegal 1) in which a total of 12 citizens were killed. The chart below (Figure 2) shows the number of violations carried out by each perpetrator.



As illustrated in the figure above, state officials and organized groups were next to security agents as leading violators. State officials and individuals also perpetrated a considerable number of violations. Table 2 indicates the number of violations recorded in each of the 14 countries cited.

**Table 2: Country and Types of Perpetrator**

| Country              | Perpetrators    |                 |                  |             |                            |           |       |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------|----------------------------|-----------|-------|
|                      | Security Forces | State Officials | Organised Groups | Individuals | Political Party Affiliates | Regulator | Total |
| <i>Nigeria</i>       | 11              | 1               | 2                | 4           | 2                          | 1         | 21    |
| <i>Ghana</i>         | 4               |                 | 2                | 7           | 5                          |           | 18    |
| <i>Guinea</i>        | 6               | 1               | 1                | 5           | 4                          | 1         | 18    |
| <i>Senegal</i>       | 13              |                 |                  | 2           |                            |           | 15    |
| <i>Niger</i>         | 7               | 4               |                  | 2           |                            |           | 13    |
| <i>Mali</i>          | 9               | 1               | 1                |             |                            |           | 11    |
| <i>Togo</i>          | 8               | 2               |                  |             |                            |           | 10    |
| <i>Cote d'Ivoire</i> | 5               | 1               |                  | 3           |                            |           | 9     |
| <i>Gambia</i>        | 7               |                 |                  |             | 1                          |           | 8     |
| <i>Sierra Leone</i>  | 1               |                 | 2                |             | 5                          |           | 8     |
| <i>Liberia</i>       | 3               | 2               |                  | 3           |                            |           | 8     |
| <i>Mauritania</i>    | 6               | 1               |                  |             |                            |           | 7     |
| <i>Burkina Faso</i>  | 1               | 1               |                  |             |                            |           | 2     |
| <i>Benin</i>         |                 |                 |                  |             |                            | 2         | 2     |
| <i>Guinea Bissau</i> | 2               |                 |                  |             |                            |           | 2     |
| <b>Total</b>         | 83              | 14              | 8                | 26          | 17                         | 4         | 152   |

As can be seen from the **Table 1** above, political party affiliates carried out 17 violations in five countries, which is quite disturbing.

## Targets /Victims of Violations

This section of the report looks at the direct targets and/or victims of the violations reported. It excludes mass victims whose number is not definite, such as the people affected by a ban on demonstrations.

A total of 286 victims made up of individuals and media organisations were affected by the 152 violations. The trend showed that the main targets of the violations were outspoken citizens, particularly anti-government demonstrators, journalists and other media workers like technicians. 160 citizens representing almost 56% of the victims were citizens, followed by 92 journalist victims representing 32%. This includes the 26 journalists assaulted by supporters of the APC party at a press conference in Osun State, Nigeria. Nineteen media houses constituting 6.6% and 15 activists (5%) make up the victims of the violations reported during the year 2018.

## Redress for Violations

The 152 violations contained in this report were largely carried out with impunity. Among the few exceptions was a court decision in Niger ordering the reopening of Laabari TV as well as the reopening of Radio Renouveau in Mali by the media regulator after the station was shut down by the mayor of Bamako.

A delegation of senior police officers from the headquarters visited the Multimedia Group and [apologized](#) for the police brutality meted out to journalist Latif Iddris. The visit on April 9 came almost two weeks after the reporter was assaulted by police officers on duty.

Similarly, the director of Public Relations of the Nigerian Police Service, Moshood Jimoh, called Taye Adeni of the Nigeria News Agency and [apologized](#) to her after she was assaulted together with Enemaku Ojochigbe of AIT (television) by some police personnel. However, the promised penal action against the assailants has not been carried out.

In Togo, the Minister for Security and Civil Protection, Yark Damehame, replaced the damaged camera of Aristide Teko Ahatefou, a journalist with the online news website, *Togo Actualités*. The journalist's camera was destroyed on April 25, 2018 when he was assaulted by a gendarme while he covering a demonstration.

There was another act of redress in Togo; the [release](#) of 45 out of 92 persons who had been detained for taking part in political demonstrations in Togo in 2017.

Following the fatal demonstration in The Gambia, The Inspector General of Police rendered an apology and tendered in his resignation.

The period under review also saw a Federal High Court in Abuja [awarding 10 Million](#) Naira (about US\$27,500) in damages to Jones Abiri on September 13. Abiri, the Editor-in-Chief of the *Weekly Source* newspaper, was arrested and detained in August 2016. During his arbitrary detention, press freedom and human rights groups in and outside Nigeria, made several interventions, including a [signed petition](#) calling on President Muhammadu Buhari to ensure the release of the detained journalist.

In Ghana, Ohemaa Sakyiwaa, a reporter at Adom FM in Accra who was assaulted by a member of Ghana's ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP), [cleared the first hurdle](#) in her legal battle for justice. Her assailant, had filed a counter-application seeking to nullify the journalist's suit, but the Human Rights Court in Accra dismissed the application and awarded the cost of GHC 600 (about US\$130) to Sakyiwaa on July 30, 2018.

While these few redress actions are welcome, they fall far short of expectation and raise questions about the commitment of governments in the region to tackle impunity. The lack of accountability for these abuses undermines quality and independent journalism which are the keystones of democratic and accountable governance.

## Impunity

As demonstrated by the above narrative, impunity remains entrenched in the sub-region. Sadly, this lack of accountability for freedom of expression violations induces a vicious cycle of further abuses and a fostering of an atmosphere of fear that leads to self-censorship.

When impunity for crimes against journalists is allowed to thrive, quality and critical, independent journalism are compromised. Consequently, the quest for inclusive, transparent and accountable governance is undermined.

Attacks on journalists and citizens exercising their right to peaceful assembly are often carried out by security agents who are the first point of call in the law enforcement system. Political party affiliates, particularly sympathisers of ruling governments, are also increasingly getting violent against critical journalists. Unfortunately, governments often demonstrate a lack of political will to punish these two groups of perpetrators.

If no action is taken to reverse the trend, journalists, critical citizens and civil society activists will be paralysed by a sense of siege, leading to widespread self-censorship.

To avoid such a scenario, urgent measures need to be taken to end the growing culture of impunity. What is needed now is a real commitment by governments to prioritise the protection of journalists and the redress of crimes against journalists dissenting voices, particularly by overzealous security officers.

## Other FOE Development

In what is a milestone development, the Gambia's Supreme Court [ruled](#) in May that the country's laws on sedition, false news and criminal defamation were unconstitutional. In another positive

development in May, the government paid compensations to the families of Ebrimah Manneh and Deyda Hydera, two of the high profile victims of Yahya Jammeh's reign of terror.

The media environment in Liberia was however [hostile](#) during the period under review. President George Weah himself got irritated by a question from a senior journalist, Jonathan Paye-Leyleh during a press conference and embarrassed the journalist. Jonathan Paye-Leyleh has since left the country for the United States, saying that he does not feel safe, although there are no reports of threats against him.

Still in Liberia, the Minister of Finance, Samuel Tweah, vowed that government's response to "mistruth and falsehood in the media" will be "weaponised." Liberia's media fraternity condemned the minister's as liable to incite the enthusiastic party youth, whom the minister was addressing, against critical journalists.

On December 25, 2018, Information Minister Lenn Eugene Nagbe, described the Press Union of Liberia as a "useless" organization in a radio interview. The minister, who is a member of the PUL, was suspended by the organisation. He was however pardoned after he met the executives of the PUL to render an apology.

Meanwhile, the trial is continuing of the suspected killers of Tyron Brown, a journalist with Super FM. Brown killed in the early hours of April 2017. Police investigations did not establish that the journalist was killed because of his work. The prime suspect claims he killed Brown in self-defence having suspected the victim of being an armed robber.

In a positive development, the lower chamber of Liberia's Parliament unanimously approved a bill to decriminalise libel on July 3, 2018.

There was a similar boost for the media in Sierra Leone with President Julius Maada Bio promising the [imminent repeal](#) of the criminal libel and sedition laws.

December 13, 2018, marked exactly 20 years since Burkinabe journalist, Norbert Zongo was assassinated. In what was a major step forward in the long struggle to secure justice for the slain journalist, a court in France authorised the [extradition](#) to Burkina Faso of the prime suspect, Francois Compaore, to face trial.

On April 3, 2018, the authorities in Niger expelled Baba Alpha of the Bonferey TV from the country after the journalist had served a year of his two-year sentence. He had been accused of using false documents to obtain his Nigerien nationality.

Over a period of two weeks beginning July 13, Niger's revenue authority, Direction Générale des Impôts, [closed down](#) nine media outlets for non-payment of accumulated taxes.

On June 18, 2018, the print media industry in Mauritania was crippled by a strike action by workers of the state printing press Imprimerie Nationale, which prints all newspapers in the country.

In Benin, the government listened to public concerns and [withdrew taxes](#) on electronic communications that could have significantly increased the cost of communication.

The region witnessed a major event on the FOE front when Ghana became the fourth country in Africa to host the global celebration of the World Press Freedom Day 2018.

On July 11, 2018, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), in collaboration with other media stakeholders, held a [Forum with the Ghana Police Service](#) on strengthening media-police relations for safety of journalists in Ghana. The forum produced a number of positive outcomes, including a decision by the Inspector General of Police (IGP) to include media relations in the curriculum of police training.

On January 23, 2018, the MFWA [petitioned](#) the Acting Chairman of the ruling New Patriotic Party over attacks on journalists by the parties security guards the attacks occurred in December 2017 at the party's headquarters.

## Conclusion

The 152 violations contained in this report and the impunity surrounding them reflect negatively on West Africa, which is held up as a model democratic region in Africa. The fact that 12 citizens were killed in crackdowns on demonstrators in makes the situation even more depressing.

These violations are in flagrant breach of the various legal safeguards for civil liberties including the right to freedom of expression and assembly adopted by all the 14 countries cited. These safeguards include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and the national Constitutions of the respective countries. Another point worth stressing is the fact that nearly all the violations were perpetrated with impunity.

The situation, therefore, calls for all stakeholders to continue to work together to address this threat to journalists' safety, press freedom, freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly. To this end, the MFWA make the following recommendations for improving the freedom of expression environment in the region.

## Recommendations

### To Media Organisations and Journalists

- Work with high standards and professionalism at all times.
- Media managers and owners must report and denounce violations against media organisations and journalists.
- Media managers must commit to using all legal means to ensure justice for media persons whose rights are violated in the line of duty.

### To Governments in West Africa

- Ensure that both state and non-state actors respect and protect FOE rights.
- Promote the safety and protection of journalists and media organisations.
- Ensure that security agents stop violating the rights of journalists and others exercising their right to freedom of expression. Specifically, police and security forces must cease committing acts of physical attacks, arbitrary arrests and detentions against journalists and dissenting voices.
- Train security agents to appreciate the work of the media in democratic societies and to work collaboratively with them.
- Order a stop to the use of live bullets to control demonstrators

### To ECOWAS

- Hold accountable culprits (both state and non-state actors) of freedom of expression violations through criminal, civil, administrative, or other sanctions to combat impunity.
- Encourage member states to “ensure respect for the rights of journalists” as stated in Article 66 of the ECOWAS Revised Treaty.
- Impose and enforce sanctions on Member States that recalcitrantly flout statutory obligations.

### To the African Commission Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information

- Engage the governments of Guinea, The Gambia, Senegal and Togo where a total of 12 people including four journalists were killed, to properly investigate the cases and ensure justice for the families of the victims.

### To the UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion

- Call on the governments in West Africa, particularly The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Guinea, where violations have been recurring, to respect and protect freedom of expression rights.
- Include more West African countries in fact-finding missions.