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April 12, 2021

Honourable Mohamed Rahman Swaray
Minister of Information of the Republic of Sierra Leone
Freetown
Sierra Leone

Honourable Minister,

Petition to Intervene in Case Against Journalist Fayia Amara Fayia

The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), West Africa's biggest freedom of expression and media development organisation and its partners, Sierra Leone Journalists' Association (SLAJ) and the Media Reform Coordinating Group – Sierra Leone (MRCG-SL) bring you our warmest compliments.

We are writing to respectfully seek your intervention to end the ongoing prosecution of journalist, Fayia Amara Fayia of the Standard Times newspaper.

On April 2, 2020, journalist Fayia Amara Fayia went to a suspected COVID-19 quarantine facility at Dama Road to report on activities there. However, he was reportedly denied permission to enter the facility, and alongside other journalists. Fayia, therefore, decided to take photos with his phone from a distance. At that point, one Mohamed Sesay, identified as the District Council Chairman, allegedly ordered him to stop taking the photographs and asked to meet him "in camera." As Fayia insisted that the Mr. Sesay should engage him in the open, he (Sesay) allegedly called one Major Fofanah to deal with him. They subsequently drove the journalist to the police station.

The journalist reportedly fell unconscious at the police station and was rushed to the Kenema Government Hospital where he was admitted and confined to a wheel chair, still under police custody. Upon his discharge from hospital four days later, Fayia was returned to the police station and detained for three days.

As the media fraternity in Sierra Leone condemned the attack and called for the culprits to be brought to book, the police rather arraigned the victim before a Magistrate's Court in Kenema. They charged the journalist with assault, disorderly conduct and obstruction of security officer's duties.

His trial commenced on April 9, 2020, and the Magistrate granted him bail on medical grounds. Fayia, who is also a student at Fourah Bay College in Freetown, has since had to travel from the capital to Kenema at least ten times following many adjournments. The case has considerably distracted him from work and studies, and the costs related to the trial have drained him financially.