

Annual State of Media Freedom in Sierra Leone

2022

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Legal Regime	4
Regulatory institutions.....	7
Key Developments	8
Improving Relations between the State and the Media.....	9
Violations.....	10
Types Of Violations	13
Perpetrators	14
Victims of violations.....	14
Status of redress	14
Conclusion.....	16
Recommendations	17
References:	18

Introduction

Sierra Leone's repeal¹ of its criminal libel law (Part V of the Public Order Act, 1965 (Act No. 46 of 1965) in 2020 remains an important major boost for press freedom and freedom of expression. In November of 2021, the country signed the Global Pledge on Media Freedom becoming the fifth country in Africa to commit to the values and principles of the Media Freedom Coalition. The country's ranking on the World Press Freedom Index improved from the 2021 position of 75 out of 180 countries to 46 out of 180 countries in 2022.

Sierra Leone adopted an Access to Information [Law](#)² in 2013 and followed it up a year later with the creation of the Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC) to ensure the effective implementation of the law. The Commission works to facilitate and monitor compliance of all public institutions with their obligations to disclose information in a proactive manner. The passing of the Access to Information Law was aimed at removing official obstructions to journalists and citizens' quest for information held by public institutions.

The positive legal environment was generally consolidated while relations between the government and the media Association also improved. However, there remain challenges that significantly erode a lot of shine from the fine improvements.

On November 2, 2021, SLAJ signed a [Memorandum](#)³ of Understanding with the national security administration in the country to commemorate the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. The MoU had crowned a round table dialogue on the theme "Maintaining Law and Order and the Safety and Security of Journalists." Just a month after the MoU signing, in December 2021 however, there was a report of the police physically assaulting and detaining a journalist.

Meanwhile, the country's telecommunications [law](#)⁴ remains a major bane of press freedom. Sections 30 and 65 of the law do not only empower the National Telecommunications Commission (NATCOM) to revoke the licenses of broadcast stations over default in the payment of operating license fees, but also to close down media houses, to some extent, at their discretion.

¹ <https://www.mfwa.org/major-boost-for-press-freedom-as-sierra-leone-scraps-criminal-libel-law-after-55-years/>

² <http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2013-02.pdf>

³ <https://www.mfwa.org/issues-in-focus/sierra-leone-media-security-agencies-sign-mou-to-enhance-cooperation-for-safety-of-journalists/>

⁴ <https://natcom.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/The-Telecommunications-Act-2006.pdf>

On June 23, 2021, Sierra Leone’s Parliament passed the Cyber Security and Crime [Act](#)⁵ into law accomplishing, probably, the most significant development for freedom of expression in the country for the year in terms of the prospects and challenges the law presents to journalists and citizens’ digital rights.

The challenge is underlined by the government’s failure to pass a Data Protection Law which is seen to be overdue after the passage of the Cyber Security and Crime Act in 2021. Also, the National Computer Security Incidence Response Coordination Centre responsible for managing cyber security incidents in Sierra Leone is yet to be established. And so, while the legal regime governing the press freedom and freedom of expression environment in Sierra Leone saw improvement between May 2021 and September 2022, there have also been gaps that need to be addressed.

Legal Regime

The body of laws governing the media in Sierra Leone are comprehensive and well-delineated. The raft includes the Independent Media Commission [Act of 2020](#)⁶, the Defamation Ordinance of 1961, the Media Code of Practice, and the Cyber Security and Crime Act of 2021.

All of these laws, of course, have the 1991 Constitution as bedrock. Act No 6 Sections 11 and 25 of the Constitution remain the main laws that guarantee freedom of expression and press freedom.

Section 11 of the 1991 constitution provides that ‘The press, radio and television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Constitution and highlight the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people.’

Section 25 (1) also provides that, ‘Except with his own consent, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of expression, and for the purpose of this section the said freedom includes the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference, freedom from interference with his correspondence, freedom to own, establish and operate any medium for the

⁵ <http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2020-Cybercrime%20Act.pdf>

⁶ https://www.parliament.gov.sl/uploads/bill_files/The%20Independent%20Media%20Commission%20Act,%202020.pdf

dissemination of information, ideas and opinions, and academic freedom in institutions of learning.’

The Independent Media Commission Act 2020 (Act No. 5 of 2020) is what regulates the media in Sierra Leone and is purposed to promote professionalism in media practice by individuals and corporate media institutions alike. The Act makes provision for the IMC to develop a Media Code of Practice, complete with Rules and Regulations that govern the Establishment and Operations of Print, Electronic Media and Advertising.

The Cyber Security and Crime Act, 2021 governs the cyberspace in Sierra Leone and is purposed as the regulatory framework for the prohibition, detection, prosecution and punishment of cybercrimes. It is also the law that provides for the protection of critical national information infrastructure.

The Civil Defamation Ordinance law of 1961 deals with civil defamation and has, since the repeal of the Criminal libel law in 2020, been the main deterrence against and the redresser of defamation.

The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) Code of Ethics provides guidelines that address ethical issues in journalism in the country.

Encapsulated within the constitutional provisions and titular laws governing freedom of expression and media in Sierra Leone are specific Acts and ordinances that serve as regulations. Below is a tabling of these Acts and ordinances.

Table 1.1: Specific Acts containing Media Laws and Regulations still in Force

No.	Specific Statutes on Media Laws/Regulation – Acts of Parliament	Year	Status of the law
1.	Undesirable Publications Cap 113 of the Laws of Sierra Leone, 1960	1961	In force
2.	Undesirable Advertisement Ordinance – Cap 114 in the Laws of Sierra Leone, 1960	1960	In force
3.	Defamation Ordinance – Act No. 32	1961	In force
4.	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation Act, 2009 (Act No. 1 of 2010).	2010	In force
5.	The Independent Media Commission (IMC) Act, 2020 (Act No. 5 of 2020)- It repealed and replaced the Independent Media Commission (IMC) Act, 2000 (Act No. 12 of 2000) as amended in 2006 & 2007	2020	In force
6	Cybersecurity and Crime Act 2021	2021	In force

Source (Sowa & Kapuwa, 2015, but updated regularly)⁷

Table 1.2: Other Statutes (Acts of Parliament)/common law relating to Media Regulation Still in Force

No.	Other Statutes (Acts of Parliament) with laws relating to media regulation	Year	Status of the law
1.	The Treason and State Offences Act of 1963	1963	In force
2.	Criminal Libel – The Public Order Act, 1965 (Act No 46 of 1965)	1965	Repealed
3.	Publication of False News – The Public Order Act	1965	Repealed
4.	Seditious Libel – The Public Order Act	1965	Repealed
5.	Constitution of Sierra Leone – Freedom of Expression and of the Press	1991	In force
6.	Constitution of Sierra Leone – Public Emergency Law	1991	In force, but under review
7.	Constitution of Sierra Leone – Law of Contempt of Parliament	1991	In force
8.	The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	1995	In force
9.	Pharmacy and Drugs Act	2001	In force
10.	The Telecommunications Act	2006	In force, but under review
11.	The Child Rights Act	2007	In force
12.	The Anti-Corruption Commission Act, 2008 (Act No 00 of 0000)	2008, as amended in 2019	In force
13.	The Copyright Act, 2011 (Act No 00 of 2011)	2011	In force
14.	The Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (Act No 00 of 2012)	2012 as amended in 2019	In force
15.	The Right to Access Information Act, 2013 (Act No 00 of 2013)	2013	In force
16.	Public Order (Amendment) Act, 2020 (Act. No 4 of 2020)	2020	In force
17.	The Law on Contempt of Court	Common Law	In force

Source (Sowa & Kapuwa, 2015; updated)

Table 1.3: Codes Dealing with Media Regulation Still in Force

⁷ Francis Sowa and Joseph Ebenda Kapuwa, Media Laws and Regulations: Review and Update on Sierra Leone’s Statutory and Self-Regulatory Models (2015).

No.	Codes	Year	Status of the law
1.	Code of Conduct of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists	2000 (reviewed in 2014/2015)	In force.
2.	The Independent Media Commission (IMC) Media Code of Practice	2007	In force, but under review.

Regulatory institutions

The list of institutions that regulate the general media space in Sierra Leone naturally starts with the judiciary to which the 1991 constitution vests all judicial powers. By nature, the constitution is the mother law providing for the regulatory environment for all areas of endeavour including the media space. Section 120 (2) of the 1991 Constitution provides that “The Judiciary shall have jurisdiction in all matters civil and criminal including matters relating to this Constitution, and such other matters in respect of which Parliament may by or under an Act of Parliament confer jurisdiction on the Judiciary.”

The Independent Media Commission (IMC) which is established by the IMC Act of 2000 (as repealed in 2006 and 2007) is mandated to register, license, monitor and enforce the Media Code of Practice. Per the constitution, it is mandated to, “(a) promote a free and pluralistic media industry throughout Sierra Leone; (b) ensure that media institutions achieve the highest level of efficiency in the provision of media services; (c) promote fair competition among media institutions and persons engaged in the provision of media services; (d) protect the interest of the public against exploitation or abuse by media institutions...”

The National Telecommunications Commission (NATCOM) has the responsibility to regulate electronic media – radio, television and Direct to Home (DTH) services as provided for by its mother Act, the Telecommunications Act, 2006 (Act No. 9 of 2006) as amended. Section 9 (2) of the said Act provides that the functions of the Commission include “(a) promote fair competition among telecommunications operators; ... (d) grant licenses for the operation of telecommunications networks; (e) manage, allocate, license and regulate the use of the radio frequency spectrum and the geostationary satellite orbits in Sierra Leone; (f) prepare and review a national frequency allocation plan.”

SLAJ was established in 1971 as an association for all journalists in Sierra Leone. Through its Disciplinary Committee which it established pursuant to Article 14 (3) of its constitution, it adjudicates matters of indiscipline and professional misconduct of its members to enhance and promote professionalism in media practice.

Sierra Leone has telecommunications [laws](#) that regulate electronic media in the country. Specifically, Sections 30 and 65 of the laws allow the media regulator, National Telecommunications Commission (NATCOM), to suspend or cancel broadcast licenses for various violations. The list of violations includes fraud, treason, or according to the law, “where the suspension or cancellation is in the public interest.”

Also, Section 65 requires broadcasters to obtain “a general or specific license” to operate a radio transmitter.

The net effect of the legal and regulatory environments, institutions and the work of these institutions, has been quite a mixture of both good and problematic. This is probably best reflected in the fact that SLAJ has both praised collaboration with the government and also complained about abuses against journalists and media houses.

Interestingly, the positives have also been punctuated with rather outlandish attacks on journalists over their work.

Key Developments

The repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965 in 2020 which removed criminal libel from the country’s statutes remains the most significant and highly touted development for press freedom in the past two years. President of the SLAJ, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, recently reiterated this in a meeting with the Minister of Information and Communications, Mohamed Rahman Swaray. According to him, this repeal has since served as a springboard for other positive developments for press freedom in Sierra Leone.

For 2021, the key highlight was the passage of the Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021 into law by the Parliament of Sierra Leone on June 23, 2021, making it a legal statutory instrument regulating the cyberspace in the country. Since the passage of the law, it has gone into effect with some people being arrested for violating it.

In one of its earliest applications, a local rap artiste, Alhaji Amadu Bah, popularly known as LAJ, was arrested over a Facebook post insulting journalist Asmaa James, of Freetown-based *Radio Democracy*. LAJ has seen the Facebook video describing the journalist as a “bastard child,” and threatening that “the next time I see you, I will piss on your face.”

Also, on May 26, 2022, the police detained Sorie Saio Sesay, a journalist with the privately owned *Okentubun Radio FM* based in Kamakwie, northern Sierra Leone

after accusing him of forwarding a comment about the alleged killing of a taxi driver by the Police. The police had seized Sesay's phone before detaining him. The journalist was later transferred to the police headquarters in Freetown and released on bail after six days in detention.

In another incident, the police arrested and detained Ibrahim Kemoh Sesay, a former Minister of Transport and Aviation, and presidential aspirant for the opposition All People's Congress (APC) party for infringing the cyber security law. A police statement on April 25, 2022, said the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Headquarters was investigating Sesay in connection with a video circulating on WhatsApp containing "*cyberstalking and cyberbullying to wit (Inciting and Insulting messages)* against the President of The Republic of Sierra Leone." On May 5, 2022, the former Minister was put before a court and remanded in custody at the Pademba Road male Correctional centre, until May 9, 2022.

Improving Relations between the State and the Media

The government of Sierra Leone has also been having close cooperation with the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) with the cooperation producing great achievements for press freedom and freedom of expression according to testimonies by SLAJ and the government. During a September 12, 2022 meeting between executives of SLAJ and Information and Communications Minister, Mohammed Swaray, SLAJ President, Ahmed Nasralla testified that "We have worked together with Government through your Ministry to achieve great things for the media in the last four years. I assure you that we will continue to work with the Government to achieve greater things for the media and at the same time hold you to account as part of our national duty."

In response, Minister Swaray said, "Our relationship is one that is made in heaven. None of the outstanding achievements you have outlined would have been possible if SLAJ has not had a collaborative engagement with the Government on matters related to media development in Sierra Leone. Together we are doing a fantastic job in spite of the numerous challenges".

Parts of the fruits of the cooperation include a USD50million World Bank grant that the Government of Sierra Leone is spending to execute a project to identify all national information infrastructure to declare critical and thus under the protection of the government.

The government has also committed to table a Data Protection Bill before Parliament. The Information and Communications Minister also reiterated that it is assisting SLAJ to acquire land for a national office and two regional offices.

From April 21 to April 22, 2022, Sierra Leone's Ministry of Information and Communications hosted a [Media Viability and Investment](#) Conference in Freetown with funding from the World Bank. The conference led to Sierra Leone being listed as one of 17 countries to benefit from the International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM). A Multi Stakeholders Advisory Board and a Technical Working Group have been set up in anticipation of a windfall which will be used to manage a local counterpart of the IFPIM.

Media stakeholders in Sierra Leone had a roundtable discussion with all the security agencies in the country. The meeting climaxed with the signing of an [MoU](#) to enhance cooperation and mutual understanding in order to promote the safety of journalists. The MOU was signed on November 3, 2021, after a frank and friendly dialogue between representatives from the media and the security services made up of the Police, the Military, the Fire Force, the Sierra Leone Correctional Services, and the Office of National security.

Violations

In spite of the generally good legal environment for freedom of expression and press in Sierra Leone and cordial relations between the government and the press union (SLAJ), the country has recorded a number freedom of expression and press freedom violations over the years. The violations have ranged from death threats, physical attacks, intimidations, arrests and detention of journalists, raids and forcible media closures.

On February 17, 2022, journalist Alusine Antha, was attacked by about 30 people in the western city of Waterloo, while he was covering a meeting over a land dispute. Antha, a presenter with the privately owned broadcaster Eagle Africa FM, had gone to cover a meeting over a dispute between members of the local Matala community and former Assistant Inspector-General of Police Christopher John. Matters got to a head and the former Police chief fled the scene, and when Antha attempted to leave on his motorcycle, a group of people accused him of being part of the ex-IGP's team, and pelted him with stones, hit him with sticks, and took away his motorbike, two phones, and a recorder.

In April 2022, the home of TV reporter, Gibril Gottor, was reportedly doused in petrol by unknown persons in an apparent attempt to burn him and his house down. It is believed that he became a target due to his investigation of a number of sensitive issues, including the alleged rape of a minor by a police officer and the extortion of fishermen by naval personnel. In the course of his investigations, Gibril also received threats from unknown persons. As a result, he was forced to stay away from his family in order not to endanger them.

On July 2, 2022, four Sierra Leonean soldiers [brutalised](#) broadcast journalist Maada Jessie Jengo on various parts of his body, and also slashed his face with a sharp object. According to reports, Jengo, senior producer and presenter with the privately owned Voice of Peace and Development (VOPAD) Radio 96.5 FM, was set upon on a road in Sierra Leone's western Waterloo city by his assailants. He was being taken to the office on a commercial motorbike when they (the rider and pillion) came across the soldiers' jeep, which was blocking the road. Pleas with the soldiers to move their vehicle were reportedly ignored and this led to an exchange of words with the soldiers. According to reports, one of the soldiers rushed at him and slapped him in the face, while insulting him as a "foolish journalist." Soon, three other soldiers joined in beating him. Later, the soldiers dragged the journalist into the back of their jeep and kept hitting him as they drove to a nearby gas station.

In August 2022, NATCOM suspended the licenses of privately owned broadcast networks, Star Radio and Star TV for over two weeks and denied workers access to the broadcasters' transmitters in Brookfields, a neighbourhood in western Freetown over the alleged nonrenewal of broadcast licenses.

In December 2021, rapper, Alhaji Amadu Bah, popularly known as LAJ, verbally attacked Asmaa James Kamara, the director of Freetown-based *Radio Democracy*, describing Asmaa as a "bastard child" and threatened that "the next time I see you I will piss on your face."

The threat and abuse were contained in a Facebook [video](#) that SLAJ posted on December 11, 2021, following Radio Democracy's extensive coverage of a case in which the artiste is standing trial for causing public disorder and assaulting a police officer. The case was last called on December 6, but the accused failed to turn up, which was also reported by the radio station.

On December 13, 2021, the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) allegedly assaulted and detained Ransford Wright, a camera operator of the AYV Media Empire. SLAJ explained that Wright had gone to the Central Police Station to get the other side of a story (an accident involving an SLP motorcycle) that he had filmed earlier. SLAJ condemned

the attack, with the SLP responding by saying in a December 14, 2021 statement that it was going to open an investigation into the attack.

In a letter dated December 14, 2021, the *Salone Compass* newspaper notified SLAJ and the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MCRG) of ‘scathing verbal attacks and threats to the entire editorial team of the newspaper from unknown members of the general public through phone calls.’ The threats, it said, had started on December 13, 2021, after they had published a story with the banner headline “POLICE PLANS MASSIVE ARRESTS” which was based on a press conference by the SLP on December 9, 2021, at the Police Headquarters. The newspaper says it was also accused of trying to incite a boycott of a mid-term census by anonymous callers some of whom identified themselves as police officers.

Between December 25 and December 30, 2021, blogger, Hawanatu Konneh Fofanah, reported cyber-attacks on Facebook which eventually degenerated into death threats.

On November 22, 2021, the Sierra Leone Police reportedly raided the office of the editor of Voice of Salone Newspaper, David Johnson, to arrest him. Johnson was accused of making ‘insulting statements’ against one Lawyer Sydney Campbell through WhatsApp. According to reports, the attempted arrest was in connection with a story on a land saga between the lawyer and Hassan Sankoh of Limba Corner-Rokel Community in Freetown.

Also in October 2021, The Times Newspaper editor, Salieu Tejan Jalloh, revealed he was the target of threats while the President had intended to order his arrest, “I was even forced to travel out of the country for my personal safety as the President was about to order my arrest after investigating a critical story involving one company. An international organization on the protection of journalists had to rescue me,” he has said. He added that because of its critical reporting, The Times Newspaper office has often been physically attacked. “We have been writing and exposing corruption, especially at Statehouse and the numerous Presidential oversea trips, and for this reason, our newspaper has always been threatened.”

On October 5, 2021, the Sierra Leone Police in Freetown arrested and detained ten (10) journalists of Star Radio’s Media One Center. The arrestees included the station manager, Abdurahman Kamara. They were rounded up after a complaint by the Electricity Distribution and Supply Authority (EDSA) on an alleged illegal electricity connection by Star Radio. However, Abdurahman Kamara denied the allegations. The SLP, through Deputy Media and Public Relations Officer of the Sierra Leone Police, Samuel Saio Conteh, explained that the police arrested the journalists for obstructing the investigation process. The proprietor of the media centre was also detained when he visited the station. SLAJ intervened and nine journalists were

granted bail on the same day. However, the proprietor was kept on in detention for three days. Later, the case was put before a court.

On August 12, 2021, Phebean Swill-Randall, a presenter with African Young Voices (AYV) TV, had her membership on the Sierra Leone Board of Entertainment and Investment terminated by the Ambassador of Entertainment and Investment, Amara Dennis Turay over a critical Facebook post. The journalist member had criticised increments in the pump price of fuel in the country. She was sacked from the Board after she refused the Chairman's order to delete what he considered as anti-government post.

On June 13, 2021, BBC Sports journalist, Mohammed Fajah Barrie was allegedly subjected to verbal attacks by the Advisor to Sports Minister, Alie Kader over a publication that players of Sierra Leone's national soccer team, Leone Stars, had been stranded for several hours at the border with Guinea over COVID-19 fears.

On June 10, 2021, TV-News 24 journalist, Osman Hardy Jalloh, was arrested in Kenema, Eastern Region and detained for the second time on the orders of Magistrate Joseph Toby of Court Number 2 in Kenema, after a follow-up article he had published on TV-News24 on a matter involving an Imam and a female chief in Blama. He spent five days at the Kenema Correctional Center.

On May 6, 2021, the Sierra Leone police arrested and detained Hassan Gbessay Koroma, a journalist with the Concord Times Newspaper, for allegedly taking pictures of the Minister of Internal Affairs, David Panda Noah on Siaka Stevens Street. The journalist took the pictures while the police were conducting an operation to clear commercial bike riders from the Central Business District (CBD) of Freetown. With the intervention of his editor, SLAJ General Secretary, Asmieu Bah, the journalist was released the same day.

Types Of Violations

Between 2021 and 2022, Sierra Leone recorded about twenty-two (20) press freedom violations. They included arrests and detentions (7), threats (6), physical attacks (4), suspension of media outlets (2), and censorship (1). It is worth mentioning that some incidents give rise to more than one violation and, sometimes, more than one victim.

Perpetrators

The perpetrators of the violations were in four (4) broad categories – Individuals, that is, members of the general public including anonymous persons; State/Public Officials, that is, government appointees; Media Regulatory Body, that is, NATCOM; and Security Agents, that is, the Sierra Leonean Police (SLP).

Security Agents accounted for the highest number of violations (8) mainly in the form of arrests and detentions, followed by Individuals (7). State/Public officials committed 3 violations while and Media Regulatory Bodies committed 2 violations.

Victims of violations

There were two types of victims of the violations – journalists, media outlets or broadcast networks.

The overwhelming majority of the victims of the violations were journalists/bloggers (25) with the rest being two media outlets.

Status of redress

The status of redress of the various cases are mixed. While some (mostly those perpetrated in 2022) are under investigation, many of those perpetrated in 2021 have been resolved. the resolutions are in the forms of the Police granting bail, SLAJ intervening and brokering peace between parties or complainants abandoning cases for personal reasons. Below are the various cases captured in the period and the statuses of redress.

- February 17, 2022, mob assault on Eagle Africa GFM journalist, Alusine Antha at Waterloo – Matter still under investigation by Police
- April 2022, dousing of the home of TV reporter, Gibril Gottor in petrol in apparent attempted arson – case still under investigation
- July 2, 2022, physical assault and wounding of broadcast journalist, Maada Jessie Jengo, by four Sierra Leonean soldiers – case still under investigation?
- August 2022 NATCOM suspension of licenses of privately owned broadcast networks, Star Radio and Star TV in August 2022 –
- September 11, 2022, assault of the Night Watch Newspaper, Emmanuel Christian Thorli, by some staff members of the Njala University (NU) in

Ebo Town – SLAJ condemned the attack and the case was reported to the police.

- December 13, 2021, alleged assault and detention of AYV Media cameraman, Ransford Wright by the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) – The matter is still under police investigation.
- December 14, 2021, letter by The Salone Compass Newspaper notifying SLAJ and the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MCRG) of ‘scathing verbal attacks and threats to the entire editorial team of the newspaper from unknown persons through phone calls – SLAJ still looking into the matter
- October 8, 2021, the revelation that The Times Newspaper editor, Salieu Tejan Jalloh, was the target of threats while the President had intended to order his arrest – The matter was resolved and the African Defenders Human Rights (ADHR) negotiated with the government to protect him and guarantee his safety.
- November 22, 2021, the raid of the office of the editor of Voice of Salone newspaper, David Johnson, by Sierra Leone Police in an attempt to arrest him – Sydney Campbel, complainant, had withdrawn the case.
- October 5, 2021, arrest and detention of ten (10) journalists of Star Radio’s Media One Center, including station manager, Abdurahman Kamara by the Sierra Leone police – Matter still in court.
- June 10, 2021, arrest of TV-News 24 journalist, Osman Hardy Jalloh, in Kenema, Eastern Region by Sierra Leone Police and subsequent detention on orders of Magistrate Joseph Toby of Court Number 2 in Kenema – Osman was released with the intervention of SLAJ. He would file a letter of complaint against Magistrate Joseph Toby to the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL). The HRCSL regional office east said it is doing an ‘admissibility opinion’ on the matter.
- May 6, 2021, arrest and detention of Concord Times newspaper journalist, Hassan Gbessay Koroma, for allegedly taking pictures of the Minister of Internal Affairs, David Panda Noah on Siaka Stevens Street – the case was closed with the intervention of SLAJ. The matter was discontinued. complainant, Asmaa James, on 22 December 2021, posted on her Facebook timelines that she had forgiven LAJ after prayers and fasting.
- June 13, 2021, verbal attacks on BBC Sports journalist, Mohammed Fajah Barrie by Advisor to Sports Minister, Alie Kader – Minister of Sports intervened and the matter was settled between the parties.
- August 12, 2021, the sacking of Phebean Swill-Randall, a presenter with African Young Voices (AYV) TV, from the Sierra Leone Board of Entertainment and Investment by Ambassador of Entertainment and Investment, Amara Dennis Turay over a Facebook post she made on increment in the pump price of fuel in the country – Phebean refused to apologize for the comment and accepted the sack.

- October 22, November 2, and November 17, 2021, cyber-attacks on Salone Times journalist, Thomas Joseph Dixon over Facebook posts on the alleged deportation of Sierra Leoneans from Germany, President Maada Bio's frequent travels and suspension of Auditor General – Dixon says he just ignored or blocked the attackers.
- December 25, and 30, 2021, cyber-attacks on blogger, Hawanatu Konneh Fofanah, on Facebook eventually degenerated into death threats - The matter is under Police investigation.

Conclusion

There has been some tangible consolidation of the legal and statutory environments in favour of press freedom and freedom of expression since the repeal of the criminal libel and seditious law in 2020, no doubt. Within the period, the passage of the Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021 into law stands out as the most significant achievement. Through this law, Sierra Leone has legislation to prohibit, prevent and punish cybercrimes, including bullying and threats that are often targeted at journalists.

Also, the country's signing of the Global Pledge on Media Freedom becoming the fifth country in Africa to do so is quite a flaunt of its espousal of the values of press freedom and freedom of expression.

There is also a fine collaboration between the government and the journalists' association of Sierra Leone as attested to by both the President of SLAJ and the Minister of Information and Communication. However, it would appear that the positives are only occurring at the policy level. This is because, despite the developments, outrageous attacks on journalists continue. And the worst of it is that the majority of the attacks are perpetrated by state agencies and agents especially the Sierra Leonean Police (SLP).

The worrying picture is that the central government is spawning laws and ratifying international conventions that are not being effectively culturalized into the general population so that a climate of legal formality rather than biting laws that truly instil press freedom and freedom of expression is what is developed. The situation where journalists are being arrested over stories they have done although criminal libel no longer exists in the country is appalling.

Recommendations

The government's intentions are well communicated in the efforts that have been put into strengthening laws that protect the freedom of expression. Also, the signing of the Global Pledge on media freedom further expresses the government's commendable outlook on press freedom. However, it is obvious that good policies have not been deterrent enough against rampant attacks on journalists and media practitioners.

This calls for a lot of civic education among the general population and security agents regarding the need to respect the law and refrain from violating press freedom.

Also, the perpetrators of abuses against journalists and media outlets must be made to face the full rigours of the law.

To this end, the government must strongly condemn attacks on journalists and the media and regularly affirm its commitment to protecting press freedom.

In line with the call SLAJ, the authorities should fast-track the passage of the Data Protection Law to complement the cyber security and crime act which was passed in 2021.

There is also the need to establish the National Computer Security Incidence Response Coordination Center which is supposed to manage cybersecurity incidents.

Given the novelty the cybercrime law and its abuse by individuals and the security agents to harass journalists, there should be a vigorous education and awareness creation about the law.

On the part of the media, all stakeholders must work to ensure better protection of the physical integrity and social wellbeing of journalists.

Media owners and managers must adopt and observe safety protocols and procedures for their media houses and take all measures to ensure justice whenever their employees are abused.

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