

# UNDER SIEGE

Annual Report of Attacks on Media Freedom and  
Freedom of Expression in Nigeria 2023



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Freedom of Expression in Nigeria 2023**



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The research, tracking, monitoring, and analysis of the incidents of attacks on the media and freedom of expression during the year under review, which are documented in this report were carried out by Mr. John Gbadamosi and Ms. Esther Adeniyi, Programme Officers at MRA, and Mr. Idowu Adewale, MRA's Communications Officer. MRA's legal team, made up of Ms. Obioma Okonkwo, Head of the Legal Department; as well as Mr. Monday Arunsi and Ms. Damilola Onabanjo, Legal Officers, provided additional inputs on the organization's legal interventions.

Mr. Ayode Longe, MRA's Deputy Executive Director, supervised the research, wrote the final report and coordinated the entire project.

The cover design for the publication as well as the layout were done by Ms. Bunmi Bamiselu.

Media Rights Agenda hereby acknowledges these various contributions and is grateful to the respective individuals.

## PREFACE

In any system of democratic governance, a free and independent media is essential for ensuring transparency, accountability, and the informed participation of the citizenry in governance. Within the framework of Nigeria's Constitution, the media is specifically tasked with upholding the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, has for many years been reputed to have a vibrant media scene that has long played a crucial role in shaping public discourse and holding power to account. However, the year 2023 has been marked by an alarming escalation in attacks on the media, threatening the very foundations of media freedom and democratic governance.

This report, "Under Siege: Annual Report on Attacks on Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression in Nigeria 2023," aims to provide details and a comprehensive analysis of the various forms of attacks on media freedom and freedom of expression in 2023, which also marked the beginning of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Administration.

From physical violence against journalists and other media personnel to threats, arbitrary arrests and detention, legal and regulatory pressures, as well as other forms of harassment and intimidation, among others, there has been a clear and steady decline in the freedom and ability of the media to perform its core constitutional duty of holding the government accountable to the people.

The threats to and attacks on media freedom during the year were multifaceted and deeply troubling. Our investigations highlight numerous incidents of harassment, intimidation, and violence against journalists, as well as seizures of and damage to work equipment, invasion of offices and homes of media professionals by law enforcement and security officials, and the increasing use of legal mechanisms to punish and stifle critical voices.

These tactics not only jeopardize the safety and professional integrity of media practitioners but also impede the public's right to information.

The findings presented here are the result of extensive field research and a thorough review of secondary data sources. Our objective is not only to

document and analyze these incidents but also to advocate for urgent and effective measures to protect media freedom in Nigeria.

We hope that this report will serve as a crucial resource for policymakers, international organizations, media practitioners, and civil society advocates for media freedom.

By shedding light on the current challenges and providing actionable recommendations, we hope to contribute to the ongoing efforts to safeguard media independence and ensure that the media can continue to fulfill its vital role in Nigerian society.

As we present this report, we call upon all stakeholders to reaffirm their commitment to upholding the principles of a free press and to take decisive actions against the encroachment on media freedoms. The preservation of a free and independent media is not only a fundamental right but a necessity for the health and progress of Nigeria's democracy.

**Edetaen Ojo**

Executive Director

Media Rights Agenda

February 2024



# CHAPTER ONE

## **1.0 Analysis of Attacks on Journalists in 2023**

### **1.1 Analysis by Types of Attacks**

In 2023, MRA documented 78 incidents of attacks on freedom of expression including attacks on journalists, media workers, and media outlets which suffered various forms of attacks on them and their safety in the course of carrying out their duties. Other citizens were also victims of attacks for expressing themselves online, especially on social media. The types of attacks on freedom of expression in 2023 included threats to lives, assault and battery, arrest and detention, harassment, restrictions, seizure and damage of work equipment, prevention from venues of events, invasion of offices, etc. None of these cases was investigated and no perpetrator was charged to court.

A predominant trend identified by MRA in the course of collating, documenting and analysing the suppression of freedom of expression in 2023 was the assault and battery of journalists. MRA documented 27 cases where journalists were physically attacked and beaten while carrying out their professional duties. This category constituted 34.61% of all incidents recorded by MRA throughout the year. Within this classification, journalists not only endured physical assaults but also experienced invasion of their privacy, with personal devices scrutinized and content deleted in an attempt to silence them and compromise their ability to report objectively.

A number of these attacks occurred specifically during 2023 general election coverage, suggesting a systematic targeting of the press during critical political events. Journalists faced violence, seizure and damage to their equipment while covering various stages of the electoral process, from



campaigning to vote counting.

In instances where law enforcement agents did not directly abuse their power by infringing on the rights of journalists, there were reported cases of inaction on the part of law enforcement agents when these journalists and media workers are attacked by hoodlums. Despite being attacked, journalists reported that in several incidents, law enforcement agents present at the scene of the assaults did not intervene but stood askance or looked the other way.

In nine cases, journalists reported threats to their lives by state agents and unidentified individuals. These incidents account for 11.53% of the documented attacks throughout the year. Among these cases, five involved threats from state actors, six were from security operatives and government officials. Perpetrators of these attacks are: politicians affiliated with the All Progressives Congress (APC), the Ebonyi State governor, Mr. David Umahi; a soldier identified as Lance Corporal Samson; Kaduna State governor-elect, Senator Uba Sani; and a member of the Nigerian Police. Three of the nine cases involved threats from unidentified persons, and one was the reported threat to a journalist by some Muslims over accusation of blasphemy.

Recorded incidents of journalists and citizens being arrested and detained for exercising their freedom of expression came to 18 in 2023, representing another 23.07% of all documented attacks on freedom of expression by MRA. In these cases, MRA documented instances where journalists, radio anchors, online publishers, and citizens were apprehended and detained for their professional work, social media posts, or perceived criticism of government officials and institutions.

MRA documented three instances of media outlet invasions, representing 3.84% of the recorded incidents of attacks on freedom of expression collated by MRA in 2023. In one of these cases, persons suspected to be Yoruba nation self-determination agitators armed with charms, amulets, guns, cutlasses and other dangerous weapons, forcibly entered the premises of Amuludun 99.1 FM, a radio station owned by the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) in Ibadan, Oyo State. The armed intruders took staff hostage and seized control of the station's live broadcast.

In two other incidents, hoodlums infiltrated the offices of Kogi State Broadcasting Corporation in Ochaja, Kogi state, and Rock 92.3 FM in

Jalingo, the capital of Taraba state. The invaders not only destroyed work equipment but carted away some valuables.

Journalists faced harassment and obstruction in 11 documented incidents, particularly during the conduct of the 2023 general elections, constituting 14.10% of all recorded attacks on journalists. In four instances, political thugs impeded journalists from covering the elections; another four cases involved journalists being obstructed from observing result collation by INEC officials and security operatives; in one incident, security operatives prevented journalists from covering the distribution of election materials; in another incident, the All-Progressives Congress Presidential Campaign Council (APC-PCC) expelled a photojournalist from an event, accusing him of engaging in espionage and live-streaming the a campaign event.

In one incident involving two broadcast outlets, the National Broadcasting Commission, Nigeria's broadcast sector regulator, imposed fines on the two media houses for alleged breach of the Nigerian Broadcasting Code. On February 3, 2023, NBC imposed fines of N2 million each on Arise Global Media Limited, owners of Arise News TV; and Continental Broadcasting Services Limited, owners of Television Continental (TVC) for allegedly violating the Broadcasting Code in their coverage of political campaigns. In separate letters to the Chief Executive Officers of Arise Global Media Limited and Continental Broadcasting Service Limited, the NBC accused them of violating the Broadcasting Code in their coverage of political campaigns and gave each of them two weeks within which to pay the N2 million penalty. These two instances of imposition of fines on media houses constitute 1.28% of the recorded instances of attacks on freedom of expression in 2023.

MRA documented three incidents of attacks on freedom of expression involving the courts. In one such occurrence, the court ordered the remand of two individuals for purportedly defaming the character of Hon. Egbedun Adewale, a newly elected speaker of the Osun State House of Assembly, through their social media posts. In another incident, the court remanded two journalists over an alleged defamatory report they published over four years earlier. The third recorded case involved the court sentencing a social media user to three years in prison for allegedly cyberstalking a Nollywood actress on the TikTok platform. These three incidents collectively account for 3.84%

of the reported attacks on freedom of expression documented in 2023.

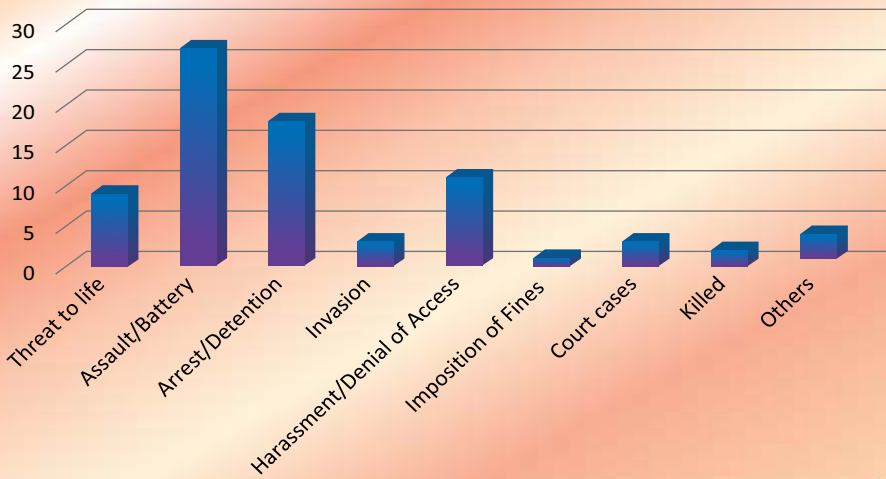
MRA documented two fatalities resulting from attacks on freedom of expression in 2023. In one incident, a man was fatally stoned for allegedly blaspheming the founder of Islam. In another case, a 27-year-old journalist and third-year student at Nassarawa State University, who had gone missing, was discovered dead after some days. These incidents account for 2.56% of the recorded attacks on freedom of expression in 2023.

Other cases documnted by MRA in the attacks on freedom of expression include: attacks on media houses by unidentified gunmen, an assassination attempt on a newspaper editor, summons of journalists by the police, and the expulsion of two student union leaders advocating for a protest against fee hikes which was later revoked by the university administration, recognizing an error in judgment. These together account for 5.12% of the total incidents of attacks on freedom of expression.

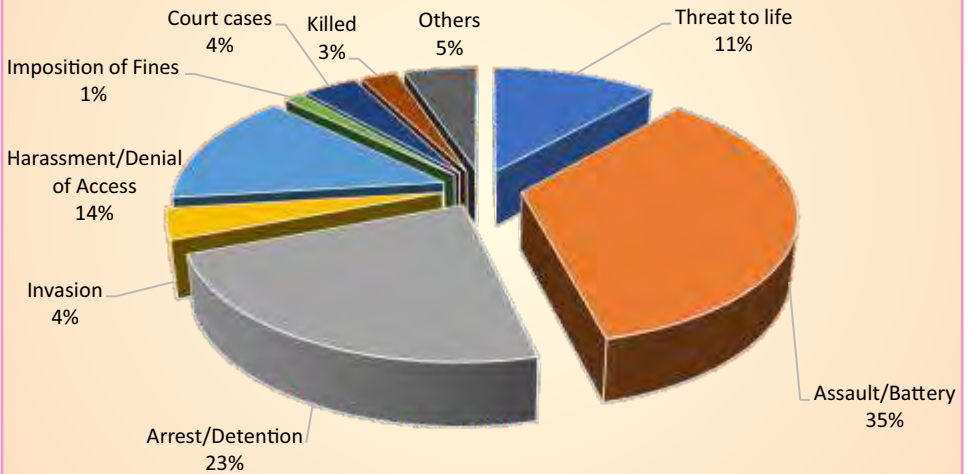
**Table Showing Frequency of Attacks on Freedom of Expression in 2023**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Types of Attacks</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1.	Threat to life	9	11.53%
2.	Assault/Battery	27	34.61%
3.	Arrest/Detention	18	23.07%
4.	Invasion	3	3.84%
5.	Harassment/Denial of Access	11	14.10%
6.	Imposition of Fines	1	1.28%
7.	Court cases	3	3.84%
8.	Killed	2	2.56%
9.	Others	4	5.12%
<b>Total</b>		<b>78</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Chart Showing Frequency of Attacks on Freedom of Expression in 2023**



**Chart Showing Percentage Frequency of Attacks on Freedom of Expression in 2023**



## 1.2 Analysis by Perpetrators of Attacks

From collated incidents of attacks on the media and freedom of expression, MRA identified eleven classes of perpetrators of these attacks; they include law enforcement and security agents, thugs and hoodlums, government officials, unknown armed men/assailants, judges, mobs, the National Broadcasting Commission, politicians, INEC officials, academic institution, as well as attacks from unidentified persons.

Law enforcement and security agents, including operatives of the Nigeria police, the Military, the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Interpol, Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), and Task Forces, were the major perpetrators of attacks on freedom of expression. According to MRA's records, these government entities were involved in 33 instances of violating freedom of expression.

Law enforcement agents were involved in various forms of aggression, including three cases of threats to the lives and safety of journalists, eight cases of assault/battery on journalists, and eighteen instances of arrest and detention. During the 2023 general elections, MRA documented three cases where journalists faced harassment and were denied access by security operatives to cover election processes.

Additionally, MRA recorded an incident where the Police IGP's Monitoring Unit summoned Mr. Petrus Obi of Everyday NewsNgr, Mr. Ignatius Okpara of the African Examiner, and Mr. Clinton Umeh of Journalists 101 from Enugu to Abuja. In terms of percentages, law enforcement and security agents were identified as the perpetrators in 42.86% of the documented incidents involving attacks on freedom of expression.

Political thugs and hoodlums were perpetrators in 17 of the recorded incidents of attacks on journalists and media houses. These attacks were particularly prevalent during the 2023 general elections. This means that in 22.08% of the total incidents of attacks on the media and freedom of expression, political thugs and hoodlums were perpetrators.

Government officials, both elected and appointed, encompassing governors, legislators, ministers, and commissioners, were implicated in five recorded incidents. The individuals involved in these attacks included Mr. David

Umahi, the Ebonyi State governor; Senator Uba Sani, Kaduna State governor-elect; personnel from the Ministry of Women Affairs; and Major General Bello Mohammed Abdullahi (Rtd), the Niger State Commissioner of Homeland Security. These categories of persons were involved in 6.49% of the recorded incidents involving attacks on freedom of expression.

Unknown armed men/assailants were also perpetrators in five incidents of attacks on journalists and media houses. This constitutes 6.49% of recorded attacks on freedom of expression.

MRA recorded five cases of journalists being threatened by unidentified persons. This category accounts for 6.49% of documented attacks.

The courts/judge were perpetrators in three recorded incidents, that is, 12.5% of attacks on freedom of expression recorded in 2023.

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) was a perpetrator in one instance. The Commission fined media houses for alleged breach of the broadcasting code. This means the NBC was a perpetrator of attacks on the media in 1.29% of the instances of attacks.

Mob attacks on the media happened three times which also accounts for 3.89% of the instances.

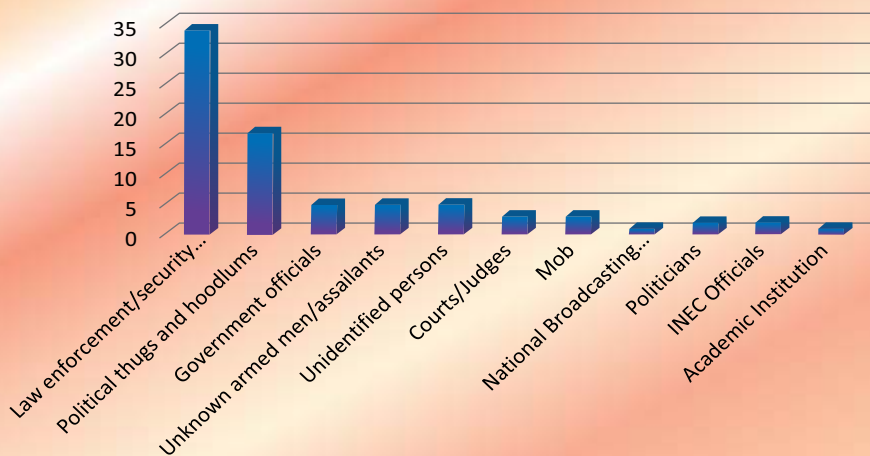
Politicians were perpetrators in two incidents or 2.59% of the instances of attacks.

MRA recorded one case of expulsion of two student union leaders by an academic institution, University of Abuja, for calling of protest over tuition fees increase. However, the expulsion was later revoked by the university administration, recognizing an error in judgment. This case accounts for 1.29% of documented cases of attacks on freedom of expression.

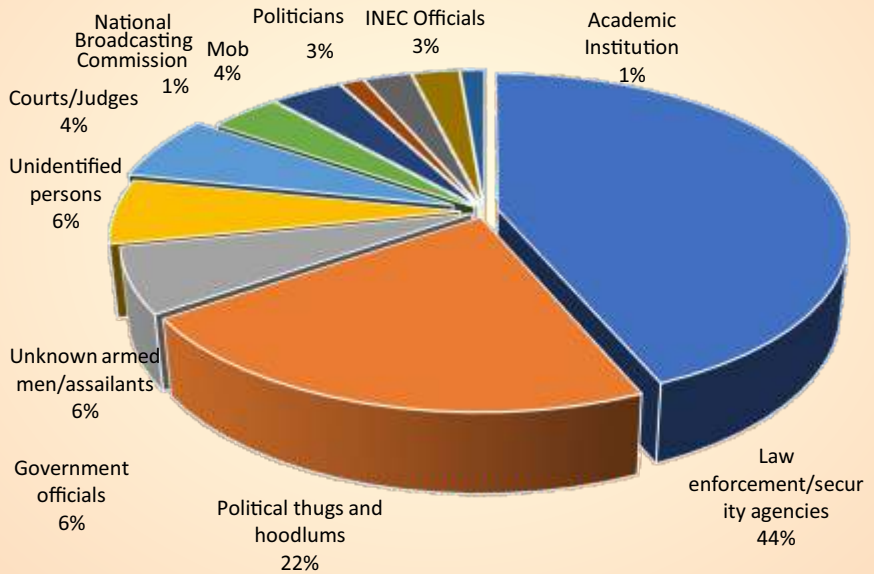
**Table Showing Perpetrators of Attacks on Freedom of Expression by Different Perpetrators in 2023**

S/N	Perpetrators	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Law enforcement/security agencies	34	43.58%
2.	Political thugs and hoodlums	17	21.79%
3.	Government officials	5	6.41%
4.	Unknown armed men/assailants	5	6.41%
5.	Unidentified persons	5	6.41%
6.	Courts/Judges	3	3.84%
7.	Mob	3	3.84%
8.	National Broadcasting Commission	1	1.28%
9.	Politicians	2	2.56%
10.	INEC Officials	2	2.56%
11.	Academic Institution	1	1.28%
<b>Total</b>		<b>78</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Chart Showing Perpetrators of Attacks on Freedom of Expression by different perpetrators in 2023**



**Chart Showing Percentage of Perpetrators of Attacks on Freedom of Expression in 2023**







## CHAPTER TWO

### **2.0 Conclusion and Recommendations on Safety of Journalists**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

On May 29, 2023, President Ahmed Bola Tinubu was sworn in as President of a democratic Nigeria making him the fifth democratically elected president in the current 24 years of unbroken democratic dispensation. In spite of Nigeria running a democratic government, journalists and citizens still face breaches of their right to freedom of expression from a variety of perpetrators and the government does not seem to care about upholding the Nigerian Constitution to protect this right.

Freedom of expression as a cornerstone of democracy is enshrined in Section 39 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution (as amended) as a fundamental human right. However, the right of the media and citizens to freely express themselves both offline and online was greatly tested as the new government of President Tinubu subjected citizens to various forms of attacks in 2023.

Attacks on the right to freedom of expression have been sustained and seem to be worsening in this regime as MRA's monitoring, collation, and documentation of attacks on freedom of expression demonstrated this trend.

The safety of journalists has since 2006 caught the attention of inter-governmental bodies including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and the UN Human Rights Council etc that they have identified

it as a challenge and consistently advocated for the safety of journalists globally.

There is the need to ensure the safety of journalists and this demands a multi-faceted approach. The Nigerian Government needs to take concrete actions to uphold press freedom and freedom of expression by ensuring accountability for those who target journalists. The United Nations systems have laid the foundation for the safety of journalists and government needs to build on and strengthen them.

Equally crucial are the proactive steps journalists take to safeguard their security both offline and online. This encompasses measures such as environmental scanning to assess potential risks in their reporting environments as well as employing encrypted communication.

The protection of journalists is not merely a matter of personal safety; it is integral to the vitality of an open society. The responsibility falls on governments, international entities, members of the public, and journalists themselves to employ measures that ensures their safety.

However, the effectiveness of these measures hinges on a broader context of respect for human rights, the rule of law, and a robust judicial system. Collaboration among media entities, civil society, and other stakeholders is indispensable.

In Nigeria, diverse stakeholders bear distinct responsibilities in safeguarding journalists and preserving freedom of expression.

## 2.2 Government

The Nigerian Government has the duty, capacity, and authority to safeguard journalists and uphold the right to freedom of expression by implementing several key measures:

**Strengthen Legal Protections for Journalists:** The Nigerian Government should strengthen the legal protection for journalists and freedom of expression by enacting laws that criminalize attacks on journalists and impose severe penalties for such offenses to prevent journalists from being

targeted due to their reporting.

**Accountability for Attacks on Journalists:** The Government should uphold the rule of law by ensuring that individuals or groups who threaten or attack journalists are held accountable. This includes taking actions such as conducting thorough investigations and prosecutions of those who perpetrate crimes against journalists, as well as providing protection for journalists who are at risk. Taking the appropriate actions will reduce attacks on the media as such actions send the signal that journalists can no longer be attacked with impunity.

**Promotion of Media Literacy:** The Government should encourage media literacy by equipping citizens with the skills necessary to evaluate and comprehend the information they receive. This initiative can contribute to the development of an informed and critical public that is less susceptible to disinformation and propaganda.

**Training for Law Enforcement and Security Agents:** Considering that law enforcement and security agents are major perpetrators of attacks against journalists, the Government has a responsibility to provide appropriate training to all its security and law enforcement agencies that would emphasize their constitutional roles in ensuring the safety of Nigerians, maintaining law and order, and specifically protecting journalists in the course of their work.

## **2.3 Media Unions/Associations and Media Development Organizations**

Key media stakeholders are who play active roles in the activities and affairs of media practitioners are media unions/associations and civil society organizations working on promoting and protecting press freedom and freedom of expression. They also play vital frontline roles in promoting the safety of journalists. Some of the roles they can play include:

**Building the Capacity of Journalists for Reporting Crises:** Media unions/associations, newsroom managers, and media development organisations should provide continuing capacity building on the safety of

journalists especially when they cover elections and crises. This will help them understand all they need to do to manage risks associated with their work.

**Monitoring, Collating, and Documenting Attacks on Journalists/Media:** like is done all over the world by media development organisations, this set of stakeholders should diligently monitor, collate, and document attacks against journalists. They should also speak against attacks on journalists and take actions that protect journalists and escalate issues of journalists' safety as widely as possible so that necessary actions can be taken on the matter.

**Providing Support and Resources for Journalists:** For their day-to-day work and whenever they are attacked, journalists need support and resources including safety training, legal assistance, and psychological support. Media unions and associations, as well as media development organizations are best placed to provide these support and resources to journalists when needed.

**Advocacy for Conducive Legal and Policy Environment:** for journalism and the media to thrive, the legal and policy environment must be conducive and meet international standards, norms and practices on freedom of expression. Where they fall short, there will be the need for advocacy for legal and policy reforms that protect freedom of expression and the safety of journalists. They also constitute the main stakeholders to galvanise other stakeholders to push for laws that align with international standards; ensure that freedom of expression offences are not criminalized, that ensure that journalists can get redress for attacks on them, and policies that promote media diversity, digital rights, and freedom of information.

**Educating the Public:** The consuming public has the right to timely and accurate information and they need to be able to join hands in efforts aimed at ensuring the safety of journalists. Journalism unions/associations and media development organisations are in the best position to educate the public on the importance of freedom of expression and the safety of journalists and the need to support the media. This they can do by providing information and resources on media literacy and promoting civic engagement around freedom of expression and media freedoms and encourage members of the public to take action to support these issues.

**Collaborating to Amplify Efforts:** They collaborate with other groups,

including journalists, human rights organizations, community and faith-based organisations, international, and inter-governmental bodies, to amplify efforts aimed at protecting freedom of expression and the safety of journalists.

**Providing litigation and legal services for breaches of freedom of expression:** in order to be able to make impact, journalism unions/associations and media development organisations can also offer free litigation and legal services to journalists, citizen journalists, bloggers and users of social media etc. whose right to freedom of expression are violated.

## 2.4 The General Public

The public also has a vital role in ensuring the safety of journalists. It can take actions that can help to create a more conducive environment for journalists to perform their duties:

**Supporting Independent Media:** Independent media thrive when they are buoyant. The public can help support independent media by subscribing to and purchasing their services and products as these enable the media to report truthfully and also ensure that a diverse range of voices and perspectives are reflected in their reportage.

**Participating in the Democratic Process:** When the public participates actively in the democratic processes including voting and being voted for, they can create a more open and democratic society that is able to hold the government to account and is less likely to attack journalists or restrict freedom of expression.

**Media Literacy:** Media literacy helps the public to differentiate true stories from those pushed out to mis and dis-inform the public. The public can, through being critical consumers of information, promote media literacy. The public can achieve this by questioning and getting the sources of information, evaluating the credibility of sources, and being aware of disinformation and propaganda. If members of the public can do this, they will be neither consumers nor purveyors of fake news and propaganda.

**Ensuring Governmental Accountability:** The public must uphold governmental accountability in safeguarding the principles of freedom of expression and ensuring the safety of journalists. This responsibility encompasses advocating for thorough governmental investigation and prosecution of crimes perpetrated against journalists, as well as safeguarding journalists' rights to report without constraint.

**Promoting Awareness:** Members of the public possess the capacity to raise awareness regarding the critical significance of freedom of expression and the protection of journalists. This effort encompasses active participation in advocacy events and initiatives aimed at advancing media freedoms, as well as the encouragement of others to engage in similar endeavours.



# CHAPTER THREE

## **3.0 Incidents of Attacks on Journalists and Freedom of Expression**

### **3.1 Threat to Life**

#### **Journalist Raises Alarm Over Threats to Life**

Mr. Samson Isah Alfa, the Niger State Correspondent of Aljazeera newspapers, in March 2023 raised the alarm over threats to his life. This, according to him, was as a result of his discovery of a facility suspected to have been used for rigging the Presidential and National Assembly elections in the state. He alleged that he has since been receiving calls, mostly from politicians belonging to the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC), threatening his life and warning him to stay away from the matter.

Samson said he was among the first to visit the facility, which he said belongs to one of the political aides to Governor Abubarkar Sani Bello, and found many computers, BVAS machines, ballot papers, and voters' cards, among other materials.

He stated that some top government functionaries, including the Chief of Staff to the Governor and the Special Adviser to the Governor, had come to the building and started questioning why he were there.

Samson said, “They even called my family people and some of them have called to inform me how they were told to warn me to steer clear in my own interest”.

He has called on the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and security

agencies to look into the matter, saying he was only carrying out his duties as a journalist trying to uncover what was going on inside the facility.

### **Gov. David Umahi Orders Arrest of Journalists, Fake Observers**

The Ebonyi State governor, Mr. David Umahi on March 17, 2023, ordered the arrest of any journalist or fake observer found loitering in polling units and other election zones during governorship and house of assembly elections fixed for March 18.

During a statewide broadcast and press conference preparatory to the polls, Gov. Umahi said he had a word for 'emergency journalists' adding that “people jump out, especially now that we have online media” and claim they are journalists.

He stated that he knows there is a union for journalists in the state and concluded that those who are not members of the union are not journalists. He added: “There are visiting journalists who we may not know: such persons need extra accreditation from the chairman of NUJ in the State.

The governor claimed journalists who were not ordinarily based in the state need to register with the Ebonyi State NUJ Chapter because of security threats adding “Anyone who parades himself in violation of these rules may risk arrest.”

### **Soldier Threatens to Shoot Journalist**

On March 19, 2023, a soldier, identified as Lance Corporal Samson, a member of a team of military personnel who mounted a roadblock attacked journalists who were on official assignments, covering the governorship and House of Assembly elections in Kontagora Local Government Area of Niger state. He threatened to shoot one of the journalists.

The soldiers had mounted a roadblock in front of the Landmark Radio Station in Kontagora and an under-aged boy shifted a plank placed by the soldiers on the road to enable the reporters who are Landmark Radio staff to pass, but the action infuriated the soldiers who then subject the boy to various punishments.

Unhappy that an innocent boy was being punished for committing no



offence, the journalists explained to the soldier what had transpired but the angered soldier threatened to shoot one of the reporters, ordering him to take over the punishment being meted out to the young boy. The journalists, who were wearing their press jackets, tried to identify themselves with their tags but the soldier would not listen.

It took the intervention of the leader of the army team, a senior officer (Lieutenant Colonel) to resolve the matter, even so the soldier remained adamant.

### **Editor-in-Chief of The Nigeria Lawyer Alleges Threat to Life Over 2023 Post-Election Publications**

The Founder and Editor-In-Chief of the online platform, The Nigeria Lawyer, Ms Chioma Kate Unini, raised alarm over alleged threats to her life from faceless and anonymous persons who expressed displeasure over some of the stories published on her platform that took a critical look at the roles some government institutions and individuals played in the 2023 general elections.

She said people were particularly irked by her report of the case of alleged targeted suppression and subjugation of Igbos by non-state parties tacitly supported by institutions of the state who watched on and refused to bring offenders to book even in the face of indisputable and glaring evidence.

Chioma said the first set of threats she faced came from encrypted phone numbers (private numbers) after the March 23, 2023 publication titled *“Did MC Oluomo's Threat to Igbo Voters in Lagos End Up As “A Joke”? A Query to The Nigeria Police Force”*. She said the unknown persons warned her at various times against publishing stories of that nature or else she would bear the consequences.

In another editorial, The Nigeria Lawyer on May 13, 2023, published another opinion piece titled *“Re: “Eze Ndibgo Terrorism Trial Begins in July”: A Case of Selective Justice by The Lagos AG and Police Against Igbos”*, which infuriated her antagonists as they sprung up again and began issuing threats.

The medium expressed its full and total commitment to balanced reportage in fairness to all parties, meticulously reviewing news reports before publishing

and ensuring the interest or reputation of any Nigerian is not unduly sabotaged or prejudiced by its publications. It also called on security agencies to take note of the unfortunate incident and launch proper investigations to identify those who are behind the threats.

### **Journalist Petitions Security Agencies over Threat to Life by Governor-Elect**

Mr Hassan Wuyo, the Kaduna State Correspondent of the Vanguard newspaper, on March 27, 2023, petitioned security agencies alleging a threat to his life by the Kaduna State governor-elect, Senator Uba Sani. He asked to be protected from harm.

In the petition titled “My sad encounter with the governor-elect” Hassan alleged that while honouring an invitation by the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) in the state the governor-elect singled him out and threatened his life. He said he “was threatened, psychologically depressed and emotionally unbalanced” by Sen. Sani.

Narrating his ordeal, the journalist said he received an invitation on March 26, 2023, to cover a press conference by the Kaduna State governor-elect at the APC campaign office at Isa Kaita Road, Kaduna, only to be descended upon with anger and threats.

He said while in the hall, the governor-elect asked about his medium and when he informed him that he is the Correspondent of Vanguard Media, Sen. Sani suddenly changed his countenance and began to heap blames on him and said unapologetically that his reports as published in the Vanguard were against his political interest.

Hassan therefore sought security cover against any harm from Sen. Uba Sani.

### **Journalist Goes into Hiding, Alleges Threat to Life for Criticising Police on Tiktok.**

Ms Rukayya Aliyu-Jibia, a journalist who works for a Katsina-based Hausa language television station, Tambari Hausa TV, in May 2023, went into hiding and raised alarm over an alleged threat to her life. Ms Aliyu-Jibia had earlier been arrested for what the police described as seeking “cheap popularity” on Tiktok and later released.

She disclosed that she was arrested for criticising the police public parade of four girls allegedly arrested for prostitution on her personal Tiktok account. Rukkayya had earlier been arrested for what the police described as seeking “cheap popularity” on Tiktok and later released.

The journalist said: “... the Nigerian Police, Katsina State Command, paraded four suspects, young ladies between the ages of 19 to 23, accusing them of prostitution. Upon seeing that video, I recorded a TikTok video on my personal Tik Tok page, where I quoted a section in Nigerian Constitution which I suggested to the police that they should have taken the girls to the court until they are proven guilty before parading them to the press,”

Narrating her ordeal, she said after the video was published, Mr. Gambo Isa, the police spokesperson in the state, invited her to the Katsina Emir's palace.

She said “I was on my way to the emir's palace when Gambo Isah and his boys came with four cars, blocked my way, they dragged me out of my car, and they broke my phone and I sustained injury as you can see, and they dragged me to the emir's palace where Gambo Isa told the emir that I'm sabotaging their efforts in the state.”

Rukayya said the emir ordered the police to remand her in detention but that when she was taken to court to be arraigned, the judge was absent. She said she was later taken to the police area commander's office and asked to write a statement and thereafter released and asked to report back the following day.

According to her, she reported back at the police station as she was asked at about 11:00 am hoping to be taken to court. She said the area commander however informed her that she would be taken to police headquarters. She said: “I was so scared of what happened to me the other day. Gambo Isa assaulted me, so I ran for my life.”

Contacted, Mr Gambo Isah said the journalist was seeking cheap popularity through her Tiktok videos. He claimed that she had been using her Tiktok account to attack police activities in the state since 2022. He also debunked the allegation that police are trying to arrest her, saying she had been granted bail to a surety.

## **Journalist Goes into Hiding Over Alleged Threat to Life for Report Unravelling Corruption in Anambra State**

Ms. Karen James, an investigative journalist, has gone into hiding following assassination attempts made against her after she allegedly uncovered corruption in the education system in Anambra State.

She said she was confronted with menacing death threats and multiple assassination attempts shortly after an extensive month-long investigation revealing widespread corruption and incompetence within Anambra State's education system. These attacks, she said, are attempts to silence her because of her steadfast dedication to journalism.

Ms. James' investigative work revealed the distressing saga of Blessed Wisdom Model School in Onitsha, which abruptly halted its third-term promotion examination and announced its immediate closure because a two-year-old had been allegedly flogged. This action left hundreds of schoolchildren stranded on the streets of Onitsha. She petitioned Dr. Charles Chukwuma Soludo, the Anambra State governor about her findings.

In a petition submitted on August 10, 2023, to the Speaker of the Anambra State House of Assembly, she detailed that her troubles began after exposing an alleged scandal within the Anambra State Ministry of Education. She emphasized that her month-long investigation had uncovered significant corruption, incompetence, and a blatant disregard for the public's demand for transparency at Blessed Wisdom Model School saga which had led to the abrupt termination of the third term promotion examination, displacing over 600 schoolchildren onto the streets of Onitsha.

The investigation has been perceived as a direct assault on the Anambra State Education Ministry, thereby posing a threat to those holding positions of authority within the ministry

## **Police Threaten WikkiTimes Editor, Wife, Others for Exposing Terrorism Funding, Illegal Mining in Niger State**

Mr. Yakubu Mohammed, editor of WikkiTimes and author of a published investigative report revealing terrorism funding and illegal mining in Niger State, has been placed on the police watch list while his wife, colleagues, and friends have also been subjected to coordinated threats, according to the

Bauchi-based online media organization.

Yakubu showed through his investigation that miners with ties to China, who were operating under the licenses of Eso Terra Investment Limited and Majelo Global Resources Limited, were illegally exploiting Nigeria's natural resources. These same miners were also suspected of bribing Dogo Gide, a notorious kingpin who terrorizes several states in Nigeria, along with his armed bandits.

Bauchi and Niger State Police Commands traced Yakubu and his wife Nafisat's phone numbers in their pursuit of the editor. A police officer named Muhammad Hamzat, identified by Truecaller, contacted the editor's friend Mustapha Gangare, as well as WikkiTimes reporters, Usman Babaji and Rabiuh Tahir Musa in their search. The officer stated that a signal was sent from the Niger State Police Command to put Yakubu on the watchlist.

Mustapha, Usman and Rabiuh were informed by the police that they were considered “sub-targets.” The police officer, Hamzat contacted Yakubu's wife and threatened her, saying he knew her location and could have found her husband if he wanted. He then demanded information about Yakubu's whereabouts.

When Mustapha was contacted by the officer, he was told that the police were searching for someone who had stolen a phone and that he was among the sub-targets. Mustapha was invited to a meeting, but declined and requested an official letter explaining the reason for the invitation.

According to WikkiTimes, Mustapha confirmed that the police were after Yakubu due to his work as an editor. Similarly, the police contacted Rabiuh and told him that they were searching for someone, and he was considered a sub-target. He was later invited to a meeting but he did not honour the invitation due to the suspicious nature of the request.

### **Journalist Goes into Hiding Over Accusation of Blasphemy.**

Mr. Gabriel Idibia, head of bureau of Daybreak Nigeria newspaper, who lives in Kaduna disclosed on October 16, 2023, that he had to flee Kaduna and go into hiding after he was accused of blasphemy.

The accusation arose after Mr. Gabriel Idibia shared a viral video featuring

Mosab Hassan Yousef, the son of a prominent Hamas figure.

Gabriel said he shared the video not for any other reason but to alert his colleagues so that they can have the opportunity for a healthy debate on the subject since the group was made up of journalists who ordinarily are shapers of opinion.

The video he shared in the general WhatsApp group of Kaduna journalists on the evening of October 12 is titled “Son of Hamas Exposes Muhammad.” It showed the said Mosab Hassan Yousef addressing speaking on religious intolerance.

Gabriel accused some of his Muslim colleagues, including a former chairman of the Kaduna State Council of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and others who practice the Islamic faith, of instigating the blasphemy allegation against him.

He stated that: “As journalists, we are enlightened individuals who I believe can have healthy debates without resort to primordial or religious sentiments.”

He said he was however surprised to, discover that on the morning of October 13, he had been removed from the Kaduna journalists' WhatsApp group, which had become a battleground of reactions and counter-reactions focused on his person.

He said while some colleagues tried to mediate with the Muslims, others insisted on holding him accountable for what they considered blasphemous actions, adding that: “I was shocked and traumatized as my intentions were clearly misconstrued”.

According to him, a few Christian journalist colleagues who supported his views suggested that he should be cautioned and forgiven, while some Muslim colleagues argued that sharing the video amounted to blasphemy against Prophet Muhammad and he should be dealt with. He disclosed that as a result of the video, the group chat became filled with anger, criticism, hate comments, and outright insults and threats to his life.

Gabriel said: “Some of my colleagues who were more considerate advised that I should flee Kaduna immediately due to the growing threats and insults

from both Muslim journalists and some non-journalists”.

Deborah Samuel Yakubu a second-year Christian college student in Shehu Shagari College of Education, in Sokoto, state of Nigeria similarly faced accusations of blasphemy in a WhatsApp group chat in May 2022. She was hunted down by her accusers and brutally murdered, and nobody was brought to book for the murder.

## **3.2 Assault and Battery**

### **Trust TV Cameraman Brutalised by Hoodlums at APC Campaign Rally in Lagos**

A cameraman with Trust Television, Mr. Taiwo Yishau, was on February 21, 2023, brutalised by some hoodlums at the Teslim Balogun Stadium, Surulere, Lagos venue of the grand finale of All-Progressives Congress (APC) presidential flag bearer, Asiwaju Ahmed Bola Tinubu's campaign rally.

Despite displaying his press tag issued by the APC, Taiwo was stopped from entering the venue of the rally even after explaining that he was duly assigned and accredited to cover the event. The hoodlums attacked and beat him up at one of the gates to the Stadium. He was hit several times by the gang of hoodlums who accused him of forging the accreditation tag.

Narrating his ordeal, he said: “The worst thing is that policemen watched while the thugs descended on me.”

He explained one of the bouncers who were hired to man the gate handed him over to the thugs who beat him mercilessly, insisting he was working for the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP).

“They said I'm working for the opposition and policemen were there while this lasted. I showed them the press tag given to us by the APC Publicity Secretary, Mr. Seye Oladejo yesterday but they said it is fake, that I forged the tag.”

According to him, the thugs claimed he was working for the opposition party and demanded that he show them previous works he had done for APC while they kept beating him.

“I couldn't believe it. Their intention was to kill me and the policemen kept watching as if nothing was happening. They didn't say anything. While the beating continued, I was trying to protect my camera and my phone; they kept beating me, saying I'm an opposition member.” He added.

### **Journalist Beaten by Political Thugs while Covering Youth Protest**

On February 22, 2023, the CrossRiverWatch Civic Space Editor, Jonathan Ugbal, was attacked by suspected agents of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) along Mekenge Layout in Calabar Municipality while covering a protest by youths of Ikot Abasi Obori community. The thugs beat him up outside the campaign office used by two of the party's candidates, Hon. Eta Mborá (Calabar Municipal/Odukpani federal constituency) and Hon. Efa Esua (Calabar Municipal House of Assembly).

Jonathan had gone to cover the planned protest by youths of Ikot Abasi Obori community after he was informed by Miss Rachael Bassey, a youth leader in the community, about the protest.

He said he was on the phone with Rachael asking her what transpired when he discovered he had been surrounded by a group of nearly 20 people who began to hit and throw invectives at him.

In the process, his laptop bag was taken from him, the phone he used to take photographs at Ikot Abasi Obori, and an Infinix SMART 5, which he used in calling Ms. Rachael, were also snatched from him, a third device, a Redmi 10C was also confiscated by one of those who attacked him. His old CrossRiverWatch Identity Card and all the cash on him except a Fifty Naira note were also snatched.

The iPhone 6s which he said he uses as a backup device due to its slightly cracked screen was smashed on the road by someone who snatched it from his back pocket. In addition, his bag which contained a laptop which was snatched from him and thrown on the road.

Jonathan had to seek medical attention for the bruises and pains he sustained from the beating.



## **Reporter Covering Election Assaulted by Suspected Political Thugs**

The Cable's judiciary correspondent, Bolanle Olabimtan, was on February 25, 2023, assaulted, injured, and her phone seized by persons suspected to be political thugs while covering the Presidential and National Assembly elections at ward 03, Owa Model Primary School, Ika North-east LGA in Delta State.

Bolanle said at about 4.20PM, some persons, suspected to be political thugs, arrived at the venue in a red Toyota Highlander and a white bus. They ordered officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to discontinue the vote counting while the police officers deployed to the polling unit looked on.

The suspected thugs ordered the electoral officials to move to Ngala Primary School to continue counting but met resistance from some voters who insisted that the votes must be counted at the polling unit.

Bolanle said she had stopped filming when one of the thugs approached and hit her from the back, whereupon she hit her head on the wall and fell to the ground. She said the thug forcefully collected her phone, went through her private chats, searched her entire gallery, checked her official and election group chats, went on her Instagram page, checked her feed and private DMs, and deleted pictures and videos.

She disclosed that they also threatened to deal with her adding that all these happened under the rain and the journalist who was already hurt was also shivering from cold.

## **Journalist Molested by Hoodlums while Covering Elections**

Mr. Dayo Aiyetan, the Executive Director of the International Center for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), was on February 25, 2023, molested by hoodlums at Agwan Fulani Town Hall in Gwagwalada, Abuja while covering the Presidential and National Assembly elections.

Dayo was beaten while his phone, car key, purse, and a pouch containing his debit cards, Nigeria and US driver's licenses and other items were stolen.

According to him, there was a disturbance at a polling unit where a man was

trying to upturn the canopy on top of INEC officials. He began recording the scene only to be ordered by another man to stop recording which he did. However, he said within seconds, he was surrounded by hordes of people: miscreant, thugs etc.

They beat him, tore his clothes, and in the process, he lost his phone, car key, purse and a pouch containing my debit cards, Nigeria and US driver's licenses and other items. He was however able to fight to keep his camera.

He added: “A guy brought out a knife and tried to stab me. I kicked him with my steel-toed Skechers and ... Fortunately, apart from a few scratches, I escaped unhurt.”

Dayo disclosed that CSP Hamza Sadiq, the DPO of Gwagwalada, assisted him in recovering his phone and car key, but his voter's card, driver's licenses, debit cards, and purse were not recovered.

### **Angry Youths Attack Journalists on Election Duty**

On February 25, 2023, some angry youths, attacked journalists covering the Presidential and National Assembly elections at Liberty area of Ibadan, the Oyo State capital.

The youths attacked vehicles passing through Liberty-Oke Ado Road, particularly those on election duties. One of the vehicles attacked by the youths was occupied by News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) crew members who were moving around the city to monitor the election.

The youths lamented the hardship they were experiencing due to the scarcity of fuel and new naira notes, saying that the government should have addressed the problem before conducting the elections.

### **Journalists Attacked at Polling Unit, Equipment Damaged**

Four journalists and a media worker covering the February 25, 2023, Presidential and National Assembly elections in Bayelsa State were assaulted, their phones seized, their cameras broken, and prevented from covering the elections.

Daily Post state correspondent, Akam James, was assaulted around the voting area while taking note of the voting processes at ward 05 unit 19 in

Ebelebiri community; the publisher of Upfront news magazine, Princewill Sede and the managing editor, Jeany Metta were beaten; while TVC reporter, Mr. Joe Kunde and the cameraman, Mr. Miebi Bina were also chased out of the community.

They were attacked when the smooth voting process at the polling unit was disrupted following an attempt by a voter to assist an elderly woman to cast her vote.

### **Journalist Covering Market Fire Incident Attacked by Angry Mob in Borno**

A reporter with the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Mrs Pauline Kuje Vana, was on February 26, 2023, attacked by an angry mob while covering a fire outbreak at the Maiduguri Monday Market in Borno State.

The incident was reported to have started at about 1.00 am and lasted till 8:30 am, despite efforts by the Fire Service men to stop the raging inferno, a development that led to the destruction of goods worth billions of Naira.

The journalist was attacked and beaten alongside her crew in an attempt to file a live report on the fire incident at the market.

An eyewitness said: “The angry shop owners who are victims of the fire outbreak and sympathisers attacked the crew and injured the reporter.”

The reporter was later taken to the 7 Division Nigerian Army Hospital in Maiduguri for treatment.

### **Thugs Attack Arise TV Crew Covering Governorship and House of Assembly Elections**

On March 18, 2023, thugs attacked and brutalised the crew of Arise TV News Channel at Ikate around Elegushi's Palace in Lagos, where they went to cover governorship and state house of assembly elections. The crew members were brutally assaulted. They sustained injuries while some of their equipment, including drones, were confiscated by their assailants.

A reporter, Oba Adeoye; cameraman, Opeyemi Adenihun; and the driver, Yusuf Hasan were beaten and bruised by the thugs. Opeyemi, who was operating the station's drone sustained injuries on his face.

## **Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps Officials Assault Journalist**

On March 18, 2023, Mr. Edwin Philip, a journalist working with Breeze FM 99.9 in Lafia, Nasarawa State, was brutally beaten up by officials of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) while covering the governorship and State House of Assembly elections.

Edwin disclosed that some members of one of the political parties were trying to disenfranchise voters through intimidation and deception. He said while reporting election proceedings live to his station, Breeze FM Situation Room, he got a call that voters at the polling unit 061, Chiroma Ward, Lafia East, were asked to return at 2.30 pm to vote after being accredited, which is contrary to the new electoral law.

He decided to seek help to remedy the situation and approached officials of the NSCDC to complain about the issue. He said when he got to the venue, he met Ibrahim Abdullahi, (Adon garin) Chief of Staff to Emir of Lafia who became violent, beating some electorates and as a result, he moved away from Adon garin.

According to him, the Adon garin left the venue only to return with officials of NSCDC whom he ordered to beat him and throw him out of the vicinity. Whereupon the NSCDC officials descended on him beating him mercilessly and leaving him in a pool of blood. He suffered serious injuries to his head because of the assault.

He said that the NSCDC officials took his wristwatch, baseball cap and his mobile phone but that they later return his mobile phone to him.

The Nasarawa State Commandant of NSCDC, Abbas Muhammed, through a press statement issued by the Public Relations Officer, NSCDC Nasarawa State, Jerry Victor, on March 19, 2023, condemned the attack on Edwin describing it as a shameful act.

The Commandant apologised to the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) Nasarawa State Council and the general public, assuring that such an incident would not repeat itself. He vowed to investigate the incident to fish out the perpetrators of the attack on the journalist.

He directed that Edwin be immediately given medical attention with a

promise to settle all bills incurred to avoid any health complications.

### **Thugs Brutalise Journalist Covering Governorship and House of Assembly Elections**

Mr. Ashiru Umar, a journalist working for Premier Radio in Kano, was on March 18, 2023 brutalised by thugs while covering the governorship and state house of assembly elections at Gidan Galadima, Galadanci Primary in Gwale Local Government Area of the State.

The political thugs reportedly descended on him, hitting him with various weapons, thinking that he had captured them while they were giving out food items to bribe eligible voters at the polling unit.

Ashiru sustained injuries as a result of the attack. His gadgets were destroyed and he had to be taken to the hospital for medical attention.

### **Newspaper Correspondent Attacked by Thugs at Polling Unit**

Mr Aloy Attah, a Correspondent of the Sun Newspaper in Onitsha was on March 18, 2023 attacked by armed thugs who invaded the polling centre at Awada Primary School, Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra State. They stole N3,000 from him.

The thugs invaded the place and carted away money and phones from voters. They seized his phone and only returned it when he started mentioning names of prominent Obosi men. Other journalists were also attacked.

### **Armed Thugs Chase Journalists, Others from Polling Unit**

Armed political thugs on March 18, 2023, assaulted and drove journalists and officials of the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) away from Ward 13 polling Unit 22, Itori Odo, Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State when a journalist started taking pictures at the unit.

On sighting the journalist taking pictures, an agent of the All-Progressive Congress (APC) challenged him saying they had instructions not to allow anybody to take pictures or record videos at the unit. All efforts to convince the agent fell on deaf ears.

Adejoke Adeleye, a reporter with the News Agency of Nigeria (NANS), and

several other journalists were assaulted at the unit as well as officials of INEC while ballot boxes were destroyed.

### **Thugs Attack TV Crew Covering Elections in Lagos**

A Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS) crew comprising of Lekan Shobowale, a reporter; Folorunso Abiola, a cameraman; and Ope Adegoke a driver, who were monitoring the March 18, 2023 governorship and House of Assembly elections in Lagos State were attacked and assaulted and their equipment damaged by hoodlums, led by a woman in the Onigbongbo area of Lagos State.

### **Journalist Attacked by Armed Men Who Demanded for His Midget**

On March 22, 2023, at about 8 pm, Mr. Mohammed Usamat Suleman, who works with Shimo FM in Jalingo, Taraba State, was attacked by armed men along Labour House Road in Jalingo while he was returning home from work.

Mohammed said after he closed from work on the fateful day, he headed home boarding a tricycle unknown to him the other occupants were apparently waiting for him. He said while the vehicle was moving, they brought out various weapons and demanded that he produced a particular midget, which was not with him at the time of the attack.

His attackers injured him and he was traumatized as a result. He had to be taken to the Federal Medical Centre in Jalingo for treatment following the attack.

### **Soldiers Join Hoodlum to Attack Journalist in Abuja**

On March 30, 2023, Mr. Sinafi Omanga, a journalist with the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), was attacked by hoodlums who were supervised and joined by men in military uniform and a woman in mufti. He sustained injuries to his body while his eye glasses were broken.

The attack, according to Sinafi, was led by a man and a woman who identified themselves as soldiers in the Nigerian Army and lasted for about two hours. It took place at Mombasa Street, Wuse Zone 5, in the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) District of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Narrating his ordeal, Sinafi, a co-host of ICIR's 'Eye on The Street', a weekly vox-pop programme, said two men who dressed as military personnel were part of the hoodlums who attacked him.

The journalist had noticed that two men accused of stealing a mobile phone were being subjected to jungle justice and he picked up his device to record the incident. When they mob noticed he was recording, they pounced on him.

Sanafi said they tortured him mercilessly and injured him on the head. They also threatened to kill him. He said a member of the mob, whom others called Dogo, was bent on hitting him with a big rod that could have ended his life. He said Dogo told him he was lucky he could not lay hands on any broken bottle, which he would have apparently used to injure him.

He disclosed that beyond the physical assaults, he was forced to pay the sum of N4,000 into a third party's account with the name Ikechukwu Emmanuel Duru before they released his phone which they had confiscated. He said the mob that brutalized him also stole his wristwatch, N5,000 cash from his bag, tore his shirt and destroyed his medicated eyeglasses.

He said after destroying his eye glasses, they targeted his eyes which they began to punch

They also deleted important files from his phone, including footage and pictures of the jungle justice being meted out to the two men.

### **Photojournalist Assaulted, arrested while Covering Protest by Aviation Unions in Lagos**

Mr. Benedict Uwalaka, a photojournalist with Daily Trust newspaper, was on April 17, 2023, assaulted, arrested and detained for covering a protest by members of aviation unions at the Murtala Muhammed Airport (MMA) domestic terminal in Lagos. He was injured and his camera screen broken preventing its lens from reattaching. He was detained at the Airport Police Division for about two hours.

Benedict, who was injured in the arm, was taken to the MMA Domestic Airport Division of the Police where he was detained.

He said while he was covering the protest by aviation workers at the airport,

an officer sitting in a police vehicle with two other officers summoned and criticized him for taking a woman's photo without her permission. He said the police officer asked him to delete the picture, which he declined to do. Angered, the officer grabbed his camera and punched his hand several times.

The officer who assaulted him took the photojournalist to the airport's police station and left, saying he would return.

Benedict said he waited at the station for more than two hours hoping to speak to a supervisor but left when they did not report at the station. Officers at the airport police station told him that they did not know the officer who brought him in and that unless the officer was available, there was nothing they could do about the matter. They claimed they do not know the policeman and that there was no way they could trace him. Coupled with his inability to speak with a superior officer, he left the station.

### **Police Brutalise, Detain TV Reporter Filming Riot Incident in Oyo State**

On May 25, 2023, at about 10:30 am, operatives of the Oyo State Police Command brutalized and inflicted injuries on Mr. John Alabi, a Silverbird News24 reporter, while he was recording policemen dispersing a riotous crowd in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital with his phone. He was also detained and spent about five hours behind the counter.

John said about five policemen pounced on him while taking photos and making video of them dispersing a rowdy crowd, adding that they took away his phone and prevented him from calling his office.

The policemen beat the reporter with police batons, he was also hit with the butt of a gun, and he sustained injuries including bruises on his face. His clothes were soaked in his blood because of the beating.

John said: “While they were beating me, I kept telling them that I'm a journalist, but they beat me and injured me a few meters from my eye. They wanted to lock me up but later put me behind the counter. They collected my phone immediately.”

The policemen asked why he was taking pictures of the incident, identifying himself as a journalist, showing them his identity card and holding a



microphone with the name of his station did not dissuade them from beating and arresting the journalist.

He was only allowed to make a call at about 3.30 pm.

### **Thugs Attack Journalists Covering Election Tribunal**

On June 5, 2023, suspected political thugs stormed the venue of the governorship election tribunal sitting at the Magistrate Court, Isabo in Abeokuta and attacked journalists. The Blueprint newspaper correspondents and other journalists were chased out of the premises and only the timely intervention of a known party stalwart who informed the thugs of their identity prevented the journalists from being beaten up

The thugs, numbering over 100 came with canes, and other harmful objects to scare opposition party members away from accessing the court premises.

The heavy security presence at the court from as early as 7am did not deter the thugs who beat up perceived opposition at the court.

### **Police Forcefully Use Journalist as Bait to Arrest Community Leader**

Five armed operatives of the Rivers State Police Command on June 5, 2023, harassed and threatened Mr. Chinedu Orlu-Orlu, a presenter with Today 95.1 FM radio. They took him and forcibly led him to Rumuaholu where they used him as bait to lure and arrest Mr. Kingsley Victor Woko, Chairman of Rumuaholu Community Development Association in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of the State.

Chinedu said one of the police operatives called him on the phone pretending she had a business with him. Thereafter, they stormed his office with their guns drawn, ready to shoot. He said the policemen dialed the community leader's number with his phone and once they saw that he had it stored in his phone, ordered him to produce Kingsley and threatened that they would detain him and deal with him if he did not.

The journalist said they took him to the community where Kingsley lives. There, they forced him to call the community leader and once he came out, they pushed him away and arrested the community leader, and by their action gave the impression that he betrayed the community leader.

The Police used Chinedu as bait because he had on several occasions interviewed Kingsley and aired the interviews and other news items about and from him.

### **Journalist Assaulted While Investigating South-East Nigeria Entrepreneurial Development Centre**

On June 30, 2023, Ms. Charity Uwakwe, a correspondent of Nigerian Horn newspaper, was assaulted by some staff of the Ministry of Women Affairs, in Umuahia, Abia State, where she had gone to investigate the disbursement of funds by the management of the South-East Entrepreneurial Development Centre, (SEEDC).

Charity said she went to the Ministry to ascertain how many indigenes of Abia State benefited from the programme and to also know what other subsequent programmes the Management had in stock for them.

She disclosed that the attack was led by the Public Relations Officer of the Ministry, Mrs. Oluchi Franklin, in the office of the Principal, Skill Acquisitions, a section of the ministry. Charity said Mrs. Franklin accused her of wrongfully recording the conversation and consequently proceeded to physically attack her dragging her mobile phone with her and in the process, she was bruised on her chin bone. Charity added that Mrs. Franklin also grabbed her collar and shook her violently, causing her severe pains in her neck.

Although the reporter insisted that she had not recorded anything and pleaded to be freed from the attack, Mrs. Franklin did not relent but hurled insults at Charity, labeling her a “foolish journalist” and a “roadside journalist.”

The situation got to a point where the PRO and her colleagues threatened to destroy Charity's phone and detain her until her boss arrived.

For nearly two hours, Charity endured physical and verbal abuse and it wasn't until news reached the Ministry that individuals from the government house were on their way to intervene that Charity was allowed to leave.

## **Lagos State Taskforce Manhandles, Detains Reporter Covering its Operations.**

Operatives of the Lagos State Environment and Special Offences Enforcement Unit on August 7, 2023, arrested, manhandled, and detained Mr. Ikechi Nzeako, a reporter with the privately-owned Daily Independent newspaper, while he was covering the seizure of traders' goods at the railway crossing in the Agege area of the State.

After a long debate by operatives of the task force on the propriety of the arrest, they released him from the Black Maria but all the photographs he took were deleted before his phone was returned to him.

## **Armed Hoodlums Attack Journalists, Cameramen on Guided Tour of Nembe Community**

On August 16, 2023, hoodlums armed with various weapons brutally attacked six journalists and media workers representing different media outlets who went to cover the aftermath of a violent conflict that erupted in Opu Nembe community, Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, and confiscated their television cameras and other equipment.

Among those assaulted were Mr. Joseph Kunde of Television Continental (TVC), a privately owned television station, and his cameraman, Mr. Bina Miebi; Mr. Awe Baratuapere of the Federal Government-owned Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and his cameraman, Mr. Ayebakuro Egein; Mrs. Iniyekenime Doctor Bruce of Daar Communications Limited, operators of Africa Independent Television (AIT) and RayPower radio; and Mr. Femi Folaranmi of The Sun Publishing Limited.

The journalists were on a guided tour of the community to assess the situation following a conflict in the community. This was after the deployment of the Police Mobile Force (PMF) and Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) by the Inspector-General of Police in response to the initial unrest.

The hoodlums suddenly emerged from various directions when the media team reached the last demolished building owned by the regent of the community. They attacked the journalists and cameramen who fled in different directions and sought refuge in nearby houses and the Police base.

The Police officers led by Unit Commander, Mr. Silas, however rose to the occasion to repel the hoodlums. While Awe and Femi managed to reach the Police base, the others remained trapped within the community.

Mr. Silas and his team successfully rescued Joseph, but unfortunately, Bina, his cameraman, fell into the hands of the hoodlums. The hoodlums brutalized him and seized his camera and phones when the attackers identified him as a TVC cameraman. They stripped him of his clothing and tied him up.

Later, Mr. Silas re-entered the community to rescue Bina, engaging in a gunfight with the hoodlums.

Mrs. Brice, whose equipment were confiscated by persons who hid her in exchange for her safety, managed to escape to the nearby Ogbolomabiri community. The Police team later rescued her and brought her to the Police base.

All the journalists eventually returned to Yenagoa, while the Police promised to continue their efforts to recover their confiscated equipment.

### **Political Thug Assaults Journalist Inside Adamawa State Government House**

On August 31, 2023, Mr. Ibrahim Mista Ali, a journalist and blogger, was assaulted inside the Adamawa State Government House in Yola, by Mr. Hamidu Mukhtari, a suspected political thug popularly known as Dogo. Mr. Ali was in Government House to cover a press briefing by the Secretary to the State Government, Alhaji Awwal Tukur.

The journalist was reported to have been attacked for criticising Adamawa State Governor, Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri.

Narrating his ordeal, Ibrahim said Hamidu slapped, punched, and dragged him by the neck in the presence of security personnel who, rather than arrest him, intervened by pleading with Hamidu to release him. Ibrahim said Hamidu had earlier threatened to deal with him for covering the opposition.

Hamidu is believed to have led several attacks against those perceived to be critics of the state governor.

## **Road Safety Officers Beat up Journalist for Capturing their Activities on Video.**

Officers of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) on September 18, 2023, attacked Mr. Mustapha Usman, a journalist with the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), near the Corps' Zone 7 office in Abuja. They beat him up and confiscated his identification card for capturing their activities on video.

The reporter saw the officers forcefully wrestling the steering wheel of a vehicle from a woman after they had stopped her and when they failed to take over the steering from her, they deflated her car tyres, prompting Mustapha to video the incident.

But when the officers discovered that Mustapha was capturing them, they ran after him, pounced on him, beat him up and collected his identity card.

Recounting his ordeal, Mustapha said he was passing by when he observed the officers surrounding the woman's car. He said when he got closer, he noticed that the officers were trying to forcibly take control of the steering wheel of the car from the woman after which they deflated her tyres. He said: "I was watching closely, and I tried to record the event on video".

He disclosed that when they tried to disperse the crowd that gathered and also attempted to pull him away, he resisted telling them he is a journalist and showed them his identity card, but they didn't pay attention.

Mustapha said: "They started slapping me. About five of them surrounded and attacked me. I can't even recall exactly how many of them beat me because it was close to their office, and there were many. I was retrieving my ID card from the floor when one hit me and took it away."

The FRSC officers took Mustapha's identity card to their office and held it for over two hours insisting that he delete the recordings on his phone and apologise for recording them while they were performing their duties.

Mustapha later sent a message to the Corps spokesperson Mr. Bizi Kazeem who directed him to the sector commander, who subsequently ordered the release of his identity card.

The sector commander, Mr. Muta Chorrie, in his reaction blamed the reporter for recording the officers “while doing their job”, describing what he did as disrespectful and malicious.

### **Police Attack Journalists Covering Kano Election Petition Tribunal.**

On September 20, 2023, officers of the Nigerian Police Force attacked two journalists: Mr. Salim Ibrahim of Daily Trust newspaper, and Mr. Zahraddeen Lawal, BBC Hausa reporter, who were in the court to cover proceedings at the Kano State Governorship Election Petition Tribunal.

The operatives of the Nigeria Police who attacked them destroyed their gadgets.

Conflict erupted when the police officers on duty instructed the journalists to move about 10 meters away from the court premises. In the process, the officers confronted them and accused them of taking photographs.

Some police officers attacked the BBC reporter in an attempt to seize his phone, while others targeted the Daily Trust reporter and forcefully seized his phone, damaging the screen

### **VOA Reporter Assaulted by Commissioner of Homeland Security in Niger State**

Mr. Mustapha Batsari, a reporter with Voice of America (VOA), based in Nigeria, was on November 24, 2023, assaulted by Major General Bello Mohammed Abdullahi (Rtd.), the Niger State Commissioner of Homeland Security, when the reporter approached him at the Government House in Minna for details regarding the crisis at Beji in Bosso Local Government Area.

Narrating his ordeal, the reporter disclosed that after making several calls without success, he went to the commissioner's office but did not meet him. He then decided to search for him in the government house to get the side of the government on the report he was working on. Mustapha said rather than respond to his question, the commissioner reportedly threatened him, rained abuses on him and attempted to seize his midget.

Mustapha said: “The commissioner who is in charge of the security of lives,

threatened my life and tried to confiscate my recording gadget despite the fact that I was not recording the interaction.”

He added that it took the intervention of people around to save him from the wrath of the commissioner.

The Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Niger State Council condemned the assault on the reporter by the commissioner and called on the state governor, Mohammed Umaru Bago, to intervene in the matter.

### **NSCDC Operatives assault Journalist in Anambra State**

On December 2, 2023, operatives of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), numbering about 11, physically assaulted Mr. Izunna Okafor, a reporter with the online news portal, <https://247ureports.com/>. They kicked him and hit him several times with the butt of their guns.

Izuna disclosed that while returning to Awka, the Anambra State capital from the venue of the Soludo Ambassadors' Anambra South Rally in Nnewi in the same vehicle with officers of the NSCDC, his phone fell from his pocket in the vehicle before he disembarked from the bus.

He said before he could be allowed to alight where disembarked, he had to raise his voice and when the bus eventually stopped, he realized that one of his phones had fallen from his pocket. He said he informed the driver that his phone had fallen and that he needed to retrieve it. He informed the driver but one of the operatives attached to the Awka Capital Territory Development Authority (ACTDA) ordered the driver to speed off, and then intentionally slammed the door of the bus close on his hand, leaving him with severe hand injuries.

Having been left behind and although he was in pains, he had to board a commercial vehicle to the place where the Civil Defence officers said would be the final bus stop.

According to him, when he got to the place, he sought for an explanation from the officer who slammed the door on his hand but the officer challenged him asking him what gave him the boldness to ask such question from him, a uniformed and armed man. He said as the officer raised his voice at him, he also cocked his gun while his colleagues descended on him.

The reporter said some of the Civil Defence officers also cocked their guns and even threatened to shoot him while beating him.

He said it took the intervention of Mr. Ossy Onuko, the Managing Director of the ACTDA to stop their assault on him, adding that the Civil Defence officers continued threatening him and vowed to track him and further deal with him. He said the officers further boasted that no one can stop them from unleashing their mayhem on him as anyone who attempts to do so should first care for their welfare before advising them.

When the State Commandant of Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, Anambra State Command, Mr. Edwin Osuala, heard of the incident, he ordered a probe into the assault.

### **3.3 Arrest and Detention**

#### **Radio Programme Anchor, Guest Arrested after Live Interview Broadcast**

On January 18, 2023, Mr. Yakubu Haliru Jeka-Dafari, a presenter with the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN)-owned Jewel FM Station in Gombe, the Gombe State capital, and a guest in his programme, Sheikh Ahmad Mandy Abubakar, were arrested and detained at the Police Headquarters in the State after a live interview that was aired on the station.

Yakubu was detained after he honoured an invitation by the police following the airing of his interview session with Sheikh Ahmad, who was himself arrested at a political gathering and detained.

Yakubu, who anchors a Hausa political programme '*Harshen ka Alkalin ka,*' was invited and questioned as to why he invited and aired the interview he had with Sheikh Mandy Abubakar, the Imam of one of the Mosques in Gombe metropolis, who is said to be a former die-hard supporter and an active member of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) before he decamped and joined the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), thereby pitching him against the Governor.

His arrest is suspected to have been influenced by the Gombe State



government under the leadership of Alhaji Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya for the utterances credited to the Islamic Cleric. Although officials of the government denied instigating the arrest, they, however, confirmed that they lodged a petition with the police over claims made by the cleric in the interview.

Yakubu was however released the following day after a long discussion between Jewel FM's General Manager and the Commissioner of police but Sheikh Ahmad was not released. Sheikh Mandy Abubakar was released on February 2, 2023.

### **Online Publisher Arrested, Arraigned, Remanded in Custody for Alleged Blackmail**

On February 25, 2023, Mr. Haruna Mohammed Salisu, the publisher of WikkiTimes, an online media outfit, was arrested and detained at the Police Criminal Investigation Department in Bauchi for alleged disturbance of public peace and attempt to blackmail the Bauchi State Governor, Mr. Bala Mohammed. He was subsequently charged to court and remanded in custody.

Haruna was arrested in Duguri, the hometown of the governor while interviewing and recording some aggrieved women who were protesting their inability to get employment after they had submitted their resumes at different quarters, saying they would not participate in the presidential election.

The publisher was arraigned before Ahmed Musa, Chief Magistrate in charge of Court three in Bauchi on February 28. The Chief Magistrate ordered him to be remanded at the Correctional Centre in Bauchi and adjourned the matter to March 1 for hearing and to rule on bail.

The Commissioner of Police, who was the complainant, accused Haruna of hiring some women to incite disturbance of public peace by instigating them to make utterances that would prejudice the peace and well-being of the intended voters at the polling unit in Duguri ward of Alkaleri Local Council and to blackmail the incumbent governor in his ward contrary to section 114 of the Penal Code.

Haruna denied all the charges when they were read to him.

His Counsel, S.G Idrees sought his bail, but a counsel from the Ministry of Justice, Haruna Mohammed, informed the court that the Ministry of Justice would like to take over the case from the Police and continue with the case as contained in the 1999 Constitution.

The court granted him bail on the following conditions: a bail bond of 500,000.00; two sureties, one of who must be a Civil Servant not below the rank of Director and the second surety must be his District Head.

He left the correctional facility on March 2 after he met the bail conditions.

Narrating his experience, Mr. Salisu said he originally planned to cover the elections in the northern part of the state but for ease of movement, he had to join the Bauchi correspondents' chapel of journalists to cover Bauchi South, including Alkaleri local government, which is the hometown of the governor.

He noted that although he had covered several elections in Nigeria, and he was aware of the dangers that came with covering political events, especially with the limited freedom of the press in Nigeria, nothing could have prepared him for the incident that occurred.

Mr. Salisu said on arriving at the venue of the elections, he joined other journalists to interview the governor in his hometown in Duguri where he cast his vote. Then as they moved around to observe and interview voters, they came across a group of women who were murmuring and complaining. He became curious and approached them to find out the cause of their agitation. Seeing his press badge, one of the women called out, “Muna da korafi” which means “We have a complaint to make.” He then asked what their complaint was, and they crowded around him taking turns to express their grievances.

He said that as soon as the interview ended, a group of the governor's supporters attacked him and tried to grab his phone which he used for the video recording. They accused him of attempting to embarrass the governor by filming protesters in his hometown. He tried to convince them that he had no intention of undermining the governor. He went his way believing that the issue had been resolved, but unknown to him, the governor's security aides had already been alerted about his interviews with the protesters.

According to Mr. Salisu, one of the governor's security aides came to him and forcefully took his phone, ordering him to unlock it so he could have access to the footage. He then dragged him towards the governor and warned him that he would have to explain why he was attempting to shame the governor in his hometown.

Despite his explanation that he was merely trying to understand what the anger of the women was, the officer refused to listen. He took his phone into the room where the governor was, and he was questioned by other security personnel. While the interrogation was going on, the governor's supporters (thugs) returned and began to assault him before the police whisked him away.

Haruna said: “While all this was happening, I couldn't help but question my offence. I had committed no crime but simply carried out my duty as a journalist by documenting the events of the day and giving a voice to citizens with the right to complaints. But Governor Bala Mohammed instead saw me as a threat to his power and government.”

“The governor, I was informed, believed that I was hired by the opposition party to undermine him, the same opposition that has accused WikkiTimes, my media organization, of being used by Governor Bala Mohammed's government to attack them. Despite these accusations from both sides, neither the opposition nor the government has been able to provide any evidence to support their claims.” He stated.

He was later escorted to a nearby station by the police where he was held in custody for several hours before being transferred to Bauchi Police Command. He was detained for three days and remanded in the Bauchi prison for another two days.

He said his experience in detention was a reminder of how vulnerable journalists are in Nigeria, adding, the experience traumatised him, and separated him from loved ones including his mother who fell ill and wept endlessly for days.

He cited Governor's Bala Mohammed continued attack on his critics as a representation of anti-democracy which is characterised by an unparalleled level of intolerance for opposing voices. Haruna disclosed that over the last

three years, the governor has ordered the arrest of his critics, who talk about his poor performance in office as well as the detention of people who criticise him on social media. He also threatened to ex-communicate a Daily Trust reporter who asked a critical question during a public event.

Haruna pointed out that those that have been arrested and detained on the governor's orders were denied their right to a fair trial and held in custody for extended periods without being charged.

Such actions according to him, are gross violations of the Nigerian Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and expression.

“When citizens are afraid to express their opinions freely due to the threat of arrest and detention, democracy suffers. It is disheartening to see a former journalist like Governor Mohammed serially gag the press.” He said.

The publisher stated that since the incident, Governor Bala Mohammed has launched a smear campaign against WikkiTimes and its journalism, relying on the falsehood sold to him by his footlings, claiming that he sponsored the women who protested against him.

The police investigation into the matter found no evidence to support the governor's claims that Mr. Salisu had sponsored the protests. The video footage he took also did not show any evidence of him paying the women to protest against the governor, nor was any of his aides able to produce any video of him hiring the women to protest.

### **Police Arrest Newspaper Reporter for Taking Pictures During Election**

On February 25, 2023, Mr. Gbenga Oloniniran, a reporter with The Punch newspaper was arrested by a team of policemen near the residence of Governor Nyesom Wike in Rumuiprison, Port Harcourt in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State for taking picture of election scenes.

Gbenga, who was on election duty, was taking shots of a scene where policemen were arresting some youths at a polling unit. When the policemen saw him taking pictures, they swooped on him with one of the policemen pointing a gun at the reporter who instinctively prostrated on the ground.

The policemen, attached to the Swift Operation Squad, asked him: “Why are

you capturing us? Who are you? What do you want to do?” “Come here, go inside the vehicle,” they ordered the reporter. They seized his phone, assaulted him and bundled him into their van. They continued to beat the reporter while in the van even as they deleted several pictures he had previously taken, including those taken while he was being arrested.

The reporter was released at the Rivers State University, Junction in Port Harcourt after the matter had been reported to the Rivers State Police Command spokesperson, Grace Iringe-Koko.

Speaking after his release, Oloniniran said he was brutalised by police officers at a polling unit close to where the incumbent governor of the state, Nyesom Wike, voted earlier.

The journalist said he was arrested for recording the moment some police officers were harassing a male voter at the polling unit.

### **Commissioner of Police Orders Arrest of Online Publisher for Alleged Falsehood**

On March 13, 2023, the Enugu State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Ahmed Ammani, ordered the state's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to investigate and prosecute Mr. Dave Okanya, an online publisher, for allegedly spreading false information against authorities in the state.

The commissioner described as the height of falsehood and mischief-making, the alleged baseless and misleading publication by the online publisher.

Ahmed said Okanya stated, among other contrived claims, that he, the commissioner “banged phone call” on Gov. Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi.

The Police Commissioner urged the people of the state and members of the public to completely disregard the claim which he said was fictitious, saying there was no iota of truth in it.

The Police boss said “I wonder the source of his impetus to publish and circulate same on the social media. Consequently, I have ordered the state CID to immediately commence a discreet investigation that will lead to the arrest and prosecution of the publisher and his aiders.”

He said the command has made it categorically clear that the content and context of the publication, in this critical moment of the general elections, is one joke taken too far.

### **Soldiers Detain Journalists Covering Election**

Some journalists accredited by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to cover the March 18, 2023, governorship and the house of assembly elections were detained in a Bakassi community in Cross River State where they were traveling to cover the election, despite possessing INEC-issued media tags and traveling in branded vehicles.

One of the detained journalists, Ubong Umoh of Sparkling FM, Calabar, said they were detained by armed military men who claimed that they had orders from above to block the road.

He said even after a lengthy explanation, the military men still said they should have left as early as 5 am.

### **Interpol Arrests Twitter User over Alleged Cybercrime**

On March 18, 2023, Mr. Nnamdi Chude, a Twitter user was arrested in Onitsha by Interpol's Cybercrime Unit in Anambra State. He was transported to the State Criminal Investigation Department in Awka, where he was detained for alleged cybercrime and thereafter taken to Abuja the following day.

Nnamdi used his Twitter account to raise the alarm that thugs suspected to be affiliated with the ruling All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) in the state had reportedly entered certain polling units and stolen ballot boxes.

He expressed disappointment over the incident saying thugs disrupted the voting process to prevent APGA from losing the state assembly election to another party.

In the tweet, Chude said, "I can't remember the last time I heard of ballot box snatching in Anambra, this is the height of it, @CCSoludo has taken us back to Mbadinuju's era."

The Nigeria Police, through its Twitter handle @PoliceNG on March 22 confirmed that Chude Franklin Nnamdi with Twitter handle '@chude\_\_' was

arrested and that he is being investigated by the Nigeria Police Force National Cyber Crime Centre (NPF-NCCC) Abuja, for cyberstalking, pursuant to a complaint received via a petition, about his activities on social media which, according to the Police, contravenes the provision of Section 24 of the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act, 2015, and other criminal laws.

The series of tweets said further that a prima facie case had been established against him while the case file had been forwarded to the Force Legal Department for further action.

The Nigeria Police Force urged members of the public to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the law and be aware of the penalties for violating them most especially the cybercrime law with the new trends in the digital media space.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice had ruled on March 25, 2022, that section 24 of Nigeria's Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc) Act, 2015 “is not in conformity with Articles 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).” The Court ordered Nigeria to repeal or amend the section, which it held to be in gross violation of the right to freedom of expression.

### **Police Arrest, Detain Reporter for Filming Arrest Scene at the Supreme Court**

On May 26, 2023, the police arrested Mr. Ameh Ejekwonyilo, the Premium Times online newspaper judiciary reporter, for using his phone to film a scene of arrest at the Supreme Court premises. They confiscated his phone and detained him in their office at the Supreme Court in Abuja for about four hours before releasing him.

After arresting him, two of the police officers attached to the Supreme Court police station, Peter Ekele and Mary Ogbome, seized Ameh's phone and took him to their nearby office within the court premises.

Following the seizure of his phone, the reporter could not get in touch with his editors about his situation until it was handed back to him at about 1.07 pm

to enable him to unlock it for the police officers to access the pictures and videos in the device. He took advantage of the opportunity to send messages to his editors intimating them about his detention.

The reporter said he repeatedly asked what offence he had committed, but they could not say. He said it took the intervention of his editors; the Director of Information of the Supreme Court, Festus Akande; and the Police Public Relation Officer, Force Headquarters, Muyiwa Adejobi for him to be released at about 3:30 p.m.

One of the reporter's colleagues who also covers the judiciary and who witnessed the arrest, called the journalist's supervisor, Ade Adesomoju, Head, Premium Times Judiciary, Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Desk, to shed light on the situation.

Members of the National Association of Judiciary Correspondents (NAJUC) led by Kayode Lawal pleaded with the police to release the reporter but were ignored.

For more than two hours after Mr. Adesomoju and another Premium Times editor, Bisi Abidoye, arrived at the Supreme Court police station and engaged the Divisional Police Officer, Rakiya Gimba, in a lengthy discussion over the matter, the police continued to detain Ameh.

Asked which law the reporter broke to warrant his arrest; the police officers repeated the same refrain that he tried to hide his phone when an officer demanded to know why he was filming the scene. They also claimed he refused to film the earlier part of the scene where a woman being arrested allegedly slapped a police officer.

The police insisted that the reporter must write a statement as part of their investigation process. They made him write a statement and in fact, tried to dictate what he should write but the reporter insisted he would not change his statement.

He was later granted “bail on self-recognition and his mobile phone returned to him.



## **Police Arrest Publisher on Orders of Governor Peter Mba**

On July 7, 2023, operatives of the anti-kidnapping unit of the Enugu State Police Command arrested Mr. Mike Ilediagu, publisher of News Centre, an online blog, following the publication of a news item, titled, “Pandemonium in parts of Enugu as gunmen enforce sit-at-home, Air Force respond.”

Citing “orders from above,” the police operatives arrested Mike, even though he had pulled down the story when he got wind of his impending arrest.

Governor Mbah had banned the mandatory sit-at-home protests on Mondays in Southeast Nigeria ordered by the separatist group, 'Indigenous People of Biafra' (IPOB), and threatened to shut down markets that refused to open on Mondays.

Mike was released the same day following the intervention of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) President, Mr. Chris Isiguzo.

## **Hooded Security Operatives Abduct, Detain Broadcast Journalist**

On July 27, 2023, some hooded armed operatives of the Nigeria Police, abducted Mr. Chinonso Uba, popularly known as NonsoNkwa, a broadcast journalist who anchors the programme, '*Igbo Ekpebie*' on Ozisa FM in Owerri, Imo State and took him to an unknown destination.

The policemen had laid siege to Assumpta Cathedral of the Owerri Catholic Archdiocese which houses Ozisa FM, waiting for Chinonso to end his programme and come out. After he came out, he got into his car and drove out of the premises of the church premises. But the policemen, operating in a Hilux vehicle, a Lexus 350 Jeep, and an ES 330 car followed him and double-crossed his car in front of Holy Ghost College Secondary School junction. In a commando style, they forced him to stop and dragged him out of his car, and in spite of him shouting that they wanted to kill him, forced him into one of their vehicles and drove off, abandoning the Chinonso's car at the scene of his abduction.

The Imo State Police Spokesman, Mr. Henry Okoye, later disclosed that Chinonso was arrested by operatives of the Force CID, Abuja and not the Imo State Police Command.

He was detained till August 16, when the police arraigned him at an Abuja Federal High Court which ordered the Police Force to release him.

Chinonso was arraigned for an alleged defamatory statement by him to the effect that Governor Hope Uzodimma and Alhaji Asari Dokubo were responsible for killings in Imo State.

The police, in charge No: FHC/ABJ/CR/367/2023 between Inspector General of Police Vs Chinonso Uba told the court that Uba's offence contravenes the Cyber Crime Prohibition Act.

On August 18, the presiding judge, Justice E. N. Okpe, held that Chinonso's "arrest, detention, and torture were illegal, unconstitutional, reckless, and a violent infringement of his fundamental human rights." The court consequently ordered the police to release him within 24 hours. He was however not released.

Chinonso was released on August 29, 2023, 10 days after the Federal High Court ordered his release within 24 hours.

### **Police Arrest Chike Ibezim Over Report on Fashola, Disregard Court Orders to Release Him**

On August 10, 2023, Mr. Chike Ibezim, an entrepreneur and younger brother to the publisher of Reportera News, Mr. Nnamdi Ibezim, was arrested in Abuja by police operatives who claimed that his phone was the registered mobile device used to make a malicious post, alleging that Mr. Babatunde Fashola, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria, and a member of the ruling All-Progressives Congress (APC) was involved in writing the judgment of the Presidential Election Petition Court (PEPC).

The said post further alleged that soldiers had been deployed to impose restrictions on movements around Mr. Fashola's residence ahead of the judgment, scheduled for delivery on September 4, 2023.

Chike acknowledged ownership of the mobile device but denied overseeing Reportera, insisting that his brother, Nnamdi Ibezim, was the publisher.

Following his arrest, a high court sitting in Abuja issued an order mandating the police to either release Chike immediately or charge him to court on August 30. However, the police refused to act on the court's order.

On September 9, Chike's lawyer, Mr. K. Okafor, appeared before Justice Adelaja of the FCT High Court in Kubwa, Abuja, to inform her about the police's statement claiming they are legally detaining Chike.

Justice Adelaja emphasized that her initial order was “in line with the provisions of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, with particular reference to section 35(4) and 35(5) of that constitution.” She reiterated that the police are mandated to obey the court's order issued on August 30, and in the event, they failed to comply, Chike's lawyer was free to take the necessary enforcement procedural steps.

Chike spent 75 days in detention before he was finally released.

### **Police Arrest Three for Protesting Against Emir of Kano**

The Kano State Police Command on August 13, 2023, arrested three persons: Abdulrazak Usman Sarki, Fatihu Muktar Faruk, and Usman Baba Attah, suspected to be among the people who protested against Alhaji Aminu Ado Bayero, the Emir of Kano, at the re-commissioning of the Hasiya Bayero Paediatric Hospital near the Emir's palace.

The protesters chanted: “new governor, new Emir.” They urged Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf to remove the current Emir and install a new one, citing the change in government as their reason.

The Kano state Commissioner of Police, Mr. Mohammad Usaini Gumel confirmed the arrest saying the protesters invaded the venue of the event chanting provocative slogans that, according to him, sparked security uncertainty around the Emirate Council and particularly, the Emir of Kano and other invited dignitaries.

Mr. Gumel said when his command received the report, he dispatched the Police Tactical Units of the command to identify and arrest the perpetrators including their sponsors, adding that the investigation was supported by the use of Technical Equipment that led to the arrest of the suspects.

### **Traditional Religion Devotee Arrested, Arraigned for Allegedly Defaming Monarch, Remanded in Custody.**

A popular Isese (a Nigerian traditional religion) devotee and activist, Mr.

Adegbola Abdulazeed, a.k.a. Talolurun (Who is God), was on August 16, 2023, arrested in Ibadan, Oyo State, for allegedly insulting Alhaji Sulu Gambari, the Emir of Ilorin, and taken to Ilorin, Kwara State where he was detained.

Adegbola was also accused of planning to start a war in Ilorin by inviting other traditional and idol worshippers to assemble in the city on August 20, 2023; burning the Quran and insulting some Islamic clerics.

On August 17, he was arraigned before a magistrate court in Ilorin and was further remanded in a correctional facility.

On August 23, he was again arraigned at the Upper Area Court in Ilorin charged with criminal conspiracy, insulting and exciting contempt of religious creed, criminal defamation and inciting disturbance contrary to Section 97, 210, 392 and 114 of the Penal Code Law.

The charge reads, “On 03/08/2021 at about 1300hrs, the above-captioned case was reported to the commissioner of police, Kwara State command, through a letter of petition written by Association of Proud Sons and Daughters of Ilorin Emirate, Ilorin, Kwara State against you Adegbonla Abdulazeed Talolorun, M of No 53 Adeyemo Layout, Molete, Ibadan, Oyo State for discreet investigation.

“That sometime lately in the month of July 2023, the attention of the president, Alhaji Muritala Abdulkareem Baba Bariga and other members was drawn to the videos on YouTube channel that were posted by you Adegbonla Abdulazeed Tololorun wherein you blasphemed Islam religion, burnt Qur'an, defamed some Islamic scholars in Ilorin.

“That you specifically mention Alfa Ahmad Labeeb Agbaji, Alfa Abdulsalam Baba Tonile Okuta-Agidi, that his father, late Mohammad-Lawal Okuta Agidi that was an idol worshipper, fake cleric and has a shrine in Ilorin.

“You also defame Chief Iman of Offa Alhaji Muhideen Salman Hussein.

“They also stated that you are threatening to cause war in Ilorin and its environs by sending different write-ups on your page on social media inviting other traditional and idol worshippers to assemble in Ilorin on the 20th of August 2023.

“Investigation conducted at the surveillance section, State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID) Ilorin, revealed that you Adegbonla Abdulazeez Talolorun 'M' of No 53 Adeyema layout, Molete, Ibadan Oyo State, criminally conspired together with others at large, to insult Islamic religion, defamed the character Alfa Ahmad Labeeb Agbaji, Alfa Abdulsalam Baba Tonile Okuta-Agidi and Chief Imam of Offa, Alhaji Muhideen Salman Hussein.”

After the court session, Mr. Adedamola Solesi, one of the lawyers representing him addressed other Isese adherents who came to the court. He said Adegbola could barely walk or stand in court due to the severe beatings he received in detention.

He was released on November 17, 2023 after being granted bail the day before. He spent 92 days at the Okekura Correctional Facility in Ilorin.

### **Police Arrest, Detain Lawyer for Alleged Defamation of Government Appointee**

On August 18, 2023, Mr. Femi Oniyide, an Abeokuta-based lawyer, was arrested by operatives of the Nigeria Police following a petition against him by Mr. Tokunbo Talabi, Secretary to the Ogun State Government (SSG), alleging “criminal threat to life, malicious falsehood, criminal defamation and misuse of police connection.” He was taken to the Force Criminal Investigation Department (FCID) Alagbon, Lagos, where he was detained.

Sources claimed that Femi had initially been evading arrest and that the police had trailed him for a while prior to his arrest.

Mr. Talabi had in the petition signed by Mr. Adepeju Jaiyeoba, his solicitor, and addressed to the Assistant Inspector General of Police (AIG), FCID, Alagbon, Lagos State, accused Femi of holding a press conference where he said Femi accused him of money laundering and printing of ballot papers.

The petition dated July 26, 2023, said on July 24, 2023, Mr. Talabi's attention was drawn to a publication titled, 'Legal Practitioner Accuses Ogun SSG of Money Laundering, Ballot Paper Printing', being an explicit report originating from a world press conference held by Femi. The petition claimed further that Femi accused Mr. Talabi of using his former Company, Superflux

International Limited, to siphon monies from the Ogun State government, engaging in money laundering activities, stealing and diverting COVID-19 Funds, perpetrating illegal activities such as the printing of ballot papers for use in the 2023 general election and manipulating the printing output to influence the elections in favour of the Ogun State Governor.

Femi was also accused of petitioning the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) to investigate Mr. Talabi for the purported offences.

Mr. Talabi's lawyer detailed the alleged infractions on the reputation of his client by Femi and called on the police to investigate his complaint and for possible prosecution to serve as a deterrent to others.

### **Police Detain Kwara-Based Journalists on Orders of State Government Officials**

Operatives of the Nigeria Police Force, Kwara State Command, on September 11, 2023, detained two online journalists, Mr. Abdulrazaq Aiyelabegan Babatunde, publisher of Just Events Online and Mr. Lukman Oluwatoyin Bolakale, publisher of Satcom Media on the orders of officials of the Kwara State Government.

The two journalists were detained at the Kwara State Police Command following a petition written against them by the immediate past Principal Private Secretary (PSS) to Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq, Ms Monsurah Jumoke Gafar, who alleged defamation of character.

The journalists wrote the contentious story titled “Gov Abdulrazaq's Camp Kicks Against Reappointment of Jumoke Gafar” from a press release signed by one Chief Rotimi Adebawale which they attributed to their story.

They were invited through a phone call by one Sikiru Adedayo of the Anti-Kidnapping and Cultism unit of the Kwara State Police Command, an invitation which they honoured within two hours of receiving the call.

They were questioned about the veracity and source of the report, which they availed the police. Despite availing the police of the source of the press statement including the phone number and position of the source, who is a

senior government official, the police went ahead to detain them.

The publishers spent ten days in detention before they were released by Magistrate Abdulganiyu Ajia when they appeared before him and their lawyer, Mr. Taofeek Olateju, applied for their bail.

### **Journalist Arrested Over Possession of Laptop.**

On September 13, 2023, Mr. Pelumi Salako, a freelance journalist working with Al Jazeera, the Qatari state-owned international news television network was arrested by officers of the Nigeria Police Force, Kwara State Command, in Ilorin, for being in possession of a laptop, for which he could not immediately produce the receipt at the point of his arrest.

Narrating his ordeal during a telephone conversation with the Foundation for Investigative Journalism (FIJ), Salako explained that despite clarifying that the receipt was at his residence, the police officers labeled him a suspect for his inability to tender his laptop receipt immediately as demanded by the officers.

“I am at the police headquarters in Ilorin. I was stopped and searched, then they asked for my laptop receipt, but I told them it was not on me. I have it, but it is at home. They said not having it on me makes me a suspect, but they did not tell me the crime,” he narrated.

In response to FIJ's intervention and following discussions with the Kwara Police Public Relations Officer, Ajayi Okasanmi, Pelumi Salako was subsequently released from police custody.

### **Journalist Arrested, Detained in Kaduna over Publication**

On November 13, 2023, Mr. Achadu Gabriel Idibia, who writes for Daybreak newspapers, was arrested in Kaduna and detained over a report published on September 24, 2023 titled “Kaduna Hajj camp, a national shame, men, women sleep together in overcrowded hall – investigation.”

He was detained in a correctional facility and questioned on why he wrote the story.

Achadu had earlier on September 24, been arrested and detained at a detention facility run by Special Police Unit “Operation Yaki” over the news

report released on bail after a colleague, Amos Mathew of the New Nigeria Newspapers, stood surety for his bail.

He was arraigned on November 15 charged with defamation of character, intimidation, and incitement of contempt for religion. He was granted bail and released on November 16, with the case adjourned to November 28, 2023.

### **Editor Arrested, Detained by Security Operatives in Abuja**

On December 4, 2023, Mr. Marcus Fatunmole, News Editor at the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), was arrested by security operatives, including a police officer, from Abuja Property Development Company (APDC), and Ms Ibukun Akindele an official of the privately owned company, 360 Transport for Abuja (360 TFA), while taking pictures of a fleet of luxury buses parked at “Eagle Square” car park.

They detained him for six hours at the Central Police Station, Federal Secretariat, Abuja, seized his phone and accessed his Google account.

Marcus was at the Eagle Square to investigate a viral video of old luxury buses allegedly being renovated for mass transit in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and taking pictures when security operatives interrupted and arrested him.

Despite presenting valid identification and confirmation from his editor, Marcus was kept in detention from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm. The security operatives demanded for letter authorizing him to take pictures at the Eagle Square.

### **Journalist Arrested from Home by Security Operatives, Whereabouts Remain Unknown**

On December 12, 2023, Mr. Precious Eze, an online publisher, was arrested at about 1:24 am at his residence in Lagos by operatives of a Special Task Force of the Nigeria Police from its Abuja office and has been held incommunicado since his arrest with his whereabouts unknown to his family members and colleagues.



Upon his arrest, the police confiscated Precious's laptop, phones, and other electronic devices which they took from his home. A friend at the scene offered to accompany them, but the police declined. They promised the friend that they would contact him the next morning to provide information about his whereabouts but no contact was made and all attempts to reach the publisher were unsuccessful.

Friends and family members expressed concerns about his well-being in custody saying he is hypertensive and on medication, and now is being deprived of access to his drugs.

He was later traced to the Department of State Services (DSS), Nigeria's intelligence service, and released when his lawyer secured his bail after spending 10 days in detention.

### **3.4 Office Invasion**

#### **Suspected Yoruba Nation Self-Determination Agitators Hijack Radio Station**

On May 28, 2023, at about 5.30 AM, persons suspected to be Yoruba nation self-determination agitators, armed with charms, amulets, guns, cutlasses and other dangerous weapons, stormed the premises of Amuludun 99.1 FM radio station, owned by the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), in Ibadan, Oyo State.

They entered the broadcast studio held staff on duty hostage, hijacked the live broadcast and started broadcasting. They declared in their broadcast that Oodua Nation has come to stay; that Yoruba is no more under the Federal Republic of Nigeria; and that the United Nations will soon declare Oodua Nation. The agitators were on air broadcasting for about one hour before the arrival of a joint team of police and soldiers who arrested them.

Policemen from the Moniya Divisional Police headquarters and Moniya Area Command; Oyo Station Joint Security Patrol team codenamed, Operation Burst; and soldiers from 2 Division of Nigerian Army, Odoogbo, Ojoo, Ibadan, stormed the station and ended the siege laid by the hijackers. The security and law enforcement agents were able to arrest five of the suspects,

who were taken to the Oyo State Police Command, Eleyele, Ibadan, where they were paraded.

### **Criminals Burgle Radio Station, Steal Valuable Equipment**

Some suspected hoodlums on the night of June 5, 2023, broke into the offices of the Kogi State Broadcasting Corporation in Ochaja and carted away broadcast equipment as well as other valuables worth millions of naira while they destroyed others. The burglary pulled the station off the air.

The news of the burglary was disclosed in a statement by Ms Patience Salawu, public relations officer at the Kogi State Ministry of Information and Communications.

Ms Salawu said the Ministry carried out an on-the-spot assessment to ascertain the level of damage and noted that the station would not be able to operate for now. She added that the state government has directed security agencies to fish out the perpetrators.

She said: “With the level of damage at the station, it is regrettable to note that the broadcasting corporation would not be able to operate for the time being. The government is however committed to returning the station back on air as soon as possible.”

### **Hoodlums Invade, Loot Radio Station in Jalingo**

On the night of July 21, and into the early hours of July 22, 2023, suspected hoodlums raided and looted the corporate offices of Rock 92.3 FM situated at Malam Joda Area of Jalingo in Taraba State.

According to one of the directors, Mr. Ahmad Gassol: “The hoodlums stormed our office premises, carting away several items, while the Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Ayodele Samuel, was in one of the offices. He was rescued unscathed by the Department of State Services (DSS) and Army personnel, who responded to a distress call.”

Items reportedly looted from the station Jalingo by the hoodlums include two television sets (43 inches and 50 inches), three Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) gadgets, and an eight-channel digital audio mixer.

Ahmad pleaded for public cooperation in recovering the looted items, saying they are critical to the station's operations.

The invasion left the CEO traumatized.

### **3.5 Harassment and Denial of Access**

#### **APC-PCC Expels Arise TV Cameraman from Event, Accuses Him of Espionage**

The All-Progressives Congress Presidential Campaign Council (APC-PCC) on January 13, 2023, expelled an Arise TV cameraman on allegations that he was clandestinely livestreaming Bola Tinubu's event without authorization and that he was on espionage mission.

The occasion was the All-Progressives Congress, (APC) Presidential Candidate, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu's dialogue with the Nigeria Economic Summit Group, (NESG) in Lagos where he presented his comprehensive economic plan to the business stakeholders.

Mr. Bayo Onanuga, the APC-PCC Director of Media and Publicity, disclosed in a tweet that the unnamed journalist was not authorised by anyone and was consequently sent out.

Mr Onanuga claimed in his tweet that: “Arise TV cameraman clandestinely streamed live Asiwájú Bola Tinubu's event in Lagos today. He was not authorized by anyone. He was clearly on espionage but was busted and sent out.” He also asked in the tweet: “Is journalism by stealth part of the practice by Arise News?”

#### **Journalists Prevented from Covering Distribution of Election Materials**

On February 22, 2023, security forces working under the orders of officials with the Osun branch of the Central Bank of Nigeria barred journalists from at least 10 separate media houses from accessing the bank office in Oshogbo, the Osun state capital, where Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials had come to collect election materials, including result sheets and ballot papers.

Toba Adedeji, a reporter with The Nation newspaper, who was there said when he covered a similar collection of election materials ahead of the Osun State governorship elections in July 2022, journalists were permitted to

access the bank premises.

### **Political Thugs Delete Contents from Journalist's Phone**

On February 25, 2023, a group of men stopped Ajayi Adebola, a reporter with Peoples Gazette, covering the February 25, 2023, Presidential and National Assembly elections, at a polling unit in Lagos, and deleted pictures she had taken from her phone.

She said some of her assailants wore vests representing the All Progressives Congress.

### **Security Agents Intercept Reporter, Delete Pictures from his Smartphone.**

Security agents, suspected to be operatives of the Department of State Services (DSS) on February 25, 2023, intercepted and questioned Adesola Ikulajolu, a reporter with the Center for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID), about his work. They collected his smartphone and deleted the picture folders from his phone as he moved between polling units in Lagos.

### **Hoodlums Harass, Bar Journalists from Covering Elections**

On March 18, 2023, during the governorship and houses of assembly elections in Nigeria, persons suspected to be political thugs and hoodlums harassed, assaulted and barred journalists from covering elections at different locations in Lagos. Ms Henrietta Oke, Ms Amarachi Amushie, and Ms Nkiru Nwokedi, reporters, and cameramen of the African Independent Television (AIT), were harassed and assaulted by the hoodlums in Eti-Osa, Ifako-Ijaiye and Amuwo Odofin local government areas.

Amushie was harassed and her camera was destroyed, while the photographer was assaulted before a party chieftain. Nkiru lost her phone in the process, but it was later found by members of the O'odua Peoples Congress (OPC) and returned to her.

### **Political Thugs Harass Pulse Nigeria Media Crew**

A news crew of Pulse Nigeria, an online news medium, which covered the

March 18, 2023, governorship and the house of assembly elections in Ikeja areas of Lagos State were harassed by political thugs who did not want the medium to capture alleged vote buying at a polling unit in Anifowose area.

Pulse Senior News Reporter, Ms Ima Elijah, acting on a tip-off by an eye witness about the incident of vote buying led the Pulse media team to the polling unit to verify the claim.

When the crew got to the polling unit, however, she and other members of the Pulse media crew were harassed by a group of thugs who insisted that the voting process in the area should not be captured live or recorded.

Although the Pulse media crew members showed their INEC Media accreditation tags, the thugs nevertheless insisted that they leave.

At one point, one of the thugs attempted to snatch Ima's phone in an effort to stop her from recording events at the polling unit.

When efforts to reason with the thugs proved abortive, the Pulse media team left the polling unit to avoid physical harm and damage to its equipment.

### **Election Umpire Officials Bar Journalists from Council Collation Centre**

Officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on March 18, 2023, barred journalists and others from observing the collation of results of the governorship and house of assembly elections that came from the wards at its collation centre at the Somolu Local Government Area of Lagos State.

Rather than collate the results publicly, INEC officials took the results from the wards to an inner office where, with some selected persons, they carried out the exercise. At about 4:58 am on March 19, the returning officer, alongside police escorts, left the INEC LGA office at Somolu with the results. The outcome was not disclosed to journalists or other observers.

### **INEC Official Prevents Journalists from Election Collation Centre**

On March 19, an official from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) ordered four security officers to prevent Ayo Adenaiye, an Arise TV news correspondent; James Akpa Oche, a campus reporter at

Bayero University, Kano; Stephen Enoch, a reporter with Plus TV Africa, and at least three other journalists from various outlets from accessing a vote collation centre in the city of Kano.

Ayo disclosed that INEC officials had a list that excluded many journalists from entering the collation centre.

### **Armed Officials Chase Journalists from Election Collation Centre in Adamawa State**

A combined team of armed law enforcement and security operatives on April 15, 2023, chased away journalists from the premises of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Headquarters in Yola, Adamawa State, where they had gone to cover the collation of results of the supplementary governorship election held in the State.

The journalists who arrived at the collation centre at about 3 pm to cover the process were turned back by the security officers on guard.

A police officer told reporters: “This order is from above that we should not allow journalists inside the collation centre for now.” The police reportedly claimed that they had accredited journalists whom they would invite to cover the collation and announcement of the supplementary election results.

The journalists, who had been accredited to cover the supplementary election, were mostly from the Correspondents' Chapel of the Adamawa State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ).

### **Security Officials Prevent Journalists from Covering Interior Minister's Assumption of Duty.**

Paramilitary officials on August 21, 2023, manhandled journalists and barred them from covering the assumption of duty by Mr. Olunmi Tunji-Ojo, the newly appointed Minister of Interior, after his swearing-in ceremony at the Presidential Villa in Abuja.

The Minister arrived at the ministry in Area 1, Garki area of Abuja at about 2:20 pm accompanied by a crowd of supporters and was smuggled into the Minister's conference hall by security officials who also prevented journalists from entering the hall because, according to them, the discussion was a

“family matter”.

All explanations by journalists that they were invited to cover the event and that the assumption of a minister was a public event, fell on deaf ears. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, Ms Oluwatoyin Akinlade, ordered security operatives to throw out the journalists even though she invited them to the event.

The journalists left the venue after waiting for over two hours in the Minister's Waiting Room to see if they could possibly interview the Minister.

### **Suspected Political Thugs Harass Journalists Covering Elections in Imo State**

On November 11, 2023, a reporter with the online newspaper, Premium Times, Mr. Chinagorom Ugwu, was harassed by political thugs at Polling Unit 028 located in Ama Ozaraigwe in Omuma Community, in the Oru East Local Government Area of Imo State, where he went to cover the off-season governorship election in the State.

The reporter said the suspected thugs became apprehensive by his presence at the polling unit and ordered him to leave the vicinity. He said one of the thugs told him he was making people uncomfortable at the polling unit and asked him to leave saying the reporter had seen enough. The thug told the reporter that his face was strange, adding that they knew themselves in the community.

When he informed one of the thugs that he was accredited to cover the election, another thug retorted: “Anyone can come here with a tag and say he's accredited.” The first thug told the reporter they were not doubting him but said he had seen enough and pushed the reporter away. The reporter hesitated and one of the thugs flared up threatening to deal with him if he failed to leave immediately. The thugs asked him to go to other polling units.

Again, when he attempted to take a photograph of an Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) poster showing details of the polling unit, the thugs prevented him and tried to lynch him.

As a number of the thugs gathered to deal with him, a woman advised him to leave immediately.

Some minutes later, at polling unit 002, Court Hall Etiti within the same community, the reporter was again asked to leave the unit's premises by a suspected thug who informed him that he can only be allowed to observe the unit if one of them, believed to be their leader allowed him.

He was led to see the man, in his forties, who asked what the reporter came to do at the unit.

Following his explanations, the man granted the reporter access to the polling station but signaled to the thug to keep close watch on him. Police operatives who were present at the polling unit witnessed the incident but failed to intervene.

Another reporter from the News Agency of Nigeria, who asked not be named, said he was equally harassed by suspected thugs in some polling units. He said “They didn't even allow me to get close. They came and met me immediately a bike man dropped me. They asked me repeatedly, 'what's it? So, from their tone, I knew something was happening there and I just left”.

### **3.6 Imposition of Fine**

#### **NBC Fines Arise TV, TVC N2m Each Over Alleged Breach of Nigerian Broadcast Code**

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) on February 3, 2023, asked Arise Global Media Limited, owners of Arise News TV; and Continental Broadcasting Services Limited, owners of Television Continental (TVC) to pay N2m each as a fine for allegedly breaching sections of the Nigerian Broadcasting Code.

In separate letters to the Chief Executive Officers of Arise Global Media Limited and Continental Broadcasting Service Limited, the NBC Director-General, Mallam Balarabe Ileh, accused them of violating the Broadcasting Code in their coverage of political campaigns and gave each of them two weeks within which to pay the N2 million penalty.

In the letter to Continental Broadcasting Services Limited, Mallam Ileh



said the NBC monitored its consistent breach of the Nigeria broadcasting code over a period, adding that “the worrisome trend has become a house style on your channel that enjoys national coverage.”

The Commission pointed out that TVC News does not offer equal coverage to other political parties as it gives the All-Progressives Congress (APC).

The NBC gave specific instances in which it said TVC breached the Broadcasting Code through its broadcasts. The Commission said on January 6, 2023, at 12:29 pm, at the Joint Media Directorate of the APC Presidential Campaign Council, Festus Keyamo, while briefing the media, made the following comments: “Obasanjo and Atiku run a criminal enterprise, an empire of fraud in Abuja. At the same time that Ahmed Bola Asiwaju was toiling hard, beautifully and meticulously to rebuild Lagos, two criminals were stealing money in Abuja at the time...they both stole from the SPV account at that time.”

In another instance, the NBC said, that on January 24, 2023, at 03:39 pm, during the APC Presidential Rally in Abia State, the APC Presidential Candidate Bola Tinubu after telling the public to vote APC under the symbol of broom, went on to say: “... You know what you do with the rest of them? They are like lizards, cockroaches, and mosquitoes. Just take the broom, wipe them off.”

On the accusation of unequal coverage of the activities of the main opposition, Mallam Illelah said: “On October 10, 2022, your station [TVC] started its news with 17 minutes of APC news and one minute of PDP story with a video clip that did not play.”

Accusing Arise News TV of unprofessional broadcasts, the NBC listed its breaches of the Nigerian Broadcasting Code to include: its broadcast on January 24, 2023, between 1.00 pm – 2.27 pm when Arise TV aired the Presidential campaign rally of PDP which was held in Delta State, which the Commission said was replete with unfair remarks and mockery of the APC presidential candidate by Dino Melaye.

Specifically, the NBC said at the rally, “Mr. Melaye sang a song ‘...hand dey shake, leg dey shake, baba wey no well, e dey shout emilokan’ he further went on to fall down demonstrating the frailty of the APC presidential candidate.”

The Commission said Arise TV did not only air the programme but repeated the clip of Dino Melaye in a mockery of the APC Presidential candidate in another programme 'What's Trending' anchored by Ojy Okpe.

In addition, the letter to Arise News TV said: “On January 26, 2023, at 9.40am, during the programme Morning Show, a guest, Na'jaatu Muhammed described the Presidential Candidate of APC, Bola Tinubu as mentally deranged without caution from the anchor. The guest had a field day with vituperations against the presidential candidate of the APC.”

The NBC again cited another instance of breach of the broadcast code saying: “On January 31 2023, at 3:30 pm, during the broadcast of the PDP presidential rally in Sokoto State, Dino Melaye referred to the Vice-Presidential candidate of APC, Kashim Shettima as GCOB, meaning Grand Commander of Bandits.”

The Commission accused the television stations of breaching sections 1.10.4; 3.1.2; 3.1.2; 3.3.1(e); 4.2.2 (g); 4.2.2 (g); 4.3.1(e); 5.3.3 (c); 5.3.3 (e); 5.3.3 (f); and 5.5.1 (b) of the Nigerian Broadcasting Code, among others.

The NBC ordered the stations to pay the fines within two weeks of the receipt of the letters, warning that the sanction would be graduated if they fail to pay early

### **3.7 Court Cases**

#### **Court Remands Two Arraigned for Allegedly Defaming Osun State Assembly Speaker**

On June 7, 2023, a magistrate court sitting in Osogbo, the Osun State capital, remanded two men, Mr. Ajibola Oluwasegun and Mr. Ajiboye Babatunde, in correctional custody after they were arraigned for allegedly defaming the character of the new speaker of the State House of Assembly, Hon. Egbedun Adewale through their social media posts.

The two men were arraigned before Magistrate Olusegun Ayilara on two counts of conspiracy and defamation of character, offences which they were alleged to have committed on June 2, 2023, with intent to injure the reputation

of the Speaker.

Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Idoko John, the prosecutor who presented the charge sheet in court said the men conspired to publish a defamatory matter against the speaker on the date. The men pleaded not guilty to the charges filed against them by the police.

The charge sheet states that they “did falsely post on social media that Hon. Egbedun Adewale, is a fraudster declared wanted by FBI/EFCC, thereby exposing him to hatred or ridicule, or damage to his profession or trade/reputation and thereby committed an offence contrary to section 373 and punishable under Section 375 of the Criminal Code Cap. 34 Vol II Laws of Osun State of Nigeria 2002.”

Efforts by their counsel, Oluwabusayo Ebo, to secure their freedom proved abortive as Magistrate Ayilara urged him to apply formally for their bail.

Magistrate Ayilara ordered that the men be remanded in a correctional facility and adjourned the matter to June 9, 2023, for ruling on their bail applications.

### **Federal High Court Jails Lady for Allegedly Cyberstalking Nigerian Actress**

Justice Nicholas Oweibo of the Federal High Court sitting in Lagos on August 2, 2023, sentenced Ms Nwakaego Okoye, a social media influencer, to three years imprisonment for allegedly “cyberstalking” Ms Eniola Badmus, a Nollywood actress, on the social media platform, TikTok.

Ms Okoye who pleaded guilty to a two-count charge of cyberstalking was given her an option of paying a fine of N150,000 in lieu of jail time in consideration of her remorse.

Nwakaego and one Chimabia (said to be at large) were accused of conspiring to commit the offence between December 2022 and July 2023 in Lagos, in contravention of Sections 24(1)(b), (2)(a)(c) and 27 of the Cybercrimes Act, 2015.

Nwakaego apologised for her actions, saying she needed money to pay her house rent, adding that desperation pushed her into acting in such a manner. She said a friend of hers, Fortune Ibe, convinced her that if she talked about

Ms Eniola Badmus, the actress would send her N200,000 because she informed her friend about her rent.

She said: “That was what prompted the video. I am so sorry; I just did that because I was desperate to pay my house rent. I just did it because of the money.”

Meanwhile, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Community Court of Justice has actually ruled that section 24 of Nigeria's Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc) Act, 2015 is not in conformity with Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The Court ordered Nigeria to repeal or amend the section, which it held to be in gross violation of the right to freedom of expression. However, the Nigeria Police Force continues to arrest and charge Nigerians with the same section of the law.

### **Magistrate Court Sentences Two Journalists Over Defamation of Character**

On November 29, 2023, Magistrate Court 4 sitting in Asaba, Delta State sentenced two journalists: Mr. Joe Ogbodu, Managing Editor of Bigpen Nigeria, an online newspaper, and Prince Amour Udemude, to prison for the defamatory [report](#) they published over four years ago, on October 17, 2019.

The court sentenced Prince Amour to two years imprisonment or a fine of N100,000.00, and Joe Ogbodu to one year imprisonment, to pay the sum of N50,000.00 fine respectively to the Delta State Government and to write a retraction in BIG PEN and Sahara Reporters Online, coupled with a retraction in one Nigerian Newspaper.

The two journalists in their story about a bloody crisis in Uzere community accused Mr. Sam Ogrih of funding and sponsoring some armed Uzere community youths who styled themselves as “Freedom Fighters” and had unleashed mayhem on the community.

Joe and Prince Amour had pleaded not guilty to the charge of misdemeanour, to wit defamation, after listening to the five-count charge and their counsels applied for their bail.

When the court resumed sitting on the case, the presiding Magistrate, B.N Anumadu sentenced them and ordered them to tender an unreserved apology to Mr. Sam Ogrih for the report.

They wrote an apology wherein they stated that the story was not intentional and that they deeply regretted publishing it.

In their apology, the two journalists said they regretted the publication after re-examining the facts of the story and thereby apologised to Sam Ogrih for any inconveniences the story may have caused his reputation. They said: “The story was not intentional and it's deeply regretted. The general public should take notice.”

On October 12, 2022 when they appeared before a Magistrate Court sitting in Asaba, [Prince](#) Amour alleged that he was coerced and threatened by a police prosecutor, Ms Theresa Okpor, to write a statement that she dictated.

### **3.8 Killed**

#### **Man Stoned to Death for Allegedly Blaspheming Founder of Islam**

On June 25, 2023, a man identified as Usman Buda Mai Hanji was stoned to death at the Sokoto Abattoir by a mob for allegedly blaspheming the founder of Islam.

When news of the alleged blasphemous comment began to spread, an enraged mob quickly formed and taking matters into their own hands stoned Usman until he died due to the injuries inflicted upon him in the process.

Details surrounding the alleged blasphemous comment made by Usman remain unclear, as does the exact composition and motivations of the mob that carried out the attack.

Blasphemy allegations have historically sparked violent reactions and pose significant challenges to fostering a climate of religious tolerance and respect for diverse beliefs. On May 12, 2022, Ms Deborah Samuel Yakubu, a second-year student of Shehu Shagari College of Education in the same city was killed by a mob of Muslim students who accused her of blasphemy.

## **Journalist Declared Missing, Later Found Dead**

Mr. Yusuf Mubarak, a 27-year-old journalist and third-year student of Nassarawa State University, who went missing on the night of September 13, 2023, was found dead on September 16, 2023, along Unity Road, Ilorin, in Kwara State.

His remains were buried according to Islamic rites.

Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq of Kwara State as a result called on security agencies in the state to unravel the cause of the death of the journalist. The governor in a statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Mr. Rafiu Ajakaye, described as shocking and saddening the death of Mubarak under hazy circumstances that he said must be investigated by security agencies.

## **3.9 Others**

### **Unknown Gunmen Attack Radio, TV Stations in Port Harcourt**

A radio station, Wish FM 99.5 and the Atlantic Television Network, both located in Ozuoba, in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, were on February 21, 2023, attacked by unknown gunmen with explosive devices suspected to be dynamite. They also shot sporadically into the air during the attack.

The incident occurred around 8:40 pm and led to the destruction of some broadcast equipment and property in the facility which houses the two media outlets owned by a member of the House of Representatives, Hon. Chinyere Igwe.

No life was lost during the incident.

### **University of Abuja Authorities Expel Students for Calling for Protest over Tuition Fees Increase**

On May 26, 2023, the authorities of the University of Abuja expelled two student union leaders: Mr. Cyprian Igwe, the Director of Socials of the university's students' union, and Mr. Olamilekan Samson Oladeru, the

Director of Sports, for calling for a meeting and protest by students over the institution's increase of tuition fees.

The rustication letter signed by Alkasim Umar, the University's deputy registrar, accused the students of circulating an inciteful press release “capable of jeopardising the peaceful and smooth conduct of academic activities in the university and a breach of the University Matriculation Oath”. By the letter, the Vice Chancellor ordered their rustication and ban “from all university campuses pending the determination of the case.”

Cyprian had posted on the Student Union's WhatsApp group expressing his displeasure at the University's April 29, 2023, decision to increase school fees while Olamilekan was accused of circulating a press release. Both students had written their final year exams and were waiting for their call-up letter for the mandatory one-year service.

The rustication letter reads in part: “Your actions are capable of jeopardising the peaceful smooth conduct of academic activities in the university and a breach of the university matriculation oath. By the powers conferred on the Vice Chancellor as contained in the University of Abuja Act, he on behalf of the senate has directed your immediate rustication from the university. Accordingly, you are banned from all university campuses pending the determination of the case.”

The President of the Students' Union, Emmanuel Anyantayo Emitayo, and Speaker of Union's Parliament, Muhammad Bahar, confirmed that a communique was circulated but claimed that their signatures were forged in the communique circulated on various social media platforms in the school.

The University later recalled the rustication letters issued to the students saying it was issued in error.

### **Editor Escapes Assassination Attempt in Abuja**

On June 27, 2023, Mr. Saawua Terzungwe, the Deputy Political Editor of the Daily Trust newspaper, escaped an attempt made on his life while he was returning home from the office in Abuja. Saawua worked on the production desk until late into the night, leaving his office after 11 pm. After leaving office he drove his car and headed home to the Mararaba area in neighbouring

Nasarawa State.

Some unknown persons followed him in a car to the estate where he lived and confronted him with firearms after he entered through the gate to the estate. He said the leader of the group expressly ordered his men to kill the journalist.

Recalling his experience, Saawua said the assailants did not make any demands for money, ATM cards, or transfers. He disclosed that one of the would-be assassins ordered him to surrender his car key, but their leader expressed anger towards the member, and ordering that he should be shot.

They fired several shots at him but he managed to escape through a backdoor and navigated his way through a bush path to seek protection and help at the nearest police station. One of Saawua's neighbors later informed him that his attackers had continued searching for him within the confines of the mini estate, persistently threatening to end his life that very night.

The assailants absconded with Saawua's car key, wallet, and one of his phones, which they took from his vehicle before he had a chance to secure them.

After the incident, Saawua promptly reported the matter to the police.

### **Police IGP's Monitoring Unit Summons Journalists from Enugu to Abuja**

On August 12, 2023, the office of the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Monitoring Unit of the Nigeria Police summoned three journalists – Mr. Petrus Obi of Everyday NewsNgr, Mr. Ignatius Okpara of the African Examiner, and Mr. Clinton Umeh of Journalists 101, all based in the South-eastern State of Enugu, to report in Abuja on August 14, 2023, to answer to allegations of “criminal conspiracy, cyberstalking, injurious falsehood, conduct likely to cause breach of public peace and criminal defamation with intent to incite”.

The summon was made in a letter signed by Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) A. A. Elleman, Head of the Unit, following allegations leveled against the journalists by Dr. Monday Nwite Igwe, Medical Director of the Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital in Enugu.



The invitation followed news stories and articles published by the journalists about happenings at the Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital in Enugu, including the closure of the hospital's School of Post Basic Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing in Enugu, both of which Dr. Igwe exercises supervision over.

However, the matter was resolved, and they did not have to go to Abuja.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.0 Appendix

#### 4.1 Table Showing Attacks on Freedom of Expression in 2023

THREAT TO LIFE				
S/N	Date	Attack	Victim	Perpetrator
1	March 2023	Journalist Raises Alarm Over Threats to Life	Mr. Samson Isah Alfa, Niger State Correspondent of Aljazeera newspapers	Politicians belonging to the All Progressive Congress (APC)
2	March 17, 2023	Gov. David Umahi Orders Arrest of Journalists, Fake Observers	Journalists	The Ebonyi State governor, Mr. David Umahi
3	March 19, 2023	Soldier Threatens to Shoot Journalist	Journalist affiliated with Landmark Radio, Niger State	A soldier, identified as Lance Corporal Samson
4		Editor-in-Chief of The Nigeria Lawyer Alleges Threat to Life Over 2023 Post-Election Publications	Ms Chioma Kate Unini, Founder and Editor-In-Chief of the online platform, The Nigeria Lawyer	Anonymous
5	March 27, 2023	Journalist Petitions Security Agencies over Threat to Life by Governor-Elect	Mr Hassan Wuyo, the Kaduna State Correspondent of the Vanguard newspaper	Senator Uba Sani, Kaduna State governor-elect
6	May 2023	Journalist Goes into Hiding, Alleges Threat to Life for Criticising Police on Tiktok.	Ms Rukayya Aliyu-Jibia, Tambari Hausa	A police officer, Mr Gambo Isah

7	August 10, 2023	Journalist Goes into Hiding Over Alleged Threat to Life for Report Unravelling Corruption in Anambra State	Ms. Karen James, Investigative Journalist	Unknown
8		Police Threaten WikkiTimes Editor, Wife, Others for Exposing Terrorism Funding, Illegal Mining in Niger State	Editor of WikkiTimes, Mr. Yakubu Mohammed, his wife, colleagues, and friends	Bauchi and Niger State Police Commands
9		Journalist Goes into Hiding Over Accusation of Blasphemy	Mr. Gabriel Idibia, head of bureau of Daybreak Nigeria newspaper	Muslim journalist colleagues
<b>ASSAULT/BATTERY</b>				
10	February 21, 2023	Trust TV Cameraman Brutalised by Hoodlums at APC Campaign Rally in Lagos	A cameraman with Trust Television, Mr. Taiwo Yishau	Hoodlums
11	February 22, 2023	Journalist Beaten by Political Thugs while Covering Youth Protest	Jonathan Ugbal, CrossRiverWatch Civic Space Editor	Political Thugs
12	February 25, 2023	Reporter Covering Election Assaulted by Suspected Political Thugs	Bolanle Olabimtan, TheCable's judiciary correspondent	Political Thugs
13	February 25, 2023	Journalist Molested by Hoodlums while Covering Elections	Mr. Dayo Aiyetan, the Executive Director of the International Center for Investigative Reporting (ICIR)	Hoodlums
14	February 25, 2023	Angry Youths Attack Journalists on Election Duty	Journalists	Angry Youth/Mob
15	February 25, 2023	Journalists Attacked at Polling Unit, Equipment Damaged	Daily Post state correspondent, Akam James the publisher of Upfront news magazine, Princewill Sede and the managing editor, Jeany Metta Mr. Joe Kunde and the cameraman, Mr. Miebi Bina	Unknown
16	February 26, 2023	Journalist Covering Market Fire Incident Attacked by Angry Mob in Borno	A reporter of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Mrs Pauline Kuje Vana	Angry Mob

17	March 18, 2023	Thugs Attack Arise TV Crew Covering Governorship and House of Assembly Elections	A reporter for Arise TV, Oba Adeoye; cameraman, Opeyemi Adenihun; and the driver, Yusuf Hasan	Thugs
18	March 18, 2023	Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps Officials Assault Journalist	a journalist working with Breeze FM 99.9 in Lafia	Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC)
19	March 18, 2023	Thugs Brutalise Journalist Covering Governorship and House of Assembly Elections	Mr. Ashiru Umar, a journalist working for Premier Radio in Kano	Thugs
20	March 18, 2023	Newspaper Correspondent Attacked by Thugs at Polling Unit	Mr Aloy Attah, a Correspondent of the Sun Newspaper in Onitsha	Thugs
21	March 18, 2023	Armed Thugs Chase Journalists, Others from Polling Unit	Adejoke Adeleye, a reporter with the News Agency of Nigeria (NANS)	Armed Thugs
22	March 18, 2023	Thugs Attack TV Crew Covering Elections in Lagos	A Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS) crew comprising of Lekan Shobowale, a reporter; Fólórunsó Abiola, a cameraman; and Ope Adegoke a driver	Hoodlums
23	March 22, 2023	Journalist Attacked by Armed Men Who Demanded for His Midget	Mr. Mohammed Usamat Suleman, who works with Shimo FM in Jalingo, Taraba State	Unknown Armed Men
24	March 30, 2023	Soldiers Join Hoodlum to Attack Journalist in Abuja	Mr. Sinafi Omanga, a journalist with the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR)	Hoodlums and Soldiers
25	April 17, 2023	Photojournalist Assaulted, arrested while Covering Protest by Aviation Unions in Lagos	Mr. Benedict Uwalaka, a photojournalist with Daily Trust newspaper	Nigeria Police
26	May 25, 2023	Police Brutalise, Detain TV Reporter Filming Riot Incident in Oyo State	Mr. John Alabi, a Silverbird News24 reporter	Nigeria Police

27	June 5, 2023	Thugs Attack Journalists Covering Election Tribunal	The Blueprint newspaper correspondents and other journalists	Thugs
28	June 5, 2023	Police Forcefully us Journalist as Bait to Arrest Community Leader	Mr. Chinedu Orlu-Orlu, a presenter with Today 95.1 FM radio	Nigeria Police
29	June 30,2023	Journalist Assaulted While Investigating South-East Nigeria Entrepreneurial Development Centre	Ms. Charity Uwakwe, a correspondent of Nigerian Horn newspaper	Staff of the Ministry of Women Affairs
30	August 7, 2023	Lagos State Taskforce Manhandles, Detains Reporter Covering its Operations	Mr. Ikechi Nzeako, a reporter with Daily Independent newspaper	Lagos State Taskforce
31	August 16, 2023	Journalists, Cameramen on Guided Tour of Nembe Community	Television Continental (TVC), and his cameraman, Mr. Bina Miebi; Mr. Awe Baratuapere of the Federal Government-owned Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and his cameraman, Mr. Ayebakuro Egein; Mrs. Iniyekenime Doctor Bruce of Daar Communications Limited, operators of Africa Independent Television (AIT) and RayPower radio; and Mr. Femi Folaranmi of The Sun Publishing Limited.	Hoodlums
32	August 31, 2023	Political Thug Assaults Journalist Inside Adamawa State Government House	Mr. Ibrahim Mista Ali, a journalist and blogger	Political Thugs
33	September 18, 2023	Road Safety Officials Beat up Journalist for Capturing their Activities on Video.	Mr. Mustapha Usman, a journalist with the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR)	Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC)

34	September 20, 2023	Police Attack Journalists Covering Kano Election Petition Tribunal.	Mr. Salim Ibrahim of Daily Trust newspaper, and Mr. Zahraddeen Lawal, BBC Hausa reporter	Nigeria Police
35	November 24, 2023	VOA Reporter Assaulted by Commissioner of Homeland Security in Niger State	Mr. Mustapha Batsari, a reporter for Voice of America (VOA)	Major General Bello Mohammed Abdullahi (rtd), the Niger State Commissioner of Homeland Security
36	December 2, 2023	NSCDC Operatives assault Journalist in Anambra State	Mr. Izunna Okafor, a reporter with the online news portal, <a href="https://247ureports.com/">https://247ureports.com/</a>	Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC)
<b>ARREST/DETENTION</b>				
37	January 18, 2023	Radio Programme Anchor, Guest Arrested after Live Interview Broadcast	Mr. Yakubu Haliru Jeka-Dafari, a presenter with the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN)-owned Jewel FM Station in Gombe	Nigeria Police
38	February 25, 2023	Online Publisher Arrested, Arraigned, Remanded in Custody for Alleged Blackmail	Mr. Haruna Mohammed Salisu, the publisher of WikkiTimes	Nigeria Police
39	February 25, 2023	Police Arrest Newspaper Reporter for Taking Pictures During Election	Mr. Gbenga Oloniniran, a reporter with The Punch newspaper	Nigeria Police
40	March 13, 2023	Commissioner of Police Orders Arrest of Online Publisher for Alleged Falsehood	Mr. Dave Okanya, an online publisher	Nigeria Police
41	March 18, 2023	Soldiers Detain Journalists Covering Election	Ubong Umoh of Sparkling FM Calabar	Soldiers
42	March 18, 2024	Interpol Arrests Twitter User over Alleged Cybercrime	Mr. Nnamdi Chude,	Interpol

43	May 26, 2023	Police Arrest, Detain Reporter for Filming Arrest Scene at the Supreme Court	Mr. Ameh Ejekwonyilo, the Premium Times online newspaper judiciary reporter	Nigeria Police
44	July 7, 2023	Police Arrest Publisher on Orders of Gov. Peter Mba	Mr. Mike Ilediagu, publisher of News Centre, an online blog	Nigeria Police
45	July 27, 2023	Hooded Security Operatives Abduct, Detain Broadcast Journalist	Mr. Chinonso Uba, a broadcast journalist with Ozisa FM	Nigeria Police
46	August 10, 2023	Police Arrest Chike Ibezim Over Report on Fashola, Disregard Court Orders to Release Him	Mr. Chike Ibezim, an entrepreneur and younger brother to the publisher of Reportera News	Nigeria Police
47	August 13, 2023	Police Arrest Three for Protesting Against Emir of Kano	Abdulrazak Usman Sarki, Fatihu Muktar Faruk, and Usman Baba Attah.	Nigeria Police
48	August 16, 2023	Traditional Religion Devotee Arrested, Arraigned for Allegedly Defaming Monarch, Remanded in Custody.	Mr. Adegbola Abdulazeez, a.k.a. Talqolun (Who is God)	Nigeria Police
49	August 18, 2023	Police Arrest, Detain Lawyer for Alleged Defamation of Government Appointee	Mr. Femi Oniyide, an Abeokuta-based lawyer	Nigeria Police
50	September 11, 2023	Police Detain Kwara-Based Journalists on Orders of State Government Officials	Mr. Abdulrazaq Aiyelabegan Babatunde, publisher of Just Events Online and Mr. Lukman Oluwatoyin Bolakale, publisher of Satcom Media	Nigeria Police
51	September 13, 2023	Journalist Arrested Over Possession of Laptop.	a freelance journalist working with Al Jazeera, the Qatari state-owned international news television network based in Doha and operated by the Al Jazeera Media Network	Nigeria Police

52	November 13, 2023	Journalist Arrested, Detained in Kaduna over Publication	Mr. Achadu Gabriel Idibia, who writes for Daybreak newspapers	Nigeria Police
53	December 4, 2023	Editor Arrested, Detained by Security Operatives in Abuja	News Editor at the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR)	Nigeria Police
54	December 12, 2023	Journalist Arrested from Home by Security Operatives, Whereabouts Remain Unknown	Mr. Precious Eze, an online publisher and journalist	Nigeria Police
<b>INVASION</b>				
55	May 28, 2023	Suspected Yoruba Nation Self-Determination	persons suspected to be Yoruba nation self-	Hoodlums
		Agitators Hijack Radio Station	determination agitators, armed with charms, amulets, guns, cutlasses and other dangerous weapons, stormed the premises of Amuludun 99.1 FM radio station, owned by the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), in Ibadan, Oyo State.	
56	June 5, 2023	Criminals Burgle Radio Station, Steal Valuable Equipment	Kogi State Broadcasting Corporation in Ochaja	Hoodlums
57	July 22, 2023	Hoodlums Invade, Loot Radio Station in Jalingo	The corporate offices of Rock 92.3 FM, Jalingo	Hoodlums
<b>HARASSMENT/DENIAL OF ACCESS</b>				
58	January 13, 2023	APC-PCC Expels Arise TV Cameraman from Event, Accuses Him of Espionage	Arise TV cameraman	APC-PCC
59	February 22, 2023	Journalists Prevented from Covering Distribution of Election Materials	Toba Adedeji, a reporter with The Nation newspaper	Security forces



60	February 25, 2023	Political Thugs Delete Contents from Journalist's Phone	Ajayi Adebola, a reporter with Peoples Gazette	Political thugs
61	February 25, 2023	Security Agents Intercept Reporter, Delete Pictures from his Smartphone.	Adesola Ikulajolu, a reporter with the Center for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID)	Security agents
62	March 18, 2023	Hoodlums Harass, Bar Journalists from Covering Elections	Henrietta Oke, Amarachi Amushie and Nkiru Nwokedi, reporters, and cameramen of the African Independent Television (AIT)	Hoodlums
63	March 18, 2023	Political Thugs Harass Pulse Nigeria Media Crew	Pulse Senior News Reporter, Ms Ima Elijah	Political thugs
64	March 18, 2023	Election Umpire Officials Bar Journalists from Council Collation Centre	Journalist	INEC officials
65	March 19, 2023	INEC Official Prevents Journalists from Election Collation Centre	Ayo Adenaiye, an Arise TV news correspondent; James Akpa Oche, a campus reporter at Bayero University, Kano; Stephen Enoch, a reporter with Plus TV Africa, and at least three other journalists from various outlets	INEC official
66	April 15, 2023	Armed Officials Chase Journalists from Election Collation Centre in Adamawa State	Journalists	Armed officials
67	August 21, 2023	Security Officials Prevent Journalists from Covering Interior Minister's Assumption of Duty.	Journalist	Security Officials
68	November 11, 2023	Suspected Political Thugs Harass Journalists Covering Elections in Imo State	a reporter with the online newspaper, Premium Times, Mr. Chinagorom Ugwu,	Political thug

<b>IMPOSITION OF FINES</b>				
69	February 3, 2023	NBC Fines Arise TV, TVC N2m Each Over Alleged Breach of Nigerian Broadcast Code	Global Media Limited, owners of Arise News TV; and Continental Broadcasting Services Limited, owners of Television Continental (TVC)	National Broadcasting Commission (NBC)
<b>COURT CASES</b>				
70	June 7, 2023	Court Remands Two Arraigned for Allegedly Defaming Osun State Assembly Speaker	Mr. Ajibola Oluwasegun and Mr. Ajiboye Babatunde	Court/Judge
71	August 2, 2023	Federal High Court Jails Lady for Allegedly Cyberstalking Nigerian Actress	Ms Nwakaego Okoye, a social media user	Court/Judge
72	November 29, 2023	Magistrate Court Sentences Two Journalists Over Alleged Defamation of Character	Mr. Joe Ogbodu, Managing Editor of Bigpen Nigeria, an online newspaper, and Prince Amour Udemude	Court/Judge
<b>FATALITIES</b>				
73	June 25, 2023	Man Stoned to Death for Alleged Blaspheming Founder of Islam	a man identified as Usman Buda Mai Hanji	Mobs
74	September 13, 2023	Journalist Declared Missing, Later Found Dead	Mr. Yusuf Mubarak, a 27-year-old journalist and third-year student of Nassarawa State University	Unknown
<b>OTHERS</b>				
75	February 21, 2023	Unknown Gunmen Attack Radio, TV Stations in Port Harcourt	A radio station, Wish FM 99.5 and the Atlantic Television Network	Unknown Gunmen

76	May 26, 2023	University of Abuja Authorities Expel Students for Calling for Protest over Tuition Fees Increase	Mr. Cyprian Igwe, the Director of Socials of the university's students' union, and Mr. Olamilekan Samson Oladeru, the Director of Sports	University Authorities
77	June 27, 2023	Editor Escapes Assassination Attempt in Abuja	Mr. Saawua Terzungwe, the Deputy Political Editor of the Daily Trust newspaper	Unknown
78	August 12, 2023	Police IGP's Monitoring Unit Summons Journalists from Enugu to Abuja	Mr. Petrus Obi of Everyday NewsNgr, Mr. Ignatius Okpara of the African Examiner, and Mr. Clinton Umeh of Journalists 101	Police

## 4.2 MRA's Interventions on Issues of Freedom of Expression in 2023

In the course of the year 2023, MRA continued to pursue its mandates of promoting and protecting the right to freedom of expression, media freedom, access to information as well as digital rights and freedoms. These the organisation did through different activities both locally and internationally.

MRA intervened through publications, issuing of press statements, offering of legal assistance and litigation services, conducting capacity building workshops, and participating in national regional and global events that align with its mandates.

## 4.3 Publications

### 1. Publication of Guide for Journalists on Using the FOI Act for Investigative Reporting

MRA produced, printed, and disseminated copies of a guide for journalists on using the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act for investigative reporting. The Guide is titled "Beaming the Searchlight: Manual on Using the Freedom of Information Act for Investigative Reporting."

The guide touched on different aspects of using the FOI Act for investigative reporting. It explores different components including Key Features of the FOI Act, Elements of Investigative Reporting, and The Role of the FOI Act in Investigative Reporting etc.

## **2. Publication of Annual Reports of Attacks on Journalists and Media Organizations**

MRA monitored attacks on journalists and media organizations, offline and online, in 2022 by tracking, documenting and analyzing such incidents. From this, MRA produced, printed, and distributed copies of an Annual Report on the Freedom of Expression situation in Nigeria in 2022. The publication is titled “Stifling Freedom of Expression in Nigeria: Annual Report of Attacks on Free Expression and Media Freedom in 2022”.

The Annual Report analyzes and presents the information gathered in different formats. It establishes trends and patterns in the attacks, highlights issues such as the affiliations and classes of individuals responsible for the attacks, the various forms of attacks, the numbers and percentages of the attacks where female journalists or female media workers are the victims, the number of occasions where governmental action was taken to investigate, prosecute and/or punish the perpetrators, etc.

These attacks were publicized and the information gathered were used to support a range of advocacy activities by MRA, project partners and other partners of MRA.

## **3. Publication of Guide on Protection Mechanisms on the Safety of Journalists**

MRA produced, printed and disseminated a Guide on Protection Mechanisms on Safety of Journalists having identified and collated regional (ECOWAS and African Union) and international (United Nations system) instruments on the safety of journalists, online as well as offline, with which it produced the report with advisories on how journalists, media organizations and other actors can utilize the instruments and mechanisms to protect themselves, ward off threats and seek accountability for attacks against journalists.

## 4.4 Capacity Building Workshops

### **Workshops for Journalists on Using FOI Act for Investigative Reporting**

MRA organized three workshops for journalists on how to use the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act for investigative reporting that equipped participating journalists with the knowledge and skills they require to conduct in-depth, factual and accurate reporting on various subjects while minimizing the risks associated with gathering information and evidence through other traditional journalistic methods.

The two-day workshops took place on October 26 and 27 in Kaduna for journalists from the Northern states of Nigeria; the second workshop was held on October 31 and November 1 in Ibadan, Oyo State for journalists from the South-west; while the third workshop was held on November 23 and 24, 2023, for journalists working in the South-east and South-south states.

Participants at the workshops were drawn from among early to mid-career journalists working for print, broadcast and online media organizations who had not previously undergone any training on how to use the FOI Act.

The objective of the workshops was to familiarize participating journalists with the FOI Act and its provisions as well as to build their capacity to deploy it effectively as a tool for gathering information and evidence from public institutions and other entities covered by the Act, which they require in the course of conducting investigative reporting.

The workshops familiarized them with the key provisions of the Act, how to make requests for information under the Act to public institutions and other entities to which the Act applies in order to increase their chances of successfully obtaining the information they requested, the enforcement mechanisms and options available to them whenever they are wrongfully denied access to information, among other topics.

Journalists who participated in the workshops committed to use the FOI Act in their reporting after the training and to subsequently work on stories where they can demonstrate that they relied on the FOI Act to obtain information used in the reporting. MRA provided them with ongoing support in the form of mentorship on using the FOI Act during the period of their reporting and

gave them other forms of technical assistance that they requested in the process.

Each of the participants were given materials including copies of the FOI Act, a Guide for Journalists on Using the FOI Act for Investigative Reporting, produced by MRA, and other resources to enhance their knowledge and skills as well as to provide them with guidance after the workshops.

MRA also provided financial resources to the journalists to enable them deploy and use the FOI Act in their reporting as there are costs associated with using the Act. The financial resources were given to enable the journalists to cover expenses arising from the use of the FOI Act such as the cost of printing multiple FOI requests, transportation or courier costs for submitting such requests and following up on them, and payment for access to the information requested, should the institutions to which the requests are made charge for them.

The workshops were organized by MRA with support from the MacArthur Foundation through the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism (WSCIJ) and are being carried out under the Collaborative Media Engagement for Development, Inclusion and Accountability (CMEDIA) Project, a multi-level intervention that supports media independence, improved transparency, accountability, and good governance in state and local governments with more public awareness on the need for accountability, and amplified marginalised voices.

## **4.5 Press Statements**

### **Media Rights Agenda Condemns Expulsion of Arise TV Cameraman from APC Presidential Campaign Meeting**

On January 16, 2023, Media Rights Agenda (MRA) condemned the expulsion of an Arise Television cameraman from a campaign meeting by the All Progressives Congress (APC) presidential candidate, Asiwaju Bola Tinubu, with the business community in Lagos on January 13, 2023, describing the action of the party's Presidential Campaign Council (APC-PCC) as bizarre, highhanded and a violation of the rights of the media.

In a statement issued in Lagos, MRA's Programme Director, Mr. Ayode Longe, expressed concern that “the APC-PCC's blatant disregard for the rights of a journalist performing a constitutionally-protected function even at a time when the party is seeking to persuade Nigerians to vote its candidate into the highest office in the land, portends grave dangers for the media should that candidate prevail in the elections.”

Mr. Bayo Onanuga, the APC-PCC Director of Media and Publicity, had claimed on Twitter that the Arise Television cameraman was caught clandestinely livestreaming Bola Tinubu's campaign event without authorization and accused him of being “on espionage mission”.

But Mr. Longe expressed outrage at the allegation and the APC-PCC's justification for its unconstitutional action, describing it as ridiculous and baffling. He said: “What authorization does the journalist require to perform his professional duty of covering a political campaign event? How can a purely journalistic act by a cameraman from a television station filming a public political campaign event and beaming it live to a public audience be characterized as espionage? Should the cameraman have first made a public announcement that he is covering the event so as not to be accused of doing so clandestinely?”

He added: “We find this particularly bewildering because Mr. Onanuga, who issued the justification and made the accusation of espionage, spent a significant portion of his career as a professional journalist engaged in what came to be known as guerrilla journalism, for which he and the two media outlets, TheNews and Tempo magazines, where he served as an editor, were widely applauded, including by people like Asiwaju Bola Tinubu. It is the worst form of irony that he is now attempting to condemn a journalist engaged in his professional pursuit as having committed a capital offence.”

According to Mr. Longe, “If this attitude is indicative of the vision of the party or its presidential candidate on the role of the media in the democratic process, then we shudder to think of what the future holds for journalists and the media community should this attitude and mentality be brought into the highest political office in Nigeria.”

He noted that it is the duty of the media to scrutinize and hold accountable public office holders and institutions as well as public figures, including

political parties and candidates seeking public office, and to ensure that members of the public have as much information as possible about them, their programmes and their track records in and out of office, adding that the media cannot properly play their role in the electoral process if they are prevented from having access to public events which form part of the process.

Saying that anyone unwilling to be subjected to scrutiny by the media has no business seeking public office, Mr. Longe stressed that it is contrary to the code of journalism practice in Nigeria and everywhere else in the world that institutions or individuals who are being held accountable should be the ones to determine the media organizations or journalists that are allowed to hold them to account.

He said that journalists are entitled to and should be given the fullest access to all electoral events, and that such access should be non-discriminatory. He therefore urged “the entire media community, regardless of the political sympathies that individual media professionals may have, to rise in unison to condemn the APC-PCC's undemocratic action.”

Mr. Longe also called on the APC-PCC to publicly apologise to the cameraman and his media organization and make a public commitment not to repeat such action in future.

### **MRA Calls on National Assembly to Investigate Regulatory Activities of NBC**

MRA on February 6, 2023, urged the National Assembly to launch an investigation into the regulatory activities of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), accusing it of succumbing to the control of an overtly politically partisan Minister of Information to cow broadcasting stations in Nigeria in an effort to prevent them from criticizing government officials and powerful political figures.

MRA said in a statement issued in Lagos that it was compelled to seek the intervention of the National Assembly in the light of February 3, 2023, imposition of fines of N2 million each on two television stations, Arise News and Television Continental (TVC), by the NBC for alleged breach of the Nigeria Broadcasting Code, describing the action as the latest in a pattern by the NBC of abusing its powers to repress broadcasters in violation of basic



rules of natural justice.

MRA's Programme Officer, Ms Maimuna Momoh, noted in the statement that “It cannot be fair or just that the NBC, which wrote the Nigeria Broadcasting Code to create offences, is the complainant in the allegations of violation of the Code by broadcasting stations, investigates the alleged breaches itself, prosecutes the accused stations, sits in judgment on the matter, frequently without even giving the stations any opportunity to defend themselves against the allegations, sanctions them through the imposition of fines, which it collects as part of its revenue. This is clearly an affront to principles of fair hearing, equity and justice.”

In separate letters dated February 3, 2023, signed by NBC Director-General, Mallam Balarabe Ileh, to the Chief Executive Officer of Arise Global Media Limited, owners of Arise News, and the Chief Executive Officer of Continental Broadcasting Service Limited, owners of TVC, the Commission accused them of violating the Broadcasting Code in their coverage of political campaigns and gave each of them two weeks to pay a penalty of N2 million.

MRA condemned the action saying this pattern of behaviour by the Commission has reached alarming levels as, in most cases, it is either being used as a weapon by the Information Minister to impede broadcasting stations from performing their constitutional role of upholding the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people or it is on its own turning its regulatory function into a revenue drive, and in both cases, frequently dispensing with the imperative of giving accused stations the opportunity to defend themselves.

Ms Momoh said: “In recent years, we have seen several dozen examples of such outrageous sanctioning of broadcasting stations, even in the absence of any complaint from anyone and without their being given any opportunity to defend themselves against baseless accusations in many cases as the NBC has turned its regulatory function into a scavenger hunt for revenue or succumbs to pressures from the Executive branch of government to sanction stations which criticize government officials or their actions.”

Observing that the NBC has also sometimes claimed to be sanctioning broadcasting stations for inaccurate or untruthful reporting, she remarked

that “It is not only ironic but outright dangerous that the NBC is seeking to enforce truth and objectivity in the outputs of broadcasting stations while it is taking directives in so doing from a partisan Minister of Information who is notorious in this country and beyond for his disregard for truth and objectivity.”

According to her, “If the NBC is not deterred from this its approach to regulations, Nigerians will be fed only the Minister's version of the truth, thereby defeating the purpose of Section 22 of the Constitution.”

Ms Momoh stressed that “An established principle guiding the operations of a regulatory authority exercising powers in the area of broadcasting is that it should be independent and adequately protected against interference of a political, commercial or other nature. Contrary to this internationally established norm, the Minister of Information continues to interfere in the regulatory functions of the NBC and frequently deploys it as a weapon with which he prevents broadcasting stations from performing their duty to uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people or for punishing those that dare to do so”

She therefore called on the National Assembly, in the exercise of its oversight functions, to conduct an open and transparent investigation into the NBC and the conduct of its regulatory functions in order to prevent it from completely destroying the broadcast sector in Nigeria.

## **MRA Sets Up Hotline for Journalists under Attack During 2023 Elections**

On February 22, 2023, MRA announced the establishment of a hotline to assist journalists who come under attack during the 2023 elections, saying the facility would enable such journalists to receive support, and guidance about their rights and available safety mechanisms, as well as litigation assistance, should that become necessary to enforce their rights.

In a statement issued in Lagos, MRA's Programme Officer, Mr. John Gbadamosi, explained that the hotline was necessitated by the increasing level of attacks against media practitioners and organizations, particularly during the last several months leading up to the elections.

He said: “Besides the immediate effects of such attacks on the affected journalists and their families, the chilling effect on media freedom is also putting Nigeria's democracy at risk since there can be no genuine democracy where journalists and the media are unable to perform their functions without fear.”

According to him, “Attacking journalists and obstructing them with impunity in the performance of their professional functions has become an equal opportunity undertaking by different actors, with men of the Nigerian Police and other security and law enforcement personnel who should ordinarily protect the journalists being the major perpetrators of the attacks against them, along with other government officials, armed hoodlums, political thugs, criminal elements and other bad actors.”

Mr. Gbadamosi said the number, 08138755660, which can be used to make regular calls, WhatsApp calls or to send text messages or WhatsApp messages to MRA, will also be available on MRA's website and its social media platforms so that any journalist or media worker who is threatened, under attack or has been attacked in the course of their work or as a result of their work can easily access the number and get in touch with the organization.

He advised journalists to save the number on their mobile devices on speed dial so that it is easily and quickly accessible to them should the need to use it arise.

Mr. Gbadamosi explained that journalists and other media workers may call the hotline or send messages to report relevant incidents, including threats of physical harm, to MRA for documentation purposes; to seek advice about their legal rights or available official mechanisms at domestic, regional or international levels, for them to lodge formal complaints about the violation of their rights.

He noted that journalists and media workers are free to lodge complaints through the number, including being prevented from doing their jobs, being subjected to degrading or inhuman treatment, arbitrary arrests and detention; assault, battery or other forms of physical violence; arbitrary raiding and searching of their homes or offices by security agents or other acts of intimidation, harassment and threats, including any such incident targeting

their family members because of the work of the journalists.

Mr. Gbadamosi said the hotline will remain in operation from now until after the inauguration of the new government that will emerge from the elections.

### **MRA Condemns Attack on TV Cameraman, Calls on Police Authorities to Order the Arrest and Prosecution of the Perpetrators**

MRA on February 24, 2023, condemned the brutalization of Trust Television station cameraman, Mr. Taiwo Yishau, at the venue of the All Progressives Congress (APC) grand finale rally for the party's presidential flag bearer, Asiwaju Ahmed Bola Tinubu, on February 21, 2023.

The organization called on Police authorities to ensure the immediate arrest and prosecution of the perpetrators, saying it was bewildered that policemen stationed at the venue of the rally who witnessed the attack on the media professional did nothing to assist him or to put an end to the assault. It described the failure of the policemen to intervene to put an end to the unwarranted attack on the cameraman as criminal negligence.

In a statement issued in Lagos, MRA's Programme Officer, Mr. John Gbadamosi, said the attack on Mr. Yishau was “an egregious violation of press freedom and the basic human rights of the journalist”, stressing that “journalists play a vital role in our society, serving as watchdogs to hold those in power accountable and provide the public with essential information. Any attempt to silence or intimidate journalists or otherwise impede them in the performance of their duties constitutes a threat to our democracy and should not be condoned.”

Mr. Yishau was reportedly attacked at one of the gates to the Teslim Balogun Stadium, venue of the rally, despite displaying his press tag issued by the party. He was stopped from entering the venue of the rally even after explaining that he was duly assigned and accredited to cover the event. He was thereafter hit multiple times by a gang of hoodlums who accused him without any evidence or basis of forging the accreditation tag.

According to Mr. Yishau, the incident started when the bouncers hired as security men at the gate to the stadium handed him over to his attackers who accused him, also without any evidence or basis, of working for another

party.

Narrating his ordeal, the cameraman said: “I showed them the press tag given to us by APC Publicity Secretary, Mr. Seye Oladejo yesterday. But they said it is fake. They said I am working for the opposition. They asked me to show previous works I did for APC and they kept beating me.”

Mr. Yishau said the policemen stationed a few meters away from the scene stood idly by, watching the brutal assault on him, adding that “They didn't say anything. I was trying to protect my camera and the phone as they kept beating me.”

Stressing that the behavior of the policemen and the political party that allowed such an assault on a journalist was unacceptable, Mr. Gbadamosi noted that the Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage requires law enforcement agencies, political parties and other relevant stakeholders to ensure an enabling environment for journalists and other media workers to effectively discharge their duties before, during and after elections.

He expressed concern at the repeated incidents of attacks on media professionals and the violation of their rights at political rallies and events, particularly those of the ruling APC, saying it was an extremely worrying development that political parties which are expected to be the platforms through which the leaders of the country would emerge have no appreciation of the importance of the role of the media in the political process, including elections.

Mr. Gbadamosi called on the Inspector General of Police to order an immediate investigation into the incident and ensure that those responsible for the attack on Mr. Yishau are arrested and prosecuted.

Besides, he said, all relevant authorities, including the leadership of the various political parties, should take urgent steps to ensure the safety of journalists and put necessary measures in place to prevent such incidents from happening in the future.

### **Imposition of N5M Fine on Channels TV by NBC: Arbitrariness Taken Too Far**

On April 4, 2023, MRA and the International Press Centre (IPC) condemned

the imposition of N5 million fine on Channels Television saying: “For the umpteenth time, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) has acted arbitrarily in the purported exercise of its powers as the regulatory authority for the broadcast sector in Nigeria.”

They noted that on March 31, 2023, it was announced that NBC had slammed a fine of N5m on Channels Television, based on the claim that it violated the Nigeria Broadcasting Code because of the interview the station's Seun Okinbaloye had with the Vice-Presidential candidate of the Labour Party, Mr. Datti Ahmed on March 22, 2023.

In the said interview Mr. Ahmed expressed strong opposition to the swearing-in of the President-Elect, Senator Ahmed Bola Tinubu, on May 29, 2023, weightily alleging that it would be tantamount to the end of democracy.

According to MRA and IPC, although the NBC did not disclose the material fact in its announcement of the sanction, the regulatory body apparently acted on a widely publicised petition addressed to it by Mr. Bayo Onanuga, Director of Media and Publicity of the All Progressives Congress Presidential Campaign Council (PAC-PCC), in which he demanded that the station be punished over the interview in question. The petition was published by many news mediums on March 30, 2023.

They noted that barely 24 hours later, the NBC struck. Against the well-established principle of natural justice, which, among others, make fair hearing sacrosanct, NBC did not avail Channels TV the opportunity of putting forward its defense against Mr. Onanuga's allegations before slamming the hefty fine.

“Assuming without conceding that Channels TV erred in the management of the said interview, it was still pertinent for the NBC to have heard their side of the story. In failing to do so, the NBC acted unfairly and unjustly as it based its heavy-handed decision on the claims of one side only,” MRA and IPC said.

NBC has in this instance again exercised quasi-judicial powers injudiciously, by constituting itself to the prosecutor and the judge over a case brought before it by a third party. In previous instances, it has also additionally been the accuser.

They pointed out that Mr. Onanuga is not just anybody, saying he speaks for the in-coming president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and that ordinarily, this should have informed the need for the NBC to act more cautiously instead of exposing itself to the accusation that it has become the ruling government or ruling party's willing tool to suppress press freedom.

They said: “Even if, as the NBC claims, it acted based on its own observation, it was still imperative for it to allow Channels Television to respond to the allegations, especially since that made it the accuser, the prosecutor and the judge.”

The organisations reiterated that the fundamental principles that ought to guide the regulation of broadcasting and related activities are the ones that advance the public interest and are investment friendly both of which, according to them, have been discarded in the handling of the petition.

They urged “the NBC to desist from walking this path, which undermines its credibility and independence and weakens the broadcast sector as a result,” and called on it to immediately reverse the hastily imposed fine and give Channels TV the deserved opportunity to defend itself.

### **MRA Calls on Federal Government to Ensure Adequate Protection for Media Freedom**

On May 3, 2023, MRA called on the Federal Government to ensure adequate protection for media freedom in law and in practice, saying the relentless attacks on the media over the years had also undermined the general human rights protection for all Nigerians, democracy and sustainable development in the country.

In a statement to commemorate this year's World Press Freedom Day and the 30th anniversary of proclamation of the Day by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993, MRA said by strengthening the right to freedom of expression, which is a critical human right that serves as a driver for all other human rights, the Government could ensure a future where all other human rights are adequately protected and respected in Nigeria.

MRA's Programme Director, Mr. Ayode Longe, noted in the statement that given the enormous duty imposed on the media by the Constitution,

particularly Section 22, which requires the media sector to ensure that the Government lives up to its responsibilities to the people and to hold the Government accountable, the failure to provide adequate protection for the media was impeding its ability to perform these functions upon which good governance, democracy and sustainable development in Nigeria depend.

Mr. Longe said: “The clear evidence before us is that no other sector of the Nigerian society has faced such relentless attacks for decades as the media sector has had to endure. By placing the responsibility of policing a powerful institution like the Government on the media without adequate or commensurate protections, the media has been made a target for attacks by all corrupt or incompetent government officials seeking to hide their misdeeds or mistakes.”

Observing that this year's World Press Freedom Day is being commemorated with the theme “Shaping a future of rights: Freedom of Expression as a driver for all other human rights”, Mr. Longe said “It is only in an environment where freedom of expression is adequately protected and respected that citizens can have the confidence to engage in public discourse; criticize government policies and officials; make meaningful contributions to policies; advocate for their own rights as well as the rights of others.”

MRA also called on the incoming Administration of President-elect Bola Ahmed Tinubu to make a commitment to protect media freedom and to do so by, among other things, reviewing and amending existing laws and regulations to ensure they provide robust legal protections for freedom of expression, in conformity with international standards; taking steps to ensure the safety of journalists, offline and online, as well as by investigating and prosecuting attacks on journalists, and holding perpetrators accountable.

### **MRA Calls on NBC to Comply Fully with Court Order Restraining it from Imposing Fines on Broadcast Stations**

MRA on May 15, 2023, called on the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to comply fully with the orders of Justice James Omotosho of the Federal High Court in Abuja which restrained it from further imposing fines on radio and televisions stations, saying even if it plans to appeal against the judgment, it should not continue to walk the path of lawlessness.



In a statement issued in Lagos, MRA said its attention had been drawn to a statement credited to NBC Director General, Mallam Balarabe Shehu llelah, vowing that “The Commission will appeal against the judgment when it is found to be in conflict with previous judgments of the court, which empowers the Commission to regulate broadcasting in Nigeria (sic)”

MRA's Executive Director, Mr. Edetaen Ojo, said in its statement that: “We recognize and respect the right of the NBC to appeal against the judgment of the Court, if it is dissatisfied with the decision, so long as it does not flout the orders of the court when those orders have not been set aside by an appellate court. Whatever the NBC's view of the Court's judgment may be, it cannot deny that there is a valid and subsisting order of a court of competent jurisdiction prohibiting it from imposing fines on radio and television stations. Should the Commission or its Director-General take it upon themselves to sit on appeal over the judgment of the Court and disobey the clear and unequivocal orders of the Court, we wish to reassure them that we would take immediate and vigorous action to maintain the integrity of the court and its orders.”

According to Mr. Ojo, “The NBC Director-General's statement amounts to a feeble attempt to mislead the public. We do not dispute the power or authority of the NBC to regulate broadcasting in Nigeria and we have not challenged its right to do so. That was not the issue before the court. But this does not make the Commission a court of law and neither the National Broadcasting Commission Act, as amended, nor the Nigeria Broadcasting Code can be interpreted to confer judicial powers on the NBC to impose criminal sanctions on radio and television stations in flagrant violation of the Constitution, as Justice James Omotosho stated so eloquently in his judgment.”

He noted that besides being a correct interpretation of the provisions of the Constitution, the decision of Justice Omotosho is also consistent with international standards for the regulation of broadcast media as contained, for instance, in Principle 17(5) of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, which states that: “The powers of regulatory bodies shall be administrative in nature and shall not seek to usurp the role of the courts.”

Mr. Ojo contended that the provisions of the Declaration are binding on Nigeria and its institutions, being an affirmation of the principles for anchoring the rights to freedom of expression and access to information in accordance with Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, an international human rights instrument to which Nigeria is a State Party, and which also forms part of Nigerian Law, having been domesticated in Nigeria by the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (*Ratification and Enforcement*) Act, Cap A9, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004.

He said: “We appreciate that the NBC cannot be happy that we have shut down this major source of revenue for the Commission, but we urge it to tread the path of constitutionalism and the rule of law and obey the orders of a court of competent jurisdiction, established by the Constitution, especially if it expects individuals and entities subject to its regulatory authority to comply with its own lawful directives. The NBC will be courting anarchy should it decide to disregard the court's orders.”

### **MRA Calls on Enugu State Governor to Respect Press Freedom, Discontinue Attacks on Journalists**

MRA on July 31, 2023, called on Governor Peter Ndubuisi Mbah of Enugu State to immediately discontinue the harassment and intimidation of journalists in the State, saying the ongoing attacks on the media by his government in violation of the Constitution amounts to a breach of the oath he took on becoming Governor two months earlier, particularly his pledge to “preserve, protect and defend the Constitution.”

In a statement issued in Lagos, MRA's Deputy Executive Director, Mr. Ayode Longe, said: “We wish to advise Governor Mbah, in the light of the fact that he is new to his office, that the media do not exist to sing his praises but to perform a constitutionally mandated function of upholding the responsibility and accountability of his government to the people. Accordingly, the unwarranted attacks by his government on journalists engaged in the lawful pursuit of their professional duties will not go unchallenged.”

Calling on the Governor to put a stop to the ongoing harassment and intimidation of Mr. Michael Okechukwu Ilediagu, the publisher of News Center, and other journalists in the state, orchestrated by the Governor's aides, Mr. Longe warned: “If the situation persists, we will be compelled to

activate all constitutional means and international mechanisms available to us to challenge this ongoing illegality which constitutes a clear abuse of office and abuse of power.”

He called on President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Olukayode Egbetokun, to order an investigation into the abuse of police powers by Police authorities in Enugu State at the behest of the Governor's Office for the purpose of harassing and intimidating journalists in the State with the objective of preventing them from performing their constitutional functions.

Mr. Longe noted that Mr. Ilediagu had been subjected to intimidation by operatives of the Police Anti-kidnapping Squad in the State, who invaded his home and arrested him over his reporting on developments in the State, with no evidence that he had committed any offence, adding that officials of the Enugu State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) as well as other journalists and civil society actors in the State have confirmed that the journalist and publisher continues to face threats and harassment from State Government officials.

Stressing that journalism is not a crime to warrant the use of police units to hound journalists, especially while criminals are roaming free, he argued that the potential crime is in the abuse of police powers to advance the personal and political interests of government officials.

Mr. Longe therefore called on Governor Mbah and his aides to abide by the rule of law and allow journalists and media organizations in the State to carry out their professional duties free of any harassment, intimidation or other attacks and threats.

### **MRA Condemns Attack on Journalists by Hoodlums in Bayelsa State, Calls for Urgent Police Action**

MRA on August 17, 2023, condemned the brutal assault on several journalists by armed hoodlums in Opu Nembe community in Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State and called on the Nigeria Police Force to conduct a thorough investigation into the incident and bring the perpetrators to justice.

On Wednesday, August 16, 2023, six journalists representing different media outlets who were covering a violent conflict that erupted in the Opu Nembe community, were brutally attacked by hoodlums armed with various weapons, who illegally confiscated their television cameras and other equipment.

Among those assaulted were Mr. Joseph Kunde of the privately owned television station, TVC News, and his cameraman, Mr. Bina Miebi; Mr. Awe Baratuapere of the Federal Government-owned Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and his cameraman, Mr. Ayebakuro Egein; Mrs. Iniyekenime Doctor Bruce of Daar Communications Limited, owners of the Africa Independent Television (AIT) and RayPower radio; and Mr. Femi Folaranmi of The Sun Publishing Limited.

In a statement issued in Lagos by Mr. John Gbadamosi, its Programme Officer, MRA expressed grave concerns about the inability of the Police to protect journalists from these sorts of violations of their freedom, describing the situation as “a sad dereliction of the Government's obligation under international human rights law to prevent such attacks against journalists and generally ensure their safety.”

Mr. Gbadamosi said: “Having failed to take effective measures to prevent this attack on the affected journalists, we now call on the Government and the appropriate law enforcement authorities, particularly the Police, to live up to their obligation to diligently and speedily investigate the assault on the journalists and ensure that the perpetrators are identified and punished in accordance with the Law. The Government should not continue to condone, or enable by its silence and inaction a culture of impunity for attacks against journalists.”

He urged the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Mr. Kayode Egbetokun, to order the Bayelsa State Police Command to immediately initiate a transparent and thorough investigation into the incident while also directing sensitization and enlightenment activities across the entire Police force in Nigeria to enable officers and men of the agency to have a better appreciation of the role as well as the rights of the media and journalists in a democracy.

Stressing that journalists must be able to fulfill their professional duties of reporting on matters of public interest without fear of violence or other forms

of attacks against them, he noted that the “rising frequency of physical violence being visited on journalists on a regular basis has become deeply concerning and alarming”.

According to Mr. Gbadamosi, “This disturbing trend not only jeopardizes the safety and well-being of journalists but also poses a significant threat to the fundamental principles of freedom of the press and the health of our democracy as the existence of media freedom in law and in practice is a critical component of any functioning democracy.”

### **MRA Calls on President Tinubu to Ensure Journalists' Safety and Punish Perpetrators of Attacks**

On November 2, 2023, MRA called on President Bola Tinubu to make a clear commitment to ensure the safety of journalists in Nigeria and bring an end to impunity for crimes against journalists by ensuring that Government officials and non-state actors who attack journalists are appropriately punished in accordance with the Law.

MRA's Executive Director, Mr. Edetaen Ojo, said: “On the occasion of this year's International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, we remain extremely concerned that in spite of numerous and frequently recurring cases of attacks against journalists in Nigeria, with at least 19 journalists killed over the years, no one has ever been charged with any crime for such attacks or punished for such offenses, with the result that Nigeria appears to be suggesting that attacking or killing journalists is acceptable and will attract no consequences.”

The organization noted that it is now 10 years since the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed November 2 of every year as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists by Resolution 68/163 on “The safety of journalists and the issue of impunity”, which it adopted on December 18, 2013 at its 68th session.

It explained that in the resolution, the UN General Assembly urged all Member States, including Nigeria, “to do their utmost to prevent violence against journalists and media workers, to ensure accountability through the conduct of impartial, speedy and effective investigations into all alleged violence against journalists and media workers falling within their

jurisdiction and to bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice and ensure that victims have access to appropriate remedies.”

MRA noted that the General Assembly also called upon States to promote a safe and enabling environment for journalists to perform their work independently and without undue interference, including by means of legislative measures; awareness-raising in the judiciary and among law enforcement officers and military personnel, as well as among journalists and in civil society, regarding international human rights and humanitarian law obligations and commitments relating to the safety of journalists; the monitoring and reporting of attacks against journalists; publicly condemning attacks; and dedicating the resources necessary to investigate and prosecute such attacks.

It regretted that over the last 10 years, the Federal Government had not taken any discernible measure towards fulfilling any single one of these requirements, even as attacks against journalists and other media workers have continued unabated and with impunity, including the repeated occurrence of some of the specific acts condemned by the resolution, such as torture, extrajudicial killings, physical violence against journalists, arbitrary detention, intimidation and harassment, among others.

Mr. Ojo said: “Under the current administration, the need to put in place mechanisms to ensure the safety of journalists ought not to be a difficult case to make. As a media owner, President Tinubu must certainly be personally aware of the important role that the media play in ensuring an informed citizenry and the emergence of a knowledgeable society, in providing members of the public with critical information that they require to make important decisions in their lives and in upholding the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people as well as the fact that the work of journalists often puts them at risk of intimidation, harassment and violence.”

According to him, “It is our hope that being better informed about these issues than his predecessors in office, the President will direct the relevant officials and agencies in his Administration to take necessary steps and work with other media stakeholders, including media professional bodies and civil society organizations, to establish a national mechanism for ensuring the

safety of journalists and ending impunity for crimes against journalists.”

### **MRA Calls for Protection of Journalists during Off-Cycle Elections in Bayelsa, Imo, Kogi States**

Ahead of the off-cycle elections in Bayelsa, Imo, Kogi States, MRA on November 10, 2023, called on Federal and State Governments as well as law enforcement and security agencies to take adequate measures to protect journalists and other media workers during the off-cycle elections in these States, saying their role in providing information about the electoral process is critical in ensuring free, fair and transparent elections.

In a statement issued in Lagos ahead, MRA urged journalists to be safety conscious and to utilize its existing hotline in reporting any threat or attack that they may experience throughout the process as well as any obstacle or challenge to their effective coverage of the elections.

MRA's Communications Officer, Mr. Idowu Adewale, noted in the statement that “Given the pattern of heightened attacks on journalists and the media during previous elections, including the recent 2023 general elections, as well as the tense political climate in the three states in the lead up to the elections, it is imperative that measures are taken to ensure general security during the elections and provide adequate protection for journalists covering the elections.”

According to him, “Access to information enables citizens and other members of the public to have the information they need about political and electoral processes and therefore facilitates effective public participation in elections. Journalists and the media play a big part in ensuring that citizens and other members of the public have access to information and are able to participate in the process. It is therefore imperative that the safety and well-being of these interlocutors are assured and safeguarded as part of efforts to ensure the integrity of the elections.”

Mr. Adewale explained that MRA's existing hotline, which was established ahead of the 2023 general elections early in the year, remains available to journalists who may face challenges, including harassment, intimidation, or violence, as they carry out their professional duties, adding that by reporting such incidents through the hotline, MRA would be able to document them

and render a range of support services, including providing advice to journalists about their legal rights or available official mechanisms at domestic, regional or international levels for seeking redress; providing legal assistance; and, in appropriate cases, launching campaigns on their circumstances.

Lamenting the increasing incidents of attacks on journalists in the run-up to the off-cycle elections and as experienced earlier in the year ahead of the general elections, he stressed that, “A free and vibrant media is fundamental to a healthy democracy and that journalists must be able to carry out their duties without fear, coercion, or violence. MRA is ready to support them and ensure their safety during this critical period.”

Mr. Adewale said the hotline can be reached by journalists and other media workers seeking assistance through regular calls, WhatsApp calls, or texting and can be utilized by those who are under threat, attacked, or harmed in the course or due to their work as media professionals.

He urged media organisations, civil society, and the general public to remain vigilant and report incidents of attacks or harassment against journalists, insisting that “By doing so, we can collectively promote a safe environment for journalists to carry out their duties and contribute to the democratic process.”

He gave the hotline for assistance or to report incidents to MRA as 08138755660.

## **4.6 Litigation Undertaken MRA in 2023**

In pursuing its mandates of safeguarding press freedom and ensuring the safety of journalists, MRA instituted several lawsuits before the national and regional courts and rendered legal assistance to some journalists. In addition, MRA continued with some of the cases pending from previous years before the regional and national courts because some of these cases faced several challenges including, several adjournments, late hearing dates amongst many. As a result of these challenges, some of the cases filed from previous years spilled into 2023 and some were adjourned till 2024.



While MRA recorded victories in some of the cases it filed or handled in 2023, some were decided against MRA or dismissed.

### **Summary of the cases MRA handled in 2023:**

- The Incorporated Trustees of Media Rights Agenda (MRA) versus Federal Republic of Nigeria: In this case, MRA instituted a class action against the Federal Government of Nigeria at the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice concerning the murder of 11 journalists who were killed while they were discharging their journalistic duties. The suit was heard on May 19, 2023, and was adjourned to October 30, 2023, for judgment, however the court did not sit and it was later adjourned to January 30, 2024 for judgment.
- In another suit against the Federal Government of Nigeria, MRA instituted a lawsuit before the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice challenging the failure of the Nigerian Government to ensure the safety of eight journalists during the discharge of their duties as journalists. The suit came up before the court on May 19, 2023, and was adjourned to October 15, 2023, for hearing.
- MRA pursued a legal action against the Attorney General of the Federation (AGF) and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) at the Federal High Court Abuja challenging the authority of the Nigerian Government to suspend Twitter operations in Nigeria. After several adjournments, the suit was heard on November 1, 2023, and the court fixed February 22, 2024, for judgment.
- In 2021, MRA provided Mr. Eniola Daniel with legal assistance to challenge the violation of his human rights by the Chairman of the Lagos State Taskforce on Environmental Sanitation and Special Offences, Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP) Shola Jejeloye; Commissioner of Police, Lagos State, Inspector General of Police and the Lagos State Government while he was undertaking his journalistic duty in Lagos State. In ensuring that Mr. Daniel got remedies for the brutal treatment meted out to him by these perpetrators and his rights were protected, MRA pursued a fundamental human rights suit against these perpetrators before a

Federal High Court in Lagos State. This suit suffered several adjournments and was heard on October 26, 2023, when the court adjourned the suit for judgment to December 13, 2023. On December 13, 2023, the court did not sit and the suit was later adjourned to January 30, 2024, for judgment.

- MRA had lodged a suit before a Federal High Court in Lagos State against the Attorney-General of the Federation (AGF) asking the court to determine whether the failure of the Nigerian Government to take measures to prevent attacks on journalists and other media practitioners as well as to investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators of all attacks against journalists and ensure that victims have access to effective remedies is a violation of the “The Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information” an instrument derived from the African Charter on Humans and People's Rights, a treaty which Nigerian is a state party to and has ratified. On countless time, the suit was adjourned before it was fixed for November 3, 2023. However, the court did not sit and it was adjourned to February 23, 2024, for hearing.
- MRA filed a lawsuit against NBC and the Attorney-General of the Federation before a Federal High Court in Abuja in 2022 contesting the powers of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to fine broadcasters. On May 10, 2023, the court delivered its judgment and held that fines are only within the purview of courts for criminal offenses and deemed the NBC's actions as unconstitutional. In attempt to overturn the judgment, NBC filed a motion on May 24, 2023 and on November 23, 2023, the court ruled that it has become functus officio and dismissed NBC's application.
- MRA filed a suit before a Federal High Court in Abuja against the Attorney General of the Federation raising concerns about the violation of the fundamental rights, including the right to life and freedom of expression of Nigerian journalists killed in the line of duty. The argument and adoption of processes took place on November 23, 2023 and the case adjourned to February 16, 2024, for judgment.
- MRA provided legal assistance to Kings Communication in filing a fundamental human rights suit against the Nigerian Police Force,

Dangote Petroleum Refinery and others for unlawfully invading the premises of the media outlet on August 10, 2021, and judgment was delivered on July 3, 2023, against Kings Communication Ltd.

- MRA extended legal support to Ms. Godsgift Onyedinefu, a journalist who sought information under the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 from the National Insurance Commission but was denied the information. MRA instituted a case against the the Commission and judgment was delivered on November 16, 2023, in favour of the Commission.
- MRA initiated a legal action at the Federal High Court Abuja against the Attorney General of the Federation and the National Broadcasting Commission for wrongfully denying it the information it requested via a letter dated February 17, 2023. The suit was adjourned to February 12, 2024, for hearing.
- MRA initiated a legal action against the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the Attorney General of the Federation (AGF) challenging the NBC wrongful denial of information it had requested via a letter dated February 20, 2023. The suit was adjourned to February 12, 2024, for hearing.
- Incorporated Trustees of Media Rights Agenda versus Central Bank of Nigeria & 2Ors: All proceedings in this case were adopted and argued on February 2, 2023. On June 14, 2023, the Federal High Court in Abuja delivered its judgment. The Court resolved the issues in favour of MRA and granted all the reliefs sought, except for relief no. 5. A total of five reliefs were granted in favor of MRA, and the judgment was entered accordingly as per the summarized terms announced in open Court.
- MRA offered legal assistance to Mr. Segun Fatuase, who sought information under the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 from the Nigerian Railway Corporation but was denied the information by the Corporation. The processes filed in this suit were argued and adopted on November 22, 2022, and the judgment was delivered on May 24, 2023.
- In the case of Blessing Oladunjoye versus Yaba College of Technology and another, MRA offered legal support to Ms. Oladunjoye, who sought

information under the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 but was denied the information by the Yaba College of Technology. Judgment delivered on November 29, 2023. The court ordered the institution to pay her N300,000 as exemplary and aggravated damages for wrongfully denying her access to the information she requested and directed it to make available to her all the information she requested for.

- MRA sought information under the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 from the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) but was denied the information. Consequently, MRA instituted a legal action against the agency and the Attorney General of the Federation. After several adjournments in 2023, the suit was adjourned to March 12, 2024, for hearing.
- MRA sought information under the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 but was denied the information by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC). Consequently, MRA instituted a legal action against the agency the Attorney General of the Federation. The suit was heard on October 11, 2023, and judgment was reserved for February 5, 2024.
- MRA filed a suit against the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) over fines it imposed on Multichoice Nigeria Limited, TSTV, and NTA-Startimes Limited for airing BBC Africa Eye's "Bandits Warlords of Zamfara" documentary. The suit was heard on October 30, 2023 and adjourned to January 16, 2024, for judgment.
- MRA sought information under the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 but was denied the information by the Lagos University Teaching Hospital Management Board. Consequently, MRA instituted a legal action against the hospital. On November 30, 2023, the court delivered its judgment, ordering the Teaching Hospital Management Board to provide MRA access to the requested information.
- MRA institution a suit challenging a bill not in compliance with international human rights standard. Processes filed in this suit were argued and adopted on November 23, 2023, after several adjournments, judgment was reserved for February 16, 2024.
- MRA instituted a class action suit against the Governor of Sokoto State

challenging the telecommunication and Internet shutdown in the State. The suit was heard on February 1, 2023 after several adjournments and judgment delivered on June 8, 2023, in favour of the Sokoto State government.

## **About Media Rights Agenda (MRA)**

Media Rights Agenda (MRA) was established in 1993 as an independent, non-partisan, not-for-profit, non-governmental organization for the purpose of promoting and protecting the right to freedom of expression, media freedom, access to information as well as digital rights and freedoms.

It was incorporated in 1997 with the Corporate Affairs Commission under Part C (Incorporated Trustees) of the Companies and Allied Matters Act 1990 and has Observer Status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Banjul, The Gambia.

### **MRA's Aims and Objectives are:**

1. to promote respect and recognition for press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria;
2. to provide protection and support for journalists and writers engaged in the lawful pursuit of their professional duties;
3. to promote the highest standards of professional ethics, integrity, training and conduct in the journalism profession;
4. to bring about a conducive social and legal atmosphere for the practice of journalism, and ensure the protection of the journalists' right not to be compelled to work against his or her conviction or disclose confidential sources of information; and
5. to promote citizens' right of access to records and information held by governments and public institutions.
6. to promote and protect the right to freedom of expression and other human rights online

## **Activities**

MRA's activities are varied and include, but not limited to the following:

### **Research and Publication**

Under this programme, Media Rights Agenda has produced a number of publications on various issues which affect media freedom, freedom of expression, access to information and digital rights.

### **Litigation/Legal Services**

Under its Litigation Programme, Media Rights Agenda offers legal assistance to journalists who are arrested and detained, subjected to oppressive criminal charges in the course of their professional duties, assaulted, or harassed and intimidated in any other manner.

MRA also litigates in class actions aimed at eliciting broad judicial pronouncements with positive implications for media freedoms.

It has pursued both approaches at Nigerian domestic courts as well as before international judicial forums, including the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights where it has litigated more cases on freedom of expression and media freedom than any other organization on the continent.

It also offers free legal services and representations for individuals and civil society organisations denied of access to information request from relevant institutions through its nationwide network of FOI lawyers.

### **Advocacy/Campaigns**

MRA runs an Advocacy and Campaigns Programme under which it campaigned for the reform of media laws in Nigeria and championed the campaign for the enactment of a Freedom of Information Act in Nigeria.

The Freedom of Information Bill proposed by Media Rights Agenda to the National Assembly in Nigeria and passed into law on May 28, 2011 guarantees citizens' and non-citizens' right to access information in the custody of government, its agencies and institutions as well as private bodies carrying out public functions.

In addition to carrying out local campaigns on issues of media freedom and

freedom of expression generally, MRA also conducts international campaigns using international human rights procedures and mechanisms. Such campaigns are used mainly in cases of the arrest and detention of journalists, other acts of harassment and intimidation of journalists, closure of press facilities, proscription of media establishments and publications in challenging repressive press laws. As part of this effort, MRA has filed complaints and communications to the African Commission of Human and Peoples Rights, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa; the United Nations Human Rights Council's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the (now defunct) United Nations Country Special Rapporteur on Nigeria; and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Lawyers and Judges.

MRA is also involved in the Africa-wide campaign for the adoption of Access to Information laws and Internet rights and freedoms that meets internationally accepted standards and principles.

### **Training/Capacity Building**

MRA organises training workshops, seminars and conference on a variety of issues affecting the media, journalism practice, freedom of expression, the right of access to information, and digital rights and freedoms. It also exposes practicing journalists to training opportunities available outside Nigeria and, in some cases, assists journalists with securing admission to such training programmes.

### **Governance/Management Structure**

Media Rights Agenda has two levels of governance and operations. These are: the Board and the Secretariat.



