

Media Freedom Under Threat:

The State of Media Freedom and Journalists Safety in Nigeria,
2024



Media Freedom Under Threat:

The State of Media Freedom and Journalists Safety in Nigeria,

2024




Media Rights Agenda
21, Budland Street, Off Isheri Road
Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria
P. O. Box 52113, Ikoyi, Lagos
Tel: +234 806 524 0610
E-mail: mra@mediarightsagenda.org
website: <https://mediarightsagenda.org>
 [@MRA_Nigeria](#)
 Media Rights Agenda
 [mranigeria](#)

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	v
Preface	vi

Chapter One

1.0	Analysis of Categories of Attacks on Freedom of Expression	1
1.1.	Analysis by Types of Attacks	1
1.2.	Analysis by Perpetrators of Attacks on Freedom of Expression	5
1.3.	States Where Attacks took Place	7

Chapter Two

2.0	Incidents of Attacks on the Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression in 2024	8
2.1	Assault and Battery	8
2.2	Arrest and Detention	22
2.3	Threat to life	36
2.4.	Abduction/Kidnapping	44
2.5.	Prevention from Assignments	49
2.6.	Invasion/Raid	52
2.7.	Harassments	55
2.8.	Killed	56
2.9.	Others	56

Chapter Three

3.0	Analysis of Attacks over the Past Three Years	68
3.1	Analysis by Types of Attacks	68
3.2	Analysis by Perpetrators of Attacks	70

Chapter Four

4.0	Conclusion and Recommendations	74
-----	--------------------------------	----

Chapter Five

5.0	Interventions by Media Rights Agenda on Freedom of Expression Issues	78
5.1	Press Statements	78
5.2	Media Rights Monitor Newsletter	109
5.3	Publications	110
5.4	MRA Builds the Capacity of Journalists on Laws Affecting Media in Nigeria	111
5.5	MRA Commemorates 2024 World Press Freedom Day with CSOs, Journalists	112
5.6	Litigations Undertaken in 2024	119

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is produced and published by Media Rights Agenda (MRA) with support from the MacArthur Foundation through the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism (WSCIJ), under the Collaborative Media Engagement for Development, Inclusion and Accountability (CMEDIA) Project. MRA is grateful to both the MacArthur Foundation and the Wole Soyinka Centre for their support.

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, Ms. Esther Adeniyi and Oluwatimileyin Adams, 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

The media in Nigeria, as in many parts of the world, serve as a vital check on power and a voice for the people. Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution, as amended, gives the “press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media” the awesome duty of upholding “the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people.”

Yet, as this report on attacks against journalists and the media in Nigeria shows, that duty has been fraught with risks, dangers and other challenges for the media community. What makes the situation even more intolerable is the fact that journalists and the media are entirely at the mercy of the Government and its law enforcement and security agencies, which the media ought to be free to hold accountable.

Ironically, it is the Government as well as law enforcement and security agencies that have the responsibility to protect journalists and ensure their safety under national and international laws and instruments.

Section 14(1) of the Constitution states that “Nigeria shall be a State based on the principles of democracy and social justice”, and further provides in Section 14(2)(b) that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government.” There can be no doubt that journalists fall within the category of the “the people” for whom the government has as its primary purpose ensuring their security and welfare.

But much more pointedly, Principle 20 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa provides, among other things, that “States shall guarantee the safety of journalists and other media practitioners” and further that “States shall take measures to prevent attacks on journalists and other media practitioners, including murder, extra-judicial killing, torture and other forms of ill-treatment, arbitrary arrest and detention, enforced disappearance, kidnapping, intimidation, threats and unlawful surveillance undertaken by State and non-State actors.”

It is, therefore, a tragic irony that the State, represented by its officials along with its law enforcement and security agents was responsible for over 70 percent of the attacks on journalists and the media recorded during the year 2024, as shown by this report. In all of the cases, none of these officials or law enforcement and security agents has been held accountable in any way, which strongly suggests government support or at least tolerance for the attacks.

The year was marked by escalating threats, intimidation, harassment,

physical attacks and other forms of attacks against the media, which is a clear reflection of the challenges facing journalists who pursue their work in an increasingly hostile environment.

The attacks on journalists, recorded in this report, took different forms, each of them aiming to intimidate, silence, or harm journalists who reported on sensitive issues or challenged powerful entities.

Journalists were subjected to direct physical violence, while in many cases, illegal arrests and arbitrary detention were used to intimidate them or prevent them from reporting on particular issues. Harassment, including verbal abuse in person, over the phone or through social media; threats, stalking, and other forms of intimidation, was often used to create a hostile environment to deter journalists from pursuing critical stories.

Journalists also faced cyber harassment, such as hacking, phishing, and other digital attacks, which were used to compromise their data, sources, and most significantly, their safety. There were indications that journalists' communications were being monitored, during which information about them or their activities were gathered as part of a broader effort to intimidate them.

There were also instances where threats or attacks were directed at the family members, friends, or loved ones of the journalists as a means of exerting pressure on them.

In the course of the year, journalists and media organizations faced scores of lawsuits or criminal charges which were intended to intimidate them, exhaust their resources, prevent them from publishing certain stories or to punish them for publishing negative or unflattering reports about powerful individuals or institutions. These included civil claims for defamation, criminal defamation cases, charges of sedition, treason, terrorism, “cyberstalking”, among others.

The year also witnessed attacks on and damage to equipment and facilities belonging to journalists or media organizations. Some of these occurred in the course of raids on media houses, vandalism of property, and destruction of cameras and other equipment, which were designed to disrupt their work and make it harder for them to continue reporting.

Sometimes, the perpetrators of these attacks employed a combination of different tactics and different forms of attacks through which they created a

climate of fear and restricted media freedom.

Nigeria is widely regarded as a country with one of the most dynamic and resilient media landscapes in Africa. Yet, journalists continue to face grave dangers in the course of their work.

The work of the media, which requires them to uphold democracy, transparency, accountability and human rights ought to afford them various forms of protection. Instead, the reality is that many journalists find themselves targeted by both state and non-state actors.

These increasing attacks on journalists do not appear to be isolated incidents but represent an alarming trend that stifles free expression and deliberately undermines public accountability.

In this annual report, we document the various forms of attacks against journalists, highlighting the incidents reported, the patterns observed, and the perpetrators of the attacks.

Each attack recorded here is not only an affront to the individual targeted but an assault on the collective right of Nigerians to be informed and engaged in the democratic process. These findings serve as a solemn reminder of the urgent need for protective measures to be adopted and put in place to ensure that the media can operate freely and safely.

It is our hope that this report will not only raise awareness but also spur action, such as prompting legislative and institutional reforms that strengthen protections for journalists and hold perpetrators accountable. A free, independent and professional media is essential to the health of our democracy, and the safety of journalists is integral to safeguarding that freedom.

We commend the journalists who continue their work despite the risks and extend our solidarity to all those who have suffered in their pursuit of truth.

The Nigerian people deserve a media sector that is free, fearless, and protected. With this report, we renew our call for a national commitment to defending media freedom, so that journalists can fulfill their essential role without fear of retribution, harassment or intimidation.

Edetaen Ojo
Executive Director
Media Rights Agenda
November 2024

Chapter One

1.0 Analysis of Categories of Attacks on Freedom of Expression

1.1 Analysis by Types of Attacks

Media Rights Agenda (MRA) collated and documented a total of 69 incidents of attacks on journalists, media workers, media houses, and freedom of expression from January to October 2024. These attacks took various forms including assault and battery, arrest and detention, threats to life, abduction and kidnapping, harassment, prevention from carrying out professional duties etc. These attacks were perpetrated by various groups, including especially law enforcement and security agencies. They all went without the perpetrators being held to account for their crimes.

These attacks reflect the physical risks that media personnel face in the line of duty and also when citizens express themselves online. These have serious repercussions on journalists' safety and ability to perform their duties freely, underscoring the urgent need for protective measures.

According to MRA's monitoring, the predominant form of attacks visited on journalists, media workers and those who try to express themselves freely is assault and battery. From January to October 2024, MRA recorded and documented 21 cases of physical brutalities on journalists, media workers and citizens for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Brutalities visited on the media and Nigerians for expressing themselves accounted for 30.43% of the total documented incidents of attacks on freedom of expression from January to October 2024.

Arrests and detentions accounted for 24.63% of the recorded incidents, with 17 cases documented during the period covered. Journalists, media workers, and even citizens expressing their opinions continue to be targets of detainment, often for covering stories deemed critical by authorities, powerful and rich individuals. These actions were seen as part of a broader strategy to suppress freedom of expression, discourage reporting on government and police misconduct, and intimidate those working to keep the

public informed.

With eight cases, 11.59% of the total attacks, threats to life are another disturbing tactic used to silence media workers and intimidate them into self-censorship. Four of these threats were from anonymous people and are designed to foster fear, especially when covering issues related to crime, corruption, or political scandals. In four other cases, the concerned journalists knew the people who were threatening their lives. Such life-threatening intimidation undermines journalists' rights and risks creating a fearful media landscape.

In six instances, journalists were kidnapped or abducted during the period covered by this report, making up 8.69% of reported incidents. In three of these incidents, unknown persons were responsible. In another three incidents, operatives of law enforcement and security agencies were responsible. According to reports, they stalked and kidnapped the journalists without first inviting them and in some cases, kept them incommunicado for days. The abductors use this tactic to extract information, and intimidate journalists and their organizations. Journalists often suffer severe psychological and physical attack from these incidents. This trend highlights the extreme measures some individuals or groups will take to deter media personnel from doing their work.

Prevention from reporting makes up 7.24% of incidents, with five documented cases. This involves obstructing media personnel from accessing or covering significant events, often through threats, blockades, or even physical interference. Such obstruction not only violates journalists' rights but also denies the public access to important information, skewing public knowledge and stifling informed discourse. Unfortunately, operatives of law enforcement and security agencies were perpetrators and, in some cases, where they are not the perpetrators, they either support the perpetrators or turn a blind eye when hoodlums harass and prevent journalists and media workers from covering newsworthy events.

With three reported incidents (4.34%), media outlet invasions represent a direct attempt to shut down press operations, destroy or confiscate equipment, and intimidate entire newsrooms. These raids did not only disrupt daily operations but also spread fear among staff members, who are left uncertain about the safety and continuity of their work.

Cases of harassment of journalists were two incidents (2.89%), but still represent significant threats to freedom of the press. Such harassment includes verbal abuse, intimidation, and sometimes physical manhandling, deterring media workers from reporting freely. This constant antagonism fuels a hostile working environment, making it challenging for journalists to perform their duties.

In one case, a journalist tragically lost his life, highlighting the ultimate risk that media personnel face. The journalist, Mr. Kolawole Omoniyi, was a Multichoice SuperSport's media crew traveling from Lagos State to Uyo, the Akwa Ibom State capital to cover the African Cup of Nations qualifying match between the Super Eagles of Nigeria and the Libyan national team, Mediterranean Knights. He was shot dead by armed kidnappers.

Other forms of intimidation, including police summons and court-issued warrants, etc., account for six incidents, representing 8.69% of the attacks. These administrative or legal tactics are often used to intimidate and exert control over journalists, media workers, and citizens expressing dissent, signaling a concerning misuse of legal systems to stifle free expression.

The Table below shows the frequency of various forms of attacks on the media and freedom of expression

S/N	Category of Attacks	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Assault and Battery	21	30.43%
2.	Arrest and Detention	17	24.63%
3.	Threat to Life	8	11.59%
4.	Abduction/Kidnapping	6	8.68%
5.	Prevention from Duty	5	7.24%
6.	Invasion/Raid	3	4.34%
7.	Harassment	2	2.89%
8.	Killed	1	1.44%
9.	Others	6	8.69%
Total		69	100%

1.2 Analysis by Perpetrators of Attacks on Freedom of Expression

Law enforcement and security agencies including the Nigerian Police Force, the Department of State Services (DSS) Nigerian Immigration Service, and the Nigerian Army constituted more than half of the perpetrators of attacks on journalists, media workers, media houses and freedom of expression during the period covered by this report. They perpetrated the documented attacks in 45 of the recorded 69 instances. In other words, they were responsible for attacks on freedom of expression in 65.21% of the time.

The agencies in this category of perpetrators were established by law to maintain peace, order, and justice in Nigeria, prevent crimes and ensure public safety, carryout law enforcement and investigations, protect the rights and freedoms of citizens, and provide national security, among other duties. Unfortunately, data gathered by Media Rights Agenda show that they failed in their duties but rather turned their authority to attack the media and freedom of expression.

In six incidents, unnamed but unarmed individuals were perpetrators of attacks on the media and freedom of expression. This account for 8.69% of the incidents of attacks on freedom of expression where this group was the perpetrator.

Thugs and hoodlums who were either hired by political actors or are loyalists of politicians/political parties were responsible in seven instances of the recorded attacks on the media. This category of attackers constitutes 10.14% of the perpetrators of attacks against freedom of expression.

Civilian government officials attacked journalists in four of the 69 recorded incidents and this constitute 5.79% of the total.

In one instance, 1.44%, an individual, a retired Air Force officer, threatened a journalist.

Unknown armed men or unknown gunmen were perpetrators of attacks on the media in four recorded instances which constitute 5.79% of the total 69 instances recorded.

Chart showing the frequency of various forms of attacks on the media and freedom of expression

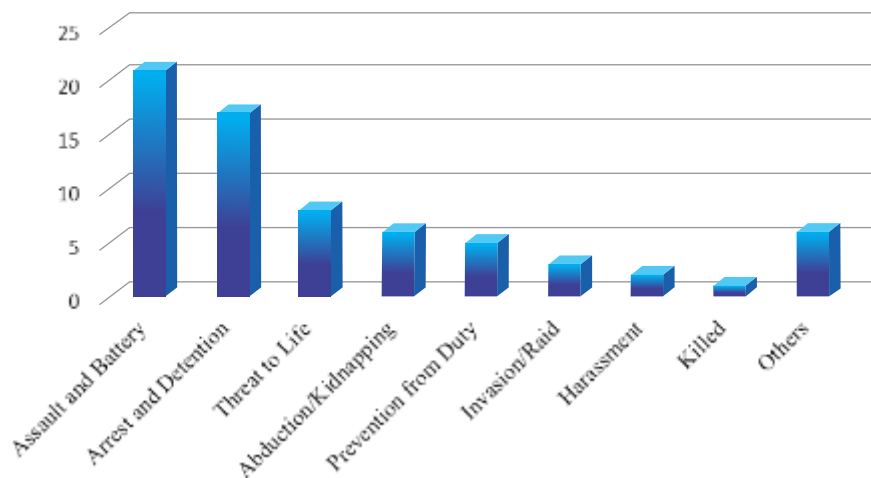
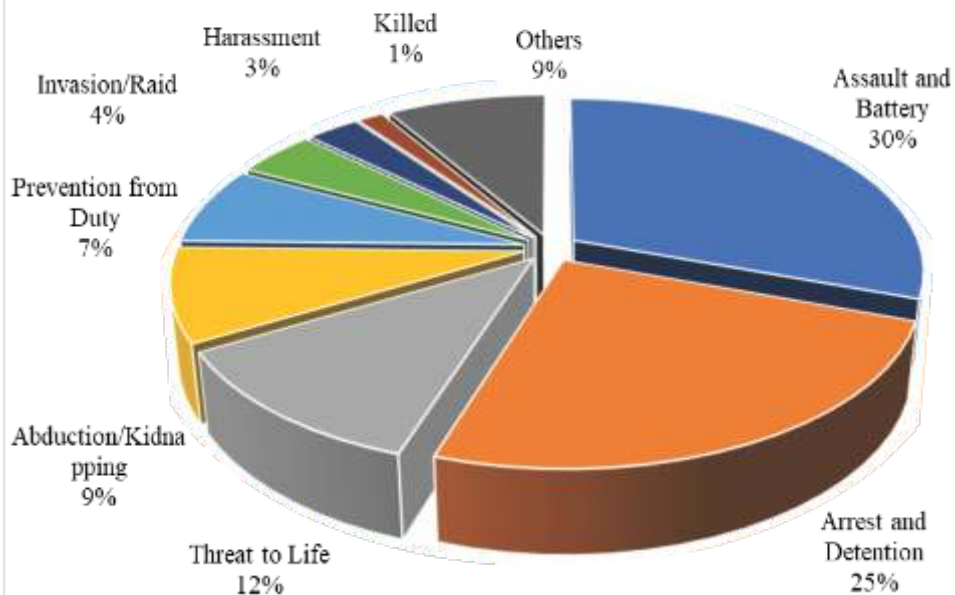


Chart showing the percentage of various forms of attacks on the media and freedom of expression

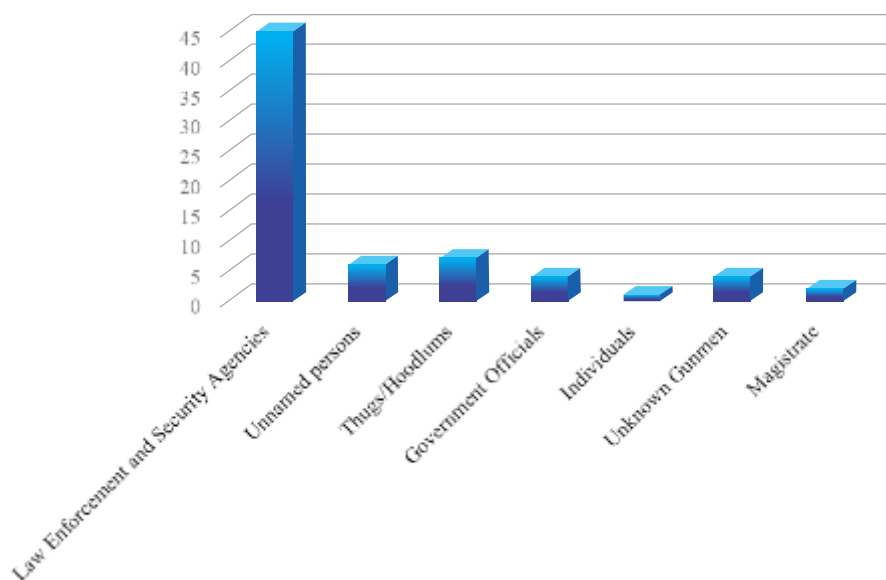


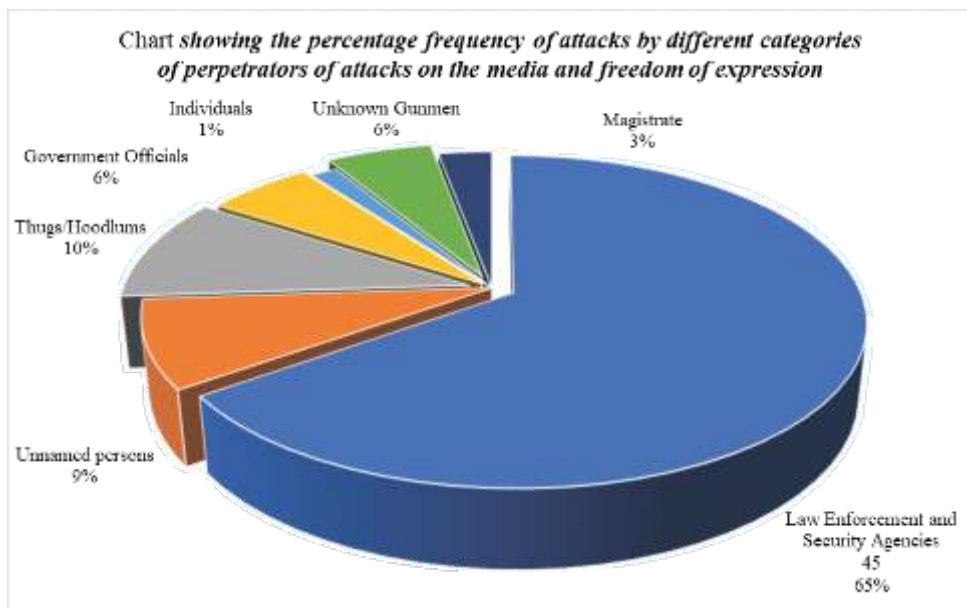
Two Magistrates were perpetrators of attacks on journalists in two instances. One of the Magistrate issued a bench warrant for the arrest of a publisher while a second one confiscated the tools of journalists who were in the court to cover its proceedings. This constitutes 2.89% of the total.

The table below shows the frequency of attacks by different categories of perpetrators of attacks on the media and freedom of expression

S/N	Perpetrators	Frequency of Attacks	Percentage
1.	Law Enforcement and Security Agencies	45	65.21%
2.	Government Officials	4	5.79%
3.	Unnamed persons	6	8.68%
4.	Thugs / Hoodlums	7	10.14%
5.	Individuals	1	1.44%
6.	Unknown Gunmen	4	5.79%
7.	Magistrate	2	2.89%
Total		69	100%

Chart showing the frequency of attacks by different categories of perpetrators of attacks on the media and freedom of expression





1.3 States Where Attacks took Place

The majority of the attacks on journalists took place in Lagos State: Lagos is Nigeria's commercial capital with the highest concentration of media houses than any other state.

MRA recorded 11 incidents of attacks on freedom of expression in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory.

Four incidents took place in Rivers state and three incidents apiece in Delta, Oyo, and Abia States.

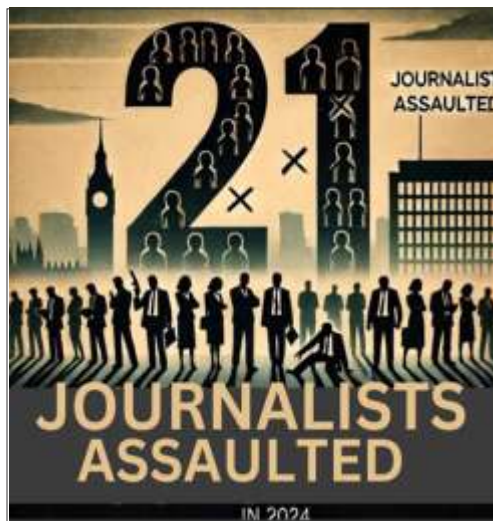
Two incidents of attacks took place apiece in Edo, Kwara, Bauchi, Ogun, Cross River, and Anambra States

MRA recorded one incident of attack in each of Osun, Niger, Nasarawa, Katsina, and Akwa Ibom States. Other states where one incident was recorded are Borno, Sokoto, Plateau, Imo, Kaduna and Enugu States

Chapter Two

2.0 Incidents of Attacks on the Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression in 2024

2.1 Assaults and Battery



1. Governor's Security Aides Brutalise Journalists at Event

On January 26, 2024, some security aides attached to the Osun State governor, Mr. Ademola Adeleke, manhandled and roughened Mr. Bunmi Adigun, a reporter with the Ogun State Television (OGTV), when he went to cover the 66th birthday of Oba Adeyemi Adekeye, the Abepa of Joga Orile and conferment of Baba Oba chieftaincy title on governor Adeleke.

The security aides reportedly began to push people including journalists immediately after the governor arrived at the venue of the event.

Narrating his ordeal, Bunmi said: “They pushed my cameraman and other cameramen, thought that was enough until they got to where we were standing, I was harassed, embarrassed, and they nearly tore my clothes.”

The reporter said when he tried to get to those who harassed them, he noticed that they were putting on a different uniform from the normal police uniform with no name tag and wearing nose masks.

Following the incident, the Ogun State chapter of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), in a statement by Wale Olanrewaju, its chairman, called on Governor Adeleke to, as a matter of urgency, fish out and reprimand the

'power drunk' police officers who attacked the reporter.

Reacting to the allegations, Mr. Olawale Rasheed, the spokesperson to Osun State governor, tendered an unreserved apology to the Ogun State Council of NUJ for the 'unruly conduct of some security men at the Joga-Orile chieftaincy event'.

He said, “On behalf of the governor, I apologise to the secretary of the NUJ in Ogun State, and any other journalist who might have been affected by the incident. However, we want to put it on record that several dignitaries attended the event with different security personnel. The officers shown in the video do not belong to the convoy of the Osun State Governor.”

2. Murder Suspect Assault, Threaten Journalists in Court

On February 9, 2024, about 15 persons standing trial for the killing of the Village Head of Lambata in Niger State, Alhaji Muhammad Abdulsafur, assaulted cameramen from the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and Niger State Television (NSTV) and threatened journalists attending the resumed trial of their case, saying their continuous reporting of the case was enough.

The suspects, who were granted bail by Justice Aisha Bawa Wodu, of High Court 3, Suleja, Niger State, warned journalists that drastic action would be taken against them if they continued to report their court appearances.

The assaulted journalists were conducting interviews outside the courtroom when the suspects pounced on them as they left the courtroom. It took the intervention of Court Registrar and their Counsel to bring the situation under control.

The suspects however warned the journalists that there would be consequences if they do not stay away from the trial.

They boasted that: “Henceforth, you journalists should stop reporting our court proceedings. If not, we are ready to deal with any journalists that dare to write anything about us.”

3. Thugs Attack Journalists at Governorship Primary Election Collation Centre

On February 17, 2024, several journalists who were covering the All Progressives Congress (APC) governorship primary election were attacked by suspected political thugs at Lushville Hotel in Benin City, Edo State, which served as the election coalition centre.

The problem began after the primary election results from eight local government areas had been announced, and journalists covering the event were instructed to vacate the center. Before journalists could gather their things together, thugs swooped on the venue after overpowering the police operatives at the gate.

Journalists were viciously attacked and beaten, with their equipment destroyed by members of a faction of the party. In a shocking display, a laptop belonging to a journalist working with Arise TV, Abraham Godwin, was smashed in the presence of security agents at the centre. An NTA cameraman and a Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) reporter were also assaulted, and their equipment vandalized.

The presence of the State Commissioner of Police, Funsho Adeboye, with the officials of the party at the centre did not deter the hoodlums from engaging in the free for all.

Following the attack, the leadership of the NUJ, requested the leadership of the APC to tender unreserved apology within seven days to the Union, for assaulting its members or be prepared for a war with the media.

Chairman of the Edo State Council of NUJ, Comrade Festus Alenkhe, disclosed this on February 18 in Benin, while reading the decision of the national leadership of the Union over the attack on journalists who were covering the primary election of the party.

Comrade Alenkhe described the attack on journalists who have the legitimate rights to cover electioneering process as a show of shame. According to him, the NUJ, Edo State Council met at the directive of the national leadership and resolved that the Edo State APC should replace all the damaged equipment of journalists that were covering the event, pay the medical bills of those injured

during the attack, and that the APC should tender an unreserved apology.

The NUJ also urged the Edo State Commissioner of Police to help fish out all those who were responsible for the attack and ensure that they are prosecuted because the report says that some of them are well known as they did not wear masks.

The Union also requested that the management of Lushville Hotel make available to it the CCTV footage of the incident and that this should be made public and also help the police in doing their investigations.

4. Journalist Assaulted while Covering Police Raid on BDC Operators in Abuja

On February 21, 2024, Ms Kasarahchi Aniagolu, a reporter with The Whistler newspaper, was assaulted and beaten up by the anti-violence crime unit of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) while covering a raid by operatives of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on Bureau de Change (BDC) operators in the Wuse Zone 4 Area of Abuja. She was also arrested and taken to the Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) headquarters (FCT Anti-violence Crime Unit) where she was detained.

Narrating her ordeal in a series of WhatsApp chats, the journalist disclosed her arrest at 1:17 PM stating that she had been arrested and was being held at the SARS headquarters for recording the raid on the BDC operators.

She added that she urgently needed help as she had been dealt with and wanted everyone to know that the Police were picking up BDC operators, and she was also picked up while she was about to video them.

She said: “They hit my phone and picked it up. They confiscated my laptop, and they are parading me like a criminal gang. They hit me and broke my ID pouch. Told me I will be killed and nothing will happen.”

She was released on the same day after spending eight hours in illegal detention at the Anti-Violence Crime Unit of the Nigeria Police Force in Guzape, Abuja.

5. Journalist Assaulted, Arrested by Soldiers for Covering Protest in Delta State

On February 23, 2024, soldiers from the Nigerian Army 3 Battalion in Effurun, Uvwie Local Government Area of Delta State arrested, brutalized and handcuffed the South-South Bureau Chief of Galaxy Television, Mr. Dele Fasan, at the DSC roundabout in Effurun for recording video clips of an aborted labour protest in the metropolis. They also hit him with the butt of their guns.

According to an eyewitness, Mr. Fasan was picked up by the soldiers in the presence of the police team led by a Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Operations, Aina Adesola.

He was later released by the soldiers following the intervention of the police boss and his colleagues who appealed to the Army Commander, Major A.E Ohegbe, on whose order he was released and the handcuff pulled off.

Confirming his arrest in a chat with newsmen shortly after he was released, Mr. Fasan said he was trying to shoot video clips of the protest scene which was already taken over by security operatives when the overzealous soldiers accosted him.

He commended the DCP Aina Adesola for promptly intervening in the matter.

“The military were not civil at all during the protest. But the police led by DCP Aina Adesola, the Navy, the Department of State Services (DSS), and Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) operatives were civil as they all intervened and I was released”.

He added that the Army Commander, Major Ahegbe, later apologised to him after the ugly act had already been done.

6. Immigration Officers Assault Journalist in Ibadan

Mr. Seun Falomo, a cameraman with Galaxy Television was on April 5, 2024, assaulted by immigration officers while trying to report the arrest of an official of the Oyo State Road Transport Management Agency (OYRTMA)

in Ibadan, Oyo State. He was pushed to the ground and threatened with a gun but was rescued by some of his colleagues and some members of the public.

The assault occurred a few minutes after the OYRTMA official was arrested and detained for apprehending a Nigerian Immigration Service personnel who violated traffic rules.

According to reports, the immigration officers retaliated by arresting the OYRTMA official, stripping him naked, and locking him up at their Zone F headquarters on Old Ife Road in Ibadan.

The Immigration officers turned their aggression towards the journalists present for trying to cover the incident for their mediums. In the process, Mr. Falomo and others were assaulted and threatened with death. Some of the immigration officers also attempted to seize his camera which was met with resistance.

Comrade Ademola Babalola, Chairman, NUJ, Oyo State Council, described the incident as worrisome and issued a short statement, appealing to journalists to be mindful of overzealous security operatives.

7. Journalist Assaulted During APC's Governorship Primary Elections in Ondo State

The Ondo State Commissioner for Youths and Sports Development, Mr. Saka Yusuf-Ogunleye, on April 20, 2024, at about 11.45 AM local time, assaulted Mr. Tayo Ikujuni, a senior journalist with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) during the conduct of the APC governorship primary elections at Ward 9, Eji-Oba High School, Oba-Ile, Akure North Local Council in Ondo State.

The commissioner also collected his phone, threw it away, and ordered his political thugs to seize his other gadgets.

An eyewitness said that the incident occurred when the reporter noticed that voting had commenced and as a result asked the Commissioner when the election materials arrived. The commissioner reportedly screamed at the journalist, saying, "Who are you? You're a useless journalist. You're a stupid journalist. Go away from here."

The journalist was saved from further battery by the swift intervention of some individuals and security personnel, who prevented political thugs from further attacking him. When contacted, Mr. Yusuf-Ogunleye denied the allegation but apologised to journalists over the development.

The Ondo State Council of the NUJ in a statement by its Chairman, Mr. Leke Adegbite, frowned at the attack and physical assault on the senior journalist, describing it as barbaric, unacceptable, and uncivilised.

8. Lagos State Building Control Agency Officials Brutalise The Guardian Reporter

On May 30, 2024, Mr. Olusoji Olaopa, Head of Enforcement of the Lagos State Building Control Agency (LASBCA), ordered his men to drag and beat Mr. Eniola Daniel, a journalist with The Guardian newspaper, at the scene of a four-storey building collapse at 15 Iga Idunganran, Lagos Island.

Mr. Olaopa had boasted that he would beat the reporter and face no consequences. In a verbal assault on the reporter, he said, “You are stupid, I will beat you and nothing will happen. Step out now.” He then pushed the journalist to the floor with the assistance of a mobile police officer attached to him.

During the assault, an official of the Lagos State Emergency Management Authority (LASEMA) shouted at Mr. Olaopa: “You know he's a journalist, he identified himself already.”

Additionally, an official of LASBCA reportedly threatened to stab Mr. Daniel.

9. Journalist Attacked by Security Guards while Covering Strike in Umuahia

Mr. Emmanuel Nwazue, a correspondent of Afia TV in Umuahia, the Abia State capital, was on June 3, 2024, attacked and assaulted by security guards attached to First City Monument Bank (FCMB) on Akanu Ibiam Way (Bank Road), Umuahia, while covering the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC)

indefinite strike.

Mr. Nwazue explained that he was interviewing residents to get their thoughts on the industrial action when two FCMB guards approached him. He had asked some bank customers who were visibly frustrated by the strike, to move a few miles away from the bank premises for the interview to avoid capturing the bank building on camera.

During the interview, the security guards disrupted the scene, demanding that Mr. Nwazue hands over his camera. When he refused and attempted to leave, the guards blocked his path, resulting in a physical altercation.

Mr. Nwazue recounted being beaten by the guards and pushed around until he fell onto the main road, and narrowly avoided being hit by an oncoming vehicle. Passers-by and witnesses, including the interviewee, intervened to rescue him from the ill-treatment being meted on him by the security guards.

He sustained an ankle dislocation and damage to his camera equipment during the assault. He reported the incident to both his media outlet and the police in Abia State.

Mr. Nwazue, who said he was just recovering from lumbar spondylosis, expressed concern that the attack could aggravate his pre-existing medical condition.

10. Immigration Officers Assault Female Journalists in Benin City

On July 31, 2024, some officers of the Nigerian Immigration Service in Benin, the Edo State capital assaulted Ms Joy Odigie, a journalist with NAN, when she visited the Edo State Command of the service to interview its Public Relations Officer, Mr. Ake Kenneth, on the reported burglary of offices of the command.

Ms Odigie was cleared by the security at the entrance she walked into the building only to be queried at the reception as to her mission at the command.

She disclosed that she had passed through the security men in front of the office and was already ascending the staircase when she heard some officers

shouting, 'Excuse me.' She said when she realised that she was the person being called, she came down from the staircase.

Ms Odigie said she informed them that she is a journalist and that she wanted to see the PRO. According to her, one of them answered saying that he knew that she is a journalist but started shouting that he wanted to search her, claiming she could be carrying a bomb.

The reporter said she told him since he knew that she is a journalist, he should allow her go and see the PRO rather than embarrass her but he continued to talk down on her.

At a point, Ms Odigie said a female officer informed her, “Oga is calling you” and she asked for the name of the Oga. Rather than tell the journalist the name of her superior, she replied, “You are disrespecting my Oga, you this stupid albino”.

Ms Odigie said when she expressed her reservations over the uncouth words used on her, other officers descended on her and confiscated her belongings.

She said one of the officers with a gun dragged her by the arm and pulled her outside the office. She said when the umbrella she was holding fell from her hand, it was picked up by an officer who confiscated it.

She thereafter left the office and put a call across to the PRO of the service, who then came to her rescue and asked that her umbrella and other belongings be returned to her.

11. Journalists Attacked, Vehicle Vandalised

On August 1, 2024, a Channels TV vehicle conveying 11 journalists and media workers from different media outlets including TVC news correspondent, Mr. Ibrahim Isah, to cover the nationwide #EndBadgovernance protests was attacked and vandalized by hoodlums who also assaulted the journalists with weapons. The journalists sustained injuries and were traumatized.

12. Thugs Attack Journalists in Asaba

On August 1, 2024, thugs suspected to have been hired by government stormed the Bua Roundabout in Asaba, Delta State, venue of the #EndBadGovernance protests and started harassing journalists and protesters. They attacked Mr. Matthew Ochei and Mr. Monday Osayande, correspondents of The Punch newspapers; a Pointer reporter, Lucy; Mr. Amour Udemude, an investigative journalist, and a reporter with Sahara Reporters.

The hired thugs manhandled Mr. Udemude and the other journalists when they discovered they were capturing assault of protesters with their phones and also interviewing them. The thugs attacked them, forcefully took some phones and smashed their gadgets on the tarred road. The situation escalated as more thugs came and assaulted them including the correspondent of The Guardian newspapers. Men of the Nigerian Police who witnessed the assault on the journalists stood askance and did nothing. Reprieve however came the way of the journalists when an Army officer rescued them from the thugs and escorted them from the scene to safety but Mr. Udemude's phone was not returned to him.

13. Editor Arrested in Calabar

On August 1, 2024, while covering the nationwide #EndBadgovernance protests, Mr. Jonathan Ugbal, Managing Editor of CrossRiverWatch Newspaper online, and some activists were assaulted, arrested, handcuffed, forced into waiting vehicles and taken to an undisclosed destination by operatives of the Nigerian Police Force. Before his arrest, Mr. Ugbal had shared a video showing that the roads surrounding Mary Slessor Roundabout had been deserted. They were later released.

14. Hoodlums Attack NUJ Vehicle

Hoodlums, on August 1, 2024, during the nationwide #EndBadgovernance protests, attacked an 18-seater bus belonging to the NUJ transporting food items to Ernest Etim Press Centre in Calabar. Joseph Abasi, Cross River State correspondent of Nigerian Tribune, was seriously injured.

15. Journalists Teargassed, Beaten by Policemen

The Police, on August 1, 2024, targeted and arrested two journalists who were covering the nationwide #EndBadgovernance protests at Ahmadu Bello Way in the Garki area of Abuja in spite of identifying themselves as journalists. A Premium Times reporter, Mr. Yakubu Mohammed was beaten, with batons and the butt of police guns until he sustained injuries on his head. He was briefly arrested and detained in a police van close to the building housing the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of Nigeria at the Federal Secretariat in Garki. His phone was seized and broken by the Police. Mr. Mohammed went out to cover the protests wearing a press vest that clearly identified him as a journalist; he also presented his identity card issued to him by his outlet. Mr. Mohammed said the Policemen told him that they didn't care about his identity card and informed him that they had earlier arrested an NUJ chairman.

Narrating his ordeal, Muhammed said, “While the Assistant Superintendent of Police, Luka Fada, and some of his colleagues went for the protesters, a menacing officer in a bulletproof vest and helmet came for me. Three other officers later joined him all pounced on me with a ferocity that left me reeling. One wrenched my right hand to seize my phone, and the three others hit me with their weapons, resulting in a head injury and an internal twist in my right shoulder. These monsters intentionally came for me, fully aware that I am a journalist who has caught them on camera harassing protesters.”

He was released some 15 minutes later following the intervention of Mr. Kayode Jaiyeola, a photojournalist with Punch newspapers.

16. AIT, News Central TV Crews Attacked

On August 1, 2024, Police operatives fired teargas at Africa Independent Television (AIT) and News Central TV crews that went to the Central Business District of Abuja to cover the nationwide #EndBadgovernance protests. Ms Mary Adeboye of News Central TV was hit by a teargas canister fired by the Police. Ms Adeboye was conducting interviews with protesters, capturing their voices and grievances when she was suddenly and brutally interrupted as police forces intervened to disperse the crowd.

In the midst of the chaos, a teargas canister, launched by the police, struck Adeboye on her foot. The force of the impact was debilitating, leaving her unable to walk and struggling to catch her breath. The thick, acrid smoke from the teargas engulfed her, making it nearly impossible to continue her work or even remain on the scene.

17. DSS, Police Shoot at Peaceful Protesters, Journalists

On August 3, 2024, operatives of the DSS and the police shot rounds of live ammunition and tear gas to disperse protesters and journalists covering the nationwide #EndBadgovernance protests at the MKO Abiola Stadium in Abuja.

At about 12:15 PM, a hooded DSS operative cocked his rifle, moved towards journalists covering the protests and started firing. Pellets of the bullets created pockmarks on the windscreen of a Toyota Sienna vehicle, while three bullets pierced the trunk of the car conveying Premium Times journalists deployed to cover the protests.

A handful of protesters had earlier gathered by the main entrance of the Stadium while vans of heavily armed police officers and the Army had already stationed themselves there with others positioned strategically around the stadium. One of the masked DSS officials shouted at the crowd: “Leave this place, leave this place,” while pointing his rifle towards journalists covering the protests. He later loaded his rifle and began to shoot in the direction of journalists carrying cameras and in the ensuing chaos, security officials deployed to the scene ran after the protesters and journalists.

Journalists from various media outlets, including **Emmaunel Agbo and Abdulkareem Mojeed**, both of Premium Times, The Cable, Punch, Peoples Gazette, Arise News, AIT, News Central, and others, found themselves caught up in the situation. Dyepkazah Shibayan, a reporter with The Cable, was among those caught in the midst of the mayhem.

18. Journalist Attacked by Police During National Protest

On August 6, 2024, Hilary Damissah, an independent journalist with

DigiVation Network, was brutally assaulted by Nigerian security operatives while covering the #EndBadGovernance national protest near the Berger Roundabout in Abuja.

Mr. Damissah, who was wearing a visible media identification tag, was in the midst of protesters when he was tear-gassed at close range by officers from a stationed police Hilux van. The attack occurred as he was attempting to photograph the demonstrators and onlookers, which the officers deemed unacceptable.

In his attempt to escape, Damissah was further beaten with a baton, resulting in serious injury and a deep cut on his finger. He managed to find safety before being aided by protesting youths, who rushed him to a medical facility in the Games Village, Kaura District of Abuja.

Eyewitnesses at the scene reported that before the incident, a combined team of the Nigerian Police and the NSCDC had informed protesters that the Berger location was not approved for any anti-government protest, citing “orders from above.” A senior police officer whose name tag was not displayed on his uniform stated, “We are here to enforce law and ensure strict compliance to all the directives which forbids any demonstration around this place and anyone who refuses to obey will have themselves to blame.”

19. Policemen Eject Journalists from Protest Venue

On August 6, 2024, the policemen attached to Freedom Park, the venue of the #EndBadGovernance protest in Ojota, Lagos State, forcefully evicted journalists and watched as hoodlums assaulted them.

The incident happened in the afternoon when the police told reporters from the Foundation for Investigative Journalism (FIJ) and other media outfits to get as far away from the location as possible since #EndBadGovernance protesters were not at the venue. When the reporters protested this directive and challenged the police to provide credible reasons for imposing their decision on them, the police said the journalists were posing a threat to the peace of the neighbourhood.

According to reports, when the reporters from FIJ asked a policeman for

clarity, he said their gathering there would constitute problems, and that journalists were attracting attention. Thereafter the police began pushing them away and the hoodlums took advantage of this to threaten the retreating reporters. As this was ongoing, the police turned and left the hoodlums to harass the journalists and did nothing.

The hoodlums threatened to hurt the journalists and pushed them away from the protest ground.

The News Central Television crew, led by its correspondent, Mr. Benard Akede, was also subjected to harassment and intimidation while covering the #EndBadGovernance protests in the Ojota area of Lagos.

The crew members were threatened by armed thugs carrying batons and sticks. Mr. Akede attempted to continue his live report to the studio amid the chaos but the thugs forcefully pushed him and his crew into their press vehicle and ordered them to vacate the premises without delay.

20. Suspected Thugs Attack Channels TV Journalist

On August 7, 2024, some hoodlums suspected to have been sponsored by the government attacked a Channels TV reporter, Deborah Agbalam, in front of the Federal Secretariat on the Port Harcourt/Aba Expressway in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, while she was covering the #EndBadGovernance protests in the state. The journalist was surrounded and intimidated by the thugs who gathered to prevent any protest from holding. The thugs vowed to suppress the protest.

21. Suspected Political Thugs Attack Reporter Covering Local Elections in Rivers State

On October 5, 2024, armed men suspected to be political thugs attacked Mr. Emmanuel Atseyinku, a correspondent of the online news portal, 9 News Nigeria, and his driver while they were covering the Rivers State local government election, damaging their camera in the process.

Mr. Atseyinku said the thugs attacked them just a few poles from the Igwuruta Divisional Police Station in Igwuruta Ikwerre Local Government Area of

Rivers State.

According to him, while they were running for safety, the thugs pursued, caught up with them, attacked them and completely damaged their camera while they stole some of their gadgets.

2.2 Arrests and Detention



1. Two Journalists Arrested, Docked, Released on Bail

Two journalists, Salihu Ayatullahi, Editor-in-Chief, and Adisa-Jaji Azeez, Managing Editor of an online news portal, Informant247, were on February 6, 2024, detained in Ilorin, the Kwara State capital, for allegedly publishing injurious reports against the Rector of the Kwara State Polytechnic, Engineer Abdul Jimoh Muhammed, when they honored a police invitation.

The following day, police charged them as well as Salihu Shola Taofeek, and Abdulrahman Taye Damilola with conspiracy and cyberstalking under section 24(1)(b) of Nigeria's Cybercrimes Act, and defamation under section 393 of the Penal Code Act. Taofeek, and Damilola who were not present in court were said to be “at large.”

The journalists were detained in connection with investigative stories published by Informant247 medium on November 10, 2023, and February 2, 2024, alleging that the Kwara State Polytechnic Rector made false claims about the institution's financial status and commissioned shoddy, uncompleted projects.

Salihu and Adisa, through their lawyer, A. J. Edun, approached the Federal High Court seeking protection of their fundamental human right to press

freedom and liberty.

Although the prosecutor, Abdullah Sanni, reminded the court of the motion *ex parte* attached to the First Information Report claiming that granting the journalists bail may jettison police efforts to arrest those who are at large, Magistrate Monisola Kamson, who presided over the matter however granted them bail with two hundred and fifty thousand naira and two sureties each while the matter was adjourned to February 13, 2024.

2. Journalist Arrested, Charged, Remanded at Custodial Centre for Publication

On May 1, 2024, Ibraheem Hamza Mohammed was arrested by the Nasarawa State Command of the Nigeria Police on the accusation of falsely publishing the theft of N40 million cash from Governor Abdullahi Sule's bedroom. The police thereafter charged him with violation of the Cybercrime Act and secured an order to remand him at the Medium Security Custodian Centre in Lafia, the Nasarawa State capital, pending the commencement of trial.

The said news story was published on February 22, 2024, on FirstNews, a Lagos-based online newspaper.

He was released on May 10, after a Nasarawa High Court sitting in Doma granted him bail.

A press statement issued by Tobi Soniyi, legal adviser/chairman, Advocacy Committee, International Press Institute (IPI) said “To secure his release, IPI Nigeria's delegation led by the president, Musikilu Mojeed, visited Lafia on May 6, meeting with top officials of the Nasarawa State government, including Governor Sule; Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Labaran Magaji, and the chief press secretary to the governor, Ibrahim Addra.”

“The delegation also visited and conferred with the journalist, Mr. Mohammed, in prison.”

Additionally, the management of FirstNews apologised to Governor Sule over the story, saying it had since found that the said story lacked any form of truth and that the reporter merely concocted the story in his bid to pursue a personal vendetta against the governor.

3. Journalist Arrested, Detained by Hisbah Corps

Mr. Jamil Mabai, a journalist with Trust TV, was on May 14, 2024, arrested and detained by the Katsina State Hisbah Corps (Sharia law enforcement agency) while at the corps' office to interview its Public Relations Officer.

Mr. Mabai explained that he went to the Hisbah headquarters after securing an appointment for a follow-up interview with the corps' Public Relations Officer, Mr. Nafiu Akilu, over the shooting death of Mallam Gambo by an officer of the Community Watch Corps.

The journalist disclosed that when he got to the Hisbah headquarters for the scheduled interview, he couldn't find Mr. Akilu, unknown to him that the PRO's unavailability was a set-up to arrest and detain him. He said while waiting, some Hisbah officers approached him and took him into a cell where they locked him up. He said they also confiscated his phone claiming that they had an "order from above" to detain him.

He explained further that despite explaining that he was a journalist there for a scheduled interview, the Hisbah officers insisted on detaining him and they confiscated his phone before throwing him in a cell. He said he was later taken to meet the Hisbah commandant who threatened him and told him that he was fighting with religion and that there was nothing he or anybody could do against the activities of Hisbah.

Mr. Mabai said: "So, when I left the commandant's office, I saw the PRO and I asked him why would you do such a thing. You are supposed to be a bridge between journalists and your organisation and to now use this as a setup is disturbing. Then he said he was alerted that there was a directive that I should be detained and they decided to kill two birds with one stone." He was released from the cell after an hour.

4. Journalist Detained Over Report on Lagos-Based Businessman

Officers of the Nigerian Police Force, Zone 2 Lagos Command on May 27, 2024, arrested Mr. Precious Eze, publisher of the online newspaper “News Platform” from his home in Gbagada, Lagos following complaints by a businessman and politician, Prince Chris Odinaka Igwe.

The arrest followed the publishing of a report titled “Gunshots in VGC: MD & CEO of Mainland Oil & Gas Ltd, Chris Odinaka Igwe Alleged to Have Opened Fire After Dog Encounter Turns Hostile.” Prince Igwe who felt offended by the news report, wrote a petition against the journalist.

Mr. Eze was detained for nearly a week following his arrest before his colleagues from the Society of Digital Newspaper Owners of Nigeria (SDNON) learned of his situation and tried to secure his release on bail but to no avail.

He was arraigned on May 30, before the Ebute Meta Magistrate Court to secure a remand order, which resulted in a judicial rebuke of the police's actions. The magistrate struck out the case, deeming it without merit and affirming that Eze had no case to answer. Rather than release the journalist, he was returned to custody and rearraigned before another magistrate on May 31, 2024 with the case adjourned to a future date in June.

5. Journalist, Two Others Arrested, Remanded in Prison for Alleged Cybercrime

Mr. Koko Robson, a reporter with a local newspaper, The Waves, in Uyo, Akwa Ibom, along with two others Mr. Victor Akpan and Mr. Okon Ben were arrested by the Police in May 2024 over alleged cybercrime and remanded in prison.

The three men were accused of publishing materials on Facebook, accusing the village head of Ikot Ebidang in Onna Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Ukpe Alfred, of embezzling N45 million given to the village by an oil company, Sterling Global Ltd.

Mr. Japheth Japheth, the prosecution counsel from the Akwa Ibom State Police headquarters told the court that the publication was false and intended to cause “annoyance, inconvenience, danger, obstruction to the peace the

community” and to intimidate and caused “hatred and ill-will” against the village head.

Mr. Japhet has moved the case through three courtrooms from a Magistrate Court in Uyo to a Federal High Court in Calabar, Cross River State, and then to a State High Court in Awa, Akwa Ibom State.

Although they were initially charged with cyberstalking, the charge was later amended to defamation of character, which the prosecution said is punishable under Section 332 of the Criminal Code CAP Vol 2 Laws of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, 2022.

They were initially remanded in Uyo prison before being moved to Eket prison where they are currently being held.

6. Radio Personnel Arrested in Maiduguri

The Editor-in-Chief, Head of Programmes, the Nigerian Director and eight other staff members of Radio Ndarason International (RNA) were on August 1, 2024, arrested in their office in Maiduguri after the Borno State Commissioner for Information and Internal Security visited the station. They were taken to the Police Headquarters in Maiduguri where they were detained.

7. Photojournalist Arrested by Police

On August 1, 2024, a photojournalist with The Punch newspapers, Mr. Kayode Jaiyeola, was arrested by a policeman said to be working with the National Security Adviser who handed him over to the FCT Police Command where he was detained. He was covering the #EndBadGovernance protests which took place nationwide.

8. Newspaper Photojournalist Arrested

On August 1, 2024, at the Eagle Square in Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT), operatives of the Nigerian Police arrested a photojournalist with Daily Independent newspaper, Mr. Jide Oyekunle, while covering the #EndBadGovernance protests.

Despite shouts of “He is a journalist” by his colleagues, they dragged him by the waist, manhandled him and seized his mobile phone. The Police Public Relations Officer of the FCT Command, SP Josephine Adeh, later debunked reports that he was arrested, claiming that he was “taken away from the perceived unsafe environment for his own safety after being advised to leave where he was standing for a safer location and he declined, ...”

He said he was later released and disclosed that he was asked why he was covering the protest when a court had restricted protesters to MKO Abiola Stadium. He also disclosed that his phone was not returned to him when he was released. Mr. Oyekunle is the Correspondent Chairman of NUJ, FCT Chapel. Mr. Oyekunle accused Mr. Bennett Igwe, the FCT Commissioner of Police of ordering his arrest.

9. Microblogger Arrested, Detained for Alleged Cybercrime

On August 5, 2024, Mr. Isaac Bristol, a microblogger and leak journalist known on X platform as @PIDOMNigeria, was tracked and abducted by 15 armed officers of the Nigerian Police Force National Cybercrime Center (NCCC) who stormed his residence in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, broke in and dragged him away like a criminal. He is being detained by the Nigerian police for allegedly committing computer-related fraud, terrorism financing and espionage.

They also accused him of espionage, treasonable felony, computer wire fraud and unauthorised removal of classified documents.

He was taken to Abuja where he was kept incommunicado in solitary confinement, denied of food, water and access to a lawyer for six days in an anti-kidnapping unit before being transferred to a different facility. He later ended up in the Force Criminal Investigation Department (FCID) custody in Abuja.

The police have demanded two level 16 civil servants in either federal or state civil service who own landed property worth at least N500 million in Abuja as sureties for Isaac's bail. The sureties are to produce letters of introduction from their offices; copies of the original of the properties, their letters of appointment, letters of their last promotion, and office identity cards. They

are also to produce the original of these documents for sighting.

On the alternative, Isaac is to produce a surety who is a businessman who owns a business entity registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission, a landed property within the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja or in any state capital in Nigeria worth Five Hundred Million Naira (N500,000,000.00) and ready to make copies available of his CAC certificate, Certificate of Occupancy of his landed property and the original documents for sighting.

Police spokesman, ACP Muyiwa Adejobi, later disclosed that in a well-coordinated effort, operatives from the Nigeria Police Force National Cybercrime Centre (NPF-NCCC), popularly called “cyber hawks,” headed by Uche Ifeanyi, a Commissioner of Police, apprehended Bristol Isaac Tamunobiefiri, over alleged document leaks. He said further that several allegations have also been levelled against Isaac including unlawful possession, leakages of classified documents, cyber-related offences, and others.

On September 3, 2024, he was arraigned at the Federal High Court in Abuja, and Justice Emeka Nwite ordered that Mr. Tamunobifiri, be remanded in the Kuje correctional facility near Abuja and adjourned the case to September 23, 2024 for the ruling on the bail application.

He was arraigned on September 27, on a nine-count charge filed against him by the Inspector-General of Police at the Federal High Court and was granted bail. He was released after meeting the bail conditions on October 4, 2024.

10. Journalist Arrested, Remanded in Custody for Publishing Content Critical of Kano State Governor

On August 29, 2024, Mr. Muktar Dahiru, a journalist with Pyramid FM radio station based in Kano, was arrested by the police and remanded in a correctional facility for publishing content deemed critical of Kano State Governor Abba Yusuf and the recently reinstated emir of Kano, Alhaji Lamido Sanusi, on social media.

Mr. Dahiru was secretly charged before Magistrate Court 24 at Gyadi Gyadi, Court Road, with criminal conspiracy, defamation of character, and intentional insult, offences which, according to the Kano State government

contravene sections 97, 391 and 115 of the Penal Code Law. The complainant in the matter is Mr. Anas Abba-Dala, Senior Special Assistant on Political Awareness to Governor Abba Yusuf.

At the September 3 hearing, the Magistrate Court presided over by Umma Kurawa granted him a N1 million bail bond, the provision of three sureties, one of whom must be the chairperson of the NUJ, Mr. Dahiru's wife, and a reputable individual endorsed by the Kano Hisbah Board. He also banned him from posting content on social media that may be deemed offensive to the officials of the state government. The court had adjourned the sitting to October 2, 2024.

Mr. Dahiru, in several posts, shared an audio interview with an opposition politician who accused the governor of corruption and challenged the governor to allow federal anti-corruption agencies to investigate the Novomed scandal instead of the state anti-corruption agency.

In another video post, Mr. Dahiru shared a radio programme in which the governor's political adviser claimed that the vice president, Mr. Kashim Shettima, is not a Nigerian.

Mr. Dahiru was freed after substantially fulfilling his bail conditions. The Chairman of the NUJ however did not agree to stand as surety for him because he is not a member of the NUJ. His lawyer had then submitted an application to replace the NUJ chairman with the chairman of the Radio, Television, Theatre and Arts Workers' Union of Nigeria (RATTAWU) but his application had not been certified when the Magistrate ordered that he be rearrested as a result and returned to prison custody.

11. Tambuwal's Media Aide Remanded over Alleged Defamation of Sokoto Governor and Family

Shafi'u Umar, a media aide to former Sokoto State Governor, Aminu Tambuwal, was in August 2024, arrested and remanded in a correctional facility, accused of alleged defamation of the current Sokoto State Governor, Ahmad Aliyu, his wife Fatima Aliyu, and the deputy governor, Idris Muhammad Gobir.

Umar had shared a series of media posts on Facebook that were deemed

offensive by the state government. Among the content he is accused of disseminating is a video showing Governor Aliyu struggling to construct a sentence in English - a clip that quickly went viral and became a point of ridicule. Additionally, Umar reportedly shared a document believed to be the governor's Senior Secondary School Certificate, which purportedly shows that Aliyu had failed English with an F9 grade, fueling a narrative questioning the governor's ability to communicate effectively in English.

Another piece of content shared by Umar was a video of Fatima Aliyu, the governor's wife, spreading money on the ground during her birthday celebration. The video was met with outrage and criticism from the citizens of Sokoto State.

As a result of these contents, Umar was arrested by the police on August 25, 2024, and arraigned before a Chief Magistrate Court in Sokoto State. Journalists were not allowed to cover the court proceedings, presided over by Magistrate Fatima Hassan.

During the hearing, the prosecution presented a First Information Report (FIR) that accused Umar of circulating injurious falsehoods and engraving defamatory material, offenses that are punishable under the Penal Code law. The FIR said that the offences were committed in July 2024 when Umar shared the controversial videos and documents online. The prosecution argued that these actions were intended to tarnish the reputation of Governor Aliyu and his administration.

In his defence, Umar, represented by his lawyer Yusuf Abubakar, denied all the charges and made an oral application for his bail, arguing that the accusations were baseless and politically motivated. However, the Chief Magistrate adjourned the ruling on the bail application until September 6, 2024, ordering Umar to remain in custody until then.

12. Four Journalists Arrested, Arraigned for False Report, Cyberstalking Guaranty Trust CEO

Four journalists: Precious Eze, Publisher/Editor-in-Chief, News Platform; Olawale Rotimi, Managing Director, National Monitor; Rowland Olonishuwa, Editor, News Hob Mag!; and Seun Odunlami, Website

Administrator, www.newsjaunts.com, were arrested by men of the Nigeria Police Force accused of defamation and cyberstalking.

They were arraigned before Justice Ayokunle Faji of the Federal High Court in Lagos on September 27, 2024, charge with cyberstalking, false publications and spreading false information allegedly aimed at insulting Mr. Segun Agbaje, Chief Executive Officer of the financial holding company, Guaranty Trust Holding Company (GTCO) Plc.

The Special Fraud Unit at the Lagos State Police Command told the court that the journalists conspired to commit a felony, to wit, cyberstalking and thereby committed an offence punishable under section 27 of the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc) Act 2015 as amended in 2024 sometime in August 2024 in Lagos. Justice Ayokunle ordered them to be remanded at the Ikoyi facility of the Nigeria Correctional Service Centre.

The police prosecutor, Mr. Emmanuel Jackson, also claimed that the journalists knowingly sent false messages or publications on social media, through a computer or network to the general public as follows: “EFCC, FRI's storms GTBanks over Segun Agbaje's N1 trillion scam” and “Whistle Blowers expose Segun Agbaje Nepotism, Power Play, Enrich Him and Sister, Kofo Dosekunni,” among other publications to insult Mr Agbaje or to cause criminal intimidation, annoyance, ill-will, needless anxiety, injury or hatred to him and thereby committed an offence contrary to and punishable under section 24 (1) (b) of the Cybercrimes (Prohibition/Prevention, etc) Act, 2015 as amended in 2024.

The journalists pleaded not guilty to the charges while a lawyer, Mr. Ade Afolabi, moved an oral application on behalf of two of the journalists. However, the police prosecutor objected to the move, stating that since it is a joint trial, the defence cannot move bail applications for two of the four defendants. The court refused the bail on the ground that the lawyer must file a proper bail application that the prosecution would respond to if he so wished.

On October 14, 2024, they were re-arraigned by the Police before a Federal High Court on amended ten-count charge including alleged cyberstalking and publishing false allegations through various social media outlets against Guaranty Trust Holding Company.

13. Police Arrest Journalist in Ogun State

On September 25, 2024, Mr. Seun Odunlami, publisher of Newsjaunts online and a member of the NUJ in Ogun State, was arrested by operatives of the Lagos State Police command.

He was arrested by plain-clothed officers in the presence of some of his colleagues in front of Providus Bank, Oke-Ilewo, Abeokuta, Ogun State, a few meters away from the NUJ Secretariat, Iwe Irohin Press Centre, and whisked away to an unknown destination with an unmarked bus while all his phones have since been switched off.

A colleague who was with the publisher when he was arrested but chose to speak under the condition of anonymity confirmed his arrest.

The colleague said, “The gunmen arrived in a car, handcuffed Seun, and dragged him in and when I called him on the phone, he said they were from the Special Fraud Unit, Ikoyi”.

When contacted, the spokesman of the Ogun State Police Command, Superintendent of Police, Omolola Odutola, said that no official report has been made against the arrest of the journalist but that the command will swing into action to help locate his whereabouts.

14. Member of Nigerian Guild of Investigative Journalists Arrested by Police over Publication

On September 20, 2024, Mr. Olurotimi Olawale, a member of the Nigerian Guild of Investigative Journalists (NGIJ), was arrested by security personnel from the Nigeria Police Force's Zone 2 Command Headquarters in Lagos State over a report he published about Guaranty Trust Bank (GTB) and its Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Segun Agbaje.

The content of the story, which has not been fully disclosed, reportedly focused on issues concerning the bank's operations, potentially raising concerns about its management practices under Mr. Agbaje's leadership. Sources close to the journalist claim that the article was investigative in nature and aimed at exposing certain irregularities.

Following his arrest, Mr. Olawale was reportedly questioned extensively about the publication and its sources. There are concerns within the media community that this arrest represents another instance of harassment and intimidation of journalists who publish stories critical of powerful individuals or institutions.

Colleagues of Mr. Olawale, along with members of the Nigerian Guild of Investigative Journalists, have condemned the arrest, calling it a violation of press freedom and a targeted attempt to stifle critical investigative journalism.

15. DSS Detain Social Media User for Criticising Plateau State Governor's Administration

Mr. Samuel Bature, a 26-year-old critic of Plateau State Governor, Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang, was on September 17, 2024, arrested by operatives of the DSS and taken to the State CID Police Headquarters where he was kept in custody following his social media posts questioning the governor's priorities.

Mr. Bature criticised the governor for purchasing a BMW 2025 model worth N250 million while governance suffered. His posts attracted widespread public concern over the lack of infrastructure and the state's economic situation, suggesting a disconnect between the governor's spending habits and the developmental needs of Plateau State.

Security operatives reportedly arrested and detained him for ridiculing the governor through his posts, which prompted public outcry. He was transferred to the State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID) in Jos, where he has remained without being charged to court.

Activists have initiated a campaign, #FreeSamuel, on social media, condemning the actions of the police and calling for his immediate release.

He was eventually arraigned at the High Court 8 of the Plateau State High Court on October 2, 2024, on a three-count-charge of defamation of character under Section 373 of the Penal Code Law of Plateau State 2017, for allegedly making a defamatory statement against the governor and his party, the

Peoples Democratic Party (PDP); injurious falsehood under the same section; and cyberstalking under Section 24(b) of the Cybercrime Act.

He was eventually released on bail on October 4, 2024.

16. DSS Arrests Journalist Over Report that Allegedly Poses Threat to National Security

On October 18, 2024, armed and masked operatives of the DSS stormed the Abuja residence of Ms Edna Ulaeto, a staff member of OrderPaper, an online platform dedicated to writing reports about Nigeria's legislative chambers, and arrested her in her casual nightwear. She was manhandled and bundled into their vehicle before being driven over. She was reportedly arrested over a report the DSS said posed a serious threat to national security and caused significant local and international embarrassment.

Neighbours who tried to intervene or document the incident were pushed away, and some forced to delete their photos and videos.

OrderPaper had reported that DSS operatives invaded the National Assembly (Nigerian Parliament) as part of a purported plot to impeach the Senate President, Mr. Godswill Akpabio.

The outlet brought down the story and issued a retraction and public apology to the agency.

The agency said it sought to understand from the reporter the reasoning behind the inaccurate reporting and potential sources of false information aimed at destabilising the country.

She was later released same day following the intervention of the Nigerian chapter of the International Press Institute (IPI).

17. Police Arrest Broadcast Journalist for Alleged Defamation, Other Offences

On October 21, 2024, operatives of the Imo State Police Command arrested an Owerri-based broadcast journalist, Mr. Chinonso Uba (alias Nonsonkwa),

accusing him of alleged cyberstalking, character defamation, spreading misinformation and inflammatory statements, following a petition by a member of the public over a viral video he shared relating to the burning of the National Open University Study Center in Nsu, Ehime Mbano Local Government Area on September 30, 2024.

The police thereafter arraigned Mr. Uba at the Magistrate Court 5 in Owerri, the state capital on October 23 on five-count, which include conspiracy, treason and arson, preferred against him by N.S. Onwochie, Legal Prosecution Officer, Owerri, Imo State on behalf of the state police commissioner. When the charges were read to him, the court did not allow him to take a plea on the ground that it lacked jurisdiction to entertain the charges.

Mr. Uba's lead counsel, Mr. C. K. Mgbekonye, applied orally for his bail relying on Section 36(5) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). Mr. Mgbekonye further told the court that the offences the journalist was accused of fall under what the court can exercise its discretion on regarding the granting of bail.

However, the prosecution counsel opposed the oral bail application citing section 93(1) of the Imo State Administration of Criminal Justice Law, which according to him, gave only the High Court the power to grant bail upon application. He asked the court to refuse the oral bail application on the ground that the court lacks jurisdiction to grant bail or hear the charges.

The Court declined jurisdiction to grant him bail and ordered that he be remanded at the Owerri Correctional Centre.

The Magistrate asked his counsel to apply for his bail at the High Court and thereafter adjourned the case to November 12, 2024, for the Directorate of Public Prosecution report and transmission of the case file to the High Court.

2.3 Threat to Life



1. Journalist Alleges Threat to His Life by Unknown Persons

On January 7, 2024, a Lagos-based broadcast journalist, Mr. Adeniyi Kunnu raised alarm over threats to his life and those of members of his family by an unknown person.

Mr. Kunnu reported that for several years, he had received negative reactions from some people who listened to him on radio or

watched him on television, being a media professional.

He said recently, he has faced such a barrage of threats that he could no longer dismiss them as mere occupational hazards of journalism adding that the situation had become critical enough for him to seek intervention and protection.

The journalist revealed that on November 27 and December 8, 2023, Mr. Victor Obot Archibong, a fellow broadcast journalist, was accosted by two men who inquired about his [Adeniyi] whereabouts, assuming he was associated with the media outfit where Victor works. He said a similar incident occurred on December 28 and 30, 2023, when Mr. Nicholas Anyamene, another media colleague, reported that individuals had visited his workplace asking about him.

Furthermore, Mr. Adeniyi disclosed that on December 1, 4, and 13, 2023, colleagues informed him that unidentified persons had made inquiries about him, expressing dissatisfaction with his outspokenness on his weekly broadcasts.

He added that he had also received threatening emails from an unknown individual who goes by the name Ibrahim Mohammed on December 25 and 29, 2023, the contents of which imply knowledge of his and a family member's whereabouts.

These developments had left him completely worried, especially for the safety of his immediate and extended family members.

2. Journalist Raises Alarm over Threat to Life, Seeks Police Protection

Ms Victoria Ojeme, a reporter with Vanguard Newspaper, raised alarm over threats to her life by unknown persons after she spoke out about the killings of her kinsmen in a bloody communal crisis. She has called on the Police authorities to give her protection from those threatening her.

Ms Ojeme had in February 2024 raised the alarm over the crisis in her community following the bloody clashes between the people of Mbarvu and Mbasombo communities in Gwer East Local Government Area of Benue State that claimed the lives of many including those of her loved ones.

She pointed out that the threats to her life heightened immediately after the story of the atrocities in her hometown was published.

She had called for an end to the crisis, which led to the sacking of communities and displacement of the people from their ancestral homes over disputed farmlands.

She noted that some unknown persons who have not been comfortable with her outbursts and outcries have been sending messages to threaten her.

Narrating her experience in a statement on May 8, 2024, in Abuja, she said she reported the matter to the police, after an unknown person sent her a message informing her that they know where she lives in Abuja and that they were coming for her soon.

She stated that she no longer feels safe living in her home and even in the country due to some criminal elements who have on a few occasions sent verbal messages through people she does know, indicating that she is being watched.

She called on the police authorities to investigate the ongoing killings in her hometown, adding that from there, they might be able to trace the people threatening her life.

Ms Ojeme added that what she gets in return instead of support are threats to her life which has left her vulnerable to attack by unknown persons who drop threatening messages for her in front of her residence.

3. Journalist Petitions the Police over Alleged Threat to Life

Ms Edoamaowo Udeme, a reporter with Scroll Report, who is also the Executive Director, of the Network Against Domestic Violence Foundation (NADVF), petitioned the Inspector General of Police, (IGP) Mr. Kayode Egbetokun, over continuous threats to her life and those of her family members by a soldier identified as CPL Ojo Abu who allegedly sexually violated a minor.

Ms Udeme who disclosed, in the petition dated July 7, 2024, that her troubles started after she fought for justice on behalf of the violated minor implored the IGP to ensure the protection of her life and those of her family members. She said the threat has traumatized her and her family.

Narrating her ordeal, Ms Udeme said: “Sunday, July 28, 2024, at exactly 8.15 am, I received a call from a phone number, 08081762741, who threatened to not only make my life and that of family miserable but will track me to my house and wipe me and my entire family out.”

She said CPL Abu terrorized her on phone for one and a half hours and she immediately reported the matter to the spokesperson of the Nigerian Army, Maj. Gen Onyema Nwachukwu, (then Brig. Gen) who took immediate action and invited her and CPL Abu to his office at the Army Headquarters.

According to her, following the intervention by the Army, the rape victim was examined and placed under medical care. She said while investigation was still going on, she received a call from CPL Abu on July 28, 2024, and he threatened to trace her to her house and wipe her entire family out, including her.

Following this threat, she said she again called Gen Nwachukwu who referred her to the Provost Marshal and on July 31, 2024, she wrote a petition with the subject: “Threat to my life” to The Provost Marshal of the Nigerian Army Military Police through which she sought speedy investigation, arrest and trial of Cpl Abu and to provide her and her family with security and protection until the matter is resolved.

She said on August 6, 2024, she was invited to the Nigerian Army Corps of Military Police where she received a reply to her earlier letter and informed that Cpl. Abu was tried at the Administration Battalion Army Headquarters Garrison on the 24th of June, 2024 for the offences of Absence Without Official Leave as well as Escape from Custody and was dismissed from the Nigerian Army and that the Ex-soldier is no longer subject to service law and cannot be investigated by the Army. She said she was then requested to make an official complaint to the Nigerian Police.

She appealed to the Nigerian Police to please provide her, her husband and daughter with adequate security and protection.

4. Citizen Journalist Alleges Threat to His Life for Reporting Corruption on Social Media

Mr. Chukwunenye Nweke, a citizen journalist, has alleged that his life is in danger for investigating corrupt practices by some public officials, reporting the matter to the Police, making a Freedom of Information request for the report of the police investigation into the matter and publishing his findings on social media.

He was remanded in custody for making series of posts on Facebook, WhatsApp, X and in broadcast stations alleging that some public officials committed fraudulent and criminal act and are being shielded.

Mr. Nweke reportedly faced harassment, arrest, detention and arraignment at a Magistrate and a High Court. On January 13, 2023, he was arraigned in Magistrate Court eight (8), Umuahia North, Abia State by Zone 9 Police Headquarters, Umuahia on alleged cybercrime and was remanded in custody. He was released on April 5, 2023 after securing bail through a State High Court, Umuahia and meeting the bail conditions.

Again, on April 25, 2024, Mr. Nweke was rearraigned before the Federal High Court, Umuahia and remanded in prison custody for the second time for the determination of his bail application by Honourable Justice Musa Kakaki. The case was adjourned from April 25, 2024 to June 11, 2024, for ruling on his bail application. On June 11, Mr. Nweke was granted bail with the following conditions; Two (2) Million Naira Bail Bond, two sureties who must be residents of Umuahia under the jurisdiction of the Court, the sureties must have three (3) years tax clearance and must deposit Certificate of Occupancy (C of O) of landed property equivalent to the bail bond to the Court Registrar. Mr. Nweke remained in custody till July 16, after perfecting the bail conditions set by the Federal High Court, Umuahia.

The Commissioner for Justice and Attorney General of Abia State, Barr. Ikechukwu Uwanna, who was prosecuting the matter later claimed that he had washed his hands off the case as, according to him, the case file had been handed over to the Federal Government of Nigeria based on a petition written to the Federal Government of Nigeria by Mr. Chukwunyenye Nweke.

He wrote several petitions and Freedom of Information requests to Zone 9 Police Headquarters in Abia State for copies of the findings from the Police investigation of the alleged corruption but the Police have consistently denied him access to the case file.

5. Journalist Threatened by Bauchi State Governor's Security Aides

On August 8, 2024, security operatives attached to Governor Bala Moham\med of Bauchi State threatened to deal with journalists who were inside the Palace Hall of the Emir of Katagum trying to find where to record the Governor's speech. An operative of the DSS simply identified as Abdul ordered the journalists to vacate the hall.

The journalists who are members of the Bauchi State Correspondents' Chapel of the NUJ were at the Palace of the Emir of Katagum when the Governor visited the local government after a violent protest where hoodlums razed the Council Secretariat, a former deputy governor's house among others in Azare, Bauchi State.

The journalists were looking for an alternative spot to get their job done within the hall when the DSS officer approached them again and threatened them saying: “This is just the beginning.”

The DSS officer blurted out: “You challenged me? You will see. This thing that you have done, this is the beginning.” He warned the journalists threatening that he would deal with them.

6. Retired Air Force Officer Threatens to Deal with FIJ Reporter

Mr. Felix Ihenacho, a retired Air Force officer, threatened to use the police to hunt down Ms Opeyemi Lawal, a reporter with the FIJ following the publication of a news story on a land tussle for which he failed to respond when he was contacted.

Mr. Ihenacho reportedly used the police to intimidate and arrest one Mr. Joseph Oluigbo, an Abuja-based furniture upholsterer, over a land tussle in April.

Mr. Oluigbo was released by the police on May 20 after spending one month in detention. When FIJ called Felix Ihenacho for comments on May 20, his line wasn't available. He also did not respond to WhatsApp and text messages sent to him the following day.

On May 23, 2024, FIJ published a story of the arrest on April 20, 2024, of Mr. Oluigbo by officers of the Nigeria Police Force, Abuja, for failing to provide the people he had stood as surety for in a land dispute involving Mr. Ihenacho and the Uzoma family of Umuokwaraku in Imo State. Ms Lawal wrote the story.

Prior to writing the story, the reporter had reached out to the retired officer to get his side of the story but he was unreachable through his phone line. She sent an SMS and a WhatsApp message but he did not respond to any of these. Thereafter, FIJ went to the press with the story.

After its publication, Mr. Ihenacho called FIJ on June 17 asking to speak with Ms Lawal.

He continued to call FIJ's office until June 20 when Ms Lawal answered the

phone and he requested for FIJ's office address. When the reporter insisted that the conversation could be held over the phone rather than in person, he threatened to use the police to track FIJ down.

He continued to request for the location of FIJ and when he was directed to the internet for information on FIJ, he flared up and said he would ensure that the police were sent after FIJ and Ms Lawal.

He threatened: "I am going to hand over this case to the appropriate agency, and I am going to get you. I am going to track you. I am going to come after you because you are giving me the impression that you are a paid agent in the first place."

7. Journalist Petitions Police over Threats to His Life

Mr. Jamiu Folarin, a journalist, on March 22, 2024, petitioned the Ogun State Police Command over alleged threats to his life by land grabbers in Ogun State, South-west Nigeria following programmes he hosted in September and November 2023, on the menace of land grabbing and inflated contracts in the state.

Mr. Folarin said: "The threats to my life started months after I hosted a radio programme on Rockcity 101.9 FM on the criminal activities of land grabbers in Ogun State."

He said in November 2023, he also investigated inflated multi-million naira projects executed by different contractors in the state which was also broadcast.

He said he believes that there is a connection between his previous media engagements, the threats to his life, and a perceived attempt to stop him from further investigating the activities of land grabbers and execution of government projects.

The journalist addressed his petition to CSP Mustapha Opawuyi, the divisional police officer (DPO) at Sabo/Ilupeju Police Station in Abeokuta. The journalist and some of the alleged land grabbers were subsequently invited to the station.

The journalist said “Even in front of the police officers, one Lukman Kudaisi threatened me. He said he would deal with me. He said I was so lousy and that I had the audacity to be talking about land grabbers.”

8. Editor-In-Chief Alleges Threat to His Life

Mr. Ebule Anthony Metsese, Editor-In-Chief of Fresh Angle International, an online newspaper, raised alarm over recurring threats to his life as a result of controversial developments in Warri Kingdom.

He disclosed through a statement published in the medium that the most recent of these threats, was connected to the incident that happened at Okere community in Warri on March 2, 2024.

Expatiating further, he said even though he is a native of Okere community, he decided not to publish the event in Fresh Angle but noted that despite that, he has received a series of warnings directly or indirectly targeted at him warning that if he publishes any report regarding the incident, he will be severely dealt with.

He added that the threats are not unconnected with the support the newspaper gets from Chief Ayirimi Emami.

Mr. Metsese said some of the persons behind the threats have indirectly patronized the newspaper while making derogatory comments about its professional integrity. Others, he said, have never used the newspaper and instead choose to intimidate members of the editorial team in an attempt to censor the newspaper and prevent it from publishing reports.

He emphasized that the newspaper was not established to serve the interest of any individual or ethnic nationality, but was open to patronage from persons, institutions and corporate bodies across the world.

2.4 Abduction/Kidnapping



1. **A r m e d Soldiers Abduct First News Editor in Lagos**

Gunmen suspected to be soldiers, numbering about ten on March 15, 2024, abducted Mr. Segun Olatunji, Editor of the online news portal,

“FirstNews”, and a former Kaduna Bureau Chief of Punch Newspaper, at his home in the Iyana Odo, Abule Egba area of Lagos State.

A statement released by the management of FirstNews said Mr. Olatunji's abduction was linked to a story published by the media organization titled, “Revealed: Defence Chief running office like family business Public Interest Lawyers.”

The management also linked his abduction to another report titled, “EXCLUSIVE: How contractor, company stole N100bn, laundered funds for top govt officials Investigation”, which was later pulled down.

Shedding light on the incident, Mr. Olatunji's wife stated that the armed men arrived at their residence, a few minutes after 6 pm, and whisked her husband away adding that her husband's abductors reached for his phone and seized it immediately after they arrived before bundling him into a van. She added that efforts to know his offence or where they were taking him were rebuffed by the stern-looking men.

The Publisher of FirstNews, Mr. Daniel Iworiso-Markson, who also confirmed the incident, said there has been no trace of him, as his phone line has been switched, and no one has reached his family or the management of FirstNews to disclose the real reason behind his abduction.

The management of FirstNews has called on the military high command and the security agencies to investigate his whereabouts and the reason why he

was arrested. Mr. Olatunji was detained incommunicado.

He was released on March 28, 2024, following public outcry over the arrest.

2. Channels TV Reporter Kidnapped, Released

On April 11, 2024, at 9 PM local time, unidentified gunmen kidnapped Mr. Joshua Rogers a reporter with Channels Television at his residence in Rumuosi in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State after returning home from work.

Mr. Rogers, who covers the Rivers State Government House for his organisation, was reportedly trailed after he closed from work to his residence.

Reports indicate that he was approached by the unidentified gunmen who then forced him out of his vehicle at gunpoint and subsequently whisked him away in his car to an unknown location.

Mr. Rogers had reportedly earlier covered an event in Ndoni in the Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State where Governor Siminalayi Fubara, inaugurated a Primary Healthcare Centre.

The kidnappers later contacted his wife and demanded for N30 million ransom to release him.

Mr. Rogers was however released around 10 PM on April 12, 2024.

One of his colleagues, Mr. Charles Oporum who confirmed his release said he had reunited with his family. The management of Channels Television also confirmed the development through a short statement.

3. Reporter Abducted by Police, Detained for Ten Days without Charge

On May 1, 2024, Mr. Daniel Ojukwu, a reporter with the FIJ, was abducted at

Herbert Macaulay Street, Yaba in Lagos State by operatives of the Intelligence Response Team of the Inspector General of Police and taken to the State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID), Panti in Lagos, where he was detained incommunicado for five days.

Twenty-four hours after he went missing, FIJ made a missing person report at police stations in the area where Ojukwu was headed.

Mr. Ojukwu was accused of cyberstalking, cyberbullying, and conspiracy, amongst others over an investigative report he did about an agency of government republished by the medium.

He was thereafter, transferred to the Nigeria Police Force-National Cyber Crime Centre (NPF-NCC) in Abuja on May 5 where he was again detained.

On May 9, journalists, publishers, free press advocates, and concerned citizens stormed the Nigeria Police Force Headquarters, Louis Edet House in Abuja, in a peaceful protest, carrying banners and placards with different inscriptions touching on the freedom of the press and fundamental human rights of journalists and calling on IGP Kayode Egbetokun to immediately release the journalist.

After his whereabouts were ascertained, FIJ applied for his bail and the police gave FIJ's lawyers and negotiators led by the publisher of Sahara Reporters, Omoyele Sowore; chairman of NUJ, FCT Correspondent's Chapel, Jide Oyekunle; and Ms Bukky Shonibare, chairperson of FIJ's Board of Trustees, stringent bail conditions.

Initially, the Nigeria Police Force, on the orders of IGP Egbetokun, refused to release Daniel even after meeting his bail condition on May 7, which required him to provide two directors from the public service with landed property in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja as sureties.

He was eventually released on bail on May 10, to two directors in the federal civil service who stood as sureties for his conditional bail. They were instructed to submit two passport photographs of themselves to the FCID and asked to provide the reporter to the police whenever they needed him.

The day before his release, the Deputy Inspector General of Police in charge of operations, DIG Ayuba Ede, had said that the reporter would be released at the discretion of IGP Egbetokun. Mr. Ojukwu was not charged to court.

FIJ later claimed that it had information that shows that Mr. Muiz Banire, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) and founder of the United Action for Change - “a pressure group and think tank with the drive to build a society where people are valued and treated equally and enjoy their rights as full citizens” - wrote the petition on behalf of Mrs. Orelope Adefulire based on which the police abducted Mr. Ojukwu.

4. Police Abduct Editor from Abuja Home over Alleged Defamation

At about 6 PM on May 22, 2024, heavily armed policemen, numbering about 10, stormed the Abuja home of the Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of Globalupfront Newspaper, Mr. Madu Onuorah, in Lugbe area in two Sienna buses and in the presence of his wife and children, forcibly arrested and took him away without presenting any warrant of arrest or disclosing reasons for his arrest.

The police seized Mr. Onuorah's phones to prevent him from reaching his family, friends, and lawyer despite pleas from his family. He was initially taken to the Lugbe Police Station from where he was later taken to Enugu.

ASP Daniel Ndukwe, the Enugu State Police Command spokesman later came out to disclose that Mr. Onuorah was arrested in Abuja with the assistance of police operatives from Ebonyi State Command and the aid of intelligence, after efforts made to formally invite him failed. The arrest, according to ASP Ndukwe followed the receipt of a written petition to the Commissioner of Police, Enugu State Command, against him over an alleged defamatory publication he made against a US-based Reverend Sister.

Mr. Onuorah was a former Abuja Bureau Chief of The Guardian Newspaper and former Managing Director of The Authority Newspaper.

Mr. Onuorah was released on the night of May 23, following widespread condemnations of his arrest and calls for his release.

5. Bandits Abduct Two Kaduna Journalists and their Families

On July 6, 2024, at about 10.30 PM local time, armed bandits in large numbers invaded the Dahjonu community in Millennium City of Chikun Local Government Area of Kaduna State and abducted two journalists: Mr. Abdulgafar Alabelewe of The Nation newspapers and Mr. AbdulRaheem Abdu of Blueprint newspapers as well as their wives and children.

Mr. Taofeeq Olayemi, one of the victims' family members who confirmed the incident said when the bandits arrived, they scaled the fence, shot sporadically, shattered their windows and doors, and removed the protective iron before abducting the victims and taking them to an unknown destination.

The abducted journalists and their families were all rescued by security operatives near Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory on July 13.

The National Security Adviser (NSA), Nuhu Ribadu, handed them over to the Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Idris, in Abuja.

6. Freelance Journalist Abducted, Brutalised, Dumped by the Roadside

On October 15, 2024, some unidentified armed men stormed the home of a freelance journalist, Mr. Oluwatosin Oshibanjo, in Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, and kidnapped him. His abductors later dumped him by a roadside after severely brutalizing him.

Narrating his ordeal, Mr. Oshibanjo said on the day of his abduction, he was on a call with his wife when he heard a knock on the door and when he opened the door, two men armed with a gun marched him out to their waiting vehicle, a red Toyota Camry, with two other men seated inside.

He said his abductors thereafter drove towards Ososa road and that at a point, they made a U-turn back to Ijebu-Ode, blindfolded him, made two left turns before stopping and then they dragged him into a house.

The abductors, he said, pulled off his shorts, poured water on him, sellotaped

his mouth, and tightened the blindfold. He said they hit him several times on the leg which became numb and they later dragged him inside a vehicle again.

He added that after a while, he became unconscious, and when he woke up, he heard them discussing that the matter had escalated and that their work was about to get them into trouble. He said he was taken to a tiled room where his abductors informed him that they were not kidnappers but cultists. He stressed that despite his pleas for food, they refused to feed him.

The journalist said he was again dragged into a car and his abductors drove around before they suddenly stopped, removed the blindfold, and pushed him out naked.

He was able to call his mother with the help of a passer-by who allowed him to use his phone and she came to pick him.

2.5 Prevention from Assignments

1. Journalists Barred from Covering Arraignment of Former Kwara State Governor

On February 23, 2024, journalists who gathered at the Federal High Court on Fate Road in Ilorin, the Kwara State capital were barred from entering the premises of the court to cover the arraignment of the former governor of Kwara State, Dr. Abdulfattah Ahmed by the EFCC.

The court Registrar and some policemen prevented the journalists from entering the court premises saying they had orders from above not to allow journalists.

Mr. Dele Oyewale, the EFCC Ilorin Zonal Command spokesman, later convinced the authorities to allow the journalists into the court, and when they were eventually allowed into the court premises, they were not allowed to use their equipment to cover the proceedings.

2. Journalists Barred from Covering Labour Party Convention

On March 27, 2024, journalists were barred from covering the Labour Party National Convention which took place at the Grand Seasons Hotel in Nnewi, Anambra State. The gate of the hotel was reportedly manned by security personnel who denied everyone entry, except those duly identified by party officials.

According to news reports, all efforts made to reach the party's spokesman, Mr. Obiorah Ifoh, to allow journalists with tags into the venue were rejected.

3. Nigerian Senate Restricts Journalists Covering its Proceedings

On May 7, 2024, the President of the Nigerian Senate, Godswill Akpabio, barred more than 10 television stations and photojournalists from covering the plenary of the proceedings of the upper legislative chamber without giving reasons.

Reports have it that one of the security operatives at the entrance of the Senate chamber told journalists that Senator Akpabio instructed the security unit to restrict and prune down the number of media houses covering Senate proceedings. Among the media outlets banned by the Senate are Galaxy TV, Ben TV, MITV, ITV Abuja, PromptNews, ONTV, and Liberty.

A document signed by the Clerk of Senate, Chinedu Akubueze, and pasted at the entrance to the chamber listed only seven media houses that were allowed to cover proceedings. They included the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), Channels Television, African Independent Television (AIT), TVC, Arise News, Newage, and ADBN.

The leadership of the National Assembly Press Corps had met with the Clerk of the Senate on May 1 to resolve concerns about covering the Senate's proceedings in the chamber and dialogue on the matter was ongoing when this happened.

4. News Central TV Crew Prevented from Live Coverage

On July 31, 2024, News Central TV correspondent, Mr. Benard Akede, and his crew were stopped from their live coverage of events at the Lekki Toll Gate. Mr. Akede was reporting live when a police officer stopped the broadcast. Discussions with officers ensued and a senior officer was called. After having a chat with the reporter, the senior officer permitted the crew to resume the live broadcast.

5. Arise TV Reporter Prevented from Interviewing Protesters

On August 1, 2024, an Arise TV reporter disclosed that the Police prevented journalists at the Lekki Toll Plaza in Lagos from interviewing anyone there because doing so may lead to the gathering of a crowd.

2.6 Invasion/Raid



1. **Police Invade TV Station, Arrest Guest on Live Programme, Destroy Equipment in Abia**

On January 17, 2024, at about 2:40 p.m. men of the Nigerian Police Force attached to the Umuahia Area Command, invaded a

television station, ABN TV in Umuahia, Abia State, and arrested the guest, Udensi Donald, during a live programme.

The incident took place during the Youth Rendezvous programme, hosted by Grace Onyekachi.

The Director of the Radio and TV station, Ifeanyi Okali, who disclosed this in a statement said the management was “worried by the invasion of our broadcast station” by the police operatives.

The invading policemen claimed that an elder brother of the guest named Uche Onwuka Udensi, had written a petition against him, over a family matter. The policemen rejected pleas by staff to allow the programme to end before they arrest the guest. They invaded the studio and arrested him, while the programme was still on air.

Mr. Okali said that during the operation, many of the station broadcast equipment including laptops, cameras, microphones, and midgets were damaged beyond repair.

ABN TV/Radio demanded an open apology from the Police in Abia over the unprovoked attack on the station saying it left the station with huge financial losses due to the damage to its equipment which it called on the police authorities to replace.

2. Armed Robbers Loot Radio Station, Injure Guard in Oyo

On August 23, 2024, armed robbers stormed Ajilete 92.1 FM, a radio station in the Gambari area of Ogbomoso owned by the Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS), and carted away equipment worth millions of naira.

The armed robbers also raided the station's power generator house, where they cut off armoured cables, and ransacked the transmitter house.

In the course of the robbery, the station's 70-year-old security guard was brutally attacked. The robbers tied him up, beat him, and struck him in the chest with the butt of a gun. They also stole his motorcycle. The injured guard was immediately rushed to a nearby hospital for treatment.

Kemi Ojelade, the Acting Head of Ajilete 92.1 FM, who confirmed the incident, stated that BCOS management, led by its General Manager Mr. Goke Adelakun, visited the station to assess the extent of the damage.

The incident was reported to the police, and ACP Adigun Gbolagade, the Area Commander from Owode Police Headquarters, visited the scene.

3. EFCC Operatives Invade Radio Station, Disrupt Broadcast, Confiscate Equipment

Armed EFCC operatives, Nigeria's anti-graft agency, on October 14, 2024, invaded a radio station, Urban 94.5FM in Enugu. They disrupted a live broadcast, arrested some staff members and confiscated broadcast equipment.

Ms Favour Ekoh who was anchoring the live “Prime Time,” programme was forcefully removed from the programme causing significant disruption of broadcast. She was taken away by the operatives.

The management of the radio station expressed shock as the EFCC did not give any reason for their actions.

Mr. Dele Oyewale, the EFCC Head of Media and Publicity, later claimed that the Commission raided the station to effect the arrest of Ms Ekoh whom it

claimed was involved in a Ponzi scheme and had refused to honour its invitation.

He said the EFCC arrested Ms Ekoh, whom it took into custody for her involvement in an alleged N700 million Ponzi scheme fraud, which has affected about fifty victims, adding that she was immediately released after making a statement.

He said the EFCC operatives only stormed the station to arrest the journalist and denied that they disrupted a live programme or confiscated any equipment from the station.

However, the management of Urban Radio insisted, through a post on the station's official X handle, posted on October 16, that EFCC operatives interrupted its live a programme to arrest its presenter.

The station uploaded a one-minute and 12-second recording of the EFCC invasion on the microblogging platform. In the recording, Ms Ekoh, the presenter, was heard asking some persons believed to be EFCC operatives, apparently entering the studio, "What's going on?" adding "I am on a programme, and you're in the studio."

When an EFCC operative informed her that she was wanted, she again asked: "Can I finish with my programme? I have to finish."

"No, you can't. We don't have the time (to allow you to finish the programme)," one of the EFCC operatives responded.

"I am on air," Ms Ekoh reminded them, but the EFCC operative told her "Accord us that respect. You have a petition to answer to."

Ms Ekoh emphasised that she was on air when the signal went off.

The General Manager of Urban Radio, Richard Onyeka, said that the EFCC operatives turned off the switch where the console was plugged abruptly taking the station off air. He explained that they turned off the switch when they realised their voices were being aired during the live programme. "We went off the air at that point. They put us off air when they yanked off the switch where our console was plugged in," he said.

2.7 Harassment

1. Hoodlums Harass Journalists at Protest Ground in Lagos

Journalists who went to cover the second day of the #EndBadGovernance protests in Ojota, Lagos on August 2, 2024, were harassed by hoodlums who asked them to vacate where they were, saying the area belonged to them and that if the journalists did not leave, they would fight them.

Journalists who were harassed include News Central Africa crew, Mr. Damilola Olufemi of BusinessDay, Mr. Kabir Adejumo of HumAngle, and civil society activists. One of the hoodlums reportedly claimed that the journalists were supposed to cover the violence taking place during the protests. One of the hoodlums said: “This is our area. There is violence going on that you need to cover. Leave this place now or I will beat you.”

2. Journalists Harassed, Evicted from Lagos Protest Ground by Police, Threatened by Hoodlums

On August 6, 2024, the policemen attached to Freedom Park, the venue of the #EndBadGovernance protest in Ojota, Lagos State, harassed and forcefully evicted journalists and watched as hoodlums assaulted them.

The incident happened in the afternoon when the police told reporters from the FIJ and other media outfits to get as far away from the location as possible since #EndBadGovernance protesters were not at the venue. When the reporters protested this directive and challenged the police to provide credible reasons for imposing their decision on them, the policemen accused the journalists of posing threat to the peace of the neighbourhood. According to reports, when the reporters from FIJ asked a policeman to clarify, he said their gathering there would constitute problems, and that journalists were attracting attention. Thereafter the police began pushing them away and the hoodlums took advantage of this to threaten the retreating reporters. As this was going on, the policemen turned and left the hoodlums to harass the journalists while they did nothing.

The hoodlums threatened to hurt the journalists and pushed them away from the protest ground.

The News Central Television crew, led by its correspondent, Mr. Benard Akede, was also subjected to harassment and intimidation while covering the #EndBadGovernance protests in the Ojota area of Lagos.

The crew members were threatened by armed thugs carrying batons and sticks. Mr. Akede attempted to continue his live report to the studio amid the chaos but the thugs forcefully pushed him and his crew into their press vehicle and ordered them to vacate the premises without delay.

2.8 Killed

1. Nigerian Sports Journalist Killed, Others Abducted by Gunmen

A Multichoice SuperSport's media crew member, Mr. Kolawole Omoniyi, was on October 9, 2024, killed and seven of his colleagues kidnapped by armed men along the Isseke-Orlu Road in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State while they were traveling from Lagos State to Uyo, the Akwa Ibom State capital, to cover the African Cup of Nations qualifying match between the Super Eagles of Nigeria and the Libyan national team, Mediterranean Knights.

The attackers were said to have flagged down their bus and forced them to disembark and led them into the bush.

About an hour after the incident, a joint security team rescued six of the abducted journalists while they continued to comb the forest for the last crew member.

2.9 Others

1. Police Summon Three Journalists to Facilitate Undisclosed Investigation

The Nigeria Police on August 22, 2024, summoned three journalists affiliated with Alimosho Today, a news outlet based in Lagos, namely: Mr. Oluwamodupe Akinola, the publisher; Ms Ayomide Eweje, Managing Editor;

and Mr. Wisdom Okezie, a former reporter with the news organisation, to report on August 27, 2024, to the office of the Assistant Inspector-General (AIG) of Police, Zone 2 Command in Onikan, Lagos, to facilitate an undisclosed investigation.

The three journalists were invited through separate letters signed by a Deputy Commissioner of Police, Martin Nwogoh, on behalf of the AIG in charge of Zone 2 headquarters of the Nigeria Police. Mr. Nwogh claimed that the office was investigating a matter reported to the AIG but did not state who reported the matter or what information was required from them to enable them to prepare adequately.

The deputy police commissioner, in the invitation to Ms Eweje, Mr. Okezie and Mr. Akinola stressed that “this is a fact-finding exercise in the interest of justice and fairness.”

2. Magistrate Seizes Phones of Journalists Covering Trial in Lagos

On August 19, 2024, Mr. Waliu Salamia while presiding over the alleged felony trial of online journalist, Mr. Precious Eze, at the Ebute-Metta Magistrate Court in Lagos State, seized the mobile phones of three broadcast journalists who were covering the court proceedings.

During the hearing, police prosecutor Mr. Cyril Ejiofor raised concerns about the presence of cameramen from TVC News, News Central, and Arise News in the courtroom. He argued that their presence constituted harassment towards the police and the complainant. Mr. Ejiofor also accused the journalists of recording the proceedings on their phones.

Despite the journalists' explanations that they were only taking notes on their devices, the magistrate ordered them to surrender their phones to the court orderly or leave the courtroom.

3. Bauchi Magistrate Court Issues Bench Warrant for Publisher's Arrest

A Magistrate Court sitting in Bauchi on September 2, 2024, issued a bench warrant for the arrest of Mr. Haruna Mohammed Salisu, the publisher of

WikkiTimes, for failing to appear in court to stand trial for alleged criminal defamation. The Magistrate said Mr. Salisu's absence from court sessions necessitated the enforcement of an earlier order to arrest him.

Mr. Salisu is standing trial for defamation over an investigative report written by Yawale Adamu and published by WikkiTimes. The investigative report exposed how Hon. Mansur Manu Soro, a member representing Darazo/Ganjuwa Federal Constituency in the House of Representatives, diverted hundreds of millions in what appears to be fraudulent contracts through his associate in Bauchi State.

Mr. Abubakar Abdullahi, a director of Sahel Global Desert Energy Limited and ally to Hon. Soro, sued WikkiTimes over the publication joining Yawale Adamu in the suit.

In his reaction, Mr. Idris Gambo, counsel to WikkiTimes explained that his clients were not aware of the lawsuit until they were served through substituted means and contended that there was no record of attempts to serve his clients before resorting to substituted service. He said they had been complying with court dates and that he had informed the court that the publisher was out of the country.

Mr. Gambo added that after he received the service in his office, he went to court, but the court was not in session, and the complainant was himself absent. He said as a result, he asked the registrar to inform him when a new date is fixed for hearing and expressed surprise that despite his efforts, the complainant told the court that the journalists ignored its invitation, as there was no record of their attendance in court.

4. Social Media User Invited by DSS for Allegedly Criticising Oyo State Governor

Mr. Idris Animasaun, a social media user and critic of Governor Seyi Makinde of Oyo State, was on September 23, 2024, summoned by the DSS. The invitation, according to reports, is related to his recent criticisms of the governor's actions, particularly the takeover of community open spaces. The social media user announced the invitation on his Facebook page expressing uncertainty about the exact reasons for the DSS invitation.

Mr. Animasaun, known for his criticism of governance in Oyo State, consistently challenges Governor Makinde's policies. He recently accused the governor of shifting the blame for Nigeria's economic troubles entirely onto President Bola Tinubu's administration, while allegedly sponsoring media posts to bolster his public image.

In addition, he claimed that the governor's media team had threatened him using the DSS.

In his post, Mr. Animasaun stated that the DSS had requested him to appear at their office at 10 AM on September 24, 2024. He noted his concerns about the invitation but said he would attend without a lawyer, but accompanied by members of the media. His posts on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) highlighted his uncertainty about what offense he may have committed, suggesting it might be linked to his recent critical posts.

According to reports, he has shared various posts criticizing Governor Makinde's administration, including reposts from other social media users. One of the post accused the governor of failing to address hunger in the state, despite agriculture being a responsibility of both the state and federal governments. Other posts criticized the governor's handling of state resources and the quality of infrastructure projects.

In a similar Facebook post, he pointed to issues with the Lekan Salami Stadium in Ibadan, particularly during a recent football match where the pitch became waterlogged.

Mr. Animasaun highlighted the poor state of the stadium despite previous renovations and questioned the effectiveness of the government's investment in sports development in the state.

5. Nigeria Police Declare David Hundeyin, another Wanted for Alleged Collusion in Leakage of Secret Government Documents

The Nigeria Police Force on September 3, 2024, declared an investigative journalist, Mr. David Hundeyin, wanted for alleged collusion with Bristol Isaac Tamunobifiri, known on X (formerly Twitter) as @pidomnigeria, to leak, publish and distribute restricted documents on sensitive matters of national security.

Mr. Olumuyiwa Adejobi, the Force Public Relations Officer, disclosed during a press briefing that investigation of the leakage of some official documents was initiated following complaint by the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, (OSGF).

Mr. Adejobi said that discrete investigation initiated by operatives of the Nigeria Police Force National Cybercrime Center (NPF-NCCC) to identify those responsible for the leakage led to the identification of Bristol Isaac Tamunobifiri, Michael Temidayo Alade, and David Hundeyin, as suspects.

The police also accused Mr. Tamunobifiri of illegally accessing police-restricted data and posted directives from the office of the Inspector-General of Police, and many other restricted documents with the aim of jeopardizing the security network in Nigeria. The Force also claimed to have established that Tamunobifiri also raised funds through anonymous means to sponsor cyberterrorism and other related crimes saying evidence of this was derived after critical forensic analysis of his crypto wallet transactions.

Mr. Adejobi stated that Tamunobifiri was arrested to protect national security, maintain public order, identify and apprehend those engaged in criminal activities threatening the stability of the nation in connection with alleged criminal conspiracy, offences against the Official Secrets Act, leakage of classified 'restricted' documents, acts likely to cause breach of public peace, sedition, fraud, and tax evasion.

The Police Spokesperson said since Messrs Hundeyin and Alade have been fingered by the Police, they want to interrogate them for further action. He promised that: “The police will do the needful to make sure everyone involved in such crimes will be brought to book after thorough interrogation and investigation.”

6. Kano State Government Revokes Accreditation for 14 Journalists Covering its Activities

On October 21, 2024, the Kano State Government announced the withdrawal of accreditation to 14 journalists assigned by various media houses to cover activities at the Governor's Office but gave no reason for its action.

Mr. Sanusi Bature Dawakin-Tofa, the spokesperson for Governor Abba Yusuf, in a message forwarded to the affected reporters, directed them to return to their respective organisations for replacements.

The statement listed the 14 journalists affected which include Aliyu Yusuf, director for public enlightenment; Sani Abubakar, public relations officer (PRO); Adamu Dabo, chairman crew, Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN); Naziru Yau, Abubakar Rimi Television (ARTV); Sadiq Sani AA, ARTV; Rabiun Sunusi, Triumph; and Umar Sheka, Freedom Radio.

Others are Jabir Dan'abba, Nasara Radio; Labaran, sound operator; Simon, AIT cameraman; Nasiru Danhaki, Nigeria Television Authority (NTA); Abdullahi Sule, driver; Baba Kusa, Express Radio; and Ibrahim Muazzam, Radio Kano.

The reasons for the withdrawal of accreditation from journalists from these media houses were not disclosed but some source claimed that it is complex.

Some journalists believe the withdrawal is related to two incidents: a confrontation between the Kano government house press crew and DSS operatives at the Jigawa Government House over access restrictions which degenerated into a heated argument, during Governor Yusuf's condolence visit to Jigawa, following a petrol tanker explosion.

The second suspected incident involved journalists who sought audience with Bauchi State Governor, Mr. Bala Mohammed, without prior approval, during his visit to Kano for a religious event. The matter reportedly upset government officials.

Reacting to news reports of the withdrawal of accreditation, Mr. Bature said the action is a routine to replace reporters who cover the activities of the governor.

He explained that the State government can decide "at any time" to ask for the replacement of reporters with or without an explanation. According to him, "Replacement is normal. From time to time, people are changed from Government House beat with or without reason. It is normal in any organisation". "Many at times, media organisations replace their reporters or we ask for replacement", the spokesman further said.

Table Showing Attacks on Freedom of Expression in 2024

Assaults and Battery				
S/N	Date	Nature of Attack	Victims	Perpetrators
1.	January 26, 2024	Governor's Security Aides Brutalise Journalists at Even	Mr. Bunmi Adigun, a reporter with the Ogun State Television	Security aides to Governor Ademola Adeleke of Osun State
2.	February 9, 2024	Murder Suspect Assault, Threaten Journalists in Cour	Nigerian Television Authority and Niger State Television cameramen	Murder suspects
3.	February 17, 2024	Thugs Attack Journalists at Governorship Primary Election Collation Centre	Several journalists	Political thugs
4.	February 21, 2024	Journalist Assaulted while Covering Police Raid on BDC Operators in Abuja	Ms Kasarahchi Aniagolu, reporter with The Whistler newspaper	Nigeria Police Force
5.	February 23, 2024	Journalist Assaulted, Arrested by Soldiers for Covering Protest in Delta State	Mr. Dele Fasan, South-South Bureau Chief of Galaxy Television	Soldiers
6.	April 5, 2024	Immigration Officers Assault Journalist in Ibadan	Mr. Seun Falomo, a cameraman with Galaxy Television, Ibadan	Immigration officers
7.	April 20, 2024	Journalist Assaulted During APC's Governorship Primary Elections in Ondo State	Mr. Tayo Ikujuni, a senior journalist with the News Agency of Nigeria	Ondo State Commissioner for Youths and Sports Development, Mr. Saka Yusuf Ogunleye
8.	May 30, 2024	Lagos State Building Control Agency Officials Brutalise The Guardian Reporter	Mr. Eniola Daniel, a journalist with The Guardian newspaper	Mr. Olusoji Olaopa, Head of Enforcement of the Lagos State Building Control Agency and others
9.	June 3, 2024	Journalist Attacked by Security Guards while Covering Strike in Umuahia	Mr. Emmanuel Nwazue, correspondent of Afia TV, Umuahia, Abia State	Bank security guards
10.	July 31, 2024	Immigration Officers Assault Female Journalists in Benin City	Ms Joy Odigie, a journalist with the News Agency of Nigeria	Immigration officers
11.	August 1, 2024	Journalists Attacked, Vehicle Vandalised	11 journalists and media workers from different media outlets	Hoodlums
12.	August 1, 2024	Thugs Attack Journalists in Asaba	Mr. Matthew Ochei, Mr. Monday Osayande, correspondents of The Punch newspapers;	Hired thugs

1.	August 1, 2024	Thugs Attack Journalists in Asaba	Mr. Matthew Ochei, Mr. Monday Osayande, correspondents of The Punch newspapers; Lucy, a reporter with Pointer; Mr. Amour Udemude, a journalist with Sahara Reporters	Hired thugs
2.	August 1, 2024	Editor Arrested in Calabar	Mr. Jonathan Ugbal, Managing Editor of CrossRiverWatch	Nigerian Police Force
3.	August 1, 2024	Hoodlums Attack NUJ Vehicle	Joseph Abasi, Cross River State correspondent of Nigerian Tribune	Hoodlums
4.	August 1, 2024	Journalists Teargassed, Beaten by Policemen	Mr. Yakubu Mohammed, Premium Times reporter and others	Nigerian Police Force
5.	August 1, 2024	AIT, NewsCentral TV Crews Attacked	Ms Mary Adeboye of News Central TV and AIT Crew members	Nigerian Police Force
6.	August 3, 2024	DSS, Police Shoot at Peaceful Protesters, Journalists	Several journalists	Department of State Services
7.	August 6, 2024	Journalist Attacked by Police During National Protest	Hilary Damissah, a journalist with DigiVation Network	Nigerian Police Force
8.	August 6, 2024	Policemen Eject Journalists from Protest Venue	Several journalists	Nigerian Police Force
9.	August 7, 2024	Suspected Thugs Attack Channels TV Journalist	Ms Deborah Agbalam, Channels TV reporter	Hired thugs
10.	October 5, 2024	Suspected Political Thugs Attack Reporter Covering Local Elections in Rivers State	Mr. Emmanuel Atseyinku, a correspondent of "9 News Nigeria," and his driver	Thugs

Arrests and Detention

S/N	Date	Nature of Attack	Victims	Perpetrators
11.	February 6, 2024	Two Journalists Arrested, Docked, Released on Bail	Salihu Ayatullahi, Editor-in-Chief, and Adisa-Jaji Azeez, Managing Editor of Informant247 news portal	Nigerian Police Force
12.	May 1, 2024	Journalist Arrested, Charged, Remanded at Custodial Centre for Publication	Ibraheem Hamza Mohammed, FirstNews	Nigerian Police Force
13.	May 14, 2024	Journalist Arrested, Detained by Hisbah Corps	Mr. Jamil Mabai, a journalist with Trust TV	Hisbah Corps
14.	May 27, 2024	Journalist Detained Over Report on LagosBased Businessman	Mr. Precious Eze, publisher of "News Platform"	Nigerian Police Force

1.	August 1, 2024	Radio Personnel Arrested in Maiduguri	Editor-in-Chief, Head of Programmes, the Nigerian Director and eight other staff members of Radio Ndarason International (RNA)	Nigerian Police Force
2.	August 1, 2024	Photojournalist Arrested by Police	Mr. Kayode Jaiyeola, photojournalist with The Punch newspapers,	Nigerian Police Force
3.	August 1, 2024	Newspaper Photojournalist Arrested	Mr. Jide Oyekunle, a photojournalist with Daily Independent newspaper	Nigerian Police Force
4.	August 5, 2024	Microblogger Arrested, Detained for Alleged Cybercrime	Mr. Isaac Bristol, a microblogger	Nigerian Police Force
5.	August 29, 2024	Journalist Arrested, Remanded in Custody for Publishing Content Critical of Kano State Governor	Mr. Muktar Dahiru, a journalist with Pyramid FM, Kano	Nigerian Police Force
6.	August 2024	Tambuwal's Media Aide Remanded over Alleged Defamation of Sokoto Governor and Family	Shafi'u Umar, a media aide to former Sokoto State Governor, Aminu Tambuwal	Nigerian Police Force
7.	August 2024	Four Journalists Arrested, Arraigned for False Report, Cyberstalking Guaranty Trust CEO	Precious Eze, Publisher/Editor-in-Chief, News Platform; Olawale Rotimi, Managing Director, National Monitor; Rowland Olonishuwa, Editor, News Hob Mag!; and Seun Odunlami, Website Administrator, www.newsjaunts.com ,	Nigerian Police Force
8.	September 25, 2024	Police Arrest Journalist in Ogun State	Mr. Seun Odunlami, publisher of Newsjaunts online	Nigerian Police Force
9.	September 20, 2024	Member of Nigerian Guild of Investigative Journalists Arrested by Police over Publication	Mr. Olurotimi Olawale, member of Nigerian Guild of Investigative Journalists	Nigerian Police Force
10.	September 17, 2024	DSS Detain Social Media User for Criticising Plateau State Governor's Administration	Mr. Samuel Bature, a 26-year-old critic of Plateau State Governor	Department of State Services
11.	October 18, 2024	DSS Arrests Journalist over Report that Allegedly Poses Threat to National Security	Ms Edna Ulaeto, a staff member of OrderPaper	Department of State Services
12.	October 21, 2024	Police Arrest Broadcast Journalist for Alleged Defamation, Other Offences	Mr. Chinonso Uba (alias Nonsunkwa)	Nigerian Police Force

Threat to Life			
Date	Nature of Attack	Victims	Perpetrators
January 7, 2024	Journalist Alleges Threat to his Life by Unknown Persons	Mr. Adeniyi Kunnu, a Lagos-based broadcast journalist,	Unknown persons
May 2024	Journalist Raises Alarm over Threat to Life, Seeks Police Protection	Ms Victoria Ojeme, a reporter with Vanguard Newspaper	Unknown persons
June 20, 2024	Retired Air Force Officer Threatens to Deal with FIJ Reporter	Ms Opeyemi Lawal, a reporter with the IF	Retired Airforce Officer
July 2024	Journalist Petitions the Police over Alleged Threat to Life	Ms Edoamaowo Udeme, a reporter with Scroll Report	Soldier identified as CPL Ojo Abu
July 2024	Citizen Journalist Alleges Threat to His Life for Reporting Corruption on Social Media	Mr. Chukwunenye Nweke, a citizen journalist	Nigerian Police Force
August 8, 2024	Journalist Threatened by Bauchi State Governor's Security Aides	Several journalists	Department of State Services
March 22, 2024,	Journalist Petitions Police over Threats to his Life	Mr. Jamiu Folarin, a radio presenter	Unknown persons
March 2024	Editor-In-Chief Alleges Threat to His Life	Mr. Ebule Anthony Metsese, Editor-In-Chief of Fresh Angle International	Unknown persons
Abduction/Kidnapping			
Date	Nature of Attack	Victims	Perpetrators
March 15, 2024	Armed Soldiers Abduct First News Editor in Lagos	Mr. Segun Olatunji, Editor of the online news portal, "FirstNews"	Combined team of law enforcement and security agencies
April 11, 2024	Channels TV Reporter Kidnapped, Released	Mr. Joshua Rogers a reporter with Channel Television	Unknown gunmen
May 1, 2024	Reporter Abducted by Police, Detained for Ten Days without Charge	Mr. Daniel Ojukwu, a reporter with the IF	Nigerian Police Force
May 22, 2024	Police Abduct Editor from Home in Abuja over Alleged Defamation	Mr. Madu Onuorah, Publisher and Editor in-Chief of Globalupfront Newspaper	Nigerian Police Force
July 6, 2024	Bandits Abduct Two Kaduna Journalists and their Families	Mr. Abdulgafar Alabelewe of The Nation newspapers and Mr. AbdulRaheen Abdu of Blueprint newspapers	Armed bandits
October 15, 2024	Freelance Journalist Abducted, Brutalised, Dumped by the Roadside	Mr. Oluwatosin Oshibanjo, a freelance journalist	Unknown gunmen

Prevention from Assignments				
S/N	Date	Nature of Attack	Victims	Perpetrators
1.	February 23, 2024	Journalists Barred from Covering Arraignment of Former Kwara State Governor	Several journalists	Court Registrar and some policemen
2.	March 27, 2024	Journalists Barred from Covering Labour Party Convention	Several journalists	Security personnel
3.	May 7, 2024	Nigerian Senate Restricts Journalists Covering its Proceedings	Media houses including Galaxy TV, Ben TV, MITV, ITV Abuja, PromptNews, ONTV, and Liberty	Security operatives of the Senate chamber
4.	July 31, 2024	News Central TV Crew Prevented from Live Coverage	Mr. Benard Akede, News Central TV correspondent	Nigerian Police Force
5.	August 1, 2024	Arise TV Reporter Prevented from Interviewing Protesters	Unnamed Arise TV reporter	Nigerian Police Force
Invasion/Raid				
S/N	Date	Nature of Attack	Victims	Perpetrators
6.	January 17, 2024	Police Invade TV Station, Arrest Guest on Live Programme, Destroy Equipment in Abia	Udensi Donald, ABN TV in Umuahia, Abia State	Nigerian Police Force
7.	August 23, 2024	Armed Robbers Loot Radio Station, Injure Guard in Oyo	Ajilete 92.1 FM, Gambari, Ogbomosho	Armed robbers
8.	October 14, 2024	EFCC Operatives Invade Radio Station, Disrupt Broadcast, Confiscate Equipment	Urban 94.5FM in Enugu	EFCC operatives
Harassment				
S/N	Date	Nature of Attack	Victims	Perpetrators
9.	August 2, 2024	Hoodlums Harass Journalists at Protest Ground in Lagos	Several journalists	Hoodlums
10.	August 6, 2024	Journalists Harassed, Evicted from Lagos Protest Ground by Police, Threatened by Hoodlums	Several journalists	Hoodlums
Killed				
S/N	Date	Nature of Attack	Victims	Perpetrators
11.	October 9, 2024	Nigerian Sports Journalist Killed, Others Abducted by Gunmen	Mr. Kolawole Omoniyi, a Multichoice SuperSports' media crew member	Unknown gunmen

Others				
S/N	Date	Nature of Attack	Victims	Perpetrators
1.	August 27, 2024	Police Summon Three Journalists to Facilitate Undisclosed Investigation	Mr. Oluwamodupe Akinola, the publisher of Alimosho Today; Ms Ayomide Eweje, Managing Editor; and Mr. Wisdom Okezie, a former reporter	Nigerian Police Force
2.	August 19, 2024	Magistrate Seizes Phones of Journalists Covering Trial in Lagos	Cameramen from TVC News, News Central, and Arise News	Magistrate
3.	September 2, 2024	Bauchi Magistrate Court Issues Bench Warrant for Publisher's Arrest	Mr. Haruna Mohammed Salisu, publisher of WikkiTimes	Magistrate
4.	September 2024	Social Media User Invited by DSS for Allegedly Criticising Oyo State Governor	Mr. Idris Animasaun, social media user	Department of State Services
5.	September 3, 2024	Nigeria Police Declare David Hundeyin, Another Wanted for Alleged Collusion in Leakage of Secret Government Documents	Mr. David Hundeyin	Nigeria Police Force
6.	October 21, 2024	Kano State Government Revokes Accreditation for 14 Journalists Covering its Activities	Reporters from 14 media houses	Kano State Government

Chapter Three

3.0 Analysis of Attacks over the Past Three Years

3.1 Analysis by Types of Attacks

The analysis for the types of attack on journalists that occurred from 2022 to 2024 shows a fluctuation in the number of the different types of attacks. Assaults and battery remained the most prevalent form of attack on freedom of expression, peaking at 27 incidents in 2023 before decreasing to 21 in 2024. In 2022, MRA recorded 20 incidents.

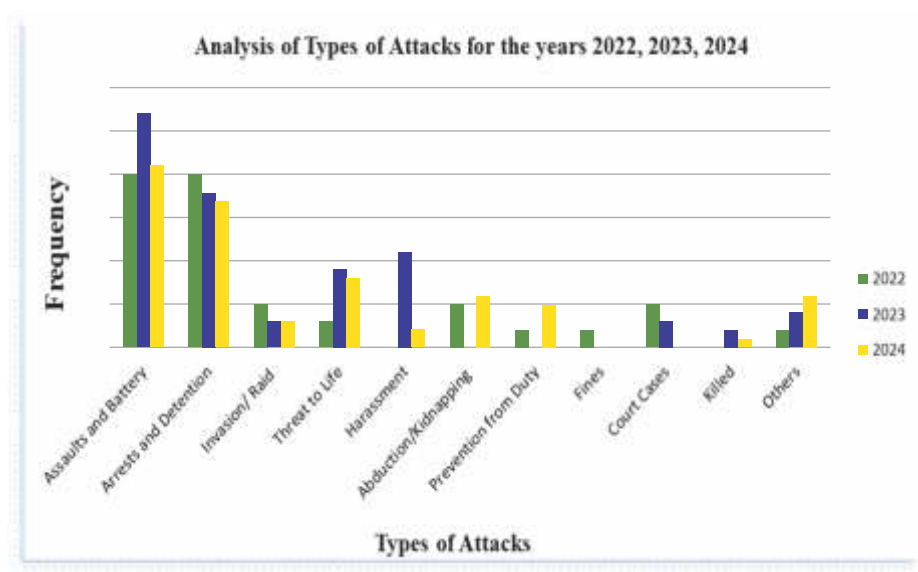
Arrests and detention showed a gradual decline from 20 cases in 2022 to 18 in 2023 and 17 in 2024.

Kidnapping/abductions of journalists increased from five cases in 2022 to six in 2024, with none reported in 2023. Incidents of prevention from duty rose significantly from two in 2022 to five in 2024, no such incident was recorded in 2023. Threats to life increased from three cases in 2022 to nine cases in 2023 and declined slightly to eight in 2024.

Incidents of harassment of journalists dropped dramatically from 11 in 2023 to two in 2024; no incident of harassment was recorded in 2022. Court cases decreased from five in 2022 to three in 2023 and none in 2024, while fines were reported only in 2022. Tragically, there were two fatalities in 2023 and one in 2024.

The table below shows the types of attacks on freedom of expression in 2022, 2023 and 2024

S/N	Types of Attacks	2022	2023	2024
1.	Assault and Battery	20	27	21
2.	Arrest and Detention	20	18	17
3.	Invasion/Raid	5	3	3
4.	Threat to Life	3	9	8
5.	Harassment	-	11	2
6.	Abduction/Kidnapping	5	-	6
7.	Prevention from Duty	2	-	5
8.	Fines	2	-	-
9.	Court Cases	5	3	-
10.	Killed	-	2	1
11.	Others	2	4	6
Total		64	77	69



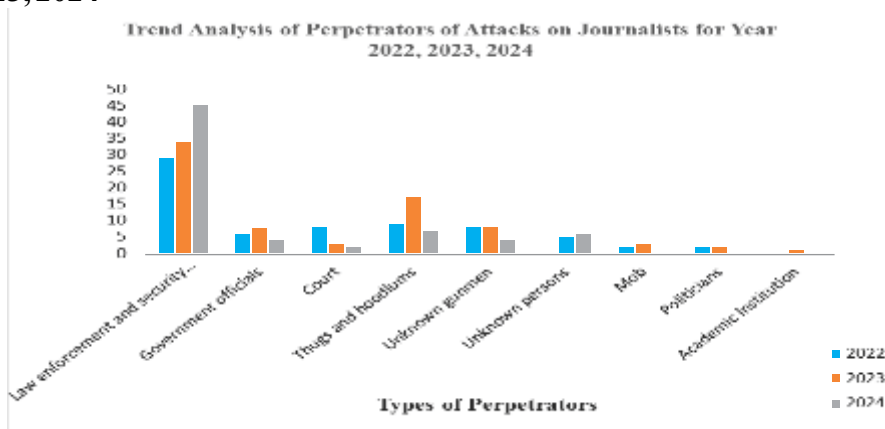
An academic institution was a perpetrator of attack on the media in one incident in 2023, but with no incidents reported involving academic institution in 2022 or 2024.

There was a reported case involving a known retired Airforce officer threatening a journalist in 2024; in 2022 and 2023, there were no reported cases of attacks in which a known individual without affiliation was perpetrator.

The table below shows the perpetrators of attacks on freedom of expression and the frequency of their attacks in 2022, 2023 and 2024

S/N	Types of Perpetrators	2022	2023	2024
1.	Law Enforcement and Security Agencies	29	34	45
2.	Government Officials	6	8	4
3.	Courts	8	3	2
4.	Thugs and Hoodlums	9	17	7
5.	Unknown Gunmen	8	8	4
6.	Unknown Persons	-	5	6
7.	Mob	2	3	-
8.	Politicians	2	2	-
9.	Academic Institution	-	1	-

Trend Analysis of Perpetrators of Attacks on Journalists for Year 2022, 2023, 2024



3.2 Analysis by Perpetrators of Attacks

The analysis of the categories of perpetrators involved in incidents of attacks on the media and freedom of expression from 2022 to 2024 shows that Law Enforcement and Security Agencies remained the worse perpetrators. MRA's records show a consistent upward trend, rising from 29 in 2022 to 34 in 2023, and then reaching 45 in 2024. In 2024, law enforcement and security agencies constituted 60% of perpetrators of attacks on the media and freedom of expression.

Cases involving government officials fluctuated from six incidents in 2022 to a peak of eight in 2023, then declined to four in 2024.

The Courts, comprising of judges and magistrates, was one category of perpetrators of attacks on the media and freedom of expression. Over the three years under review, MRA recorded a decrease with eight incidents in 2022, three in 2023, and two in 2024.

From the above analyses, personnel of government institutions and agencies remained the worst perpetrators of attacks on the media and freedom of expression than any other category of perpetrators.

Thugs and Hoodlums as perpetrators peaked in 2023, with incidents increasing from nine in 2022 to 17 in 2023, then dropping to seven in 2024.

Incidents of attack on the media involving unknown gunmen remained stable at eight in 2022 and 2023, then a decrease to four in 2024.

There was no incident of attack on the media or freedom of expression in which unknown persons were recorded as perpetrators in 2022, but such was recorded in 2023 with five cases and a slight increase to six in 2024.

Mob-related incidents of attack on the media saw a slight increase from two in 2022 to three in 2023 while there were no recorded incidents of mob attack on the media in 2024.

Politicians as perpetrators of attacks on the media and freedom of expression remained steady with two cases each year across 2022 and 2023, with no reported case in 2024.

1. Federal and State Governments

- **Strengthen Legal Protections:** Introduce and enforce laws that explicitly protect journalists and media workers from arbitrary arrest, detention, assault, and harassment. Consider establishing legal penalties for violations against journalists to create a deterrent effect.
- **Accountability Mechanisms:** Set up independent bodies to investigate attacks on journalists and ensure that those responsible face prosecution. These mechanisms should operate transparently, allowing public access to findings.
- **Media-Friendly Policies:** Develop policies that enhance media freedom, recognizing the media as a crucial pillar of democracy. Encourage compliance with and enforce the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 to promote transparency and accountability within government institutions.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Fund and run campaigns to highlight the role of journalists in society, emphasizing that they are public servants essential to democracy. Sensitization could help reduce hostility towards the media from security agencies and the public.

2. Law Enforcement and Security Agencies

- **Specialized Training for Officers:** Provide human rights and media relations training to law enforcement officers, particularly those in the Nigerian Police Force, DSS, Immigration, and the military, emphasizing the lawful treatment of journalists and media workers.
- **Develop a Media Protection Unit:** Establish a dedicated unit within law enforcement agencies to handle cases involving journalists, ensuring that officers understand journalists' rights and are equipped to support media freedom, not suppress it.
- **Internal Accountability Systems:** Implement an internal disciplinary framework to hold officers accountable for violating journalists' rights. Officers found responsible for harassment, assault, or unwarranted detention should face appropriate disciplinary action.
- **Engage in Dialogue with Media Organizations:** Foster ongoing communication with media representatives to build mutual understanding and reduce incidents of confrontation.

Chapter Four

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Data collated, documented and analysed by Media Rights Agenda between January and October 2024, show 69 incidents of attacks targeting media personnel and citizens exercising their right to free expression which reveal a troubling pattern of repression and intimidation that need to be holistically addressed.

These attacks include physical assault, arbitrary arrest and detention, abductions, threats to life, harassment, and obstruction from reporting. Perpetrators range from law enforcement and security agencies who, along with other government officials, are responsible for over 70 percent of these violations, to political thugs, unidentified individuals, and even members of the judiciary.

These incidents underscore the alarming risks and dangers faced by media practitioners in Nigeria, where expressing dissent or covering critical stories can lead to grave consequences, including physical violence, psychological trauma, and even death. Beyond the immediate harm inflicted on individuals, these attacks erode media freedom, disrupt the public's access to information, and compromise democratic principles by fostering a climate of fear and self-censorship.

In light of these challenges, it is essential to engage multiple stakeholder groups in efforts to safeguard media freedom, protect journalists, and promote accountability for perpetrators.

The following recommendations provide targeted actions for government authorities, security agencies, judiciary, media organizations, civil society, political actors, the international community, and the public, with the goal of fostering a safer and more supportive environment for the media and freedom of expression in Nigeria.

3. Judiciary

- **Protect Journalistic Freedom:** The judiciary should ensure that legal protections for media freedom are upheld. Judges and magistrates must be trained to respect media freedom, making rulings that protect journalists' rights unless there is substantial legal justification for restrictions.
- **Reform Judicial Processes:** Expedite the handling of cases involving attacks on journalists and freedom of expression violations. Special attention should be given to cases of unlawful arrests, detention, and harassment of journalists, ensuring they are resolved quickly and transparently.
- **Caution in Issuing Warrants:** Magistrates and judges should exercise caution in issuing warrants for journalists to be arrested or detained or for searches on their homes and offices. They should bear in mind that the functions and activities of journalists are often in the public interest and therefore ensure that enabling such an action against them or their work is done on legitimate grounds, serves the public interest and is in accordance with the spirit and letters of the Constitution and aligns with the constitutional right to freedom of expression. Clear guidelines for issuing such warrants should be established.

4. Media Houses and Journalists

- **Enhance Digital and Physical Security:** Media organizations should invest in digital security training and physical safety measures for their staff. Journalists should be equipped to handle threats such as hacking, online harassment, and physical assault.
- **Documentation and Reporting:** Ensure that attacks on journalists and media houses, including incidents of assault, threats, and harassment, are meticulously documented and reported to relevant authorities. Encourage journalists to report violations to CSOs that can offer legal or advocacy support.
- **Develop Legal and Psychological Support Systems:** Establish support services for journalists facing harassment or trauma from their work. This includes access to legal aid, counseling services, and emergency response protocols.

5. **Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Media Advocacy Groups**

- **Advocacy and Public Pressure:** CSOs should continue advocacy efforts highlighting the need for protections for journalists and freedom of expression. Persistent public pressure can push government bodies and security agencies to take journalists' rights more seriously.
- **Legal Assistance:** Offer legal representation to journalists facing harassment or attacks of a legal nature and work with human rights lawyers to ensure cases are pursued to completion. Provide support for strategic litigation to hold perpetrators accountable and to create a more conducive and enabling environment for the media to perform their functions.
- **Capacity Building:** Provide training on security and self-defense for journalists, particularly in areas prone to violent incidents. Additionally, educate journalists on their legal rights when dealing with authorities.
- **Community Outreach and Awareness:** Collaborate with media and educational institutions to raise awareness of the importance of a free, independent and professional media. Publicize instances of harassment to foster empathy for journalists among the general public.

6. **Political Parties and Politicians**

- **Condemn Attacks and Commit to Media Freedom:** Publicly denounce attacks on journalists and freedom of expression, affirming a commitment to media freedom as part of democratic values. Politicians should discourage their supporters from harassing or intimidating media personnel.
- **Respect Journalistic Roles:** Politicians should understand that journalists are not adversaries but play a crucial role in informing the public. Politicians can engage journalists respectfully, understanding their responsibility to question and scrutinize public policies and political actions.
- **Discourage Use of Thugs:** Political parties should refrain from employing thugs or loyalists to intimidate or attack journalists. Parties should develop internal codes of conduct prohibiting harassment or obstruction of the media.

7. **International Community and Diplomatic Missions**

- **Diplomatic Pressure and Monitoring:** Diplomatic missions should consistently monitor the freedom of expression landscape in Nigeria and apply diplomatic pressure on the government to address abuses against journalists.
- **Support for Media Freedom Initiatives:** International bodies can fund and support initiatives focused on training, legal support, and safety for journalists. Collaborating with local CSOs on these programmes can amplify their voices as well as the impact of their work.
- **Public Statements on Freedom of Expression:** Regularly issue statements on the importance of media freedom and human rights. Public condemnation from influential international bodies can help to hold the government accountable for its treatment of journalists and pressure the government to behave better.

8. **General Public**

- **Advocacy for Media Freedom:** Support journalists and media houses by speaking out against attacks on the media. Public outcry can influence authorities to reconsider policies and actions that suppress media freedom. Be conscious that attacks on the media ultimately amount to an effort to deprive members of the public of access to information and independent sources of information.
- **Fact-Checking and Responsible Consumption:** Encourage responsible consumption and sharing of news to reduce misinformation that often fuels hostility toward journalists. Informed public support can help to establish a more respectful environment for media.
- **Report Incidents:** Whenever members of the public witness acts of harassment or obstruction of journalists, they should report these incidents to media advocacy groups or CSOs and, in appropriate cases, to law enforcement agencies, providing documented evidence where possible to assist in accountability efforts.

By implementing these recommendations, each stakeholder can contribute to a safer and more conducive environment for journalists and freedom of expression in Nigeria. These actions would help ensure that the media can

perform its role without fear, furthering the democratic values essential to national development.

Chapter Five

5.0 Interventions by Media Rights Agenda on Freedom of Expression Issues

5.1 Press Statements

Over the course of the year, as in previous years, MRA used press statements as a powerful tool for advocacy, awareness-raising, informing the public about important issues and developments, and for mobilization of specific and wide-ranging stakeholder groups as part of our work in promoting and defending freedom of expression, access to information, media freedom, digital rights and Internet freedom, among other issues.

Press statements gave us the opportunity to immediately respond to violations of these rights and to highlight systemic issues affecting journalists and the media sector. By using press statements to document incidents, inform the public, raise awareness and call for action, the strategy enabled us to contribute to shaping public discourse on these issues, setting benchmarks for accountability, and participating in or leading opposition to attacks on and threats to freedom of expression and media freedom.

MRA used press statements very effectively in informing the public and authorities about incidents and trends threatening freedom of expression and media freedom, in amplifying lesser-known issues, and turning isolated incidents into high-visibility causes that demanded responses and accountability. This helped to increase awareness and to create a supportive climate for media freedom, as well as for mobilizing stakeholders and the general public.

Below are some examples of the press statements issued by MRA on different issues of freedom of expression and media freedom.

Court Nullifies Provisions of Broadcasting Code Empowering NBC to Impose Fines on Broadcasters

On January 17, 2024, Media Rights Agenda issued a press statement to announce the judgment of a Federal High Court in Abuja which, same day, declared null and void the provisions of the Nigeria Broadcasting Code authorizing the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to impose fines on broadcast stations for alleged breaches of the Code as it ruled that administrative and regulatory bodies could not exercise judicial powers.

Delivering judgment in a suit instituted by Media Rights Agenda against the NBC following the Commission's imposition of fines of N5 million each on a television station and three pay TV platforms in 2022 for allegedly undermining Nigeria's national security by broadcasting documentaries on banditry in Nigeria, Justice Rita Ofili-Ajumogobia held that the NBC not being a court of law, acted above its powers by imposing such fines.

The judge commended MRA for its legal challenge of the NBC's action and issued an order of perpetual injunction restraining the Commission or anyone acting on its behalf from further imposing any fine on any media platform or broadcast station in Nigeria for any alleged offence committed under the Nigeria Broadcasting Code.

Justice Ofili-Ajumogobia set aside the fines imposed by the NBC on August 3, 2022 on Multichoice Nigeria Limited, owners of DSTV; TelCom Satellite Limited (TSTV); Trust-TV Network Limited; and NTA Startimes Limited for broadcasting a documentary about the state of banditry and security in Zamfara State, saying the regulator's action was wrong and unjustifiable in a democratic society.

Abuja-based human rights lawyer, Mr. Uche Amulu, filed the suit on behalf of MRA asking the court to hold, among other things, the NBC's action of imposing a fine on each of the media platforms and the station for broadcasting a documentary about the state of banditry and security in Zamfara State is unlawful and unconstitutional and has a chilling effect on the freedom of media to impart information and ideas. MRA contended that it would deter the platforms and station from reporting the true state of affairs regarding the security situation in Nigeria, and therefore constitutes a violation of the rights of MRA, its members, and other citizens of Nigeria to

freedom of expression, particularly their rights to receive ideas and information without interference, as guaranteed by the Constitution and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights.

MRA also sought a declaration that the procedure adopted by the NBC in imposing the fines is a flagrant violation of the rules of natural justice and the right to fair hearing under Section 36 of the Constitution and Article 7 of the African Charter as the Commission is the drafter of the Code, which provides for the alleged offences for which the media platforms and the station were punished, and which empowers the NBC to receive complaints, investigate and adjudicate on the complaints, impose fines and collect fines.

MRA contended that the NBC, not being a court of law and not having been constituted in a manner as to secure its independence and impartiality, has no power or competence to impose fines on broadcast stations as punishment or penalties for the commission of an offence as the competence to establish that an offence has been committed and to impose criminal sanctions or penalties belongs to the courts.

Besides, it claimed, the NBC, not being the Nigerian Police or a law enforcement agency, has no power to conduct a criminal investigation or an investigation that could lead to criminal charges against the affected media platforms and stations or the imposition of criminal penalties and accordingly, that the investigation purportedly conducted by the Commission, leading to the fines imposed on the media platforms and station for alleged offences under the Nigeria Broadcasting Code is ultra vires, null and void.

MRA also urged the Court to declare that the Nigeria Broadcasting Code issued by the NBC, being a subsidiary legislation that empowers it as a regulatory and administrative body to enforce the provisions of the Code, cannot confer judicial powers or jurisdiction in criminal matters on the Commission to impose criminal sanctions or penalties such as fines, particularly as the Code was made by the NBC itself.

It urged the Court to declare the fines unconstitutional, ultra vires, null and void, set them aside and issue an order of perpetual injunction restraining the NBC, its servants, agents, privies, representatives or anyone acting for or on its behalf, from further imposing any fine on any of the media platforms or

station, or any other broadcast station in Nigeria for any alleged offence committed under the Nigeria Broadcasting Code.

In her judgment, Justice Ofili-Ajumogobia agreed with all MRA's arguments and granted all the declarations and injunction sought by the organization. She however refused to grant the organization's claim for N700,000 as costs it incurred in litigating the action; another claim for N2 million as general damages for NBC's infringement on its rights as well as a request for N1 million as punitive damages for the Commission's "outrageous conduct in abusing its powers and arbitrarily imposing fines on broadcasting stations".

MRA Calls on the Federal Government to Leverage Radio in Tackling the Crises Ravaging Nigeria

Media Rights Agenda on February 13, 2024, called on the Federal Government to leverage the enduring nature and unique characteristics of radio in tackling the challenges of illiteracy, ignorance and poverty in Nigeria, saying the continuing potency of radio after more than 100 years of its existence can help to foster dialogue among diverse groups and mitigate the plethora of crises ravaging the country.

In a statement to commemorate the 2024 World Radio Day (WRD), MRA's Deputy Executive Director, Mr. Ayode Longe, underscored the need for Nigerians to live in peace and harmony as the country builds its democracy and noted that the nature of radio, particularly in the context of a country like Nigeria, makes it ideally suited to facilitate dialogue among the various ethnic, religious, social, political, and economic sectors across all the geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

Mr. Longe said: "For over a century, radio has made a great impact in the lives of people around the world as it is available to even the poor in the remote parts of the world, bringing them timely information, education and entertainment. Radio has also adapted, through the century, to changes and developments in technology and is now available in more gadgets than ever before. It has also remained the most widely available medium of communication in the world, reaching billions of people daily."

WRD is celebrated on February 13 each year and the theme for 2024 is

“Radio: A Century Informing, Entertaining, and Educating”. The theme celebrates the rich history and enduring impact of radio over the past century, recognising radio's role in informing, entertaining, and educating audiences worldwide. The theme also emphasizes the continued relevance and potency of this medium till date.

The WRD celebration followed the proclamation of the Day in 2011 by UNESCO member states and subsequent endorsement by the United Nations General Assembly on January 14, 2013 as an international day. February 13 was chosen as it is the date the UN Headquarters-based United Nations Radio was established in 1946.

Mr. Longe noted that although technological developments which have offered a variety of new ways to be informed, educated and entertained have posed a challenge to radio, they have also enhanced a wider reach for radio broadcasts, making it possible for radio broadcasts to transcend geographical boundaries and making a massive impact in the information, entertainment and education sectors around the world.

He said: “Radio is one medium that offers a variety of ways to reach the greatest number of people cheaply wherever they may be and possibly in the language that they speak and understand. This makes it a veritable tool in the hands of the government at all levels to carry all Nigerians along in the formulation and implementation of their policies.”

Mr. Longe argued that rather than diminish the importance of radio, technology has actually enhanced it, making it available in affordable portable gadgets that can be carried about easily, even in pockets. He added that radio is also available and can be accessed on the internet, making it possible for radio broadcasts to transcend signal limitations and for people who have traveled outside their localities to still listen to their favourite local radio stations online, if they so desire.

MRA called on the government to especially strengthen and expand community radio broadcasting by ensuring that more licences are issued to communities and groups for community radios and that the licenses are affordable and issued only to communities and not to individuals or cults who would misuse them. It also urged the government to build strategic partnerships with radio broadcasters to harvest the benefits of the medium to the fullest and for the holistic wellbeing of Nigeria.

Court Orders Federal Government to Investigate all Attacks Against Journalists, Punish Perpetrators of Attacks

On February 16, 2024, Media Rights Agenda issued a press statement announcing a landmark judgment given on that day by a Federal High Court in Abuja directing the Federal Government to investigate attacks against journalists, prosecute and punish perpetrators of such attacks and take measures to prevent further attacks on journalists while ensuring that all journalists who are victims of attacks have access to effective remedies.

Delivering judgment in a suit filed by MRA against the Federal Government, represented by the Attorney-General of the Federation, Justice Inyang Ekwo upheld the organization's claim that by failing to guarantee the safety of journalists and other media practitioners in accordance with Principle 20 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, the Federal Government breached its statutory duty under the Declaration and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Ratification and Enforcement) Act (Cap A9), Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004.

The judge also ruled that the Federal Government bears responsibility and is accordingly liable for the actions and conduct of law enforcement, security, intelligence, military and other officials and agents that threaten, undermine or violate the rights and safety of journalists and other media practitioners.

In a suit filed on its behalf by Abuja-based human rights lawyer, Mrs. Mojirayo Ogunlana-Nkanga, on October 26, 2021, MRA complained about the violation of the fundamental rights to life and freedom of expression of Nigerian journalists and media practitioners who were murdered at various times over the last few decades in the line of duty or under circumstances relating to the discharge of their duties as journalists and the failure of the Federal Government to protect them, carry out effective investigation, prosecute and punish the perpetrators of the murders.

MRA named some of the murdered journalists, including the late Editor-in-Chief of Newswatch magazine, Mr. Dele Giwa, who was killed on October 19, 1986 by a parcel bomb in his home in Lagos; Ms Bolade Fasasi, a member of the National Association of Women Journalists and former treasurer of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), who was shot dead by three unidentified

gunmen in Ibadan on March 31, 1998; Mr. Edward Olalekan Ayo-Ojo, who was found dead beside his car on a road in Lagos in the early hours of June 1, 1999; and Mr. Omololu Falobi, a former features editor of The Punch and founder of the media advocacy group, Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS), who was gunned down on October 5, 2006, as he left his office in Lagos.

The others are Mr. Godwin Agbroko, the Chairman of the Editorial Board of This Day newspaper, who was murdered by unknown gunmen on December 22, 2006; Mr. Abayomi Ogundeji, a member of the Editorial Board of This Day newspaper, who was shot dead on August 17, 2008; and Mr. Edo Sule-Ugbagwu, Judicial Correspondent of The Nation newspaper, who was murdered in his home in a Lagos suburb by a gang of armed men on April 24 2010.

In his judgment, Justice Ekwo noted that given the special role that journalists play in the society, they ought to be protected and not put at risk. He accordingly declared the killing of the journalists as a violation of their fundamental right to life under section 33 of the 1999 Constitution and Article 4 of the African Charter and held that their killing while carrying out their journalistic duties was a violation of their right to freedom of expression and the press under section 39 of the Constitution and Article 9 of the African Charter.

He also declared that the failure of the Federal Government to fulfil its statutory and treaty obligations to guarantee their safety in accordance with Principle 20 of the Declaration of Principles amounts to a violation of the Declaration and a breach of the statutory duty imposed on the Government by the African Charter.

He also held that the failure of the Government to take measures to prevent various forms of attacks on journalists and other media practitioners, including murder, extra-judicial killing, torture and other forms of ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and detention, enforced disappearance, kidnapping, intimidation, threats of physical violence, beatings and assault, unlawful surveillance, among others, as required by Principle 20 amounts to a breach of the Government's statutory duty.

Besides, Justice Ekwo ruled, the failure of the Government to guarantee the safety of journalists; its failure to take effective legal and other measures to investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators of attacks against journalists

and other media practitioners, as well as its failure to ensure that the victims of such attacks have access to effective remedies in accordance with Principle 20, amounted to a breach of the Government's statutory duty.

He therefore ordered the Federal Government to take measures to prevent attacks on journalists and other media practitioners; to investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators of all attacks against journalists and other media practitioners; ensure that all victims of attacks against journalists have access to effective remedies; and take measures to raise awareness and build the capacities of various stakeholders, particularly journalists and other media practitioners; policy makers, law enforcement, security, intelligence, military as well as other officials and relevant stakeholders on the laws and standards for ensuring the safety of journalists and media practitioners.

MRA, Three Other Media Support Groups Mark 2024 World Press Freedom Day, Urge Governments to Protect Media Freedom

Media Rights Agenda and three other human rights and media support organizations on May 2, 2024, called on Federal and State Governments to take urgent measures to ensure media freedom and the safety of journalists in Nigeria, saying the deteriorating state of media freedom in the country is potentially harmful to its system of democratic governance.

Their call was contained in a statement through which they announced their collaborative activities to commemorate the 2024 edition of World Press Freedom Day (WPFDD 2024) through separate events that took place in Lagos and Abuja on Friday, May 3.

According to the statement, MRA and Global Rights: Advocates for Sustainable Justice, in collaboration with the International Press Centre (IPC) and the Centre for Media and Society (CEMESO), announced that they would hold a hybrid convening in Lagos under the theme: “The Imperative of Media Freedom for Democratic Governance”, to underscore the vital role that the media play in promoting transparency, accountability, good governance, and democracy.

The statement said media stakeholders would be drawn from among

journalists and editors, media owners and managers, civil society organizations, the academia, and others participating physically and virtually and will include activities such as sharing of experiences by journalists who have faced various forms of attacks, a presentation on the importance of counselling for journalists who have been victims of attacks, as well as presentations on various civil society efforts to ensure the safety of journalists and protect media freedom, which are designed to strengthen the media as they strive to promote democracy, human rights, and social justice.

It said separate event will be hosted in Abuja by Global Rights in collaboration with MRA and the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR). The event, which according to the statement, will be a Webinar titled "Freedom of the Press in Peril - Raising the Bar for Press Freedom in Nigeria", is aimed at sparking a conversation on how to safeguard press freedoms in Africa and how the operational environment for the press can be improved in Nigeria and across the continent.

The statement said the event will identify global best practices that create a conducive and enabling environment for the press and share experiences of how they can be domesticated in a way that makes them more easily accessible to journalists and other media professionals in Nigeria.

Proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in December 1993, World Press Freedom Day is celebrated around the world on May 3 every year as a reminder to governments of the need for them to respect their commitment to press freedom and create a safe and conducive environment for journalism and media practice.

Commenting on the collaborative efforts by the various organizations, Mr. Edetaen Ojo, Executive Director of MRA, said: "As the world celebrates World Press Freedom Day on May 3, we wish to reaffirm our commitment to upholding the fundamental principles of free speech, independent journalism, and the protection of press freedoms worldwide knowing that a free and independent media is the oxygen of democracy. We are determined to work with like-minded individuals and organizations towards the emergence of an environment where media professionals can carry out their professional functions without fear or intimidation and where the media can realize its true purpose."

According to Mr. Lanre Arogundade, Director of IPC, “We recognize the challenges facing journalists and media professionals across the country, including censorship, intimidation, violence, and online harassment. In the face of these threats and attacks, we commend the resilience and courage of journalists who continue to pursue the truth, often at great personal risk. We also promise that we shall continue to render whatever support we can to ensure that the atmosphere is made conducive for them to ply their trade.”

Dr. Akin Akingbulu, Executive Director of CEMESO, said: “We take the opportunity of this important occasion to once again call on governments, civil society organizations, and individuals everywhere to join us in defending press freedom, protecting journalists, and ensuring that information remains a public good accessible to all. Together, let us stand united in support of press freedom and the fundamental principles of democracy.”

MRA Condemns Police Harassment of Journalists, Calls on President Tinubu to Safeguard Media Freedom

On May 17, 2024, Media Rights Agenda, condemned the acts of harassment and intimidation of journalists and media organizations by the Nigeria Police Force National Cybercrime Centre (NPF-NCC) over their reporting and called on President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to take urgent measures to safeguard media freedom and terminate the abuse of the Police and the Cybercrimes Act by powerful political figures and rich individuals to hound journalists performing their constitutional duties.

Citing a police invitation to Mr. Nurudeen Yahaya Akewushola, a reporter with the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), and the organization's “Managing Directors” over a purported investigation into a case of alleged “cyberstalking” and defamation of character as the latest example of this trend, MRA said unless President Tinubu approves of and condones these Police abuses and misuse of the Law to harass journalists, he should be extremely concerned about the unflattering record they have created for him in just one year in office.

The Police invitation to the ICIR, dated April 16, 2024, but delivered to the organization on Wednesday, May 15, demanded the presence of Mr. Akewushola and the ICIR managing directors at the NPF-NCC in Abuja on

Wednesday, April 24, to discuss a purported case of cyberstalking and defamation of character in which, according to NPF-NCC, Mr. Akewushola “featured prominently”.

In a statement condemning the actions of the Police, MRA's Communications Officer, Mr. Idowu Adewale, said: “MRA notes with alarm the troubling pattern of harassment and intimidation faced by journalists in Nigeria, particularly through the misuse of the Cybercrimes Act. We are particularly disturbed by the upsurge in this deplorable Police practice under the Administration of President Tinubu, a man who owns multiple media organizations and built his political career on a history of democratic struggle.”

Noting ICIR's concerns that the Police invitation may be linked to Mr. Akewushola's investigative reporting, which uncovered allegations of corruption involving former Inspectors General of Police, Mr. Adewale said such actions by the Police to shield former heads of the Force from scrutiny constitute an odious abuse of power.

He added that MRA was concerned, based on a pattern established by the Police in previous cases where it has invited journalists for questioning, that their intention is to detain Mr. Akewushola as punishment for his investigative reporting and subsequently release him on bail indefinitely since he is being invited over an alleged investigation into a purported offence that has been abolished, to the knowledge of the Police, in the recent amendment to the Cybercrimes Act and he could therefore not be prosecuted under any circumstance for an alleged offence that does not exist in Law.

Mr. Adewale pointed out as further evidence of the lack of fairness or due process in the actions of the Police the fact that it failed to provide Mr. Akewushola and the ICIR a copy of the petition it is supposed to be investigating or any details regarding the allegations against them and yet pretends that it is giving them an opportunity to defend themselves.

He called on President Tinubu to instruct the Police to desist from the misuse of the Cybercrimes Act to suppress journalistic freedom, harass or intimidate journalists and the media, stressing that “a free and independent press is essential to the effective functioning of any democratic system of government.”

MRA Says Abduction of Global Upfront Newspaper Editor-in-chief Unacceptable, Describes Police as 'Gun for Hire'

Media Rights Agenda, on May 24, 2024, condemned as appalling and unacceptable, abduction of Mr. Madu Onuorah, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of the independent online news outlet, Global Upfront newspaper, by operatives of the Nigeria Police Force for allegedly defaming a Reverend Sister based in the United States.

Observing that the Nigeria Police has progressively become a “gun for hire” at the disposal of rich or powerful individuals or organizations who wish to silence journalists or to punish them for critical reporting, MRA argued that by constantly diverting and wasting Nigeria's security resources to hound journalists all over the country at the behest of government officials, or other rich and powerful individuals, as well as organizations, the law enforcement agency has become incapable of performing its most important function of ensuring the security of Nigerians, resulting in an upsurge in violent crimes across Nigeria.

At about 6.00 pm on May 22, 2024, 10 heavily armed policemen reportedly stormed Mr. Onuorah's home in Lugbe area of Abuja in two Sienna buses and in the presence of his wife and children, forcibly arrested and took him away without presenting any warrant of arrest or disclosing any reason for his arrest. The police seized Mr. Onuorah's phones to prevent him from reaching his family, friends, and lawyer despite pleas from his family. He was initially taken to the Lugbe Police Station from where he was later taken to Enugu.

The Enugu State Police Command later said, through its spokesman, Mr. Daniel Ndukwe, an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP), that Mr. Onuorah was duly arrested in Abuja with the assistance of police operatives from Ebonyi State Command and the aid of intelligence, after efforts made to formally invite him failed. The arrest, according to ASP Ndukwe followed the receipt of a written petition to the Commissioner of Police, Enugu State Command, against him over an alleged defamatory publication he made against a US-based Reverend Sister.

In a statement condemning the actions of the Police, MRA's Programme Officer, Ms Esther Adeniyi, described as ridiculous and nonsensical the claim by the Police that Mr. Onuorah was only arrested “after efforts made to

formally invite him failed”, saying it was a clear indication that the journalist was never invited by the Police and that there was no justification whatsoever for the huge public resources apparently wasted in dispatching policemen from Enugu and Ebonyi States to Abuja to abduct the journalist and take him to Enugu.

She argued that public resources should not be used to protect the reputations of individuals, adding that a Reverend Sister based in the United States would never write a petition to the Police for alleged defamation of character in that country but has chosen to do so in Nigeria knowing that she could successfully abuse the system by procuring the services of the Police for her personal vendetta.

Ms Adeniyi said: “We are extremely concerned that the Police are wasting government resources - human, material, and financial - to go to such lengths to prosecute what should ordinarily be a civil matter, rather than concentrating their efforts on more important security issues in the country, including in the South East. The world has since moved away from criminal defamation, which is inconsistent with regionally and internationally established norms and standards for the protection of the right to freedom of expression and media freedom. Nigeria cannot remain stuck in this antiquated practice.”

Besides, she noted, not having conducted any investigation into the subject matter of the report complained about to establish its truth or otherwise or to determine whether any offence had actually been committed, it was clearly premature and irrational for the Police to take such aggressive action against the journalist, unless they had an agenda that they were pursuing against him.

Ms Adeniyi said: “MRA finds appalling and unacceptable this tactic by law enforcement and security agencies of arresting journalists Gestapo-style, transferring them to other far away locations several hundreds of kilometres away from where they live and work, and detaining them incommunicado without any warrant of arrest and frequently without formally charging them with any offence.”

Although she expressed relief that Mr. Onuorah has now been released, she called on the Federal Government, particularly the Minister of Justice and Attorney-General of the Federation as well as the Inspector-General of

Police, to put an end to the culture of impunity for the repeated violation of constitutionally protected rights by the Police and other security and law enforcement agencies, urging that all those responsible for the journalist's unlawful and unconstitutional arrest and detention should be held accountable.

MRA Condemns Federal Government's Threat to Jail Officials Leaking Information

On July 4, 2024, Media Rights Agenda condemned as anachronistic and inimical to transparent and accountable governance a statement credited to the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Mr. George Akume, in which he threatened that Government officials who disclosed information without authorization would be jailed.

Speaking in Abuja on July 2, 2024, at a workshop organised by the Bureau for Public Service Reforms (BPSR) in collaboration with the Office of the Government of the Federation (OSGF), Mr. Akume said the unauthorised leakage of sensitive official documents constitutes a felony, claiming that there is no defence for such, either in the Constitution or Freedom of Information (FOI) Act.

In a statement by its Deputy Executive Director, Mr. Ayode Longe, MRA described as false and illogical the SGF's accusation in the same speech that civil society organisations (CSOs) “use the Freedom of Information Act to harass, intimidate and siphon resources from public officers through the dissemination of fake and unfounded information”, saying Mr. Akume's call for the regulation of the activities of civil society organizations on this ground was a red herring designed to divert attention from the Government's real challenges.

He argued that unless the SGF is saying that when CSOs apply to public institutions for information using the FOI Act, they are given “fake and unfounded information” in response, we do not see how his accusation can be remotely true, adding that we also do not see how requesting information under a valid and subsisting Law passed by the National Assembly for that purpose and assented to by the President can amount to harassment, intimidation or siphoning resources from public officers.

Calling on Mr. Akume to substantiate his allegation that civil society organizations are using the FOI Act to harass, intimidate and siphon resources from public officers, Mr. Longe stressed that the SGF's apparent aversion to transparency and accountability in government should not lead him to mischaracterize the FOI Act or falsely accuse CSOs that have only exercised the right given to them and every other person by the Act.

He said: “We are disheartened to see on public display such profound ignorance of the FOI Act by a senior official of the Federal Government. We respectfully call on him to make an effort to familiarize himself with the provisions and intent of this piece of legislation in order not to cause further embarrassment to the Government he represents.”

Mr. Longe advised the SGF that he would face an uphill task in attempting to prosecute any government official for unauthorized disclosure of information in the face of Section 27(2) of the FOI Act, which protects whistleblowers and states unequivocally that “Nothing contained in the Criminal Code or Official Secrets Act shall prejudicially affect any public officer who, without authorization, discloses to any person, an information which he reasonably believes to show mismanagement, gross waste of funds, fraud, and abuse of authority; or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety notwithstanding that such information was not disclosed pursuant to the provision of this Act” and goes on to provide that “No civil or criminal proceeding shall lie against any person receiving the information or further disclosing it.”

He noted that the SGF's preoccupation with secrecy rather than good governance was neither helpful to citizens nor to the Government itself, saying “Perhaps, if the Government was formulating and implementing policies and actions that are resulting in tangible benefits to citizens, it would not be so concerned about its decisions and actions becoming public knowledge.” He, therefore, advised the SGF to concentrate his efforts on ensuring that the Government does the right thing rather than things the Government itself appears to be ashamed of, such that it would not be afraid of its decisions and plans being revealed to the public.

Arguing that whistleblowers are vital to the integrity and proper functioning of a country's public institutions, Mr. Longe noted that “The protection of whistleblowers is now a global priority and the SGF would find himself in a face-off not just with Nigerian civil society but also with the international

community should he attempt to prosecute any official for disclosing information that reveals corruption, mismanagement of funds, fraud, waste of public resources, abuse of power, or any other wrongdoing.”

He commended those “courageous individuals” in government who have, despite such threats and in the face of great adversity, chosen to speak out against wrongdoing, whether anonymously or publicly, to expose corruption, fraud, abuse of office, and other unethical actions that undermine public trust and confidence in government, describing them as “the unsung heroes of our society.”

According to him, “Whistleblowers are driven by a profound sense of duty and a commitment to the greater good. They shine a light in the dark corners of our governments, revealing truths that many officials would prefer remain hidden. Their actions have often led to significant positive changes, including correcting injustices, the implementation of reforms, and safeguarding the public interest.”

Mr. Longe said rather than threatening whistleblowers with imprisonment in order to create a climate of fear and discourage others from coming forward, the Government should be adopting additional measures and enacting laws to ensure adequate protection for them in the light of the immense value that they bring to the society and the essential role they play in combating corruption as well as maintaining accountability and transparency.

MRA Condemns Kidnap of Journalists and Families, Calls on Federal Government to take Immediate Action to Secure their Release

Media Rights Agenda on July 8, 2024, expressed deep concern over the abduction of two journalists based in Kaduna State, along with their wives and children, and called on the Federal Government, particularly its security and law enforcement agencies, to take immediate action to secure their safe release in accordance with its duty to ensure the safety of journalists and other media workers.

According to reports, about 15 armed men invaded the Dahjonu community in Millennium City, in the Chikun Local Government Area of Kaduna State

in the night of Saturday, July 6, 2024, and abducted Mr. Abdulgafar Alabelewe, a reporter with The Nation newspaper; and Mr. AbdulRaheem Abdu of Blueprint newspaper, along with their wives and children.

In a statement issued in Lagos, MRA's Deputy Executive Director, Mr. Ayode Longe, said: "The kidnap of the two journalists and their families is a heinous act that underscores the growing dangers faced by journalists in Nigeria and the urgent need for the Federal Government to fulfill its obligation to ensure the safety of journalists and other media workers. We unequivocally condemn the abduction and call on the Federal Government, as well as all relevant security and law enforcement agencies, to take all necessary measures to secure the immediate and safe release of these journalists and their families. The government must also act swiftly and decisively to bring the perpetrators of this despicable crime to justice."

He stressed that the safety of journalists is vital to the preservation of media freedom and the protection of human rights, adding that journalists play a crucial role in informing the public, holding power to account, and fostering a democratic society, adding that any attack on them is an attack on the collective right of Nigerians to information and freedom of expression.

Mr. Longe noted that in addition to Section 14(2)(b) of the Constitution, which makes the security of all Nigerians, including journalists, the primary purpose of government, the Government also has an obligation under various regional and international instruments to which Nigeria is a party to ensure the safety of journalists, to properly and adequately investigate any attack against journalists and to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice.

He therefore urged the government to reaffirm its commitment to the safety of journalists by taking concrete steps to protect media professionals from threats, violence and other forms of attacks, including ensuring that security agencies are adequately equipped and trained to respond to such incidents and that there is a clear and effective strategy for preventing future abductions and attacks on journalists.

Mr. Longe said MRA stands in solidarity with the families of Mr. Alabelewe and Mr. Abdu during what must be an incredibly difficult time for them, and called on all Nigerians to join it in demanding the safe return of the journalists and their families.

MRA Calls on Federal Government and Security Agencies to Protect Journalists Covering Protests

Media Rights Agenda on July 31, 2024, called on the Federal Government and security agencies to protect journalists covering the protests that were scheduled to begin on August 1, 2024, stressing that as citizens exercise their democratic right to protest unpopular government policies and actions, it is imperative that journalists are able to report on the events without fear of harassment, obstruction, or violence targeted at them.

In a statement issued on its behalf by Ms Esther Adeniyi, a Programme Officer, MRA urged the government and security agencies to adopt and implement specific measures to protect journalists during the protests, including ensuring their physical safety, respecting their right to gather information, and preventing any form of intimidation or violence against them.

According to her, the call became necessary in light of recent events where journalists have faced undue harassment, obstruction, and violence while performing their duties with relevant authorities taking no steps or measures to ensure their safety, including during critical moments of public demonstrations.

Citing Principle 20 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in November 2019, which it said had been given judicial seal in Nigeria by a Federal High Court in Abuja, MRA said the Government had an obligation to take measures to prevent attacks against journalists and other media practitioners as well as to take effective legal and other measures to investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators of such attacks.

Elaborating on the scope of the government obligations, Ms Adeniyi insisted that journalists must be granted unhindered access to cover the protests and other public gatherings in general and that obstructing their ability to report in any way constitutes a direct violation of press freedom that also undermines the public's right to be informed.

She said: “The right of journalists to cover protests is fundamental to a functioning democracy. As Nigeria braces for significant protests in the coming days, it is crucial that journalists are allowed to perform their duties safely and without interference. We call on the Government and security agencies to take immediate action and proactive measures to protect journalists and uphold the principles of press freedom. In particular, the Government and security agencies should respect the role of the media and allow journalists to report freely and without hindrance; take proactive measures to ensure the safety of journalists covering the protests, including protecting them from physical harm, harassment, and unjust arrest or detention, as well as promptly investigating and bringing to justice anyone who threatens, attacks or harms any journalist.”

Ms Adeniyi also called on members of the public, including protesters, to recognize the important role that journalists play in a democracy and, therefore, support and protect them as they report on critical events affecting the nation.

She urged journalists to implement personal security plans as they go about covering the protests given the documented instances of harassment, intimidation, and violence against media professionals during previous protests. She also advised them to report any incident of attacks or harassment that they encounter while covering the protests through MRA's hotline 08065240610.

MRA Plans Workshops for Journalists on Laws Affecting Media in Nigeria

On August 5, 2024, Media Rights Agenda announced that it will convene a series of workshops across the country in the coming weeks to sensitize journalists about laws and regulations affecting the media in Nigeria and equip them with a comprehensive understanding of the legal landscape governing media operations in order to enhance their capacity to report ethically, freely and safely.

The organization said the first of the workshops, for journalists based in the south western states, would take place in Abeokuta, Ogun State, on August 6 and 7, 2024 while two other workshops will be held subsequently in Owerri,

Imo State, for journalists in the South East and South South; and in Abuja, for journalists from the northern part of the country.

In a statement issued in Lagos by its Programme Officer, Mr. Timileyin Adams, MRA explained that the workshops are informed by the need to equip journalists with the knowledge and tools necessary to enable them to navigate media laws and regulations confidently, competently and safely.

He said: “The legal landscape in Nigeria presents a complex web of laws and regulations affecting the media, some of which are misused from time to time by governments and other powerful members of the society to impede the work of journalists and the media. These workshops represent a significant step towards empowering journalists with the knowledge and skills they require to navigate the complexities of these laws and regulations as well as to enjoy the benefits of relevant regional and international instruments.”

According to Mr. Adams, each of the workshops, which will span a period of two days, will cover a range of topics and issues crucial to journalism practice, including national, regional and international frameworks on freedom of expression, media freedom and the safety of journalists; legal frameworks that are inimical to media freedom in Nigeria; digital security and common digital threats to journalism practice; ethics in journalism practice in Nigeria; beneficial legal frameworks for journalists and the media in Nigeria; how to avoid legal liabilities as a journalist; how to protect information, systems, confidential sources and contacts; and avenues for journalists to obtain legal and litigation support.

Court Orders Lagos State Government to Investigate Reporter's Death and Prosecute Killers

On August 6, 2024, Media Rights Agenda announced through a press statement that a Federal High Court in Lagos has ordered the Lagos State Government to ensure an investigation into the death of Mr. Pelumi Onifade, a 20-year reporter with Gboah TV, an online television channel, who was reportedly arrested by officers attached to a Lagos state task force while covering the #EndSARS protests in 2020, and later found dead at a mortuary in Ikorodu in Lagos, where his body was deposited. The Court also ordered

the State Government to conduct a coroner's inquest to ascertain the cause of the death of Mr. Onifade as well as identify and prosecute those responsible.

Delivering judgment in a suit filed by MRA over the death of the journalist against the Police and the Lagos State Government, Justice Ayokunle Olayinka Faji agreed that the Government's chief law officer “cannot just conduct an inquest without a duplicate of the case-file” but he ruled that section 74 of the Administration of Criminal Justice Law (ACJL) of Lagos State gives the Attorney-General the power to request for a case-file from the Commissioner of Police.

Although the Court dismissed five of the claims made by MRA against the Police on the ground that there was no evidence before the court to support them, Justice Faji noted that none of the facts in MRA's affidavit was denied by the Attorney-General who only raised an issue of law, adding that in the course of oral arguments, the Attorney-General's counsel also undertook to conduct an inquest.

Lagos-based lawyer, Mr. Charles Musa, who was selected for conferment of the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), filed an originating summons on August 4, 2021, on behalf of MRA, against the Lagos State Commissioner of Police (COP), the Inspector-General of Police (IGP) and the Attorney-General of Lagos State.

In the suit filed pursuant to Sections 6(6) and 46(1) as well as 33, 35 and 39 of the 1999 Constitution; Articles 4, 5 and 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Ratification and Enforcement) Act, 2004; and Order II Rules 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the Fundamental Rights (Enforcement Procedure) Rules 2009, the organization is asking the court to declare that:

- Mr. Onifade's shooting in Oko Oba in Agege Local Government Area of Lagos State, by agents of the COP and the IGP on October 24, 2020 in the course of his journalistic work is unconstitutional and a gross violation of his fundamental rights as guaranteed by section 33 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) and Article 4 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Ratification and Enforcement) Act (Cap A9) Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004;
- Mr. Onifade's arrest and unlawful or restriction of his liberty by agents of the COP and the IGP on October 24, 2020 in the course of his

journalistic work is unconstitutional and a gross violation of his fundamental rights as guaranteed by sections 35, 39 and 46(1) of the 1999 Constitution and Articles 5 and 9 of the African Charter;

- The constitutional and statutory duties of the respondents do not extend to unlawful detention of innocent individuals who have not been charged to Court or found guilty of any offence by a competent court of law in Nigeria; and
- The COP and the IGP have an obligation to investigate crimes committed against Mr. Onifade, a journalist exercising his right to freedom of expression as guaranteed under Sections 33 and 39 of the Constitution and Articles 4 and 9 of the African Charter.

MRA also asked the court to issue three orders, directing the respondents to launch a transparent, impartial and independent investigation into the circumstances of the death of Mr. Onifade whose body was found in a morgue in Lagos; directing them to conduct a coroner's inquest to ascertain the cause of his death; and directing them to identify and prosecute those responsible for his death.

In his judgment, Justice Faji pointed out that although the COP and the IGP were served with the originating summons and other processes in the suit, they did not file any response.

He noted that Mr. John Gbadamosi, MRA's Programme Officer who deposed to the affidavit in support of suit, did not witness any of the facts relevant to the matter, adding that there was also no documentation in support of the claim that Mr. Onifade's corpse was deposited in a mortuary.

Justice Faji also observed that although there was constant reference in the affidavit to the family of the deceased who, he said, would have the necessary information regarding their various interactions with the Police, none of them filed any evidence in support of the incident. He therefore dismissed the claims against the Police for lack of evidence.

Although the judge commended the Office of the Attorney-General of Lagos State for upholding the duties of the office by attending court and assisting the court in the matter, he noted that the explanation by the Attorney-General's lawyer that the reason a coroner's inquest was not conducted was because the duplicate of the case file was not forwarded to his office.

According to him, in response to the court's question on what the Attorney-General did about the matter since being served with the court processes, the lawyer submitted that the Attorney-General is ready to conduct an inquest.

Justice Faji stressed that the Attorney-General is not alleged to have known about the alleged unlawful killing of Mr. Onifade and is also not accused of being involved in the killing but that as stated by MRA, he has a duty to conduct an inquest into the circumstances of the death.

He said: “Indeed, in paragraph 15 of the counter affidavit, the 3rd respondent (the Attorney-General) has stated that he would prosecute anyone found to have a prima facie case established against him”.

Justice Faji therefore directed the Attorney-General to take all necessary steps to see to the investigation of the circumstances of the death of Mr. Onifade and to conduct a coroner's inquest to ascertain the cause of the death as well as identify and prosecute those responsible for his death.

MRA Calls on Federal Government to Obey Court's Order Directing it to Prevent Attacks against Journalists

On August 14, 2024, Media Rights Agenda called on the Federal Government to comply with the orders of a Federal High Court in Abuja directing it to take measures to prevent attacks on journalists and other media practitioners and to investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators of all attacks against journalists.

In a letter dated August 12, 2024 and delivered to the office of the Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice the following day, MRA expressed “deep concern regarding recent reports of continued attacks and harassment of journalists across Nigeria, particularly during the #EndBadGovernance protests, which took place between August 1 and 10, 2024, despite a subsisting order of the Federal High Court in Abuja directing the Federal 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.”

In the letter signed by the Head of its Legal Department, Ms Obioma Okonkwo, MRA reminded the Attorney-General of the judgment delivered by Justice Inyang Ekwo on February 16, 2024, in a suit it filed against the Attorney-General of the Federation in which the court granted the eight declarations sought by MRA and issued three orders directing the Federal Government to:

- Take measures to prevent attacks on journalists and other media practitioners;
- Investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators of all attacks against journalists and other media practitioners, and ensure that all victims of attacks against journalists have access to effective remedies; and
- Take measures to raise awareness and build the capacities of various stakeholders, particularly journalists and other media practitioners, policymakers, law enforcement, security, intelligence, military as well as other officials and relevant stakeholders on the laws and standards for ensuring the safety of journalists and media practitioners.

Noting that MRA had previously brought the judgment to the attention of the Attorney-General by forwarding a copy of it to him under cover of its letter dated March 5, 2024, in which the organization also requested him to take urgent steps to ensure compliance, Ms Okonkwo said: “As the chief law officer of the country and Respondent in the suit referred to above, it is your constitutional duty to ensure that the rule of law is upheld and that all orders of court are complied with fully and without delay. Non-compliance with such orders not only undermines the judicial process, it also threatens the very fabric of our democratic society.”

She stressed that the continued disregard for the court's orders amounts to contempt of court, which will not only erode public confidence in the justice system but also bring the government into disrepute nationally and internationally.

Ms Okonkwo called on the Attorney-General to take “immediate steps to ensure full compliance with the orders of the court to prevent further attacks on journalists and bring those responsible to justice.”

She urged him to act swiftly to uphold the rule of law and to demonstrate his

commitment to justice by ensuring the safety and security of journalists across Nigeria, adding that “The world is watching, and it is crucial that Nigeria upholds its democratic obligations and the protection of fundamental human rights, including freedom of the press.”

MRA Condemns Incessant Police Harassment of Journalists, Says Situation is Intolerable

Media Rights Agenda on August 26, 2024, condemned the incessant harassment and intimidation of journalists, saying recent incidents of abductions, arbitrary arrests, detention and other forms of attacks against media professionals by security and law enforcement agencies have reached alarming levels and are posing a grave danger to media freedom and democracy in Nigeria.

Describing the harassment and intimidation of journalists by the Police and other security agencies as relentless, MRA cited as latest examples of this trend, the cases of Ms Ayomide Eweje, Managing Editor of “Alimosho Today”, a community news outlet based in Lagos; a former reporter with the news organization, Mr. Wisdom Okezie and the Publisher, Mr. Oluwamodupe Akinola, who have been asked by the Nigeria Police to report to the office of the Assistant Inspector-General (AIG) of Police, Zone 2 Command in Onikan, Lagos, tomorrow, August 27, 2024 to “facilitate” an undisclosed investigation.

The three were invited through separate letters dated August 22, 2024, signed by Mr. Martin Nwogoh, a Deputy Commissioner of Police, on behalf of the AIG in charge of Zone 2 headquarters of the Nigeria Police, claiming that the office was “investigating a matter reported to the Assistant Inspector-General of Police” without saying who reported the matter or what information was required from those being invited to enable them prepare adequately.

The deputy police commissioner asked Ms Eweje, Mr. Okezie and Mr. Akinola to report to the officer in charge of the Zonal Monitoring Unit, stressing that “this is a fact-finding exercise in the interest of justice and fairness.”

In a statement issued in Lagos by the Head of its Legal Department, Ms

Obioma Okonkwo, MRA said the failure of the Police to provide details in the letter of invitation was an ambush, adding that it had identified a pattern in numerous such invitations by the Police designed to lure journalists to the police station only to detain them when they report in response to the supposed invitation.

Saying that it was curious that the Police had become the weapon of choice for public officials and other rich or powerful individuals seeking to silence and punish journalists who publish negative reports about them, Ms Obioma said: “It seems that the Police now consider journalism a crime such that anybody who is unhappy about any report published by the media is able to get the Police to hunt down any journalist involved with uncommon zeal even as real criminals go about their business unchallenged for the most part.”

According to her, it is also clear that whenever such complaints are made to the Police over media reporting, although the Police frequently claim to be investigating the complaints as their justification for summoning journalists, detaining them or charging them to court, no investigation is ever conducted to verify the truth or otherwise of the stories or articles published by journalists that resulted in the complaint made against them.

Ms Okonkwo called on the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Mr. Kayode Egbetokun, to put measures in place to stop the obvious abuse of Police powers noting that the consistent failure to check the practice in the past had created a climate of impunity as most Police officers now feel confident that there will be no negative consequences for them which has in turn emboldened many and resulted in an upsurge of unjustifiable harassment of journalists.

MRA Calls on Lagos State Government to Obey Court's Order to Investigate Reporter's Death and Prosecute Killers

On September 2, 2024, Media Rights Agenda announced through a press statement that it had called on the Lagos State Government to comply with the order of a Federal High Court in Lagos directing it to ensure an investigation into the death of Mr. Pelumi Onifade, a 20-year reporter with Gboah TV, who was reportedly arrested by the Police while covering the #EndSARS protests in 2020 and later found dead, and to identify and

prosecute those responsible.

In a letter written on the organization's behalf by its lawyer, Mr. Kingsley Kenechukwu, of the law firm of Charles Musa and Co., dated August 22, 2024 and addressed to the State's Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice, MRA urged the Government to “comply with the directives of the honorable court so that justice would be seen to be done and hope given to the common man that there is still justice in the judicial system.”

Mr. Kenechukwu reminded the Attorney-General of the July 19, 2024 decision by Justice Ayokunle Olayinka Faji, citing page 15 of the judgment where the court directed him to take “all necessary steps to see to the investigation of the circumstances of the death of Pelumi Onifade and to conduct a coroner's inquest to ascertain the cause of the death.”

The lawyer also referred to paragraph 14 of a counter-affidavit dated March 20, 2023 filed in the suit by the Attorney-General in which he stated that he would prosecute anyone found to have a prima facie case established against him in relation to the death of Mr. Onifade.

Mr. Kenechukwu recalled in the letter that during oral arguments which took place on May 13, 2024 in the suit instituted by MRA against the Police and the Lagos State Government over the death of the journalist, Mr. A. Amu, who represented the Attorney-General, also indicated willingness and readiness of the Attorney-General to conduct an inquest into the death.

He said in the light of these, MRA is praying the Government to comply with the court's directives in the interest of justice.

MRA filed the suit against the Lagos State Commissioner of Police, the Inspector-General of Police and the Attorney-General of Lagos State, asking the Court, among other things, to declare that Mr. Onifade's shooting in Oko Oba in Agege Local Government Area of Lagos State, by policemen on October 24, 2020 in the course of his journalistic work is unconstitutional and a gross violation of his fundamental rights while his arrest and subsequent restriction on his liberty by the Police were unlawful.

Although Justice Faji held in his judgment that there was no evidence before the court to support MRA's claim that the late journalist died in the custody of

the Police after which his body was deposited at the Ikorodu Mortuary in Lagos, he however granted the organization's request to order an investigation and directed the Attorney-General to take all necessary steps to see to the investigation of the circumstances of Mr. Onifade's death; conduct a coroner's inquest to ascertain the cause of the death; and identify and prosecute those responsible for his death.

MRA Condemns Harassment of Citizens by DSS for Exercising Right to Information under FOI Act

Media Rights Agenda on September 16, 2024, condemned the harassment of the leaders of a citizens group by the Department of State Services (DSS) for exercising their fundamental right to request information from the government under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, 2011, describing the act of intimidation as unlawful and aimed at undermining the very principles of transparency and accountability that the Act is designed to uphold.

The DSS in Ibeju-Lekki in Lagos State is reported to have called one of the conveners of Ibeju-Lekki Peoples Forum, Mr. Jamiu Olayinka, on telephone in the morning of September 12, 2024 and asked him to report at the DSS office in Ibeju-Lekki at 10am that same day.

Mr. Olayinka said upon honouring the invitation, he was questioned about an FOI request made to the Lagos State Government and subsequent lawsuit filed to enforce compliance with the FOI request over the \$100 million reportedly paid by billionaire businessman, Alhaji Aliko Dangote, to the State Government for approximately 7,000 acres of land now occupied by Dangote Refinery, which was compulsorily acquired by the Government without compensation and which the Government claimed to have given to Alhaji Dangote free of charge about nine years ago.

The FOI request was made by *De Renaissance Patriots Foundation*, a socio-cultural organisation, by a letter dated July 29, 2024, addressed to Lagos State

Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu, asking him to confirm a recent statement by Alhaji Dangote that he paid \$100 million as compensation for the land he acquired for his refinery.

Following the Government's failure to respond, De Renaissance Patriots and the Ibeju-Lekki Peoples Forum filed a suit against the Government asking the Federal High Court in Lagos to compel the government to respond to Alhaji Dangote's claim, and if the statement is true, to give a detailed account of how the money was collected and what it was used for.

In a statement by its Deputy Executive Director, Mr. Ayode Longe, MRA said: “The FOI Act was enacted to empower citizens to seek information, foster open governance, and ensure that government activities are transparent and accountable to the public. The harassment of individuals for legitimately exercising their right under the Act by submitting an FOI request and asking the court to enforce compliance is a direct violation of this right and a disturbing affront to the democratic ideals that Nigeria aspires to uphold.”

According to him, the FOI Act affirms the right of any person to access or request information “which is in the custody or possession of any public official, agency or institution howsoever described” while Section 1(3) of the Act also gives any person entitled to the right to information under it “the right to institute proceedings in the Court to compel any public institution to comply with the provisions of this Act.”

Mr. Longe insisted that the rights given to any person by the Act can be exercised by any group or body of persons in the light of the clear definition of a “person” under Section 30 of the Act to include “a corporation sole and body of persons whether corporate or incorporate, acting individually or as a group.”

He therefore called on the government and all relevant authorities to put an immediate end to the intimidation and harassment of citizens seeking information through lawful means, saying that the actions of the DSS not only erode public trust in the government but also violate the legal rights of all

Nigerians and members of the public to access information.

Mr. Longe said: “We urge the government to reaffirm its commitment to the rule of law and the principles of open government by ensuring that citizens can exercise their rights without fear of harassment, intimidation or retaliation. Those responsible for this harassment of citizens should be held accountable for this gross subversion of the Law and abuse of power, while the safety and freedom of those using the FOI Act to seek information must be guaranteed.”

Stressing that in a democracy, access to information is not a privilege but a right guaranteed by Law, he said: “We stand in solidarity with all citizens courageously and dutifully exercising their right to information and call for immediate remedial action to prevent further abuse of power by any organ or agency of Government.”

5.2 Media Rights Monitor Newsletter

For over two decades, Media Rights Agenda has published a monthly newsletter known as Media Rights Monitor (MRM), which has served as a tool for maintaining a strong relationship with its stakeholders, including its beneficiaries, donors, governments in Nigeria, diplomatic missions in Nigeria and around the world, other civil society organizations in Nigeria, regionally and globally, and the public at large, particularly the Nigerian society.

The MRM was distributed in its early years through physical deliveries and by post. However in the last decade, it has been disseminated via email and through online platforms, sometimes incorporating multimedia content and features to make it more engaging. Electronic dissemination has also made it easier to target audiences around the world, thereby extending its reach.

The MRM has enabled MRA to establish and maintain direct connections with members of these groups, to engage with them, inform them about developments in the media, freedom of expression, access to information,

digital rights and Internet freedom sectors and communities as well as to mobilize action and drive our advocacy efforts.

MRA uses the MRM to keep our stakeholders informed and updated about our work, initiatives, and achievements. It enables us to provide regular updates about our activities and the outcomes of those activities. However, beyond informing and engaging our stakeholders, we also rely on the MRM for much of our advocacy.

MRA tracks, collates and documents attacks against journalists and media organizations which it also publishes on its website as well as in the MRM

The monthly editions of the MRM are disseminated to various regional and international networks of media freedom and freedom of expression organizations and promoted on social media platforms. It reaches nearly 10,000 recipients every month. MRA also published issues of interest or relevance to journalists and the media sector in the newsletter.

5.3 Publications

In the course of its work during the year under review, MRA published and distributed thousands of copies of two books on media freedom. These are *Under Siege: Annual Report of Attacks on Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression in Nigeria 2023*; and *Navigating a Minefield of Laws: A Guide for Nigerian Journalists*.

The report: “*Under Siege: Annual Report of Attacks on Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression in Nigeria 2023*,” represents an important reference material on the state of freedom of expression in Nigeria in 2023 for journalists, the media, civil society groups, government and policymakers, and international advocacy groups.

“*Navigating a Minefield of Laws: A Guide for Nigerian Journalists*,” identifies and analyses Nigerian laws and regulations that affect media practice in the country both positively and negatively. It also makes recommendations for a more conducive regulatory environment for media practice in Nigeria. It is another important reference material for journalists

and media outlets to keep safe and for civil society organisations to understand the legal and policy environment and enable them to hone in on their advocacy efforts geared towards policy formulation and change.

5.4 MRA Builds the Capacity of Journalists on Laws Affecting Media in Nigeria

Media Rights Agenda trained 78 journalists across the country through a series of workshops in which it sensitized the journalists about laws and regulations affecting the media in Nigeria and equipped them with a comprehensive understanding of the legal landscape governing media operations in order to enhance their capacity to report ethically, freely and safely.

The first of the workshops, for journalists based in the south western states took place in Abeokuta, Ogun State, on August 6 and 7, 2024 with 26 journalists participating while two other workshops were held in Enugu, Enugu State, on September 11 and 12, 2024, for journalists in the South East and South South; and in Abuja on October 9 and 10, 2024, for journalists from the northern part of the country.

In a statement issued in Lagos by its Programme Officer, Mr. Timileyin Adams, MRA explained that the workshops are informed by the need to equip journalists with the knowledge and tools necessary to enable them to navigate media laws and regulations confidently, competently and safely.

Each of the workshops, which spanned a period of two days, covered a range of topics and issues crucial to journalism practice, including national, regional and international frameworks on freedom of expression, media freedom and the safety of journalists; legal frameworks that are inimical to media freedom in Nigeria; digital security and common digital threats to journalism practice; ethics in journalism practice in Nigeria; beneficial legal frameworks for journalists and the media in Nigeria; how to avoid legal liabilities as a journalist; how to protect information, systems, confidential sources and contacts; and avenues for journalists to obtain legal and litigation support, among others.

The workshops which had participants drawn from the print, radio, television and online media, were held with support from the MacArthur Foundation through the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism (WSCIJ) under the Collaborative Media Engagement for Development, Inclusivity 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.

5.5 MRA Commemorates 2024 World Press Freedom Day with CSOs, Journalists

On May 3, 2024, in commemoration of the 2024 edition of World Press Freedom Day (WPFDD 2024), MRA and Global Rights: Advocates for Sustainable Justice, in collaboration with the International Press Centre (IPC) and the Centre for Media and Society (CEMESO), held a hybrid convening in Lagos. The theme of the convening was: “The Imperative of Media Freedom for Democratic Governance”, to underscore the vital role that the media play in promoting transparency, accountability, good governance, and democracy.

The event which had various stakeholders participating in-person and online adopted the Lagos Plan of Action on Media Freedom in Nigeria.

Below is the text of the plan:

The Lagos Plan of Action on Media Freedom in Nigeria

Introduction

*On the occasion of the 2024 edition of World Press Freedom Day (WPFDD 2024) on May 3, Media Rights Agenda (MRA) and Global Rights: Advocates for Sustainable Justice, in collaboration with the International Press Centre (IPC) and the Centre for Media and Society (CEMESO), convened a one-day commemoration event in hybrid format at the IPC Conference Hall in Lagos under the theme: “**The Imperative of Media Freedom for Democratic Governance.**”*

The purpose of the convening was to reflect on the state of media freedom in Nigeria based on experiences shared by various journalists who had been victims of attacks in recent times as a result or in the course of their work as media professionals, discuss strategies and activities to improve the environment for media practice in the country and combat impunity for attacks against journalists, other media professionals and media organizations.

The event was attended in person and virtually by journalists and other media professionals from the print, broadcast and online media from across the country, media proprietors and publishers, academics, human rights defenders and representatives of various civil society organizations, lawyers and other professionals.

The convening was moderated by Ms Blessing Oladunjoye, Publisher of BONews, and addressed at the opening by Mr. Edetaen Ojo, Executive Director of Media Rights Agenda; Mr. Lanre Arogundade, Executive Director of the International Press Centre; and Dr. Akin Akingbulu, Executive Director of the Centre for Media and Society, all of whom welcomed participants, spoke about the work of their respective organizations in the promotion and defence of media freedom in Nigeria and safety of journalists. They also presented findings from monitoring activities focused on attacks on journalists and the media carried out by their organizations over the last one year, covering the first year in office of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

The meeting also heard testimonies from Mr. Clinton Umeh of the online news outlet, Journalists 101, based in Enugu; Ms. Khadija Yahaya, a journalist with Arewa Radio in Kano; Ms. Charity Uwakwe, an online journalist with Famous Reporters, based in Umuahia, Abia State; Mr. Eniola Daniel, a reporter with The Guardian newspaper in Lagos; and Mr. Benedict Uwalaka, a photojournalist with the Daily Trust newspaper, who is also based in Lagos.

The journalists shared multiple experiences of attacks that they suffered or experienced as a result of their work as journalists or in the course of carrying out their professional duties; as well as the impact of these attacks on them and on their work.

Following their testimonies, Dr. (Mrs) Uzochukwu Israel, a Clinical Psychologist in the Department of Psychology of the University of Lagos, made a presentation on the “Possible Psychosocial Effects of Attacks on Journalists and their Management” in which she shared with participants the potential mental and physical health implications of trauma, which can lead to prolonged or long term mental and physical health problems such as chronic pain, gastrointestinal issues, cardiovascular problems, immune system dysregulation, and sleep disturbances, among others. She discussed several strategies for self-management of the problem when initial symptoms manifest and emphasized the need for journalists and other victims of trauma to seek professional help in appropriate cases.

In the ensuing discussions, some other participating journalists also shared experiences of attacks that they had suffered or witnessed, with many decrying the absence of state intervention in response to such attacks, inadequate support systems from employers and the society as well as the love-hate relationship with journalism that such experiences create in them.

At the end of the event, the participants agreed to adopt this Plan of Action on Media Freedom in Nigeria.

Observations

The following observations were made in the presentations and discussions at the event:

- ◆ Journalists and other media workers continue to experience various forms of attacks, including murder and other forms of extra-judicial killings; torture and other forms of ill-treatment, inhuman or degrading treatment; arbitrary arrests and detention by law enforcement, security, intelligence and military officials; kidnappings and abductions; harassment and intimidation; threats of physical harm to them or their family members; unlawful or arbitrary surveillance undertaken by State and non-State actors; unlawful raids of their offices or homes; unlawful seizure of their equipment or professional tools, among other forms of attacks.
- ◆ Journalists and other media workers who are victims of attacks

often do not receive any support or assistance from their employers, including the media proprietors and managers, which makes the journalists feel unappreciated, abandoned and demoralized. Indeed, sometimes, media proprietors and media managers succumb to pressures from governments and other powerful actors and themselves become perpetrators of further attacks on such journalists.

- ♦ Attacks on journalists and media management can create a chilling effect on freedom of expression and media freedom as targeting journalists for their reporting or for their critical views can deter others from speaking out or reporting on contentious issues, which can lead to a narrowing of the public discourse and a reduction in the diversity of perspectives, limiting democratic participation and the exchange of ideas.
- ♦ Attacks on journalists and media management also have broader societal implications beyond the individuals directly affected as they frequently result in a weakened media environment, which can also undermine democracy, accountability, and the functioning of civil society.
- ♦ It is, therefore, imperative that the psycho-social effects which arise from the traumatic experiences of journalists who have been victims of attacks are promptly and comprehensively addressed while the safety and well-being of journalists is protected. Journalists should not keep the psychosocial trauma they suffer as a result of attacks to themselves but should seek appropriate medical support, particularly from psychiatrists and or clinical psychologists.
- ♦ Broad strategies can also be adopted to avoid or prevent the negative social implications which attacks on journalists can have on the society by advocating for press freedom, promoting legal protections, fostering a culture of respect for journalism, supporting mental health resources, and ensuring accountability for attacks on media professionals.
- ♦ There is widespread ignorance among members of the Nigerian

public about the role of journalists in society, particularly in a democratic society. As a result of this ignorance, there is a lack of awareness among members of the public that journalists play an important role in providing them with access to information that they need for critical decision making on many different levels, including personal decisions, professional decisions, economic, commercial or business decisions, and political decisions, among others. There also appears to be a lack of appreciation of the fact that without the availability of the news and information provided by journalists, the ability of members of the public to make good and effective decisions would be greatly hampered.

- ◆ Given the specific responsibilities imposed on the media by Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution and in the light of the risks, threats and reprisals that journalists and the media face in carrying out their professional functions, it is clear that they are not adequately protected in the performance of these duties either under the Constitution or any other domestic Law. It is imperative, therefore, that legal reforms should be undertaken to ensure that the media has a conducive and enabling environment to perform its constitutional functions and that those who attack or impede the media in playing its role are appropriately sanctioned.

Recommendations and Resolutions

The following recommendations and resolutions were made and adopted at the event:

- ◆ Given the scale of the challenges confronting the media sector in terms of the attacks on media freedom and the attendant hostile environment for media practice in Nigeria, it is imperative that media stakeholders foster greater collaboration to improve their effectiveness. This should encompass greater demonstration of solidarity among media professionals, among civil society organizations as well as between the media sector and civil society. There should also be better and more sharing of information about attacks and responses being contemplated or undertaken to avoid duplication of efforts.

- ◆ Collaborative efforts, tools and procedures should be developed by media stakeholders for the purpose of ensuring better tracking, documentation and dissemination of information on attacks on journalists and media freedom in general in order to ensure that all cases of attacks on media freedom or on journalists and media organizations are reported and adequately addressed.
- ◆ Media professional bodies such as the Nigeria Union of Journalists and the Nigerian Guild of Editors as well as other civil society organizations should engage with media organizations, including their proprietors and managers, and sensitize them on the need to support journalists in their employment whenever they are attacked. They also need to engage these employers on the need to provide better security for the journalists that they employ, including through arranging security training, the provision of appropriate equipment and tools to enhance their security online and offline as well as through the adoption of appropriate security policies and protocols to ensure the safety and security of the journalists.
- ◆ Federal and State Governments, through their relevant agencies such as ministries of information, the National Orientation Agency (NOA), media regulatory bodies, state-owned media establishments, among others, as well as other media stakeholders such as media professional bodies and civil society organizations should undertake media literacy and public sensitization activities to enlighten members of the public about the important role that the media play in society and the need to ensure their safety while respecting their rights. They should also be enlightened about the ethical and professional standards applicable to the media, legal and legitimate avenues open to them to seek redress when they have complaints about the conduct of media professionals or any breach of ethical or professional standards.
- ◆ Federal and State Governments as well as other media stakeholders should regularly engage with the military establishment, as well as law enforcement, security, and intelligence agencies to enlighten them about the role of the media and the rights of journalists. The content of such sensitization should also be incorporated into the training programmes for these officials in order to bring about a change in the prevailing orientation, attitude and culture.

- ◆ The Federal Government should be required and requested by media stakeholders to make a public commitment that there will be no more impunity for any military personnel, police personnel, other law enforcement, security, intelligence agencies or other government officials who violate the rights of journalists and other media workers and that henceforth any such official involved in or engaged in the violation of the rights of journalists or attacks on the media would be prosecuted in accordance with the Law.
- ◆ Further to the above, media professional bodies and other civil society organizations should work together to hold the Government accountable to this commitment by tracking, documenting and publicizing every incident of attack on journalists or the media, and ensuring that proper investigations are conducted and that the perpetrators are prosecuted in accordance with the Law regardless of their status.
- ◆ In appropriate cases, media professional bodies and other civil society organizations should take advantage of judicial and quasi-judicial mechanisms available at the national, regional and international levels to ensure that there is accountability for any attack against journalists or the media.
- ◆ Further to the above, media stakeholders resolved to establish an industry-wide legal and litigation assistance programme in collaboration with legal professionals for the benefit of journalists, other media professionals and media organizations that are victims of attacks. The programme would be supported by a dedicated fund established by the stakeholders and its ultimate objective will be to ensure that no attack on any journalist or media organization goes unchallenged and that all perpetrators are held accountable, either through civil claims for damages or through criminal prosecution. The litigation programme will also identify and mount legal challenges against specific media laws or other general laws being used or with the potential to be used to repress media freedom or impede the work of journalists.
- ◆ Media stakeholders further resolved to work with other relevant stakeholder groups to establish a national mechanism on the safety of journalists, which would have a mandate to prevent attacks on

journalists, and whenever such attacks occur, to ensure that the perpetrators are prosecuted and punished.

- ◆ In order to enhance the effectiveness of a legal assistance and litigation programme, media stakeholders resolved to work collaboratively in the near future to bring about the adoption of an appropriate policy document and the enactment of suitable legislation to protect journalists and the media, consistent with the requirements of relevant regional and international instruments applicable to Nigeria.

Adopted in Lagos this Friday, the 3rd day of May, 2024

5.6 Litigations Undertaken in 2024

In 2024, Media Rights Agenda engaged in extensive litigation to safeguard media freedoms and hold authorities accountable for actions infringing on journalists' rights and public access to information. MRA continued to pursue numerous cases, including dozens of suits outstanding from previous years. The cases included a challenge to the suspension of Twitter (now X) in Nigeria, violations of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, and infringements on journalists' rights. MRA contested the denial of requests for information made by the organization as well as some made by journalists and other civil society organizations, cases of illegal arrests and wrongful detentions; and cases challenging the constitutionality of laws or practices perceived as undermining free speech and access to information.

Throughout 2024, MRA also sought justice on behalf of journalists who suffered fatal or violent attacks due to their work, bringing these issues to the ECOWAS Court and Nigerian courts. These efforts included a landmark judgment in January, where the Federal High Court in Abuja restrained NBC from further imposing fines on broadcast media outlets, ruling that such actions exceeded the commission's authority. Through its strategic litigation, MRA has continued to advocate for the protection of journalists, legal accountability, and a robust defense of constitutional rights, underscoring various challenges facing freedom of expression in Nigeria.

Below are some of the cases that MRA litigated in 2024.

On February 22, 2024, the Federal High Court in Abuja ruled on MRA's case against the Attorney General of the Federation and NBC, challenging the suspension of Twitter in Nigeria. After several delays, the court first dismissed NBC's preliminary objection, affirming that MRA had the standing to sue under the Fundamental Rights Enforcement Procedure Rules, 2009.

However, the court ruled that the rights of the Applicant could not supersede the collective security rights of citizens and noted that freedom of expression is not absolute, allowing for restrictions under Section 45 of the Constitution. As a result, the court dismissed MRA's case.

On February 22, 2024, a Federal High Court in Abuja delivered judgment in a legal action that MRA instituted against the Attorney General of the Federation (AGF) and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), challenging the Nigerian Government's suspension of Twitter operations. After several adjournments, the case was heard on November 1, 2023, and a preliminary ruling was set for January 17, 2024. The court thereafter scheduled February 22, 2024, for the judgment, which was thereafter delivered on that day.

A Federal High Court sitting in Ikoyi, Lagos, on July 19, 2024, delivered a judgment directing the Attorney-General of Lagos State to conduct a Coroner's inquest and investigate the death of Pelumi Onifade. MRA had filed a legal action against the Lagos State Commissioner of Police, the Inspector-General of Police, and the Attorney-General of Lagos State challenging the failure to investigate the circumstances of Pelumi's death. After multiple adjournments, the case came up for hearing on December 11, 2023, but the court did not sit. Judgment was initially scheduled for July 8, 2024, but eventually delivered on July 19, 2024. The court dismissed reliefs sought against the Lagos State Commissioner of Police and the Inspector-General of Police.

In one of its strategic litigation efforts, MRA filed a suit against the Attorney General of the Federation at the Federal High Court, Lagos, challenging the failure of the Federal Government to implement the Anti-Torture Act of 2017 as well as the failure of the Attorney-General to develop regulations for its

implementation, as required by the Act. The case, presided over by Justice Ringim, had been adjourned multiple times, with the AG's office attending court, but the motion remained unheard. After a scheduled hearing in September was delayed due to the court not sitting, a new date has been set for December 4, 2024, following Justice Ringim's transfer out of the Lagos Judicial Division of the Court.

The ECOWAS Community Court of Justice on May 30, 2024, delivered judgment in a lawsuit filed by Media Rights Agenda against the Federal Government of Nigeria challenging the Government's failure to protect the rights and ensure the safety of eight journalists who were murdered while performing their professional duties. The class action suit was filed by MRA to seek accountability for the government's inability to prevent the killings and its failure to investigate and prosecute those responsible.

In a judgment delivered on February 16, 2024, Justice Inyang Ekwo, presiding judge, ordered investigations to be carried out into the unresolved cases of extra-judicial killing of Dele Giwa and other named journalists in the country. MRA had filed a class action against the Attorney General of the Federation, challenging the Nigerian Government's failure to take adequate measures to prevent attacks on journalists and media practitioners and to investigate such attacks.

In another strategic litigation effort, MRA filed a suit against the Attorney General of the Federation to affirm the applicability of Principle 20 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa in the Nigerian context and to ensure its enforcement. Principle 20, titled "Safety of journalists and other media practitioners" outlines the obligations of the State to ensure the safety of journalists and other media practitioners by preventing attacks against them as well as taking effective legal and other measures to investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators of attacks against them. The proceedings, initially set for October 19, 2022, faced delays due to the AGF's non-attendance and lack of legal representation from his office. Subsequent hearings were rescheduled multiple times, including on April 3, 2023, and June 29, 2023, before being set for November 3, 2023, but the court did not sit. The matter was again adjourned to February 23, 2024, for hearing, and then adjourned to June 10, 2024, and July 2, 2024. On July 2, 2024, the court did not sit due to the fact that the presiding judge, Justice Nnamdi Dimgba, had been elevated to the

Court of Appeal bench, leading to a further adjournment of the matter to October 15, 2024. The court also did not sit on October 15, 2024, and no new date had been set, as Justice Nnamdi Dimgba, who was recently elevated, has yet to be replaced by another judge.

In 2021, MRA assisted Mr. Eniola Daniel, a reporter with The Guardian newspaper, in a legal challenge against Chief Superintendent of Police Shola Jejeloye and the Lagos State Government for violating his human rights during his journalistic activities. MRA filed a fundamental human rights suit at the Federal High Court in Lagos, which faced multiple delays. The case was heard on October 26, 2023, with a judgment originally set for December 13, 2023, but was postponed to January 30, 2024. On January 29, the court registrar confirmed that the session scheduled for February 2 had been canceled, and the judgment was instead delivered on January 30, 2024. In her ruling, Justice Yellin S. Bogoro dismissed the suit, citing insufficient evidence to substantiate the claims.

MRA filed a class action suit at the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice against the Federal Republic of Nigeria concerning the murders of 11 journalists while they were performing their journalistic duties. The judgment was initially scheduled for January 30, 2024, but was delivered on March 4, 2024. A three-member panel of the court, presided over by Justice Gberi-be Ouattara and delivered by Justice Dupe Atoki, concluded that the journalists' case could not be classified as a “public interest” litigation given that the loss of life is personal. As a result, the court dismissed the petition. Although the court acknowledged that the murders constituted a gross violation of the journalists' rights, it ruled that it lacked jurisdiction to entertain the case or award reparations for the victims as the case was not brought by family members.

MRA filed an application for judicial review against the National Broadcasting Commission and the Attorney General of the Federation regarding the wrongful denial of a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act, 2011. The case was initially adjourned to February 12, 2024, for hearing and later rescheduled for judgment on April 29, 2024. Judgment was ultimately delivered on May 8, 2024, with the court dismissing the suit for lack of merit, citing insufficient proof of delivery of MRA's request for information to the Commission.

In a separate suit, MRA filed an application for judicial review against the National Broadcasting Commission and the Attorney General of the Federation over the Commission's refusal to provide information requested under the Freedom of Information Act, 2011. The hearing was initially set for February 12, 2024, but was later postponed to April 29, 2024, for judgment. On May 8, 2024, the court dismissed the case, citing a lack of sufficient evidence to prove the delivery of MRA's information request to the NBC.

In 2020, MRA provided legal assistance to a journalist, Blessing Oladunjoye, to initiate legal action against the Nigerian Shippers Council and its Executive Secretary for alleged wrongful denial of her freedom of information request by the council. The court scheduled a hearing for the council's preliminary objection and counter-affidavit on February 15, 2024. The case was then adjourned to April 17, 2024, for mention, and subsequently to September 24, 2024, for hearing, with hearing notices to be served on the Respondents. However, on September 24, 2024, the court did not sit, leading to a further adjournment to November 14, 2024, for mention.

MRA filed a suit against the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Senator Michael Opeyemi Bamidele, Senator Mohammed Sani Musa, and the Attorney General of the Federation, challenging the constitutionality of the Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation Bill, commonly known as the Social Media Bill. MRA contended in the suit that the bill did not comply with international human rights standards and the Constitution. However, on February 16, 2024, the court delivered its judgment, striking out the suit on the ground of lack of jurisdiction.

In 2020, MRA provided legal assistance to Blessing Oladunjoye, who was denied a Freedom of Information request, to initiate legal action against the Federal Institute of Industrial Research, Oshodi and its Director General. The matter was first scheduled for hearing on March 7, 2024, but was adjourned to May 17, 2024, due to the absence of proof of service of hearing notice on the Respondents. It was later rescheduled to July 9, 2024, but the court did not sit as the judge attended a seminar in Abuja. The hearing was then adjourned to September 25, 2024, and further postponed to December 11, 2024, for the report of service.

On July 22, 2024, Justice Binta Nyako of the Federal High Court in Abuja

granted all the reliefs sought by Heptano Communications Limited, publishers of Sport Intelligence Newspaper, and ordered the Minister of Sport and Youth Development to pay the media outlet N1 million as exemplary and aggravated damages for the unlawful violation of Heptano's right of access to information under the Freedom of Information Act, 2011. The court also made an order directing the Attorney General of the Federation to institute criminal proceedings against the Minister or whoever is responsible for supplying the information requested for the offence of wrongful denial access to information under Section 7 (5) of the FOI Act. MRA provided legal assistance to Heptano Communications in filing and litigating the suit against the Minister.

On January 17, 2024, Justice Rita Ofili-Ajumogobia of the Federal High Court in Abuja ruled in favour of MRA, restraining National Broadcasting Commission from further imposing fines on broadcasting platforms. She declared the provisions of the Nigeria Broadcasting Code authorizing NBC to impose fines as null and void, stating that regulatory bodies cannot exercise judicial powers. She set aside the N5 million fines imposed on some broadcasting stations by the NBC and issued an order of perpetual injunction restraining the NBC from imposing fines on any media platform for alleged code violations. MRA had filed a suit against the NBC challenging the fines it imposed on Multichoice Nigeria, TSTV, and NTA-Startimes for airing the BBC Africa Eye documentary "Bandits Warlords of Zamfara."

In another case, MRA filed an application for judicial review against the National Broadcasting Commission and the Attorney General of the Federation at the Federal High Court in Lagos challenging the denial of a request for information made under the Freedom of Information Act, 2011. The case was initially adjourned to January 15, 2024, for judgment. However, on January 16, 2024, the court notified the lawyers to the parties that the judgment was not ready, and a new date would be communicated. On February 5, 2024, the court delivered its judgment, ruling that MRA's case against NBC was statute-barred and dismissed the suit.

In yet another case, Media Rights Agenda filed a class action suit against the National Broadcasting Commission on November 8, 2021, challenging fines imposed on 23 broadcast stations. The case was slated for a report on the service of the MRA's Originating Motion, which was confirmed by the NBC's counsel. The case was adjourned to June 27, 2024, for the hearing of the

Originating Motion. On that date, the NBC served a counter-affidavit dated June 25, 2024 on MRA's legal representative, leading to a further adjournment of the suit to November 27, 2024, for hearing.

Profile of Media Rights Agenda

Media Rights Agenda was established in 1993 as an independent, non-partisan, not-for-profit, non-governmental organization for the purpose of promoting and defending the right to freedom of expression, media freedom, and access to information. However, it was formally registered in 1997 with the Corporate Affairs Commission. It also has Observer Status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Banjul, The Gambia.

Activities

MRA's activities are varied and include, but not limited to public awareness and enlightenment, research and publication, litigation and legal services, advocacy and campaigns as well as training and capacity building. It implements activities in the following areas:

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 conducts strategic litigation aimed at improving the legal, regulatory and institutional environment for media practice in Nigeria as well as advancing the frontiers of the right to freedom of expression.

It has pursued both approaches at Nigerian domestic courts as well as before international judicial forums, including the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights where it has litigated a significant number of cases on freedom of expression and media freedom.

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

Advocacy/Campaigns

MRA runs an Advocacy and Campaigns Programme under which it has 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 was proposed by Media Rights Agenda to the National Assembly in July 1999 and finally became Law on May 28, 2011, although it had previously been passed by the National Assembly in 2007 but did not become law at that time as then President Olusegun Obasanjo refused to assent to it. The Act guarantees any person a right to access information in the custody of government, its agencies and institutions as well as private bodies carrying out public functions, providing public services or utilizing public funds.

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 media 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 campaigns for the adoption of Access to Information laws in different countries in Africa, including Liberia, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, Ghana, Zambia, Namibia, among others. MRA has also been involved in regional campaigns to advance digital rights and Internet freedoms.

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.

