

4th Quarterly Report By the PUL Media Alert Office

Monday, March 19, 2018

Introduction:

In accordance with the Term of Reference (TOR) of the Media Alert Office, we are pleased to submit, to the Leadership of the Press Union of Liberia the 4TH Quarterly Report.

It can be recalled that the Media Alert Office, since its birth on April 10, 2017, has released three previous quarterly reports.

The reports, as we all may know have been focusing on threats/attacks on journalists and media institutions in Liberia, including issues of free speech.

Methodology:

The methodology, as usual, entails the collection of local dailies and going through them, monitoring of radio stations (news and talk shows) and the receiving of direct reports.

Verification:

Figures gathered are normally verified by going on the spot, getting in touch with independent sources on the ground, as well as making contacts with civil society actors and the Press Union of Liberia coordinators in the various regions of Liberia.

1. Attack Number One

The Media Alert Office captured another attack on Reporter Henry Karmo of Front Page Africa.

Reporter Karmo was allegedly insulted and assaulted in the open by Montserrado County District 9 Representative, Munah-Pelham-Youngblood.

The incident occurred on Tuesday, February 13 at the Capitol, where PUL members and others who cover the Legislature are assigned.

The Press Union of Liberia, after hearing the sad development issued a statement, to condemn the act.

It can also be recalled that prior to the incident involving the Front Page Africa reporter, two other Legislative reports were allegedly attacked by Grand Bassa County Senator, Nyongblee Karnga-Lawrence.

The concerned reporters are Austin Kawah and Abraham Morris. The incident occurred on Wednesday, January 31, 2018 on the grounds of the Capitol.

Reporter Karmo's situation followed a recent publication by the local daily, seen as very critical and perhaps embarrassing to the lawmaker.

The publication was looking at what is glaringly the dual role being played by Representative Youngblood, since President George Weah ascended to the Presidency, that is, performing the role of a representative and at the same time protocol officer, especially during the State of the Nation Address by the Liberian Chief Executive.

However, a further verification process by the Media Alert Office has shown something contrary.

The Media Alert Office paid a visit to the Managing Editor of the Heritage Newspaper, Mohammed Kanneh. During discussions and further inquiries, Mr. Kanneh said one of the journalists was late as the lawmakers were already in session. He said based on their lateness, the doors were shut to avoid distraction during

deliberations. The two reporters insisted that they had to enter the Chambers at all cost. Mr. Kanneh said as the journalist's voice and noise were penetrating the door, Senator Nyunblee Karnga-Lawrence came out to ensure orderliness in her capacity as Chairman on Rules and Order. He said it was at the juncture that one of them became very emotional to the point that he even started pointing his fingers at the Sergeant-At-Arms who was still standing at the door.

"In the process his finger went into the Sergeant -At-Arms' jaw," Kanneh told the Media Alert Office.

The Media Alert Office therefore thinks the situation does not warrant being documented as an attack on the two journalists.

2. Attack Number Two

During the reporting period, the Media Alert Office was able to capture another attack involving Reporter Sylvester Choloplay of the FABRICS FM.

Reporter Choloplay had gone to the Slaughter House, commonly known as Cow Factory on Gardnerville-Somalia Drive on February 15, 2018 to initiate investigation into allegations of pollution by the management of Slaughter House.

In his interview with some of the residents, it was revealed that people were falling ill on a daily basis due to the pollution from the area. The residents called for government's intervention.

After his interview with Beatrice Kanneh, believed to be the Services Manager of Slaughter House, he was called on his phone to return to Ms. Kanneh for additional points, not knowing that they lady in question and some individuals said to be her employees had problem with the interview.

Based on what was established to be a consensus reached by the group, Reporter Sylvester returned , not knowing there were

people already planted, allegedly by Ms. Kanneh to jump on him, force his recorder and phone out from his hands in order to delete the recordings.

It was God who saved the journalist from the hands of these people.

As a result of the act, Reporter Sylvester's recorder is not functioning as it used to be.

3. Attack Number Three

During the reporting period, another staff of FABRICS, Sylvester Worwee came under physical attack by a man believed to be officer of the Armed Forces of Liberia, AFL, in person of Isaac Duo. Officer Duo, alias, Sergeant Natt, slapped Journalist Worwee in his full head on the Kesselle Boulevard Community in Barnersvill on February 23, 2018.

The reporter was making a call in the area during the evening hours when Officer Duo, stopped by him and started asking him several questions. The officer was not in uniform to be quickly identified by Worwee. He tried to forcefully ask for the reporter's mobile phone as the reporter was taking him for a criminal based on his appearance- one, not being in uniform and being under the influence of alcohol.

According to Mr. Worwee, the AFL soldier has since apologized and is still trying to extend his apology through some neighbors.

4. Attack of the year 2018.

Of all of the attacks tracked, collated and analyzed and subsequently published since the birth of the Media Alert Office on April 10, 2017, we consider the situation involving the BBC's Jonathan Paye-Layleh and Liberian President, George Weah as the greatest.

The Media Alert Office views the Liberian leader's statement against Mr. Paye-Layleh as the biggest of all of these attacks because it comes from a sitting President of our country, who has,

on several occasions vowed to promote a free and vibrant press during his administration.

In particular- President Weah hailed his predecessor, Madam Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf for signing the Table Mountain Declaration in 2012. President Weah's comments against Journalist Paye-Layleh, on March 22, 2018, during a media stakeout at the Foreign Ministry, in the presence of international guests, including the UN Deputy Secretary General, Madam Almina Mohammed continue to raise concerns about his sincerity.

During the press stakeout, the Liberian Chief Executive accused Journalist Paye-Layleh of being against him (president) at the time he was advocating for human rights in Liberia. The President also said Journalist Paye-Layleh was painting a positive picture of the Liberian crisis through his reports to the BBC.

The BBC stringer, including the Press Union of Liberia made efforts to seek clarification/explanation from President Weah., but to no avail.

As we release this report, Journalist Paye-Layleh has surfaced in the United States of America, clearly for dear life.

Besides, before the Liberian leader could openly accuse Journalist Paye-Layleh once being against him, there were series open verbal attacks on the media community in Liberia by both senior and junior officials in President Weah's CDC-led Government.

Among them are Deputy Information Minister for Public Affairs, Eugene Fahgon, Finance and Development Planning Minister, Samuel Tweah and Monrovia City Mayor, Jefferson Kojee.

Documented instances:

1. On Tuesday, March 13, 2018, Mr. Kojee warned that the CDC-led Government, he vigorously campaigned to bring to power, won't be unsettled by the reports of the media.

Mr. Kojee was quoted in the local dailies as saying : "We [will] stand tall to work for our people and careless about the media criticisms of this government."

2 Mayor Koijee's pronouncements came after another statement from Deputy Information Minister for Public Affairs, Eugene Fahngon.

Mr. Fahngon vowed that the Media in Liberia will remain poor or broke for the next 12 year, inferring that President Weah will win a second term. Minister Fahngon accused the journalism community in Liberia of denting the election campaign of President Weah by tagging him as being "dull" and as well accompanied that description with other derogatory languages.

5. Threats of Law Suit against Hot Pepper

The Hot Pepper Newspaper, in its Tuesday, March 27, publication, Volume 2 Number 652 reported a threat of law suit against the local daily by a former officer of the defunct Special Anti-Terrorism Unit (SATU), an armed unit that was established by slain Liberian President, General Samuel Kanyan Doe before the Liberian Civil War.

Here is a caption of the paper's front page lead story:

April 14, 1979 Rice Riot Alleged Killer Threatens Hot Pepper With Law Suit

--- Hot Pepper Responds
(Details still being established-----)

PUL position on attacks:

The Press Union of Liberia has not ever withdrawn from the battle front of responding to these increasing attacks on the media community in Liberia since then. The Union, has, among other things sought explanations, condemned and warned against further unfriendly actions against journalist in Liberia.

Recommendation:

The Media Alert Office is appealing to all of us to help publicize its work, as the tracking process is intended to highlight what is affecting us as journalists in Liberia.

The appeal is based on two separate occasions of the quarterly reports not being carried by many media institutions.

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