



H. E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf,
President of Liberia
Executive Mansion
Monrovia
Liberia

30 August 2013

Your Excellency,

We are writing on behalf of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum, which represent 18,000 publications, 15,000 online sites and over 3,000 companies in more than 120 countries, to express our deep concern over the closure of FrontPageAfrica and the imprisonment of managing editor, Rodney Sieh.

Mr. Sieh was jailed on Wednesday 21 August following his inability to pay an exorbitant US\$1.5 million fine imposed in a Supreme Court ruling convicting him for libel. Reports say Mr. Sieh has since been hospitalized after beginning a hunger strike to protest his detention.

In 2010, FrontPageAfrica reported the findings of an official government inquiry that accused the former Minister of Agriculture, J. Chris Toe, of corruption. Mr. Toe resigned from his position but was never charged.

We are deeply concerned that the imposition of such a heavy fine was a deliberate attempt to silence a critical media outlet. FrontPageAfrica has repeatedly reported on corruption, official misconduct, and human rights abuses. We are also troubled by unconfirmed reports of jury tampering and call for an urgent review of Mr. Sieh's case.

In July 2012, at a signing ceremony for the Declaration of Table Mountain, you committed Liberia on a path to greater press freedom. We respectfully remind you of your words from that day: "We are signing the Declaration of Table Mountain in order to underscore our message loud and clear, to advance a free press and freedom of expression, not just in Liberia but the entire continent of Africa."

The excessive libel damages imposed on Mr. Sieh for reporting the findings of an official government inquiry into corruption, his imprisonment, and the closure of an important independent newspaper are all serious setbacks to press freedom and the fight against corruption in Liberia.



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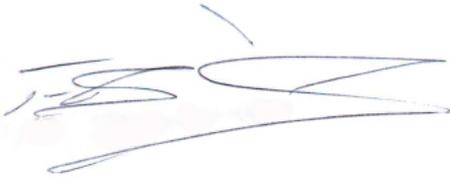
Where reasonable damages are proven legitimate recourse to errors committed by the press, any compensation should be awarded in proportion to the offence committed and should not be used to undermine the financial stability of an independent media house.

Furthermore, the episode calls into disrepute the spirit of the Declaration of Table Mountain as well as the pledges made by you and your government to make Liberia freer and more accountable. It is also in contravention of the Pan-African Parliament resolution, passed in October 2012, entitled 'Press Freedom for Development and Governance: Need for Reform', in which member states are encouraged to sign the Declaration as part of their commitment to promoting the principles of human rights and democracy in Africa and encouraging good governance, transparency and accountability.

We respectfully remind you that jailing journalists and closing media houses on charges of defamation or for "insulting" authorities or their policies, prevents legitimate public discourse and critical writing and leads to self-censorship.

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tomas Brunegård', with a horizontal line underneath.

Tomas Brunegård
President
World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Erik Bjerager', with a horizontal line underneath.

Erik Bjerager
President
World Editors Forum

WAN-IFRA is the global organisation for the world's newspapers and news publishers, with formal representative status at the United Nations, UNESCO and the Council of Europe. The organisation groups 18,000 publications, 15,000 online sites and over 3,000 companies in more than 120 countries.