

Media Alert Data

(April – June 2020)

Thirteenth Quarterly Report by the PUL Media Alert Office

Introduction:

In accordance with the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the Media Alert Office, I am pleased to submit, to the leadership of the Press Union of Liberia and partners, the 13th Quarterly Report.

It can be recalled that the Media Alert Office, since its birth on April 10, 2017, has released twelfth 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 some radio stations (news and talk shows) and the receiving of direct reports.

Verification:

Figures gathered are normally verified by going on the troubled spots, getting in touch with independent sources on the ground, as well as making contacts with civil society actors. At the same time, the Media Alert Office makes contacts with the Press Union's coordinators in the various counties, as part of its tracking process.

Attack:

1. On Thursday, May 7, 2020, Journalist David K. Yango, of the Vision Communications Network Incorporated (Strong FM 98.3 / TV) was attacked and beating by Police Officers of the Red-light Zone 9 Deport # 2, during his reportorial duty. David and other reporters were interviewing marketers meaning women who goods were seized by police officers. According to the Police, the market women were selling at a wrong spot. The Strong FM Reporter was arrested, beaten and jailed. David suffered injuries after the police used of force.
2. On Sunday, May 7, 2020, Journalist Christopher Walker of Front Page Africa was again attacked by officers of the Liberia National Police (LNP) assigned at the Slip Way Check point in Monrovia at the hour of 9:05pm. Walker was on his way home from work when he detained for what the police said was his failure to display the controversial Fahngon Pass. The Press Union of Liberia had disagreed with the Deputy Information Minister arbitrary nullification of a previous pass approved by the Journalists' Union and the

3. On Friday, May 9, 2020, at 8 – 9 pm Journalist David Kpanie of the Voice of Pleebo was attacked, threatened and insulted by Wellington Kyne, City Major of Pleebo in Maryland. Kpanie had interviewed Robert Weah, coordinator of Speaker Chamber’s Constituency and George Tamba Kortheh, Administrator of Mcintosh Rental Truck Services on a Talk show on Voice of Pleebo.
4. On Wednesday, May 20, 2020, at 3: 01pm Journalist Sunny Blar of the Development Communication Network FM 91.3 (DCN) of Cestos, River Cess County was attacked and beaten by Officer Jerry Blamo, Chief of Operation of the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency (LDEA) after he had gone across the street to purchase a bag of mineral water. The LDEA Officer confronted the reporter to stay across the street because it was already curfew time but the reporter told the officer that he was only going to purchase the water and immediately return to the radio station. In an effort to convince the LDEA Officer, Reporter Blar displayed his press card but was disregarded and whipped.
5. On Friday, May 22, 2020, at 9: 22am Journalist Abraham Saah of Foya District Kissi TV Radio (FDKTV) an Online Media Platform was attacked by family and local people after he reported the story of a fifteen years old (15) girl who was raped and impregnated by her step dad.

The Press Union of Liberia contacted regional security chiefs and local authorities on the safety of journalists.

6. Government of Liberia On Saturday, May 23, 2020, Journalist Trojan Kaizolu of Fabric Radio was attacked by Melvin Sackor, Deputy Police Director for Operation (102), and ordered him flogged. Trojan was seized and bundled into a police pickup truck and taken to a nearby police station. Col. Sackor later apologized for what he termed as unfortunate situation.

Threat:

7. On Thursday, April 30, 2020, Solicitor General, Cllr. Sayma Syrenius Cephus threatened to seize equipment, shut down and prosecute media institutions who he said will be found publishing or airing ‘fake news’ during the Coronavirus Pandemic or COVID-19 period in the country. His decision was triggered by an unconfirmed information reported by a local radio station and was also trending on social media that President Weah had been tested positive of the Coronavirus. Some of President Weah’s confidants earlier tested positive for the virus.

In reaction, the Press Union of Liberia vowed to challenge through the courts state prosecutors threats to shutdown media institutions that they deem culpable of disseminating 'fake news' during the current state of emergency imposed on the country. The Union insisted that the current emergency is focus on health and that using it for other ends under the edges of fake news including the curtailing of media freedom violates constitutional rights.

Current legal regimes of the media in Liberia, the Press Union asserts forbids arbitrary closure of media institutions. To alleged that some media institutions have been using their platforms to spread 'fake news' without naming them represents intolerance for public scrutiny of the government.

8. On Friday, May 1, 2020, Assistant Minister for Public Affair, Eugene Fahngon, threatened that journalists and media workers who will not be using his approved pass issued by the Ministry of Information should be dealt with by State Security. His statement came in the wake of war of words between Fahngon and the Press Union of Liberia on the rightness of the Deputy Minister's unilateral decision to nullify first press pass approved by all media stakeholders.
9. On Thursday, May 7, 2020, it was reported by Journalist Ansu Sheikh Sonii, Station Manager of Voice of Top FM has been harassed, intimidated and threatened by Officer Ambrose Brown of Grand Cape Mount County Police Detachment and Mr. Papa Nynabu. The station had reported that Officer Brown discharged fire-arm unlawfully in the town of Kinjor, Gola Konneh District. Firing of the deadly weapon left residents in fear.

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 journalists 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. Many thanks to our partners for supporting the work of the Media Alert Office

Thanks,

James L. Davids

Media Alert Officer/PUL

Photo Evident:



Melvin Sackor, Deputy Police Director for Operation (102), Journalist Trojan Kaizolu of Fabric Radio and Charles B. Coffey Jr. President of PUL



Melvin Sackor, Deputy Police Director for Operations, Journalist Trojon Kiazolu, Charles B. Coffey Jr. President of PUL and Daniel Nyakonah, Vice President of PUL



Journalist David K. Yango, of Strong FM been beaten by Police Officers



Journalist David K. Yango, been interview KMTV Crew

