



# PRESS UNION OF LIBERIA (PUL)

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FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION OF AN INVESTIGATION CONDUCTED INTO JUDGE JOMAH JALLAH AND CLLR. SAYMA SYRENUS CEPHUS COMPLAINTS AGAINST FRONTPAGE AFRICA NEWSPAPER.

DONE ON FEBRUARY 8, 2022, AT THE PUL HEADQUARTERS ON 44<sup>TH</sup> CLAY STREET, MONROVIA, LIBERIA.

## COMPLAINTS:

On January 13, 2022, Cllr. Jomah Jallah, Stipendiary Magistrate of the Monrovia City Magisterial Court, Temple of Justice, and Liberia's Solicitor General, Cllr. Sayma Syrenus Cephus, filed separate complaints with the Press Union of Liberia (PUL), against FrontPage Africa Newspaper for its January 23, 2022 publication linking them to alleged money launderer, Patrick Wahi Hermann.

The Publication of the Front Paper Africa Newspaper:

January 23, 2022 edition of its publication, captioned "Solicitor General, Judge talking with the Criminal" a direct allegation that the Magistrate and Cllr. Cephus have been talking with a certain alleged money-launderer called Patrick Wahi Hermann.

Beginning with Judge Jomah Jallah:

In his letter of complaint, Judge Jallah accused Front Page Africa Newspaper of damaging his hard-earned character, reputation, the integrity and independence of the Liberian Judiciary by a "false and misleading" publication, and at no time did he Judge Jomah Jallah talk with any money launderer, let alone Patrick Wahi. He further indicated that the newspaper did not also contact him for his side of the story. Cllr. Jallah, then requested the PUL to investigate the matter and give him justice.

Cllr. Cephus version:

In like, manner, Cllr. Cephus denied talking with Patrick Wahi Hermann, the alleged money launderer, and requested the PUL to probe the matter and give them justice. Upon receipt of the complaints, the PUL constituted an investigative panel and subsequently invited Cllr. Jallah, Cllr. Cephus and the management of the Front Paper Africa Newspaper to a hearing.

The hearing was conducted on January 27, 2022 by the investigative panel headed by the President of the Press Union of Liberia Charles B Coffey, Jr

Methodology:

The PUL code of ethics was used as tools for the investigation. The code of ethics is the standard of professional practice for Liberian journalists and/or media practitioners engaged in gathering, transmitting, disseminating and commenting on news and information.

The Investigation:

The panel probed into the matter, by getting both Judge Jallah, Cllr. Cephus and Front Page Africa newspaper sides of the story.

Judge Jallah first took the stance, he told the PUL investigative panel, as earlier indicated in his letter of complaint, that at no time did he talk to the alleged money-launderer Patrick Wahi Hermann as reported by FrontPage Africa, and challenged the paper's management to provide evidence. Judge Jallah further informed the panel, that the paper did not contact him to get his side of the story.

For his part, Solicitor General Cephus, confirmed receiving text message from Lennart Dodoo, editor of FrontPage Africa Newspaper, at exactly 8:15PM on January 12, 2022, informing him of having documents linking him to alleged money launderer, Patrick Wahi Hermann.

Replied Cllr. Cephus: "Lennart thanks a lot for taking the time off to reach me by text. However, when you say documents, I do not understand and the only way it would be possible for a lawyer of my status to respond is for you to kindly share with me the documents.

The expression "I have documents" is quite vague and seems a mindset game requiring me to respond to something that is hidden from me. That as a professional

journalist myself, I shall be pleased for you to let me see those documents before you go to press. I trust that you will have the courage to do so.” Following the aforesaid response, Dodoo again texted me.

“Cllr. Cephus, can you confirm or deny that you have been communicating with Patrick Hermann who has been indicted for money laundering, theft of property, wire fraud and criminal conspiracy?”

However, Cllr. Cephus told the panel that he has no link with the alleged money launderer, Patrick Wahi Hermann and request the Front Page Africa Newspaper to provide evidence.

Response from Front Page Africa Newspaper:

Front Page Africa was represented by its Managing Editor Rodney Sieh and News editor Lenard Dodoo. They first denied allegation of blackmailing raised by Cllr. Cephus and Judge Jallah in their letter of complaint to the PUL.

On the issue of the January 23, 2022 story linking Judge Jallah and Cephus to alleged money launderer Patrick Wahi Hermann, the two Front Page Africa Newspaper managers insisted of reporting a factual story.

Though, they claimed having a call log of conversation between, or among Solicitor General, the Judge and the alleged money launderer, the Front Page Africa Newspaper management failed to produce the call log or provide evidence on the subject matter brought before the PUL, by the plaintiffs.

Instead of the issue involving Patrick Wahi Hermann and the plaintiffs, the Front Page Africa Newspaper, presented a copy of its second publication linking Cllr. Cephus and Judge Jallah to a co-defender Jonathan Davies in the alleged money laundering case. The Front Page Africa Newspaper management also provided documents depicting a call log of conversation among Jonathan Davis and the plaintiffs.

In reaction, Judge Jallah and Solicitor General Cephus insisted that their complaints were squarely about the paper news story linking them to suspect Patrick Wahi

Hermann, and demanded the call log or evidence of their conversation with Patrick Wahi Hermann as alleged by the newspaper.

However, Rodney and Dodo argued that the Magistrate and the Solicitor General conversation with suspect Jonathan Davies was equally a conflict of interest as he is being prosecuted by government for the same crime allegedly committed by Patrick. Judge Jallah further indicated that there is no money laundering case before him, involving Jonathan Davis and again requested the Rodney and Dodo to confine themselves to the case before the PUL.

At the same time, Magistrate Jallah maintained that the case was not before him during his conversation with Jonathan Davies and that was not his issue in the complaint presented to the PUL.

Findings:

Following careful scrutiny of the explanation and argument put forth by both plaintiffs and defendants, PUL conclude with the following:

That FrontPage Africa Newspaper failed to provide call-log of conversations between and among Judge Jomah Jallah, Solicitor General Cephus and Patrick, as such it could not substantiate claims that Cllr. Cephus and Judge Jallah were in conversation with the alleged money launderer. However, the paper provided a call log of a conversation between and among Judge Jallah, Cllr. Cephus and one Jonathan Davies who is indicted by the Government of Liberia of the same crime with Patrick Wahi Hermann and presented same to the investigative panel. The paper also did not exert substantial effort to contact Judge Jallah for his side of the story although the Paper stated that he could not be reach up to press time.

The Panel maintained that the a story of such needed substantial effort to get the side by the Judge be either texting him or visiting his office but a single call which didn't go through was not enough to be his side of the story. The Paper News editor stated in response that they could not establish contact with him through his phone and it was a weekend publication and could not wait.

Signed

Members of the PUL Investigative Panel

James Davids

Musa Kenneh

Approved

Charles B Coffey, Jr

President of the PUL/ CHAIRMAN

PUL INVESTIGATIVE PANEL