

Press Freedom in Nigeria: Seven Unresolved Killings, over 300 violations Underline Impunity under Buhari's Administration



THE STATE OF MEDIA FREEDOM IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

Section 22 of Chapter 11 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended confers on the press, radio, television and other agencies of mass communication, the obligation to uphold at all times, the fundamental objectives contained in the chapter, as well as uphold the responsibility of the government to the people. It is therefore the responsibility of the media to hold people in Government accountable for their actions or inactions.

Regarded as the fourth estate of the realm, the media are an essential factor in the process of democracy. They do not only monitor governance and make government accountable, but also help to mobilise the populace to participate in the process of governance and development.

Since the functions of government are clear, in performing these functions, government officials are expected to be honest, responsible, transparent, accountable, efficient in administration and services delivery. Where any of these is lacking or is deliberately subverted, it is the responsibility of the media to raise alarm.

However, certain vested interests, especially in government, business and politics, do not appreciate the media's watchdog role and are bent on preventing journalists from shining light on their anti-social activities. Over the past five years, there have been about 300 press freedom violations in Nigeria. These violations range from arbitrary arrests and detentions, physical attacks including attacks on media houses, threats and harassment. This report gives an overview of the media legal framework in Nigeria and highlights a number of these violations that have been documented by the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA). It discusses the chronic impunity surrounding these violations and ends with recommendations to various actors on measures to take to end the trend.

An Overview of Laws, Policies and Institutions Governing the Media Space in Nigeria

a. Nigerian Press Council Act

This Act to established to promote high professional standards for the Nigerian press, and deal with complaints emanating from members of the public about the conduct of journalists in their professional capacity or complaints emanating from the press about the conduct of persons or organisations towards the press and for other matters connected therewith.

Stakeholders like the Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria and the Nigerian Guild of Editors had issues with the Act which had resulted into legal problems. The Nigerian Press Council has

remained ineffective since then. Presently, the Act is being proposed for amendment by the House of Representatives.

b. National Broadcasting Commission Act (NBC Act)

This Act empowers the NBC to establish and disseminate a national Broadcasting Code and setting standards with regards to the content and quality of material for broadcast. The NBC Code which represents the minimum standard of broadcasting in Nigeria, was published to provide regulations for broadcasters and to ensure that broadcasting plays a pivotal role in the social, cultural, technological, economic, and political lives of Nigerians.

c. Nigerian Press Organisation

This body is made up of the Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria, Nigeria Union of Journalists and the Nigerian Guild of Editors. This organisation is merely ceremonial as its functions are not clearly defined. Its directives, when issued are hardly adhered to by Journalists or Medium concerned.

d. Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria

The Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria (BON) is a broad coalition of public and private broadcasters as the nation's umbrella Union of Terrestrial Radio Television (Tv) Direct-To-Home (DTH) Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) Multimedia Distribution System (MMDS). Its objectives amongst others is to set, regulate and monitor professional standards and ethics of its members.

Key Press Freedom and Safety of Journalists Issues

Politicians have realised that to acquire power, either through legitimate means or through outright manipulations, they need to obtain the connivance of the media. And politicians and political office holders also know that to retain power, they require the support of the media, ditto those who wish to ascend to power. Even those whose positions are threatened suddenly realise the need to pocket the media. These elements have compounded the problems of the media.

According to Joel Simon, Executive Director of Committee to Protect Journalists, based in New York, "in many parts of Africa where democracy has supposedly taken root after years of strife, press conditions have actually worsened." In all these countries, he noted that "powerful figures have developed a wide range of innovative approaches that cumulatively represent a soft authoritarianism that is spreading in many regions of the world," arguing that "Journalists in many repressive societies, suffer, if you will, from too much government: Smothering, self-serving, and intrusive governments that seek to sharply restrict the boundaries of dissent..."

The media in Nigeria have suffered a number of setbacks over the years, with the obvious but unsuccessful attempts by government to control them. There are equally increased harassment and killings of journalists in the country. These acts are daily causing frustrations among media professionals in the country.

Politicians, both in and out of government are increasingly filing legal cases against journalists who especially report on allegations of corruption, while security operatives have been used to block access for reporters in several areas.

On the other hand, a number of ostensibly independent media establishments are in fact owned by leading politicians and (or) businessmen, thereby heightening concerns about the continuation of the independence of the press, while poor professional standards and ethical violations continue to make journalists vulnerable to government attacks.

Acts of impunity against journalists, particularly murder, is the ultimate form of censorship. These unfortunately, are likely to continue unabated. From the murder of Dele Giwa in 1986 through a parcel bomb, the killers are yet to be fished out and brought to book. Since then several attacks have been recorded against journalists, in spite of the fact that attacks against journalists and media equipment are illegal under international humanitarian law and the Nigerian legal system. Clear signals indicate that such killings are sponsored by desperate politicians and (or) high office holders who had things they wished kept secret.

For the period being reviewed, 2016- 2020, we have recorded some of the highest levels of violence targeting journalists in the country. These statistics constitute an indictment of the poor record on democracy and rule of law in Nigeria. The lack of transparency, corruption and politics of exclusion often result in frustrations and violent rivalries, creating dangerous environments in which journalists become easy targets for powerful forces intent on suppressing dissent and evading public accountability.

Summary of Press Freedom Violations over the Period

The increasing rate of violations of media professionals and members of their families, is a clear signal that journalists are now being deliberately targeted as a result of the work they do. At least 300 violations affecting about 500 journalists, media workers and media houses have been recorded in Nigeria under the regime of President Buhari. Below are some notable examples:

1. On April 11, 2016 around 3. Am, an unknown gunman kidnaped Tope Kuteye, the Channels TV correspondent in Owerri from his home. The kidnapper later made a ransom demand of N15million.

2. On December 2016, the Department of State Service in Lokoja, Kogi State, arrested Friday Ogungemi, publisher of *Policy and Lawmaker Magazine* and detained him without trial. This action which was at the instance of Governor Yahaya Bello of Kogi State was another example of how prominent Nigerians react to Media scrutiny. Friday Ogungemi's alleged crime was authoring an Editorial on the Chief of Staff to the Governor of Kogi State, Mr Edward Onoja, captioned: "OVERZEALOUS CHIEF OF STAFF ACTS GOVERNOR EXTRAORDINAIRE.
3. On January 17, 2017, the Borno State Police Command arrested and detained Inuwa Bwala, Publisher of *National Trial* newspaper in Abuja, at the instance of a top politician in 2016. This Journalist had to send an SOS (Save Our Soul) to the Nigeria Union of Journalists and friends that there was threat to his life in detention. It took the intervention of the Union to secure his release.
4. On January 13, 2017, the Police CID in Area 10 Garki, Abuja, [arrested and detained](#) Desmond Utomwen, publisher of Freshnews, an online newspaper, at the instance of a serving Customs officer, Inspector Umaru Faru. Desmond was working on a story which allegedly was critical of the said officer. Desmond was released following the intervention of Police AIG Usman Shehu who received a complaint from the NUJ. The Union demanded for a thorough investigation by the customs of the alleged corruption by Umaru Faru, but to no effect.
5. On January 19, 2017, the police arrested Premium Times Publisher, Dapo Olorunyomi alongside the Judiciary Reporter, Evelyn Okakwu, and held them for several hours at Police Headquarters in Abuja. This was at the instance of the Chief of Army Staff then, Lt Gen Tukur Yusuf Buratai who complained about defamation of character.
6. On April 19, 2017, some men of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Nigeria Police Force, arrested and detained Midat Joseph, correspondent of the *Leadership* newspaper for being critical of Kaduna State Government and the Governor Nasir el-Rufai's administration. The journalist later released on bail granted by a court after spending two nights at the Police cell.
7. On September 22, 2017, Emmanuel Antswen, is the Correspondent of News Agency of Nigeria in Makurdi, Benue State, who was arrested and detained at the instance of the Benue State Commissioner of Water Resources over a story on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)
8. On February 7, 2017 State Security Service, SSS, Kaduna Command, invited Luka Binniyat and detained him, after interrogation over a story he wrote in the Vanguard Newspaper. He was later arraigned with the court imposing stringent bail conditions in July 2017. Luka remained in detention in Prison till October, 2017 when the bail conditions were varied by the court.
9. On March 3, 2018, the Department of State Security arrested Tony Ezimakor, the Abuja Bureau Chief of The Independent Newspapers and detained him for four days over a report he authored alleging that the Nigerian government paid ransom to secure the release of some Chibok schoolgirls

abducted by Boko Haram. Despite the fact that the journalist suffers from hypertension, he was kept in custody for that long and denied his drugs, before he was released without any charge.

10. On January 1, 2018, Daniel Elombah, the publisher of the news website, Elombah.com was arrested and detained together with the editor of website, Timothy Elombah, after publishing an article that criticised Nigeria's Inspector General of Police. While Daniel was released same day, Timothy spent 25 days in detention. The two were charged with cybercrime on March 1.

11. On 14 August 2018, the Police arrested and detained Samuel Ogundipe, a reporter of the Premium Times after the journalist honoured their invitation. The police demanded that he reveals his sources for a news article he had written based on an intercepted communication from Department of State Services (DSS) published by. The news article referred to a report on the investigation into the invasion of the National Assembly by operatives of the Department of State Services (DSS), which the Inspector General of Police (IG), Ibrahim Idris, had submitted to the then Acting President, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo. Other media organisations published the same report. Samuel refused to reveal his sources, even after the police threatened that they would not release him unless he revealed his sources. He was, thereafter, charged with 'criminal trespass' and 'theft of police document'

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13. On March 1, 2019, police arrested Obinna Don Norman, publisher of The Realm News – an online news medium in Lagos. The arrest was effected while the journalist was participating in a talk show at Flo FM, a local radio station in Umuahia, Abia State. He was accused of defaming and harassing Abia State Senator, Theodore Orji, on February 21, 2018 and held at the Afara Ibeku Prison in Umuahia on charges of cyberstalking under the Cybercrimes law 2015.

14. Jones Abiri, editor and publisher of the Weekly Source newspaper, was rearrested in March 2019 by armed men as he was meeting six colleagues at the Bayelsa Federated Newspaper Publishers Association. Abiri was previously held by the DSS for two years without trial, over alleged links to rebels in the Niger Delta in the southeast. He was also accused of threatening oil companies.

15. On August 22, 2019, Agba Jalingo, the publisher of CrossRiverWatch, was arrested over a report alleging that Cross River State governor, Ben Ayade, diverted N500 million belonging to the state.

Jalingo's case is being prosecuted by the Cross River State government which took over the case from the police. He was granted bail by the court, after spending 174 days in detention in both the police cell and Calabar prison.

16. On September 24, 2019, Okodi Okodi and Owoidoho Udofia of Inspiration FM in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State and their driver were harassed and detained by Police while covering a protest over the Government ban on motorcyclists in Uyo.

17. On June 15, 2020, four journalists, Edeki Igafe of the News Agency of Nigeria, Onyekachukwu Meluwa, (*Punch* newspaper), Christopher Odamah (*Delta Trumpet*) and Francis Sadhere (*Business Day*), were detained at a police station in Warri Delta State. They had gone to a police station to follow up on the arrest earlier that day of their colleague, Mathew Omonigho of the *Daily Post* newspaper.

Physical Attacks

18. On June 1, 2017, Charles Otu, Publisher of Peoples CONSCIENCE Newspaper, was attacked and beaten to pulp by thugs sponsored by some Agents of Ebonyi State Government in Abakaliki. He was rescued from kpirikpiri Police Station Abakaliki by sympathisers where he was dumped by his attackers and accused of mischief. He had received several threats by thugs and some Agents of the state government since then.

19. On July 30, 2017, Lawal Mohammed, is a Cameraman with NTA Kaduna who was beaten and his Camera damaged by sponsored political thugs who invaded the NUJ Press Centre Kaduna to disrupt a Press briefing by some APC Legislators

20. On September 12, 2017, Sunday Nwakanma of the Daily Times Newspapers, Chidi Asonye, of Authority Newspapers and Boniface Okoro of Oracle Today Newspapers were attacked by soldiers of Operation Python Dance at Abia State NUJ Press Centre Umuahia for attempting to cover their operations. Both Sunday and Chidi had their phones seized while Boniface had his Samsung Tablet 3 smashed.

21. On October 30, 2017, Emmanuel Ogbeche of Abuja Inquirer Newspaper was physically attacked in his office in Abuja by an Abuja Legal Practitioner because he published a story which the lawyer felt affected his interest. On the instigation of the Lawyer, Emmanuel was arrested by the Police.

22. On October 26, 2017, Ikechukwu Ibe, Daily Trust photographer, was attacked and beaten by an Army Captain in Abuja. His camera was also seized.

23. On October 27, 2017, Jacob Onjewu, an online Editor with New Nigerian Newspapers Kaduna, was assaulted by soldiers while covering the closing ceremony of the Kaduna International Polo Tournament.

24. On January 4, 2018, the police physically assaulted Enemaku Ojochigbe of AIT (television) and Taye Adeni of the Nigeria News Agency. The two had gone to cover the commissioning of a dry dock in Kaduna. The security officers also denied 10 journalists access to the venue for the commissioning.

25. On February 18, 2018, four thugs suspected to be a vigilante group of Nigeria's ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) in Kogi State, accosted and assaulted Atabor Julius, a journalist with the Independent newspaper. The assailants also threatened to kill Atabor if he did not desist from writing critical reports about their political party.

26. On September 16, 2019, officials of the Akwa Ibom State Environmental Protection and Waste Management Agency assaulted Mary Ekere, a reporter with The Post Newspaper based in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The journalist was filming the taskforce's brutality against street hawkers in the city.

27. On January 30, 2020, a group of soldiers stormed the Borno State Secretariat of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) in Maiduguri and arrested Tunji Omirin, a journalist with the *Daily Trust* newspaper. The soldiers handcuffed Omirin and took him away around 4:30 pm. (17:30 GMT). The journalist was detained and interrogated for about three hours over a story he had written on the Boko Haram insurgency before being released with caution.

28. On January 25, 2020, a mob claiming to be supporters of Godswill Akpabio, a Minister and candidate in the rerun of Senate elections in Akwa Ibom State assaulted Godwin Sunday, a television cameraman with the Global Pilot and destroyed his camera. The incident occurred at the Unit 9 polling station located in the Independence High School in Ukana, Essien Udim.

29. Still on January 25, 2020, some political thugs assaulted Edidiong Udobia, a freelance journalist covering the same elections at the Village Hall, Ikot Etan Unit 6, Ukana East, Ward 9. The thugs held Udobia by his shirt and dragged him to their superior, Emmanuel Inyangettor, who ordered that the journalist's phone be seized. The journalist had his phone returned to him after it had been scanned and found to contain no adverse content.

30. On June 15, 2020, a legislator ordered his guards to beat Ike-Jacobs Nwosu of the *Eastern Lead Express* newspaper. Uche Ogbuagu, a lawmaker in Imo State, confronted Nwosu at the premises of the state assembly building in the capital Owerri, over a publication that allegedly misquoted him (Ogbuagu). After appearing to accept the Nwosu's explanations, Ogbuagu invited him to his office within the state assembly premises, only to order some four men to assault the journalist and seize his phone.

31. On May 26, 2020, police officers stormed the office of the Nigeria Union of Journalists in Warri, Delta State and assaulted Mathew Omonigho, a reporter for the *Daily Post* newspaper. The officers, led by one Detective Rueben Noah, went straight after Omonigho and asked him to disclose the whereabouts of Cletus Opukeme, publisher of the *Daily Watch* website, against whom the Minister of

Niger Delta Affairs, Godswill Akpabio, had lodged a complaint. The officers tore Omonigho's trousers, cut his belt, and bundled him into a vehicle, when he said he did not know Opukeme's whereabouts.

32. On April 28, 2020, members of a joint police and civil defense task force arrested Emma Bricks Oko, publisher of the online magazine brickswrite.com.ng, for filming their violent enforcement of the COVID-19 lockdown against commercial motor cycle riders in Abuja. He was arraigned in court on charges of obstructing the work of the task force later that same day and sentenced to 3 hours Community Service and N5000 fine by a Magistrate Court in Utako, Abuja,

33. On April 1 2020, members of the State environment task force assaulted the NUJ Chairman in Delta State, Michael Ikeogwu and his colleague, Mathew Omonigo while covering an exercise to enforce Covid 19 restrictions.

Attacks on media Houses

34. On August 22, 2017, the building housing Breeze FM, 99.9 in Lafia was demolished on the orders of the State Governor, Umaru Tanko Al Makura, ostensibly because it was built without the required approval of the Nasarawa State Urban Development Board. It is instructive to note that the same Governor was present at the time the radio station was commissioned. The State Government was simply not comfortable with the coverage of the state by the station.

35. On January 6, 2019, a team of armed security forces consisting of the Army, Department of State Security Service and the police stormed the office of Daily Trust Newspapers in Abuja. A simultaneous operation was also carried out at the media outlet's offices in Lagos and Maiduguri and Lagos were also invaded by the security forces. For about four hours, the security officers ransacked the Abuja office and carried away computers and mobile phones. The soldiers revealed that they were searching for the reporter who authored a story about a planned military operation against the Boko Haram insurgents.

36. On October 21, 2020 during the #Endsars protests, Television Continental (TVC) Lagos was attacked and burnt down by thugs who infiltrated the ranks of the protesters. The Nation Newspapers as well as Channels Television were also attacked.

Threats and Harassment

37. The front page comment of The Punch, of Wednesday, December 11, 2019 which assessed President Muhammadu Buhari and his leadership style was condemned by Government as an attempt to cause disaffection. Security operatives harassed and stalked the editors.

38. On December 15, 2019, officers of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) stormed the offices of The Sun Newspapers in Lagos in an attempt to enforce a court judgement against Senator Orji Uzor Kalu who owns the media organisation. The EFCC asked the staff of the organisation to vacate the premises and allow for a takeover in line with a court judgement which ordered for the seizure of property belonging to the Senator. While the EFCC eventually left without carrying out the threat, it was a disturbing that the media empire of the Senator was the priority target of the anti-graft organization. Meanwhile, the court of Appeal later overturned the judgment.

39. On April 22, 2017, Olalekan Adetayo wrote a piece titled "Seat of power's event centres going into extinction" in his column. In that piece, he stated how activities were at the lowest ebb at the time in the Presidential Villa. The following day, April 23, 2017, the SUNDAY PUNCH led with a story authored by Adetayo and titled "Fresh anxiety in Aso Rock over Buhari's poor health." On Monday, April 24, 2017, the then Chief Security Officer to the President, Bashir Abubakar, expelled Adetayo from the State House after he had summoned him to his office and questioned him on the two reports which he considered uncomplimentary to Buhari's administration.

On the orders of the CSO, the then Officer in Charge of officials of the Department of State Services in the Villa seized Adetayo's State House Pass, marched him to the gate of the Villa and paraded him before a platoon of security operatives who were ordered never to allow him enter the Presidential Villa again.

40. On October 21, 2020, by Soldiers denied a crew from Arise TV access to the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos to cover the Endsars protests.

This development is of major concern to the Union as journalists and media organisations are targets of attack by both protesters and Government. Actions like this only bring back unpleasant memories of the long tenure of Military rule and the established culture of intolerance against the media when Nigeria recorded her most grievous crimes against the industry. Sadly, we are once more witnessing actions that seek to undermine the profession by both State and non-State actors.

The Federal Government continues to show open contempt and disrespect for the Media through their agencies like the NBC because the fines imposed on the media houses were unnecessary, discriminatory, and an attempt to discourage a free, independent media.

41. On April 22, 2020, Governor David Umahi of Ebonyi announced that he had “banned for life” two journalists from reporting at the Government House and from all government facilities in the state. Accusing Chijioko Agwu of *The Sun* and Peter Okutu of *Vanguard* newspapers of unfavourable reporting, proceeded to incite the public against the media; “Ebonyi people are very angry with the press and let me warn that I won’t be able to control them.”

42. In a widely circulated [video](#), a former Minister of Aviation, Chief Femi Fani Kayode was seen unleashing an outburst of anger threats and insults on the Cross River State Correspondent of the Daily Trust Newspaper, Eyo Charles. The journalist had, during a press briefing August 25, 2020, asked the ex-Minister a simple question which he felt was embarrassing. Kayode emotionally assaulted the journalist and threatened him for daring to ask such a question.

Attempted Censorship

43. Hate Speech Bill 2018: The bill suggests that any person found guilty of any form of hate speech that results in the death of another person shall die by hanging upon conviction. The bill was sponsored by Senate Spokesperson, Senator Aliyu Sabi Abdullahi, out of a growing concern over increased violence and hatred in the country. Prescribing capital punishment for hate speech, was resisted by Stakeholders, principally because this could be used indiscriminately against perceived political opponents by unscrupulous members of the political elite. It can also be used to gag the media.

44. In May 2019, new rules were introduced, to take effect [on June 11](#), that would have severely limited the press's access to the National Assembly. Under the new rules, to cover the National Assembly, a media outlet would be required to have a daily circulation of forty thousand copies or five thousand daily views online. Among other requirements, journalists must also show two years of experience in covering the National Assembly, and be members of the journalists' union. Commentators had suggested that if the rules had gone into effect, the beneficiaries would be government-owned media because they are larger in readership and are more likely to meet other requirements. The proposed rules have been withdrawn following a public outcry.

Excessive Fines

45. In August, 2020, The National Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON) imposed a fine of N5million (13,000 USD) on *Nigeria Info Radio* for alleged hate speech. The media fraternity in Nigeria condemned the fine as insensitive and crippling, especially considering the already precarious situation in which the COVID-19 had plunged most media enterprises.

46. On October 26, Nigeria's broadcast regulator, the National Broadcasting Commission imposed a fine of 3 million naira (US\$7,850) on three televisions, sanctions generally condemned by the media fraternity as excessive. The regulator had accused the three stations—Africa Independent Television, Channels Television, and Arise Television— of unprofessional reportage on the EndSARS protests. code, a charge misconduct in their coverage of the protests. A legal fight –back by some rights groups was unsuccessful as the courts backed the regulator's action.

Unresolved Killings

Nigeria is fast gaining notoriety for its failure to tackle impunity for crimes against journalists including killings. For example, in 2017, four journalists [were killed](#) in separate incidents with no credible inquiry yet to find the culprits and their motive for the fatal attacks. The four were [Ikechukwu Onubogu](#), a cameraman with the Anambra Broadcasting Services, [Lawrence Okojie](#) of the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) in Edo State, [Famous Giobaro](#), a desk editor with Glory FM in Bayelsa State and freelance broadcaster, Abdul Ganiyu Lawal in Ekiti State.

Four more journalists have since been killed under circumstances that have yet to be clarified through any credible investigations.

The killing on July 22, 2019 of [Precious Owolabi](#), a reporter with the Channels Television in Abuja while covering a protest by members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria-IMN, was agonising. The sudden violent turn of events during what was supposed to be a peaceful protest by the IMN members who were demanding the release of their leader, Sheik Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, led the police to shoot indiscriminately. The Reporter-Precious Owolabi who was on national service died of bullet wounds sustained during the coverage of the protest. It was not clear who actually fired the fatal shots. A Deputy Commissioner of Police, in charge of Operations at the FCT Police Command, Umar Usman equally died from gun shots sustained during the violent protest. So far, no investigations were carried and it was believed that the young Reporter, was a victim of Police action.

On January 28, 2019, security forces who were battling Shiite Muslim protesters in Abuja, [shot and killed](#) Alex Ogbu, a journalist with the *Regent Africa Times* newspaper.

On January 15, 2019, Maxwell Nashan, a journalist with the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Adamawa State was, [found tied and muzzled](#) in a bush with his body hacked at several places. Nashan, who had been abducted from his house the previous day, died on arrival at the hospital.

On January 21, 2020, Alex Ogbu, a Reporter with Regent African Times in Abuja was killed by a stray bullet from the Police while covering a clash between the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) popularly known as Shi'ites and Police in Abuja.

On October 24, 2020, Pelumi Onifade, who was covering the #EndSARS protests for *Gboah TV*, an online television channel, was attacked by security officers and carried away alongside a mob arrested by the Lagos State Task Force. About a week later, the body of the student journalist was found in a mortuary in Ikorodu Lagos. His family lawyer said his body had bullet wounds. Onifade was a 200-level student of the Department of History at Tai Solarin University of Education, Ogun State, and an intern at *Gboah TV*.

Analysis of Trends of Violations Recorded over The Period

No doubt Safety of journalists remains central to press freedom, and point particularly to the responsibility of the state in protecting media freedom and ensuring that there is no impunity for crimes against journalists.

Safety of Journalists goes beyond killings and physical assault but also include the absence of arbitrary arrest, resorting to exile to escape repression, harassment, destruction and confiscation of equipment and premises, and self-censorship in media. Impunity for crimes against journalists in Nigeria has remained the predominant trend, with only few perpetrators of attacks against journalists being brought to justice.

Clamping down on the media by the Muhammadu Buhari Government is a sign of weak democracy and a restive government and it is instructive to note that a free and open press is part of the bedrock of democracy and development, and these should be encouraged and sustained.

In addition to attacks on journalists, instigated or tolerated by the authorities, journalists are now facing some new, ruthless and non-state actors in the form of armed militant groups such as Boko Haram in the North East, Fulani herdsmen in Central Nigeria and other Regions of the country, various groups in the Niger Delta, Bandits in the North West, Kidnap gangs all over the country and various Freelance armed players. These groups sometimes designate journalists as 'legitimate targets' for daring to report independently on the conflict or crimes in which they are involved.

Boko Haram had on many occasions staged deadly attacks on public events and premises, with the sole aim of causing the deaths of the unsuspecting public and media professionals covering them.

This new security situation increases risks to journalists' safety at work. It also means that journalists, their organisations and employers must develop new strategies to overcome these security challenges, even where funds are not available to pay salaries and maintain equipment.

Election periods in Nigeria and other violent demonstrations which are frequent also constitute very dangerous assignments and moments for Journalists and journalism.

In Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, journalists take great personal and professional risks to collect, process and disseminate news and information to over 100 million citizens in 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory and beyond. But sadly, being a journalist today can often be a deadly pursuit, particularly for those covering conflict and other dangerous assignments. Conflict areas and post-conflict areas are predominantly dangerous environments for journalists. The number of journalists that suffer various acts of impunity across the country and attacks on media equipment and facilities daily is on the increase and this poses great danger to democracy.

Over the years, there was the lack of political will by the Governments at all levels in the Country, to take effective measures for better protection of journalists and to fully implement the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa, which clearly states that "No one shall be subject

to arbitrary interference with his or her freedom of expression...”, and to cooperate and support the mandate of Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression in the Continent and to build synergy with the Union to foster safety of all media professionals.

Looking at the trends of violations it is clear that Government and its agents are the main culprits. One case of conviction was recorded. A Magistrate Court in Abuja sentenced Emma Bricks to 3 hours of Community Service and a fine of N5000 for filming Police brutality during the Covid 19 lockdown. Security operatives had been used in most cases to harass and detain journalists like the case of Jones Abiri who was harassed and detained several times by personnel of the Department of State Security Service and charged to court for alleged terrorism. Industry Regulator, the NBC was used selectively to intimidate independent broadcast stations.

Similarly, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission in an instance was used to molest staff of the Sun Newspapers. The National Assembly that is ideally a representative of the people had on some instances displayed outright connivance with Government, acting as a mere appendage. The Hate Speech Bill and the New Rules being contemplated then to restrict media access to Parliament are examples. State Governors are also showing intolerant actions against the media. Six cases stood out from the 36 examples given. Two by the Governor of Ebonyi State, David Umahi, one each by the Governor of Kogi State, Yahaya Bello, then Governor of Borno State, Kashim Shettima, and then Governor Umaru Tanko Almakura of Nasarawa State. The sixth example is that of Agba Jalingo arrested and charged for treason at the instance of Governor Ben Ayade of Cross River State. One case of a party Chieftain, Fani Kayode who harassed a journalist and threatened to have him sacked by his employer for asking him an unsettling question sums up the temperament of most politicians to the media and that of Ogbeche in Abuja who was assaulted by a Lawyer, appeared to be an isolated case to prevent investigation into alleged corrupt practice.

The incidents of thugs attacking journalists is mostly instigated by politicians who operate from the sidelines, like the burning down of TVC in Lagos during the #Endsars protests. Thugs were sponsored to attack premises linked to frontline politician and Leader of APC, Ahmed Bola Tinubu. In almost all the attacks, journalists suffer physical and psychological trauma while their gadgets are either confiscated or destroyed. Kidnap of Journalists in the one instance cited was for ransom purpose and so it appeared in many other cases recorded but not mentioned. In all instances monies had to be raised by family members and the Union to secure the release of such journalists.

Status of Redress of Violations

Lack of redress is a major impediment to Press Freedom violations. Within the period under consideration, no single act of such violations has been successful redressed either by the courts of law or by the National Human Rights Commission which findings and rulings are never given any serious attention. The Nigerian legal system is very cumbersome and expensive as such individual

journalists lack the financial capacity to persecute such cases while the Union is equally constrained because of lack of funds. These two examples are however of interest:

1. In September of 2020, the Appeal Court in Abuja was to begin hearing an appeal by the police and Guaranty Trust Bank (GTB) against the award of N100 million damages to a journalist they were convicted of brutalising. The journalist, Desmond Utomwen, was manhandled by police officers at an Abuja branch of the GTB over seven years ago. He dragged his assailants to an Abuja high court and was awarded damages, but the defendants appealed the judgment. Desmond Utomwen, a former staff of The NEWS magazine, in December 2009, had gone to cover a protest by some Nigerians over allegations that officials of the GTBank were involved in fraudulent withdrawals of large amounts via the bank's Automated Teller Machines (ATM). But police officers attached to the bank, situated at Area 3, Garki, Abuja, and bank officials descended on the reporter and beat him thoroughly. The officers then seized the unconscious reporter, his identity card, N2,000, camera, and digital recorder and detained him at the Garki Police Station for several hours while denying him access to medical treatment. The reporter sought redress in court after the bank and the police rebuffed several appeals by him and his employers for the matter to be investigated. The process of appeal is slow and from all available information, some interest groups would rather have the case scuttled as up till now no hearing date has been fixed for the appeal.

2. The case of Yomi Olomofe is pathetic. A Federal High Court sitting in Lagos in February 2016, began hearing on the fundamental rights suit filed by the Lagos State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists against the Comptroller General of the Nigeria Customs Service and eight others over alleged assault on one of its members, Otunba Yomi Olomofe.

The Lagos NUJ had filed the case against the defendants on behalf of the Badagry-based journalist for the enforcement of his fundamental rights to life, dignity of the human person and freedom of expression and the press, following the severe assault and beating he suffered in hands of the Customs and some hoodlums allegedly hired by the Custom officials.

The Lagos NUJ had filed a N500 million criminal suit against Nigerian Customs Service over the brutal assault of Olomofe at Seme border post in 2015. The NUJ is asking for N500 million as special and exemplary damages for the violation of the applicant's rights.

The applicant, in the suit, asked the court for a declaration that the beating meted out to him by the defendants, who inflicted bodily and internal injuries on him on June 25, 2015, in the premises of the NCS, Seme, was "capable of infringing on his right to life as guaranteed by Section 33 (1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Article 4 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights."

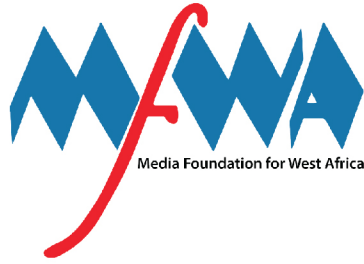
Sadly, this case is stalled as a result of medical challenges being faced by the victim, Yomi Olomofe. These are some of the challenges making seeking for redress, a herculean task.

vii. Recommendations to both Governmental and Non-Governmental Stakeholders

The following is regrettable state of press freedom and safety of journalists in Nigeria and should be urgently addressed:

1. Highly skilled persons now shun employment in the media industry due to low pay and poor staff welfare conditions. There is therefore an urgent call to provide competitive wages and emoluments for Media workers.
2. The long hours of work and tight deadlines which create an unhealthy work environment replete with stress-induced ailments should be replaced with a conducive environment to ensure optimal performance and reduce health risks.
3. Journalists suffer maltreatment in the hands of overzealous security agents, political thugs and disgruntled elements. There should, therefore be a deliberate effort to investigate and publish such violations while adequate insurance cover be taken for media workers exposed to accidents and injuries.
4. Given the fact that security agents account for majority of the press freedom violations recorded, the military and police authorities must issue direct instructions to their officers to refrain from wanton attacks on, and frivolous arrests of journalists.
5. Journalists in developed countries are celebrated, and this is made possible by the attention, consideration and funding given by relevant authorities and stakeholders to the sector. This is however not so in Nigeria despite the invaluable services being rendered by the sector which also provides the window through which other nations view and assess the country. There is therefore an urgent need for all Stakeholders to ensure that the profession of Journalism is accorded its rightful place in society.
6. The training and retraining of media Professionals, especially with regard to personal protection and security, should be given priority by the NUJ, Media Owners and other Stakeholders.
7. Government must be alive to its responsibilities and obligations. Many acts of impunity are clear indications of the failure of government to uphold international obligations to protect the lives and liberties of citizens, especially journalists. The systematic failure to address the ever increasing numbers of unresolved murders of journalists and other media workers feeds into the sense of impunity and encourages further violence against the media. Investigations into serious violations including attacks on media houses and killings must be bolstered and pursued to their logical conclusion.

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