



AFRICAN FREEDOM
OF EXPRESSION
EXCHANGE (AFEX)

Freedom of Expression Monitor



April - June, 2021

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Executive Summary

As part of its mandate, the African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX), a continental network of freedom of expression and media rights organisations in Africa has embarked on a series of activities that seek to protect and promote freedom and human rights, monitor violations of freedom rights and related issues and developments, and produce regular statements and reports.

The present report forms part of such activities, and covers the period of April to June 2021, and highlights incidents of freedom of expression (FOE), and other related developments. The AFEX Freedom of Expression Situation Report for April-June 2021, focused on 25 countries during the quarter under review.

A total of 91 incidents of freedom of expression violations were recorded across the 25 countries. Somalia recorded the highest number (12) of FOE violations, followed respectively by Nigeria (10) and DRC (9). Ghana and Angola respectively recorded eight and seven violations each.

Details of other violations recorded in different countries during the period under review are featured under the chapter of country and incidents of violations in this report.

In terms of perpetrators of these violations, security forces emerged as the leading culprits. This has been the trend over the past years, since 2013 when AFEX started collating and analysing incidents of violations of freedom of expression on the continent. However, attacks perpetrated by unknown armed individuals and the armed groups are emerging as another worrying trend. These attacks are extremely violent, marked by assault and killings. In addition, legal means are also used to harass, intimidate journalists and media. During this quarter, security forces accounted for 45 violations of FOE, while the courts were cited for 10 incidents, followed by state/public officials (12), out of a total of 91 violations.

From the perspective of legal frameworks and constitutional norms, each country featured in this report is bound to respect, protect and promote freedom of expression. Each has a set of legal provisions, and all are parties to numerous treaties and conventions that impress on them to respect, uphold and promote fundamental human rights. The provisions of these texts stem from regional and international frameworks that ensure freedom of expression, including civil and political rights. However, violations are increasing, almost across the continent. In addition, there is total impunity for crimes against journalists. The resort to broadly-worded cyber laws, cybersecurity, and internet surveillance to stall civic space online and track dissidents is becoming part of repressive behaviors of government in the cyberspace, including internet and social media shutdown.

The report ends with a set of recommendations to the various stakeholders, aiming at improving press freedom and freedom of expression on the continent.

Introduction

The freedom of expression landscape in Africa differs from one country to the other. But several countries have made a transition from dictatorship to democratic regimes. Some countries relapsed into the military regime, while others are struggling to emerge from the transitional democratic process. The democratic transition has been peaceful in some countries and regional blocs. In others, the process is stalled by terrorist attacks and protracted social and political conflicts. Nevertheless, with the advances in information and technology communication, such as internet and social media, coupled with the massive use of digitally enabled devices, the media landscape has evolved. This has led to a vibrant and dynamic flow of information. This change has put far behind us the days of public information control by state media.

However, the media landscape is confronted with dwindling public trust, as a result of the overwhelming spread of fake news, misleading and false information. Bloggers, social media influencers and citizens journalists, who often break news before the traditional media, are challenging traditional media and muddling the lines between journalism and online sensationalism.

The speed at which information is now accessible, in addition to the diverse existing platforms that exist, underpins the progress made in terms of freedom of expression. But several countries are finding means and ways to curtail, the yet fragile gains, and are devising all legal means to repress freedom of the press, media rights, and freedom of expression, constitutionally guaranteed and protected. The exercise and the enjoyment of these rights, constitutionally guaranteed, and regionally and internationally upheld by several treaties and protocols, to which countries are parties, are stained by the deployment of advanced surveillance tools, inimical cybersecurity laws, and sponsored prosecution and legal harassments.

Press freedom and the rights of citizens to freedom of expression are seen by some autocratic authorities as a threat to their power. This is because more and more citizens previously unaware of democratic governance issues are now sensitized by the media and journalists who publish critical articles about the government's actions and policies. But the more the media and journalists are stepping up efforts to play their constitutional role of public information, and enabling the public to demand an account of public duties bearers, the more they become the targets of assaults, abuses, and repression because of their reportage.

The African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX), has over the years been monitoring the freedom of expression environment across the continent. AFEX, through its member organisations, has intensified advocacy on freedom of expression, media rights, the safety of journalists, while reporting and documenting violations and developments across countries. The network has also increased its advocacy activities and engagements to fight against the entrenched and pervasive culture of impunity for crimes against press freedom and journalists and other media workers.

In line with its advocacy strategy, on regular basis, AFEX produces a series of reports on FOE on the continent. This present report, titled AFEX Freedom of Expression Situation Report for April to June 2021, highlights incidents of freedom of expression violations in 25 different countries during the quarter under review. The report also puts on spot issues confronting journalists in their line of duty, and their roles of public information and watchdog roles, indispensable for any democratic regime to thrive. It

serves as well as awareness-raising to bring the attention of duty bearers on challenges journalists and other media practitioners face across the continent, and urge them to intervene.

This edition of the reports is the second of a series of four reports that will be produced quarterly to serve as resource material and advocacy tools for the promotion and protection of FOE and media rights in Africa. A total of 91 violations were recorded in 25 African countries in this second edition of the AFEX FOE Situation in Africa Report which covers April-June 2021.

Methodology

The FOE Situation in Africa report is collated and published periodically by the AFEX network. AFEX compiles reports published by its member organisations from their daily monitoring, reporting and documenting of FOE violations recorded in their respective countries or regions. For countries where AFEX has no presence, the network relies on online monitoring and contacts built in such countries to cover them. Additionally, this report also features reports published by other human rights organisations working to promote freedom of expression in Africa on the IFEX website.

Data collated from these reports are then analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings are subsequently made public as an advocacy and awareness-creation tool with a set of recommendations to relevant stakeholders.

This AFEX Situational FOE report covers April - June 2021. The findings of the report are presented below under the following subheadings: **Types of violations, perpetrators, the target of violations, countries, and incidents of violations**. The report concludes with some recommendations for the improvement of the FOE situation in Africa.

Findings

A total of 91 violations were documented in the 25 countries featured in this report. Somalia recorded 12 violations, followed by Nigeria with 10 violations and DRC with 9 violations. Ghana, and Angola, recorded respectively, eight and seven violations each. Details of the types and number of violations recorded in the remaining countries are provided in **Figure 1** in this report. Security agents were the major perpetrators of the violations recorded. They accounted for 45 out of the 91 violations documented. A majority of the victims of the violations recorded during the monitoring period were male journalists. One female journalist, and human rights activists were also affected in addition to the killing (6) of journalists and one social media activist. Several protestors were killed also. In Ghana, for instance, two protestors were killed, while in Eswatini, more than 20 people were reported killed during pro-democracy protests. Victims included the general public. For instance, in the incidents of Twitter shutdown

in Nigeria, and internet shutdown in Ethiopia, the general public was the victim. The impunity for the majority of the violations recorded continued to be a worrying trend. The situation of press freedom and freedom of expression appear to be glaringly deteriorating across the continent.

Types of Violations

The AFEX review of issues of freedom of expression violations for the period of April to June 2021 recorded a total of 91 violations in twenty-five countries. The violations were in 12 different categories. Arrests/detentions, physical attacks, threats and killing of journalists and protestors were the most frequently perpetrated violations. At least, eight incidents of killings, four instances of disruption of online media platforms, and internet shutdown were also recorded. The frequencies of the twelve types of violations recorded during the period are presented in the chart below:

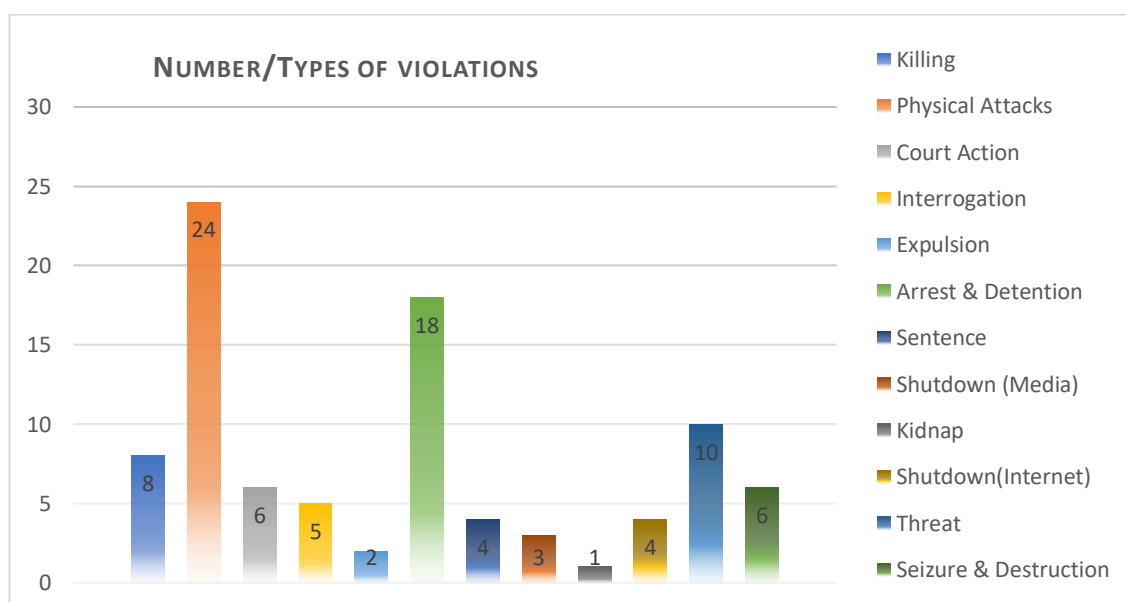


Figure 1: Types of violations recorded

Perpetrators of Violations Recorded

State security agents persist to be the key perpetrators of FOE violations in Africa. Among the eight types of perpetrators of violations, security agents accounted for 45 violations. The other perpetrators included state officials, courts, media regulatory bodies, political party affiliates, individuals, and armed groups.

Figure 2 below gives details of types of violators and the number of violations each accounted for during the period.

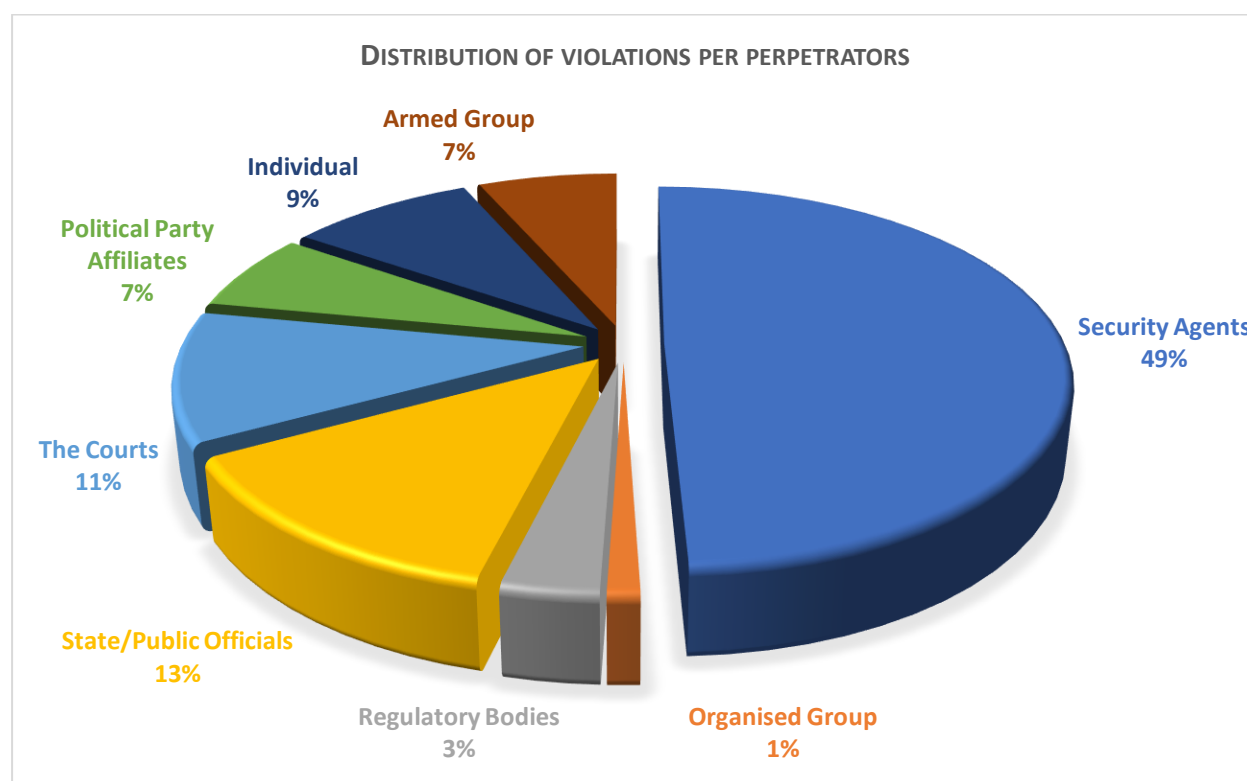


Figure2: Types of perpetrators of violations recorded

Targets/ Victims of Violations

Apart from journalists, the victims of violations included bloggers, activists, shutdown of media houses and internet blockage. Our monitoring and documenting show that 61 identifiable journalists were victims of various violations. In Nigeria, Ethiopia and Eswatini, where Twitter and Internet were disrupted, it is hard to establish the exact number of the victims, the entire country was affected. The figure for victims of attacks on demonstrations is also, somehow, difficult to be establish, although a few numbers of people arrested, injured, or killed. For instance, in Ghana, two protestors were officially declared killed, but in Eswatini, more than 20 protestors were reported killed, while others are said missing.

Media houses were also part of the targets of assault on press freedom and freedom of expression in terms of the shutdown, damages to premises as a result of assault or raids by security agents, organised groups etc.

Countries and Incidents of Violations

Twenty-five countries recorded violations during the reporting period. Twelve violations were recorded in Somalia, followed by Nigeria (10). The Democratic Republic of Congo and Ghana followed with nine and eight, respectively. Nine countries each recorded one violation. The description of the violations and the frequency in other countries are as follows:

Somalia

On June 24, Hanad Ali Guled, a journalist working for the Goobjoog Media Group was attacked while he was returning home, in Mogadishu, by unidentified assailants. It was not clear why the journalist was attacked. His assailants stabbed him after beating him mercilessly. The incident was condemned by the media fraternity. And, the Somalia Journalist Syndicate (SJS), called on the police to investigate the attacks and bring the perpetrators to book.

On June 11, elements of the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) and the police invaded Star FM radio in Guriel town, Galmudug state, and arrested and detained Ubeyd Hassan Mohamud. The journalist was detained for four days, in a house owned by the commander of NISA, before being released.

On June 10, police officers, prevented a dozen of national and foreign journalists to cover a protest and interviewing parents of missing Somalian soldiers in Eritrea.

On May 23, three journalists were intimidated and threatened by South West State's Bay Regional Police Commissioner, Amin Mad-Darfur. Following a press conference held by some local clan elders complaining about the formation of a new cabinet, the high police officer intimidated order to Abdirashid Mohamed Ibrahim, Qasim Mohamed Ahmed, and Ali Mohamud Adan, three journalists working with local media, to not publish any story about the conference. According to SJS, out for fear of safety and life, the three journalists did not publish the story as a result of the intimidation of threats mounted on them by the regional commander.

On April 9, Haashim Omar Hassan, a journalist working with the privately-owned media outlets, Radio Adado, and Five Somali TV, was arrested and detained by the Somalian police officers. The arrest of the journalist followed two posts on his Facebook page. In one post, the journalist alleged that some police officers can't afford their bills in a local restaurant. In the other post, Hassan published a statement on the alleged killing of a young man by a police officer. After his arrest, the police submitted the journalist to interrogation and released him the following day.

On April 25, police in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, arrested, detained, and assaulted physically, Bashir Ali Shire, a journalist working with the Radio Hubal. Shire was reporting live a violent protest and gunfight between two rival factions' groups. The journalist's phone was confiscated by a one-armed officer who assaulted him with his gun, another shot live ammunition towards the journalist. Luckily for him, the bullet did not hit him. Shire was interrogated about his work and later released.

Still, related to the military scuffle between the two rival factions of the army, on the same day, two other journalists working with Universal TV were arrested by armed NISA officers. The military men confiscated the journalists' working tools and ordered them to delete images and videos recorded. The military men threatened to shoot the journalists when they attempted to resist the order of deletion of content of their cameras.

On April 21, the police officer arrested and detained Ali Said Mohamed, a journalist working with Mudug Journalist, a Facebook news page of the Galmudug region, located in the central part of Somalia. Mohamed's arrest was in connection with a report that alleged cases of money extortion by police officers within the Galkayo police station. Mohamed was freed on the following day, without any charge.

On 16 April, some Somalia special army forces descended on Radio Deegaan, a local private media in southern Galkayo. The assailants arrested and detained Mohamed Omar Yusuf, a journalist working with the radio station. The military men confiscated working tools such as laptops and voice recorders. It wasn't clear, why the radio station was attacked. According to the Somalia Journalist Syndicate (SJS), the local authorities refused to disclose the reason for the raid, in addition, Yusuf was held incommunicado, access to him by his family and colleagues was denied.

On 13 April, police in Somaliland arrested and detained Adan Abdi Idle, a veteran journalist. Idle was arrested over an article and photos alleging corruption involving, the Governor of Somaliland Bank, Ali Ibrahim Baghdadi. In two instances, Idle was brought before the court, but no evidence of the allegations was provided by the bank. Instead of releasing the journalist, the court gave seven more days to the police to provide evidence of the charges, whilst the journalist remained in custody.

Nigeria

Nigeria recorded ten incidents of FOE violations; this was the same number it recorded during the first quarter of 2021.

On April 15, 2021, five security forces raided the office of the privately-owned Daily Nigerian news website in Abuja. The security went there to arrest the journalist Jaafar Jaafar. In his absence, the security forces tended a summoning letter to Jaafar's colleague, demanding the journalist to present himself to police headquarters on April 19 for questioning about his alleged "criminal conspiracy, defamation, injurious falsehood and inciting violence." What is believed, could have triggered the summon, is the fact that, in March 2021, the journalist filed a petition to the police following threats professed against him by, the governor of Kano State, Abdullahi Gaduje, this in connection with a critical video produced by the journalist in 2018. Out of fear for his life, the journalist went into hiding.

On April 16, 2021, five thugs assaulted Frederick Odimayo, a journalist working with Grace FM radio station. The assault followed an investigative report produced by the journalist on the drug trafficking business.

On April 30, 2021, the police arrested Sunday Ode, a journalist working with the newspaper the People's Daily. Ode was arrested by the police on alleged orders of Samuel Ortom, the governor of Benue state in northwestern Nigeria. The arrest of Ode

followed the publication of a critical report on the governor's alleged mishandling of the conflict between the Bonta and Ukpute tribes in Benue state.

On May 10, 2021, some security officers attacked newspapers vendors and arrested six of them in Owerri, the capital city of Imo State in southeastern Nigeria. The vendors were attacked for simply selling newspapers containing articles on the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a proscribed secessionist group in Nigeria. While the newspapers were confiscated, the vendors were detained and later released.

Following the broadcasting of a documentary exposing acts of violence perpetrated by Ahmed Isah a purported human rights advocate, who doubled as host of a show on Human Rights Radio, attacked Peter Nkanga, the journalist who produced the documented violence aired on BBC. Nkanga also received several death calls and messages on May 20, 2021, from Ahmed. Out of fear for his life, Nkanga went into hiding.

On May 31, 2021, a police officer in Abuja fired a teargas canister at Omoyele Sowore, the publisher of the online news outlet, SaharaReporters. Sowore and several other people were protesting against widespread insecurity in Nigeria when the incident happened.

On June 4, 2021, the Nigerian government placed an indefinite suspension on Twitter operations in the country following the tech company's deletion of a tweet by Nigerian president Muhammadu Buhari. The following day, Nigerian information minister Mohammed described Twitter's action as "insulting", and announced a ban on Twitter access in Nigeria.

On June 5, four major telecoms and mobile internet service providers in Nigeria, MTN, Airtel, 9mobile, and Glo, all disconnected their users from accessing Twitter.

Still, concerning the authority's onslaught on press and freedom expression, Nigeria's National Broadcasting Commission, the regulatory body of all broadcast stations, intimidated an order to all radio and TV stations to immediately deactivate their Twitter handles and desist from using the platform to gather or disseminate information.

On 19 June, Titus Badejo, a radio presenter and On-Air Personality with Naija FM was murdered by unknown gunmen while he was leaving a club in the night in Ibadan, in his car with other friends in the capital city of Oyo state in southwestern Nigeria. Badejo killing is a targeted attack, since all other passengers with him in the car were not touched, and nothing was stolen. It is not yet clear whether Badejo was killed because of his work as a journalist. The motives of his murder are still to be unraveled by the police.

DRC

Nine incidents of violations of press freedom were documented during the quarter.

Four journalists were targeted with threats on social media for their critical reportage on the government of President Etienne Tsishekedi, in Kinshasa, the capital city of DRC. In April, a video with photos of four journalists was published online by an

individual who proclaimed himself as a fighter from the diaspora (combattant de la diaspora) and threatened Stany Bujekera, a journalist working with an online media, Elysee Odia from Top Congo FM radio, Peter Tiani from the newspaper Vrai Journal, and Claude Pero Luwura from the television channel CPL. The unidentified person, a sympathizer of the ruling government accused the journalists of sabotaging President Tshisekedi's efforts.

On June 22, two journalists, Daniel Michombero and Dosta Lutula were attacked for their work as journalists. Michombero works with several foreign news outlets, was attacked by seven military men who forced their way through his house in the night in his hometown, in Goma city. The assailants threatened to kill him, manhandled his wife, and took away his work equipment.

The following day, on June 23, Dosta Lutula, a journalist working with Canal Kin Télévision in Kinshasa, the capital city of DRC, was attacked in the street by several sympathizers of the ruling party Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS). Dosta was assaulted when he was interviewing the public on COVID-19 related governments restrictions. The assailants accused him of insulting the President because of his work of public information.

On Mai 9, Barthelémy Kubanabandu Changamuka, a journalist working with the Kitshanga Community Radio (CORAKI FM), and host of the programme entitled "Food Security" was killed at his home by two armed men in civilian clothes. The assailant shot the journalist at point-blank range, eight times, and took away his phone after the murder. It is still not clear why the journalist was killed since the police have not rendered an investigation into the killing.

On April 19, Louis France Kusikeza, a journalist working with the privately-owned television channel, CML13 TV, was summoned to the military barrack Kokolo and detained. His arrest followed a publication he did on social media on an alleged scuffle between two top military officers over the non-payment of allowances. The journalist was accused of "attempts to create revolt among the army. "

On the same date, another journalist, Pascal William Boji who works with a radio and television broadcasting station in Bukavu, the capital town of South Kivu province, was knocked down in the chest by a stone thrown by police. The journalist was covering a police repression a protest by some local assemblymen of the district. As a result of the assault, the journalist fainted and was injured.

On May 29, Parfait Katoto, a journalist and director of the local radio station, Radio Communautaire Amkeni Biakato, was attacked in the night by armed men. They assaulted him physically and threatened to kill him because of critical reportage on the army in Ituri province.

Ghana

Eight incidents of press violations and freedom of assembly were recorded as part of the worrying trend of instilling a culture of silence, with a series of incidents of attacks on the press and freedom of expression occurring in the country in recent years.

On June 28, Ibrahim Muhamed, a vocal social media activist and member of a social-political pressure group, was pronounced dead, upon arrival at a hospital in

Kumasi, in the Ashanti region. Muhamed who was also known under the name Kaaka met his untimely death after being physically assaulted by some alleged hoodlums who bludgeoned him in front of his house the day before.

On June 29, security forces killed two protesters in the town of Ejura, a suburb of Kumasi. At least, four other protestors were injured as a result of the crackdown on a public protest against the killing of Kaaka. The two protestors were killed when the authorities deployed police and military men in the town, instead to seek to calm public tempers against the killing of Kaaka, who met his untimely death because of his social media activist and exercising his rights to freedom of expression online.

On May 11, seven security forces heavily armed, descended on the premise of Citi FM/TV, a privately owned media outlet based in Accra. Before the security forces raid, Caleb Kudah a journalist working with Citi FM/TV was arrested and detained at the ministry of national security for “unauthorised filming” of public vehicles parked in the forecourt of the said state institution. While Kudah was in detention, the security forces in their raid on Citi media group premise attempted to arrest Zoe Abu-Baidoo, a female journalist with whom Kudah shared the photos he took from the ministry of security. The military raid on the media group, triggered an atmosphere of panic among the journalists. Out of fear, Baidoo sought refuge, however rendered herself to the security and was interrogated for hours before being released, alongside her colleague Kudah. The arrest, detention of Kudah, and the descend of security forces of the Citi/FM and the interrogation of the journalists were criticized by the Media Foundation of West Africa, an AFEX member as a violation of press freedom, tantamount to abuse of authority.

On April 15, some soldiers assaulted physically at least four journalists, including one female one for simply covering a demonstration at La, a suburb in Accra. The victims included Nii Ayikwei and Desmond Osae Amponsah, two journalists working respectively with Citi FM/TV and of TV Africa. The demonstrators were protesting against the military encroachment of their stool land. The military assaulted physically the protesters also, pursued some into neighbors’ houses, and inflicted severe beatings. The military action was condemned as unproportionable use of forces against civilians.

On May 7, Peter Tabiri, a journalist working in the Western and Northern regions of Ghana with Pent TV based in Accra, was assaulted by some alleged national security personnel. Peter's attention was caught by a violent and dubious operation of the so-called security personnel at the Petroland fuel station in the Asankragua township. As the journalist was calling the divisional police station to crosscheck the information, his assailants smashed the journalist's phone, kicked him several times, and punched him to the ground.

On April 1, David Tamakloe, the editor of the online newspaper, Whatsup New, was arrested by security forces for alleged extortion and publication of false news. The journalist denied the accusation, stating that it was rather a deliberate act of intimidation and influence. This is because he was investigating a scandal involving a certain businesswoman who turned to be the wife of a police officer. The said investigation was not even yet published. Though the journalist was released later, his phone was seized and he has to report to the police, as part of the bail conditions.

Angola

Seven incidents of freedom of expression violations were recorded, with several court actions against journalists and media shutdown.

On June 17, a court in Luanda charged two journalists, Escrivão José and Coque Mukuta with criminal defamation. The journalists allegedly published pieces of critical articles in 2020, alleging acts of corruption and physical maltreatment. Jose and Mukuta were accused by two powerful provincial governors of the ruling party. The two journalists, respectively, work with the privately-owned newspaper *Hora H*, and the news website *O Decreto*. Both had a court order placed on them which prevented them from traveling out of Luanda.

Earlier, on May 19, Escrivão José was questioned by security forces over an article published in 2019, in which the journalist alluded that a former top government officer operated an offshore bank transfer with the approval of the executive director of the Angola Investment Bank (BAI), Luis Lelis. The journalist's interrogation followed the complaints lodged against by the latter.

On May 24, Carlos Alberto, a journalist working with *A Denúncia* was interrogated for about five hours as part of a criminal investigation into his publication deemed defamatory by the Angolan Deputy Attorney General Luis Liz. The report contained a video on the acquisition of lands by the deputy attorney general. The complaint was lodged against Alberto on May 12, ahead of the release of the video on the Youtube channel on May 15.

Aside from the above attempts of intimidation and harassment, another journalist was interrogated by the police for alleged defamation complaints.

On May 18, Lucas Pedro, editor of the online media Club K, was questioned by security forces over allegations of criminal defamation leveled against him. Though Pedro corrected the information by publishing a rejoinder at the complainant, businessman Enoque Francisco, he refused an amicable settlement of the matter. Pedro risks up to one year of the prison sentence and hefty fines if convicted.

On April 19, the authorities shut down three private television channels, namely, Record TV Africa, Vida TV, and Zap Viva. These channels were accused of failure to properly register, and multiple violations of media regulation laws. The shutdown of these media outlets was criticized as an attempt to restrict critical reportage and control of pro-governmental media.

On April 7, security officers arrested and detained Jorge Manuel, a journalist working with the Radio Despertar. The journalist was covering a protest in a community of Sequele municipality, in Luanda, capital city of Angola. Some people were expressing their displeasure against an eviction exercise by the local authorities. Manuel was kept in police custody for six days, before being released on April 12.

On April 23, security forces arrested Francisco Rasgado, a journalist and owner of the private newspaper *Chela Press*, in Benguela, the capital city of Benguela Province in the Western Region of Angola. Police alleged that Rasgado failed to appear before a court following a complaint of criminal defamation and insult leveled against him by Rui Falcão, the secretary of information for the ruling People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) party. However, the journalist told CPJ, he has not

received any summon notification. Rasgado was detained for four days, before being released on April 26.

Tanzania & Zimbabwe

Tanzania and Zimbabwe accounted for six incidents, each of press freedom infringements.

In **Tanzania**, on April 21, four security forces officers from the archipelago of Zanzibar assaulted Jesse Mikofu, a journalist working with the Mwananchi newspaper. The journalist was detained, forced to sit on the ground, questioned and forced to destroy his phone. The security assaulted the journalist for simply taking photographs of them while they were sacking violently some vendors from the Darajani Area.

On April 12, two journalists, Dickson Billikwija and Christopher James, working respectively with the privately-owned media Islands TV and ITV and Radio One, were arrested and detained by state officials in Temeke Municipality, in the south of Dar es Salam, the capital city of Tanzania. According to a statement published by the Tanzania chapter of AFEX member, MISA, the arrest and detention was ordered by a local authority, Lusubilo Mwakabibi, Temeke Municipal Director, when the journalist went there to carry out a follow out reportage.

According to him, the journalists did not have permission to cover the meeting he was holding with some local traders, of whom, he was allegedly accused of maltreating. Though, the minister of Information Culture, Arts and Sports, Innocent Bashungwa ensured media stakeholders of an official response to the incident. But at the time, the report was finalized, it was not yet clear what effective action the minister has taken as a sanction against the perpetrator of such violation of press freedom.

In another incident of unlawful arrest and detention, still, on April 12, security forces arrested and detained for three days, James Lanka, a freelance journalist working for The Guardian from Moshi. The journalist was remanded in custody and released without any charges being leveled against him. His only sin, was pursuing a reportage on alleged arbitrary arrests of businessmen.

On April 9, another local authority, Dr. Philis Nyimbi, a Commissioner of Nayamagana district, threatened to take action against journalist Mabere Makubi of ITV. According to the Media Council of Tanzania (MTC), the Commissioner alleged that the journalist's reportage was endangering her work.

Pascal Katona, a journalist working with Channel 10, was also attacked by disgruntled groups of worshippers of the Makanyagio mosque concerning the results of the election of an Iman. The journalist was reporting covering the exercise while he was attacked, and his work equipment was also destroyed.

In Zimbabwe, despite an overwhelming outcry of national and international groups of human rights against violations of civil and political rights, including freedom of expression during the first quarter. Zimbabwe government did not pay heed to those calls and continued into the second quarter, the violations of freedom.

On May 14, Elias Mambo and Farrai Machamire, two journalists working for an online media outlet, Zim Morning Post, were summoned for questioning by security forces on a charge of criminal insult. The questioning followed a complaint lodged against them by Temba Mliswa, a lawmaker from the town of Norton. The lawmaker alleged that he was insulted and his image tarnished by a story published by the media outlet in February 2021. Though criminal defamation was declared unconstitutional, authorities resort to the Criminal Law of 2004 that criminalises insult. Anyone found culpable risks up to one-year imprisonment with fines.

On May 8, Zimbabwe's authorities deported, Christina Goldbaum and Joao Silva, both journalists with the US-based media, New York Times. They were deported for illegal entry into the country and for not having proper accreditation from the Zimbabwe Media Commission. In connection with this incident, on May 26, Jeffrey Moyo, a freelance journalist who works with several foreign media, was arrested for allegedly facilitating a fraudulent document for the entry of the above-mentioned journalists against section 36 of the Immigration Act in the country. Meanwhile, Moyo obtained the incriminated documents as illegal from the media commission. The journalist was tagged as a threat to state security. Moyo was denied bail and detained for several weeks, before being released on June 16, after his lawyer secured a successful request. He paid bail fees of 5,000 Zimbabwean dollars (\$US14), while the authorities deprived him of the rights of free movement by confiscating his passport.

As part of the assault on freedom by the central government in Zimbabwe, on 14 June 2021, Alice Kuvheya, was arrested and detained at St Mary's Police Station in Chitungwiza. Kuvheya is a fierce woman rights activist and succeeded in securing a court injunction against the destruction of women's informal business infrastructure and homes in Chitungwiza and Harare. After three days of detention, she was released on June 17. However, she was subjected to judicial harassment and has to report to court for proceedings. She was charged for inciting criminal activity and gathering with intent to incite public violence for mobilizing the public for a peaceful demonstration against illegal evictions and destructions of vending stalls and residents of informal traders.

In April, a court in Harare, sentenced Makomborero Haruzivishe, a critic of the government and opposition activist. The activist was sentenced on respectively to 24 months imprisonment for incitement, and 12 months for resisting arrest. The severe sentence came following his arrest and detention over charges of public mobilization against police officers. The two sentences, which run concurrently, are assorted with 10 and 6 months suspended terms, meaning 14 months of imprisonment for Haruzivishe.

Ethiopia

Like Tanzania and Zimbabwe, Ethiopia recorded incidents of violations. One journalist was killed, the internet was shut down amid the Tigray conflict and parliamentary elections during the quarter under review. Four incidents were documented.

Social media platforms such Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram were disrupted in April and May 2021 in Ethiopia, an indication of the country's relapse to its old behavior in cyberspace. This is contrary to what many expect under the administration

of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. In addition, a journalist was killed, just as in the first quarter.

On May 9, Sisay Fida, a journalist working with the Oromia media network was killed. It is believed that his murder is linked to his media reportage on the Tigray conflict. This adds to [several attacks against freedom of the press](#) documented by AFEX during the first quarter of the year.

On May 20, the authorities expelled a foreign journalist. Simon Marks, an Irish journalist working for The New York Times and several other media, was summoned by Ethiopia and interrogated and detained for about eight hours before being expelled out of the country without even allowing him to collect his belongings and bid a farewell to his child. Before his expulsion in March, the Addis Ababa authorities withdrew his reporting license.

Burkina Faso, Kenya, Uganda and Zambia also recorded three incidents of freedom of expression violations each.

In Burkina Faso, a court in Ouagadougou on April 12 condemned Boureima Ouedraogo and Salifou Ouedraogo, respectively, editor in chief and reporter of the *Reporter* newspaper. The journalists and the newspaper were found liable for defamation. The court imposed a whopping fine of 12 million FCFA, the equivalent of \$21,000 in damages and interest to be paid to Martin Nikiema, a court clerk, the plaintiff in this matter.

On April 26, an unidentified armed group operating in the Sahel region killed David Beriain and Roberto Fraile. Beriain is a journalist and Fraile, a cameraman. Both are Spanish nationals. They were killed, alongside others in an attack while they were going to a national park to shoot a documentary on the activities of poachers.

On June 8, the media regulator, Conseil Supérieur de la Communication (CSC), suspended the television and radio of media outlets, Omega group, for five days. The suspension followed the publication of false information on terrorist attacks that led to the death of several people in the country. The management of the media organisation recognised that their outfit erred, and publicly apologised for the misreporting. Despite this, the media regulator went ahead to impose the sanctions.

Kenya, on May 1, security officers fired tear gas canister targeting Mariel Müller, DW's East Africa correspondent in Nairobi. The journalist was covering a peaceful demonstration against police brutalities and coronavirus restriction measures. As a result of the attacks, Muller sustained injuries. Several demonstrators were also detained by the security forces.

On April 7, 2021, three assailants shot and killed Betty Mutekhele Barasa, a senior video editor and television producer working for the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), in Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. The assailants broke into her house and waited for her to return and gunned her down in front of her family. The murders took away the journalist's work tools and her phone.

On April 20, George Kinoti, a top officer of the Kenyan security apparatus, threatened and harassed journalists from Citizen TV, a privately owned television channel. The incident followed the publication of a documentary which alleged that police officers have been involved in arms renting to individuals and thugs in committing banditry. The documentary which has been the result of a year-long investigation conducted by the media outlet did not go down well with the police leadership.

Uganda, on April 22, security forces in the Mityana district, physically assaulted Enock Matovu, a journalist working with the privately-owned television NTV. According to the source, Matovu was attacked because of his work as a journalist, though on the day of the attack, he was not on a reporting assignment.

On May 10, a court in Kampala, the capital city of Uganda, triggered a prosecution procedure against four journalists of radio Simba, namely Maliseeri Mbabali (Uncle Luyugumo), Gold Ki Marino (Opeto), Peter Sabakaaki (omuzinyuuzi), and Julius Sserwanja (Kidomoole). The journalists were allegedly accused of publications of videos on social media, way back in 2020, deemed to spur tribal discontent among citizens against, the particular tribe, Banyankole to which belongs a large number of the ruling class in the country. Before their court appearance, the journalists were arrested in March and detained incommunicado for a week before being released.

In a different court prosecution, still related to online publication in 2020, two journalists, Pidson Kareire and Darius Magara of the *Drone Media* and the *East African watch.net* respectively, were on May 27, arraigned before a court in Kampala, and remained in custody at the Kitulya prison. They were accused of publication of defamatory articles against a road construction company, Dott Services Limited. However, after three weeks of detention both were released on bail on June 17. The bail conditions were exorbitant. Each of them was ordered to pay one million shillings (\$282), and non-cash bail of twenty million shillings (\$5,639) for sureties.

The accusations leveled against the journalists stem from an inimical press law in the country. The court invoked section 179 of the Penal Code of Uganda, which criminalize press libel.

In the two cases of court prosecution, above mentioned, the journalists benefited from legal assistance secured by the Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda, a member of the AFEX network.

In Zambia, following the broadcasting of interviews of the opposition politicians on May 16 and April 30, by the privately-owned television channel, Muvi TV, the Zambia media regulatory authority, Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), threatened to withdraw or suspend the broadcasting license of Muvi, on the alleged ground of breach of ethic and deontology, however, the media denied these allegations.

In another development of attempts of intimidation, Sishuwa Sishuwa, a newspaper columnist and academic, was harassed through police investigations, following a complaint lodged against him on April 26, by Emmanuel Mwamba, Zambia's ambassador to Ethiopia and permanent representative to the African Union. Sishuwa became a target of judicial harassment because of a critical piece he wrote on the August election in the country. Following the publication of the piece by national and international media, the diplomat attacked the media academic in a social media post.

Sishuwa sued the diplomat for defamation, and as retaliation, the latter, bounced back with a show of power and influence through police harassment, followed by judicial investigations.

On May 1, sympathizers of the ruling party, Patriotic Front political, attacked two journalists. Francis Mwiinga Maingaila and Nancy Malwele, working respectively with the privately-owned news website *Zambia 24*, *New Vision* newspaper. The journalists were attacked while covering a tussle between rival factions of the same party at its headquarters in Lusaka.

Cameroun, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini and Sierra Leone

Five countries, recorded each one, two incidents of press violations.

Cameroon is known for several cases of abuse of freedom of expression and internet shutdown over the past years in the anglophone part of the country. Several journalists were reported abusively detained in prison and taken through frustrating judicial procedures as part of intimidation and harassment.

During the period of the review, Mbog Matip, an editor of the daily newspaper, *Climat Social*, went on a hunger strike in May 2021. The journalist was arrested in August 2020 by security forces. He was since detained and charged with the publication of false information by a military court in September 2020, and his release from prison was normally due on March 7, 2021. However, as at the time this report was reviewed, Mbog Matip was still detained in prison.

Aside, Mbog Matip, Amadou Vamouké, a former journalist and head of the state broadcasting media has been held in prison for more than five years till now.

On May 18, Paul Chouta, a reporter of *Cameroun Web*, and fierce critic of the government was sentenced to 23 months into prison, with a hefty fine at the tune of \$ 3,783. He was arrested in Mai 2019 and was in pre-trial detention for more than 2years. Chouta was accused of publication of false information and defamation for having published a video on social media about the novelist Calixthe Belaya.

In what constituted an infringement on privacy and attempts to silence a vocal human rights defender, Amungwa Tanyi Nicodemus, a critical human rights activist and defender of several people indicted in the Cameroon Anglophone crisis. On May 31, 2021, security forces arrested Amungwa Tanyi Nicodemus during a court proceeding in Yaoundé. Nicodemus was arrested while protesting against what he termed as breach of legal procedures in a case of one of his clients. Following his remark, a security force officer seized by force his mobile phone by pretending that the lawyer took photographs at the premises. According to sources, while searching for the alleged photograph the security forces found other photographs of alleged military abuses in Cameroon's Anglophone regions and arrested Amungwa. The activist was detained on the charge of inciting terrorism; however, he was released on June 9.

In Côte d'Ivoire, on June 3, Traoré Medandje and Mathurin Badé, both journalists working for the media group NCI TV were assaulted by disgruntled militants of the opposition Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire-Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (PDCI-RDA). The journalists were attacked while covering a meeting at the Party headquarter between the Minister of National Reconciliation and executives

of the party led by Maurice Kacou Guikahué. The assailants also destroyed the work equipment in the course of the assault.

In Eswatini, the internet was shut down, several people were killed during a series of protests. Eswatini is a state-ruled-kingship on the continent. However, more pro-democratic voices are raising, calling for a change of the system.

During the period under review, appalling incidents of attacks on freedom of peaceful assembly, civil and political rights were recorded.

Following the alleged police killing in May of Thabani Nkomonye, a law student from the University of Swaziland University, pro-democracy protests intensified. Protestors took the street their demand to end the kingship and called for the establishment of a democratic regime.

The authorities responded by deploying the security forces who pressed heavy-handed on the demonstrations. More than 20 people were reported killed as a result of the repression by the security forces. Live ammunition and disproportionate force were used by the security forces to crack down the protests. Several people were injured, tortured, and some people are reported missing.

On June 29, the authority's shut down the internet, as part of the repression measures. Thus, denying access to information and preventing people, media and journalists exercise their rights to freedom of expression online.

Seven countries, recorded, each one incident of freedom of expression violation.

In Benin, on April 6 Avril, following President Talon's amendment of the 1990 Constitution to extend his mandate by 45 days. People took it to the streets their discontentment and protested against the move. In the ensuing protest, a protestor among the crowd attacked and vandalized Urban FM, a private station based in Parakou. The radio station which belongs to Charles Toko, the deputy mayor of Parakou, a sympathizer of the ruling party, is considered to be a propaganda tool for the ruling government.

CAR, on June 3, security officers of the Central Office for the Repression of Banditry (OCRB) arrested Nguemq Ngokpele, editor of the privately-owned newspaper, Le Quotidien de Bangui, and detained him before releasing him the following day a story published on a company, «Aimant notre Afrique», ran by Harouna Douamba. The latter sued the journalist before the court over the allegation of defamation. In connection with this affair, security officers raided the residence of Johnny Yannick Nalimo, director of publication of the online newspaper Kangbi Ndara, and took away two of his laptops.

Congo-Brazzaville, on May 3, when the world was celebrating press freedom, a court in Brazzaville, sentenced to six months, Raymond Malonga, a journalist critic of the government and publisher of the satirical magazine Sel-Piment. Four months earlier, Malonga was arrested on charges of defamation for a story published on alleged funds embezzlement involving Georgette Okemba, the wife of Jean-Dominique

Okemba, nephew of President Denis Sassou Nguesso. The sentence of the journalist came with a heavy fine of 30 million FCFA (\$53, 205).

South Africa, on June 19, Ayesha Ismail and Mario Pedro, two journalists, working with the privately-owned media eNCA, were harassed and threatened by sympathizers of an opposition political party of South Africa, Economic Freedom Fighter (EFF). The journalists were trying to report on an anti-racism protest in Cape Town while they were meted with opposition, hatred speech on their media outlet, and threatened if they dare approach the crowd. Out of fear for their life and safety, Ismail and Pedro left the scene of the protest. According to the CPJ account, this is not the first time a media outlet has been prevented from reportage by sympathisers of EFF. In March this year, Sli Masikane, a journalist of eNCA was prevented from covering a protest staged by EFF-affiliated students.

The Gambia, with the change of regime in 2016, Gambia brought away with the series of freedom of expression recorded under the former President, Yahya Jammeh. However, during the quarter under review, the country recorded an incident of press violation.

On June 2, Modou E. Njie, an official attached to the office of President Adama Barrow, assaulted physically Buba Gagigo, a journalist working with Kerr Fatou, an online media. Gagigo, was covering the registration exercise of President Adama Barrow in Banjul, when Njie attacked Gagigo, pushing him on the ground, and punching him. After assaulting the journalist, Njie accused him of intentionally preventing from taking photos of the president during a press interview. Gagigo denied the accusation as biased as baseless. The assault was condemned by The Gambia Press Union, a member of the AFEX network, and demanded sanctions to deter any potential perpetrator of press violations.

In Mali, while the country is entangled in democratic transition impasses and insecurity crisis posed by the extremist group, the safety of journalists has been in danger over the last decade. During the quarter under review, on April 8, Olivier Dubois, a French journalist working for some international media outlets was abducted by Jamaa Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), a militant coalition group affiliated to Al Qaeda. Dubois went to Gao, where he sought to interview, Abdallah Ag Albakaye, a local leader of the group in question. Since he has been held incommunicado by his abductors.

In Mauritania, on April 24, Abdellahi Mohamed Ould Atigh, editor in chief of the online newspaper Alhoora was arrested and detained for 48 hours at the Boutilimitt police station. The arrest and detention of the journalist followed a complaint from Naha Mint Haroun Cheikh Sidiya, minister of Social Affairs, Childhood and the Family. The journalist was accused of defamation and publication of false information, for questioning the transparency with which the disbursement of funds meant to support vulnerable communities affected by the COVID-19, in an article published on Facebook in March.

In Liberia, the country recorded an example of how assault press freedom online is increasing and targeted at critic journalism, and particularly, female journalists. In

June, Aryee Davis, a founder and female journalist of a Facebook-based television, GrainCost TV, was threatened for her publication on an alleged forged certificate presented by a lawmaker, Cherisia Grant. In a string of menacing messages online, a certain Facebook user called “Gedeh Eagleeyes” was intimidating Davis, saying all information and movements of the journalist are being monitored. As a result of crippling threats, and fearing for her life and her family, Davis has relocated elsewhere. The threats against Davis were condemned by CEMESP, a member of the AFEX network. However, the incidents were reported to the police.

Despite, Sierra Leone having recently decriminalised press libel, judicial harassment and assault are part of the routine to silence critics and dissidents. The country did not record a physical assault during the review period. But journalists were in court for publication of critical articles. Mahmud Tim Kargbo, a freelance journalist, was dragged before the court. On April 26, and May 12, Kargbo appeared before the Magistrate Court in Freetown. He was charged with defamation against the Assistant Inspector General of Police, Patrick AT Johnson. The judicial harassment was linked to a post on Kargbo’s Facebook page about alleged fraud and abuse of power by the Assistant Inspector General of Police in Sierra Leone. Another journalist, Fayia Amara Fayia, a journalist working with Standard-Times newspaper, has been subjugated to [court prosecution](#) after being a victim of attacks, detained last year while reporting on COVID-19 state-imposed restrictions. Also, after decriminalizing press libel in 2020, during the quarter authorities sought to introduce more repressive legislation in cyberspace by adopting a cybersecurity law that tramples on freedom of expression rights online.

Senegal is world-acclaimed for its culture of democratic and peaceful power transfer. Recently, the country recorded some upheavals with attempts of attacks on civil and political rights and the jailing of an influential opposition leader. Though boasting a vibrant media landscape, press offenses are still considered crimes, with an imposed jail sentence.

During the quarter under review, on June 17, a court in Dakar, imposed a 6 months jail term, with three suspended on Madiambal Diagne, manager of the newspaper Le Quotidien. The prosecution stems from a radio programme, where Diagne pretended that Souleymane Teliko, a magistrate who doubled also as President of the Union of magistrates of Senegal (UMS), has claimed unduly travel expenses concerning the then trial of the late President Issa Nabre of Chad. Diagne was also slapped with heavy fines at the tune of a fine of 500,000 CFA francs and 5 million CFA francs (US\$9000) as damages to be paid to judge Teliko.

Redress/Impunity over Violations

On May 11 and 19, two journalists in Guinea, Ibrahima Sadio Bah, and Amadou Diouldé Diallo were released from prison after being detained for several months. Both were arrested, and convicted of defamation by a court in Conakry. However, press libel has been decriminalized in Guinea. The release followed overwhelming outrage and calls from the national media fraternity, and international ones, including a petition

jointly sent to Mamadou Taran Diallo, the Minister of national unity and citizenship of Guinea, on the celebration of World Press Freedom Day.

On June 7, 2021 Guinea's Minister of Sports [withdrew his defamation suit](#) against Habib Marwane Kamara, Administrator of the news website [révéléteur24.com](#). The journalist had republished on his Facebook page a story carried by the website citing accusations by ex-beauty pageants that the Minister, then in charge of Culture, had made amorous proposals to them.

On June 15, prosecutors took testimony from Claude Dassé as they continued investigations into a case of assault and detention of the journalist at Abidjan's main prison, *Maison d'arrêt et de correction d'Abidjan (Maca)*. The Reporter for *L'Intelligent d'Abidjan* had gone to follow-up on reports of extortion at the penitentiary almost a year back on *May 6, 2020*, when he was assaulted by prison guards.

Other Key FOE Developments

During the reporting period, some developments were recorded. They were both positive and negative regarding the media and freedom of expression landscape in the countries featured in this report and beyond, on the continent.

As part of efforts aiming at strengthening the regional capacities of journalists' reportage on the processes and functioning of International Criminal Justice (ICJ), International Court of Justice, and the rule of law. On 28-30 June 2021, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in partnership with the MFWA, organised a virtual two-day webinar for thirty journalists and thereabout from Ghana, The Gambia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.

Legal prosecution has become a trending issue of harassment, and intimidation, and attempts to silence potential and active critical journalists. In concerted efforts to reverse this growing and worrying trend, on April 12, 2021, in a petition jointly signed by the MFWA and its partner organisation the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) as well as the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ). This freedom of expression group called on the Sierra Leonean authorities to end the frivolous prosecution of Fayia Amara Fayia, a journalist with the Standard-Times newspaper who has been dragging before the court for his work of public information about the coverage of COVID-19, since April 2020.

In a different development in Mauritius, but related to internet governance, on April 14, the Information and Technology Communication Authority (ITCA) proposed an amendment to the country's Information, Technology, and Information (ITC) Law. The amendment sought to fight against harmful content, and abuse online on the backdrop of a call for transparency and accountability from giants' social media platforms, amid the fight against fake news spurred by the pandemic of COVID-19. It is feared, the move will inure online surveillance, infringe privacy, and stifle dissidence, and the shrinking of civic space online and freedom of expression on social media.

On June 30, several human rights and freedom of expression organisation across the continent, including AFEX, called on Eswatini authorities in a joint petition addressed to Honourable Prime Minister of Eswatini, to ensure that the internet, social media platforms, and all other communication channels are open, secure, and accessible regardless of the protests that were ongoing in the country.

On June 22, the ECOWAS Court of Justice in Abuja “[restrained](#) the government of President Muhammadu Buhari and its agents from unlawfully imposing sanctions or doing anything whatsoever to harass, intimidate, arrest or prosecute Twitter and/or any other social media service provider(s), media houses, radio and television broadcast stations, the Plaintiffs and other Nigerians who are Twitter users, pending the hearing and determination of this suit.”

The ruling followed a suit filed against the government by the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) and 176 concerned Nigerians arguing that the suspension of Twitter in Nigeria and the criminalisation of the use of the microblogging platform was unlawful.

On June 30, the MFWA and the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) launched [a report](#) on the state of press freedom in Nigeria which revealed that over 3,000 violations including the killing of seven journalists have been recorded since President Buhari assumed office. The report was produced with funding support from OSIWA, while the launching ceremony was supported by the Hewlett Foundation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Freedom of press, expression, and peaceful assembly are increasingly targeted by violent repressions and assaults. While countries are struggling to recover from the devastating strain imposed on every sector of our life. Governments and security are on a rampage stifling the fundamental freedom across the continent, using autocratic remnants and recently adopted restrictions measures to quell and suppress any dissidence and resistance that speak against their grip of power.

Also, the violations of press and freedom recorded during the quarter portrayed an increasing assault by armed groups and individual that attacks critic journalists. In DRC, for instance, killings of journalists by military groups keep increasing.

The safety and security of journalists operating in conflict-torn zones have reached a peak. In Ethiopia, Somalia, and countries of the Sahel region such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, the work of a journalist is at high risk. A journalist was abducted in Mali. Several attacked or self-censored themselves in Ethiopia, out of fear of retaliation. One journalist, Sisay Fida, working with Oromia media network was killed. In Somalia, several others were assaulted physically.

Other rights, particularly civil and political rights that come along with the rights of freedom of assembly, and public mobilization through the internet and social media

are also targets of suppression. For instance, more than twenty protesters in the African state-monarchy, Eswatini, were reported killed during a series of protests that swirled across the country.

Such repression of civil and political rights connotes another era of an autocratic regime. Similarly, countries that have ratified regional and international legislation on freedom of expression, civil and political, have featured also in this report as part of countries' violators of freedom of civil and political rights. This is contrary to the requirements of any democratic governance regime, in violation of freedom guaranteed in each specific country's constitution.

Like in Eswatini, very often, the suppression of civil and political rights, including internet shutdown, occurred around public outrage, or high political tensions such as elections.

Arbitrary arrest and detention, physical assault, threats, and intimidation, are the frequent types of incidents associated with the crackdown on press freedom and freedom of expression.

In some instances, legal prosecution, and abusive interpretation of the law are used to instill fear and panic among media and journalists. This resulted in an inured culture of self-censorship and silence.

With the increased penetration of the internet and massive use of social media, increasingly inimical cybersecurity laws are adopted by authorities to crack down on freedom online and shrink the civic space. Unconventional states behaviors in cyberspace are on the rise. Sophisticated information and communication technologies are deployed to throttle the internet, to track and put dissident and critic journalists on surveillance. In the worst scenario, the deployment of artificial intelligence is combined with physical assault and raiding of media premises, arrest, and detention of journalists.

Sometimes, journalists are simply killed for simply carrying out their constitutional mandate of public information and counter-power checkers.

When uncomfortable with public outrage, some governments, instead of seeking to address the public displeasure, fell on the easy but unconstitutional state behaviors by taking down media platforms. Some simply ordered a social media shutdown. This has been the case in Nigeria when the authorities banned Twitter. In Ethiopia, also the authority's shut down the internet.

Elsewhere on the continent, in countries ruled by elected autocratic, or confronted with internal conflicts and crises, such Central Republic of Africa, Cameroon, Chad, or Gabon, self-censorship is growing rampant. This is due to existing repressive law, or fear of repression from the governing authorities or military groups that instill fears. The flow of information is controlled, and the publication of information by journalists and media are scrupulously parsed to avoid being targeted by parties into conflicts or the central authorities.

It is therefore important that all relevant stakeholders in the media and freedom of expression, including AU, regional bodies, and organisations work together to push back the eroding situation of press and freedom of expression on the continent, and take all necessary steps to consolidate the progress so far made and fortify the foundation of democracy, which among other others, freedom of press, civil and

political rights, as key indispensable requisite for progress and a thriving democratic society.

To that effect, the African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX) is making the following recommendations for all relevant stakeholders for reshaping the freedom of expression situation across countries, regions, and on the continent.

- As the countries are striving to recover from the pervert effects of the COVID-19, exceptional governance decrees act adopted to contain the pandemic continue to be used by authorities to repress the press, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly. Therefore, regional and international bodies like AU, ECOWAS, ECCAS, SADC, COMESA, etc., should intensify efforts in influencing governments towards withdrawing crippling legislation and decree adopted in the fight against the pandemic that is detrimental to press freedom rights and protect the safety of journalists.
- African governments must demonstrate their commitment to rule of law and respect of democratic principles, and transparency by openly condemning attacks against journalists and taking all necessary steps to investigate crimes against journalists, particularly, killings of journalists, and bring culprits to face the rigor of the law as to serve as a deterrent to potential violators of freedom of expression.
- African governments should ensure that security forces refrain from abusing legal forces in assaulting, using the legal prosecution and court action in repressing journalists, citizens' rights to freedom of expression on the continent.
- Security forces on the continent must ensure the safety and protection of journalists in their line of duty.
- Governments on the continent should rather challenge themselves in listening to public outcry and striving to address public concerns, instead of resorting to the brutal crackdown on demonstrations leading to scores of protests, and unnecessary and futile internet shutdowns to quell public frustrations.
- States should be more proactive in initiating genuine and human rights friendly policy and conduct in the governance of cyberspace instead of resorting to the hideous behaviors of online surveillance, breach of privacy, data protection, shrinking of civic space online on alleged agenda of "state security" and fight against terrorism.
- Telecoms and internet providers must resist unlawful governments' internet shutdown order and trolling of social media platforms when the public mobilise online to demand an account from duties bearers and protest against unpopular government policies and discriminatory practices.
- Civil society groups should continue to vigorously advocate for the protection and respect of FOE rights as well as demand redress and reparations for FOE violations.

- Owners/management of media organisations should endeavor to raise the standards of the safety and protection measures of journalists and media workers and to continue appraising their level of compliance to journalism ethics and standards.
- The media fraternity must demonstrate solidarity in condemning attacks on fellow journalists and in calling for justice for attacks against their journalists.



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