



*Empowering Media and
Voices for Public Good*



FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION MONITOR - WEST AFRICA

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Executive Summary

The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) promotes and defends press freedom and freedom of expression in West Africa to help create an enabling environment for the media and other voices to participate in governance processes. Under its Freedom of Expression and Digital Rights Programme, the MFWA documents evidence of freedom of expression issues, both offline and online, to inform and guide advocacy interventions.

Although all 16 countries are parties to binding international human rights frameworks, and their national constitutions provide safeguards for expression, attacks against expression (including activism and protests) persist. The MFWA documents the assault on the right to expression and potential threats to freedom of expression and the civic space, and uses them as evidence to spotlight the situation in the region, advocate for reparations and policy reforms.

This report documents freedom of expression violations and related developments recorded between October and December 2025 across eleven countries. It records 20 violations, 65 percent of which were attributed to state security agents. A total of 172 victims were affected, 85 percent of them journalists.

Although arrests and detentions, a violation category type, was cited as the type of violation with the most frequencies, the killing of a female TikTok influencer in Mali was the worst violation recorded. Also concerning was the withdrawal of the press cards of 130 journalists and the suspension of eight media outlets by Benin's media regulator, the High Authority for Audiovisual and Communication (HAAC). Despite the worrying violations reported, eight remedial actions were recorded in five countries.

The report ends with recommendations to governments, media regulators, state security agents, ECOWAS and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. The recommendations call on these stakeholders to ensure accountability for violations perpetrated, recourse to dialogue instead of sanctions, capacity building for security agents and the need for diplomatic pressures on governments to uphold freedom of expression rights.

Introduction



Countries in West Africa generally provide constitutional guarantees for press freedom and freedom of expression. In several instances, reforms such as the repeal of criminal libel laws and the enactment of access to information legislation have further strengthened the legal framework for the protection of these rights. Additionally, all countries in the sub-region are signatories to key international and regional human rights instruments that safeguard freedom of expression, association, and assembly.

Notably, all 16 West African states are parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. These instruments impose binding obligations on states to respect, protect, and fulfil fundamental freedoms. For instance, Article 9 of the African Charter guarantees every individual the right to receive information and to express and disseminate opinions within the law.

Despite these legal protections, the reality across the region remains deeply concerning. Freedom of expression—including activism and protest—continues to be undermined by a range of violations perpetrated by both state and non-state actors. These include arbitrary arrests, physical assaults, legal harassment, threats, and, in extreme cases, killings. Such acts are often aimed at punishing dissent and creating a climate of fear that suppresses open expression and civic participation.

In response to these challenges, the Media Foundation for West Africa systematically monitors and documents freedom of expression violations across all 16 countries in the region. Through the publication of daily incident reports, known as “Alerts,” the organisation seeks to draw attention to abuses, inform stakeholders, and demand accountability. These Alerts are subsequently compiled on a quarterly basis into comprehensive reports that provide data-driven insights into trends, patterns, and the overall state of freedom of expression in West Africa.

This report covers the daily monitoring undertaken in the last quarter of 2025 (October-December 2025). The report presents findings regarding the attacks documented in the quarter, redress attacks taken, and other notable FOE issues observed. The report ends with recommendations to key stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY



This Freedom of Expression Monitor (The Monitor) is compiled using data gathered from the MFWA's daily monitoring of freedom of expression across West Africa. The monitoring process is conducted by the organisation's country-based monitors, correspondents and selected staff, and complemented by reports from its national partner organisations in the various countries in the region.

To ensure a comprehensive and reliable dataset, the monitoring draws from multiple sources. These include firsthand reports from MFWA's national correspondents and monitors; verified media accounts and reports from MFWA's national partners; and information shared by local and international human rights organisations working in the region. When validated, the daily reported incidents are published as Alerts to draw attention to the issues identified for remedial action on an as-and-when basis. The Alerts provide detailed and timely documentation of violations, including information on the nature of the incident, identity of the victims and perpetrators, and any follow-up or redress actions taken or needed.

The Monitor also highlights other significant developments that affect media freedom and civic space in the region, including legal reforms, court rulings, policy interventions, or advocacy actions recorded in the region during the period of the report. The Monitor serves as an advocacy tool for the promotion of free speech, defence of civil liberties and the protection of media and freedom of expression rights (offline & online). It is further intended to inform efforts by actors (civil society, policymakers, international bodies, academics, etc.) that are aimed at creating a more open, free, and safe environment for expression and activism to foster good governance in West Africa.

This edition of The Monitor covers findings of the daily monitoring carried out throughout the fourth quarter of 2025 (October – December, 2025). It ends with a set of recommendations towards addressing the violations reported and improving the freedom of expression situation in the region.

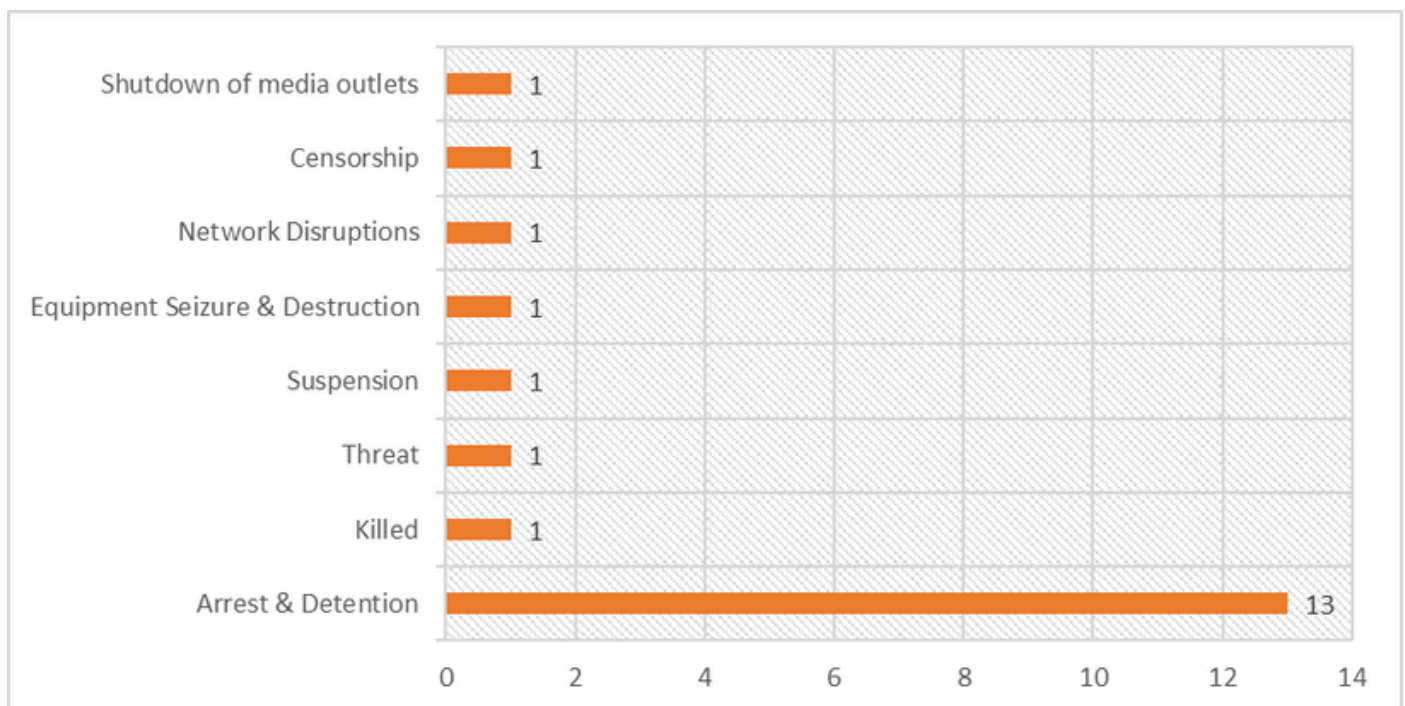
FINDINGS

This report presents the findings of the monitoring of the freedom of expression (FOE) situation (including environmental activism and expression through protests) in West Africa for the fourth quarter of 2025 (October – December 2025). It documents and analyses recorded FOE violations during the period, highlighting their scale, patterns, and trends. It further examines the specific countries where these violations took place, along with a breakdown of the incidents reported in each country. It further identifies the actors responsible for restricting expression and the victims who suffer the repressive acts. The report also assesses redress actions undertaken, and captures key developments that shaped the FOE landscape during the quarter.

INCIDENTS OF VIOLATIONS

During the period under review, 20 violations against the right to freedom of expression were recorded across the region. The 20 incidents were made up of seven categories of violations. Arrests and detentions which emerged as the most dominant violation, accounted for 13 (65%) of the 20 incidents. There was an incident of suspension that affected 130 journalists and eight media outlets in Benin. The 130 journalists had their press cards withdrawn. Unfortunately, an incident of killing was recorded in Mali where a TikTok influencer was publicly executed. Figure 1 below presents the frequency of the incidents and categories of violations recorded.

Figure 1: Frequency and Category of FOE Violations



Summaries of the specific incidents of the FOE violations captured in Figure 1 above can be found [here](#).

COUNTRIES AND INCIDENTS OF FOE VIOLATIONS

The 20 violations recorded during the fourth quarter of 2025 occurred across 11 countries. Benin, Senegal, and Nigeria recorded the highest incidents of violations (3) made up of suspensions and arrests of journalists. In Table 1 below, the frequency of violations recorded in each of the 11 countries is presented. The table also features the different categories of violations recorded in each country.

Table 1: Countries and Types of Violations

Country	Arrest & Detention	Killed	Threat	Censorship	Suspension	Equipment Seizure & Destruction	Network disruptions	Media Shutdown	Total
Senegal	3							1	4
Ghana	2								2
Benin	1				1				2
Nigeria	1					1			2
Mali	1	1							2
Mauritania	2								2
Guinea Bissau				1			1		2
Sierra Leone			1						1
Guinea	1								1
Togo	1								1
Niger	1								1
Total	13	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20

PERPETRATORS OF VIOLATIONS

The 20 incidents of FOE violations recorded were carried out by five categories of perpetrators. State security agents were culpable for majority of the violations. They were the main culprits who carried out the arrests and detentions, and destruction of equipment of journalists. The media regulator of Benin was responsible for the suspension of 130 journalists and eight media outlets. And armed group (believed to be terrorists) were cited as the perpetrators of the killing of a social media activist in Mali. Table 2 below presents statistics about the categories of actors responsible for the violations cited in the respective countries.

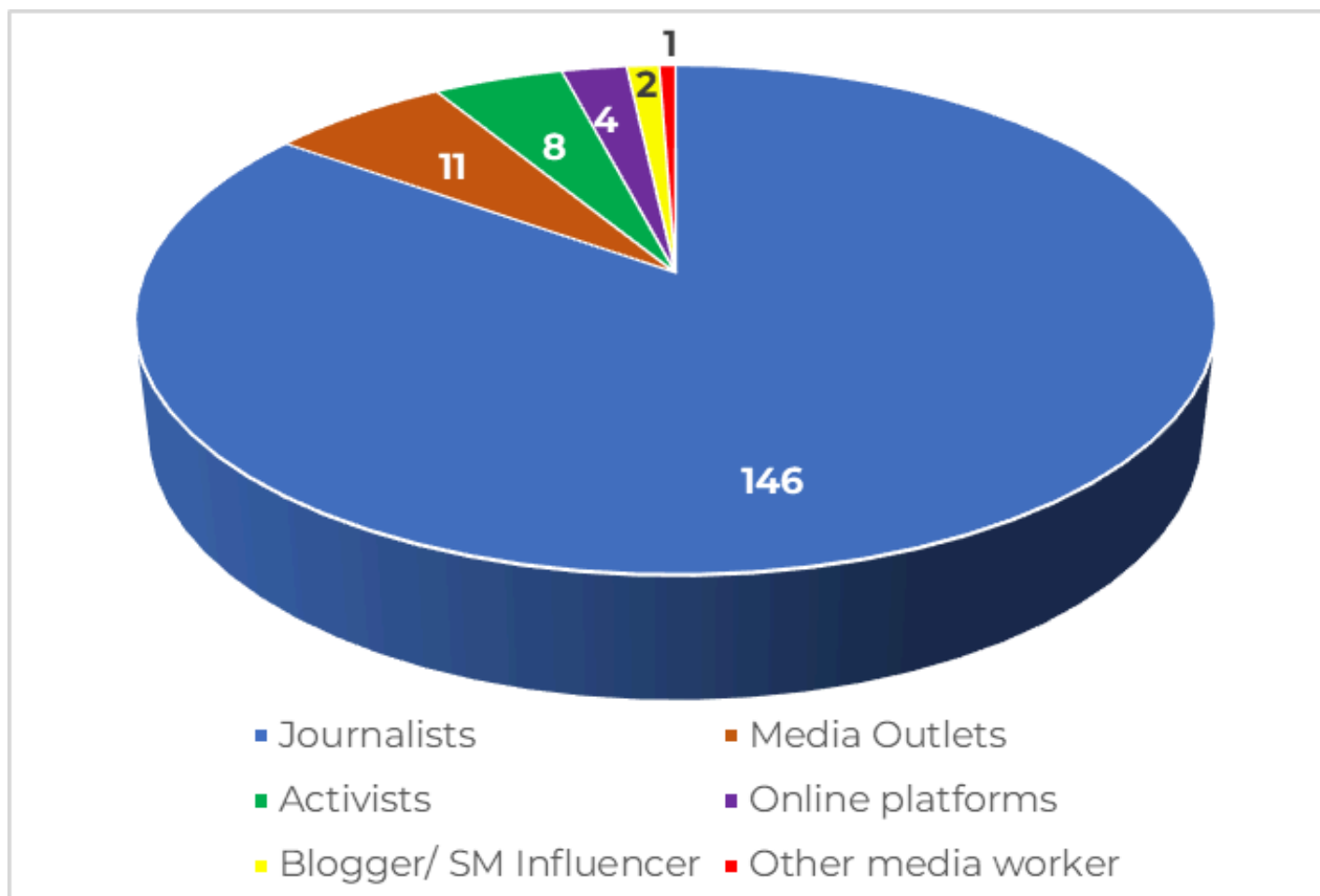
Table 2: Perpetrators of FOE Violations

Country	Security Agent	State Official	Media regulator	Gunmen	Individual	Total
Ghana	2					2
Nigeria	2					2
Senegal	2					2
Mauritania	2					2
Benin	1		1			2
Mali	1			1		2
Togo	1					1
Niger	1					1
Guinea	1					1
Sierra Leone					1	1
Guinea Bissau		1				1
Total	13	1	1	1	1	17

VICTIMS OF VIOLATIONS

One hundred and seventy-two people directly suffered from the 20 FOE violations reported. Journalists were found to be the major victims of the violations as they constituted 146 (representing 85%) of the 172 victims cited as depicted in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Victims of Violations



Out of the 146 journalists who suffered the violations, 130 were journalists who were affected by the withdrawal of press cards by the media regulator of Benin. Similarly, eight of the eleven media outlets cited as victims were the media houses that were suspended by the media regulator of Benin. The withdrawal of press cards of the 130 journalists and the suspension of the eight media outlets was described as part of what the media regulator labelled as a “clean up” of the media sector. Table 3 below presents statistics about the victims of the violations as cited in the respective countries.

Table 3: Victims of FOE Violations

Country	Journalists	Media Outlets	Activists	Online platforms	Blogger/S.M influencer	Other media worker	Total
Benin	131	8					139
Mauritania	1		6				7
Niger	6						6
Guinea Bissau		1		4			5
Senegal	2	2				1	5
Nigeria	3						3
Ghana			1		1		2
Mali	1				1		2
Togo			1				1
Sierra Leone	1						1
Guinea	1						1
Total	146	11	8	4	2	1	172

REDRESS OF VIOLATIONS

Following calls for reparation from the alerts and reports issued about freedom of expression abuses in the region by the MFWA and other organisations, the fourth quarter of 2025 recorded eight remedial actions. One of the redress cases was in response to a violation that occurred during the quarter under review where some activists and protestors were arrested and detained in Mauritania. Four of the remedial actions were in response to four violations recorded earlier in 2025 (January to September 2025). However, one of the beneficiaries of the redress action recorded was a victim of an arrest in 2018. The remaining three remedial actions concerned violations reported in 2024. Below are excerpts of the redress cases.

Senegalese journalist and commentator Abdou Nguer was released on November 12, 2025, after spending seven months in detention over a TikTok post deemed offensive to state authorities. Nguer, a commentator for SEN TV, was initially arrested on April 14, 2025, in Dakar in connection with a post on the account “Abdou Nguer Seul,” which called for an autopsy on the late President of the Constitutional Council, Mamadou Badio Camara. Nguer denied involvement, and investigations later identified Pape Amadou Ndiaye Diaw as the account owner. Although both men were acquitted of spreading false news and promoting crime, Nguer was convicted of insulting the Head of State and sentenced to six months in prison.

Also in Senegal, on December 11, 2025, the country’s Supreme Court annulled two ministerial orders by the Minister of Communication that had required media outlets to register on a new digital platform to gain media enterprise status recognition. The orders, issued in 2024, led to the suspension of 381 media outlets. The Court ruled that the Minister of Communication had exceeded his authority, as recognition of media enterprise status is already governed by the Press Code and cannot be subjected to additional procedures. Consequently, the registration platform, the commission in charge, and all sanctions against unregistered outlets were declared unlawful.

The last redress from Senegal is that of Badara Gadiaga, a columnist for the television channel Télé Futurs Médias (TFM). Gadiaga was arrested on July 9, 2025 following remarks he made against Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko during the televised program Jakaarlo that was aired on July 4, 2025. Gadiaga was released on December 12, 2025.



In Togo, the President of the Council of Ministers, Faure Gnassingbe, during his State of the Nation address on December 3, 2025, announced presidential clemency for 1,151 prisoners and detainees. The announcement was subsequently backed by a decree adopted by the Council of Ministers on December 30, 2025. Some activists and dissidents who had been imprisoned or detained for their expression were released as a result of the presidential pardon. They included Abel Yawo Atitso, secretary general of the Union of Students and Pupils of Togo (SEET), Abdoul Zoulkaneini Lamboni, a SEET member, and another student named Julien Komandéga Kataka who were arrested on September 3, 2025; Armand Agblézé and Oséi Agbagno, activists from the Togolese citizens’ movement organisation, Tournons la Page, who were arrested on August 22, 2025; and Chimene Akou Apevon was arrested on August 28, 2025, she was accused of aggravated disturbance of public order, incitement to violence, undermining state security, and attempting to destabilize state institutions. According to some sources, she had met with Armand Agblézé and Oséi Agbagno the day before their arrest.

The others included the poet, Honoré Sitsofé, also known as Affectio, who was picked up by plainclothes officers in Lomé on January 10, 2025. Togolese midwife and activist, Grace Koumayi Bikoyi, who was arrested at her home by unidentified plainclothes agents on October 3, 2025; and Abdoul Aziz Goma, a Togolese-Irish citizen (a businessman and human rights defender) who was arrested in 2018 and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment on February 3, 2025 for “undermining national security.” Meanwhile, other critical voices such as former Minister Essissomna Marguerite Gnakadé remain in detention.

On October 6, 2025, Burkina Faso released Balai Citoyen (a civil society organisation) activists Rasmané Zinaba and Bassirou Badjo after nearly two years in forced conscription. The two were picked up in February 2024 under a decree that authorises the state to requisition persons, property, and services for the war effort in the context of the country’s security crisis. Since the announcement of the decree in November 2023, civil society organisations in Burkina Faso have argued that the requisitioning mechanism in the decree was being used not for legitimate national defence purposes, but to silence critical civic voices. After the conscription of the two activists, Balai Citoyen condemned the use of this decree against the activists, describing it as targeted and punitive. The conscription of the activists was widely criticised as an attempt to suppress dissent, and multiple court orders demanding their release were ignored. The circumstances of their release remain unclear, but after 23 months in detention, the two activists have regained their freedom.

Mali recorded two redress actions involving the release of two media actors who had been imprisoned for remarks they had made. The first one is political commentator and former legislator, Issa Kaou N’Djim. He was released from prison in Bamako on November 13, 2025, after serving one year of a two-year sentence for remarks considered insulting to the military authorities of Burkina Faso. N’Djim, a former vice-president of Mali’s National Transitional Council, was arrested in November 2024 following comments he made on Joliba TV News questioning Burkina Faso’s claim that it had foiled a coup attempt.

Another media actor, Seydou Oumar Traoré, managing director of Radio Baoulé FM in Mali, was released from prison on November 26, 2025, after serving a one-year sentence (with six months suspended) for “offending a foreign head of state.” His conviction followed remarks he made in a video accusing Mamady Doumbouya, Guinea’s transitional President, of betraying the Alliance of Sahel States by cooperating with Western powers. Arrested on May 26, 2025 by Mali’s Cybercrime Unit and later tried by the National Cybercrime Court, Traoré was also fined one million CFA francs (USD 1750) despite issuing a public apology.

Mauritania also recorded a redress action. Activists who had been arrested on November 28, 2025 during demonstrations marking the 35th anniversary of the Inal massacre were released on Tuesday, December 2, alongside other protestors who had also been detained.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS



In addition to the recorded violations, a number of issues were observed during the monitoring period which are significant for the broader freedom of expression and media landscape in the region. In particular, the incidents highlighted below could potentially harm the freedom of expression environment in the four countries cited.

Nearly seven years after the murder case of Ghanaian investigative journalist, Ahmed Hussein-Suale, the Madina District Court in Accra decided to discontinue the case following advice from Ghana's Attorney-General's Office that the available evidence was insufficient to sustain prosecution. According to local media reports, the decision led to the discharge of the main suspect, Daniel Owusu Koranteng, on October 14, 2025. The Attorney-General's review reportedly found that crucial pieces of evidence, including call records and witness materials, did not meet the threshold required to sustain the charges of murder and abetment.

In Niger, on December 26, 2025, the transitional government adopted a draft executive order to reorganise and realign the country's resources to safeguard national security. The decision was taken during a Council of Ministers meeting chaired by transitional President, Abdourahmane Tiani. The intervention is aimed at realigning the countries resources, including people, goods and services to protect and preserve national interests and sovereignty, and to mitigate external threats. The measure is also intended to manage information flow around the intervention. There are, however, concerns the broad provisions, particularly on information control, could threaten civil liberties and freedom of expression.

In Senegal, students at Cheikh Anta Diop University (UCAD) and Gaston-Berger University (UGB) staged protests from late November 2025 over unpaid university scholarships outstanding for nearly 13 months. Tensions escalated on December 2 when UCAD's Academic Council authorised police intervention on campus, leading to violent clashes involving stone-throwing, barricades, and tear gas. At least 16 students were injured, while eleven officers were also hurt. About 10 students were arrested as a result of the protests. Following the unrest, the government announced the release of the pending scholarship payments.

In Benin, the media regulator, the High Authority for Audiovisual and Communication (HAAC), withdrew the press cards of 130 journalists and suspended eight media outlets, while simultaneously issuing 287 new press cards. This juxtaposition of revoking accreditation from existing journalists while granting new ones appears to reflect the regulator's stated objective of professionalising the media sector and strengthening compliance within Benin's media landscape.

Nigerian journalist Friday James Alefia, publisher of the online outlet Naija News Today, spent 87 days in detention after publishing investigative reports alleging land-grabbing, extortion, and intimidation involving Chinedu Ogah, a member of Nigeria's House of Representatives. He was arrested on September 23, 2025, at his home in Lagos by officers from the Federal Capital Territory Command, transferred to Abuja, and later charged under Sections 24 and 27 of the Nigeria's Cybercrimes Act for allegedly publishing false statements and cyberstalking. After pleading not guilty before the Federal High Court of Nigeria on November 12, 2025, he was remanded at Kuje Correctional Centre and granted bail of 20 million naira (~USD 15,000) with strict conditions that delayed his release until December 19, 2025. Alefia said the detention harmed his newsroom and staff.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The last quarter of 2025 (October to December) recorded 20 freedoms of expression (FOE) violations across eleven countries, representing a notable decline from the previous quarter (July to September), which documented more than twice as many incidents (48). While this reduction is significant, it does not lessen the impact of the violations recorded on journalists, media outlets, activists, and the broader FOE landscape. Rather, the incidents continue to reflect deeper security and governance challenges that impact the civic space negatively.

The killing of a social media influencer in Mali by an armed group stands out as a stark and the most unfortunate incident in the quarter; an incident that underscores the heightened risks faced by journalists, activists, and other civic actors in the region. Equally worrying is the withdrawal of press cards of 130 journalists and the suspension of eight media outlets by the media regulator in Benin. Further compounding these concerns is the discontinuation of the Ahmed Suale murder case in Ghana and the release of the sole suspect, which highlights persistent gaps in accountability for grave violations against civic actors. These developments contribute to an environment of fear and uncertainty, with a demonstrable chilling effect on the exercise of fundamental freedoms, particularly the right to seek, receive, and impart information.

Despite this troubling context, a few positive developments offered limited relief. The reprieve observed in Togo, alongside the release of detained journalists and activists, and the ruling by Senegal's Supreme Court annulling ministerial directives that required media outlets to register on a new digital platform, were notable highlights. These remedial actions are critical in sustaining hope, strengthening resilience among civic actors, and advancing efforts to combat impunity in the region. While commendable, these actions remain largely reactive, isolated and insufficient, and do not demonstrate a consistent, institutionalised commitment by governments in the region to protect the rights to expression. Sustained, systemic efforts are urgently needed to protect freedom of expression and to end the entrenched culture of impunity across the region.

In consideration of the above findings and concerns, the MFWA calls on governments in the region, ECOWAS and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) to ensure that the right to freedom of expression is respected and protected to help foster a freer and safer civic space that engages and contributes to governance processes. Specifically, the MFWA makes the following calls:

Governments

- Ensure accountability for FOE violations by investigating the reported cases and prosecuting offenders' perpetrators in accordance with due process to deter others from such unlawful acts.
- Ensure that all state institutions respect and protect the right to freedom of expression as required by national constitutions and international obligations.
- Regulate security conduct: Establish clear oversight and accountability mechanisms for security agencies, including mandatory human rights training and enforceable sanctions for misconduct.

Media Regulators

- Prioritise dialogue over sanctions to ensure amicable resolution of issues, professionalism and sustainability of the industry
- Ensure that sanctions meted out for unprofessional journalism conduct is legal, necessary and proportionate to ensure a professional and thriving media industry, access to information and an improved FOE ecosystem.

State Security Agencies:

- Respect the right to freedom of expression as enshrined in the respective constitutions in the respective countries.
- Exercise professionalism at all times when managing protests and dealing with journalists and other activists.
- Investigate and prosecute security officers responsible for attacks and unlawful arrests of activists and journalists.

ECOWAS

- Strengthen oversight mechanisms to ensure Member States respect fundamental human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, in accordance with regional and international human rights obligations.
- Hold Member States accountable for persistent or systemic violations against the right to expression.


Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)

- Increase diplomatic pressure on governments, to uphold press freedom, FOE and human rights commitments.
- Undertake missions to countries often cited for freedom of expression violations to engage authorities about the violations and the need to end impunity.



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