

Freedom of Expression

Developments in West Africa

an April 2025 Round-Up



INTRODUCTION

Freedom of the press and expression are essential pillars of any healthy democracy. They promote transparency, empower citizens to hold those in power accountable, and provide the information necessary for informed decision-making. These rights ensure that everyone – from journalists exposing corruption to environmental activists – can speak out without fear of reprisal.

In recognition of the significance of these freedoms, all countries in the West African region have guaranteed these rights in their national Constitutions. Most of the countries have also ratified key international human rights instruments, notably, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) which guarantee the rights to expression, peaceful assembly, and access to information.

Despite these constitutional safeguards and international commitments, the civic space in the region continue to shrink due to incessant attacks against civic expression, activism and media freedoms. As a contribution to countering the increasing attacks against the right to expression, opinion, access to information and peaceful assembly, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) has been monitoring and documenting abuses against journalists and activists (especially environmental activists) in the region. The monitoring reports expose the perpetrators and violations they commit against journalists, other media workers, news media organisations, and environmental activists (CSOs, individuals, communities, etc.). The reports also serve as reference materials for further study, advocacy and policy interventions.

This report presents findings of the daily monitoring conducted in the month of April 2025. The report ends with recommendations to relevant state and non-state actors to address the issues highlighted in the report.

FINDINGS



Daily monitoring of the civic space in West Africa in the month of April 2025 recorded eleven incidents of freedom of expression violations in six countries. The violations were generally in the form of arrests, detentions and summons; attacks against civic expression and suspension of media outlets. Details of the incidents are highlighted below with recommendations to the relevant stakeholders.

Arrest, detention, and summons

A number of detentions and summons were recorded in April 2025. In Mali, the editor of the *Canard de la Venise* newspaper, Alfouseyni Togo, was [arrested](#) and detained on April 9. Togo was charged with “undermining the state’s reputation,” “insults via a computer system,” and defamation for a story titled, “Malian justice or the plague of the century: the mistake made by Minister Mamoudou Kassogu  ” that was published in the *Canard de la Venise* newspaper. The story challenged figures referenced by the Minister of Justice, Mamoudou Kassogu  , which sought to suggest that there is a significant increase in the public’s trust in the judiciary. The story also alleged that the judiciary in Mali is riddled with corruption and manipulated to achieve political goals. The case against Togo will go to trial on June 12, 2025.

On April 10, 2025, Simon Faye, Managing Editor of the Sen TV and Zik FM, was [detained](#) by Senegalese authorities for allegedly spreading false news via Zik FM's social media handle. Zik FM's Facebook handle shared an article originally published by Afrique Confidentielle, which claimed that "West African leaders seem to have drawn a clear conclusion: Ousmane Sonko is Senegal's strongman, more than the official President, Bassirou Diomaye Faye." Although Afrique Confidentielle published the story, only Faye, the Managing Editor for Zik FM is facing legal action. He was held until April 14 and later released on bail.

Again in Senegal, a journalist, Abdou Nguer and his colleagues, Oumar Ndiaye and Fatima Coulibaly were summoned by Dakar's Colobane Police Division on April 14. After hours of questioning, Ndiaye and Coulibaly were released, but Nguer was [detained](#) over a TikTok post by an account named, "Abdou Nguer Seul." The said TikTok post called for "an autopsy on the deceased Badio Camara," the late President of Senegal's Constitutional Council. Nguer denied the post, indicating that his accounts were "Abdou Nguer Official" and "Awa Nguer." Investigators later identified the true owner of the "Abdou Nguer Seul" account, Pape Amadou Ndiaye Diaw, who also admitted authorship of the post. However, Nguer was not allowed to go, but was taken to an investigating judge with Diaw on April 17. The two were formally taken into custody.

In Ghana, two journalists were invited for interrogation by state security agencies. Gordon Asare-Bediako, a journalist with Wontumi FM based in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, was [detained](#) and questioned by five officials of the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP) after he voluntarily went to their office in response to their invitation. He was accused of making corruption allegations against Ghana's Special Prosecutor, Kissi Agyebeng, and questioned about the source(s) of the allegation. Asare-Bediako, however, refused to reveal his sources. He was charged with false publication and false communication and granted bail of GH¢5 million (USD 323,799.17). Asare-Bediako subsequently announced plans to take legal action against the Special Prosecutor.

Another journalist, Prosper Agbenyegah, Editor of the Current Issues newspaper, was on April 7 [summoned](#) for interrogation by Ghana's National Security Secretariat. Agbenyegah was questioned about a story published by his newspaper in which an allegation was made about a leaked document from National Security concerning the transportation of some Electricity Company of Ghana containers. The Private Newspapers and Online News Publishers Association of Ghana (PRINPAG) expressed concern over the incident describing the invitation as an attempt to intimidate the journalist and urged that media complaints should be lodged with the National Media Commission instead.

Attack against media and civic expression

On April 16, the third national deputy chairman of the major opposition party in Ghana (the New Patriotic Party), Alhaji Masawudu Osman, deliberately [shoved](#) the microphone of TV3, an Accra-based television station belonging to the Media General Group, at a press conference in Accra. Osman later confirmed in a media interview that the act was intentional and warned that any NPP communicator who appears on any Media General platform (including TV3, 3FM and OnuaFM) would be suspended. He also threatened to have Media General journalists assaulted if they attend future NPP events. In response, Media General issued a press release on April 18, 2025, condemning Osman's threats and filing an official complaint with the Ghana Police Service.

In Niger's Maradi region, two traders were [arrested](#) on April 3 for criticising Maradi regional officials in a private WhatsApp group. Ibrahim Kalla, a businessman, and Sani Hercule, President of a trade union of transporters, were taken into custody at the Maradi Central Police Station for criticising the performance of the region's governor and the head of the customs brigade, expressing their desire to see both officials step down.

On April 9, Nigeria's National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) directed all radio and television stations to stop [airing](#) "Tell Your Papa," a new Afrobeat single by veteran rapper Eedris Abdulkareem released on April 6. The song,

delivered in a mix of Nigerian Pidgin and Yoruba, directly addresses Seyi Tinubu, son of President Bola Tinubu of Nigeria and urges him to inform his father about the country's challenges. The NBC described the song as "inappropriate" and in violation of the broadcast code; and thus, advised media outlets not to air the song in order to maintain what the Commission referred to as "responsible broadcasting standards."

Suspension of media outlets

On April 22, Senegal's Minister of Communication ordered the immediate [suspension](#) of 381 media outlets deemed non-compliant with the country's Press Code. This followed a review by a new regulatory commission created in October 2024 to ensure professionalism in the media sector. The move adds to the series of governmental actions taken under President Bassirou Diomaye Faye that continue to put a strain on the media sector, including freezing media accounts, canceling state contracts, and refusing to honour a previous tax debt relief plan initiated by the previous government. Media development organisations, including the MFWA, have warned that these actions are pushing media outlets out of business, denying the public access to information, and shrinking the media sector in the country.

On April 28, Guinea's media regulator, the Haute Autorité de la Communication (HAC), suspended journalist Toumany Camara and his news website, www.presseinvestigation.com, for three months over defamation claims. According to the HAC, [the sanctions were issued in accordance](#) with Articles 39, 40, 53, and 108 of Guinea's Organic Law L/2010/02/CNT of June 2, 2010, on press freedom. The sanctions followed a complaint by Ms. Aïssata Beavogui, Country Manager of the mining company, Predictive Discovery, who accused Camara of "defamation and insult" through an article he published on his news website. The said article linked Ms. Beavogui to an aluminium company which was reportedly shut down by Guinean authorities for noncompliance and warned of possible environmental risks should a gold mining permit be granted to Predictive Discovery (which Ms. Beavogui now heads) in the Haut Niger National Park,

a UNESCO-protected site. According to the HAC, Camara failed to provide sufficient evidence to support his allegations, and did not seek nor publish Ms. Beavogui's side of the story and, therefore, suspended the journalist and his website for 3 months.

Lawsuit

A Ghanaian MP, Blay Nyameke Armah, [filed](#) a GHC10 million (USD 642,678) defamation suit at the High Court against four entities – Accra-based Metro TV; its parent company, Ignite Media Group; their holding company, the Jospong Group; and Lawuratu Musah-Saka, a member of the NPP communication team. The suit stems from comments made on Metro TV's Good Morning Ghana programme, aired on April 7, 2025, in which Musah-Saka alleged that Armah was a “cocaine kingpin” who was in possession of 3,000 kg of cocaine (valued at USD 350 million). The MP described the allegations as baseless, defamatory, and made with malicious intent and is requesting the court to declare the statements made against him as false and defamatory. Additionally, he is seeking a public apology and retraction from the defendants with the same prominence as the initial and subsequent broadcasts. On the April 14 edition of the same programme, Musah-Saka retracted her statements and expressed regret for her remarks. The case is, however, pending a hearing.

Other developments

The three Burkinabé journalists who were arrested after the congress of the Journalists Association of Burkina (AJB) in March 2025 – Guezouma Sanogo, president of the AJB, Boukari Ouoba, vice president of the AJB, and Luc Pagbelguem, the BFI TV who reported on the Congress –[surfaced](#) on April 2 in a viral video dressed in military uniforms. This follows a similar incident in October 2024 when three other journalists disappeared and later reappeared as conscripts. The Burkinabé authorities appear to be using conscription to punish and/or as a weapon to silence critics.

On April 25, 2025 Nigeria's Competition and Consumer Protection Tribunal [upheld](#) a \$290 million fine against Meta Platforms Inc. for violating data protection and consumer rights laws. The fine, initially issued in July 2024 after a 38-month investigation, cited unauthorized data sharing and inadequate user consent practices. A separate \$5 million lawsuit filed by lawyer Femi Falana (SAN) highlights ongoing privacy concerns with big tech companies. Meta plans to appeal, disputing the interpretation of Nigeria's data protection laws.

Ghana's Minister of Communications, Digital Technology and Innovation Samuel Nartey George, [announced](#) on April 9, 2025 plans to introduce a Bill in the next parliamentary session targeting the deliberate spread of misinformation and disinformation. The proposed legislation will establish a comprehensive legal framework to guide enforcement and hold offenders accountable, all under a "spirit of full transparency." The Minister stressed the civic responsibility when communicating and warned that, once enacted, the law will enable authorities to clamp down on anyone engaged in mis/disinformation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Intolerance to civic expression by the ruling class in West Africa remains a major challenge that is contracting the civic space in the region. For the month under review for instance, at least three views expressed by taxpayers resulted in their detention. Alfouseyni Togo challenged the Senegalese Minister of Justice's figures about trust levels in the judiciary, and resulted in his arrest, detention and criminal proceeding; and Ibrahim Kalla and Sani Hercule criticised regional officials in a private group conversation on a platform known to be end-to-end encrypted, and they were arrested. These repressive acts seem to suggest that the citizens cannot even express their own views about issues or express concern about the hardships they face in their lives without fearing the possibility of being picked up. These acts are highly condemnable and must stop as a matter of urgency. At least, the Constitutions of both Senegal and Niger provide safeguards for expression and opinion.

Equally worrying is the order given by Senegal's Minister of Communications to suspend more than half of the media outlets in the country for non-compliance with the country's press code. Although the media outlets concerned may indeed be at fault, such a sweeping order will simply shrink the media sector, deny people access to information and platforms for expression.



The other issues recorded in the month under review, such as the continuous detention of Abdou Nguer, the censorship placed on media outlets in Nigeria not to play the “Tell Your Papa song,” and the attack against a media outlet and threats to its journalists by a national executive of a political party are all worrying developments that must be addressed.

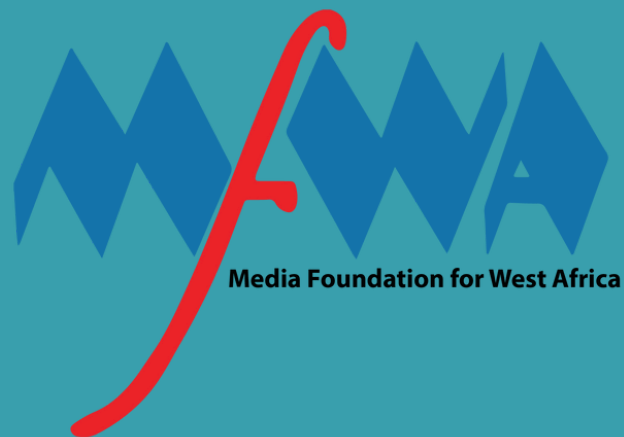
The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), therefore, calls on all state and non-state actors to desist from attacking the media, journalists, activists and members of the general public when they express themselves or share their opinions about issues of public interest. We encourage all to use rejoinders to provide facts or counter arguments to views and concerns they do not agree with.

The MFWA also calls on the Minister of Communication of Senegal to reverse the order to suspend the 381 media outlets and rather engage the media outlets in questions, media groups and associations and other relevant stakeholders in the media sector to collectively find a workable solution to get all media outlets to comply with the press code. The Ministry could also consider giving a probationary period to the 381 media outlets to comply with the press code after which non-compliant outlets may be sanctioned.


On the proposed mis/disinformation Bill by Ghana’s Minister of Communications, Digital Technology and Innovation, the MFWA calls on the Ministry to ensure transparency and meaningful stakeholder engagements throughout the process. The Ministry must also ensure that the proposed Bill protects and respects constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms, especially, the right to expression, opinion, information, privacy and assembly. The proposed Bill must also align with the provisions of the international treaties and covenants Ghana has signed on to, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The MFWA also calls on the Senegalese authorities to release journalist Abdou Nguer uncondintionally. We also call on the Nigeria National Broadcasting Commission to reverse the directive against the playing of the “Tell Your Papa” song. Also, the MFWA calls on the Ghana police service to investigate the threats by the third vice-chairman of the NPP and ensure that the targets of the threat are protected.


We also call on the media to ensure the highest standards of professionalism in the execution of their duties at all times.



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