



A collage of newspaper clippings from various sources, including the Los Angeles Examiner, Daily News, and others, all reporting on the Dahlia murders. The clippings are arranged in a way that they appear to be part of a larger, fragmented document. A large, bold, black stamp with the word "CENSORED" in white capital letters is superimposed over the top left portion of the collage. A pair of silver metal handcuffs is positioned on the right side, with one cuff resting on a keyboard and the other on a mouse. The background is a solid dark blue color. The clippings themselves are in black and white, showing various headlines and snippets of text. Some of the visible headlines include "Two Women Tell Dahlia's Fear of Mysterious Trio", "Dahlia Killer Offers Surrender", "Bundle of Clothing Clue in Dahlia Case", "Los Angeles Examiner", "New L. A. May Yield to 'Dahlia'", "Pastor Seized at 'Dahlia' Inquest; Mother Testifies", and "Police Ask Meeting With Dahlia Killer". The overall composition suggests a theme of media censorship and the public's interest in the case.

INTRODUCTION

The civic space in West Africa continue to face significant pressure. Journalists, media institutions, civil society actors, human rights defenders, and dissenting voices continue to be subjected to persistent violations. Unfortunately, regulatory bodies and some state institutions are sometimes weaponised to shut down independent media, restrict access to information or pursue dissidents. These infringements are predominantly rooted in an intolerance for critical and divergent viewpoints, and are often aimed at silencing opposition and discouraging demands for transparency and accountability. As a result, the region is experiencing a marked erosion of freedom of expression and a contraction of the civic space. This deterioration is further aggravated by a prevailing culture of impunity, where perpetrators of such violations are rarely held accountable. The absence of redress do not only exacerbates the situation, but also incentivises similar conduct, thereby weakening the voices that seek to spotlight issues such as environmental degradation, systemic corruption, and governance deficiencies.

In an effort to address these challenges and to support the preservation of an open and secure civic environment in the region, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), with the support of the 11th Hour Project of The Schmidt Family Foundation, has been monitoring, documenting and reporting positive and negative developments around civic expression and media freedom issues across West Africa. The reports are aimed at providing evidence to help in advocacy, legal action, policy reforms and better protection for activists and media workers.

The report below features findings from the January 2025 daily monitoring conducted across the 16 countries in West Africa. The report also makes recommendations for remedial actions for the violations recorded.

FINDINGS

In the West Africa mediascape, 2025 started off on a rather unpleasant note; [the killing of a sports journalist](#), who was also the deputy station manager at Vopad Radio 96.5 FM in Sierra Leone, Samuel Brima Mattia. Sierra Leone's media community has been left reeling, particularly as Mattia's own colleague, the station manager of Vopad Radio 96.5 FM, Joseph M. Lamin, admitted to orchestrating the killing of his deputy.

Mattia's body was found lying in a pool of blood on January 16, 2025. Unfortunately, it was another January 16 in 2019 when Ghanaian investigative journalist, Ahmed Hussein Suale, [was assassinated](#). However, whereas the swift action of the Sierra Leonian police has resulted in the arrest and confession from the killer of Mattia, the Ghana Police Service has not been able to resolve the assassination of Suale. Six years after his death, his killers remain at large.

The erstwhile Akufo-Addo-led government, during whose tenure the unfortunate assassination happened, could not keep to their [promise](#) of bringing the perpetrators to book. With the swearing in of the new President during the month under review, it is the expectation of the media fraternity in Ghana and across the West Africa region that President John Dramani Mahama will keep to his [campaign promise](#) of investigating Suale's murder and bringing the perpetrators to book.

Media Suspension and Regulation

In the month under review, the media regulators of Benin and Mali took decisions that have implications for press freedom. In Benin, the media regulator, the Haute Autorité de l'Audiovisuel et de la Communication (HAAC), on January 21, 2025, [suspended](#) five media outlets indefinitely, citing alleged violations of professional ethics and the spread of false information. The suspended outlets include Reporter Médias Monde (news website), Les Pharaons (news website), Crystal News (news website), Le Patriote (newspaper), Audace Info (newspaper). The HAAC also suspended a TikTok account, Mme Actu. In addition to the suspensions, HAAC revoked the press card of Romuald Alingo, the publication director of Audace Info, effectively banning him from working as a journalist.

The regulator claimed that the outlets had been the “subject of numerous complaints” and had published “unfounded allegations.” However, critics argue that this is part of a broader campaign to restrict press freedom, warning that such actions limit the public’s access to information and create a climate of fear for journalists.

In Mali, the government tightened its grip on the media as the media regulator, the Haute Autorité de la Communication (HAC), [announced](#) a new regulatory framework. The [framework](#) is intended to govern various aspects of media and communications, including online media, particularly in the context of security and stability. Speaking at a ceremony, HAC President, Gaoussou Coulibaly, said the reforms were designed to “clean up” the media landscape and reinforce oversight of journalists and online platforms.

The government insists that these changes will improve professionalism in the sector. However, many fear they are simply another attempt to stifle independent journalism and silence dissent.

Guinea’s media regulator, the High Authority for Communication (HAC), imposed a [nationwide ban](#) on Depecheguinee.com, on January 27, 2025, following the publication of an opinion article deemed as inciting insurrection. The outlet, known for anti-corruption reporting, had faced prior suspensions, prompting founder Abdoul Latif Diallo to go into exile. The ban is part of a wider crackdown on dissent, marked by media closures, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation of independent journalists, raising serious concerns over press freedom and shrinking civic space in Guinea.

In an unrelated incident in Sierra Leone, journalist Melvin Tejan Mansaray was on January 10, 2025 [barred](#) from accessing Sierra Leone’s Parliament by Speaker RT. Hon. Segepoh Solomon Thomas, following accusations of “malicious criticism” of parliamentary decisions. The decision, made without involving the Independent Media Commission (IMC), and without a prior investigation into the allegation, has raised concerns about press freedom and the appropriate use of regulatory

authority. Mansaray was banned indefinitely as no specified duration was cited by the Speaker. He is, however, expected to appear before Parliament's Ethics Committee on February 24, 2025. The Media Foundation for West Africa, PPG-SL and SLAJ have called on Parliament to reconsider its actions and respect due process through the proper channels.



In Mauritania, an anti-slavery activist, Ahmed Ould Samba, was [detained](#) by the anti-cybercrime police unit on January 22, 2025 following a Facebook post he had made. In the said post, Samba denounced systemic racial discrimination and accused President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El-Ghazouani of racist and corrupt policies. In October 2, 2024, Samba was arrested just a day after he was dismissed from his position as public finance auditor. He was released a month later without charges. His recent detention is, therefore, viewed as continued harassment.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

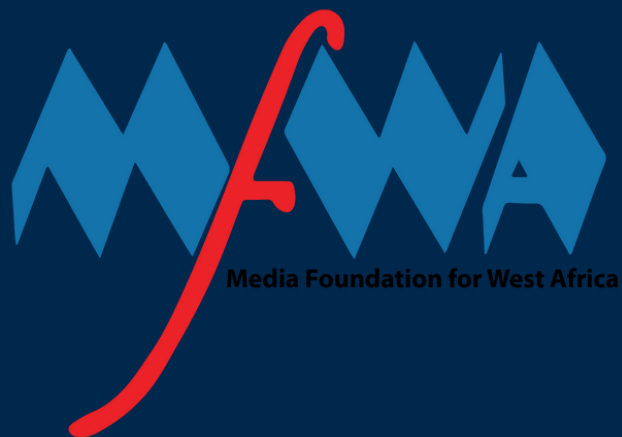
It is regrettable to note that another journalist has lost his life, more so when his death was orchestrated by a fellow media worker from the same media outlet. Equally worrying is the indefinite suspension of the five media outlets in Benin as well as the new media regulatory framework in Mali. These developments ultimately instil fear and censorship in journalists, the media fraternity, activists and the citizenry, a situation that suppresses expression and limits access to information.

The Media Foundation for West Africa, therefore, calls on the Sierra Leonian Police them to ensure that all those involved in the killing of Samuel Brima Mattia are brought to book. The Ghana Police Service and the government of President Mahama should learn from the Sierra Leonian case and expedite action to secure justice for the slain Ahmed Suale.


The MFWA also calls on media regulatory bodies to prioritise engagements over suspension of media and journalists. They should use engagements to draw attention to unprofessional conduct when they occur; and caution media outlets when they breach ethical standards; while also offering guide to the media in their work. Suspensions and shutdowns should not be the immediate resort, but the very last alternative when all other interventions have failed. Such an approach will strengthen the media sector to be more professional and help them to uphold ethical standards. The media regulators should also collaborate with media groups and associations to institutionalise periodic refresher courses for journalists and other media workers.

The MFWA also calls on the Speaker of Sierra Leone's Parliament, RT. Hon. Segepoh Solomon Thomas, to lift the ban against Melvin Mansaray and follow due process by filing a complaint with the Independent Media Commission and or the Parliament's Ethics Committee to investigate his accusation against the journalist. We also call on Mauritanian authorities to desist from harassing dissenting voices, especially Ahmed Ould Samba, as the country's Constitution guarantee the right to expression and opinion.

Governments in the region should resort to rejoinders to clarify and present facts about issues raised by critical voices and leave the discerning citizenry and international community to judge for themselves the substance and veracity of the issues raised by all parties rather than stiffling dissenting views. Attacks against dissidents only go to suggest that the issues they raise are probably true.



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