



# Freedom of Expression Situation in West Africa:

A Mach 2025 Overview



# Introduction

## INTRODUCTION

---

In most West African countries, freedom of expression, opinion, assembly and access to information are guaranteed in national Constitutions. Most of the countries in the region, have also ratified international treaties and conventions, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which also guarantees the right to expression, opinion, assembly and information. In particular, Article 19 of the ICCPR specifically covers freedom of opinion and expression, including the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas; and Article 21 provides for freedom of peaceful assembly. In spite of the constitutional and international safeguards, civic expression and press freedom are continuously attacked across West Africa. The attacks take many forms – physical attacks, arbitrary arrests and detentions, abductions/kidnapping, judicial harassment, seizure and vandalism of media equipment, suspension of media and journalists, among many others. Such acts of suppression continue to shrink the civic space in the region and muzzle critical voices needed to demand and ensure good stewardship and accountability in the efficient management of public resources, including the environment.

---

As part of measures to continuously track and assess the performance of the respective countries in the region with respect to guaranteed rights to expression, opinion, information and assembly; highlight violations for redress; and ultimately contribute to creating an enabling environment for civic expression and journalistic work, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) has been monitoring and reporting on freedom of expression developments in the region. The monitoring reports are aimed at creating awareness about the situation in the region, and spurring urgent advocacy and policy interventions to protect and uphold civic expression, press freedom and democratic values across the region.

The report below covers findings of the daily monitoring conducted across the 16 countries in West Africa in March 2025. The report ends with some recommendations to relevant governmental and non-governmental actors.

---



# FINDINGS

---

The month of March 2025 witnessed a number of attacks against civic activism and expression, especially in the military-led countries of Mali and Burkina Faso. In separate instances, leaders of some civic groups in Mali and Burkina Faso were arrested and abducted. Other civic-expression related incidents were recorded in Mauritania, The Gambia, Ghana and Senegal. Attacks against journalists and suspension of a media outlet were also cited in Nigeria and Benin respectively. Details of these developments, and a redress action that was recorded in the course of March 2025, are presented below.

## Attacks against civic activism and expression

### Mali

In Mali, on March 14, Alou Badra Sacko, President of the “Touche pas a mon argent” (Hands off my money) Movement was abducted in broad daylight after attending a meeting in Bamako. The meeting had discussed various actions, including holding a press conference to denounce newly imposed taxes on telecommunications and mobile money services. These taxes include a 10% levy on all airtime top-ups and a 1% fee on money withdrawals via mobile money platforms. Sacko’s whereabouts remain unknown.



---

## Burkina Faso

In the case of Burkina Faso, two separate cases of attacks were directed at civic and media actors. The National Coordinator and some members of the SENS (Servir et Non se Servir) Movement, were abducted. Although no official communication was issued for their abduction, the events preceding the incidents seem to suggest that their abduction was linked to a press release the Movement had issued earlier. On March 11, there was a brutal attack against the people of Solenzo, a city in the Banwa province in Burkina Faso, during which a lot of people were killed, including children. Subsequently, the SENS Movement issued a press release to denounce the Solenzo attack.

On March 18, the National Coordinator of the SENS Movement, Iddrissa Barry, was abducted at the Saaba municipal office in Ouagadougou by individuals claiming to be military police. Four days later, on March 22, four members of the SENS Movement (Servir et Non se Servir) were also abducted. The whereabouts of the five people remain unknown.

The other attack against civic expression and the media sector was the arrest of the President and the Vice President of the Burkina Journalists Association (AJB), Guezouma Sanogo and Boukari Ouoba respectively. On March 21, the AJB held a congress in Ouagadougou where Guezouma Sanogo was reappointed as president. At the congress, the AJB adopted resolutions calling for the release of detained journalists, stronger solidarity within the profession, and an end to attacks on press freedom and the right to information. Three days after the congress, on March 24, Sanogo and Ouoba were arrested. The two men were apprehended at the Norbert Zongo National Press Centre (CNP-NZ) by individuals who identified themselves as intelligence officers. They were taken to an unknown destination, as indicated in a note posted on the AJB Facebook page.

---

On the same day, March 24, BF1 journalist Luc Pagbelguem was taken away by agents of the National Security Council to be interrogated about a report he had filed on the closing of the congress of the AJB which had been aired on BF1 TV station. He was taken away in the vehicle of the agents, but his whereabouts remain unknown.

A day after, March 25, the AJB itself was dissolved. According to the Minister of Territorial Administration, Emile Zerbo, the AJB was breaching a 2015 administrative regulation. He, therefore, declared that the AJB was “... considered dissolved or non-existent.”

Two days after the dissolution of AJB, March 26, the BF1 television on which Pagbelguem’s report about the congress was aired, was sanctioned by the media regulator, the Conseil Supérieur de la Communication (CSC), for having covered the congress of the AJB. The station was also fined 500,000 FCFA (about USD 864.88).

## **Mauritania**

Two repressive incidents against civic expression were recorded in Mauritania. On March 13, 2025, Ould Bedki, leader of the "Loyauté à la Patrie" Movement, was sentenced by the Nouakchott-West court to one year in prison, six months of which were suspended. Bedki was also fined approximately USD 2,500. His sentencing followed a protest letter he sent on January 29 to the Interior Ministry, requesting permission for a symbolic sit-in for the "release" of President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El-Ghazouani. Authorities deemed the letter insulting to the President, leading to Bedki's arrest the same day. On February 5, an investigating judge ordered his detention. He was charged with insulting the president via social media under the controversial Law on the Protection of National Symbols, criticised for its vague and repressive nature.

---

A week later, March 20, some members of the National Union of Students of Mauritania (ANEM) were beaten by security forces during a protest to register their displeasure for being excluded from an iftar event with President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El-Ghazouani. The next day, March 21, a satirical video by some students targeting the President went viral and several students were arrested on March 24. The students were prosecuted under the country's Penal Code, the cybercrime law, and the controversial law on protecting national symbols. Two days after the arrest, March 26, the students were released.

### **The Gambia**

In The Gambia, the Minister of Information, Dr. Ismaila Ceesay, on March 27, 2025 summoned the editor of The Voice newspaper; the Gambia Press Union; the Media Council; and the Newspaper Publishers Association to a meeting over an article titled "Survey reveals corruption at the Presidency, National Assembly." According to the Minister, the reason for the summon was because he found the headline to be misleading. In particular, the Minister argued that the use of the word "reveal" was damaging to the government. The Minister's action was widely condemned as it was seen as an act of intimidation to silence critics.

### **Ghana**

On March 22, the police in Tamale, capital of the Northern region of Ghana, arrested Alhassan Abdul Rahaman, a social media activist and a supporter of the the major opposition party in Ghana, the New Patriotic Party, over a Facebook post deemed derogatory of Yaa Naa, the Overlord of the Dagbon Kingdom. He was arraigned before court on March 24, charged with offensive conduct, and remanded to reappear before the court on April 3, even though he maintains his account was hacked.

---

## Senegal

In Senegal, Aliou Top, Managing Editor of the online platform, Sunugal 24, was arrested by the Special Cybersecurity Division on March 13, 2025 following controversial statements he made in January 2025 during a broadcast that caused a stir among the public. In the said content, Top is reported to have claimed that the Fulbe community was planning a “sub-regional project” to place politicians from their ethnic group at the head of several West African states. He later rendered a public apology to the management of Radio Fulbé and Peul association leaders. He also withdrew the said content. Despite his apology and the withdrawal of the content, the Fulbe community filed a complaint, and on March 13, 2025, he was arraigned before a court; charged for false publication and inciting ethnic hatred; and remanded in custody to reappear before the court on March 19. On March 19, the case was adjourned to April 2 due to the absence of the plaintiffs.

## Attacks against journalists

In Nigeria, on March 6, three journalists were attacked by officials of the Nigerian military while they were on official duty in Ikeja, Lagos State. The officials also seized their gadgets. The journalists were at the headquarters of the Ikeja Electricity Distribution Company premises in Lagos, but in a coaster bus because they were due to continue to Adiyin in Ogun State to cover the unveiling of a solar project. While in the coaster, the military officers stormed the area and started assaulting people. The rampaging officers saw the journalists in the bus and attacked them as well.

Then on March 15, a journalist was beaten to unconsciousness by some church members. On the said day, the premises of the Salvation Ministries Church caught fire. Precious Amadi, a journalist based in Port-Harcourt, decided to act and help the church members by evacuating flammable furniture from the



---

church. The fire kept spreading, so Amadi contacted the Rivers State Fire Service to no avail. He then posted an SOS message on his Facebook timeline. Following the Facebook post, the church members falsely accused him of being a spy and then proceeded to physically assault him under the supervision of some junior pastors. His two phones were seized by the church members, the Facebook post was deleted without his consent, and the data on his phones were cleared. Amadi was beaten till he fell unconscious



## **Suspension of media outlet**

In Benin, on March 11, the media regulator, the Haute Autorite de l'Audiovisuel et de la Communication (HAAC) suspended Benin Web TV until further notice for alleged unfounded allegations damaging the honour and reputation of the HAAC President. Despite the fact that the HAAC President was the subject of the allegations, he was also the one who presided over the hearing, raising questions of conflict of interest.

## **Redress of violation**

On February 23, 2025, three environmental journalists documenting illegal mining activities in the Breman-Adomanya forest area of the Wassa Amenfi West District in the Western Region of Ghana were assaulted. In one of the rare instances of swift delivery of justice, on March 5 – less than two weeks after the attack – the Asankragwa Magistrate Court ruled that Daniel Baidoo, the prime suspect and leader of the illegal miners, must pay GH¢37,000 (\$2,386) in compensation for the damaged equipment. The amount was lodged with the Asankragwa Police, who were directed to release the funds to the affected journalists. The court also issued a bench warrant for four additional suspects who are still on the run.

---

---

## Other developments

In a significant progress towards securing justice for the slain investigative journalist, Ahmed Hussein-Suale Divela, a suspect has been arrested in connection with his assassination. According to reports, the police apprehended the suspect, identified as Daniel Owusu Koranteng, also known as Akwasi Amakye, at Amasaman-Adease, a suburb of Accra, on March 17, 2025. Described as a close friend of the slain journalist, Koranteng is said to have been a former colleague of Suale at Tiger Eye PI. The two reportedly worked together until Koranteng was dismissed from Tiger Eye for reasons that remain undisclosed. It has been six years since the crime occurred; although justice has delayed, it is better late than never. It is the expectation of all that the arrest of Koranteng will contribute to resolving Suale's murder case soon.

A US court has awarded undercover Ghanaian journalist, Anas Aremeyaw Anas, \$18 million (GH¢279 million) in damages for a suit he and his legal team filed on May 17, 2022, at the Essex County Superior Court against a Ghanaian politician, Kennedy Agyapong, a former MP for Assin Central in Ghana. The court agreed with Anas that Agyapong had been reckless and defamatory when he publicly accused Anas of being a criminal, a thief, and responsible for the murder of investigative journalist Ahmed Suale during an episode of The Daddy Fred Show, an online programme popular among Ghanaian audiences in the United States.

---



# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

---

The apparently calculated attacks against civic expression, particularly in Burkina Faso and Mali, is extremely worrying. As highlighted in previous reports by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and other stakeholders, the junta governments in the region have incessantly been persecuting critical journalists and dissenting voices. Over the past year in Burkina Faso, in particular, the number of abductions of critical voices to unknown destinations have been persistent and increasing, and the evidence presented in this report attest to it. There is need for an urgent action to halt the abuses; not only in Burkina Faso, but also Mali and the other military governments in the region.

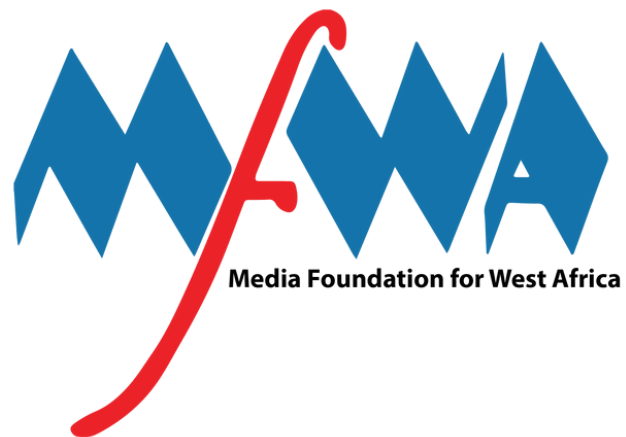
---

The MFWA, therefore, calls on the African Union and the international community to intervene in the deteriorating human rights situations in the junta-led countries. In particular, the MFWA appeals to the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights to investigate the freedom of expression and access to information violations reported in the junta-led countries of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Guinea, and indeed the other countries in the region, and liaise with the respective governments to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to book. We also call on the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression to equally engage the governments of the four military-led countries and others in the region to ensure that the right to free speech, opinion and access to information are upheld across the region.


The MFWA also calls on the authorities in Nigeria to investigate the attacks against journalists and ensure that the perpetrators are brought to book. We also urge the media regulator of Benin, the HAAC, to reinstate Benin Web TV and resort to dialogue to resolve the issue. We also recommend that an independent judicial processes be instuted for cases involving the media and the HAAC itself.

We also encourage professionalism on the part of the media, activists and the general public, at all times, in reporting on issues and expressing their concerns on all issues.

---



Media Foundation for West Africa  
Aar-Bakor Street, Ogbojo

 +233 (0) 302 555 327

 @TheMFWA

 Media Foundation for West Africa

 [info@mfw.org](mailto:info@mfw.org)

 [www.mfw.org](http://www.mfw.org)