



# Freedom of Expression

## Situation in West Africa:

A May 2025 Overview

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# INTRODUCTION

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Freedom of expression, opinion, assembly and access to information promote participation, accountability, and inclusive governance. These rights enable journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens to freely express their opinions and perspectives about any issue of significance to them. In West Africa, however, violations of the right to expression remain widespread. Journalists, media outlets, activists and critical voices are routinely targeted through threats, arrests, censorship, and physical attacks, often in retaliation for their work or criticism of authorities. These violations are frequently committed with impunity, encouraging more abuses and creating a climate of fear.

The intolerance of, and attacks against opposing views weakens the nascent democracies in the region and silences critical voices that fight against corruption, poor governance, and environmental harm. As more people are forced into silence, public oversight declines, and governments and businesses face less pressure to act responsibly and transparently.

As part of efforts to promote the respect of the right to expression, opinion, and access to information; defend victims of free expression violations; obtain redress for violations committed; and ultimately contribute to keeping civic spaces in West Africa open and safe, the





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Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) actively monitors and reports on FOE-related developments in the region. The monitoring tracks and documents actions and inactions that contract civic spaces and discourage journalists and activists from reporting or denouncing mismanagement of state resources, including the environment. The findings from the monitoring are used to support advocacy efforts and help shape policies that protect freedom of expression of all, including environmental activists, and promote a more open and accountable society.

The report below highlights findings from the monthlong monitoring conducted in May 2025. It features some redress actions for violations perpetrated in the month under review and previous months. It ends with recommendations for improving the freedom of expression (FOE) landscape; and securing justice for abused journalists and civic actors.



# FINDINGS

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Daily monitoring of the freedom of expression situation in West Africa in the month of May 2025 show that arrests, detention, physical assaults and threats against journalists and civic actors persist. Findings from the monitoring also show that media regulators continue to be the main perpetrators in suspending the operations of media outlets in the region. These findings, along with some redress actions recorded and other legal/regulatory developments captured in May 2025 are provided below.

## *Arrests and Detention*

Four journalists and a political commentator were arrested under different circumstances. In Niger, three Sahara FM journalists, Hamid Mahmoud, Mahaman Sani, and Massaouda Jaharou, were arrested on May 8 after broadcasting a report originally published by LSI Africa. The story alleged that the government had severed intelligence ties with Russia and Turkey and cancelled a contract with a Moroccan firm. Although a judge ordered their release a day after their arrest (May 9), the journalists were rearrested the evening of the same day (May 9) without explanation. They were later transferred to the Niamey State Prison on May 14. The three continue to be in detention without formal charges, a rather troubling violation of legal and procedural standards.

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In Mali, journalist Seydou Oumar Traoré was arrested and [detained](#) by the Cybercrime Unit on May 25 after releasing a video accusing Guinea's transitional leader, Mamady Doumbouya, of betraying the Alliance of Sahel States. He later issued a public apology in the Dioula language. However, he has been scheduled for trial for July 10, 2025.

In Ghana, a political commentator, Alfred Ababio Kumi, was [arrested](#) and charged with publishing false news following a social media post alleging misconduct by some judges investigating Ghana's Chief Justice. Following his post, armed operatives arrested him.

### *Physical Attacks and Threat against journalists*

Two incidents of physical attacks were recorded in Sierra Leone and Ghana. In the Sierra Leonean case, a senior cameraman with AYV Media Empire, Foday Fofanah, was brutally [assaulted](#) by police officers on May 21 after intervening in a street altercation. Witnesses report that the police officers put pepper spray into his eyes and beat him until a superior officer intervened. Fofanah suffered facial injuries and is receiving medical care.

On May 27, a journalist working with Accra-based JoyNews, Latif Iddrisu, was [assaulted](#) in Accra, Ghana, while covering unfolding events at the Economic and Organised Crime Office (EOCO) in Accra following the arrest of the Ashanti regional chairman of the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) by EOCO. Security personnel at the scene seized his mobile phone and forced him to delete videos he had recorded. He was later attacked by some supporters of the NPP during a live broadcast. The NPP national youth organiser apologised, but, JoyNews filed a police complaint. A day after the incident (May 28), the Ghana Police confirmed an [investigation](#) was underway.

Also in Ghana, on May 27, the third deputy national chairman of the NPP, Alhaji Masawudu Osman, renewed his threat against TV3

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journalists by warning reporters from the station not to interview any NPP person at the EOCO premises following the arrest of the Ashanti regional chairperson of the NPP. He warned that he would forcibly remove their microphones and discouraged his party members from speaking to any TV3 journalist covering the developments at the EOCO premises, an act of intimidation echoing a similar incident in April 2025 by the same party official.

### *Censorship and Suspension of Media Outlets*

Three media outlets/platforms and a journalist were suspended in May 2025. Out of the four suspension cases recorded, three were undertaken by media regulators. In Mali, the High Authority for Communication (HAC) indefinitely suspended French broadcaster, TV5Monde, on May 9. The HAC accused TV5Monde of biased coverage of the protest held on May 3 against the repeal of the Political Parties Charter. This is the third suspension of the TV5Monde media outlet since August 2024. Other media outlets such as France 24 and Radio France Internationale (RFI) have each been suspended at different times since the junta took over power in Mali.

In Guinea, journalist Toumany Camara and his news platform, [www.presseinvestigation.com](http://www.presseinvestigation.com), were suspended for three months by the media regulator, Haute Autorité de la Communication (HAC). The sanction followed Camara's publication of a story on his news website about possible ecological risks in granting permit for mining in the Haut Niger National Park, a UNESCO-reserved area. According to the HAC, the publication made unverified allegations against a director of the mining firm that was prospecting to mine in the forest.

A community radio station in Liberia, Smile FM, was forcibly shut down on May 5. A technician of the station, Cyrus Gbewaya, was also assaulted. On the said date, police occupied the station and barred staff from entering the premises of the station. Although he denied ordering

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the attack against Smile FM, Grand Gedeh County Superintendent, Alex Grant, confirmed authorising the station's closure based on security intelligence. The Press Union of Liberia (PUL), however, raised concerns about political interference in the station's operations.

## *Redress*

Fortunately, some of the abuses that occurred in the month under review, as well as others that had happened in previous months received some redress. In particular, three reparative actions were recorded in Mali, Guinea and Benin.

On May 12, Alfousseini Togo, editor of *Le Canard de la Venise*, was provisionally released after spending over a month in detention. Togo was arrested by Mali's Judicial Unit Against Cybercrime for publishing an article that was critical of the Malian Minister of Justice. He was charged with defamation and undermining the state's reputation and was held in detention from April 9 2025 until May 12, 2025 when he was provisionally released.

In Guinea, the media regulator, HAC, lifted the suspension imposed on journalist Toumany Camara and his news portal, [www.presseinvestigation.com](http://www.presseinvestigation.com), on May 21. Camara and his website were each suspended for three months following a story he published on the news website about possible ecological risks in granting mining permit in the Haut Niger National Park, a UNESCO-reserved area.

On May 22, Benin's media regulator, Haute Autorité de l'Audiovisuel et de la Communication (HAAC), lifted suspensions against Le Patriote and Benin Web TV. Le Patriote was suspended in January 2025 following accusations of publishing defamatory content. On its part, Benin Web TV was suspended in March 2025, alongside four other media platforms and a TikTok account, for an article the media platform published questioning the HAAC's annual budget submitted to the Ministry of the Economy.

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## *Other Developments*

Two significant developments were observed during the monitoring in May, 2025. A number of actors called on the Sierra Leonean authorities, especially the Parliament, to hold on with the passage of the anti-terrorism Bill. The calls highlighted concerns about the the vague and broad language of some of the provisions of the Bill which could easily be abused to suppress free expression as has been observed with the cybercrime law. The West African Network of Activists and Media Defence Lawyers (WANAMDEL), the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and other media stakeholders insist that the concerns raised must be addressed before being presented to the President for his ascent.

In Nigeria, Meta Platforms Inc., the parent company of Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, expressed strong opposition to a Nigerian tribunal's decision to uphold a \$290 million fine for alleged data privacy violations. The company warned that it may reconsider its operations in Nigeria if the regulatory environment becomes increasingly unfavourable. The fine was initially imposed by the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC) in July 2024, following a 38-month investigation conducted in collaboration with the Nigeria Data Protection Commission (NDPC). The authorities accused Meta of unauthorised sharing of user data, denying users control over their personal information, and engaging in discriminatory practices that disadvantaged Nigerian users compared to those in other jurisdictions with similar laws.



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# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION



While the three redress actions recorded in May 2025 are notable and commendable, more need to be done to prevent freedom of expression violations; address violations when they occur, and punish perpetrators to serve as a deterrent to others. On the back of the findings documented in May 2025, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) urges the governments of Liberia, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Sierra Leone, to take prompt and meaningful steps to address the violations recorded in their respective countries. These actions should aim at promoting accountability, safeguarding the right to freedom of expression, and ensuring that public discourse remains open, inclusive, and protected across platforms in the region.

## Ghana

Ghana's government must demonstrate commitment to protecting press freedom by ensuring thorough investigations into the assault on journalist Latif Iddrisu and the threats made against TV3 reporters. Security officials involved incidents reported must be held accountable, and legal reforms must be pursued to decriminalise speech-related offenses under Section 76 of Electronic Communications Act (Act 775) and Section 208 of the Criminal And Offences Act 1960 (Act 29) which are continuously be used to suppress dissent.

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## Benin & Guinea

While acknowledging the lifting of sanctions imposed on journalist and media platforms in Benin and Guinea, we call on all media regulators in West Africa to exercise restraint in suspending media outlets and journalists. Alternative disciplinary actions, if they must be deployed, must be explored rather than suspending sources of information and engagement of many people.

The Malian HAC, in particular, should desist from the suspension of foreign media outlets and engage in transparent, fair and reparative processes with supposed unethical media outlets to engender public trust in operations and avoid being seen as a stooge of the junta regime.

Also, the media regulators must strengthened collaboration with media actors to build a climate of mutual respect that upholds press freedom.

## Liberia

The government of Liberia must investigate the closure of Smile FM and the assault on its technician to ensure that those found to have acted unlawfully are held to account.

## Mali

General Assimi Goïta must take immediate steps to end the growing repression of the media and civil society in Mali. The detention of journalists such as Alfousseini Togo and Seydou Oumar Traoré, along with the ban on TV5Monde and the abolition of the political parties law, reflect a systematic effort to silence independent voices. The government must drop charges against journalists and lift restrictions on political and media freedoms.

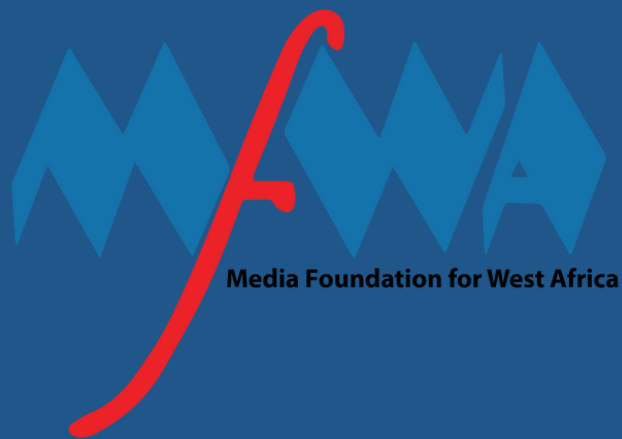
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## Niger


The Nigerian authorities must release the three Sahara FM journalists who remain in detention despite a court-ordered release. Their continued incarceration, without clear legal justification, reflects a disregard for due process. The state must respect the rights of journalists to report freely, including on sensitive geopolitical developments, and cease using security pretexts to suppress media freedom.

## Sierra Leone

The Sierra Leonean government must revise the problematic provisions of the proposed Counter-Terrorism Bill to explicitly exempt journalists and human rights defenders from criminal liability when engaging in their work. The authorities must also investigate the police assault on journalist Foday Fofanah and take measures to prevent further abuses by law enforcers against the media.



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