

Freedom of Expression Situation in West Africa

A July 2025 Overview



INTRODUCTION

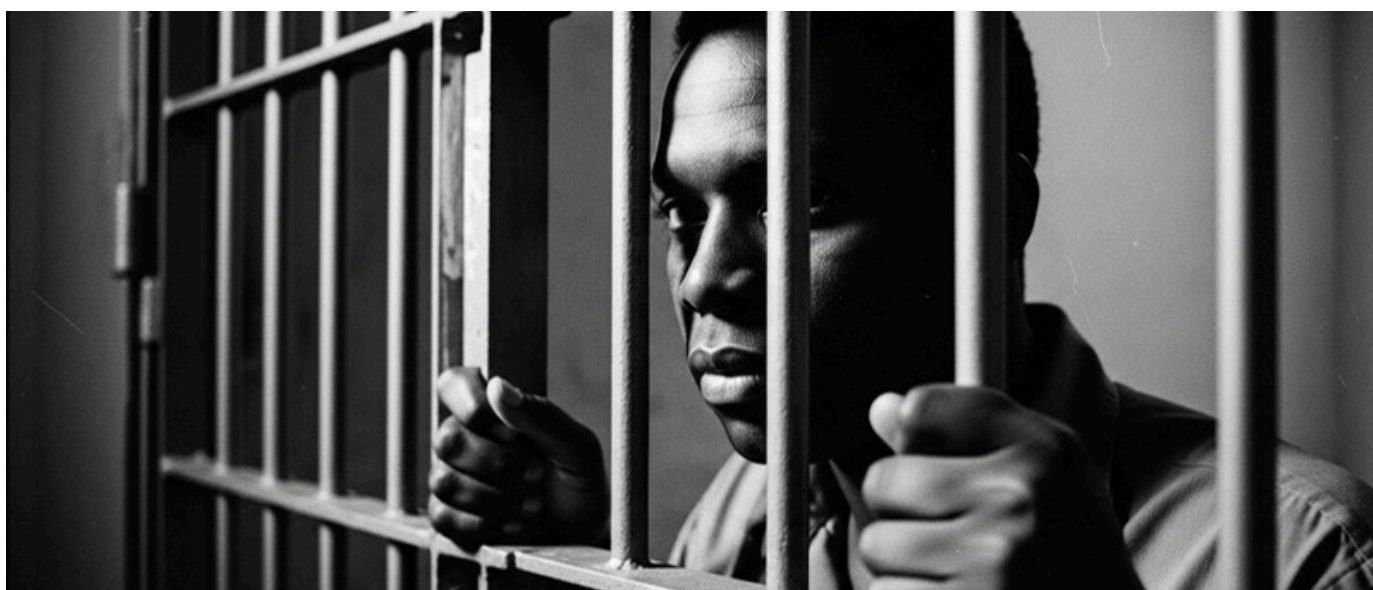
Freedom of expression, information and assembly are guaranteed as a constitutional right in most countries in West Africa. The countries in the region are also parties to numerous international and regional human rights instruments that make it obligatory for the countries to uphold these fundamental rights, among others. However, despite these legal commitments, a worrying trend of repression persists across the region. Both democratically elected governments and military regimes continue to undermine civic freedoms through systemic intimidation and coercion. Journalists, environmental activists, civil society actors, human rights defenders, and members of the general public who speak out against corruption, misgovernance, or abuse of power are frequently subjected to reprisals. These range from physical attacks and arbitrary arrests to prolonged detention, exorbitant fines, and in extreme cases, fatal violence.

To address these issues that serve as barriers to free speech and contribute to creating an enabling environment for expression, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) actively monitors and documents all attacks against expression in the region. The MFWA's monitoring also covers developments that are instructive for the promotion and defence of press freedom and freedom of expression generally. Through its daily and periodic monitoring reports, the MFWA provides reliable data and analyses that highlight the nature and scope of repression in the region. The findings from the monitoring serve as a critical tool for advocacy and policy engagement aimed at safeguarding and expanding the frontiers of free expression in West Africa.

This report presents findings from the MFWA's monitoring of the freedom of expression landscape in West Africa in July 2025. The period under review witnessed arrests and physical assault against journalists and activists in four countries – Benin, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal. The report ends with recommendations for reparation.

FINDINGS

In July 2025, six incidents that have implications for silencing the press and expression generally were recorded. The cases, which were recorded in four countries, varied in format, but their end game remained the same – putting fear in journalists, activists and ultimately, the general public to force them into silence. The incidents are grouped and summarised below under specific categories of freedom of expression violations.



ARRESTS AND DETENTION

Four cases of arrest and detention were documented in Benin, Nigeria and Senegal. In Benin, two incidents were recorded. A newspaper editor, Cosme Hounsa, was arrested on July 15, 2025 under a charge of “harassment by electronic means.” His arrest followed a complaint filed by Minister Rachidi Gbadamassi, Advisor on Defence and Security, over publications by Hounsa’s newspaper concerning a defamation case.

The second case involved the forceful repatriation of exiled journalist Comlan Hugues Sossoukpè from Côte d’Ivoire to Benin. In Benin, he was taken to court and charged with “incitement to rebellion,” “hatred and violence,” and “advocacy for terrorism.” He was subsequently placed in pre-trial detention. Sossoukpè has been living in Lomé, Togo, as a political refugee since 2019. He went for the

Ivoire Tech Forum held from July 9 to 11 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, where he was forcibly repatriated to Benin and hauled before a court.

In Nigeria, investigative reporter Buhari Ahmed Olanrewaju and activist Saidu Musa Tsaragi were arrested on July 10, 2025 by Kwara State police after they condemned a violent government-backed attack on protesters. Their arrest followed a case filed against them by the Special Adviser to the Kwara State Governor on Social Investment, Abubakar Sadiq Buhari, who was alleged to be one of those who backed the attack against the protestors.

Another incident that occurred during the month under review was the arrest of a Senegalese journalist. Badara Gadiaga, a radio host who was arrested and detained after questioning on July 9, 2025 following a heated argument with a member of parliament during a show broadcast on July 4, 2025.



PHYSICAL ATTACKS

Two incidents of assault were cited in July 2025, and both happened in Accra, Ghana. Specifically, on July 11, 2025, EIB Network reporter Kwabena Agyekum Banahene and two other journalists, one from the Multimedia Group and another from Amansan TV (ATV), covering a parliamentary election re-run in Ablekuma North in Accra, the capital, were attacked. Footage showed Banahene, who was

visibly identifiable as a member of the press, being manhandled by a police officer. The other two, Salomey Martey of the Multimedia Group and Vida Wiafe of Amansan TV (ATV) were assaulted by unidentifiable thugs.

The second assault case involved a journalist, his cameraman and an eye witness. On July 30, 2025, JoyNews reporter, Carlos Calony, his cameraman, Jonas Sodzi Voegborlo, and an eyewitness were assaulted by National Security operatives while covering a warehouse demolition exercise. Calony was punched from behind by a soldier; their equipment were seized; and the two were detained briefly. An eyewitness who was speaking to the journalist about the demolition exercise was also assaulted by a soldier.



REDRESS

Upon reporting on the incidents summarised above when they happened, and calling on relevant stakeholders to redress the violations, some notable reparative actions were observed. On July 25, 2025 a Kwara State court granted bail to Buhari Ahmed Olanrewaju and Saidu Tsaragi who were being held in detention. The two were arrested and detained on July 10, 2025 after they condemned a violent government-backed attack on protesters. Regarding the three journalists who were assaulted during the parliamentary election rerun in Accra, Ghana, the Ghana Police Service issued a statement announcing that the offending officer had been

withdrawn from the elections and referred to the Police Professional Standards Bureau for investigation. Also, in the case of the assault against JoyNews' Carlos Calony and Jonas Sodzi Voegborlo, and an eyewitness, the Ghanaian presidency condemned the attack and called for investigations.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

A number of developments also took place in the month of July 2025 that have some level of implication for the freedom of expression landscape in the region. The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) issued some statements and made some follow up calls on relevant authorities to demand reparative action. In particular, following the protests in Togo in the latter part of June, 2025, the MFWA issued a statement to demand justice for the abused protestors and investigations into the deaths of seven protestors.

In the same vein, the organisation called on Senegalese authorities to release and drop all charges against former MP, Moustapha Diakhaté, ahead of a July 16 verdict date. The former MP was arrested in June for allegedly offending the Head of State through his comments.

In Guinea, the MFWA used the one-year anniversary of the disappearance of two opposition activists, Oumar Foniké Mengué and Mamadou Billo Bah, to demand accountability for their disappearance. The two were taken to an unknown destination by security forces during a peaceful campaign against media censorship on July 9, 2024. The organisation also equally called for investigations into the whereabouts of Habib Maourane Camara whose disappearance also remains unexplained.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



From the arrests recorded in Benin, Nigeria and Senegal to the physical attacks recorded in Ghana, it is evident that journalistic expression and civic expression are under attack in a number of West African countries. The chilling effects of such violations against expression have far reaching consequences, especially in forcing journalists, activists and members of the general public into self-censorship. Self-censorship is inimical to democratic consolidation, participatory, transparent and accountable governance and the consolidation of the relatively nascent democracies in the region. Decisive actions are, therefore, critical to safeguard expression and democracy across West Africa.

The MFWA, therefore, calls on the authorities in Benin and Senegal to unconditionally release Cosme Hounsa and Comlan Hugues Sossoukpè of Benin, and Badara Gadiaga and Moustapha Diakhaté of Senegal, and drop all charges against them. The organisation also calls on the Beninese government to cease the targeting and cross-border arrests of journalists/activists in exile. The repatriation of Comlan Hugues Sossoukpè from Côte d'Ivoire and hauling him before a court

to be charged, follows how the Beninese digital activist, Steve Amoussou, was arrested from Togo and subsequently sentenced and fined. This does not bode well for Benin's democracy.


The MFWA also calls on Ghanaian authorities to thoroughly investigate and punish perpetrators who attacked journalists during the Parliamentary election rerun in Ablekuma North in Accra; and the media personnel and an eyewitness during a demolition exercise in Accra.


The organisation also calls on the Nigerian authorities to drop all charges against the released Buhari Ahmed Olanrewaju and Saidu Tsaragi.

We also call on the Togolese government to investigate the fatalities and the attacks against protestors that occurred during the protests of June 5, 6 and June 26-28, 2025. The MFWA also urges the government of Guinea to investigate the disappearances of Oumar Foniké Mengué, Mamadou Billo Bah, Habib Maourane Camara and ensure that justice is served.



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