

**World Press Freedom Day 2024**

Outcome Document from Commemoration Activity

**The Lagos Plan of Action on Media Freedom in Nigeria**

**Introduction**

On the occasion of the 2024 edition of World Press Freedom Day (WPFD 2024) on May 3, Media Rights Agenda (MRA) and Global Rights: Advocates for Sustainable Justice, in collaboration with the International Press Centre (IPC) and the Centre for Media and Society (CEMESO), convened a one-day commemoration event in hybrid format at the IPC Conference Hall in Lagos under the theme: “***The Imperative of Media Freedom for Democratic Governance***.”

The purpose of the convening was to reflect on the state of media freedom in Nigeria based on experiences shared by various journalists who had been victims of attacks in recent times as a result or in the course of their work as media professionals, discuss strategies and activities to improve the environment for media practice in the country and combat impunity for attacks against journalists, other media professionals and media organizations.

The event was attended in person and virtually by journalists and other media professionals from the print, broadcast and online media from across the country, media proprietors and publishers, academics, human rights defenders and representatives of various civil society organizations, lawyers and other professionals.

The convening was moderated by Ms Blessing Oladunjoye, Publisher of BONews, and addressed at the opening by Mr. Edetaen Ojo, Executive Director of Media Rights Agenda; Mr. Lanre Arogundade, Executive Director of the International Press Centre; and Dr. Akin Akingbulu, Executive Director of the Centre for Media and Society, all of whom welcomed participants, spoke about the work of their respective organizations in the promotion and defence of media freedom in Nigeria and safety of journalists They also presented findings from monitoring activities focused on attacks on journalists and the media carried out by their organizations over the last one year, covering the first year in office of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

The meeting also heard testimonies from Mr. Clinton Umeh of the online news outlet, Journalists 101, based in Enugu; Ms. Khadija Yahaya, a journalist with Arewa Radio in Kano; Ms. Charity Uwakwe, an online journalist with Famous Reporters, based in Umuahia, Abia State; Mr. Eniola Daniel, a reporter with The Guardian newspaper in Lagos; and Mr. Benedict Uwalaka, a photojournalist with the Daily Trust newspaper, who is also based in Lagos.

The journalists shared multiple experiences of attacks that they suffered or experienced as a result of their work as journalists or in the course of carrying out their professional duties; as well as the impact of these attacks on them and on their work.

Following their testimonies, Dr. (Mrs) Uzochukwu Israel, a Clinical Psychologist in the Department of Psychology of the University of Lagos, made a presentation on the “Possible Psychosocial Effects of Attacks on Journalists and their Management” in which she shared with participants the potential mental and physical health implications of trauma, which can lead to prolonged or long term mental and physical health problems such as chronic pain, gastrointestinal issues, cardiovascular problems, immune system dysregulation, and sleep disturbances, among others. She discussed several strategies for self-management of the problem when initial symptoms manifest and emphasized the need for journalists and other victims of trauma to seek professional help in appropriate cases.

In the ensuing discussions, some other participating journalists also shared experiences of attacks that they had suffered or witnessed, with many decrying the absence of state intervention in response to such attacks, inadequate support systems from employers and the society as well as the love-hate relationship with journalism that such experiences create in them.

At the end of the event, the participants agreed to adopt this Plan of Action on Media Freedom in Nigeria.

**Observations**

The following observations were made in the presentations and discussions at the event:

* Journalists and other media workers continue to experience various forms of attacks, including murder and other forms of extra-judicial killings; torture and other forms of ill-treatment, inhuman or degrading treatment; arbitrary arrests and detention by law enforcement, security, intelligence and military officials; kidnappings and abductions; harassment and intimidation; threats of physical harm to them or their family members; unlawful or arbitrary surveillance undertaken by State and non-State actors; unlawful raids of their offices or homes; unlawful seizure of their equipment or professional tools, among other forms of attacks.
* Journalists and other media workers who are victims of attacks often do not receive any support or assistance from their employers, including the media proprietors and managers, which makes the journalists feel unappreciated, abandoned and demoralized. Indeed, sometimes, media proprietors and media managers succumb to pressures from governments and other powerful actors and themselves become perpetrators of further attacks on such journalists.
* Attacks on journalists and media management can create a chilling effect on freedom of expression and media freedom as targeting journalists for their reporting or for their critical views can deter others from speaking out or reporting on contentious issues, which can lead to a narrowing of the public discourse and a reduction in the diversity of perspectives, limiting democratic participation and the exchange of ideas.
* Attacks on journalists and media management also have broader societal implications beyond the individuals directly affected as they frequently result in a weakened media environment, which can also undermine democracy, accountability, and the functioning of civil society.
* It is, therefore, imperative that the psycho-social effects which arise from the traumatic experiences of journalists who have been victims of attacks are promptly and comprehensively addressed while the safety and well-being of journalists is protected. Journalists should not keep the psychosocial trauma they suffer as a result of attacks to themselves but should seek appropriate medical support, particularly from psychiatrists and or clinical psychologists.
* Broad strategies can also be adopted to avoid or prevent the negative social implications which attacks on journalists can have on the society by advocating for press freedom, promoting legal protections, fostering a culture of respect for journalism, supporting mental health resources, and ensuring accountability for attacks on media professionals.
* There is widespread ignorance among members of the Nigerian public about the role of journalists in society, particularly in a democratic society. As a result of this ignorance, there is a lack of awareness among members of the public that journalists play an important role in providing them with access to information that they need for critical decision making on many different levels, including personal decisions, professional decisions, economic, commercial or business decisions, and political decisions, among others. There also appears to be a lack of appreciation of the fact that without the availability of the news and information provided by journalists, the ability of members of the public to make good and effective decisions would be greatly hampered.
* Given the specific responsibilities imposed on the media by Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution and in the light of the risks, threats and reprisals that journalists and the media face in carrying out their professional functions, it is clear that they are not adequately protected in the performance of these duties either under the Constitution or any other domestic Law. It is imperative, therefore, that legal reforms should be undertaken to ensure that the media has a conducive and enabling environment to performs its constitutional functions and that those who attack or impede the media in playing its role are appropriately sanctioned.

**Recommendations and Resolutions**

The following recommendations and resolutions were made and adopted at the event:

* Given the scale of the challenges confronting the media sector in terms of the attacks on media freedom and the attendant hostile environment for media practice in Nigeria, it is imperative that media stakeholders foster greater collaboration to improve their effectiveness. This should encompass greater demonstration of solidarity among media professionals, among civil society organizations as well as between the media sector and civil society. There should also be better and more sharing of information about attacks and responses being contemplated or undertaken to avoid duplication of efforts.
* Collaborative efforts, tools and procedures should be developed by media stakeholders for the purpose of ensuring better tracking, documentation and dissemination of information on attacks on journalists and media freedom in general in order to ensure that all cases of attacks on media freedom or on journalists and media organizations are reported and adequately addressed.
* Media professional bodies such as the Nigeria Union of Journalists and the Nigerian Guild of Editors as well as other civil society organizations should engage with media organizations, including their proprietors and managers, and sensitize them on the need to support journalists in their employment whenever they are attacked. They also need to engage these employers on the need to provide better security for the journalists that they employ, including through arranging security training, the provision of appropriate equipment and tools to enhance their security online and offline as well as through the adoption of appropriate security policies and protocols to ensure the safety and security of the journalists.
* Federal and State Governments, through their relevant agencies such as ministries of information, the National Orientation Agency (NOA), media regulatory bodies, state-owned media establishments, among others, as well as other media stakeholders such as media professional bodies and civil society organizations should undertake media literacy and public sensitization activities to enlighten members of the public about the important role that the media play in society and the need to ensure their safety while respecting their rights. They should also be enlightened about the ethical and professional standards applicable to the media, legal and legitimate avenues open to them to seek redress when they have complaints about the conduct of media professionals or any breach of ethical or professional standards.
* Federal and State Governments as well as other media stakeholders should regularly engage with the military establishment, as well as law enforcement, security, and intelligence agencies to enlighten them about the role of the media and the rights of journalists. The content of such sensitization should also be incorporated into the training programmes for these officials in order to bring about a change in the prevailing orientation, attitude and culture.
* The Federal Government should be required and requested by media stakeholders to make a public commitment that there will be no more impunity for any military personnel, police personnel, other law enforcement, security, intelligence agencies or other government officials who violate the rights of journalists and other media workers and that henceforth any such official involved in or engaged in the violation of the rights of journalists or attacks on the media would be prosecuted in accordance with the Law.
* Further to the above, media professional bodies and other civil society organizations should work together to hold the Government accountable to this commitment by tracking, documenting and publicizing every incident of attack on journalists or the media, and ensuring that proper investigations are conducted and that the perpetrators are prosecuted in accordance with the Law regardless of their status.
* In appropriate cases, media professional bodies and other civil society organizations should take advantage of judicial and quasi-judicial mechanisms available at the national, regional and international levels to ensure that there is accountability for any attack against journalists or the media.
* Further to the above, media stakeholders resolved to establish an industry-wide legal and litigation assistance programme in collaboration with legal professionals for the benefit of journalists, other media professionals and media organizations that are victims of attacks. The programme would be supported by a dedicated fund established by the stakeholders and its ultimate objective will be to ensure that no attack on any journalist or media organization goes unchallenged and that all perpetrators are held accountable, either through civil claims for damages or through criminal prosecution. The litigation programme will also identify and mount legal challenges against specific media laws or other general laws being used or with the potential to be used to repress media freedom or impede the work of journalists.
* Media stakeholders further resolved to work with other relevant stakeholder groups to establish a national mechanism on the safety of journalists, which would have a mandate to prevent attacks on journalists, and whenever such attacks occur, to ensure that the perpetrators are prosecuted and punished.
* In order to enhance the effectiveness of a legal assistance and litigation programme, media stakeholders resolved to work collaboratively in the near future to bring about the adoption of an appropriate policy document and the enactment of suitable legislation to protect journalists and the media, consistent with the requirements of relevant regional and international instruments applicable to Nigeria.

***Adopted in Lagos this Friday, the 3rd day of May, 2024***