

WE WANT JUSTICE, BRING PERPETRATORS TO BOOK

Media bodies, CSOs demand investigation into Editor's detention

The undersigned media ORGANISATIONS, media associations and professional bodies as well as civil society organizations wish to express our deep concern and strong condemnation regarding the recent unlawful arrest, detention, brutalization and torture of Mr. Segun Olatunji, Editor of FirstNews newspapers, by military personnel in response to stories published by the media outlet. We hereby demand a speedy, public, transparent and independent investigation into this act of barbarism displayed by military personnel as well as the brazen disregard for the Constitution and the Government's obligations under relevant domestic laws and international instruments. We further demand that all persons within and outside the military who are found to have been connected with this unacceptable violation of the rights of the journalist and the Constitution, including those who effected Mr. Olatunji's arrest, detention and torture, those who directly commanded them, and those who ordered or instigated the action, should be prosecuted before the appropriate court and punished to the full extent of the Law. The Chief of Defence Intelligence (CDI), who commands the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), Major General Emmanuel Undiandeye, reportedly ordered the operation that culminated in Mr Olatunji's abduction, torture, and detention while the Chief of Defence Staff, General Christopher Musa, to whom the CDI reports, was also reportedly aware of the operation but joined the CDI to claim for days that the journalist was not in their custody. They need to be held accountable for their roles in the matter.

Armed men wearing military uniforms and who introduced themselves as military personnel from the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Air Force and the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), led by a military officer who also introduced himself as Colonel Lawal, invaded Mr. Olatunji's home in a Lagos suburb on March 15, 2024, seized Olatunji's mobile phone, handcuffed and bundled him in one of their vehicles and flown, blindfolded to Abuja where he was kept in an underground cell for 14 days.

Stripped to his boxers, legs manacled hands in cuffs, kept incommunicado and not informed of his offence or the reason neither for his arrest nor of his rights as required by Law, as guaranteed under the Constitution, Olatunji was only released on March 29, 2024. He was repeatedly interrogated about stories published by FirstNews in the

absence of a legal practitioner of his choice because he was not given the opportunity to consult a lawyer. His mobile phone was also unlawfully searched in an effort by his abductors to ascertain the sources of the stories published by the news outlet. Given the above, we unequivocally condemn this gestapo-like, unlawful and unconstitutional treatment of a journalist under a constitutional democracy simply for doing his job and therefore demand that: The Federal Government conducts a speedy, public, transparent and independent investigation into the incident in order identify all persons within and outside the military who were connected with the violation of Mr. Olatunji's rights; There should be full accountability for all those responsible. Therefore, all persons within and outside the military who are found to have been connected with the incident, including those who effected Mr. Olatunji's arrest, detention and torture, those who directly commanded them, and those who ordered or instigated the action, should be prosecuted before the appropriate court; In accordance with Section 35(6) of the 1999 Constitution, as amended, the Federal Government should pay Mr. Olatunji substantial compensation and issue a public apology to him for the unlawful and unconstitutional violation of his rights as well as the inhuman and degrading treatment to which he was subjected; and The Federal Government should make an unequivocal public commitment to respect and defend the rights and freedoms of journalists and other media practitioners to carry out their professional duties in a safe and conducive environment in accordance with Sections 22 and 39 of the 1999 Constitution, as amended, and advise all law enforcement, security, intelligence, military and other agencies accordingly.

Advised any member of the public, dissatisfied or feel the content in a news medium directly affects or involves him or her unfairly, to approach the National Media Complaints Commission (NMCC) (The National Media Ombudsman) for redress, rather than engage in self-help. Should the Federal Government fail to respond positively to all these demands within 14 days from today, the undersigned media associations and professional bodies as well as civil society organisations will pursue all available mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to ensure compliance with our demands.