

# NGE, SERAP to Tinubu, Govs: “Stop harassing journalists, activists, CSOs, bloggers”



defenders, activists, opposition politicians, artists and other Nigerians.” “Impunity for those who threaten, intimidate and harass journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders and activists contributes to the hostile environment for these defenders of constitutionally and internationally guaranteed human rights in Nigeria.” “We note that the restrictions on civic space, human rights violations and suppression of the press in recent times take various forms ranging from extrajudicial to unlawful detentions, disappearances, malicious prosecutions and wrongful use of both legislation and law enforcement.” “Since the amendment of the Cybercrime Act in 2024, Nigerian authorities at all levels have consistently used the provisions of the Cybercrime Act including the provisions of section 24 on “cyberstalking” to harass, intimidate, arbitrarily arrest and detain and unfairly prosecute users of social media, activists, and journalists.” “Nigerian authorities at all levels increasingly use criminal defamation laws and other repressive laws to crack down on human rights and peaceful dissent, bringing frivolous lawsuits against journalists,

Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) and Nigeria Guild of Editors (NGE) have urged “the government of President Bola Tinubu, Nigeria's state governors, lawmakers and other actors to immediately stop the ongoing intimidation and harassment of journalists, activists, bloggers and civil society organizations (CSOs) in the country simply for the peaceful exercise of their human rights.” The groups called on “Nigerian authorities to end the use of some provisions of the Cybercrimes Act, criminal and penal codes and other repressive laws to target journalists, activists, CSOs, and critics peacefully expressing their views online, and immediately release those arbitrarily detained across the country.” The groups said, “Using repressive laws and strategic lawsuit against public participation (SLAPP) lawsuits to intimidate and harass journalists, activists, bloggers and CSOs erodes democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law in Nigeria. The statement followed the press conference and interactive session titled: **'The Escalating Restrictions on Civic Space, Media Freedom and the Deterioration of Rule of Law in Nigeria'**, held recently at the Radisson Hotel, Ikeja. The event was jointly organized by SERAP and NGE to mark the International Human Rights Day. The groups also said, “the use of repressive laws and SLAPP lawsuits to crackdown on peaceful dissent is entirely inconsistent with the Nigerian Constitution 1999 [as amended] and the country's international human rights obligations.” According to the groups, “Nigerian authorities at all levels should show that they tolerate peaceful dissent and media freedom if the Nigerian people are to have any chance of holding them accountable on their constitutional oath of office, commitments and promises.” The statement, read in part: “Criminal defamation and SLAPP lawsuits are neither necessary nor proportionate under the Nigerian Constitution and human rights treaties to which Nigeria is a state party. Such lawsuits generate a chilling effect that inhibits the enjoyment of human rights and circulation of ideas and information.” “A lawsuit challenging the legality and compatibility of some provisions of the Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) (Amendment) Act 2024 with the rights to freedom of expression and information is pending before the ECOWAS Court.” “As a matter of the rule of law, security and law enforcement agencies cannot and should not use the amended Act to continue to silence peaceful dissent pending the hearing and determination of the lawsuit by the court.” “We are deeply concerned that Nigerian authorities at all levels and other actors continue to use repressive laws and misuse the judicial processes to normalize repression of the rights of journalists, bloggers, human rights

bloggers, human rights defenders and activists.” “We are also concerned about the persistence of threats to journalists' safety, and the potential chilling effect of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) and harassment, including by security agencies and politicians.” “We note that journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders and activists play an indispensable role in documenting and reporting on human rights violations.” “The right to freedom of expression applies to all kinds of information and ideas, including those that may shock, offend or disturb, and irrespective of the truth or falsehood of the content.” “The provisions of section 24 of the Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) (Amendment) Act 2024 are inconsistent with the provisions of section 39 of the Nigerian Constitution 1999 [as amended] and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to which Nigeria is a state party.” “Stories published online have been deemed 'offensive', 'obstructive', 'insulting' or 'annoying' with actionable consequences under amended provisions of section 24 of the Cybercrime Act 2024, even when the stories are true and factual.” “Also, stories published through traditional media outlets (print and electronic) that were never sanctioned by the government have been picked on upon being rebroadcast or republished through online platforms.” “State governors, security and law enforcement agencies and officials frequently misuse the legal and judicial processes including through the use of SLAPP lawsuits to target journalists, human rights defenders, activists and civil society organizations with impunity.” “In August 2024 alone, at least fifty-six (56) journalists were assaulted or arrested while covering demonstrations across the country. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Nigeria has dropped 10 spots to 122nd in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index.” “Internet freedom of expression continues to decline due to an unprecedented pattern of arbitrary arrests and detention of bloggers after the enactment and amendment of the Cybercrime Act in 2024; most of whom are either pending at various police stations or courts of law.” “According to the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID) Press Attack Tracker, there have been 110 verified attacks in the year 2024. In comparison to the previous year, the press attacks between the first and third quarter of 2024 have surpassed those of the entire year in 2023.” “According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), at least three journalists in Nigeria have been detained since August on allegations of violating the country's Cybercrime Act, despite the recent reform of the law, highlighting the continuing use of the law and defamation laws to target and harass journalists, and activists.” “One journalist, known

under the pen name Fejiro Oliver, has been behind bars since mid-September over charges of cyberbullying. On September 18, police detained Oliver, an investigative journalist and publisher of privately owned Secret Reporters news outlet, at his office in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, then flew him to Asaba, the capital of southern Delta State. Oliver's real name is Tega Gobernadora." "In August, Azuka Francisca Ogujiuba, publisher of the privately owned Media Room Hub news site, was arrested twice in Abuja for publishing a court injunction related to a disputed land sale. The first time, she was held for five hours; the second time, for three days. Police searched and retained her phone for five days." "On August 11, she was released after interventions from friends, taking down the article, and writing an apology."

"On September 9, police in Ekiti State detained Sodeeq Atanda, a reporter with the privately owned Foundation for Investigative Journalism (FIJ), on allegations of cyberbullying, criminal defamation, conspiracy, blackmail, and malicious misrepresentation." "Atanda was responding to a letter summoning him for questioning, following a complaint by a university vice-chancellor over FIJ's allegations of sexual harassment. Atanda was reportedly detained for 11 hours, then freed without charge after multiple calls for his release. Police also reportedly invited FIJ founder Fisayo Soyombo for questioning on cyberbullying charges." "According to the CPJ, at least 25 journalists faced prosecution under the Cybercrimes Act before the 2024 reforms. Five journalists have been prosecuted for cybercrime since the reforms. Five were harassed, but not formally charged, between March and May 2024." "Ned Nwoko, senator representing Delta north, has renewed his call for the passage of the social media regulation bill, saying defamation has been weaponized in Nigeria's online space. The proposed legislation sponsored by Nwoko passed for second reading on March 18 in the senate." "The Federal Government also recently charged Sahara Reporters publisher and activist Omoyele Sowore alongside X and Facebook owners over Mr Sowore's recent alleged 'anti-Tinubu' posts on the social media platforms." "Two of the counts are brought under the Cybercrimes Act while the other three charges of criminal defamation, causing public fear and disturbance are brought under the Criminal Code Act." "The suit dated 16th September, 2025, was lodged at the Federal High Court in Abuja after Sowore allegedly refused to delete certain posts allegedly critical of President Tinubu. The charges were brought on behalf of the DSS and the Federal Government by the Director of Public Prosecutions at the Ministry of Justice." "The DSS in May 2025 also filed a SLAPP lawsuit against Professor Pat Utomi, a former presidential candidate, accusing him of attempting to illegally usurp President Bola Tinubu's executive powers by setting up a shadow government." "In the suit marked FHC/ABJ/CS/937/2025, filed at the Federal High Court in Abuja, the DSS alleged that Utomi's actions posed a threat to national security and constitutional order." "The 2007 presidential candidate of the African Democratic Congress was named as the sole defendant in the suit. DSS operatives in October 2024 also filed a SLAPP lawsuit against SERAP over allegations of an unauthorized office invasion." "These cases illustrate the growing use of SLAPP lawsuits by the DSS and other security and law enforcement agencies in Nigeria to target, harass and intimidate Nigerians for the peaceful exercise of their human rights." "We are concerned that SLAPP lawsuits have a chilling effect on the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and other fundamental human rights protected under the Nigerian Constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights." "These cases illustrate the ongoing harassment, intimidation and misuse of laws and judicial processes in Nigeria to stifle the peaceful activities of journalists, activists, bloggers and CSOs and curtail the exercise of free expression in across the country. "These charges and lawsuits appear to be designed to intimidate and harass human rights defenders and constitute an unnecessary and disproportionate interference on the rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and access to information." "We therefore call on the Nigerian authorities to immediately release all journalists, activists, bloggers and other Nigerians detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights and withdraw bogus charges against them. "Nigerian authorities should withdraw the SLAPP lawsuit brought against journalists,



activists, bloggers and civil society organizations including the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP)." "To uphold their obligations under the Nigerian Constitution and human rights treaties to which the country is a state party, Nigerian authorities should urgently act to prevent further spurious defamation cases and SLAPP lawsuits being filed by security and law enforcement agencies that target journalists, activists, and CSOs." "Nigerian authorities should decriminalize defamation in Nigerian laws and protect journalists, activists, bloggers and civil society organizations from SLAPP lawsuits and other abusive litigation aimed at curtailing the peaceful exercise of human rights in the country." "Nigerian authorities must ensure that no person is prosecuted or held criminally liable for defamation for activities protected under the Nigerian Constitution and international human rights treaties to which the country is a state party." "Nigerian authorities should enact laws to protect journalists, activists, bloggers, CSOs, critics and other individuals from legal harassment through defamation charges and SLAPP lawsuits." "Nigerian authorities must ensure that defamation cases and SLAPP lawsuits are not used by businesses as a tool to undermine legitimate rights and freedoms of affected rights holders, civil society organizations and human rights defenders." "We urge President Tinubu and his government to publicly call on Nigeria's state governors, the Nigerian Police Force, the Department of State Services (DSS) to uphold and ensure full respect for the rights of everyone in the country, including journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders and activists." "We call on President Tinubu and his government, the country's 36 governors and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) minister to genuinely uphold human rights, press freedom, ensure access to information to all Nigerians, obey court judgments, and respect the rule of law." "We urge the National Assembly to promptly and comprehensively review the Cybercrimes Act and other restrictive legislation, and revise them as appropriate to bring them into line with Nigeria's international human rights obligations and commitments regarding human rights and media freedom." "We urge the international community to hold Nigerian authorities to account for violations of human rights in the country, including by calling on the authorities at both the Federal and state levels to immediately and unconditionally release anyone detained solely for peacefully exercising their human rights." The press conference was attended by senior members of the media, civil society groups and other stakeholders. The stakeholders and participants made commitments to work together to ensure the full and effective implementation of the recommendations by the Nigerian authorities.