

Tinubu's Government recording growing attacks against Journalists — MRA



Media Rights Agenda (MRA) has decried what it described as an alarming escalation of attacks on media freedom and civic expression, particularly through the misuse of the Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act by law enforcement agencies to silence or punish journalists and critics under the administration of President Bola Tinubu. According to its report, titled, 'The Onslaught Intensifies: A Mid-Term Assessment Report on Media Freedom under the Tinubu Administration,' between May 29, 2023, and May 29, 2025, MRA documented 141 incidents of attacks on journalists, media workers, and ordinary citizens for the peaceful expression of their views on a variety of issues, including governance, economic hardship, the security situation in the country, among others. MRA said of these incidents, 61 cases (43.26 percent) were perpetrated by operatives of the Nigeria Police, while the Department of State Services (DSS) was responsible for seven cases (4.96 percent) with the two agencies collectively accounting for nearly half of all documented violations of media rights and freedom of expression across the country over the last two years. It argued that the Tinubu administration bears legal responsibility for all of these incidents, in accordance with Principle 20(5) of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, which holds that states are "liable for the conduct of law enforcement, security, intelligence, military and other personnel which threatens, undermines or violates the safety of journalists and other media practitioners."

In a preface to the report, MRA's Executive Director, Mr. Edetaen Ojo, said: "We are seeing threats to media freedom in Nigeria through the continued implementation of repressive laws, such as the Cybercrime Act which is frequently used to target, silence or punish journalists; the enforcement of politically motivated regulatory sanctions; arrests and detention or other forms of attacks on journalists; surveillance or intimidation of media practitioners; and censorship of government-controlled broadcasters, among other threats and attacks." Describing the report as a "timely intervention in a political climate where democratic gains continue to face increasing threats from censorship, regulatory overreach, violence against journalists, and the misuse of digital surveillance technologies," Mr. Ojo explained that its objective "is

not merely to criticize but to document, analyze, and illuminate the extent to which the current administration has either advanced or undermined the freedom of expression landscape in Nigeria."

MRA said among the most disturbing findings in the report was the continued abuse of the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) of 2015, as amended, particularly its controversial Section 24, which law enforcement agencies have exploited to arrest, detain, and prosecute journalists and social media users over critical or dissenting expressions online.

The organization recorded many cases of such misuse, including the arrests of Mr.

Emmanuel Uti, a journalist with the Foundation for Investigative Journalism (FIJ); Mr. Destiny Ekhurutomuen, a blogger in Edo State; four editors and reporters from Informant247 in Kwara State; Mr. Dele Farotimi, a lawyer and human rights advocate; and several others who faced excessive bail conditions or prolonged detention. According to MRA, the frequent misuse of the Cybercrime Act had become so outrageous that it resulted in an unprecedented move by the Heads of the Missions of the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Norway, and Finland in Nigeria, who issued a stern reprimand in a joint statement issued in June 2025 criticizing the Nigerian government's abuse of the Act and calling for urgent reform in the law and its implementation.

The report noted that the Tinubu administration has treated internationally and constitutionally protected rights such as peaceful protests and dissent as crimes, going so far as to charge peaceful protesters, including minors, with treason, an offence which carries the death penalty, in complete disregard of the fact that dissent and criticisms of government are not just permissible features of democracy but are, in fact, regarded as essential for its survival, vitality, and legitimacy. It stated that many journalists covering such peaceful protests have been beaten or brutalized, arrested and detained for varying durations, and have had their equipment seized or damaged, with no single perpetrator of any of these attacks being held accountable. In its statement announcing the launch of the report, MRA's Communications Officer, Mr. Idowu Adewale, said: "It is deeply ironic and troubling that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, himself a former pro-democracy activist and owner of multiple media outlets across print, radio and television, now presides over an administration increasingly defined by the repression of the very freedoms he once championed." MRA called on all stakeholders, including the media community, civil society, the judiciary, the National Assembly, and the international community, to put relentless pressure on the government to undertake meaningful reforms that uphold media freedom and the broader right to freedom of expression and democratic values in Nigeria.