

VOICES FROM THE COVID-19 FRONTLINES

***The in-depth story of attacks on journalists during
2020 pandemic in Nigeria***

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LIST OF KEY ABBREVIATIONS

AIT	- African Independent Television
CPJ	- Committee to Protect Journalists
CPS	- Chief Press Secretary
DG	- Director General
DPO	- Divisional Police Officer
DSS	- Department of State Service
FRCN	- Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria
ID	- Identity Card
IPC	- International Press Centre
MRS	- Medical Registry System
MRA	- Media Rights Agenda
NBC	- National Broadcasting Commission
NYSC	- National Youth Service Corps
NYSC	- National Youth Service Corps
NCDC	- Nigeria Centre for Disease Control
NPF	- Nigeria Police Force
NPC	- Nigeria Press Council
NSCDC	- Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corp
NUJ	- Nigeria Union of Journalists
OSF	- Open Society Foundation
PPEs	- Personal Protective Equipment
PTSD	- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
PRO	- Public Relations Officer
TVC	- Television Continental
VIO	- Vehicle Inspection Officers
WPFD	- World Press Freedom Day

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This publication was undertaken under the supervision of Mr. Lanre Arogundade, the Executive Director of IPC.

FOREWORD

This report is an example of the powerful work being done by IFEX members while they face staggering challenges to their own organisations and lives. The pandemic's impact has been dramatic, unpredictable and destabilizing. The critical ability of journalists to safely report during this time has been one of its many casualties.

The powerful testimonies IPC has collected open a window into this reality in Nigeria. Along with IPC, we hope it will serve not only to spark action on the part of those who can address these challenges to freedom of expression and information, but promote a greater appreciation for journalistic work, and a stronger understanding of what we lose when journalists are unable to do their job safely.

Annie Game

Executive Director, IFEX

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INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian media continues to remain at the press freedom cross roads. The expectation that the post-military democratic dispensation would offer succour for journalists and other media professionals is yet to materialise. Journalists face constant threats including spying, digital attacks, censorship, social media blackout, assault, arbitrary arrests, illegal detention, kidnappings, and in extreme cases murder.

Other challenges manifest in the denial of access to information despite the existence of the Freedom of Information Act and trial of journalists under the Cybercrime and Anti-terrorism Acts. So also, the attempt to introduce anti-media and anti-press freedom legislations among which are the bills in the National Assembly (the Nigerian National Parliament) seeking amendments to the laws establishing the National Broadcasting Commission (the regulatory body for

the broadcast media and the Nigeria Press Council (the regulatory body for the print media) to give them draconian powers to criminalise journalism.

Clearly, all the above constitutes the violation of the constitutional right granted the Nigerian media to monitor governance and hold the government accountable to the people as stipulated in section 22 of the constitution. They also represent the violation of the press freedom principles enshrined in the Universal declaration of human rights and the African Charter on Peoples and Human Rights. In the realm of the larger society, they undermine the twin-right of the citizens to know and freely express themselves.

It cannot but be troubling that IPC in the course of its campaigns and advocacy on press freedom and freedom of expression monitored and documented not less than 150 press freedom violations and attacks on journalists in the country between 2016 and 2020.

Aspects of the documentation including the harassment of journalists on electoral duty during the 2019 general elections and molestation of journalists deployed to cover the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, reveal the failure of the Nigerian state to recognise journalists and other media professionals as frontline workers in moments of national crisis or emergency.

This publication - *Voices From The COVID-19 Frontlines* – has arisen out of the challenge of media coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic, vividly depicting the contradictions inherent in the relationship between the media and the government.

Amidst the confusion and fake news that greeted the outbreak of the disease, the vital role of the media as purveyors of information, providing scientific and health education to the public on the disease, alongside deflating misinformation to save lives was expected to be duly recognised and supported.

However, the more Nigerian journalists and the media tried to stay on top of the Covid-19 story, the more they were obstructed by the security agencies, among others. That was why in the months of March, April and May 2020 alone, IPC documented at least 27 press freedom COVID-19 related violations. This means the attacks recorded during the period accounted for more than half of the violations of press freedom for the year 2020 as contained in the state of journalists' safety report presented by IPC on the occasion of the 2021 World Press Freedom Day and which is reproduced in this publication.

The affected journalists were from the print, radio and broadcast media outlets in Rivers, Lagos, Imo, Adamawa, Delta, Ondo, Imo and Abia States. Twelve of them gladly volunteered to tell their chilling stories in full so that this publication could represent a comprehensive compendium of their traumatic experiences. This was done through the questionnaires administered on them and live virtual interviews, which was the methodology adopted to elicit their responses. Their narratives tally with the findings of IPC that all is not well on the press freedom front.

The essence of this publication is for all media stakeholders and the larger community to have a deeper insight into the persecution they suffered far beyond the headlines and be sensitised to the need to put up spirited defence of press freedom.

The need to adopt new methodology of reporting the experiences of assaults on journalists and media practitioners beyond figures, and to increase the safety awareness of journalists and safeguard the media profession in Nigeria is actually one of the core objectives of the **Enhanced Safety Awareness Programme for Nigerian Journalists** launched in June 2020 with the support of the **International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX)**, a global network that defends and promotes freedom of expression.

In line with this new approach, it is also expected that this publication would:

- Serve as discussion, campaign, and advocacy tool on safety of journalists;
- Serve as reference source for research work on safety of journalists; and
- Serve as reference material for seeking legal redress by the affected journalists themselves or by those acting on their behalf.

Having also now established the Foundation for the Safety of Journalists, IPC looks forward to more enduring partnerships and resource support to sustain in-depth documentations like this as an annual activity that continues to capture the safety challenges of journalists and other media professionals on the field and enrich discourse on securing safe space for them.

If there is any urgent imperative, it is that there should be protective measures including legislations and policies that ensure better working conditions for journalists, promote press freedom online and offline as contained in regional and international instruments and create a healthy climate for media independence and pluralism.

The fact cannot be overstated that a free press is a chief enabler of democracy.

Lanre Arogundade

Executive Director, IPC

October, 2021

12 VOICES, 12 CHILLING ACCOUNTS

1. KUFRE CARTER:

31-Day Unlawful Detention and Arm-twisting of Judicial Process



"When I came out, I was diagnosed with PTSD. So for the next three weeks after my detention I was privately going through therapy. Like I said the detention was designed to wreck my mind. Confinement for 31 days will take a toll on any one. Medically I tried to keep fit but mentally I struggled. I have spent over N160,000 on medical treatment since my release".

Opinion on Press Freedom in Nigeria

Broadcast Journalist (Radio)

Place of Work / Beat:

XL 106.9FM/Sports

Years of Experience:

11 years

Opinion about climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

I rate the climate of press freedom in Nigeria on a scale of 4/10 because the clampdown on journalists by government forces has been devastating. The ruthlessness and viciousness have been alarming and there's no end in sight

Opinion about state of preparedness of media houses for journalists during challenging period like COVID-19 pandemic:

I would rate the state of preparedness of media houses 3/10. Most media houses are pro- government and would not allow opinions that would portray the government in bad light on their platforms.

Experience of violation of rights as a journalist during COVID-19 pandemic:

I was wrongly incarcerated for 31 days by the Department of State Services (DSS) on the orders of the Governor of Akwa Ibom State, Udom Emmanuel.

Measures taken to ensure safety and protection of rights:

None

Experience relating to torture, assault, physical injuries and damage to personal belongings:

My household items were damaged during the raid by the DSS on my apartment without a warrant of search.

Reprimand or punishment for perpetrators of violation of rights and crime committed:

None

Compensation for loss or damage to personal belongings:

No compensation in any form

Opinion about justice or denial of justice:

Justice wasn't served. Following incarceration for 31 days, the feeling is that of injustice and it's sad to know the perpetrators will never get punished.

Recommendations to the government, media professionals and associations towards improving the climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

Inclusive policy review to make government officials accountable for intolerance for press freedom and violation of the rights of media professionals.

Further comments / additional recommendations:

None

My Story

Prelude to my Ordeal

On April 25, 2020, I did a sport show on radio. After the show, I had a call from a doctor who actually has been in contact, but we never met. We had a very private discussion earlier; he has been involved at the frontline. The doctor had become more like a source. Previously he had reached out to me because the prevailing terrain in Akwa Ibom State is that people don't like talking against the state government. They are either surviving through the state government or they just want to be the good people, or they are scared of being intimidated or harassed. The doctor had shared information with me several times and I have worked on it by bringing such to the attention of the public and get the government to act on it. Previously I got information that house officers (medical doctors) were being owed their entitlements for several months and I made it public. In a month or two the government paid up all the arrears of the officers being owed.

This doctor and I never met before. So he called me and told me about the hardship medical doctors were subjected during COVID-19. Most of the things he told me were things that I already knew. He spoke about the controversies surrounding the state government handling of COVID-19 testing. According to him, the Commissioner didn't want it look like Akwa Ibom state was having too many COVID-19 cases. The situation was like out of about 200 tests, only 10 samples were sent to the NCDC. So out of 10 samples sent to NCDC, 3 will come out positive which is fair number compared to the positive cases scenario if 200 tests samples were made available to NCDC. This was done in a bid to keep down the positive cases in the state. The doctor made that call, but I didn't know my phone was tapped possibly so the conversation was let out. So the following day, I got calls from people asking me who I interviewed. They were telling me they heard my voice. I didn't imagine a private conversation which had nothing to do with my beat will be let out. So, my station mainly issued a statement effectively denying me that they had nothing to do with me.

They came for me

So I got calls from government officials telling me about the repercussions of the supposed interview which according to them was putting the state government in bad light. But I explained it was not an interview but a private phone conversation which I am entitled to on my phone. So on Sunday April 26 at around 8p.m I got a call from the head of operation of DSS inviting me the following day which was on the April 27. So, I contacted my lawyers about the invitation by DSS. So as a law abiding citizen, I went there the following day by 10am. Somehow, they knew I had made the invitation public. I later realized the plan was not to let anybody know where I was, so they were banking on me not to make it public. Before I left that morning, I made my visit to the DSS public just like I did the previous day. They were obviously angry, and I was wondering why they were angry because people knew about the visit to the DSS if they didn't have ulterior motives. They were angrier at me for letting people know rather than the reason for inviting me. So after about 7 to 8 hours back and forth the interrogations were literally more like time wasting. It became clear that no matter what I did, no matter what I say, the plan was always to implicate me even if I gave the head of John the Baptist, they will still implicate me. They asked me to give up my sources and I said NO I can't give up my source and that if they think I ran foul of the law, they should take me to court but I can't give up my source. "If you don't give up your source, we will detain you". "Tell us your source and we will let you go". This was late in the night, I said NO I'll rather spend time here than give up somebody that willingly provided information - verifiable information - so they threw me inside the cell. That was on April 29.

I was taken to a court in over four buses of DSS officials fully armed to the teeth. You will think that they have captured the leader of Boko Haram. I got the impression there was more to the case because it was coming from above, so they had to play to the script of the person that was paying them. At the court I waited for about 3 hours before my case was brought up. My case was later called by the presiding judge, Winnifred who gave me bail conditions including 3 million naira, a letter from my village head signifying that I am from Akwa Ibom state despite my Nigerian citizenship, a surety who must be a level 17 officer and above in the civil service and somebody with a landed property worth at least 15 million naira and above within the court's jurisdiction. A level 17 officer in the state is like a permanent secretary who have just one year to retire from service and either eyeing a political appointment or just want to be in the good book of the state government. So it was virtually impossible to find a government employee signing surety for somebody who has a case with the government. Before I was taken to court, the DSS came to my house and blocked the road. No fewer than 15 DSS officials all armed invaded my house. I was brought into my apartment handcuffed. My apartment was searched. They were looking for my phone which I have decided that I won't give out. So they searched everywhere for my phone, destroyed my box, electronics and other items before they left.

Hard Earned Freedom

So after the stringent bail conditions were given at the court, I was taken back to custody and so for the next 29 days I was treated like a criminal. I was locked up in an underground cell, bound hand and feet, no human contact whatsoever and served with only foods that befit animals and treated in the most undignified manners. So the next 29 days were harrowing! I was released on the May 27 which was on a Wednesday. Prior to my release, I didn't know what was going on outside, but I kept getting hints from people that brought me food. When they eventually reviewed the bail conditions, the Commissioner for Justice acting on instruction of the governor appealed against the bail. He made it look very personal. The State government through the Commissioner for Justice appealed against the variation of the bail but the appeal was not successful.

So on the Friday that the new bail conditions were met, it was brought to the DSS. The court ordered the DSS to release me, but they refused, and they said they must get orders from above which is the state government. I spent another 6 days in detention after my bail conditions were met. From what I heard; they were trying to come up with new charges against me that was unsuccessful. On the May 27, 2020 at around 3:15pm, I was finally released after 31 days.

Solitary experience in DSS underground custody

I saw a holding room, more like a cell, for VIPs. It has a bed, TV set and a cell phone. But for non-VIPs and political prisoners like me, they made sure the conditions were more harrowing. A typical day in detention is designed to rate your mind. No human contact whatsoever. So being the kind of person I am, it was a very unusual situation to be bound hands and feet without being able to move and no human contact. You will stay a whole day without seeing human beings apart from when they bring you food which is just 30 seconds.

I was not allowed access to even my lawyer throughout the 31 days which was a gross infraction on my right as a Nigerian citizen. I wasn't allowed access to anybody. My family asked to see me; my mum met several people in government to allow access to me they didn't allow. So I woke up every day by 5am. I think the first three weeks, I didn't sleep, I couldn't sleep. I don't think I slept in a stretch for more than an hour in those 31 days. It was impossible to sleep there because you barely have room for yourself. You barely have room to squat talk less of having to lie down with your hands and legs tied. It was an impossible posture to try to sleep. The most you can do is either sit or close your eyes.

I was the only one in my cell. They will open the cell when I want to bathe, and they would bring three operatives who will stand alert pointing guns at me while I have my bath. That is the only time they will unchain me. They will be pointing guns at me until I am done taking my bath and they will march me back into my cell. There were always three DSS operatives guarding me anytime I want to step out of my cell. The cell was locked and the main door to the cell was also locked as well as the door to the main door. So you probably will imagine if I tried to escape, I will still have to pass through two hefty metal doors with security operatives outside each door. I struggled to understand why they will still point guns at me even when escaping from that place is practically impossible. I was probably rated above Osama Bin Laden.

However, towards the later days maybe the last 1 week when they realized they were fighting a lost battle because the public uproar was too much, most of them became friendly. I requested the head of legal department to help me with the access to the library. So they gave me access to the library, I think I read about five books in four days including Long Walk to Freedom by Nelson Mandela and Half of the Yellow Sun by Chimamanda Adichie. Maybe they didn't expect the kind of reaction my case was getting. Apparently, they thought they were dealing with a regular person that nobody cares about but the uproar concerning my case was becoming too much. I was more or less a liability to the DSS, so the longer they kept me the more the heat they took.

The volte-face when they lost the battle

The same people that were very hostile and violent a few weeks earlier became very friendly. In fact, I even got suspicious. I stopped eating for the last 13 days. I only drank water till they were worried that I'll die. They kept telling me if you die here, we will bury you. We will take out your corpse and bury you like that so you better start eating; so they were even scared they had to threaten me to eat. But I said I would not eat. On Wednesday May 27, the state government shamefully ordered my release and I guess through the prodding of the Director General of DSS. I was supposed to be released the previous Friday when my bail conditions were met from what I learnt when I came out. I was kept in detention while perfecting new charges against me. They made the DSS DG to believe I had been

released; meanwhile the state government orchestrated my detention for another 5 days trying to see how they can buy time. So when they realised, they were fighting a lost battle the state governor shamelessly succumbed. There is this civil liberty group headed by a supposed journalist. The group went to intercede on my behalf; pretending to be begging the state government for my freedom. The court ordered my release on a Friday, but I wasn't released so the group interceded on Wednesday, and I was released so the government now made it look like if it was because of the civil liberty organisation that came to beg that led to my release. So they made it look like the court order wasn't important. The impression was that the supposed plea by the civil liberty group was more relevant and more important than a court order.

Health challenges in the aftermath of my detention

When I came out, I was diagnosed with PTSD. So for the next three weeks after my detention I was privately going through therapy. Like I said the detention was designed to wreck my mind. Confinement for 31 days will take a toll on any one. Medically I tried to keep fit but mentally I struggled. I have spent over N160, 000 on medical treatment since my release. I haven't heard anything from the government and was waiting for the next adjourned date for the case in June. The case was however eventually struck out in November since they didn't show up in court for five consecutive adjourned days - June 1, July 1, August 20, September 4 and October 16. The judge got tired and struck out the case since they were no longer interested in proving I did something wrong. To me, the impersonation was malicious and was targeted at silencing me.

2. SIKIRU OBARAYESE:

A Taste of Brutality



"Failure to punish the culprits for the injustice meted to me will be a signal that anything can happen to any journalist and such impunity will encourage further abuses. We have a lot of journalists who have disappeared in the past years or are brutalised without the authorities doing anything to address the ugly trend"

Opinion on Press Freedom in Nigeria

Journalist (Newspaper)

Place of Work / Beat:

Daily Post (Reporter)

Years of Experience:

5 years and counting

Opinion about climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

I would rate the climate of press freedom in Nigeria on a scale of 5/10, 5 because journalists are still working with fear especially during this administration.

Opinion about state of preparedness of media houses for journalists during challenging period like COVID-19 pandemic:

I would rate the state of preparedness of media houses 5/10.

Experience of violation of rights as a journalist during COVID-19 pandemic:

I was attacked by security operatives while monitoring officers' enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions. I was beaten while a Commissioner in Osun State who led the officers ordered for my arrest.

Measures taken to ensure safety and protection of rights:

Nothing was done by the state government or Police to produce the officers

Experience relating to torture, assault, physical injuries and damage to personal belongings:

I sustained some degree of injuries. I have some open injuries while Doctors at Osun State General Hospital prescribed an X-ray of my left leg because the officers used batons and boots on me.

Reprimand or punishment for perpetrators of violation of rights and crime committed:

None

Compensation for loss or damage to personal belongings:

The Chief Press Secretary (CPS) to the Osun State Governor paid N50,000 for my treatment.

Opinion about justice or denial of justice:

Justice was not served because the perpetrators went unpunished which will make them, or their colleagues do such to another journalist.

Recommendations to the government, media professionals and associations towards improving the climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

All media unions and associations and media professionals should work together to ensure the freedom of expression protected by section 39 (1) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria constitution works. Grants should be available for media houses and journalists to make them free of looking for advertisements from the government. Nigerian government should provide a safe atmosphere for journalists to practice.

Further comments / additional recommendations:

None

My Story

Walking into the hazard of the profession

I report for Daily Post in Osun state. The state government made an order to enforce the compulsory use of facemask in the state to curb the spread of COVID-19. Although I was not part of the journalists accredited by the state government to monitor the activities of the task force, I however got the notice. I was at the Old garage in Osogbo on August 3, 2020 and saw the joint task force team comprising police officers and men of the civil defense corps beating people with baton. I was taking pictures and videos with my phone when the operatives were harassing those who didn't use a face mask. One officer of the joint task force approached me and asked why I was taking pictures. I told him it was a public place and I also informed him that I was a journalist. He told me to show him my ID card. In the course of bringing out my ID from my pocket, another officer came from behind and hit me at the back. I fell and they started beating and matching me at that point I couldn't see anything. Some of my colleague said they could not recognize I was the one being

beating because of the face mask I wore. I heard the Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Adeleke Adebayo ordering them to arrest me and take me along with those they had arrested. Probably he did not know I was a journalist. I met a lady amongst those arrested, who narrated how the police officer slapped her pregnant sister. They were harassing and brutalising residents. I think why I was arrested was because they did not want their activities made public. So that was how my beating started and to my surprise the Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs knowing I am a journalist still ordered my arrest. That was when some of my colleague came in and I was later released.

After the incident, I went to a newspaper forum by (**OSUN DEFENDER**) to directly give an account of what happened. From there, the editor and some of the reporters took me to the hospital; it was after that time I realized I had been seriously injured. I couldn't move my left leg. Just for me to have it on record I went to the State Specialist Hospital, Asubiaro, Osogbo. The doctor who attended to me advised that I should conduct an x-ray just to be sure my leg was fine.

The anguish and the injuries inflicted on me

The open injuries I sustained during the attack were on my left hand and my legs. The several slaps I received gave me a red eye and I still had blood discharge from my eyes after three weeks. In the hospital I was given iodine and some pain killers and other drugs which I could not remember. I was treated for the injuries. I didn't treat the eyes at first because I did not feel anything until after three weeks when I started having headache and I couldn't raise my head. The commissioner called my head office, pleaded and said he would accept responsibility for what happened. The chief press secretary to the governor called me the second day and pleaded on behalf of the government and also gave me N50, 000 to take care of my medical needs and since then there is no move to punish the security men that harassed me. The police assured that something would be done. However, nothing has been done till date. Fortunately however, the x-ray result showed I had no fracture. Notwithstanding, I am still nursing the trauma because till now, whenever I hear the Commissioner's name or see the police my heart beats. Since then whenever I am going for an assignment, I first think twice. I have not undergone any psychological examination or trauma healing.

The four or five police officers in the joint task force team are easy to identify because the state government knows the numbers and identities of officers assigned on the day the incident happened. I have asked the CPS to the governor, Mr. Ismail Omipidan about getting justice and that the police officers would do the same thing to my colleagues or anybody if justice is not severed. But I am yet to hear or see any positive development over a year after the incident.

The quest for justice

Justice would mean a lot not just to me but to this profession. It would serve as insurance for journalists in the state and beyond. Failure to punish the culprits for the injustice meted to me will be a signal that anything can happen to any journalist and such impunity will encourage further abuses. We have a lot of journalists who have disappeared in the past years or are brutalised without the authorities doing anything to address the ugly trend. In my own opinion, justice would not just serve me alone. I believe in justice for all because this is not the first time it is happening in Osun state. It was after my incident I learnt there is a step people can take to remedy the situation. Such abuse happens without repercussion but the attack on me is the only one that is getting beyond this place. Some of our colleagues thinks it is normal. But I want justice. All I want is for the police officers should be produced, investigated and disciplined accordingly.

The hard but useful lesson

I suppose, my ordeal was probably avoidable if I had worn an identification tag. Sadly, I couldn't make a formal report to the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) because I am not a member. Notwithstanding, there is a feeling that security operative in Nigeria really do not care about wearing a tag or ascertaining the identity of individuals to avoid victimisation. They would want to do what they want to do because impunity thrives in our

clime. In Lagos, where a journalist was putting on a press jacket, he was still harassed. What happened that day was not just because I was in that circle, and they wanted to know who I was. What happened was because I was not called, and I think people that are invited for that programme would not cover the brutality against citizens as expected. I think what angered them was my recording the way they were beating people.

I lost all the pictures I took to the attack. What I actually went there to do was not just to report the incident that happened that day. A colleague and I were working on effect of lockdown and enforcement. My colleague from Premium Times went to Ogun state and I was monitoring the situation in Osun state just to do a special report. But after the attack I couldn't do the special report. I just did my regular report in Daily post.

3. OKO EMMANUEL EKPO (EMMA BRICKS OKO): Reign of terror and a manipulated Justice System



"I want my case revisited. I was beaten and dehumanised. It was the first time I had handcuffs on my hand. I never experienced such injustice. I wasn't doing something wrong; I was doing the right thing. Such experience can be very painful. Some of the taskforce men were wearing uniform without nametags. I want the judgment appealed so that the officers will be reprimanded. They went away with one of three phones collected from me"

Opinion on Press Freedom in Nigeria

Broadcast / Online Journalist

Place of Work / Beat:

Online news platform www.brickswrites.com.ng

Previously broadcast journalist with Independent Television (ITV) and Love 105.5 FM

Years of Experience:

11 years

Opinion about climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

I rate the climate of press freedom in Nigeria on a scale of 2/10 because it is only accepted and given on paper not on the field or the actors enjoying it. Simply put, there is still no freedom of press in Nigeria; the media still suffer and lack freedom.

Opinion about state of preparedness of media houses for journalists during challenging period like COVID-19 pandemic:

I would rate the state of preparedness of media houses 4/10. This may have taken the Nigerian media houses off balance because I'm sure its first time such is happening, as such I wouldn't say they were prepared.

Experience of violation of rights as a journalist during COVID-19 pandemic:

I was arrested handcuffed and treated like a mere criminal for recording inhumane treatment of tricycle rider with commuters within the Nigeria's federal capital, Abuja by Taskforce comprising the Nigerian Police Force, (NPF), Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corp, (NSCDC) Vehicle Inspection Officers (VIO) and Civilian Taskforce. I was practically dehumanised for carrying out a legitimate duty even with my press identification card; I was arrested and handcuffed like a mere criminal by the joint taskforce and handed over to the mobile court and a judgment delivered by Magistrate Mabel Bello sentenced me to some hours of community service and a fine. The facts are there on videos, pictures etc.

Measures taken to ensure safety and protection of rights:

None

Experience relating to torture, assault, physical injuries and damage to personal belongings:

I will call it torture because it was the first time I was ever handcuffed in my life. While taken to the court, I was embarrassed and told to sit on the bare floor by the VIO before my case will be attended to. The Joint Taskforce made away with my phones but no physical injury aside from the one sustained through the roughness of the handcuff around my wrist with the tricycle rider.

Reprimand or punishment for perpetrators of violation of rights and crime committed:

The perpetrators were not punished. They handed me over to the court and drove off and it ended. I was taken to court because I kept hammering that they were violating my right.

Compensation for loss or damage to personal belongings:

I was not compensated for anything till now that I write, I am rather convicted for doing my professional job.

Opinion about justice or denial of justice:

Justice was not served – How can justice be served when a journalist on duty was prosecuted for doing his job? Honestly, I tried my best to appeal the judgment but the record from the court was not released to me, I turned the court to my second home at a time after a long trace to know which court Magistrate Marble Bello operates from and after writing application for the records, the process was frustrated.

Recommendations to the government, media professionals and associations towards improving the climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

I would recommend that Press freedom should not be mere-say, it should be enforced and let information dissemination and gathering be made easy in Nigeria for democracy to thrive.

Further comments / additional recommendations:

Generally, I will like to talk about remuneration of Journalists in Nigeria; it is the reason why ethical journalism will not see the light of the day. I had horrible experiences working in the conventional media.

My Story

Manhandled and denied Justice

During the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 I was driving around Apo area in Abuja and ran into the Joint Task Force (JTF) team which comprise the men of the Nigerian police, the Vehicle Inspection Officers, (VIO) and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corp (NSCDC) and some men without uniforms. I saw a tricycle rider who was being chased by these officers (the video went viral actually), in spite of the fact that there were commuters on board the tricycle. There was commotion as the guy had to jump out of his tricycle with the commuters sustaining series of injuries. The tricycle rider ran into the bush and JTF men kept chasing him. That was the moment I decided

to record unmindful that they could see me. Some of them saw me recording and informed their colleagues to stop me. One of them stood in front of the vehicle and said I should stop. I was not driving actually but I was in my personal vehicle. They said I was recording, and I should bring out my phone that I was recording with. They dragged me out of the vehicle and started manhandling me. They grabbed my phones from me and asked me to open it so they could see what I have recorded. I had my ID card on me which I showed them. They started hitting me, pushing me up and down. They handcuffed me with the tricycle rider who was eventually caught. They dragged us around and we eventually got to a mobile court under Dantata Bridge along the airport. I was asked to sit on the bare floor. I resisted, but they insisted I needed to sit on the bare floor until my case was called up by the mobile court. I removed my shoe so I can sit on it, but I was not allowed to do so. I looked around and saw the officers around with guns.

The embarrassment and de-humanisation had started already so I agreed to sit on the bare floor. I was arrested around 11:45am and was with them until 3pm before I was taken to the mobile court, and they drove off with the tricycle driver and the rest that was arrested .apparently to collect money from them before allowing them to go. But because I am a journalist, they know I knew what I was doing. They wouldn't want to take money from me before letting me go. I was in the court till the court closed. I spoke with one of the officers on duty there, he said he went to speak with the judge and the judge said it was beyond them. The judge asked if I was driving myself and that the court was for people who were found on the road at that time of the day and not people driving or probably on official duties. My case was not heard. My phones were taken. I was asked to come back the following day I was given one of my phones to call which I did and found my way out of the place. Luckily, the content I had before I was arrested had gone viral. Several media called to hear my side of the story which was aired by AIT and WAZOBIAFM.

The following day I went back to the court, I was told my case will be transferred to another court. I got there around 8am and was there till 12pm. I was taken to a Magistrate court with Magistrate Mabel Bello as the presiding judge in Court 2, Zone 2 Magistrate Court Abuja. She heard my case immediately I got there and asked if I had my ID card on me and if I showed it to the officers. I explained to her that I had it and even brought it out to show them. I was asked to pay a fine of five thousand naira and 3 hours of community service. I became disturbed because the court that is supposed to be the hope of a common man could convict me after my explanation. I was given a receipt for the payment. After that, I made effort to find out where the Judge sits. I visited the court several times without meeting or seeing her. I could not get the record of court proceedings in order to appeal the judgment because the secretary too was never on sit. I later got tired when it became apparent that I was being frustrated.

COVID-19 Law enforcers as ultimate spreaders of the virus

It turned out COVID-19 lockdown enforcers were actually putting people at the risk of contracting the virus. I was handcuffed with a man I don't know. Either of us could have been COVID-19 positive. Several persons were kept in the same truck in manners that violated the rule of social distancing that was in place at the time. Almost 20 people were killed as a result of fear and commotion caused by taskforce team enforcing COVID-19 lockdown.

Concern about my health

I took ill shortly after the ordeal. At that period, NCDC never picked my call. I called the police, and they actually picked the call, I asked if they were with the NCDC officials that I was feeling somehow and really need to be tested, I was told to keep calling the NCDC number. I went for check-up, bought drugs and isolated myself till I got fine. I had to tell my friends to stay off me because I could not understand the way I was feeling. I had

to tell my siblings who stay with me and my friends to stay off me because I wanted to isolate myself. It was at the peak of the covid-19 outbreak. My brother went to stay with my relatives elsewhere; I stayed by myself till it was over. Fortunately, I was not COVID-19 positive though I was seriously sick.

Yearning for justice

I was dragged out of the vehicle by a number of taskforce men pushing me against each other. I was dragged on the floor. I had bruises on my leg. The handcuffs were tight, so it gave me bruises on my hands. I want my case revisited. I was beaten and dehumanized. It was the first time I had handcuffs on my hand. I never experienced such injustice. I wasn't doing something wrong; I was doing the right thing. Such experience can be very painful. Some of the taskforce men were wearing uniform without nametags. I want the judgment appealed so that the officers will be reprimanded. They went away with one of three phones collected from me.

**4. TOM GARBA (THOMAS GARBA):
A case of Unwarranted Harassment**



"They dragged me and manhandled me to the extent that I was bundled into their van. I lost my phone, and my laptop was damaged. We told them we are journalists, but they said there was a standing order that nobody should go out. At the end, I found myself in their cell with no explanation as to why we were arrested. It took the intervention of the NUJ Chairman to release us after spending the night in their custody".

Opinion on Press Freedom in Nigeria

Journalist (Newspaper)

Place of Work / Beat:

Daily Times correspondent (Tgnews publisher)

Years of Experience:

10 years

Opinion about climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

I rate the climate of press freedom in Nigeria on a scale of 4/10 because of denial of fundamental human rights of Journalists which are being trampled upon by government, organisations and individuals.

Opinion about state of preparedness of media houses for journalists during challenging period like COVID-19 pandemic:

I would rate the state of preparedness of media houses 1/10. At present, there is very poor state of preparedness by media houses.

Experience of violation of rights as a journalist during COVID-19 pandemic:

My freedom of movement, personal liberty, right to freedom of speech and fair hearing were violated by men of the Nigerian police who invaded the Secretariat of NUJ in Adamawa State.

Measures taken to ensure safety and protection of rights:

None

Experience relating to torture, assault, physical injuries and damage to personal belongings:

I was rough handled, sustained bruises in my hands and legs while bundling me to their patrol van. My clothes were torn, and my phone and laptop got missing in the process.

Reprimand or punishment for perpetrators of violation of rights and crime committed:

The perpetrators were not punished. The police authorities are not interested in reprimanding or punishing the perpetrators.

Compensation for loss or damage to personal belongings:

I am yet to be compensated although police authorities in Adamawa State promised to investigate my damaged gadgets and lost phone.

Opinion about justice or denial of justice:

Justice has not been served in my case notwithstanding that the Commissioner regretted the actions of his men and apology tendered to me by the PPRO who visited my house.

Recommendations to the government, media professionals and associations towards improving the climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

Ratification or establishment of new media laws to make law enforcement agents respect the rights of journalists and freedom to practice. There is need for proper enforcement of the existing laws by government. Media organisations or bodies like NUJ, IPC should stand up and defend the rights of journalists in the country. International community should support journalists in Nigeria to have a free wind of practice without harassment or any kind of molestation or embarrassment

Further comments / additional recommendations:

None.

My Story

Police subdued freedom of the press; violated our rights of journalists

I am a journalist known for reporting stories regarding insurgency and government activities in the Northeast. I have worked with several media organisations including the Nigerian Tribune and some Online News platforms. I am currently working with the Daily Times. It is quite unfortunate to say that COVID-19 came with lot of issues bedeviling not only Nigeria but the entire world. The pandemic turned the world upside down to say the least. The issue that is becoming so worrisome to everybody is that the pandemic has given some people the power to trample on other people's right which I found worrisome. As a journalist, I have responsibility to report on issues relating to the pandemic. There were a lot of issues in Adamawa State. I was with colleagues at the state NUJ Secretariat, and we were brainstorming on how to go about filling reports for that day. There was lockdown and people were complaining that there was no food to eat and no shopping for the households. We were trying to keep the government

informed about happening in the state. I remember a story about a woman who left an 8-year-old child to look for food and the child was involved in a car accident in the quarters she was staying. This was one of the stories we were trying to file. All of a sudden, we saw a van full of armed policemen.

The police actually came to the NUJ secretariat to disrupt a meeting by a group of journalists. They ran at us and began to manhandle some of us at the NUJ secretariat. Many journalists were there including the NUJ chairman. There was confusion! They bundled us including the NUJ Chairman, but someone said this is the chairman and they let him go. But the rest of us were arrested. They dragged me and manhandled me to the extent that I was bundled into their van. I lost my phone, and my laptop was damaged. We told them we are journalists, but they said there was a standing order that nobody should go out. At the end, I found myself in their cell with no explanation as to why we were arrested. It took the intervention of the NUJ Chairman to release us after spending the night in their custody.

I met so many people in the cell which is a small room of about 12/12 ft with 20 cellmates. Most were arrested for violating COVID-19 lockdown while few were for other issues. It was more like we were in a toilet because the smell was something else. There were lot of cockroaches and mosquitoes in the cell, more like you're close to the river bank.

Hazard of reporting amidst COVID-19 scare

The challenge with the policemen on duty that day is that some of them do not even know the duties and functions of a journalist. Such attack should not have been unleashed on me because I am a known practicing journalist in Adamawa state, and I have been covering a lot of their activities. The police PRO later intervened when he heard of the situation. He said some of the officers are just naughty at times. He showed concern by coming to my house. He acknowledged that some of their men can be overbearing. It was obvious some of the officers were under some influence. I could perceive the odour of alcohol oozing from some of them. I was trying to explain when they were forcing us into their vehicle. I showed them my ID card; they ignored it claiming it was an order. "Who gave the order, don't you know who journalists are", I demanded. I said let me call the governor to ask if journalists on duty should be arrested. But they wouldn't listen. In fact, they just tossed me into the vehicle and zoomed off.

The Commissioner of police in Adamawa State held a meeting with the NUJ officials led by the Chairman. Although I was not at the meeting, the police regretted what had happened and promised it will not happen again. However, my media organization did not take any step. It was only the report I wrote that was published but they did not take any tangible step regarding my ordeal. The police PRO came to my house to convey the apologies of the Commissioner of police. I think the police should know who a journalist is, what he does and how he reports his work in line of duty.

No Compensation for my damaged gadgets

I had to treat myself for malaria for over 2 days before I could come out to work. I asked if they would pay for my laptop that was damaged, the police PRO said they would look into the whole issue, but till now I have not gotten any response from them. I doubt if they are committed to compensation, because the last time I spoke about the laptop, he jokingly replied that they are still looking at the whole issue. So I do not think they are ready to repair the laptop or replace the phone. However, I actually thought about pursuing the issue of compensation for my damaged items through documented report, but I am mindful of what the command can do and cannot do. There are stories that I have written in respect of human right abuses that the police deliberately ignored demand for compensation. I am reluctant about documenting demand for compensation knowing that there were victims that deserve compensation but have been denied. I am reluctant and not enthusiastic about following up with the promise to compensate me.

Processing the shock: Communication technology could have saved the day

There is no doubt virtual meeting could have averted the incident, but it was normal practice for journalists to converge at the NUJ secretariat to discuss one on one. Nobody contemplated or anticipated the attack. Journalists should go about their normal duty regardless. The government, the people, and the global community rely on reports by journalists on daily basis. I was thinking the lockdown and directive from the state government could not affect the work and movement of journalists. Notwithstanding, I restricted myself from going to any other place than the NUJ secretariat. I never anticipated police could invade NUJ secretariat which is reserved place for journalists coming around to do one or two things. I decided to be in NUJ and not my personal office or any other place. What happened beat my imagination.

While the NUJ Secretariat is considered a safe place by journalists, we were however not unmindful that the use of communication technology was an option. But that option was not considered probably because nobody expected such incident could happen. We could achieve same or even better result and avoid getting into trouble in future. Going forward, useful lessons have been learnt in case of lockdown or crisis in future. More importantly, we should deploy more strategic ways of writing our story to put government on its toes rather than individual efforts because journalism should be a team work.

My life in danger

I am not covered. No journalist even reported in my defense when they threatened to kill or hunt me. Worst still they even compromised some journalists, and they were writing damaging reports against me. You can imagine where we are and how we work in this country. Your organisation doesn't protect you and your colleagues that are supposed to be your friend won't protect you. I think there must be a clear change in the way we operate and do our things and journalists and NUJ should come up with guidelines that will help or else we would not be free to go out and work. In Adamawa State now, I am very careful where I go because I know many people are hunting me because of my exclusive stories. It is scary to know they are hunting you because you choose to be different. It is hard to take care of yourself when doing it as a service to humanity and humanity is not happy with you. If not because I have a flare for writing, I don't think it is even a price for one to be a journalist in Nigeria. I consider it a call and a flare. If I don't write I feel empty, until I write something I feel at least I have done something. It is something I want to feel proud to do.

Saving Journalism profession: NUJ should not let go

My advice is that NUJ should come out with a very strong position to the government and law enforcement agencies, stating our modus operandi. Law enforcement agencies should know that journalists need freedom of movement and safety to practice the profession they all rely upon when they need a good story and report about their activities. Journalists are their friends when their interest is protected but same journalists are bad people and hunted after on the pretext of carrying out orders. When they need to project their activities, it is the same journalists that are called to cover stories. I think the NUJ should come out categorically to let security and law enforcement agencies know what the journalism profession entails. NUJ should defend the journalists as professionals who should be allowed to do their work as recognised by the constitution. It is unfortunate we are in a country where we are not being recognised or rewarded; some journalists are not even paid, and stories are written at the detriment of their lives. It is like what happened to me; even my organisation did not come to me to say sorry we heard what happened; they were interested in publishing the reports that I wrote to say this happened. So how will I be encouraged to be a journalist when my organisation is not backing me up?

5. MICHAEL IKEOGWU:

"They probably felt embarrassed that someone could hold them to account because they knew they were not doing the right thing. They were pretending to be carrying out legitimate duties. At this point some staff of the agency started shouting that I cannot challenge their authority. They threatened even to beat me. They attacked a colleague, Matthew Omoniyo who was with me. The inspector of the agency became angry with his men when he got to know that a journalist was involved. They hurriedly left the place"

Opinion on Press Freedom in Nigeria

Journalist (Newspaper)

Place of Work / Beat:

Pointer Newspaper (Reporter) / Chairman Delta State Council, NUJ

Years of Experience:

=== years

My Story

Menace of Taskforce and challenge of public accountability

During one of the days of the lockdown in Delta, my colleague and I decided that we will monitor compliance. As we moved around along Ijakpa road in Warri, Delta State we saw people gathered and we had to park our car and stroll. When we got there, we saw the environmental sanitation team arresting people and I decided to move close to them. As I approached, one of them walked up to me and I said okay can I see your team leader? He directed me to the team leader. I asked him why people were for sanitation exercise that day which was contrary to the directive of the Governor of Delta State. I think three of them knew me as a journalist. One of them is from a village close to mine. We had met on several occasions; we never had issues. The man leading the team even called my name as I approached them. The team was made up of civilians who were not in uniform. No conventional security agencies - Police, Army, Navy or even paramilitary or civil defence men were with them. The leader of the team said they were doing their legitimate job. I said the governor can neither ask the people to go out nor ask you to monitor sanitation exercise during COVID-19 lockdown. They probably felt embarrassed that someone could hold them to account because they knew they were not doing the right thing. They were pretending to be carrying out legitimate duties. At this point some staff of the agency started shouting that I cannot challenge their authority. They threatened even to beat me. They attacked a colleague, Matthew Omoniyo who was with me. The inspector of the agency became angry with his men when he got to know that a journalist was involved. They hurriedly left the place. After the attack, we issued a statement to draw the attention of government to the incident. When one of the appointees of the governor saw it, he reacted. I also complained to NUJ council in Delta State. The director of the agency called from the state capital Asaba and tendered verbal apologies. He pleaded I should not go further with press statement and that they will find a way to resolve the problem. We met about two times, and they accepted to repair the camera that was damaged in the process. I did not suffer any loss or sustain any injury; however my colleague was injured.

Journalists as neglected frontline workers

There is challenge with the way government constitutes taskforce and the individuals recruited for such purpose. I can imagine what would have happened if I was not a journalist. During COVID-19 lockdown, our business as journalists was to monitor compliance with the lockdown. The pandemic took everybody unawares. As journalists, we also have a responsibility to ensure we don't contract COVID-19. But people think we are blowing COVID-19 issues out of proportion. It is on unfortunate there was no consideration for journalists who have professional obligation to monitor and report COVID-19 and how the society and people are affected. No programme for journalists, particularly in Delta state. Government should also consider journalists who are in the frontline like health workers

and other public officials. Journalists are more prone to adverse effects of COVID-19, and I would like to see states and federal government look at what they can do to enhance the practice of journalism during emergencies like COVID-19 pandemic. Journalists need capacity building to enhance the professional practice.

6. IVY KANU:

Unpleasant Encounter with overzealous policemen



"Nevertheless, it is a breach of trust if you came out as an institution and say this section of the society is exempted from curfew and turn around to change the stand without prior notification. It shows journalism profession is being disregarded while journalists are being disrespected. You are exempting the professionals like doctors and disregarding journalists that are supposed to be providing the essential services of providing public information"

Opinion on Press Freedom in Nigeria

Journalist (Broadcaster)

Place of Work / Beat:

TVC News (Reporter)

Years of Experience:

14 years

Opinion about climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

I rate the climate of press freedom in Nigeria on a scale of 6/10 because journalists are careful delving into certain sectors and even when they do, it's not very detailed because its either you're not getting enough information or there's concerted efforts to frustrate your every move

Opinion about state of preparedness of media houses for journalists during challenging period like COVID-19 pandemic:

I would rate the state of preparedness of media houses 8/10. I assume many media Houses have put preventive measures in place, but the greater responsibility is that of journalists to protect themselves (self-preservation). As most journalists spend more time on the field than they do inside the office, so they owe themselves that duty of care.

Experience of violation of rights as a journalist during COVID-19 pandemic:

I was arrested for alleged violation of curfew time imposed by the government. The irony was that the government categorised us as providing essential services; then turned around and

arrested. My arrest by the police makes a mockery of the whole exemption thing.

Measures taken to ensure safety and protection of rights:

My office responded swiftly by airing a report of my arrest which I cleverly filed and got across to the office right there at the police station.

Experience relating to torture, assault, physical injuries and damage to personal belongings:

I closed from office at past 9pm, I was heading home when I encountered two police officers at the traffic light just opposite Alausa police station in Lagos. They stopped me and the first thing I did was turn on my inner light and went for my ID card. Politely he took a look at it, handed it over to me and asked that I drove into the station. On driving in, I realised I wasn't alone. Well at some point we were asked to put down our names and handover our phones. At that point, I was like there was no way I was going to let anyone have my phone at that time of the night when I've not been able to reach my family because I know once they succeed in taking that the next step was taking everyone into the cell. Now before this time I had put a call across to my station, so they immediately put it out there that I was arrested. So at 10pm News I was able to sneak to a corner of the police station and did live from the station. With that the Divisional Police Officer kept receiving call from God knows where. I was finally released at about past 11pm. I didn't sustain physical injury, no property destroyed, but I was traumatized.

Reprimand or punishment for perpetrators of violation of rights and crime committed:

I doubt the officers involved will either be reprimanded or punished because the officers were only carrying out an instruction from above.

Compensation for loss or damage to personal belongings:

No.

Opinion about justice or denial of justice:

Justice wasn't served because I can now say I was just a victim of an apparently organised confusion by government in managing information.

Recommendations to the government, media professionals and associations towards improving the climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

As a matter of urgency, media professional bodies must sanitise this practice, it's becoming an embarrassment.

Further comments / additional recommendations:

None.

My Story

Police suddenly realized journalists are not on essential services

On this day, a week or so after curfew was imposed to enforce COVID-19 lockdown, I was done with production in the newsroom and was heading home. I never anticipated the shock awaiting me on my way although a colleague of mine had narrated how policemen were stopping and arresting people along Billing's way Alausa. I thought my identification as a journalist and an essential worker was all I needed. I had my identification card on me and a paper indicating my television station was right there on my dashboard. We already knew that we were referred to as essential workers and the curfew did not really affect us; it should be about 9pm because I knew my story will go on air for 10pm. I needed no escort and should be in my house in 15 minutes at time of the day when the traffic is light. I drove towards Alausa where there were police officers, and I had no hesitation or fear because of the relationship I had with them having covered the beat for so many years. They flagged me down. I showed my identification card. One of the officers recognized me. He had an order to obey. He said I should drive into the police station which I did. I got into the police station and noticed I was not the only one. There were about thirteen to

fourteen people who were also arrested. I parked my car; I was trying to walk towards the divisional police officer who was giving me attitude. I waited for a while and the first thing I did was to send a message to my office that this is where I am. They said we should give them our car keys which we handed over and the next thing was all of you be on the line - funny things. We were taken to the counter where we were asked to hand over. There was a book where we signed our names and drop our telephones. At this point I said there was no way I will drop my phone because I knew with that am sure the next order to come in will be to march us into the cell and given it was covid period I was not going to take any risks. I was not going to enter a crowded place.

Power of broadcast media in the face of danger

Right there at the police station, I spoke with my colleagues saying I am standing by for 10pm news and I hid in a corner where I knew they would not notice, stayed in that corner, and did live for 10pm news. After this we all headed to the counter to hand over our mobile phones. I was able to link up with 10pm broadcast because every broadcast house including my media organisation should ordinarily have a bank for past photographs. Once live, your picture will be used to tell a story. That was what was helpful in telling my story from the police station. While this was on, there were calls stating that my arrest has gone viral. Already I knew my family will be in panic mood because they would have heard, and I held onto my phone. Before this incident went viral, journalists started heading to the police station and they were from MITV and other nearer media outlets and with that announcement from my office about my arrest, I saw the senior divisional police officer pacing up and down receiving calls. At the end of the day nobody was taken to the cell. We were released at about past eleven and we were handed our car keys.

Police is not always our friends

There was no form of physical attack, but I felt harassed and embarrassed by what happened. Interestingly, the policemen who knew who I am were embarrassed as well. They were embarrassed by the fact that I am a crime journalist who they already have a relationship with. I think for them it was more of embarrassment. I cannot describe their mood. It was difficult then approaching me after what just went down. I totally understood. I understood the fact that for uniformed men no matter the relationship you have with them it is a case of an order from above do this and you cannot question it. One of those arrested is a doctor who I explained to, and he understood me. Throughout the period I had covered stories, so for me, the question remains what changed that night? What was it that they needed to achieve? I did not get the message. I just did not know what changed that night. It is only the police that can explain what changed that night. What was it they were trying to achieve? That, I would not know. I expected the police authorities to reach me or reach the station to offer some explanations or express regrets. I felt they needed to apologise not just to me but to Nigerians. It's like they can treat us in certain way, and we have come to accept it. I did not know where to report to if I wanted to. There was not an official apology from the police. None whatsoever! At times we just take so many things for granted. We take our friendship, relationship for granted.

Freedom of the press and safety of Journalists is at stake

Fortunately, I did not sustain any injury or spend money on anything as a result of my ordeal. It was psychological and emotional trauma for me all the same, but it is part of the hazard, and we just get back into shape after a while. Nevertheless, it is a breach of trust if you came out as an institution and say this section of the society is exempted from curfew and turn around to change the stand without prior notification. It shows journalism profession is being disregarded while journalists are being disrespected. You are exempting the professionals like doctors and disregarding journalists that are supposed to be providing the essential services of providing

public information. If you told me I was not exempted I would rather have stayed over in the office or headed home earlier than the curfew time. But the impression we were given was that we were not affected. It was announced by the federal government and the state governments as well as the police themselves. But this is probably because Nigerians are also very reserved; we must know that we have rights. When they know that you can get to the police station to give statements without your lawyer, the treatment will be different. The relationship between the police and Nigerians over the years is founded on lack of trust.

7. ABIODUN OMOTOSHO: Military jackboot in a democracy



"I showed the soldier who arrested me my identity card. He collected it and refused to hand it over to me. They deleted all the files in my camera. None of them bothered to read my identity card. They were brutal. I believe they won't stop brutality of journalists; they are fond of harassing photo journalists. Military men and other men in uniform are fond of harassing us. I don't know maybe they have skeleton in their cupboard or maybe they see the camera as another gun that is why they are harassing photojournalists".

Opinion on Press Freedom in Nigeria

Journalist (Photojournalist)

Place of Work / Beat:

National Wire/All beats

Formerly with The Guardian Newspaper, NEXT Newspaper, Newswatch

Years of Experience:

15 years

Opinion about climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

I rate the climate of press freedom in Nigeria on a scale of 3/10 because we just have the issue of press freedom in Nigeria on paper. In reality there is no total freedom of press in Nigeria. Journalists cannot embark on real investigative journalism with peace of mind.

Opinion about state of preparedness of media houses for journalists during challenging period like COVID-19 pandemic:

I would rate the state of preparedness of media houses 4/10. Most media houses do not take care of the logistics aspect of the lockdown/pandemic. Only few of them prepared for the pandemic; especially health wise. Some even requested for their staff to work from home without any support while others even reduced staff strength. Many other professions provided palliatives to their staff, but in the media such things are minimal.

Experience of violation of rights as a journalist during COVID-19 pandemic:

On Wednesday May 6, 2020, I was harassed by overzealous soldiers and arrested in front of Arena Shopping Plaza, Bolade, Oshodi, Bus-stop along Lagos-Abeokuta Motor road where traders refused to follow social distancing rule and were still selling after the 3pm regulated time for closing.

Measures taken to ensure safety and protection of rights:

There were calls by my office, which really helped even though the soldier named Moses ignored the ID card I presented.

Experience relating to torture, assault, physical injuries and damage to personal belongings:

The overzealous soldier identified as Moses questioned my right to shoot in front of "our arena" during my assignment in front of the plaza. I am well aware of my rights under the FoI Bill Act 2011 (No 31, sub section E) which relates to photographs. My camera was seized, and all the shots were deleted. He demanded for N100, 000 which I didn't have. I was apprehended and detained in the military guardroom and cell and questioned for doing my lawful duty. I was labeled as a spy before the Army PRO, 9th Brigade, Major Kolawole Bello saved me at Ikeja Military Cantonment. Few hours after my detention I was uncomfortable and I collapsed at the military police detention facility and was rushed to the Medical Registry System (MRS) for resuscitation and treatment in the presence of Army PRO, 9 Brigade, Major Kolawole Bello.

Reprimand or punishment for perpetrators of violation of rights and crime committed:

I don't know but I doubt if the perpetrator will either be reprimanded or punished.

Compensation for loss or damage to personal belongings:

I was later treated, released and followed by a senior officer to my residence.

Opinion about justice or denial of justice:

No, justice was not served because I was doing my lawful duty, but I was taken as a spy on a military site.

Recommendations to the government, media professionals and associations towards improving the climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

I would recommend formal security for the media houses. I remember when I was in NEXT newspaper. After a publication that hit the presidency in Abuja then, Police were drafted to come and shut down the press but on getting to the gate they met some officers. They cannot fight each other. They had a small talk and left.

Further comments / additional recommendations:

Security is needed even for the journalists on the field. Media houses should buckle up to pay media workers a reasonable take home pay and not peanuts. Media deserve hazard allowance in Nigeria. 80% of media houses do owe salary. This is not encouraging its demoralizing.

My Story

Arrested, detained and dehumanised over a ransom

On May 6, 2020, during the lockdown period I was harassed by overzealous soldiers because I wanted to take a shot of the arena plaza at Bolade Oshodi bus stop along Lagos Abeokuta expressway where traders were violating social distancing rule. I saw them selling after the regulated closing time of 3pm and I took the shot. The soldier ran to me, collected my camera. He demanded for N100, 000 and said that if I didn't bring out money, he would hand me over to the military police. I said I didn't have N100, 000 and he handed me over to another officer who pleaded with me that I should pay something and that if I didn't bring out something they will torture me there. I was forced to part with N100,000 which he said was too small. I said that was what I had so they refused to let me go. They radioed

the military police in my presence, and I immediately called my office prompting the news to be posted on the platform. The collected my camera. I remember one of them was called Moses. They collected my camera and handed me over to the military police. I was detained by the military police at the guard room and later in a cell at the military cantonment in Ikeja for about an hour. They questioned my lawful duty and labeled me a spy and said they found something in my camera. They saw the picture of where I snapped a police man and said I was after the military. They said I was a suspect they had been looking for. I said I wasn't a spy, but they insisted. However, when the Army PRO came around, they soft pedalled. The army PRO Major Kolawole Bello was my saviour that day. But for him, I would have rotten in their cell.

Exhausted, I fainted and was hospitalised

I developed exhaustion after about an hour in the cell. I was uncomfortable. I asked for water, but nobody gave me water. There was no water around; I just discovered that I was uncomfortable. They were treating me like an enemy until the PRO came and said they should release me that I am a journalist. The PRO told them to release me thrice, but they refused. So when I fainted, they now rushed me for treatment at a medical facility - military regime system. At the hospital they were petting me and said they would take me to my house. They were romancing me. The injection the administered on me at the health facility was the only treatment I took. I didn't take any further treatment after I was released.

Nigerian journalists deserves protection from military brutality

I showed the soldier who arrested me my identity card. He collected it and refused to hand it over to me. They deleted all the files in my camera. None of them bothered to read my identity card. They were brutal. I believe they won't stop brutality of journalists; they are fond of harassing photo journalists. Military men and other men in uniform are fond of harassing us. I don't know maybe they have skeleton in their cupboard or maybe they see the camera as another gun that is why they are harassing photojournalists. They should not be disturbing people carrying out their lawful duty. It is common for military men and other security agents to harass photojournalists. It is not good for the profession. That was not the first time a soldier will collect my camera and because of my experience with them I didn't drag the camera with him when he said bring your camera; I just released it to him. If I had dragged my camera with him, he would have rough handled me. I just released my camera, and I gave him my identity card and pay attention to his name, Moses. The brief time I spent in their cell was dehumanizing. The cell was poorly ventilated. I was lucky I could manage to send a distress message to my office before my phone went off. It was the post on our platform about my arrest that made the PRO to intervene urgently.

8. ANGELA NKWO AKPOLU:

Military jackboot under democracy



"Within a split second, an operative of the DSS advanced and immediately removed my medicated glasses under the hot sun, which of course demobilised me. Almost immediately, he snatched my iPad. At this point, the other security operatives (it was a combined team of Civil Defence NSCDC, DSS, and Police) intervened and told him I got clearance and he got more infuriated as his tone showed. He cocked his gun during the process and repeatedly poked his finger on my face, telling me how he will deal with me. In all these, I was defenceless as I could not see properly; I merely followed the voices and leaned towards the policemen who apparently were more reasonable and understanding".

Opinion on Press Freedom in Nigeria

Journalist (Reporter)

Place of Work / Beat:

Leadership newspaper / Imo State Correspondent

Years of Experience:

21 years

Opinion about climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

I rate the climate of press freedom in Nigeria on a scale of 4/10 because while Journalists in Lagos and Abuja enjoy a measure of freedom, correspondents in other states do not because somehow state government crooners erroneously assume that critics are opposition figures that should be dealt with.

Opinion about state of preparedness of media houses for journalists during challenging period like COVID-19 pandemic:

I would rate the state of preparedness of media houses 3/10. Beyond provision of branded nose masks, nothing else was provided.

Experience of violation of rights as a journalist during COVID-19 pandemic:

I was assaulted by operative of the Department of Security Services (DSS). Following the forceful lockup of Fancy hotel in Umuguma, Owerri West local government area of Imo State, over fears that the proprietor had come down with Covid-19 symptoms, I had gone to get pictures to back up the report.

Measures taken to ensure safety and protection of rights:

None

Experience relating to torture, assault, physical injuries and damage to personal belongings:

Upon arrival at the hotel, I had properly identified myself as a correspondent of Leadership newspapers and the leader of the Police team gave me clearance to take the picture. I didn't request for interview because I knew they were not authorised to speak. Within a split second, an operative of the DSS advanced and immediately removed my medicated glasses under the hot sun, which of course demobilised me. Almost immediately, he snatched my iPad. At this point, the other security operatives (it was a combined team of Civil Defence NSCDC, DSS, and Police) intervened and told him I got clearance and he got more infuriated as his tone showed. He cocked his gun during the process and repeatedly poked his finger on my face, telling me how he will deal with me. In all these, I was defenceless as I could not see properly; I merely followed the voices and leaned towards the policemen who apparently were more reasonable and understanding. Afterwards, the policemen shielded me away from the DSS official. They later brought my glasses and iPad. He deleted every picture I had acquired for over a year. I was thoroughly harassed mentally and psychologically. First, I was scared stiff that I had been exposed to Covid-19 especially because of the Gestapo manner supposed patients are taken from their homes like lepers. I made sure my family members did not come close to me for about 21 days, so I don't spread it

assuming I was infected. It took me months to recover from that experience. Till date, I can't stay still beside a security official bearing arm especially a DSS official.

Reprimand or punishment for perpetrators of violation of rights and crime committed:

No, not yet because I couldn't give a name and the officials refused to give me a name.

Compensation for loss or damage to personal belongings:

Nothing has so far been done because I was unable to get the name of the official because shortly after that, the DSS changed the team that was posted to that place.

Opinion about justice or denial of justice:

No. Actually, nothing has been done

Recommendations to the government, media professionals and associations towards improving the climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

There is the need for mutual respect. Journalists should be respected as professionals. While the security operatives were discharging their jobs, I was also doing mine. It was an open space so I couldn't be accused of invading private space. They were on the road, barricaded the road actually. But I was not particular about them, but the entrance of the gate locked even when there were guests locked in against their wish.

Further comments / additional recommendations:

None

My Story

I was in darkness: They seized my glasses; blurred my vision

During COVID-19 lockdown in Owerri, Imo state, there was safety concern around Fancy Hotel in Owerri West Local Government Area. I live within that vicinity. My colleague in Imo State Chapel of NUJ requested I should confirm the report and also get pictures. This is the kind of things journalists will normally do prior to the pandemic. The information we heard was that the owner of the hotel was exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 and that he had he had visited his country home. I drove down and parked at a safe distance. The moment I parked an elderly policeman asked me about my mission, so I showed him my identity card and told him all I wanted was to take a picture to confirm that the place had been condoned off as widely speculated. He said okay no problem, so he waved to his other subordinate and so I positioned to take pictures. I think I had taken one or two from the comfort of my car. I lifted my gadget to take more pictures. So this young man from nowhere probably intoxicated took my glasses and that was as good as rendering me useless and it was under the hot sun. I wasn't seeing properly. He took my iPad. I couldn't see properly. He kept poking his finger into my nose. I told him that I got permission from the policeman to take pictures. He was talking and was pushing me, so I was staggering. I kept shifting backwards because it was obvious, I wasn't seeing well in the hot sun. For the next 10 minutes he was shouting. There were about seven security men made up of police, DSS and Civil Defence. The young man who assaulted me was actually wearing black top and armed with AK-47 which showed he was a DSS operative. The policeman that gave me permission confirmed he was the one who asked me to take pictures. But the DSS operative said the policeman could not teach him how to do his job. The policemen shielded me and then guided me to safety. I went back to my car collected my glasses and then he gave me back my iPad but then he had deleted every picture I had. These are pictures I had stored over time.

Journalists are not respected in our society

I reported what had happened to my colleagues. The chairman of NUJ chapel reached to the DSS, and they said they will look into it. But the complaint wasn't formal. After that incident, some people in the DSS started calling to make to appeal. I lost quality pictures in that experience, some very good pictures. You know for journalists pictures can be indispensable. You understand so I lost pictures that I have actually built up over in one year or more. I suffered psychological threat I don't think I can stay with armed personnel without being fearful till date. Because it was COVID-19 era, I was worried I had contracted the

virus because of the way the guy was pushing me. I had to maintain distancing from my family at home. I know the symptoms ought to show around 10 days or there about, but because of psychological effect, it took a month before I regained my sanity from that experience

We were trying to educate the public about the situation in the hotel that was condoned off. There was speculation that people were stranded in the hotel. People were stranded in some other places that were sealed up and needed to survive. The authorities were not providing food for anybody. The assault was reported in my newspaper. Media Rights Agenda (MRA) also issued a statement condemning the attack on my person.

9. SAINT MIENPAMO:

Blindfolded, kidnapped and framed by the state



"I was not allowed to see my family and I was treated very badly in DSS office. I was put in a cell that a normal human being would not survive in; I was kept alone in a cell full of cockroaches, rats and a lot of mosquitoes. When I was released, my health was affected. I was admitted at one of the private hospitals"

Opinion on Press Freedom in Nigeria

Journalist (Broadcaster)

Place of Work / Beat:

NAIJA LIVE TV

Years of Experience:

10 years

Opinion about climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

I rate the climate of press freedom in Nigeria on a scale of 4/10 because the press has been constantly harassed and intimidated by political office holders and security agencies across Nigeria. Even the Freedom of Information Act that is expected to enable journalists have free access to government financial documents have not been domesticated at the State level. And this has been the excuse politicians give to deny journalists access to government documents and information that can be used to hold them accountable. Another thing is the fact that many journalists are not financially free because their offices don't pay them salaries and as a result of this, they sell the little freedom they have to report the truth because of money.

Opinion about state of preparedness of media houses for journalists during challenging period like COVID-19 pandemic:

I would rate the state of preparedness of media houses 3/10. During the pandemic, media houses didn't provide any form of

relief for their staff; meaning they were not prepared for the pandemic. In fact, instead of looking for means to provide relief for their staff, they resorted to retrenchment of workers. Journalists in Bayelsa State, for example, had to rely on governments officials to provide relief and PPEs for them.

Experience of violation of rights as a journalist during COVID-19 pandemic:

I was arrested for publishing a Covid-19 related story. At about 1 a.m. on May 9, 2020, four masked Department of State Services agents forced their way into my room in my house in Yenagoa, the capital of Bayelsa state, blindfolded me, and drove me around for more than three hours before bringing me to the DSS local headquarters. At the headquarters, agents interrogated me about the sources for two reports I published. The agents held me until May 12, when I appeared at a press conference organized by the security agency, in which I apologized for the reports and denied allegations that the agents had abducted me. I was coerced into making those statements in exchange for being released without charges. The reason for my arrest was that through my online platform, I was accused of reporting that Governor Yahaya Bello spent a whopping sum of N7 billion on a makeshift COVID-19 isolation centre which was later blown off by wind sometime in April 2020. The said publication generated a lot of controversy which led to my arrest by the Department of State Security (DSS), and I was subsequently arraigned at a Federal High Court sitting in Yenagoa. At the time, I could not tell if anything was deleted from the phones or if they were tampered with. The second reason was that I reported that a court in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, had ordered the arrest of Bayelsa Deputy Governor Lawrence Erwhudjakpo over his alleged fake NYSC certificate

Measures taken to ensure safety and protection of rights:

Friends and relatives rallied round and provided me with a lawyer. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) stepped in and issued statements that forced the Kogi State Government to drop their case against me in Court after our final written addresses were filed. The Media Foundation for West Africa based in Accra, Ghana also offered some financial support for my legal team.

Experience relating to torture, assault, physical injuries and damage to personal belongings:

I was not physically tortured or sustained physical Injuries. I did not lose any personal items.

However, the manner they arrested me was like abduction. They came in the middle of the night without identifying themselves, seized the phone of all my family members and took me away. For five days, nobody knew where I was. Even when my lawyers went to the DSS headquarters to ask after me they denied I was with them. My wife and children went through emotional torture. I was kept in a cell where mosquitoes dealt with me for five days. They also infringed on my rights to know my crime and have access to a lawyer for five days. For me that was an abuse of my fundamental human right. After I was released, I fell sick and had to go to the hospital where I was placed under medical care and supervision on my bill.

Reprimand or punishment for perpetrators of violation of rights and crime committed:

The perpetrators continued to threaten me to saying they would make sure I spend time in jail. They were never punished.

Compensation for loss or damage to personal belongings:

I was never compensated in any form.

Opinion about justice or denial of justice:

Justice was not served because they dropped the case with the excuse that they had forgiven me of my offences against them.

Recommendations to the government, media professionals and associations towards improving the climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

Government at the State level should ensure that the Freedom of Information Act is domesticated, so as to give journalists free access to information. Media houses should pay journalists under their employment, so they don't depend on politicians to survive. It is common knowledge that if a journalist is loyal to a politician, the Journalists would be unable to hold such politician accountable when he/she is doing wrong. Media unions should not allow their loyalty to political parties to cloud their judgment. They should remain united and defend their colleagues at all times. I recall that some members of the NUJ supported my arrest, while a few stood by me. Such division cannot move the media union forward.

Further comments / additional recommendations:

Stakeholders should meet and do all that is needed to graduate the NUJ from a trade union to a professional association like Nigeria Medical Association and Nigeria Bar Association.

My Story

Beyond expose on COVID-19 corruption

I sent a message to the Secretary to Kogi State Government to confirm if the information relating to the isolation Centre destroyed by rain was true or not because it was all over the social media. The incident happened on April 23, 2020 and I published my story on May 2, 2020. I needed to confirm the facts and figures to go ahead with the publication, but I got no response. I made my publication based on the information I got from twitter, indicating the sources and the dates of the post on their handle. I was arrested on May 9 for political reasons under the guise of the publication I did on COVID-19 isolation centre. They kidnapped me and hid me inside the governor's house in the early hours of May 9, 2020. I was still working in my room when I heard a bang on my door by four hefty men. They blind folded me right inside my room. So I was asking them who they were and what they wanted. They said I should just keep quiet and just do whatever they asked me to do. So for the safety of my wife, my family I had to obey them because they were holding guns and were masked up. They didn't even explain to me who they were and DSS was not written on their shirts. They just wore black with masks on their faces. They scaled the fence, tied the gateman before they broke into the residential house where I was. I was sleeping so they didn't explain to me who they were. They took me blindfolded and collected my wife's phone; went into my children room and collected their phones. So when they wanted to enter my children's room, I said please don't wake the children because my daughter is epileptic. I needed to protect her and save her from possible trauma. I pleaded with them, yet they still went to her room and took her phone. She was shocked; so she didn't even know the people that came. It was my wife that told them after they had left that daddy had been kidnapped. So they cried throughout that night until I was released the fifth day and my daughter was still crying to show how it affected my family.

Harassed and intimidated to falsely admit a crime

I was asked to come down from the vehicle after two hours and they finally removed my blindfold. So a lot of things happened during my arrest. They pushed me, removed my blindfold, pushed me between two vehicles and took a photograph of me. They sent the photograph to the Bayelsa state government to give to their social media aid to embarrass me. The Kogi Governor never gave my photograph to the media. It was the Bayelsa State Government that did all possible to tarnish my image. DSS abducted me and my phone traced it to the government house. How can they reconcile the story that DSS arrested me, and my mobile phones were tracked and traced to government house? The story went viral that a blogger had been kidnapped in Bayelsa State. Everybody was aware, the DSS was aware, the state government was aware but when my lawyers and my family members went to enquire if it was the DSS that arrested me, the DSS said that I wasn't in their custody while in actual fact I was in their custody. They were interrogating me right in their custody, but they told my family members that

they didn't know my whereabouts; in fact they told my lawyer they won't be able to know if I was with them or not. They later tried to give the impression I have apologized but it was a big fat lie. I never apologised to anybody for my publication even though they asked me to apologise so that they will release me. Even the journalist they invited to the DSS office also knows that they asked me to say those things, so I'll be released. My family members didn't know where I was, they didn't inform my family members where I was. They didn't ask me to call anybody. My lawyers were coming, and they were telling my lawyers that I was not in their custody and my family members were worried, my wife was worried, my children were worried none of them knew where I was. I hadn't spoken to them for five days. I didn't eat for five days so they were not finding it funny that was why they hurriedly arranged the press conference just to embarrass me and they said that I confessed; that I admitted that I did the publication. I admitted the story I did was based on report already on social media so if you want to investigate me you have to go and arrest all those people. I admitted I made my publication two weeks after the same story had gone viral.

Dehumanized, denials and ---- justice

I was not allowed to read anything for five days even when I requested for one. I was not allowed to see my family and I was treated very badly in DSS office. I was put in a cell that a normal human being would not survive in; I was kept alone in a cell full of cockroaches, rats and a lot of mosquitoes. When I was released, my health was affected. I was admitted at one of the private hospitals. I was asked to report and again I was detained and taken to court the following day. I had to spend almost two weeks again because of the strict bail conditions I was given. Even when I completed all my bail conditions within 4 days, I was still kept in detention for almost 2 weeks because the judge said COVID-19 won't allow her to touch the documents relating to my case. The documents had to be quarantined for two weeks before she would sign my bail. My daughter developed serious health challenges and was admitted. I spent close to N180,000 on her hospital bill. My lawyer advised I settle the matter out of court after my first five days arrest following a statement by Kogi State Governor that they were not aware of my arrest. The Commissioner for Information made the statement that they only saw me on TVC news confessing but that the law should take its course; that I should go and defend myself in court. Kogi State Commissioner for Information said he only made verbal complaint the time that the publication was made.

10. LINUS IN CHIMA:

When the Journalist is perceived as enemy



"The guy told us he was the market master and I told him to speak to us. He insisted we should leave immediately. I told him we are from Delta Broadcasting Service, and we are here to find out what

is happening. They would have none of that. They pounced on me. Good enough, my cameraman put off his camera and hid himself from several meters across the road. They didn't mind whether vehicles were coming or not. It was by stroke of luck that I was not knocked down by oncoming vehicle"

Opinion on Press Freedom in Nigeria

Journalist (Broadcaster)

Place of Work / Beat:

Delta Broadcasting Service

Years of Experience:

22 years

Opinion about climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

I would rate the climate of press freedom in Nigeria on a scale of 8/10 because of the Freedom of Information Act. Nigerian Journalists have access to information but sometimes are shy of pursuing their stories to logical conclusion

Opinion about state of preparedness of media houses for journalists during challenging period like COVID-19 pandemic:

I would rate the state of preparedness of media houses 4/10. For an institution like mine there was poor preparation. It took personal efforts to get press tags. There was also no special protection for workers at that period. We had to endure intermittent harassment by security agents stationed to enforce the restriction of movement. Members of the public were also often hostile to us because they felt that they were being denied the opportunity to make a living while we went about freely.

Experience of violation of rights as a journalist during COVID-19 pandemic:

My rights were violated. I was harassed at a market in Effurun, Delta State while there to file a report on how well the people were complying with the COVID-19 protocols, particularly, social distancing. Traders at the market, customers inclusive were hostile because they believed that my report would encourage the government to tighten the restriction of movement and social distancing rule in the market. People did not want anything that will make them lose their freedom of movement. A group of young men who introduced themselves as market officials pounced on me and pushed me out of the market with threats to cause me serious bodily injuries. The traders around rather than come to my rescue were happy that we (journalists) were chased out of the market.

Measures taken to ensure safety and protection of rights:

None. The Local Government Chairman called on phone to say he will investigate the matter. The Delta State Government did not make any reaction to my knowledge. The institution I represent failed to take up the issue with those concerned. The Nigerian Union of Journalists, NUJ Chapel of Delta Broadcasting Service, Warri issued a statement blacklisting the Uvwie Local Government from further publication of their reports until they have tendered an apology. No apology was tendered to me directly till date.

Experience relating to torture, assault, physical injuries and damage to personal belongings:

I was pushed around for a distance of 70 metres by two young men. They bore long sticks and threatened to use it on me. Another one o pushed me into the road, and I narrowly missed being crushed by a vehicle. It was however more of a mental torture. My cameraman had tactically escaped from the scene, so our recording equipment was not damaged. I still however had the report in the News. I had no visuals to illustrate the incident.

Reprimand or punishment for perpetrators of violation of rights and crime committed:

They were never identified. No one was arrested and the local authorities disowned the perpetrators as unknown persons to them.

Compensation for loss or damage to personal belongings:

None

Opinion about justice or denial of justice:

Justice was not served.

Recommendations to the government, media professionals and associations towards improving the climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

Media professional bodies should be ready to stand up for journalists who find themselves brutalised in the course of their job. An apology is in order. There is the need for public education on the need to respect and protect journalists in the course of their duty.

Further comments / additional recommendations:

As elections draw closer Nigerians should be reminded that they need to protect the journalist and cooperate with them rather than endanger them or dehumanise them. The umbrella union of journalists needs to sensitise the public more about the role of the journalist as well as the need to protect rather than bring them to any harm.

My Story**At the Mercy of Hoodlums**

It was at the middle of the covid-19 crisis in Delta State. I work for Delta Broadcasting Service as a senior correspondent. I was attacked at a market in Effurun in Warri metropolis. But shortly before the attack, I had gone to another market known as Igbudu market to find out how they were complying with COVID-19 restrictions particularly social distancing. On the fateful day, I went to the market in Effurun market to see the level of compliance with social distancing. The state government had announced then that the market should not be opened hitherto COVID-19. Market was to open three times a week with relatively fewer people. But the people were not complying. To them, all the talks about COVID-19 were a manipulation by the government for whatever reason.

While I was conducting interviews with those who came to the market just to find out why they were not complying with the social distancing, some boys came out from nowhere and said, “you can leave, leave immediately” The guy told us he was the market master and I told him to speak to us. He insisted we should leave immediately. I told him we are from Delta Broadcasting Service, and we are here to find out what is happening. They would have none of that. They pounced on me. Good enough, my cameraman put off his camera and hid himself from several meters across the road. They didn’t mind whether vehicles were coming or not. It was by stroke of luck that I was not knocked down by oncoming vehicle. They didn’t slap me; they didn’t hit me, but they pushed and pushed and pushed until I was clearly out of the vicinity of the market. I reported the incident to the Local Government Chairman who was not available immediately as at the time of the incidence. Eventually, I reported to the Chairperson, Warri Chapel of Nigerian Union of Journalist (NUJ), a statement was issued condemning the attack with a demand that the Local Government Chairman should tender formal apology for the attack on me. The trauma of being attacked in such manner could better be imagined considering that I have worked as a journalist in the area for more than two decades and never witnessed such molestation.

My cameraman and lesson in professionalism

My cameraman disengaged and left the scene. I explained to him later that he did the wrong thing. He should have explored a vantage position to at least record what was happening so that the world can see what exactly transpired. I told him what he did the wrong because I could have been killed. The NUJ demanded apology for the incidence and a written commitment such incident won’t happen again. The apology came about two weeks later. The Chairman however made it clear he couldn’t fish out the perpetrators. From the benefit of hindsight after the incident during the COVID-19 restriction, I now realised I could possibly have avoided such ugly incident if I had gone to meet with the officials of the market to discuss my mission. Such familiarisation could have saved the day. That, for me, is a lesson in professionalism. I took things for granted precisely because I have lived in the area for a long period of time. I really did not anticipate or expected that anybody will come out to stop us from reporting situation in the market. It’s not the first time I have gone to market to monitor and report situation.

I recall a worse scenario of incident during the height of the Warri crisis in 2009, traders at Maikava market carried out protest that the youths were disrupting their trading. They had gone to the Warri Area Command of Nigerian Police to lodge their complaints. I went to speak with the traders and find out exactly what was happening. We got to the market and found security men around. The marketers pounced on us and gave the beating of my life. I couldn’t bite; I couldn’t chew for one week. Someone accosted our cameraman with a knife, collected the camera from him and that was how I came out from my hiding, and they pounced on me. I was rescued that day by soldiers who were passing through that area.

Mere apology for the hazard

There are so many reports I have done over time with permission. I assumed the market was a public place where such incident could not happen and considering that COVID-19 restriction was in place. I had spoken with a Special Assistant to the Local Government Chairman before I proceeded to the market. Besides I went for the assignment with official vehicle, official camera, microphone with inscription that clearly showed we were staff of Delta Broadcasting Service, Warri. My head of department actually wanted a legal action against the culprits while the General Manager advised we present report the matter to the police. Unfortunately, none of the plans saw the light of the day because the NUJ stepped in and threatened to blackout the activities of the Local Government unless an apology was tendered. The apology came but in form of mere verbal expression. The demand for a written apology didn’t see the light of the day.

When such incidents happen, you expect the management to show more concern about your health and welfare but that is not usually the case. I have learnt to see it as the hazard of the job, and I have learnt to develop shock absorber to such incidents. There was no post attack evaluation from the management. Even the incident that happened in 2009, I had to personally pursue the release of my seized camera which had been damaged by the time I got it back. From my experience, most media organizations and management are not adequately prepared ahead for the welfare of staff in case of dangers or attacks. No retreat programme or advisory measures to prepare staff ahead of exigencies and likely threats. I was not compensated for the attack and the previous incident in 2009.

11. VIVIAN OTTIH:

Victim of abuse of power



"I need justice. I want my salary arrears paid because I was accused falsely, wrongly suspended, humiliated, and intimidated because I have no one to speak for me. My rights were trampled upon".

Opinion on Press Freedom in Nigeria

Journalist (Broadcaster)

Place of Work / Beat:

Imo Broadcasting Corporation

Years of Experience:

19 years

Opinion about climate of press freedom in Nigeria: I would rate the climate of press freedom in Nigeria on a scale of 3/10 because Nigeria is yet to strengthen the legal framework governing the media. As far as that has not been done the climate in Nigeria remains hostile for media and journalists.

Opinion about state of preparedness of media houses for journalists during challenging period like COVID-19 pandemic:

I would rate the state of preparedness of media houses 8/10. Earlier before the hit of Ebola and the recent COVID-19, health security was not topical news. It barely made front page. Analysis during the Ebola outbreak and COVID-19 pandemic shows that a large proportion of media stories were focused on reporting the number of cases, deaths and general infections preventive measures.

Experience of violation of rights as a journalist during COVID-19 pandemic:

I was victimized by the management of my organization in the heat of the COVID-19 crises in Nigeria. As a government worker and still carrying out my duties, our salaries were not coming in for about three months. Being a union leader and a concerned person I used my social media handle to inform and plead with the government that some of us are dying as result of hunger and lack of money to access medical care. This innocent plea earned me an indefinite suspension that lasted for one year and three months. The worst of the incident was that I just put to bed and was still in the hospital bed looking for money to take

care of my hospital bills so that I can go home with my new born baby.

Measures taken to ensure safety and protection of rights:

The matter went viral, and the world spoke out for me and protected me from being harmed because a Commissioner on several occasions threatened that he will deal with me for exposing the government which was not my intentions.

Experience relating to torture, assault, physical injuries and damage to personal belongings:

I was tortured and assaulted emotionally. For the number of year and months the suspension lasted there was nothing remaining of me even up till now. I turned to a street beggar in other to feed myself and feed my children too. Only God in heaven knows what I am going through in life now. I had to stop one of my daughters from going to school because I cannot afford to pay her school fees. Life is made hell for me.

Reprimand or punishment for perpetrators of violation of rights and crime committed:

No, they have not been punished yet.

Compensation for loss or damage to personal belongings:

None

Opinion about justice or denial of justice:

No justice for now. Though I was protected by the general public.

Recommendations to the government, media professionals and associations towards improving the climate of press freedom in Nigeria: For improved media practice in Nigeria my plea will continue to go to the government. For every attack on the journalists in Nigeria, it is either the government or the security forces. And it is only the government that has the power to end the attacks on journalists. Government should amend its laws to enable a climate of free media and free speech. Government should provide justice and remedies as well as make protection of journalists a national priority.

Further comments / additional recommendations:

The United Nations and the African Union should not turn a blind eye to Nigeria. They should support Nigeria to end impunity, protect journalists and strengthen the legal framework of the media to make media unions take their responsibilities seriously.

My Story

Victimized for demanding payment of salary

During the COVID-19 period, I was still going to work, I was heavily pregnant then and managing myself to go to work. I was among the senior staff that was mandated to be going to work at that period. Two days to my delivery, I went to work. I am the chairperson of Nigerian Association of Women Journalists in Imo State. After putting to bed at the hospital, most of my colleagues were calling me to complain that they were being owed salaries and that they don't have money. Each time I go to work, I was compelled to help assist colleagues to go back home. With my position as the chairperson of the Nigeria Association of Women Journalists, I used my social media handle to write to one of the Special Assistants to the Governor on Print Media, Modestus Nwampa, to please help us approach the Governor for the payment of our salaries. I saw other organisations approaching the Governor being attended to. At this time, many fell sick. On several occasions, I asked my Director General about our salary. He was not giving me any satisfactory answer. Being a new government, I thought maybe he had not really gotten familiar with the new system. I took it upon myself to act and

demand for our salary. A query was issued on me and brought to my house. I was accused of organising a press conference. I replied to the query and explained that I never organized press conference. I was indefinitely suspended on May 8, 2020. Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) in Imo State did not help matters. Notwithstanding, the public really came to my rescue otherwise something worse than the indefinite suspension would have happened. I also thank International Press Centre and other media organisations within and outside Nigeria speaking on my behalf.

My health deteriorated

I just had a baby through caesarean section at that time. I had to struggle to provide for my three children including the baby. Even now they have not paid me. They are paying other workers. I have tried to make enquiries regarding nonpayment of my salary but was directed to different banks to no avail. The psychological torture I was subjected aggravated my blood pressure to 255 /110. It was as if the world had come down on my head. At a point, I was behaving like a mad person whilst still in the hospital. The issues became a subject of discussion on radio and social media with my name being mentioned. I thought I was going to die. With the threats from the authorities, a lot of the government officials were calling me to say “how could you be threatening the government” I said I have not done anything wrong at all. After childbirth, I fell sick. I wouldn’t notice or hear what was going on around. I lost my senses and people kept telling me to run, and that I could be killed. Everybody was against me including most of my friends in government arena who now sees me as an enemy of the government. At a point I had to brace up and face God. But with God on my side, I decided to stay and await the outcome. I need justice. I want my salary arrears paid because I was accused falsely, wrongly suspended, humiliated, and intimidated because I have no one to speak for me. My rights were trampled upon.

12. CHUKS OLUIGBO
Impunity of Nigeria Police



“At the station, the DPO wouldn’t even listen to me. I spent over two hours behind the counter. I was let go at about 10:30 pm. Some of the policemen actually said they arrested journalists because we were the ones reporting that the police were not enforcing the lockdown/curfew; they wanted to embarrass journalists the same way journalists had embarrassed them before the Nigeria public”.

Opinion on Press Freedom in Nigeria

Journalist (Independent)

Place of Work / Beat:
Formerly of ThisDay Newspaper

Years of Experience:
12 years

Opinion about climate of press freedom in Nigeria:
I would rate the climate of press freedom in Nigeria on a scale of 5/10 because the current Federal Government’s antagonism to free speech has put the press on edge. Many would rather not speak out.

Opinion about state of preparedness of media houses for journalists during challenging period like COVID-19 pandemic:
I would rate the state of preparedness of media houses 2/10 judging from what happened last year. In the thick of the pandemic/lockdown, remote work for journalists was a tall order. Media houses struggled (many are still stuck there), and many journalists were thrown back to the job market.

Experience of violation of rights as a journalist during COVID-19 pandemic:
I was accosted at the First Gate of FESTAC Town in Lagos by a band of uniformed policemen. I was on my way home from work, and it was just past 8 o’clock in the evening. They said I had violated the curfew order by the Federal Government to curb the spread of COVID-19; that I ought to have been home before the curfew began at 8pm. I told them I was a journalist, showed them my ID; insisted that journalists and other essential workers were exempted from the curfew, but they said my argument was pointless, that the order they had was that no one was exempted. I made frantic calls, including to the then Police Public Relations Officer of the Lagos Police Command who promised to intervene. At the station, the DPO wouldn’t even listen to me. I spent over two hours behind the counter. I was let go at about 10:30 pm. Some of the policemen said they arrested journalists because we were the ones reporting that the police were not enforcing the lockdown/curfew; they wanted to embarrass journalists the same way journalists had embarrassed them before the Nigeria public. I drove to the station myself, with two of them in my car. I refused to hand my keys to them. I was left behind the counter while they put the other people they arrested in the cell.

Measures taken to ensure safety and protection of rights:
My phone was not seized; so I continued to make call while behind the counter.

Experience relating to torture, assault, physical injuries and damage to personal belongings:
There was no physical assault on my person. The torture I felt was psychological.

Reprimand or punishment for perpetrators of violation of rights and crime committed:
No

Compensation for loss or damage to personal belongings:
None

Opinion about justice or denial of justice:
Justice not served.

Recommendations to the government, media professionals and associations towards improving the climate of press freedom in Nigeria:

The government must understand that press freedom is sacrosanct. You can try, you may even succeed in intimidating many into silence, but you can never muzzle the press. To media professionals (and unions and associations), do not allow yourselves to be beholden to any interest, especially government. Government is not your benefactor; part of your job is to hold government to account. Once you're compromised, you have lost your moral right as a watchdog, and the government would have you in their palm to toss at will.

Further comments / additional recommendations:

None.

My Story

Denied Freedom for no just cause

Prior to that day, I had been leaving the office late and they never disturbed me. Right there at the police station on Second Avenue, Festac., the divisional police officer was boasting to other people arrested that he could arrest anybody including journalists. Several journalists were harassed on that same day including health workers. Workers on essential duty were exempted from the lockdown but there was no proper directives to the security agents enforcing restrictions. I remember there was a time there was an argument whether identification card was enough for journalists. The Nigeria Union of Journalists and other media associations need to work collaboratively with the government to prevent such in future. Journalists carrying out their duties should not be subjected to harassment. There was need for the restrictions; no doubt but exemption for people on essential duties was not properly enforced. In addition to identification card, journalists and other workers on essential duties be given special clearance to avoid being molested by overzealous security agents. I called my editor to complain about what happened. He called the Information Commissioner in Lagos state and tried to reach the Nigeria Police Public Relations Officer in Abuja, Frank Mbah who confirmed they were aware of the kind of incidence that was happening around the country not just in Lagos but other places and was handling the issue. He got back to me. While I was there, my office put out a story online. They kept making frantic calls. While I was also there, I refused to hand over my phone. At some point, my battery was running low, I had another phone in the car. I told the police officer this phone is running low and still needs to be in touch. He said I had no privileges, but I told him am here and I cannot just run out. Eventually he agreed to escort me to the car to pick the other phone. The moment I drove to the station and was shown where to park, I parked my car and asked for my car key. I told them I was not going to give it to them. The guy wanted to drag it and told him I have vital things in the car. Two other guys who came in later but refused to go into the cell. The guys were distributing COVID-19 materials like hand sanitizers and had a lot in their booth and told them we were on essential duty, but police did not answer them. At that point I was brought out behind the counter. The Divisional Police Officer came to tell one of the officers to sanction us and let us go. The officer took us to an outer office where there was no light. We had to use our phone torch for him to get us a form to fill. Later the Divisional Police Officer came back and said, "do not worry just let them go". There has not been any follow-up from Nigerian Union of Journalists. It was something that affected not just me but quite a number of other journalists and there was no such follow up action. I stayed connected with my wife throughout the ordeal.

**THE 2020 STATE OF ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS
REPORT**

*As presented on the occasion of year 2021 World Press
Freedom Day*

Brief background

The International Press Centre under a safety of journalists project supported by the **Open Society Foundation (OSF)** commenced the monitoring of attacks on journalists in September 2018 with the aim of providing safety advisory, issuing prompt alerts, and coordinating necessary activities on attacks/assaults on journalists and media outlets.

To ensure effective implementation and coordination, a Journalists' Safety Alert Desk was established with the engagement of a Safety Alert Officer. The Journalists Safety Alert Desk has carried out the following tasks thus far:

- Launch of a helpline with mobile number **(+2348132776441)** in response to attacks on journalists and the media
- Establish contacts with journalists threatened, assaulted, or attacked.
- Draft/circulate press releases to condemn attacks and call for investigations; and
- Coordinate related advocacy initiatives on journalists who were attacked or assaulted.

This report encompasses reported attacks on journalists in the year 2020 notably during the restrictions of movements occasioned by COVID-19 Pandemic and the EndSARS protests.

The report covers:

- The location of the incidents
- The media outlets affected or attacked (whether print, broadcast or online)
- The nature of the attacks
- The identities of the victims
- The gender of the victims
- The nature of injury or abuses suffered
- The alleged perpetrators

The report concludes that the prevalence of attacks by security agents poses herculean challenge that must be engaged by stakeholders so as to ensure that the media continue to function under an enabling environment.

This becomes pertinent in view of the theme of this year's WPF, which is 'Information For Public Good'. The report contends that the media cannot properly provide information that will serve the public good in Nigeria if the lives and means of live of journalists continue to be put at risk.

The report recommends, amongst others, the design of a safety manual with updated tips for identifying and reporting threats to safety to be made available to journalists and other media professionals. This is actually already being undertaken by IPC.

Introduction and Rationale

A baseline audit on safety and security of journalists in Nigeria that was carried out by IPC in 2015 inferred amongst others that "journalists in Nigeria face enormous safety challenges in fulfilling their professional obligations to society". The baseline audit also concluded that the challenges of safety are partly because of the prevailing negative disposition of stakeholders in society including actors in governments in addition to existing institutional encumbrances under which the media operate.

The regime of ramified abuses of media rights and attacks on journalist, no doubt, dated back to the early days of the profession in Nigeria. Unfortunately, hostile environment under which journalists are compelled to carry out the constitutional duties vested on the Fourth Estate of the Realm has remained largely the same; notwithstanding marginal improvements that came with democratic struggles and targeted advocacies of the past decades.

After two decades following restoration of civil rule in 1999, attacks on journalists by security agents as well as other actors in the society remain major concerns to media stakeholders. Freedom of expression is inconceivable without an unfettered media signposted by the guarantee of safety for journalists and media professionals.

IPC's commitment to safety of journalists is in recognition of the imperative of freedom of the media in entrenching genuine democratic system that delivers good governance and in meeting the expectations of national development which the media is constitutionally obliged to safeguard.

In 2018, IPC in partnership with OSF conducted a National Survey on Safety of Journalists and Press Freedom in Nigeria. The outcome of the survey further attested to the prevailing hostile environment which is antithetical to independent journalism practise and thereby requiring concerted advocacy and continuous engagements of stakeholders towards guaranteeing safety of journalists to enhance press freedom.

Therefore, this public presentation of the report on state of attacks on journalists and media in Nigeria (2020), is in continuation of efforts aimed at highlighting the prevailing challenges of safety of journalists with the aim of consolidating on the struggle including campaigns and advocacy, for a Nigerian journalism environment that is conducive for journalists and other media professionals.

Methodology

The report on the state of attacks on journalists and media in Nigeria (2020) was generated through desk and field activities by press freedom monitors engaged in each of the country's six geo-political zones. The methodology deployed for collating the report involved monitoring of media reports as well as assessment and follow-up on information relating to reported attacks on journalists and media establishments.

The data

In the year 2020, not fewer than **forty-eight (48)** cases of attacks on journalists and **eight (8)** attacks on media outlets were reported and documented (see full analysis in table). The following are the details:

- The location of the incidents according to the geo-political zones are:
 - Southeast (SE): Eight (8)
 - Southwest (SW): Eleven (11)
 - Southsouth (SS): Twenty-three (23)
 - Northwest (NW): One (1)
 - Northcentral (NC): Two (2)
 - Northeast (NE): Three (3)

The affected States include:

Abia, Abuja, Adamawa, Akwa-Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Borno, Delta, Ekiti, Edo, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Kaduna, Kogi, Lagos, Nasarawa, Ondo, Osun, and Rivers.

- The media outlets affected or attacked (whether print, broadcast or online) are:
 - Print media: Seventeen (17)
 - Broadcast media: Twenty-Six (26)
 - Online media: Seven (7)

- Not Specified: Five (5)
- Others: One (1)

- The nature of the attacks
 - Physical assault
 - Abduction
 - Barred from government house
 - Battery
 - Gun attacks
 - Harassment
 - Threats to life
 - Murder
 - Suspension from work
 - Robbery
 - Unlawful arrest/detention.
- The identities of the victims (including datelines of reports & circumstances)

The Highlights

Attacks on Journalists during COVID-19 Pandemic

March 26, 2020: Vincent Ake of Tide Newspaper (Rivers state-owned newspaper) was sacked by Governor of Rivers State for publishing report on the first case of COVID-19 in the State without first getting approval from the Taskforce on COVID-19 set up by the state government.

March 28, 2020: Angela Nwoko-Akpolu of Leadership Newspaper was assaulted by operatives of DSS while investigating a suspected case of Covid-19 at a hotel in Owerri, Imo State.

March 28, 2020: Punch Newspaper circulation vehicle was attacked by the Military while on its way to distribute one of its titles to states in the South-South region. The windshield of the vehicle was destroyed alongside the tyres.

April 1, 2020: Michael Ikeogwu (NUJ Chairman, Delta State) and Mathew Omonigho of Daily Post were assaulted by men from the Delta State Task Force on Environment in Uvwie Local Government Area of the Delta State. The journalists were monitoring the stay-at-home directives occasioned by COVID-19 pandemic in the state.

April 15, 2020: Linus Chima and the Delta Broadcasting Service team were assaulted by security agents for covering scenes of violation of the social distancing directive by both the federal and state governments.

April 15, 2020: Norbert Amede a photojournalist with Pointer Newspaper was assaulted by men of the Nigerian Police at Ibusa, Oshimili North Local Government Area of Delta State.

April 15, 2020: Jide Bello of NTA was molested and bruised while returning home from work by Soldiers of the 32 Artillery Brigade, Nigerian Army, Owena Cantonment, Akure, Ondo State.

Attacks on Journalists during the END SARS Protests

- **Television Continental (TVC), Lagos:** The television station was attacked and partly burnt by hoodlums on **Wednesday, October 21, 2020**. Journalists and media professionals working in the establishment were also molested by the hoodlums. The attacks led to suspension of broadcast by the television station for days. <https://guardian.ng/news/hoodlums-attack-tvc-in-lagos/>
- **Channels Television, Lagos:** Security personnel attached to the station were assaulted, which led to the temporary

halting of broadcast by the station on **Wednesday, October 21, 2020**. <https://nairametrics.com/2020/10/21/breaking-channels-tv-ltv-allegedly-attacked-shut-down/>

- **Toyin Yusuf, Reporter, Osun State Broadcasting Corporation:** He was attacked alongside with a member of the Nigerian Union of Journalists by some angry youths while covering the protest in Osun on **Saturday, October 17, 2020**.
- **Arise Television, Lagos:** The crew of the television station was prevented from carrying out their legitimate duty at the Lekki Toll Gate, Lagos, by a group of soldiers on **Wednesday, October 21, 2020**.
- **The Nation Newspaper, Lagos:** The Newspaper was attacked by hoodlums who set part of the premises on fire. The incident resulted in the disruption of activities in the organization on **Wednesday, October 21, 2020**. <https://punchng.com/hoodlums-attack-burn-nation-newspapers/>
- **Reporters with Punch Newspaper:** Policemen in Lagos State on **Wednesday, October 21, 2020** tortured journalists Femi Dawodu and Segun Odunayo with Punch Newspaper for covering the #End SARS protests. <https://punchng.com/lagos-policemen-torture-punch-journalists-for-covering-endsars-protests/>
- **Africa Independent Television (AIT), Benin:** The television station was set on fire by hoodlums. The incident halted broadcast by the station on **Wednesday, October 21, 2020**.
- **Osun State Broadcasting Corporation (OSBC):** The station was attacked by hoodlums on **Wednesday, October 21, 2020**. The hoodlums destroyed the gate of the television station and made a bonfire in front of the state-owned television station. www.premiumtimesng.com
- **Akpokona Omafuaire of Vanguard Newspaper, Delta:** He was brutalized by the police, on his way to an official assignment during the curfew imposed by the Delta State Governor on **Friday, October 23, 2020**. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/10/police-attack-vanguard-reporter-damage-car-in-delta/>
- **Emmanuel Adeyemi of Sun Newspaper, Kogi:** He was hit by a stray bullet and later died while on his way to the Nigerian Union of Journalists Press Centre in Lokoja on **Monday, October 26, 2020**. <https://thenationonlineng.net/one-feared-dead-reporter-shot-as-thugs-descend-on-lokoja/>

Other Attacks

- The gender of the victims
Male: Thirty-Nine (39)
Female: Seven (7)
Not Specified: Two (2)
- The nature of injury or abuses suffered
 - Loss of valuables
 - Psychological trauma
 - Body injuries
 - Damaged camera
 - gunshot injuries, loss of life, loss of official documents and phone destroyed
- **Alleged perpetrators of attacks**
 - State Taskforce
 - The Military

- The Police
- The DSS
- The Politicians
- Political supporters / thugs Unknown gunmen
- Hoodlums
- Management of Imo Broadcasting Corporation
- NSDC
- Electricity Distribution Companies

Actions taken thus far

• Public Enlightenment and Advocacy

Press statements were issued to condemn the attacks which varied from assaults, battering etc. The press statements were published in print, broadcast and online mediums. Some of the mediums that have assisted in publishing the press statements include: *The Guardian Newspaper, Leadership Newspaper, Vanguard Newspaper, Punch Newspaper, The Nation Newspaper, Premium Times, National Mirror, ThisDay Newspaper, Daily Sun, News Agency of Nigeria, PM News, Today News, Black box, National wire, Raypower, Newsdot.ng* among others.

• Monitoring and follow-up on victims of attacks

The help desk has been relevant in reaching out to victims of attacks and assaults for the purposes of offering support and encouragement as well as to facilitate relevant interventions with the following as examples:

15/1/2020: A call was placed through to the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) council in Adamawa, and the P.R.O of the State police. Both confirmed the assault and death of Maxwell Nashan (FRCN) who was assaulted and killed by political thugs. Two suspects were later arrested by the police.

18/6/2020: A call was placed through to the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) council in Anambra state pertaining to the kidnapping of Matthew Onwuasoanya of National Light medium, who was abducted at his residence. IPC, apart from issuing a press statement demanding his release, monitored his situation through the NUJ state council until he was released.

4/7/2020: A call was placed through to the Vice Chairman of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) council in Ebonyi state pertaining to the abduction of the NUJ Chapter Chairman (Tony Nwizi) at his residence. Apart from issuing a press statement demanding his release, IPC through the helpline was in touch with the NUJ state council until he was released.

1/10/2020: IPC joined several other stakeholders to condemn the physical assault by the police on Olukayode Jaiyeola of Punch Newspaper. Within 24hours the Lagos State Commissioner of Police ordered the immediate arrest of the police officer who perpetrated the attack.

26/10/2020: IPC through the helpline reached out to Emmanuel Adeyemi of Daily Sun Newspaper who suffered a gunshot injury during the ENDSARS protest. He was rushed to a private clinic where he was treated.

Success Story

- The Safety Alert Desk has so far created more awareness to the public on the vulnerability of journalists and media profession especially through press statements.
- The initiative has assisted in documenting incidents of attacks and assaults on journalists and the media.
- Through the initiative, effective tracking and intervention of the situation of victims of media attacks / assaults has been possible.
- The initiative has created a ready link between affected journalists / media originations and Safety Alert Officer who provides relevant information to stakeholders and able

to mobilize possible intervention, as well as assistance or support where necessary.

- The initiative has offered journalists who are victims of attacks / assaults psychological relief with the knowledge that efforts are being made to fight their cause.
- The initiative has sought to promote partnership and or collaboration by stakeholders to take appropriate actions when journalists or media outlets get attacked
- The issuance of press releases on safety of journalists and the media have helped to mobilise sustained public interests in the issue of safety of journalists and the dire situation of the media in Nigeria.

Challenges

Information on threats to safety and security are often not shared by journalists who are the victims or volunteered to relevant stakeholders for necessary actions for reasons that are not unconnected with lack of proper understanding of the inherent dangers of living with such threats.

Whereas journalists who are victims of coordinated or spontaneous attacks require follow-up assistance, however, there has been less than considerable interest amongst colleagues in the media to keep such incidents or abuses on the front burner of national issues beyond the initial reportage. The low level of solidarity and lethargy of information sharing amongst journalists on situation of abuses and attacks on media and professionals remains a major concern.

Much as the help desk is relevant in providing succor to journalists who are victims of attacks, there is however the challenge with regards to lack of enthusiasm by media establishments to give the necessary support to victims of attacks and abuse to enable them seek redress and possibly get justice.

Conclusion

It is imperative for journalists to demonstrate greater sense of solidarity in dealing with attacks on media and abuses on the rights of colleagues in the profession. Sharing information relating to similar experiences and circumstances of attacks by journalists and victims could be useful for interrogating and overcoming the predisposing factors that make journalists vulnerable to victimization.

In most cases, available information provided to the help desk by victims; particularly as it pertains to identities of attackers or perpetrators of abuse may not be adequate enough considering the spontaneity of the incidents. It would therefore be helpful if colleagues who were on the same beat or at the scene of the incidents could volunteer further credible information to assist in apprehending and prosecuting abusers of journalists and attackers of the media.

It is however noted that abuse by security agents still feature as dominant challenge in spite of decades of advocacy aimed at demanding change from relevant authorities of security agencies. There is the need for relevant authorities to priorities sensitization and reorientation of security agents on the rights and privileges of journalists as part of deployment personnel on security assignment; particularly in crisis situation.

It is therefore imperative for media professional bodies especially the unions and associations as well as relevant stakeholders of the civil society to demand accountability on safety of journalists and media through renewed engagements at institutional and legislative levels.

Recommendations

The following are recommended as follow-up to existing efforts at mitigating attacks on journalists and the media:

- Greater networking, partnership and collaboration by stakeholders on safety of journalists
- Using institutional and legal mechanisms to challenge the violation of the rights of journalists and the media.

IPC MONITORING TEMPLATE FOR RECORDING INCIDENCE OF ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS									
JANUARY – DECEMBER 2020									
Name of journalist attacked/ assaulted	Media organization	Gender	Location of attack	Nature/ Description of attack	Persons/ groups allegedly responsible	Losses/ Injuries suffered	Date of incidence	Sources of the information (Print/broadcast Online reports or Offline account) Date reported	Follow up actions taken
Maxwell Nashan	Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN)	Male	Yola, Adamawa	Abduction & Physical assault	Suspected hoodlums	Deep body cuts bled to death. Died before he could be taken to hospital.	15 th January, 2020	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/372916-journalist-hacked-to-death-in-adamawa.html	Field monitor contacted NUJ council in Adamawa, and the police. Both confirmed the incident. Eight suspects were later arrested by the police.
Olatunji Omirin	Daily Trust Newspaper	Male	Maiduguri, Borno	Unlawful arrest & detention	Nigerian Military	No physical injury. He was handcuffed and left traumatized after hours of detention	30 th January, 2020	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/375256-nigerian-soldiers-arrest-journalist-over-boko-haram-report.html	Members of the NUJ in Borno protested and boycotted military events until he released.
Godwin Sunday	Not specified	Male	Akwa-Ibom	Molestation	Political thugs	Some cuts in his eyes and damaged video camera	25 th January, 2020	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/south-south-regional/374339-thugs-molest-journalists-covering-akwa-ibom-elections.html	Field monitor made efforts to call the chairman of NUJ, Akwa-Ibom but he did not pick his call
Journalists and Officials of NUJ	Not specified	Not specified	Akwa-Ibom	Denied access to the venue of election	Political thugs	Gunshot injury & damaged camera	25 th January, 2020	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/south-south-regional/374339-thugs-molest-journalists-covering-akwa-ibom-elections.html	Field monitor made efforts to call the chairman of NUJ, Akwa-Ibom but he did not pick his call.
Edidiong Udobia	Not specified	Male	Akwa-Ibom	Physical Assault	Political thugs	Nil	25 th January, 2020	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/south-south-regional/374339-thugs-molest-journalists-covering-akwa-ibom-elections.html	Field monitor made efforts to call the chairman of NUJ, Akwa-Ibom but he did not pick his call.
Alex Ogbu	The Regent Africa Time magazine	Male	Federal Capital Territory Abuja	Gunshot	Nigerian Police	Death	21 st January, 2020	The Cable 22 nd January, 2020	NUJ FCT Abuja Council expressed sadness and demanded in-depth investigation into the circumstances that led to the tragic death.
Kayode Olabanji	The Hope Newspaper	Male	Akure	Harassment	Nigerian Police & Chief Magistrate	Nil	January 17 th , 2020	The Nation Newspaper January 21 st , 2020	None

Tony Nwizi	Ebonyi NUJ Chapter	Male	Residence at Abakaliki	Abduction	Alleged Armed	Body injuries	4 th July, 2020	Phone conversation	IPC safety alert officer confirmed
Akpokona Omafuaire	the Vanguard Newspaper Broadcasting Service	Male	Warri, Delta State	Physical assault	Policemen officers	Car windows smashed, head injury	23 rd October, 2020	between ww fieldguardn monitor/2020 member of- Nil Ebonyi state chapter reporter- damage-car-in-delta/	IPC issued a press statement through a phone conversation with the incident- Chairman of the NUJ state chapter... A press statement demanding his release was issued by IPC... He was later released
Grace Benjamin Ebo	Voice of Africa Council, Nasarawa	Female	Onyihbo, His local residence, Wara, Rivers State, Eggon Local Govt	Unlawful Murder	Nigerian Unknown gunmen	Nil	November 28 th , 2020	https://ww w.solarbase.com/2020/08/04/nasarawa-nuja-condemns-killing-of-its-member/oyigbo/amp/	She was released
Mustapha Samuel Yauri Wemimo	News Television Agency Continental Nigeria (TVC)	Male	Zaria, Lagos Kaduna State	Assault Unlawful Detention	Police State Security Services (SSS)	Nil	11 th December 30 th 2020	https://ww w.wradioinigeria.gov.ng/2020/08/12/top-office-detainees-news/433976-sss-arrest-journalist-tvc-journalist.html	Nil
Eyo Charles	Daily Trust Newspaper	Male	Press briefing in Calabar, Cross-River State	Verbal assault	Former Minister of Aviation (Femi Fani-Kayode)	Nil	25 th August, 2020	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/410940-video-of-fani-kayode-verbally-attacking-another-journalist-surfaces.html	IPC issued a press statement condemning the act by the politician.
Barry Agbanigbi	The Champion Newspaper	Male	Delta State Government House	Barred from government house	Chief Press Secretary to Delta State Governor	Nil	14 th September, 2020	https://www.thestoryng.com/crime/okowas-spokesman-bars-journalist-from-government-house-over-report-on-teenage-prostitution/	International Press Centre issued a press statement demanding his immediate re-instatement
Samson Adenekan	Premium Times	Male	Polling Unit, (Ubit 1) Ward 10 Uzairue North East, Etsako West Local Government in Iyamho Area of Uzairue, Edo State	Physical Assault, Illegal Detention & Threat to life	Political thugs	Loss of official documents and body injuries	19 th September, 2020	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/415804-edodecides2020-journalists-attacked-at-oshiomholes-polling-unit-for-taking-pictures.html	All effort made by field monitor and IPC safety alert officer to reach him proved abortive as his phone was switched off.
Nathaniel Offem Ubanga	Gee TV	Male	Iyamho Primary School, Iyamo, Etsako West LGA, Edo State	Physical Assault	Political thugs	Torn clothes, phone destroyed, body injuries	19 th September, 2020	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/415804-edodecides2020-	He was rescued by fellow journalists covering the same process alongside 5 police officers.

THE 2020 STATE OF ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS REPORT

As presented on the occasion of year 2021 World Press Freedom Day

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The International Press Centre under a safety of journalists project supported by the **Open Society Foundation (OSF)** commenced the monitoring of attacks on journalists in September 2018 with the aim of providing safety advisory, issuing prompt alerts, and coordinating necessary activities on attacks/assaults on journalists and media outlets.

To ensure effective implementation and coordination, a Journalists' Safety Alert Desk was established with the engagement of a Safety Alert Officer. The Journalists Safety Alert Desk has carried out the following tasks thus far:

- Launch of a helpline with mobile number **(+2348132776441)** in response to attacks on journalists and the media
- Establish contacts with journalists threatened, assaulted, or attacked.
- Draft/circulate press releases to condemn attacks and call for investigations; and
- Coordinate related advocacy initiatives on journalists who were attacked or assaulted.

This report encompasses reported attacks on journalists in the year 2020 notably during the restrictions of movements occasioned by COVID-19 Pandemic and the EndSARS protests.

The report covers:

- The location of the incidents
- The media outlets affected or attacked (whether print, broadcast or online)
- The nature of the attacks
- The identities of the victims
- The gender of the victims
- The nature of injury or abuses suffered
- The alleged perpetrators

The report concludes that the prevalence of attacks by security agents poses herculean challenge that must be engaged by stakeholders so as to ensure that the media continue to function under an enabling environment.

This becomes pertinent in view of the theme of this year's WPDF, which is 'Information For Public Good'. The report contends that the media cannot properly provide information that will serve the public good in Nigeria if the lives and means of live of journalists continue to be put at risk.

The report recommends, amongst others, the design of a safety manual with updated tips for identifying and reporting threats to safety to be made available to journalists and other media professionals. This is actually already being undertaken by IPC.

Introduction and Rationale

A baseline audit on safety and security of journalists in Nigeria that was carried out by IPC in 2015 inferred amongst others that "journalists in Nigeria face enormous safety challenges in fulfilling their professional obligations to society". The baseline audit also concluded that the challenges of safety are partly because of the prevailing negative disposition of stakeholders in society including actors in governments in addition to existing institutional encumbrances under which the media operate.

The regime of ramified abuses of media rights and attacks on journalist, no doubt, dated back to the early days of the profession in Nigeria. Unfortunately, hostile environment under which journalists are compelled to carry out the constitutional duties

vested on the Fourth Estate of the Realm has remained largely the same; notwithstanding marginal improvements that came with democratic struggles and targeted advocacies of the past decades.

After two decades following restoration of civil rule in 1999, attacks on journalists by security agents as well as other actors in the society remain major concerns to media stakeholders. Freedom of expression is inconceivable without an unfettered media signposted by the guarantee of safety for journalists and media professionals.

IPC's commitment to safety of journalists is in recognition of the imperative of freedom of the media in entrenching genuine democratic system that delivers good governance and in meeting the expectations of national development which the media is constitutionally obliged to safeguard.

In 2018, IPC in partnership with OSF conducted a National Survey on Safety of Journalists and Press Freedom in Nigeria. The outcome of the survey further attested to the prevailing hostile environment which is antithetical to independent journalism practise and thereby requiring concerted advocacy and continuous engagements of stakeholders towards guaranteeing safety of journalists to enhance press freedom.

Therefore, this public presentation of the report on state of attacks on journalists and media in Nigeria (2020), is in continuation of efforts aimed at highlighting the prevailing challenges of safety of journalists with the aim of consolidating on the struggle including campaigns and advocacy, for a Nigerian journalism environment that is conducive for journalists and other media professionals.

Methodology

The report on the state of attacks on journalists and media in Nigeria (2020) was generated through desk and field activities by press freedom monitors engaged in each of the country's six geo-political zones. The methodology deployed for collating the report involved monitoring of media reports as well as assessment and follow-up on information relating to reported attacks on journalists and media establishments.

The data

In the year 2020, not fewer than **forty-eight (48)** cases of attacks on journalists and **eight (8)** attacks on media outlets were reported and documented (see full analysis in table). The following are the details:

- The location of the incidents according to the geo-political zones are:
 - Southeast (SE): Eight (8)
 - Southwest (SW): Eleven (11)
 - South (SS): Twenty-three (23)
 - Northwest (NW): One (1)
 - Northcentral (NC): Two (2)
 - Northeast (NE): Three (3)

The affected States include:

Abia, Abuja, Adamawa, Akwa-Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Borno, Delta, Ekiti, Edo, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Kaduna, Kogi, Lagos, Nasarawa, Ondo, Osun, and Rivers.

- The media outlets affected or attacked (whether print, broadcast or online) are:
 - Print media: Seventeen (17)
 - Broadcast media: Twenty-Six (26)
 - Online media: Seven (7)
 - Not Specified: Five (5)
 - Others: One (1)
- The nature of the attacks
 - Physical assault

- Abduction
 - Barred from government house
 - Battery
 - Gun attacks
 - Harassment
 - Threats to life
 - Murder
 - Suspension from work
 - Robbery
 - Unlawful arrest/detention.
- The identities of the victims (including datelines of reports & circumstances)

The Highlights

Attacks on Journalists during COVID-19 Pandemic

March 26, 2020: Vincent Ake of Tide Newspaper (Rivers state-owned newspaper) was sacked by Governor of Rivers State for publishing report on the first case of COVID-19 in the State without first getting approval from the Taskforce on COVID-19 set up by the state government.

March 28, 2020: Angela Nwoko-Akpolu of Leadership Newspaper was assaulted by operatives of DSS while investigating a suspected case of Covid-19 at a hotel in Owerri, Imo State.

March 28, 2020: Punch Newspaper circulation vehicle was attacked by the Military while on its way to distribute one of its titles to states in the South-South region. The windshield of the vehicle was destroyed alongside the tyres.

April 1, 2020: Michael Ikeogwu (NUJ Chairman, Delta State) and Mathew Omonigho of Daily Post were assaulted by men from the Delta State Task Force on Environment in Uvwie Local Government Area of the Delta State. The journalists were monitoring the stay-at-home directives occasioned by COVID-19 pandemic in the state.

April 15, 2020: Linus Chima and the Delta Broadcasting Service team were assaulted by security agents for covering scenes of violation of the social distancing directive by both the federal and state governments.

April 15, 2020: Norbert Amede a photojournalist with Pointer Newspaper was assaulted by men of the Nigerian Police at Ibusa, Oshimili North Local Government Area of Delta State.

April 15, 2020: Jide Bello of NTA was molested and bruised while returning home from work by Soldiers of the 32 Artillery Brigade, Nigerian Army, Owena Cantonment, Akure, Ondo State.

Attacks on Journalists during the END SARS

Protests

- **Television Continental (TVC), Lagos:** The television station was attacked and partly burnt by hoodlums on **Wednesday, October 21, 2020**. Journalists and media professionals working in the establishment were also molested by the hoodlums. The attacks led to suspension of broadcast by the television station for days. <https://guardian.ng/news/hoodlums-attack-tvc-in-lagos/>
- **Channels Television, Lagos:** Security personnel attached to the station were assaulted, which led to the temporary halting of broadcast by the station on **Wednesday, October 21, 2020**. <https://nairametrics.com/2020/10/21/breaking-channels-tv-ltv-allegedly-attacked-shut-down/>

- **Toyin Yusuf, Reporter, Osun State Broadcasting Corporation:** He was attacked alongside with a member of the Nigerian Union of Journalists by some angry youths while covering the protest in Osun on **Saturday, October 17, 2020**.
- **Arise Television, Lagos:** The crew of the television station was prevented from carrying out their legitimate duty at the Lekki Toll Gate, Lagos, by a group of soldiers on **Wednesday, October 21, 2020**.
- **The Nation Newspaper, Lagos:** The Newspaper was attacked by hoodlums who set part of the premises on fire. The incident resulted in the disruption of activities in the organization on **Wednesday, October 21, 2020**. <https://punchng.com/hoodlums-attack-burn-nation-newspapers/>
- **Reporters with Punch Newspaper:** Policemen in Lagos State on **Wednesday, October 21, 2020** tortured journalists Femi Dawodu and Segun Odunayo with Punch Newspaper for covering the #End SARS protests. <https://punchng.com/lagos-policemen-torture-punch-journalists-for-covering-endsars-protests/>
- **Africa Independent Television (AIT), Benin:** The television station was set on fire by hoodlums. The incident halted broadcast by the station on **Wednesday, October 21, 2020**.
- **Osun State Broadcasting Corporation (OSBC):** The station was attacked by hoodlums on **Wednesday, October 21, 2020**. The hoodlums destroyed the gate of the television station and made a bonfire in front of the state-owned television station. www.premiumtimesng.com
- **Akpokona Omafuaire of Vanguard Newspaper, Delta:** He was brutalized by the police, on his way to an official assignment during the curfew imposed by the Delta State Governor on **Friday, October 23, 2020**. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/10/police-attack-vanguard-reporter-damage-car-in-delta/>
- **Emmanuel Adeyemi of Sun Newspaper, Kogi:** He was hit by a stray bullet and later died while on his way to the Nigerian Union of Journalists Press Centre in Lokoja on **Monday, October 26, 2020**. <https://thenationonlineng.net/one-feared-dead-reporter-shot-as-thugs-descend-on-lokoja/>

Other Attacks

- The gender of the victims

Male:	Thirty-Nine (39)
Female:	Seven (7)
Not Specified:	Two (2)
- The nature of injury or abuses suffered
 - Loss of valuables
 - Psychological trauma
 - Body injuries
 - Damaged camera
 - gunshot injuries, loss of life, loss of official documents and phone destroyed
- **Alleged perpetrators of attacks**
 - State Taskforce
 - The Military
 - The Police
 - The DSS
 - The Politicians
 - Political supporters / thugs Unknown gunmen
 - Hoodlums
 - Management of Imo Broadcasting Corporation
 - NSDC
 - Electricity Distribution Companies

Actions taken thus far

- **Public Enlightenment and Advocacy**

Press statements were issued to condemn the attacks which varied from assaults, battering etc. The press statements were published in print, broadcast and online mediums. Some of the mediums that have assisted in publishing the press statements include: *The Guardian Newspaper, Leadership Newspaper, Vanguard Newspaper, Punch Newspaper, The Nation Newspaper, Premium Times, National Mirror, ThisDay Newspaper, Daily Sun, News Agency of Nigeria, PM News, Today News, Black box, National wire, Raypower, Newsdot.ng* among others.

- **Monitoring and follow-up on victims of attacks**

The help desk has been relevant in reaching out to victims of attacks and assaults for the purposes of offering support and encouragement as well as to facilitate relevant interventions with the following as examples:

15/1/2020: A call was placed through to the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) council in Adamawa, and the P.R.O of the State police. Both confirmed the assault and death of Maxwell Nashan (FRCN) who was assaulted and killed by political thugs. Two suspects were later arrested by the police.

18/6/2020: A call was placed through to the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) council in Anambra state pertaining to the kidnapping of Matthew Onwuasoanya of National Light medium, who was abducted at his residence. IPC, apart from issuing a press statement demanding his release, monitored his situation through the NUJ state council until he was released.

4/7/2020: A call was placed through to the Vice Chairman of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) council in Ebonyi state pertaining to the abduction of the NUJ Chapter Chairman (Tony Nwizi) at his residence. Apart from issuing a press statement demanding his release, IPC through the helpline was in touch with the NUJ state council until he was released.

1/10/2020: IPC joined several other stakeholders to condemn the physical assault by the police on Olukayode Jaiyeola of Punch Newspaper. Within 24hours the Lagos State Commissioner of Police ordered the immediate arrest of the police officer who perpetrated the attack.

26/10/2020: IPC through the helpline reached out to Emmanuel Adeyemi of Daily Sun Newspaper who suffered a gunshot injury during the ENDSARS protest. He was rushed to a private clinic where he was treated.

Success Story

- The Safety Alert Desk has so far created more awareness to the public on the vulnerability of journalists and media profession especially through press statements.
- The initiative has assisted in documenting incidents of attacks and assaults on journalists and the media.
- Through the initiative, effective tracking and intervention of the situation of victims of media attacks / assaults has been possible.
- The initiative has created a ready link between affected journalists / media originations and Safety Alert Officer who provides relevant information to stakeholders and able to mobilize possible intervention, as well as assistance or support where necessary.

- The initiative has offered journalists who are victims of attacks / assaults psychological relief with the knowledge that efforts are being made to fight their cause.
- The initiative has sought to promote partnership and or collaboration by stakeholders to take appropriate actions when journalists or media outlets get attacked
- The issuance of press releases on safety of journalists and the media have helped to mobilise sustained public interests in the issue of safety of journalists and the dire situation of the media in Nigeria.

Challenges

Information on threats to safety and security are often not shared by journalists who are the victims or volunteered to relevant stakeholders for necessary actions for reasons that are not unconnected with lack of proper understanding of the inherent dangers of living with such threats.

Whereas journalists who are victims of coordinated or spontaneous attacks require follow-up assistance, however, there has been less than considerable interest amongst colleagues in the media to keep such incidents or abuses on the front burner of national issues beyond the initial reportage. The low level of solidarity and lethargy of information sharing amongst journalists on situation of abuses and attacks on media and professionals remains a major concern.

Much as the help desk is relevant in providing succor to journalists who are victims of attacks, there is however the challenge with regards to lack of enthusiasm by media establishments to give the necessary support to victims of attacks and abuse to enable them seek redress and possibly get justice.

Conclusion

It is imperative for journalists to demonstrate greater sense of solidarity in dealing with attacks on media and abuses on the rights of colleagues in the profession. Sharing information relating to similar experiences and circumstances of attacks by journalists and victims could be useful for interrogating and overcoming the predisposing factors that make journalists vulnerable to victimization.

In most cases, available information provided to the help desk by victims; particularly as it pertains to identities of attackers or perpetrators of abuse may not be adequate enough considering the spontaneity of the incidents. It would therefore be helpful if colleagues who were on the same beat or at the scene of the incidents could volunteer further credible information to assist in apprehending and prosecuting abusers of journalists and attackers of the media.

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THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS CENTER (IPC)

The International Press Centre (IPC) is an independent, not-for-profit and non-governmental media resource center established to facilitate the active role of the media in the development of Africa and particularly Nigeria.

Vision: A Nigerian and African media that serves as the major catalyst of development

Mission: To build appropriate media and Journalistic capacities for proper engagement with issues of national development; promote access to the media by marginalized groups; build capacity of civil society and support advocacy for freedom of expression, access to information, media independence and pluralism in Nigeria and Africa.

Values: Innovation; Professionalism; Free Expression; Access to Information; Leadership; Partnership & Networking

Strategies: Training, advocacy & campaigns, media monitoring & evaluation, research & documentation, publishing and networking

Thematic Areas:



IPC, House 11, Dideolu Court, Dideolu Estate

Ogba, Lagos-Nigeria

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