

Freedom of Expression Situation in Africa Report

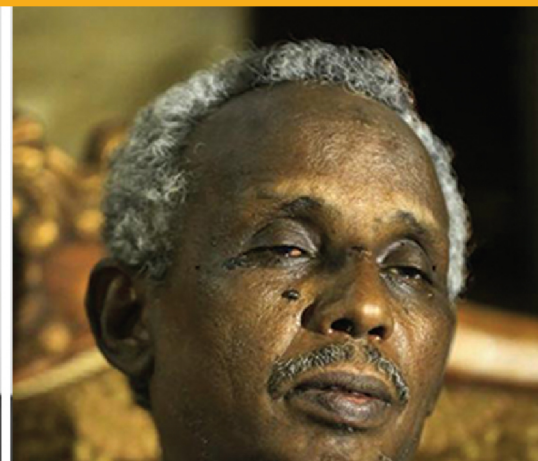
Quarterly Report



Zendele Ndebele
Freed - Zimbabwe



Amade Abubakar,
Freed - Mozambique



Osman Mirghani,
Freed - Sudan



Steeve Mwango Iwewe
Freed - DRC



Prime tv
Reopened - Zambia



Germano Adriano,
Freed - Mozambique

January-March 2019

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Executive Summary

The African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX) is a continental network of some of the leading freedom of expression and media rights groups in Africa that seeks to promote freedom of expression and human rights. AFEX is made up of fifteen (15) member organisations that are all members of the Toronto-based global free expression network, IFEX.

As part of its free expression and human rights advocacy efforts, AFEX puts together periodic reports that seek to highlight incidents of freedom of expression (FOE) violations and related developments in Africa's media landscape. The ***AFEX Freedom of Expression Situation in Africa Report*** for January – March 2019, covers incidents of FOE violations and related media developments recorded in 21 countries during the first quarter of 2019.

A total of 77 freedom of expression (FOE) violations recorded in 21 African countries. Nigeria recorded the highest number of FOE violations (16), a majority of which were recorded during electioneering period. Liberia, Zambia and Zimbabwe distantly followed with seven (7) violations each while Mauritania recorded five violations. Details of the violations recorded by AFEX during the monitoring period is provided in country-by-country analysis section of this report.

Security agents were responsible for 40 out of 77 violations followed by political party affiliates and state officials with 14 and ten violations recorded respectively. The remaining violations were perpetrated by organized groups, unknown individuals, and media regulatory bodies of various countries. Although some of the violations recorded in the first quarter of 2019 received, to some extent, redress actions from various state and non-state actors, the level of impunity for a majority of the violations recorded was high.

AFEX continues to urge stakeholders in their respective countries to adopt concrete steps towards promoting the safety of journalists and protecting the overall freedom of expression environment in Africa. The report concludes with key recommendations to state and non-state actors to work together in establishing a coordinated mechanism to tackle press freedom challenges identified in the various countries on the continent.

Introduction

Attacks on journalists, other media practitioners, activists, human rights defenders, bloggers and citizens who exercise their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and access to information continue to be a major challenge for stakeholders on the African continent and globally. Journalists in particular continue to face attacks such as physical attacks, censorship, arbitrary arrest and detention and killings in their line of duty. These attacks constitute a major threat for the practice of journalism in Africa. Worryingly, many of the violations recorded usually receive no redress actions from authorities in the various countries, thereby resulting in a pervasive culture of impunity.

There have been several efforts put in place by stakeholders at local, regional and international levels towards ensuring that freedom of expression rights particularly, the safety of journalists is prioritized by all governments in Africa. For instance, regional and international frameworks such as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the Declaration on Principles of Freedom of Expression in Africa as well as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), all seek to guarantee freedom of expression and press freedom as fundamental rights. There have also been efforts by key actors including those of the AU Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and access to information in Africa, to revise the Declaration on Principles of Freedom of Expression in Africa. This initiative aims at revising the Declaration to reflect the current trends and developments to ensure that states take steps to promote such issues. Civil society and free expression rights groups also continue to monitor and report violations against journalists and other media practitioners, activists, bloggers and citizens.

Despite the above mentioned interventions being adopted in response to tackling the challenges identified in the freedom of expression environment on the continent, it is crucial for state and non-state actors to continue to brainstorm on how they can work together to resolve these challenges which have proven to be a threat to the freedom of expression and press freedom landscape in Africa.

Over the years, the African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX), through its member organisations, has increased advocacy on the issue of the safety of journalists and continue to undertake various activities in the areas of monitoring, reporting and documenting freedom of expression violations and developments across the continent. The AFEX network itself also undertake a number of activities aimed at combatting impunity and improving the overall safety of journalists' situation on the continent.

One major area identified by AFEX in this regard is the need for both state and non-state actors to actively engage in processes embarked upon by UNESCO and the African Union (AU) towards the establishment and implementation of mechanisms on safety of journalists issues through a coordinated effort by all relevant parties. There is also the need to increase advocacy on combatting impunity for crimes against press freedom and journalists and other media workers.

As part of its advocacy work to promote and defend freedom of expression on the continent, AFEX has over the past three years produced its periodic *Freedom of Expression Situation in Africa Report*, which gives an overview of the freedom of expression violations and developments

recorded during the monitoring period. The report also seeks to bring to the attention of duty bearers challenges journalists and other media practitioners face across the globe and urge them to intervene. Reports produced also serve as a resource material and advocacy tools for the promotion and protection of FOE and media rights in Africa.

A total of 77 violations were recorded in 21 African countries in this edition of the AFEX FOE Situation in Africa Report which covers January-March 2019.

Methodology

The FOE Situation in Africa report is collated and published periodically by the AFEX network. AFEX compiles reports published by its member organisations from their daily monitoring, reporting and documenting of FOE violations recorded in their respective countries or regions. For countries where AFEX has no presence, the network relies on online monitoring and contacts built in such counties in order to cover them. Additionally, this report also features reports published by other human rights organisations working to promote freedom of expression in Africa on the IFEX website. Data collated from these reports are then analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The findings of this report are presented below under the following subheadings: Types of violations, perpetrators, target of violations and a summary of the incidents identified. Notable freedom of expression and press freedom developments observed during the three-month monitoring period are also highlighted in the report. The report concludes with a number of recommendations for the improvement of the FOE situation in Africa.

Findings

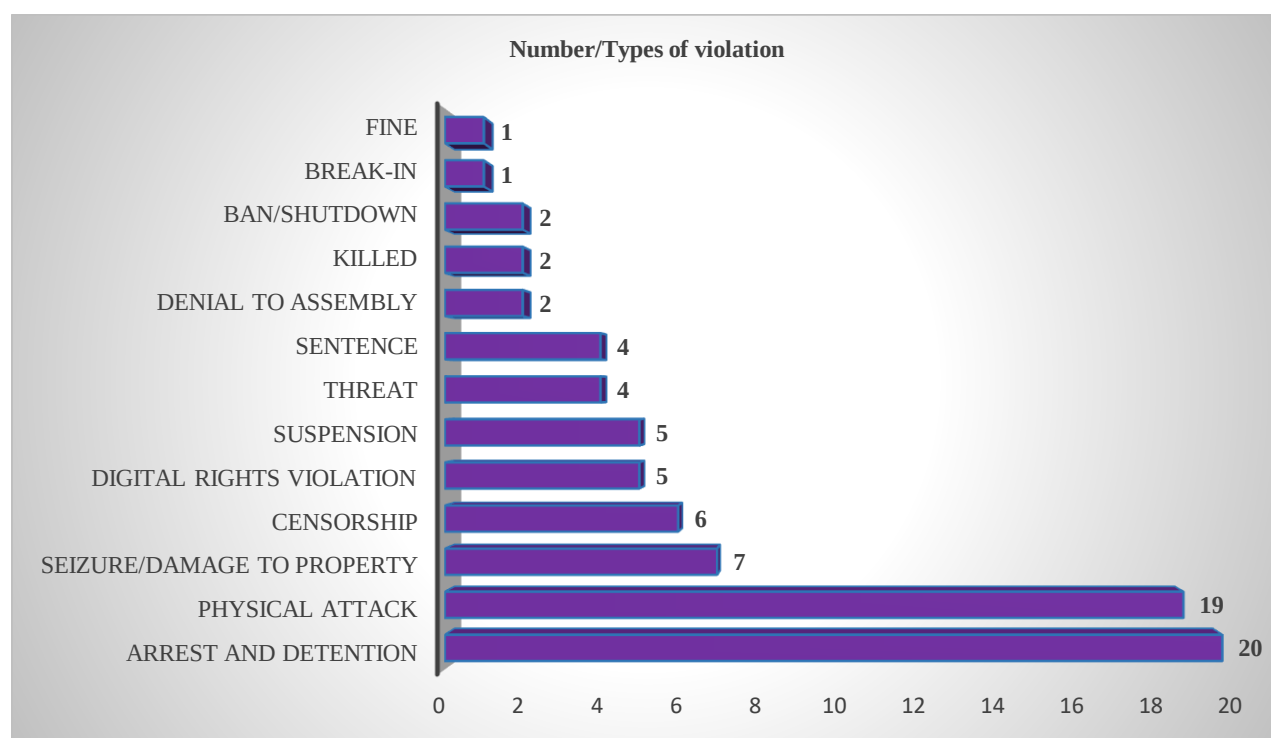
A total of 77 violations were recorded in the 21 countries cited in this report. Nigeria recorded 16 violations being the highest while Liberia, Zambia and Zimbabwe distantly followed with seven violations each. Details of the types and number of violations recorded in the remaining countries are provided in the latter part of this report. Security agents were the major perpetrators of the violations recorded. They accounted for 40 out of the 77 total violations recorded.

In all, 13 categories of FOE violations were recorded from January to March 2019. A majority of the victims of the violations recorded during the monitoring period were male journalists and other media practitioners. Other victims included bloggers, human rights defenders and citizens. There was high-level impunity for majority of the violations recorded although the redress actions received during the monitoring period this quarter were quite impressive. Details of these general findings are presented below.

Types of Violations

Altogether, 13 categories of violations were recorded in January-March 2019. Arrests and detentions (20) were the highest types of violation recorded closely followed by 19 cases of physical attacks (19). Security agents and unknown individuals were also responsible for seven incidents of FOE violations which involved the confiscation and/or destruction of equipment belonging to journalists or media houses, in six (6) of the recorded incidents, perpetrators of violations either destroyed or confiscated working equipment like recorders, mobile phones belonging to journalists or targeted media houses. There were also five (5) incidents of digital rights violations in which governments ordered a complete internet blackout or other state actors harassed journalists and dissidents who were critical of them on social media platforms including Facebook, and Twitter. Details of the number and types of violation recorded are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure1. Types of FOE Violations Recorded:

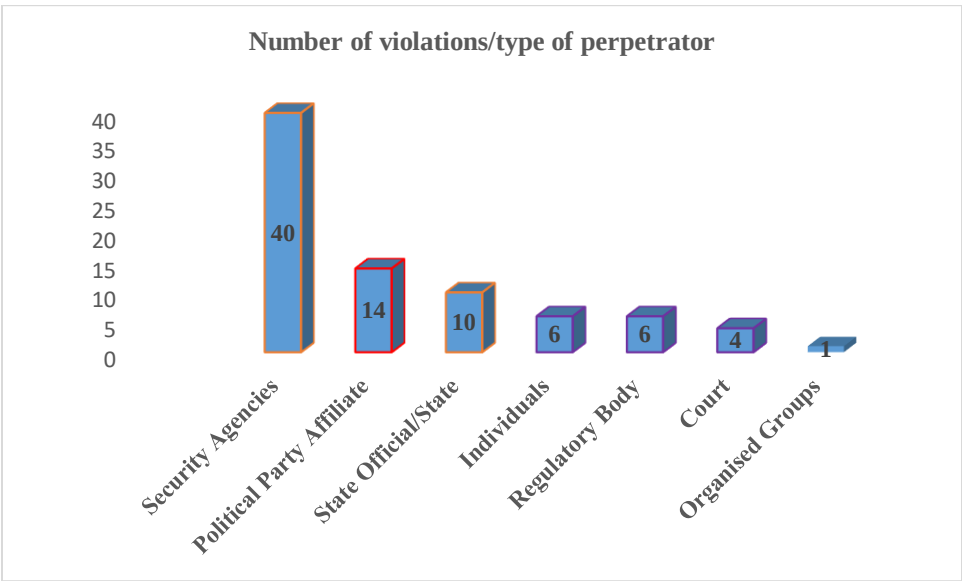


Perpetrators of Violations Recorded

State security agents remain key perpetrators of FOE violations in Africa. They accounted for 40 violations recorded in the period under review (January-March 2019). The other perpetrators included, state officials, organized groups, media regulatory bodies, unidentified individuals and political party affiliates. Police in Zimbabwe were responsible for the killing five protesters in

during massive demonstrations while unknown individuals shot and killed a member of Anas Aremeyaw Anas’ Tiger PI investigative team.

Figure 2: *Perpetrators of the Violations Recorded.*



Target/Victims of Violations

Victims of the 77 violations were mainly journalists and other media professionals. Other victims included activists, human rights defenders, bloggers, media outlets and citizens. AFEX was able to identify the number and type of victim affected in a majority of the incidents recorded while it was difficult if not impossible to know the exact number of victims involved. The highest number of attacks were against journalists (37) 34 of whom were male journalists while three were females.

The victims of other violations were media outlets which were targeted during the period.

Countries and Incidents of FOE Violations



For the first quarter of 2019, AFEX recorded 77 FOE violations in 21 African countries spread across East, West, Central and Southern Africa. This section provides a summary of the type of violation, perpetrator, victim as well as the month during which the violations occurred in the various countries. Table 1 below gives details about the types and number of violations recorded in each country.

Table 1. Country and type of violations recorded

Country	Types of Violation													
	Killed	Physical Attack	Censorship	Arrest & Detention	Digital Rights Violations	Suspended	Sentenced	Denial to Assemble	Ban/ Shutdown	Threat	Break-in	Seizure of property	Fine	Total
Nigeria		5	1	6	1				1			2		16
Liberia		2	2					1				2		7
Zambia		2	1			1				2		1		7
Zimbabwe	1	3	0	2	1									7
Mauritania		1	1	2								1		5
Ghana	1	2								1				4
Guinea				1				1					1	3
Cameroon		2		2										4
Cote d'Ivoire				1	1		1							3
Uganda				2		1					1			4
Togo							1		1					2
Tanzania						2								2
DRC				1			1							2
Sierra Leone		1										1		2
Mozambique				2										2
South Africa					1					1				2
Gabon					1									1
Somalia						1								1
Senegal		1												1
Sudan				1										1
Burundi			1											1
Total	2	19	6	20	5	5	3	2	2	4	1	7	1	77

Nigeria

Nigeria recorded a total of 16 freedom of expression violations during the first quarter to 2019. There was an increase in attacks against the media as the country held its presidential and legislative elections in February during the monitoring period. It is therefore not surprising that the country recorded the most violations as attacks against journalists and other critical voices are high during important national events like elections. A majority of the violations recorded in Nigeria were perpetrated by security agents. Some of the violations recorded included the following: On January 6, military officers [stormed](#) the regional office of the *Daily Trust* newspaper in Maiduguri, in north-east Nigeria, arrested the regional editor, Uthman Abubakar, together with a reporter, Ibrahim Sawab following a publication in the paper about the military's operation against Boko Haram. On the same day, plain-clothes soldiers in a separate incident, after thoroughly searching the Abuja head office of the paper, arrested one of its production staff and confiscated a number of computers belonging to the paper and ordered all staff to vacate the premises while they closed it down. Abubakar together with the other reporters was released two days after President Muhammadu Buhari ordered the military to end its siege to the office of the *Daily Trust Newspaper*.

A couple of days after the above mentioned incidents, three journalists from three media outlets, Emmanuel Oladesu of *The Nation* newspaper, Temitope Ogunbanke of *News Telegraph* newspaper and Abidoun Yusuf of Ibile Television were [wounded](#) after they were caught up in a crossfire during a fight between two rival factions of the National Union of Workers. The journalists were covering a political rally organised by the All Progressives Congress (APC) party on January 8.

Still in Nigeria, some thugs, suspected to be political party affiliates, on January 16, 2019 barged into the newsroom of Albaraka Radio in Bauchi State and beat up Ibrahim Bababa, a radio presenter working with the station. The journalist sustained some injuries from the attack, according to the *Punch* newspaper. Local media also indicate that the [attack](#) on the journalist could be linked to comments the presenter may have made on a point-blank programme called "Gatarin Gwari."

Three separate violations [were recorded](#) in Nigeria on Election Day (February 23). Police arrested five journalists arrested while they were going to interview Peter Obi, the vice presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Anambra State; a photojournalist was hit and wounded by a bullet fired into his home by unidentified men in military uniform; and a group of journalists were barred from monitoring the collation of results at some polling stations.

The other violations recorded in Nigeria involved the digital rights violations, shutdown of a radio station and physical attacks. In what appeared as a crackdown on a radio station by state actors, agents of Nigeria's Department of State Services (DSS) on February 28, 2019 stormed Jay FM and arrested its Chief Engineer, Ojingwa Oji in the absence of the station's Manager. Oji was released later that evening on the condition that the Station Manager reports to the DSS office the following day at 10:30am. The Manager of the station honoured the invitation to the DSS and was

thoroughly questioned about radio station's robust coverage of the cancellation of presidential and national assembly elections in Jos North Local Government Area. The Manager was later released and asked to return the Managing Director, by 5pm which he did. In a bizarre development, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) ordered the [shutdown of Jay FM](#) on March 1 without any reason.

The same day on March 1, police [arrested and detained](#) Obinna Don Norman, owner and editor-in-chief of *The Realm News*, while he was participating in a live political programme at Flo FM, based in Umahia, the capital of Abia State. Norman was charged with cyberstalking and harassment of Abia State Senator, Theodore Orji and was held at the Afara Ibeku Prison in Umuahia.

The state-level elections held across Nigeria on March 9 also recorded some violations. Political party vigilantes [attacked](#) a group of journalists covering Nigeria's Governorship elections in Kaduna State. The victims, two of whom were identified as Amos Tauna of *Daily Post* newspaper and Bala Shidong of Radio Nigeria, had their phones and other valuables destroyed by the thugs who were creating chaos at a polling station to allegedly aid vote rigging.

Soldiers seized the cars of some journalists and [held them hostage](#) for hours at the Union bank area in Damaturu, Yobe during the governorship elections, also on March 9. Musa Mingye working of Blueprint and Hamisu Kabir Matazu, a reporter of the Daily Trust newspaper were detained for no apparent reason despite having the INEC approved sticker on their cars and identifying themselves with their company ID cards, INEC-issued ID cards and INEC-issued reflective jackets.

On March 30, there was an incident of [arrest and detention](#) when four armed operatives believed to be agents of by State Security Services picked up Jones Abiri, Editor of the *Weekly Source* newspaper, from the premises of the newspaper and drove him away.

Liberia, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Liberia, Zambia and Zimbabwe distantly followed Nigeria with 7 violations each. A majority of the violations recorded in Liberia were perpetrated by unknown individuals. One radio station, Roots FM which [was attacked](#) on two separate occasions by sympathisers of the ruling government in one and by unidentified persons in the other attack. On January 31, three armed men suspected to be sympathisers of the government overpowered security personnel at Roots FM and proceeded to [destroy equipment](#) at the station's studios. Ten days after on February 10, some gunmen suspected to be sympathisers of the George Weah government also [attacked Roots FM](#). The attackers also confiscated equipment belonging to the radio station including two transmitters and an amplifier. Similarly, on March 5, some unknown assailants [attacked Joy FM](#), a radio station based in Monrovia. The attackers disrupted the station's transmission by cutting the cables connecting the antenna to the transmitter. The management of the station believed the attack was carried out by people who are unhappy about the station's critical stance on certain national issues. The attacks on dissidents extended to students as authorities at the University of Liberia on January 11 [imposed an indefinite ban](#) on activities of all student political groups in violation of their freedom of assembly rights.

In a rather baffling incident, members of the lower Chamber of Liberia's parliament [revoked their accreditation](#) of journalists who had been covering happenings at the House for some time. The members indicated they were bored with the "redundant and repetitive" reports produced by the reporters. As a result, the Deputy Sergeant at-arms on February 21, 2019 barred 18 out of 27 accredited journalists from covering the House citing there was no space to accommodate the journalists.

Most of the violations recorded in Zambia were perpetrated by political party affiliates and state actors of the ruling government against a private television station, Prime Television based in the capital, Lusaka. The privately owned TV station has come [under attack](#) following its reportage on a parliamentary by-elections held in Sesheke, a town located in the western province of Zambia. On January 26, 2019, the Secretary General of the ruling Patriotic Front (PF) party, Davies Mwila, dismissed Prime TV reporters from a press briefing he was addressing. He also declared publicly that the station is barred from covering all activities of the PF party. Following the pronouncements by Mwila, Prime TV was subjected to series of attacks by the other officials or supporters of the PF party. Members of the party's vigilante group reportedly attacked three reporters of the station in three separate incidents within a space of two weeks. Supporters of the party on February 8, 2019, physically assaulted and confiscated a laptop belonging to Lyold Kapusa, a reporter for Prime TV while another reporter, Kazela Habwanda of the TV station was also attacked by the group in a separate incident on February 5. On February 14, 2019, members of a pro-PF vigilante group physically attacked Wells Chifunda who is a court reporter for the TV station.

Some state actors also encouraged these attacks by openly antagonising the media outlet in their public pronouncements. On February 13, 2019, the Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Dora Siliya at a press briefing accused Prime TV of reporting the violent incidents that happened during the parliamentary by-elections in Sesheke, in a sensational manner. The Deputy Media Director of the PF party, Antonio Mwanza, was also quoted by an online blog, TP News, on February 13, 2019 as saying that "Prime TV must be closed down...the IBA [the media regulator] has already been directed to revoke the licence...."

Following the hostile declarations by these powerful officials, Zambia's media regulator, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) on February 15, 2019, sent Prime TV a letter requesting for the station's editorial policy and broadcast recordings of its political show, news bulletin and "Oxygen of Democracy" programme. The request followed a complaint by the Secretary General of PF party, who had earlier accused Prime TV of biased and unethical reporting.

Also, the Minister for Lands and Natural Resources, Jean Kapata, a senior political party official of the PF party threatened to cause an attack on Prime TV. Kapata was quoted as saying "to Prime TV, we are not warning you we are telling you that if you continue this type of reports, disparaging the government day in day out, these women that you are seeing here shall come and close down your studio."

The IBA again on February 28, 2019 summoned the management of Prime TV and demanded that the station renders an apology to the Secretary General of the PF party within 14 days for alleged

biased reporting on the party. The management of the station however refused to render the apology maintaining his station was professional in carrying out its journalistic responsibility.

Three days after the station was ordered to issue an apology, the IBA at a press briefing announced the [suspension](#) of the licence of PrimeTV station for 30 days with immediate effect. The media regulator said the licence of Prime TV had been revoked for exhibiting “unprofessionalism in its broadcasting” through unbalanced coverage, and opinionated news material likely to incite violence and use of derogatory language.

Further, there was a crackdown on freedom of expression and assembly rights following protests in Zimbabwe during the monitoring period. In an attempt to [disperse protesters](#) in the country, police officers shot and killed at least five persons leaving several others injured after they opened live ammunitions against unarmed protesters. Massive protests broke out in Zimbabwe on January 12, 2019 following government’s announcement of increase in fuel prices and other commodities. The police also arbitrarily arrested and detained protesters.

The government of Zimbabwe also ordered Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to shut down Internet connection in the country on two occasions as protests intensified. In a landmark ruling, the High Court in Zimbabwe ordered the government to restore the Internet after a lawsuit was filed against the government by some local rights groups, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights and MISA Zimbabwe.

On January 9, 2019 a police officer whipped Costa Nkomo a reporter of online publication 263Chat, while he was covering skirmishes between police and vendors at the Harare City Centre. Other police officers who were present at the scene, restrained their colleague and apologised on his behalf after Nkomo showed them his media accreditation card.

Youth of the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) on March 1, 2019 [physically assaulted](#) Mduduzi Masiya, a photojournalist working with the *Midlands Observer newspaper* while he was covering a monthly clean-up in Kwekwe. It took the intervention of the ZANU-PF’s chairperson for Kwekwe, Tapiwa Muto to end the assault on Masiya.

State security agents on March 21, 2019 [arrested and detained](#) Zenzele Ndebele, a civil society activist and freelance journalist together with his cameraman at the central police station in Harare. The authorities charged Ndebele with “possession of offensive weapons at public gatherings,” under Section 43 of Zimbabwe’s Criminal Law Code following the discovery of used teargas canisters in his car. Ndebele explained that he had picked up the canisters, which had been fired by the police, during the last public protest in January which he was filming. The police however, refused to release him on the same day. Ndebele was freed and all charges dropped against him after appearing in court the following day (March 22, 2019).

Mauritania

The police in Mauritania were responsible for all five violations recorded. In the first incident, a group of police officers on March 2, 2019 [harassed](#) journalist, Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Khouye, who was returning home from work. The police officers went ahead to assault Khouye even after he identified himself as a journalist. In another incident which happened on March 22, two bloggers, Abderrahmane Weddady and Sheikh Ould Jiddou, were summoned before the Public Prosecutor before being [held in prison](#). The authorities charged Jiddou of publishing a story about the government on Facebook which they deemed was false. Three days during their detention, police raided Weddady's home and confiscated his computer. Still in Mauritania, the police on March 26, 2019 [detained](#) two journalists, Bilal Camara and Mohamed Lemine Ould Isselmou and deleted from their camera, recordings of a demonstration they were covering in front of the presidential palace in Nouakchott.

Cameroon, Ghana, Uganda

The above countries recorded four violations each. In Cameroon, three unidentified persons beat up and stabbed Paul Chouta, a reporter working with privately owned news website [Cameroon Web](#), in Yaounde, capital of Cameroon. The assailants attacked Chouta at around 6am while he left home. The management of the online portal believed Chouta's attack was in connection to a [Facebook Live interview](#) he granted with Paul Eric Kingué, the campaign manager for Cameroon's jailed opposition leader, Maurice Kamto on January 22.

On January 28, 2019, two journalists who were covering the arrest of Professor Maurice Kamto, national president of the Cameroonian Renaissance Movement (CRM) political party and some of his close allies by Cameroonian police were also [rounded up](#). Théodore Tchopa and David Nzima Enyegue both working with privately owned, *Le Jour* daily newspaper based in Douala were taken to the Groupement Spécial d'Opération (Special Operations Unit) of the Cameroonian police service. The police have also confiscated mobile phones and other gadgets belonging to the journalists. They were released after five days in detention without charge.

The media fraternity in Ghana on January 16, 2019 received shocking news about the brutal killing of [Ahmed Hussein Suale](#), a member of the Tiger Eye PI team led by investigative journalist, Anas Aremeyaw Anas. Suale was shot and killed by unknown gunmen in the capital, Accra. The reason behind Suale's killing remain unclear but he played an active role in Anas' number 12 documentary which unraveled massive acts of corruption within the Ghana Football Association (GFA).

The month of March also saw a number of violations against journalists. Investigative journalist, Manasseh Azure Awuni of the Multimedia Group based in Accra begun to receive [death threats](#) from unknown persons following the publication of a documentary about activities of a vigilante group allegedly aligned to the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP). The documentary came at a time when several stakeholders in the country called for the disbandment of political party vigilante groups who were responsible for a number of violent acts within the country.

On March 14, a group of police officers [brutalised](#) Malik Sulemana and Raissa Sambou, both reporters, and Salifu Abdul Rahman, an assistant editor of the State-owned Ghanaian Times newspaper. The three were on their way to cover a story in Accra when a traffic incident resulted in a squabble between them and the police. The following day, on March 15, a pastor, Reverend Owusu Bempah, stormed the premises of Accra-based Radio XYZ accompanied by four thugs. The invaders said they were looking for one of the station's presenters, Mugabe Maase, whom the pastor said had made derogatory remarks about him on his show.

In Uganda, the country's communications regulator, Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), on February 6, 2019 suspended the Daily Monitor news website pending approval from the commission. This followed the publication of a story on the news website alleging that the speaker of parliament, Rebecca Kadaga was involved in witchcraft activities. The news website was accused of publishing "fake news" with the intention to damage her reputation.

On the same day in a separate incident, security personnel in Kampala [arrested](#) a group of journalists who were investigating the alleged involvement of the government in the trade of pharmaceuticals on the Ugandan black market. Those arrested were two BBC journalists Godfrey Badebye and Kassim Mohamed and their support staff Rashid Kaweesa, and Shafiq Kisame. The police also raided the home of a third journalist, Solomon Serwanjja, who works with privately owned NBS TV. Upon meeting his absence, police arrested his wife, Vivian Serwanjja.

Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea

There were three violations recorded in the above countries. **In Cote d'Ivoire**, on January 28, Nahoum Daleba, an activist from the political pressure group, Coalition des Indignés de la Côte d'Ivoire, appeared before a court over a critical Facebook post. He was charged with "publishing false information on national and international political issues." Still in Côte d'Ivoire, a Member of Parliament, Alain Lobognon, was [sentenced](#) to one year in prison "for publication of false information and incitement to revolt." The charges relate to a Twitter post on corruption investigations against a fellow parliamentarian. January 2019.

There was one incident in which authorities in Guinea violated the right to peaceful assembly of citizens. On January 22, the mayor of Conakry [prohibited](#) a planned demonstration by a coalition of civil society organisations calling itself the Social Force of Guinea (FSG). The mayor cited an order by the Minister of Territorial Administration in July 2018, banning all public demonstrations, insisting that the ban was still in force. In another incident in Guinea on January 3, 2019, a journalist and women's rights activist, Moussa Yero Bah of Espace FM was [ordered to pay](#) the equivalent of US\$ 2500 after losing a defamation suit brought by a businessman. The amount exceeds the maximum US\$ 1100 prescribed by the Guinean press code for press offenses.

On March 26, the police [arrested](#) Lansana Camara, deputy managing editor of the news portal *conakrylive.info* over an investigative story he had written about fuel procurement at the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was detained in the Conakry Central Prison for eight days, following a defamation complaint by the sector Minister.

DRC, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Togo

¹ The above countries recorded two incidents of violations each. The Mbandaka Peace Tribunal on Friday, March 1, 2019, [sentenced](#) Steeve Mwanyo Iwewe, a journalist working with Radio-Television Sarah (RTS) to a year in prison for “insulting” the governor of Ecuador, a province located north-west of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Iwewe was arrested on February 27 while covering protests in a Congolese suburb. Congolese authorities on March 30, released Iwewe following series of condemnation by local and international organisations including Journaliste en Danger.

Similarly, three other journalists working with the same television station, Trésor Nsaebeinga, Yannick Vital Mbombo and Jean-Claude Mafundisho indicated they have been in hiding since February 28, 2019 for fear of reprisals as their homes were visited the same day Iwewe was arrested by police officers with arrest warrants following another complaint to the Mbandaka District Prosecutor’s Office by the provincial governor for similar accusations.

In Mozambique, military officers on January 5, 2019 [arrested](#) journalist, Amade Abubacar who works with state-owned community radio station, Rádio e Televisao Comunitária Nacedje de Macomia (Community Radio and Television of Macomia) while he was photographing internally displaced people fleeing from terrorist attacks in the Cabo Delgado region located in northern Mozambique into Macomia.

Another journalist, Germano Daniel Adriano from the same community radio station where Abubacar works was also arrested on February 18, 2019 by military personnel in the same region for covering similar attacks against residents of that part of the country. Both journalists were later [charged with](#) “violation of state secrets using a computer” and “public instigation to crime using a computer”.

Then in Sierra Leone, supporters of Sierra Leone’s opposition, All People’s Congress (APC) party on January 16, [brutalized](#) a five-member crew from the AYV Media group. The crew, including two females, had gone to the house of former President Ernest Bai Koroma for a scheduled interview. However, an accusation by a party executive incited other party supporters present to assault the crew and damage some of their equipment.

Back in Southern Africa, Veteran South African journalist Karima Brown on March 8, 2019 begun receiving threats and harassments from some unknown persons alleged to be supporters of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party after her phone number was published on Twitter by EFF leader Julius Malema.

There was another attack freedom of assembly rights when on January 18, a Togolese political activist, Foly Satchivi, was [sentenced](#) to two years in prison with one year suspended. Satchivi had

been in detention in connection with his participation in, and open support for the serial opposition party protests which the government described as illegal.

On March 25, the media regulator, Haute Autorité de l'Audiovisuel et de la Communication (HAAC), [revoked](#) the licence of Bonero Lawson-Betum, owner and Managing Editor of La Nouvelle newspaper, for what it described as “deliberate refusal to respect the fundamental principles of journalism.” The revocation indefinitely bars Lawson-Betum from publishing La Nouvelle newspaper.

Burundi, Gabon, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania

These countries recorded one violation each. The government of Burundi on March 29, 2019 [barred](#) two international media outlets, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Voice of America (VOA) from reporting about the country. It will be recalled that the government in May 2018, suspended the two media outlets for six months. No local and foreign journalists operating in Burundi is therefore allowed to "directly or indirectly" contribute to the two broadcasters.

Gabon's government on January 2, 2019 shut down the Internet and broadcasting services following an [attempted coup](#) against President Ali Bongo

In Senegal, supporters of President Macky Sall on February 11, 2019 [attacked](#) the bus of the press corps covering the campaign of opposition candidate, Issa Sall in the city of Tambacouda, some 420 kilometres east of the capital, Dakar. Eight journalists were wounded in the attack.

On February 10, a regional court in the breakaway state of Somaliland ordered *Foore* newspaper to suspend publishing for one year and fined its editor-in-chief three million Somaliland shillings (about US\$300), following a conviction for publishing "false news" and anti-national propaganda. The charges were linked to the paper's coverage of the Somaliland government, including a story published on October 11, 2018 about the construction of a new presidential palace in the country.

In Sudan, agents of Sudan's feared, National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) on February 22, 2019 [arrested](#) Osmna Mirghani who is the editor-in-chief of the independent Sudanese newspaper, *Al-Tayyar*.

Although no charges were brought against him, it is believed that his arrest was in connection with comments he made in an interview he granted about the ongoing anti-government protests in the country. Mirghani was released on March 29, 2019 following pressure from local and international rights groups including AFEX.

Tanzanian authorities on February 27, 2019 imposed a seven-day ban on an independent newspaper *The Citizen* following a publication which highlighted the deteriorating democracy and

the state of the country's economy. The authorities accused the newspaper of publishing information that they deemed "seditious, false, and misleading."

Redress for the Violations Recorded



Authorities in DRC, Sudan and Zimbabwe had released all journalists and Prime TV was also reopened during the monitoring period.

The period under review received some level of redress for some violations recorded. Abubakar together with the other reporters was released two days after President Muhammadu Buhari ordered the military to end its siege to the office of the *Daily Trust Newspaper*.

In a landmark ruling, the High Court in Zimbabwe [ordered](#) the government to restore the Internet after a lawsuit was filed against the government by some local rights groups. A High Court judge, Justice Owen Tagu on January 21, 2019 ruled that the Minister of State in the President's Office Responsible for National Security does not have the authority to issue any directives in terms of

the Interception of Communications Act. This means that the directives issued by Minister Owen Ncube to shut down the Internet in Zimbabwe are illegal and therefore, without effect.

Still in Zimbabwe, police also released Ndebele, a film maker a day after he was arrested and detained.

The media regulator in Zambia on March 29, 2019 also lifted a 30-day suspension on Prime TV a week before the expiration of the ban. The decision followed series of condemnation by local and international groups.

Authorities in Sudan also released journalist, Osman Mirghani on the same day (March 29) who was arrested and detained without any charges brought against him. Mirghani was arrested on February 22, 2019 after granting an interview about the anti-government protests in Sudan.

The following day in a separate incident, Congolese authorities on March 30, released Steeve Mwanyo Iwewe who was sentenced to a year in prison and later to six months after appeal. Mwanyo was jailed for “insulting a governor. His release followed series of condemnation by local and international organisations including Journaliste en Danger.

Other Developments

There were a number of developments both positive and negative that were observed during the monitoring period. In an attempt to strengthen press freedom in Liberia, President George Weah on February 28, 2019 signed into law a bill to amend sections of the country’s constitution which penalized a range of speech offences including defamation and libel. The passage of the bill into law, which has been before Parliament for several years is a positive step by the government to strengthen press freedom in Liberia. Similarly, the Ghana’s Parliament on March 26, 2019 finally [passed into law](#) the Right to Information Bill which had been before the House for ten years. The RTI law is expected to promote public’s access to information and the fight against corruption in the country.

Moving away from West Africa, the East African Court of Justice (EACJ) on March 28, 2019 [ruled](#) that sections of Tanzania's Media Services Act (2016) violates press freedom and freedom of expression rights on the Tanzanian people. The Court therefore urged the Tanzanian government to repeal all the repressive sections. This landmark ruling comes at a time when the press freedom and human rights situation in Tanzania has deteriorated drastically with increased attacks against press freedom. Thus, if these sections are amended and are well implemented, it will contribute to ensuring an advancement in the fundamental rights of Tanzanians.

Finally, Liberian lawmakers filed a 2 Million US Dollar [lawsuit](#) against private newspaper, *Hot Pepper* and its publisher, Philibert Browne, after Browne alleged on a private radio station in December 2018 that some former and current members of the House of Representatives were

involved in some corruption and bribery scandals. AFEX finds the lawsuit as a deliberate attempt by the lawmakers to censor the journalist as well as permanently cripple the newspaper.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings, as presented above, show that the FOE situation on the continent is still under attack. Journalists continue to face persecution in their attempt to bring information close to the citizenry as well as keep governments in check. Journalists, media practitioners, bloggers and ordinary citizens face attacks including arrest and detention, censorship, court sentence etc. for exercising their right to free expression.

The findings also show that freedom of expression violations have also extended to the online spaces. For instance, there were five incidents of digital rights violations recorded which included two cases of complete internet shutdown in Gabon during a coup attempt and in Zimbabwe during protests. In both countries, the governments intended to interrupt the free flow of information during such important national events. The remaining three incidents targeted journalists and activists who criticized state officials online.

Although some redress actions were received, the incidents recorded in the various countries show that it is important for increased collaboration among stakeholders towards improving the press freedom environment in Africa. The report concludes with the following recommendations aimed at addressing the threats to journalists' safety on the continent.

In consideration of the findings, the African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX) is calling on governments, state security agents and other relevant stakeholders to address the challenges in the FOE landscape, as highlighted in the findings. The recommendations provided below if taken into account should help create an enabling environment for the exercise of FOE rights as guaranteed in the constitutions of the various countries on the continent as well as other regional and international frameworks that guarantee FOE rights. Specifically, AFEX makes the following recommendations:

- Regional and international bodies like AU, ECOWAS, ECCAS, SADC, COMESA, etc. should collaborate to put in place coordinated mechanisms towards upholding press freedom rights and protecting the safety of journalists at the regional, sub-regional and national levels.
- The regional blocs must also ensure that governments uphold legal frameworks which allow for respect of freedom of expression and assembly rights of journalists and citizens at all times.
- African governments should openly condemn attacks against journalists and put in place concrete steps to ensure journalists' safety.
- African governments should also uphold regional and international instruments they have ratified that guarantee freedom of expression rights.

- State security agencies must investigate expeditiously, all violations against journalists, media professionals, activists and ordinary people and bring the culprits to book.
- State security agencies must also refrain from using lethal force against protesters.
- Civil society groups should continue to vigorously advocate for the protection and respect of FOE rights, as well as the redress and reparations for FOE violations.
- Civil society groups must also continue to advocate and train journalists to be professional in carrying out their duties
- Owners/management of media organisations should continue to train their workers to respect the code of ethics for journalism and to be professional in carrying out their duties at all times.
- Owners or management of media outlets should take up violations perpetrated against their staff.



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