



Civil Society Reference Group
Ufungamano House
Rooms 10 & 11, Mamlaka Road
Off Lower State House Road
P.O. Box 37485 – 00100, Nairobi – Kenya
E-mail: info@civilsocietyrg.org

PRESS STATEMENT: DATED AND ISSUED ON THIS 9TH DAY OF JUNE 2019

STATE COMPLICITY AND INACTION TO BLAME FOR DETERIORATING MEDIA FREEDOM IN KENYA AS THE CIVIL SOCIETY CONDEMNS RECENT TROLLING OF NATION MEDIA GROUP, ATTACK OF STANDARD GROUP CREW IN MACHAKOS AND PLANNED DEMONSTRATION AGAINST THE STAR

Complicity of the State and its inaction in the many instances where the media have come under attack are to blame for the deteriorating state of media freedom in Kenya.

In most of the instances where individual journalists and Media Houses have been attacked, it is always the State itself that has been culpable, its agencies or powerful State and Public Officers.

Such was the case when journalists, Laban Walloga and Karim Rajan were attacked by police officers attached to Bamburi Police Station in August 2018. There is no indication that the officers who were culpable were brought to book.

Similarly, in February 2019, journalists, Emilio Muriithi (Citizen TV), Martin Munene (Inooro TV), Seth Mwaniki and Wahu wa Ngugi (MediaMax) were attacked by Kenya Forests Services officers in Naro Moru for recording some chaotic meeting between local residents at the Naro Moru Forest Station.

While the offending Kenya Forests Service officers were reportedly interdicted on the order of the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Forestry Keriako Tobiko, there have been no reports of their prosecution and conviction for their brutal attack on the journalists.

CSRG is of the view that it was not enough to interdict the marauding forest officers. They ought to have been prosecuted and if found guilty jailed to serve as a lesson to others. There is no indication that the affected forest officers remain interdicted or were prosecuted for their criminal actions against journalists.

On 26th March, 2018, several journalists were attacked by the State security personnel while covering the return of political activist Miguna Miguna's at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in the full glare of cameras as the State attempted to force Miguna onto a Dubai-bound plane.

No one was held to account for the assault. No action was taken against the senior paramilitary General Service Unit (GSU) officers despite being spotted on the camera assaulting KTN journalist Sophia Wanuna!

On 20th July, 2018, three journalists were attacked and injured by hired goons at Elite Girls' School in Muranga. Equipment belonging to journalists were damaged in the milieu following student unrest at the institution.

There is no indication that any action was taken by the State to hold the culprits to book!

On 17th October 2018, several journalists were attacked and ejected from covering Nyandarua County Assembly leadership row as MCAs sought to bar Speaker Wahome Ndegwa from entering the Assembly chambers.

The assembly's security officers rained blows, slapped and clobbered journalists, among them Royal Media Services reporter Patris Simbili, Radio Africa Group reporter Ndichu Wainaina whose press card was confiscated, Kameme FM reporter Jimmy Muguo and Sauti ya Mwananchi journalist Jathan Kamau were also attacked by the assembly's security officers claiming they were under instructions from the embattled Speaker not to allow the media to enter the chambers to cover the incident.

No action was taken against the offending county security personnel!

Kenyans have not forgotten how the State acted with a heavy hand, shutting NTV, Inooro TV, Citizen TV and KTN following their attempt to transmit live coverage of the mock swearing in of opposition leader Raila Odinga in January 2018 for more than a week!

Failure by the State to reign in on its own agents and hold them to account has led to a culture of impunity that even private institutions and individuals have taken the cue from to attack journalists with impunity.

It is against this backdrop that recent attack of Standard Media Group crew by students of Saint Steven School in Machakos County and the smear attack by a group of seemingly well-known bloggers against Nation Media Group (NMG) should be seen. It is obvious that the bloggers are at the payroll of the State to malign the NMG for playing its role in informing and educating the public on the negative impacts of some of the most profligate borrowing and unaccountable expenditures by the State.

The CSRG calls on the State to desist forthwith from its own attack on journalists and the media and hold its own officers and private actors who take the law into their own hands against journalists in order to stop once and for all, this downward trend in which journalists are treated as professionals of lesser dignity in the course of their work.

The CSRG is also aware that a Nairobi politician is working with some members of Bunge la Mwananchi based at Jeevanjee Gardens to hold demonstrations against the Star Newspaper for its coverage of the fallout between two City County politicians.

When the government that bears the greatest responsibility to protect media freedom as provided for in Article 43 of the Constitution leads in the attack of the media, maligning and delegitimizing the Fourth Estate, it exposes the media to greater vulnerability and unwarranted attacks by private actors who do so in the full knowledge that they are merely taking the cue from those charged with the responsibility to protect Kenyans in their quest to access information that the media provides.

Signed by:



Suba Churchill

+254 722 594 938

Presiding Convener

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