

Demolition of Nigeria's Breeze FM an "open attack on the press"

On May 22, 2017, security operatives and officials of the Nasarawa State Urban Development Board - acting on orders from the governor of Nasarawa State in North Central Nigeria, Umaru Tanko Al-Makura - stormed the premises of privately-owned Breeze FM and razed the building.



The ruins of Breeze FM. Credit: nfw.a.org/bellanaija.com

Ahmed Tukur, special assistant to Umaru Tanko Al-Makura, said the action was not political but a regulatory measure against illegal constructions. He maintained that the site was approved for residential purposes and that the station's mast was hazardous to people in the area.

"If tomorrow the station acquires an appropriate site, [the] government will approve it immediately. The governor has no ulterior motive against the station," he said.

Ironically, the police had to resort to sporadic warning shots to disperse hundreds of neighbouring residents – the victims of the supposed hazard – who gathered at the premises to prevent the security officials from demolishing the radio station.

In response to Ahmed Tukur's claims, the owner of Breeze FM, Nawani Aboki, said the reason for the demolition was political and that it was aimed at gagging the radio station. He said the demolition was as a result of the work of the radio station – which Umaru Tanko Al-Makura is not happy about.

“Due process was not followed. You can see that the wall is down now. It was marked yesterday and was demolished this morning. Whatever reason he (Umaru Tanko Al-Makura) gives officially is not the real one,” Nawani Aboki said.

Meanwhile, the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) branch in Nasarawa State has condemned the action. The state NUJ chairman, Dogo Shama, described the demolition as an “open attack on the press which has the potential to deprive citizens of the right to balanced reports.”

“If there was any problem with the station or its location, [the] government should have resolved the matter in a mature manner,” he said.

The MFWA is equally concerned about the action of the state authorities: “We believe that dialogue could have settled the issues better than this brutal show of force against the media house. We therefore call for an investigation into the matter.”

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