

IFJ condemns public threats against journos in Liberia

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has supported journalists in Liberia who have issued a media blackout, by printing black front pages after a government official was accused of threatening them. Radio and TV stations are also protesting against the government by suspending broadcasts for two hours daily beginning on Friday, 10 May, 2013.

According to the Press Union of Liberia (PUL), an IFJ affiliate, Othello Warrick the director of the Executive Protection Service (EPS) in Liberia on 3 May, during the World Press Freedom Day celebration, made disparaging and threatening remarks against journalists, describing media personnel as terrorists and threatened to move on them, if they question the integrity of the president of Liberia, Helen Johnson Sirleaf. "Be careful in questioning the integrity of Liberians. Be careful, because you have your pen and we have our guns. And if you incriminate the character or integrity of Liberians, like myself, we will come after you," Warrick is reported to have said.

"We strongly condemn this kind of attitude and untamed utterance. This is an open and serious threat against the media and journalists and we are particularly shocked because they come from senior security personnel. We will hold the Executive Protection Service responsible for any form of assault or attacks against journalists which has a direct relation to the statement made by Warrick. We support our colleagues in Liberia and stand in solidarity with them", said Gabriel Baglo IFJ Africa director.

The IFJ, like its affiliate the PUL, is outraged and alarmed by these wild comments. They have further brought to question the government's commitment to upholding press freedom, democracy and the rule of law. PUL sees these comments as risky and troubling. "We fear that the lack of response to such a condescending and threatening statement by a senior security functionary points to approval by the president and threatens freedom of expression, highlighting impunity against the media", said Peter Quaqua PUL's President.

As journalists feel unsafe in the presence of presidential guards who threaten their lives, correspondents assigned by media houses to cover the presidency are being withdrawn. In addition to this a news blackout imposed on the Liberian presidency until there can express an established guarantees for the freedom and safety of journalists across the country and an end to media impunity.

The IFJ supports PUL which has taken the measures in response to these unwarranted threats and calls on the government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to dispel and disassociate itself with these threats in the interest of democracy, good governance and the rule of law. Such threats have no place in an established democracy. "We therefore re-echo our call on government to dialogue with the media in order to create the enabling environment for the media to flourish." Baglo added.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>