



**AFRICAN
NGO
COUNCIL**

African Council of Non-Governmental Organisations
Conseil Africain des Organisations Non Gouvernementales
Consejo Africano de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales
Conselho Africano de Organizações Não-Governamentais
البحكومة غير ل لمنظمات الأف ريقى ل مجلس

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African NGO Council commends the Government of Sierra Leone for promoting press freedom but says more need to be done.

Freetown, Sierra Leone – The African Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (African NGO Council) appreciates the efforts of the Government of Sierra Leone, especially the Ministry of Information and Communications and Members of Parliament, for promoting press freedom by repealing the criminal liable laws contained in **part 5 of the public order Act, 1965**, but equally urges the Government to sustain an open and democratic society.

For five (5) decades, journalists and media practitioners lived and practiced their profession in fear, manic and intimidation across Sierra Leone. It is welcoming news not only for journalists in Sierra Leone but also their colleagues in other parts of the continent that could see this as a good sign that one day oppressive regimes will also follow this good path.

However, the 55-year-old law, which came into effect in 1965, was not only evil but also irrelevant for the country's democratic wellbeing and prosperity. It was cruel and harmful to the practice of journalism in the country. Successive governments have used this law to suppress and oppress journalists especially the print media.

Several journalists and politicians have gone to jail and prison because past governments used this law as a tool for oppressing their opponents or those who did not sympathise with them. Since 1965 unto the present, thankfully, there has emerged men and woman who have championed to stand up for press freedom, with the belief that 'the pen is mightier than the sword' and that free speech will and should triumph in Sierra Leone, as it does in other parts of the world.

"It's with deep appreciation African NGO Council commends President Julius Madaa Bio and his Government, including the Minister of Information and Communication, the Members of Parliament, national and international partners, and the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and media and human rights activists, for making the repeal process a success story" says Peter SaSellu, President & CEO of the African NGO Council.

"We also want to commend the tireless efforts of the Sierra Leonean civil society community and the supporters that stood with media practitioners in those difficult times. The bold decision by the government to repeal this legislation is a very promising step that changes the media landscape in Sierra Leone for good," adds Peter SaSellu.

The repeal of Part Five (5) would ensure guaranty of human rights for freedom of the press in exercising their rights as journalists for national development. The United Nations 1948 Universal

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Declaration of Human Rights states: *Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers. The concept of freedom of the press, thereby giving equal treatment to spoken and published expression.*

“We also want to take this opportunity to call on the Government of Sierra Leone and all other stakeholders concern to look into clauses in the constitution that need to be redressed and amended altogether, to yield a legitimate democratic state – one that will become a good example in the West Africa sub-region. Repealing such laws will be remarkable ventures, and that truly demonstrates good leadership in the interest of the citizens,” says SaSellu.

In conclusion, the African NGO Council encourages all journalists and other media practitioners to remain peaceful and be law abiding citizens.

About the African NGO Council

The African Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (“African NGO Council” or “AFRONGO”) is an inclusive membership organisation of NGOs and their networks as well as ‘un-networked NGOs’, which subscribe to and support the organisation’s vision, mission and values. It provides a regional platform for NGOs in their diversity, active nationally and regionally; to contribute to governance and development processes across Africa.

The Council is the pan-African umbrella organisation for NGOs operating at the national, sub-regional and Africa regional level. It was founded by a group of NGOs out of their concern to avoid duplication of NGO efforts, and to minimise conflict and competition between NGOs. The founders were also interested in ensuring maximum use of resources mobilised by NGOs for relief and social development purposes through collaboration, networking, and mutual reinforcement of each other's activities.

With its headquarters in Freetown, Sierra Leone, the African NGO Council empowers local and national NGOs and speaks as the global voice for African civil society. More information about the Council is available at www.africanngocouncil.org or contact us at info@africanngocouncil.org.

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