



CENTER FOR MEDIA STUDIES &
PEACE BUILDING



Joint Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Liberia

**For consideration of the Working Group of the 36th Session in
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Submitted by: Media Foundation For West Africa (MFWA), Center for Media Studies
and Peace Building, and IFEX on October 2, 2019

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Joint Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council on the Universal Periodic Review of Liberia

1. The **Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)** is a regional, independent NGO based in Accra, Ghana. Established in 1997, the MFWA is the preeminent media development and freedom of expression advocacy organisation in West Africa with national partner organisations in all 16 countries of the region. The MFWA aims to promote and defend the right to freedom of expression of all persons, particularly the media and human rights defenders in West Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d' Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo).
2. **IFEX** is a global network of 119 organisations working to promote and defend the right to freedom of expression and information in over 60 countries worldwide. Established in 1992, IFEX has been working to support campaigning and advocacy on a range of issues regarding the freedom of expression.
3. The **Centre for Media Studies and Peace Building (CEMESP)** was established in 2003 in response to the challenges confronting professional media practice and free speech as a result of years of conflict in Liberia. CEMESP works with relevant stakeholders to promote free media that fosters democratic accountability. Its activities cover a variety of thematic areas, ranging from conflict prevention to mediation and dialogue. The CEMESP encourages equality and development and respect for human rights especially the right to freedom of expression.

Introduction

4. Liberia, currently ruled by Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) political party under President George Manneh Weah, has faced many challenges posing grave threats to the freedom of expression, among other human rights. Although Liberia has made progress in certain areas, a lot must be done to ensure the protection, promotion and enjoyment of freedom of expression by both citizens and the media.
5. Over the past two decades Liberia has seen internal conflict, which, to a very large extent, affected the respect for the right to freedom of expression and the freedom of assembly, among numerous other human rights. Following the first Liberian Civil War from 1989 to 1997 and the subsequent involvement of the United Nations and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Charles Taylor was elected as president of the nation. After a brief period of peace, 1999 marked the start of the Second Liberian Civil War, which lasted until 2003.

6. Although the civil conflict ended nearly 16 years ago, protecting human rights remains considerably challenging. The country continues to struggle with inadequate financial resources and corruption among others. It has been proven difficult to alter traditional attitudes and practices breaching human rights. As a result, misuse of power and corruption continue to exist across several government branches.
7. Following the 2010 Review (First Cycle), the Liberian government established an Independent National Commission of Human Rights, which shows that progress was made.
8. In the 2015 Review, further improvements were encouraged.¹ Recommendations included empowering the National Human Rights Commission by providing more investigative power. Furthermore, it was recommended that measures be put in place to ensure the safety and participation of civil society in the post conflict democracy, to enhance the rule of law.
9. Liberia was also called upon to decriminalise activities of human rights defenders and revoke all measures restricting their activities and rights.
10. In the 2015 Review, Liberia supported several recommendations,² such as those relating to the ratification of some international instruments, among which the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families etc.
11. However, Liberia simply noted recommendations relating to other international instruments relating to human rights, such as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
12. For the upcoming Review of 2020, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), IFEX and the Centre for Media Studies and Peace Building (CEMESP) would like to call particular attention to the following issues: access to justice; the ratification of international instruments, mainly those relating to human rights; Liberia's constitutional and legal framework, which includes the remaining existence of restricting libel and defamation laws; freedom of expression and freedom of assembly violations.

¹ International Service for Human Rights (ISHR). The Situation of Human Rights Defenders: Liberia (UPR Briefing Paper), September 2014.

<http://www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/article/files/liberia.pdf>

² Responses to the Recommendations, Liberia Review in the Working Group: 4 May 2015. Adoption in the Plenary: 25 September 2015.

https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/liberia/session_22_-_may_2015/recommendations_and_pledges_liberia_2015.pdf

Access to Justice

13. Following the commitment of the Liberian delegation as expressed in the 2015 review, progress was made with regard to the reform of the justice system, enhancing the justice system and strengthening access to justice, particularly via the establishment of the regional hubs for justice and security.

Constitutional Framework and The Ratification Of International Instruments

14. Under the Constitution of Liberia, international agreements must be ratified by the national legislature in order to take effect.³ As a result, Liberia can accede to international treaties and protocols, yet it does not take responsibility for the effectiveness of the agreements. Meanwhile, domestic laws can remain in place, breaching human rights as enshrined in international instruments, regardless of whether Liberia has acceded to these instruments or not.
15. During the 2015 Review, recommendations⁴ were made with regard to the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR),⁵ which contains several rights that pertain to the freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. Namely, the right to self-determination as guaranteed by Article 1 prescribes the right to freely determine one's political status. Determining one's political status naturally involves the ability to express one's political opinion. Furthermore, the ICESCR also guarantees the freedom to form and join trade unions, which is a form of freedom of assembly.
16. If Liberia were to ratify the Optional Protocol to the ICESCR, citizens whose rights under the Covenant have been violated could bring their complaint before the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) in the event that domestic remedies are not available to them.
17. For the effectiveness of the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Covenant, we strongly urge Liberia to ratify the Optional Protocol.
18. Another important international instrument, which Liberia was recommended to ratify is the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which would bring the national legislation in conformity with the Protocol. This would allow for the abolition of the death penalty, which has been a point of controversy for over a decade since its reintroduction in 2008. Liberia's amended Penal Code of 2008 allows for the imposition of the death penalty by hanging for classified crimes, such as armed robbery, terrorism and hijacking.⁶

³ Constitution of the Republic of Liberia, Article. 34(iii)(b), January 6, 1986.

⁴ Responses to the Recommendations, Liberia Review in the Working Group: 4 May 2015. Adoption in the Plenary: 25 September 2015.

https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/liberia/session_22_-_may_2015/recommendations_and_pledges_liberia_2015.pdf

⁵ United Nations General Assembly (1966). International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cescr.pdf>

⁶ Liberia Act to Amend the New Penal Law of 1976, Jul. 22, 2008.

19. While these are crimes, the effect of this is worrying looking at recent happenings in other West African countries where extremism and fundamentalism exists. In such countries, journalists have been charged with terrorism offences as a result of their work on these fundamentalists and extremists.⁷
20. Indeed in Liberia itself, a journalist was charged with “Terrorist Threat, Menacing, and Criminal Coercion” in 2014.⁸
21. There is, therefore, the likelihood that a journalist or activist could be charged with terrorism for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Such individuals in such circumstances could potentially be facing a death sentence.

Political Speech, Treason And Capital Punishment

22. Whereas treason was punishable by death under the earlier Liberian Penal Law of 1976,⁹ it was not incorporated in the amended Penal Code of 2008 as a capital offence. Yet, the status of some provisions under the old Penal Law that were not reintroduced in the Penal Law of 2008, remain ambiguous.
23. Namely, in 2009, 2010 and 2013 the Liberian courts sentenced persons to death who were found to have committed murder, in spite of the fact that murder is one of the offences that was not reintroduced as a capital offence in the 2008 Penal Code. In practice, the same could happen with regard to treason. This could pose a grave threat to the extent to which persons can enjoy free speech, especially when it comes to political speech against the ruling government. Political speech could be regarded as rebellion against the state and could therefore amount to treason.
24. Since Liberia’s judiciary has sentenced persons to death for a crime that was not reintroduced under the 2008 Penal Code as a capital offence, this could be possible for acts of treason originating in free speech.
25. Although no executions have been carried out since 2000, it is estimated that there are currently 14 persons under the sentence of death. Liberia has claimed there were 9 people on death row in 2015. Yet, other reports suggested that 16 people were sentenced to death.¹⁰
26. Liberia has acceded to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 2005.¹¹ However, it never ratified the Protocol at

⁷ Security Agency Stalls Legal Process in the Case of Journalist Detained for 2 Years. Media Foundation for West Africa, August 3, 2018, <http://www.mfwa.org/issues-in-focus/security-agency-stalls-legal-process-in-the-case-of-journalist-detained-for-2-years/>

⁸ Liberia Alert: Journalist arrested, charged with Terrorism. March 23, 2014, <http://www.mfwa.org/liberia-alert-journalist-arrested-charged-with-terrorism/>

⁹ Liberia’s Penal Law of 197 - Title 26 - Liberian Code of Laws Revised. <http://www.icla.up.ac.za/images/un/use-of-force/africa/Liberia/Penal%20Code%20Liberia%201978.pdf>

¹⁰ Death Penalty Database: Liberia. Cornell Center on the Death Penalty Worldwide. Accessed 11 September 2019. <https://www.deathpenaltyworldwide.org/country-search-post.cfm?country=Liberia>

¹¹ Status, Declarations, and Reservations, Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Aiming at the Abolition of the Death Penalty, 1642 U.N.T.S. 414, 1 December 1989. Accessed 11 September 2019.

the domestic level. Per the Liberian Constitution¹² the ratification of the Protocol would require the national legislature to ratify the international agreement in order for it to become effective.

27. Relying on the rationale that the Second Optional Protocol had not yet been ratified by the legislature and was therefore not yet legally binding, the Liberian Penal Law was amended in 2008, leading to a reintroduction of the death penalty.¹³
28. In response to the reintroduction of the death penalty in 2008, recommendations were made to Liberia during the First Cycle review in 2010 regarding the abolition of the death penalty by amending its Constitution. Although the government of Liberia had planned to further examine and consider these recommendations, it has ultimately refused to support the recommendations thereto,¹⁴ resulting in a violation of the right to life as enshrined in a variety of international legal instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹⁵ Recommendations made during the Second Cycle review in 2015 again addressed the issue, yet without a satisfying result.¹⁶
29. The reintroduction of the death penalty has also been condemned by the Civil Society Human Rights Advocacy Platform of Liberia (CSO-HRAPL), which addressed the issue once again in March 2018 with its recommendations as part of a shadow report to the UN Human Rights Committee.¹⁷

State of Freedom of Expression

30. Article 15 of the Liberian Constitution protects freedom of opinion and expression, including press freedom and access to information.
31. Liberia adopted the Right to Information Law in 2010, which marked an important step towards a society characterised by freedom of expression and free media. However, the country has seen a number of challenges.
32. Until recently, defamation, libel, were also criminalised under the Liberian Penal Law of 1978.

https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtsg_no=IV-12&chapter=4&lang=en

¹² Constitution of the Republic of Liberia. Art. 34(f), Jan. 6, 1986.

¹³ Cllr. Phillip A. Z. Banks, III, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Republic of Liberia, Memorandum Opinion, DPW Doc. No. Memo-1. 1 September 2008.

¹⁴ Responses to the Recommendations, Liberia Review in the Working Group: 1 November 2010. Adoption in the Plenary: 1 March 2011.

https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/liberia/session_9_-_november_2010/recommendationstoliberia2011.pdf

¹⁵ United National General Assembly (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Retrieved 11 September 2019.

https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

¹⁶ Responses to the Recommendations, Liberia Review in the Working Group: 4 May 2015. Adoption in the Plenary: 25 September 2015.

https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/liberia/session_22_-_may_2015/recommendations_and_pledges_liberia_2015.pdf

¹⁷ CSO Condemns Liberia's Reintroduction of Death Penalty in Shadow Report, Front Page Africa (FPA), 6 June 2018.

<https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/cso-condemns-liberias-reintroduction-of-death-penalty-in-shadow-report/>

33. In May 2018, President George Weah introduced a Bill aimed at decriminalising libel. On February 7, 2019, the Senate voted unanimously to scrap the repressive sections of Liberia's penal code.
34. President Weah subsequently on February 28, 2019, signed into Law the Bill to amend Sections 11:11, 11.12 and 11.14 of the Penal Law of 1978, which prescribed prison terms for a range of speech offenses. The Law amended Chapter 11 of the Penal law repealing Sections 11.11 on criminal libel against the President, sedition and criminal malevolence.¹⁸

On-going violations of freedom of expression and opinion

35. Over the period of 2014-2019, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), IFEX and Centre for Media Studies and Peace Building have documented 31 occasions where journalists' rights were violated, including arbitrary arrests and detention and physical attacks and death threats.¹⁹
36. Perpetrators of these violations were mainly state security agents (particularly police), state officials, political party activists and other individuals.²⁰

Excessive Fines and Imprisonment for Defamation

37. The media in Liberia has witnessed a period of excessive fines meted out to it in cases of defamation filed them by individuals who are mostly politicians and powerful figures.
38. The country's courts often impose crippling fines and excessive prison sentences to journalist who are unable to pay the fines, leading to widespread self-censorship and severe economic difficulties for journalists and media in the country.
39. While seeking remedy for media infractions in court is not a violation, the act of filing civil suits with outrageous compensatory demands have been weaponised by powerful people to cripple the media and censor critical voices.
40. Following the 5,000 years imprisonment of editor-in-chief of investigative newspaper FrontPage Africa (FPA), Rodney Sieh²¹ in 2013, Liberia was strongly criticised by national and international human rights organisations for its defamation laws restricting the freedom of expression. Sieh's fine and subsequently imprisonment was because he accused a former government minister Dr. J. Chris Toe of corruption.

¹⁸ MFWA Hails Repeal of Criminal Libel in Liberia, Media Foundation for West Africa, March 4, 2019 <http://www.mfwa.org/mfwa-hails-repeal-of-criminal-libel-law-in-liberia/>

¹⁹ State of Safety of Journalists Situation in Liberia: 2014-2019. Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), 8 June 2019. <http://www.mfwa.org/publication/state-of-safety-of-journalists-in-liberia-2014-2019/>

²⁰ State of Safety of Journalists Situation in Liberia: 2014-2019 (Full Report). Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), 2019. www.mfwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/State-of-safety-of-journalists-situation-in-Liberia-June-2019.pdf

²¹ Letter from Africa: Why I was sentenced to 5,000 years in jail. BBC, September 25, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-45607713>

41. The United Nations Human Rights Committee at the time had expressed its concern that imprisonment as a punishment for defamation is not in line with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which Liberia has acceded.
42. In March 2018, FrontPage Africa once again faced a civil lawsuit for advertisers announcement it published. On April 9, 2018 sheriffs of the Civil Law Court in Monrovia shutdown their offices and arrested some staff of the newspaper. ²² Seven members of staff were heard for about three hours before Judge Yamie Quiqui Gbeisay released them on US\$350,000 bail bond. The Judge also ordered the sheriff to impound properties, including vehicles, equipment and any other assets of FPA against the bond.
43. Civil defamation suits continue to feature in Liberia's freedom of expression landscape. In January 2019, Liberian lawmakers filed a US\$2 million lawsuit against Philibert Browne, and his newspaper *Hot Pepper*, over comments he made private radio station in December 2018. Browne in the remarks on the radio station said some former and current members of the House of Representatives were given various sums of money to induce them to approve the printing of some banknotes. ²³
44. In April 2019, Liberian Minister of State for Presidential Affairs, Nathaniel McGill sued journalists of a local radio station, Roots FM for US\$500,000 in a civil defamation suit."²⁴ The MFWA noted that the action had the potential of undermining Liberia's recent progress in scrapping its criminal libel laws.
45. These defamation cases can have grave implications for the exercise of freedom of expression by the media, activists and citizens.
46. Moreover, they contravene the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which stipulates "sanctions (related to defamation) shall never be so severe as to inhibit the right to freedom of expression, including by others."²⁵

Physical Attacks

47. Roots FM, known to be critical of the government was attacked twice within a period of ten days – on January 31st and on February 10th 2019.²⁶ Armed men invaded the radio

²² Newspaper Raided, Slapped with US\$ 1.8 Million Dollar Suit, MFWA, April 13, 2018 <http://www.mfwa.org/country-highlights/newspaper-raided-slapped-with-us-1-8-million-dollar-suit/>

²³ Parliamentarians Sue Journalist; Demand USD 2M Damages, MFWA, January 14, 2019, <http://www.mfwa.org/parliamentarians-slap-journalist-with-usd-2m-lawsuit/>

²⁴ Minister Demands US\$500,000, Shutdown of Radio Station in Defamation Suit. Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA). April 18, 2019. <http://www.mfwa.org/country-highlights/minister-demands-us500000-shutdown-of-radio-station-in-defamation-suit/>

²⁵ African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (2002). Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa, Principle XII. Accessed 12 September 2019. https://www.achpr.org/public/Document/file/English/draft_declaration_of_principles_on_freedom_of_expression_in_africa_eng.pdf

²⁶ Assaults Attack Roots FM for the Second Time in Ten Days. Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), 12 February 2019. <http://www.mfwa.org/country-highlights/assailants-attack-roots-fm-for-the-second-time-in-ten-days/>

station, broke the transmission cable and took broadcast equipment with them.²⁷ After the first attack, the station was unable to broadcast for thirteen hours.²⁸

48. In June 2019, sports journalist and editor for the *Inquirer* newspaper Cassell Webster, was assaulted by armed police officers.
49. In March 2018, independent and critical radio station Joy FM faced attacks by unknown assailants. It is believed that the attack was aimed at damaging the radio station and forcing it to self-censorship.²⁹
50. On February 9 2018, a Member of Parliament Munah Pelham-Youngblood, verbally and physically assaulted Henry Karmo, a parliamentary correspondent of FrontPage Africa. The parliamentarian accused Karmo of publishing a hostile story about her.³⁰
51. In a suspected arson attack, a petrol bomb was thrown at the home of Smith Toby, a journalist with OK FM in the early hours of October 18, 2017. Fortunately, the device failed to explode.³¹
52. In October 2016, Philipbert Browne, the publisher of Liberia's *Hot Pepper* newspaper, was arrested for publishing an article in which he alleged that a lawmaker had raped a teenage girl. He was charged and imprisoned for libel.³²
53. In May 2016, journalist Wremongar Joe working for radio station Prime FM was beaten for refusing to delete a video. The video contained footage of a lawmaker arguing with spectators during a football match. The three men who beat the journalist had claimed to be working for the lawmaker, which was, however, denied at a later stage.³³

Hostility of Government and State Actors towards Media

54. Liberia's media landscape has also witnessed threats and acts of intimidations calculated to instill fear in journalists who are deemed critical of government, state officials and other powerful figures with the ultimate aim of causing the media to self-censor.

²⁷ Harmon, William Q., 'Armed Men' Attack Roots FM. The Daily Observer, 1 February 2019.

<https://www.liberianobserver.com/news/armed-men-attack-roots-fm/>

²⁸ Liberian radio station transmitter attacked twice in 10 days, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 15 February 2019.

<https://cpj.org/2019/02/liberian-radio-station-targeted-twice-in-10-days.php>

²⁹ Liberian Authorities Must Act to End Recent Spate of Attacks on Radio Stations, Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), 8 March 2019.

<http://www.mfwa.org/issues-in-focus/liberian-authorities-must-act-to-end-recent-spate-of-attacks-on-radio-stations/>

³⁰ MFWA Condemns Lawmaker's Attack on Parliamentary Correspondent, Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), 16 February 2018.

<http://www.mfwa.org/country-highlights/mfwa-condemns-lawmakers-attack-on-parliamentary-correspondent/>

³¹ Liberian Journalist Targeted by Arsonist, MFWA, October 24, 2017 <http://www.mfwa.org/liberian-journalist-targeted-by-arsonist/>

³² Parliamentarians Sue Journalist; Demand USD 2M Damages, MFWA, January 14, 2019

<http://www.mfwa.org/parliamentarians-slap-journalist-with-usd-2m-lawsuit/>

³³ Liberian journalist beaten for refusing to delete video, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 17 May 2016.

<https://cpj.org/2016/05/liberian-journalist-assaulted-for-covering-lawmake.php>

55. Following the swearing into office of President George Weah, a number of violations have been recorded in that regard, including those that have been perpetuated by the President and other government/state officials.
56. At a press conference on March 22, 2018, President Weah embarrassed BBC correspondent, Jonathan Paye-Layleh and put his life in danger. Responding to a question from Paye-Layleh about the Truth and Reconciliation agenda of his administration, President Weah, accused the journalist of working against his efforts to promote human rights, from the civil-war days.³⁴ Paye-Layleh later received death threats from individuals suspected to be linked to the government. He later fled the country for fear of his life.
57. In another incident, the Liberian Parliament on February 21, 2019, revoked the accreditation of journalists for their “repetitive” coverage of proceedings of Parliament. The notice dated February 21, 2019 called on the respective media outlets to take note of the revocation of the accreditations of their parliamentary correspondents and to send their replacements. It added that the move was in line with “best practice that is intended to enhance aggressive media service of your (the media’s) reportage to the public.”
58. To enforce the decision, 18 out of 27 accredited journalists were barred from covering the Lower House on February 21, 2019 by the deputy sergeant at-arms, who cited lack of space. Many believed the directive was particularly targeted at journalists who had been critical in their reportage against the House.³⁵
59. On March 29, 2018, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Bhofal Chambers, called armed guards to drive away two journalists Nathaniel Daygbor of the *New Dawn* Newspaper, and fellow journalists, Jackson Clay and Austin Kiawah who had to seek clarification from the Speaker following a public controversy surrounding his academic credentials.

Media Shutdowns

60. In July 2016, Liberia Telecommunications Authority shutdown the privately owned radio station Voice FM. The regulatory body claimed the shutdown was to be justified on the grounds that the station had failed to register properly as a commercial station, and that it had not paid the required fees and taxes.³⁶ Many however believe it was an

³⁴ Liberia’s Democratic Gains Threatened as Government, Media Go on Collision Course, MFWA, April 11, 2018, <http://www.mfwa.org/issues-in-focus/liberias-democratic-gains-threatened-as-government-media-go-on-collision-course/>

³⁵ Parliament Orders Media Houses to Replace ‘Boring’ Parliamentary Correspondents. Media Foundation for West Africa, February 22, 2019, <http://www.mfwa.org/country-highlights/parliament-orders-media-houses-to-replace-boring-parliamentary-correspondents/>

³⁶ Liberia forces critical radio station Voice FM to stop broadcasting, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 7 July 2016. <https://cpj.org/2016/07/liberia-forces-critical-radio-station-voice-fm-to-.php>

attempt to silence the radio station, which is very critical of the George Weah administration.

Digital Rights

61. On June 7, 2019, the Liberian government led by President George Weah, joined the growing list of African governments who violate the online rights of their citizens by turning off access to the internet/social media for 12 hours to quell anti-government protests.
62. The government ordered Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in the country to block social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and messaging WhatsApp on mobile devices. That move cut off an estimated 4,028,418 Facebook subscribers in the country from accessing the social networking site.

Recommendations

The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), the Centre for Media Studies and Peace Building (CEMESP) and IFEX appeal to the UPR Working Group to encourage the government of Liberia to fulfil its obligations under international law to protect human rights and specifically the right to freedom of expression, by observing the following recommendations:

The ratification of international instruments

63. Sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
64. Ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).
65. Continue the ratification of international instruments relating to human rights and more specifically the freedom of expression.

Constitutional and legal framework

66. Repeal the amended Penal Law of 2008 reintroducing capital punishment, and bring its legislation in line with its international obligations. The state should abide by various international legal instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)³⁷ and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by abolishing the death penalty.³⁸

³⁷ United Nations General Assembly (1966). International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Retrieved 11 September 2019.

<https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%20999/volume-999-i-14668-english.pdf>

³⁸ United National General Assembly (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Retrieved 11 September 2019. https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

67. Repeal the pieces of legislation that are currently still in place which have negative implications for the freedom of expression and opinion, specifically for media practice.
68. Remove obstacles to sustainably functioning and pluralistic media.
69. Since the progress Liberia has made by repealing its criminal libel laws, the freedom of expression in Liberia has met a number of threatening challenges such as the defamation suit of Roots FM. The Liberian government is therefore recommended to uphold the progress made, and for Minister McGill to withdraw the suit against Roots FM.

Safety of journalists

70. Take positive measures such as a National Mechanism on Safety of Journalists to promote and protect the safety of journalists and fight impunity for crimes against journalists.
71. Create mechanisms to monitor and report on journalists' safety.
72. End impunity for attacks against journalists by conducting thorough investigations on violations against media including the recent attacks on Roots FM and Joy FM.
73. Investigate death threats against journalists and protect the targets of such threats.
74. Urge security agencies to respect the freedom of speech of media professionals, as well the right to freedom of expression and assembly of citizens during demonstrations and other gatherings.
75. Hold security forces accountable for freedom of expression and freedom of assembly abuses through internal and external mechanisms, through an independent body.
76. Cease public denigration of journalists in media, which has the tendency to erode public confidence in, and support for the media.

Freedom of speech offline and online

77. Protect and ensure citizen's rights to freedom of expression online by desisting from shutting down the internet.
78. Sensitise security forces on respecting and protecting the freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly rights.