Broadcasting in Nigeria: The Politics of Licence Allocation

The clamour for the deregulation of the broadcast media in Nigeria began during the colonial era when the nationalists pressured the British Government to allow the indigenous participation in the affairs of State-controlled broadcasting stations in the country.

The Nigerian Government was soon to find out why the colonial masters held on tight to the broadcast media and over 30 years after independence, there is still the reluctance to allow a full-blown deregulation.

The Government’s response in 1992 to the demand for private participation in the ownership and running of the broadcast media was a great relief. But five years after the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Decree came into force, the Government is not as open as expected in the issuance of license to applicants.

The NBC has screened over 321 applications, but only 33 stations have commenced radio, television and satellite transmissions nationwide, satellite television re-distribution takes the highest number with 21 approved licences; the television transmission stations have risen to 10 while the radio licences remain at two.

The greatest problem which the NBC has is that the applications it is receiving are mostly coming from one part of the country.

For the purpose of effective monitoring of broadcast stations in Nigeria, and for even distribution of broadcast stations, the NBC carved the country into seven zones.

They include, Abuja, Benin, Jos, Kano, Lagos, Maiduguri and Umuahia.

The worry within the NBC is that radio and television broadcasting interest in flowing more from the southern parts of the country, a true replication of what obtains in the running of the independent newspapers in the country.

As at June 8, 1995, applications for radio licences were distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Number of Applications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abuja</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jos</td>
<td>three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagos</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Applications for open television licences were distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Number of Applications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abuja</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jos</td>
<td>two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kano</td>
<td>Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagos</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umuahia</td>
<td>Nine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maiduguri</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Applications for television satellite re-transmission came from the seven zones as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Number of Applications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abuja</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jos</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kano</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagos</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umuahia</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maiduguri</td>
<td>seven</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of licences approved has equally reflected, the patterns displayed above. Apart from Desmims Broadcasting Station in Kaduna, the nine other television stations operating in Nigeria are concentrated in Benin, Lagos, Ibadan and Obosi, all in southern Nigeria. The two radio station are located in Lagos and Obosi.

Beyond the factor of imbalance in the request and approvals so far given for the operation of broadcast stations, there is the feeling that the unstable political environment has been chiefly responsible for the refusal of the Government to approve more licences, particularly for radio operation.

As at June 8 1995, 64 requests had reached the NBC for radio licences. So far, only two have been approved. Besides, the taint of religion or outright requests for licences for religious broadcast stations and the possibility of some other applicants ending up with political stations, the most outstanding factor militating against the approval of more radio licences is the radical use to which radio stations could be applied.

The history of changes of Governments by military coups in Nigeria which normally revolve around the use of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria linked up to the other state government stations in the country is a constant source of worry.

It is believed that the present government is exercising caution in giving approvals for more private radios because of the potentials of the radio being used negatively in the course of time.

NBC Director-General, Dr. Tom Adaba said of the radio’s potentials; “The broadcast media have been central in ushering in one civilian or military government after another. They have also been effectively used to abort coups and stabilize government. They have undoubtedly has a fair share in shaping the political destiny of this country”

Agitators for more radio licences have however argued that the restriction of station to the airwaves in the zones in which they operate has effectively removed the fear of the private station being used for such negative purposes.

Ray Power 100 FM, according to the NBC regulations, can only relay its signals to Lagos, Ogun, Oyo and Osun States. The other radio station, Minaj Systems-Radio, Obosi, also has its signals restricted to areas in the eastern states.
Besides the fact that these signals restrictions constitute a cog in the wheel of information flow, and are in fact, a breach of the right to disseminate information, they defeat the argument that more licences could pose danger to the government in power.

Viewed from other side, the restriction on the signals of the only two existing radio stations should assist a broader deregulation to the extent that hundreds of radio licences should have been issued in the last five years.

**Broadcasting in Nigeria: Historical Development**

For over 50 years prior to the promulgation of the National Broadcasting Commission Decree in 1992, the ownership and operation of broadcasting stations in Nigeria remained in the hands of Government.

No private ownership of radio and television broadcasting channels was permitted.

The ban was laid out in section 36(2) of the 1979 Nigerian Constitution thus:

“Every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions, provided that no person other than the Government of the Federation or of a state or any other person or body authorized by the President, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces shall own or operate a television or wireless broadcasting station for any purpose whatsoever.”

Although the above provision implied a qualified permission for the private ownership of the electronic media, the enabling legal framework for the actualization of the provision did not come until 1992 when the General Ibrahim Babangida’s regime enacted the National Broadcasting Commission Decree No. 38, opening up the gateway for the participation of private hands in the ownership and running of radio and television stations.

**The Era of Government Monopoly**

The era of Government sole ownership of the broadcast media dates back to the colonial period when deliberate efforts were made to bar the nationalist movement from the broadcasting arena.

The Colonial Government launched the first known broadcasting system in Nigeria, the Rediffusion Broadcasting System (RDS), relayed through the Rediffusion Box on December 1, 1935. The Success of this pioneer effort led to its transformation into the Nigerian Broadcasting System (NBS) in 1952 employing the obsolete RCA71/4KV shortwave Frequency Normandy Beachhead Mobile Transmitter.

Despite the campaign mounted by the nationalists for their participation in the ownership of the broadcast media, the colonialists, realizing the potency of broadcasting, prevented a deregulation.

Upon independence in 1960, the Nigerian Government continued the monopoly of ownership and control of the electronic media inherited from the colonial Government.

The emergent regional governments in the newly independent nation soon established their own broadcasting organizations, and with the creation of the states, the priority area remained the setting up of a television and radio stations for the propagation of government policies and programmes.

**Characteristics of Government Owned Channels**

The tradition of the Government-owned broadcast media revolves around the sole objective of keeping the citizenry informed of government activities and programmes and the exclusion of critical viewpoints.

The major channels, the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) employ the advantage of their network services to reach out to the people with the day-to-day activities of the government officials.

Many state-owned radio and television stations have followed this traditional pattern in content relays. The general character of these media houses is a monolithic flow of information from Government to the people, with little or no avenue created for feedbacks.
The programmes structure also suffer acutely from the lack of adequate independent production.
This has made it largely impossible for the various government-owned media to be financially self-dependent. The result is the retention of a civil service pay structure for staff, with the consequent low motivation; lack of modern equipment and the absence of quality programmes for the viewers and listeners.
With a largely lopsided programme content, there is hardly room for participatory broadcasting. Under these circumstances the advantage of broadcasting in stimulation political and community development, among the rural populace is hardly noticeable.

Emergence of Independent Broadcasting Channels
The promulgation of Decree 38 of 1992 by the Babangida regime opened a fresh chapter in the development of broadcasting in Nigeria.
The Decree set up the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) vested with powers to screen applications from interested persons or groups wishing to own and operate radio and/or television stations.
The enthusiasm with which Nigerians greeted the deregulation can be measured by the number of applications which flooded the NBC office from across the country for broadcast licences.
Although the NBC declined to disclose the actual number of applicants since 1992, Media Rights Monitor learnt that several hundreds of applications were received by the NBC. For instance, as at June 8, 1995 a total number of 321 applicants sought licences to operate radio, television and cable redistribution services from the NBC.
A breakdown of the number shows that 64 asked for radio licences, 57 for television licences and 198 applications were received for satellite redistribution licences.
However, on June 30, 1993, the first batch of private broadcast applicants were given operational licences.
There were 27 licences, made up of 14 for the operation of television stations and 13 for satellite television redistribution or retransmission.
In August 1994, the first radio licence was given to DAAR Communications Limited. The company soon on September 1, began an FM station with the name Ray Power 100 FM, in Lagos.
Another radio station Minaj Systems Radio was subsequently licenced to operate in Obosi, Anambra State. No fewer than 10 private television stations are now in operation throughout the country.
The other television stations are Minaj Systems TV, Obosi, Independent Television (ITV), Benin; Galaxy Pictures, Ibadan; and Desmims Broadcasts Nigeria Limited (Desmims) in Kaduna.
A total of 27 outlets now have the permission to operate cable satellite redistribution stations in Nigeria.
The only radio stations licenced to operate – Ray Power 100 FM, Lagos and Minaj System Radio, Obosi are already on air.
The NBC has equally licenced two operators to broadcast on satellite television stations. One of the satellite stations, Africa Independent Television, which is already on air locally, are promised go on international airwaves soon. The other by Minaj Systems whose local television channel is already on air and has commenced its satellite test transmission from Obosi, Anambra State.

Characteristics of Private Broadcasting Media
Since the emergence of private broadcasting in Nigeria, the public has, for the first time since independence, been provided with array of alternatives of the tube and the airwaves.
Residents of the south west zone covering Lagos, Ogun, Oyo and Osun States, for instance, now have at least six private television stations to choose from. Ray Power 100FM runs a non-stop, round-the-clock radio broadcast schedule in Lagos. So does AIT.

Also introduced on the private radio and some of the television stations are public oriented discussion programmes that involve the participation of listeners/viewers.

There is a gradual improvement on the level of public discourse of issues which before now, could not have been discussed so openly on the Government owned channels.

The competition which has accordingly ensued has led to the introduction of quality programming with the Government stations now waking up to emerging fresh challenges.

The Director-General of the NBC, Dr. Tom Adaba, said of the new competition.

“Deregulation of Broadcasting in Nigeria has set in motion a genuine competition for supremacy and survival of the fittest syndrome among old as well as new operators in the field. This is a welcome phenomenon, which I believe has the potential of eliciting the best output from broadcasting houses nationwide.”

The competition has widened the public flow of information as the right to receive and impart information is flourishing more than ever before.

But there is still the lack of grass root participation required in a pluralistic society like Nigeria. The two radio stations on air are essentially commercial broadcast stations which place emphasis on survival rather than political and community development broadcasting.

But even in the face of the huge financial outlay for the continued existence of the private radio and television stations they have proved that there is a great potential in private broadcasting in Nigeria.

Broadcast Censorship

Broadcast censorship in Nigeria rarely takes a direct form. This is to the extent that news and information materials do not have to go through the hands of official censors before they are relayed in the airwaves.

But sufficient rules and legal restrictions have been placed on the corridors of broadcast houses to prevent the relay of certain news items or commercialise certain aspects of broadcasting in Nigeria. There is also the required strict adherence to the percentage of local and foreign information and programming contents.

In January this year, four licences for the operation of cable-television redistribution stations were suspended for not meeting the NBC’s 20 per cent local content requirements. The suspended operators are Desmims Broadcast Limited, Sokoto and MG Communications Limited in Kano, Sokoto and Abuja.

Earlier in November 1996, a majority of the operators of the satellite television redistribution licences were fined heavily by the Government for failing to meet the local content requirement. While three of the operators were fined N50,000 each, others except six operators, were fined N100,000 each for the same alleged local content inadequacy.

So far, only the six operators that passed the NBC’s local content test are allowed the source and run adverts on their channels.

The NBC also said recently that it “will soon announce further sanctions for stations which have paid the fines but failed to increase local contents to twenty per cent.” Similarly, the NBC requires operators of the open television broadcast and radio licences to have 60 per cent local content.

All the private broadcast stations in Nigeria therefore face severe sanctions, including a possible suspension or outright revocation of licences, for failure in this regard.

Also in 1996, the operational licences given to nine broadcast companies were withdrawn by the NBC for not meeting the deadline to begin operations. Although the NBC insists that the withdrawal of the licences was not politically motivated, the inclusion of the licence given to former President, General Ibrahim Babangida’s Triple Heritage on the list of the withdrawn licences raised questions as to the real motive for the withdrawal of the licences.
The National Broadcasting Commission Decree: Undermining Independent Broadcasting

By Tunde Fagbohunlu

The National Broadcasting Commission Decree No. 38 of 1992 legally terminated 32 years of government monopoly of broadcasting in independent Nigeria. The outlawing of private or independent broadcasting [widely regarded as an encroachment on the right to receive and impart information] has been replaced by a regime which allows the licensing of private broadcasters.

Yet, it is practically impossible to assert that the Decree has truly liberalized broadcasting law in Nigeria, for the regulatory structures and processes established by the Decree not only vest wide and subjective powers in the Head of the ruling Military Government in relation to the licensing process itself, but also severely undermine the independence of the so called “independent broadcasters”.

This will be borne out by the following analysis of the provisions of the Decree relating to the licensing process itself and the regulation of licensed broadcasting establishments.

The provisions of the Decree which impact on the concept of pluralism in broadcasting [such as the provisions on cross-media ownership] will also be appraised.

The Licensing Process

Section 1 of the Decree establishes a National Broadcasting Commission which is vested with the power to “receive, process and consider applications for ownership of radio and television stations, including cable television services, direct satellite broadcast and other medium of broadcasting” [Section 2(1)(b)].

Although section 2(1)(b) as well as sections 9(2) and 9(3) of the Decree suggest that the grant of licenses is a function exercised by the Commission, it is clear that the ultimate decision as to who would be granted a broadcasting license is made by the head of the ruling military government, for section 2(1)(c) of the Decree restricts the function of the commission [vis-à-vis the granting of licenses] to merely “recommending applications through the Minister of Information] to the President Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces for the grant of radio and television licences”.

The decision to grant a broadcasting license is a purely subjective one. Although section 9(1) and (2) of the Decree set out objective criteria [such as the corporate status and ownership of the applicant for a broadcasting licence, non-affiliation with any foreign interest, compliance with the objectives of the National Mass Communication Policy, the availability of broadcast frequencies, etc.

Section 9(3) of the Decree provides that compliance with such objective criteria “shall not entitle an applicant to the grant of a licence”.

The Decree thus affords latitude for a licensing decision to be motivated by purely political consideration, and stands in sharp contrast to the licensing process in other African countries such as South Africa, where the independent Broadcasting Authority [the equivalent to
the Nigerian Commission] allocates frequencies only after public hearings, and based on
publicly available criteria.

**Regulation of Licensed Establishments**

Establishments licensed to broadcast under the Decree are subject to strict monitoring
and control by the Commission in relation to purely technical as well as editorial matters.

Thus, the Commission is empowered to approve the transmitter power, the location of
stations and areas of coverage of a licensed establishment, as well as to regulate the types of
broadcast equipment to be used by it.

Operators of licensed stations are obliged to make their broadcast facilities [including
equipment and station log book] available for inspection by the inspectorate staff of the
Commission.

With regard to editorial matters, it is clear that the Commission exercises some form of
control over the programming of licensed establishments since, under the third schedule to the
Decree [which sets out the standard terms on which a broadcasting license is granted], a licence
must contain a schedule of proposed programmes over a given period of time, accompanied by a
synopsis of each of the programme plans.

The editorial independence of licensed establishments is further undermined by section 9(1)(e) of the Decree which obliges operators of licensed stations to ensure that such stations are
suited “to promote national interest, unity and cohesion”.

The implication of this provision [and the effect it has had in practice] is to proclude
licensed stations from featuring, say, stories concerning the plight of ethnic minorities such as
the Ogoni, a Nigerian ethnic minority tribe which has been vocal in its demand for a better deal
from the Federal Government and the oil multinationals regarding the environmental
degradation of their communities, since such stories are likely to be considered by the
government as promoting ethnicity or disaffection. As Richard Carver points out, “there should
be no editorial pages in favour of “good news” journalism… an understandable desire to
promote reconciliation can quickly spill over into the suppression of ‘divisive’ points of view”
[“Who Rules the Airwaves? Broadcasting in Africa” Publication of Article 19 and Index on
Censorship, page 10].

The overall effect of various provisions of the Decree is that the controls exercised by the
Commission in respect of licensed establishments may, and invariably are dictated by the
interests and policies of the ruling military government.

Thus, not only are all the members of the Commission appointed by the head of the
ruling military government, but the Decree also specially provides that the Minister of
Information may give the Commission directives of a general character relating generally to
particular matters with regard to the exercise of its functions, and it is the duty of the
Commission to comply with such directives [section 6 of the Decree].

One such matter in respect of which the Commission is obliged to comply with
directives given by the Minister of Information would apparently be in respect of the
Commission’s disciplinary powers over “erring” broadcasters.

By section 2(1)(n) of the Decree, the Commission is empowered to apply sanctions
[including revocation of licences of stations which do not operate in accordance with “the public
interests]

Since the ruling military government invariably perceives its interest as being
synonymous with “the public interest”, sanctions are likely to be applied for purely political
considerations.

**Pluralism under the Decree**

In an apparent effort to strike a balance between political and religious interests, Section
10 of the Decree precludes the grant of broadcasting licences to religious organizations and
political parties.
This however operates against the background of a public broadcasting system [the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN)] which is virtually controlled by the ruling military government and which traditionally advances the political interests of that government. In such context, it is arguable that the concept of pluralism in broadcasting will be better advanced by a system of equitable allocation of frequencies to political interests, rather than one which completely outlaws political proprietorship of broadcasting facilities, while giving the ruling government the latitude to advance its own political interests through the public broadcasting system.

The provisions of the Decree aimed at curbing monopolies in broadcasting are glaringly inadequate. There is no express prohibition of cross-media ownerships [except that a person may not have controlling shares in more than two television stations].

Conclusion

The degree of control exercised by the ruling government [through the proxy of the National Broadcasting Commission] with regard to the licensing and regulation of independent broadcasting establishments, justifies the conclusion that the Decree does very little, in practical terms, to provide for the exercise of truly independent broadcasters.

“Innocent 4” Spend Second Year In Jail

Last month marked the end of the second year in prison for four Nigerian journalists convicted in 1995 by a Special military tribunal which tried them on treason charges over stories published by their news magazines.

Known as the “Innocent Four”, the journalists are serving 15-years jail terms each in different prisons across Nigeria following their conviction by the tribunal on charges of “accessory after the fact to treason” for writing stories touching on an alleged coup plot to topple the military government of General Sani Abacha in March 1995.

The journalists are Chris Anyanwu publisher and editor-in-chief of *The Sunday Magazine* (*TSM*); Kunle Ajibade, editor of *TheNews Magazine*; George Mbah, assistant editor of *Tell Magazine*; and Ben Charles Obi, editor of *Weekend Classique* magazine.

Their secret trials before the military tribunal headed by Brigadier General Patrick Aziza, breached all international standards of fair trials including guarantees of the right to be represented by lawyers of one’s choice, trial by a competent, independent and impartial court, access to adequate time and facilities for the preparation of a defence and the right of appeal to a higher and independent judicial body.

Anyanwu is currently incarcerated at Gombe prison (about 1,200 kilometres from Lagos); Ajibade is at Makurdi (887 kilometres away); Mbah is held in Biu prison (about 1,500 kilometres from Lagos) while Charles Obi is at Agodi prison in Ibadan (141 kilometres away).

Anyanwu was first arrested on March 15, 1995 after TSM reported the arrests of military officers over an alleged coup plot.

She was detained for eight days and released on March 23 only to be rearrested 11 days later on June 4.

Mbah was arrested on May 5, 1995; Obi on May 9 and Ajibade on May 23.

They are all being held under harsh and punishing prison conditions. Although two members of their facilities may be allowed to visit them once monthly the high costs of families members of traveling hundred of kilometres from their homes to the places of their imprisonment and the stringent conditions laid down for the enjoyment of this privilege make its practically impossible on a monthly basis.

The Media Rights Agenda (MRA) is insisting on the unconditional release of the journalists, and has called on the International community to mount pressure on the military Government to immediately set them free.
Despite the huge global advancements in information technology, the radio remains the most important means of mass communication, especially in Africa and other developing regions of the world, where illiteracy and ignorance are predominant.

The potentials of broadcasting through radio and television, therefore, are formidable. Yet deregulation of broadcasting in Nigeria has been slow in coming. Five years after a legal framework was put in place for private broadcasting in Nigeria, the industry continues to be plagued by myriad of problems.

The Media Rights Monitor, in this edition opening our second volume, exposes some of the problems confronting private broadcasting in Nigeria.

After collating the materials for this report we were overwhelmed by the magnitude of the difficulties under which private broadcasting stations carry on operations.

We shall complete the publication of the full report, and offer recommendations on ways to improve the broadcasting situation in Nigeria in the next edition.

This edition also features other aspects of media rights monitoring, which we are certain will interest all who crave for a free press across the world, and spur them into some action aimed at putting pressure on the Nigerian Government to free detained journalists and abrogate harsh media laws.

We welcome comments and suggestions on the report in the hope that our joint contributions could lead to the evolution of a Nigerian society where media rights are accorded high respect.

Austin Agbonsuremi.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT
Media Rights Agenda (MRA) would like to acknowledge the support of various individuals and organisations in the production of this newsletter, and in particular, the European Human Rights Foundation which provided the grant for the publication.

Sad End Of A Journalist…Killed By June 12 Closures

BY SHOLA OSHUNKEYE

On June 12 1993, a presidential election was held in Nigeria. It was acclaimed to be the freest election ever in Nigeria. But the military Government annulled it setting in motion one of the most difficult periods in the lives of journalists in Nigeria.

In the heat of the crisis, over 18 newspaper publications and broadcasting houses were shut down.

Thousands of journalists and other media workers had their jobs terminated or suspended for long periods. At least six journalists died as direct consequences of the media clamp down. So many journalists are still suffering today for the role their media houses played in condemning the annulment of the June 12 elections. In this report, we are reproducing a story, first published by the Weekend Concord, one of the newspapers shut down over the June 12, 1993, elections, in its February 22, 1997 edition.

It is just one of the reported deaths traceable to the hazards of journalism practice in Nigeria.

On January 20, one of Nigeria’s finest production editors, Mr. Abudu Raufu Balogun, Ex-Production Editor of National Concord, slipped out of life’s center stage anonymously, keeping faith with his calling. He would have been 56 on July 11. Before he died he was the paper’s production consultant, a contract appointment spanning years.

He died of stroke, a product of hypertension he got during the 18-month closure of Concord. Balogun’s widow, Adedotun, 51, wept profusely as she recalled her husband’s dying days, praising the man’s total commitment to work but regretting that he died leaving nothing behind.

“He dedicated all his life to journalism,” she says. He would leave home around noon each day and won’t come back until between midnight and 1a.m. Sometimes, he used to sleep in the office. That has been his routine for years.

“I am happy he was appreciated as a sound professional, but there is little to show for his efforts. We have been living in this small room and parlor for years with our grown-up children. We have no house, no car. The gratuity he collected on retirement was finished on his sickness.

“The job took the whole of his life but gave back little. The only property we have is half a plot of land which we were praying to build at least two rooms on so that we can leave this small place. But the sickness took everything.”

The journey to death, began for Balogun during the five-month proscription clamped on Concord and Punch Newspapers in 1993 by the Babangida regime following the voiding of the June 12, 1993 presidential poll.

“Because we had nothing to support our family and nobody to turn to, he was worried and thinking seriously,” recalls Mrs. Adetoun Balogun, mother of the late production editor’s five children. At the same time, he became restless because he couldn’t just sit in a place without working.’ Before long his breathing became heavy and rapid. Later he began to feel pains in his chest. It was discovered that he had developed high blood pressure.”

The problem, however, fizzled out at the de-proscription of Concord Press in November 1993 at the onset of the Abacha regime. For the seven months Concord operated, Mrs. Balogun says her husband’s health returned to “normal”

The last straw, however came through the June 10, 1994, closure of Concord by Abacha regime. As the proscription persisted, Mr. Balogun’s health dipped.

“He never thought they could open Concord again”, the widow continues. He lost all hope.”
By the time Concord resumed in December, 1995, Mr. Balogun had become a shadow of his former agile and alert self. He was recalled as production consultant on a two-year contract. He was only strong enough to work till October 1996.

A month before, his health had taken a turn for the worse. He has become slow and drab and begun to lose his memory. “Many times”, continues the widow, tears in her eyes, “he would leave home, take Oshodi bus but wouldn’t know when he would land at Mile 2. Sometimes he may be coming from Mafoluku and end up at Ojuelegba.

“Like his last day in office. He left home at 12 noon and was heading for work. The bus took him to Mile. He didn’t know. It was when he regained his memory that he joined another bus to Ojuelegba.

From Ojuelegba, he took another bus to Palm Grove. From Palm Grove, he used the last N5 in his pocket to board a bus to his sister’s place at Pedro. It was his sister that finally brought him home that day. Because of this loss of memory, he could come home unusually early or late and we never knew it was a serious problem, a problem that could lead to death. Any time he came home unusually early or late and we asked him, he would say, ‘it is a long story, it’s a long story. It was when his sister brought him home that day that he confessed that he was losing his memory’.

Shortly after. Mr. Balogun began to lose control of his left leg and arm. One morning, at the premises of Gbagada General Hospital where his wife was taking him for treatment, he had stroke.

It would appear as if Mr. Balogun had a picture of heaven in his dying days. And he told his family so in parables. But they could not decode the parables. Not until he was gone.

“He began to behave unusually funny,” continues his widow, a food vendor at Bishop Owens Primary School in Bariga, Lagos. “Sometimes he would ask us to bring him to the parlour and play his favourite Ebenezer Obey’s record, Iwa Ika K’ope (Evil does not pay) for him. And he would dance and spray us.

“On December 31, he did a similar thing. He asked us to organise a similar party and he danced and danced. He sprayed his children over N200 and bought for almost everybody in the house.

“When we asked him what was it all about, he said he was just happy. That very soon, his children will hold a party for him, no matter how small and they will call musician. We never knew he was talking about his death.

“Any time we were with him, he tried to keep us happy. But the moment he was lonely, he would begin to cry as if regretting something.

I caught him weeping on some occasions and I asked him what was the matter, he would just tell me that he was just imagining how good it would be to get back to Concord and continue his work. Other, times, he would just hold me and begin to pray for me.

“January 13, 1997, was last time he spoke to us. He called all of us together prayed with us. After the prayers, he began to speak big, big English. But the last thing I heard him say was North or South, East or West…. he never completed it.”

On Monday January 20, the man died.

After working for New Nigerian, Newspapers in Ijora, Lagos, the late Balogun joined the staff of Concord Press of February 1, 1980 as a sub-editor. Two years later, he was voted as Concord’s High Flier (the most outstanding staff) for the year 1981. He got a cash award of N250.

Promoted deputy production editor in September 1985, he became the group night editor in February 1989. A workaholic with eyes for details, the late Balogun got another commendation in January 1990.

“I commend especially your willingness to assume responsibility whenever it arises.” Mr. Nsikak Essien the former editor of National concord wrote.

October 1992, late Balogun was appointed acting production editor. He became the substantive production editor seven months later. When Concord resume in December 1995, he was appointed production consultant on a two-year contract. Unfortunately he never lived to complete his tenure.
The current production editor to National Concord, Mr. Biodun Adelabu, described him as “a meticulous worker, a humble man who regarded all that worked with him as equal. With him, there was no master-servant relationship.

He was pains-taking and fiercely loyal. What pains me most about his death is that it is untimely even though only God knows when to call a man home. We will miss his brotherly love, advice and professional counseling.

To Mr. Moyo Adewuyi, National Concord’s chief sub-editor, the death of Mr. Balogun has robbed Nigerian Journalism of “a thorough professional with eyes for minutes details. He was a complete gentleman, loyal worker. He was my boss for 10 years and in all of those years he was a father figure.

“We had a very cordial working relationship and we always relied on his tremendous wealth of experience which he readily gave all of us. He was one of the best production men that lived. I learnt from him, humility as leader and the courage he exhibited in the face of adversity and total, unwavering devotion to the company.”

Excerpts From Interview With Mrs. Bunmi Ajibade, Wife Of Kunle Ajibade, Editor of The News Magazine Serving a 15-Year Jail Term

Question: How did you hear about Mr. Kunle Ajibade’s arrest?
Answer: One of my brothers-in-law informed me. Before he left home on Tuesday, May 2, 1995, he told me he was coming that very day. I didn’t see him on Tuesday. I didn’t see him on Wednesday. I didn’t even see him on Thursday. I wasn’t afraid because sometimes he would go like that, he would say “I am coming now, now” and pressure of work won’t let him return for days. So I just took it as one of those occasions. But this time, one of my brothers-in-law just came in and said “Where is my brother? I said he has gone to Lagos. He asked me “When did he say he is coming back? I said on Tuesday; I have not seen him since. So he just brought out the newspaper and showed me that he (Ajibade) has been arrested.

What were your immediate reactions on the news?
I wasn’t afraid. I didn’t panic. I just took it as it has been happening to others. I told myself that after some days, he would be released.

Were you able to see him before the trial?
No.

What is your feeling about his sentence?
Well, the first day I heard about it, I just laughed. I was even alone with Mayowa and I was pregnant. It was the last part of the news (Nigerian Television Authority – NTA News.) I looked at it and said shame to Abacha! So it won’t even be more than 15 years. But I know it is not real. My husband cannot spend 15 years in jail. For what? What has he done? But it is not news to me any more.

Since he was sentenced, do you have any information about where he is incarcerated?
Okay, all along I learnt he was in Lagos. That was before they were made to face the tribunal. Then, after he had been sentenced, his colleagues came here to inform me. I think what happened was that the second day, I heard the news, I went to those vendors where we do normally collect newspapers. I asked them for my papers, but they said, “Madam, you don’t have papers today”. I didn’t know that they were hiding it from me. They don’t want me to see the papers. So I went to work normally. When I got to school, I saw Vanguard. It was in Vanguard I read everything. I think about two or three days after, I learnt he had been transferred to Makurdi. Then later, his colleagues came here to informed me that they are now sure he was in Makurdi and that they have send people to find out what was happening to him over there.
Were you asked to provide any lawyer for him or to defend him?
Never

So he wasn’t allowed access to a lawyer?
I didn’t even know how the trial went.

Up till now?
Up till now. Nothing. I was just told they were made to face a tribunal. That was just it.

There has been no official information from them?
I just heard about it over the news.

When was the first time you saw him after the trial, after he had been sentenced?
It was a year after he left home. I think it was, if I can remember, it was June 1996.

Where?
In Makurdi. I went to see him with my children and my brother-in-law.

Can you just tell us about the circumstances of your visit?
I went in November 1995. I was pregnant. I went with Mayowa. We were not allowed to see him. So we came back.

In Makurdi?
Yes.

All the way from Ibadan to Markurdi?
Yes.

And they didn’t allow you to see him?
No. They didn’t allow me

After he had been sentenced?
Yes. The woman said that the order came that nobody should see him, that he should not be visited. So we came back. And I went back again in June 1996. I was allowed to see him. We got there, we were told by one of the warders who came to tell me that she wanted an application. After writing the application. I gave it back to the warder, the warder took it from me. Then later, the CSP (Chief Superintendent of Prisons) said that I should come in with my children and that my brother-in-law should not come in. They said he wasn’t allowed to see him, his brother. We just went to his officer, we sat down there. He said they should go and bring my husband. And one warder went to bring him. He came into the room with one of the officials. The man was sitting between us, listening to all…

In between?
Yes, in between us. I was sitting like this, the man was sitting between me and my husband. I didn’t even know I had to pass all the things I took to him through that man. I just gave them to my husband straight. Because I took some pictures along which I intended to show him, and some other things. And the man said “Ah, we don’t do that here. Why should you just give them to him?” I said I didn’t know. So I gave them to the man who sat right between us.

How many of you were there?
Myself, the CSP, that man I just talked about now, Kunle and the children.

How was his condition when you saw him in Makurdi?
It wasn’t impressed.

What was his general feeling?
He wasn’t really feeling fine in my perception because what happened was, even when he was at home, he used to have malaria attacks not to talk of when he was complaining of mosquito bites seriously.
What was your reaction like when you saw him?
Well, I would say at first, I was really happy I saw him alive, but I wasn’t impressed about his condition.

How frequent are your visits to Makurdi?
It has never been frequent because, you know it is not easy for me to be going to Makurdi once a month. The last time we went there, we were told that officially we are to visit him once a month. But how do I go to Makurdi, especially with these children. I cannot go without them.

If I go without them, Kunle will ask me what I have come to do. I have not been frequent.

What is the length of the journey? How long does it take? How do you travel?
By air, it is just an hour or an hour and 30 minutes journey. But by road, the last time we went, we went by road, it was a whole day. We spent a whole day. We left Ibadan around 10.00am and we got to Makurdi, say past 9.00pm.

Are there direct flights from Ibadan to Makurdi?
No. From Lagos. Anytime we are going, his colleagues will come and pick us to Lagos.

So there is direct flight from Lagos to Makurdi?
Yes. Then coming back, when we get to Lagos, they (his colleagues) pick us up.

How do you understand or read the whole issue as it relates to this matter?
You mean Kunle’s matter? Everything looked like rubbish to me because I didn’t understand. Even up till now. I can’t understand why they are still holding him. People have been making comments here and there, both at home and abroad that they should leave these people alone. I am talking about the journalists. Those who are not soldiers and these four journalists, I can’t still understand what is happening, I can’t. I was even told sometime that our President (General Abacha) doesn’t even read newspapers. No wonder. How does he know what is happening if he doesn’t read newspapers?

Excerpts From Interview With Mrs. Bose Agbe-Davies Mbah, wife of Assistant Editor of Tell Magazine, George Mbah, one of the four journalists serving a 15-year jail-term

Question: How did you get to know that your husband had been arrested?
Answer: I got the information unofficially. Even when I had been informed that my husband was at DMI (Directorate of Military Intelligence), I was told point blank when I got there that he was not there.

How long was it before they finally acknowledge that he was there?
Actually, the night I went there, a soldier told me that my husband was there. But he told me unofficially. After that, I got to know that Ben Charles Obi (another jailed journalists) was also there. Despite all the information at my disposal that he was at DMI, I was not allowed to see him. The next day, I went to the same DMI to give him some food, clothes and so on, but the soldier I met on duty said there was no such person there. He said he did not know where my husband was.

So when did they officially acknowledge that he was there with them?
Up till now, the government has not officially acknowledged. I think people have taken that aspect for granted because there is a lot of publicity on it from activists and human rights groups.

So they did not acknowledge that he was with them before his conviction?
The only thing was indirect acknowledgement.
**Has your husband told why he was convicted? The reason why they convicted him?**

He told me how he was picked up. He said they really did not come for him as George Mbah initially. He said they came to the Tell office for the editor, but the editors were not around and they were talking to him. At some point during the conversation, they asked him what his name was and he said “George Mbah? They said are you the George Mbah? Then they referred him to this Dateline publication and they arrested him. That was how it happened. He said they arrested him in connection with a coup story in a publication of Dateline. The story was about a suspected coup plotter, Major Oni. In the publication, the family had thought he had been killed in detention, but the Government said he died a natural death. The major buried in Ilorin. The story in question was written by Gbolahan Gboyega with additional reports by George Mbah, because he was covering defence ministry.

**Was he tortured?**

I define torture in terms of solitary confinement. He was chained at DMI.

**When was the last time you saw him? And how was he?**

Two months ago. His spirit is quite high, but he is till very sick. As you know, in 1993, while covering the Abiola elections in Maiduguri, he was involved in a motor accident in which he sustained head injuries. He consequently had a plastic surgery. Which needs to be carefully monitored. His top right eye-lids is not healing well. The wound is now infected. On my last trip to see him, I noticed that the eyeball is becoming clouded. That worries me. The medical facilities available to him are grossly inadequate.

I wouldn’t want to risk further complications, so I have decided to wait for George to be released and then we’ll seek adequate medical care. In the meantime, I hope his medical condition can be contained by the available facilities and the medication I can get to him. Apart from this, his skin has become quite dry and scaly, possibly due to the climate in Biu. He has also lost considerable weight. But that is only normal as he can’t eat prison food.

**How regularly are you allowed to see him?**

Officially, they said I can see him every month.

**How much does it cost you to go down to the place?**

I spend a minimum of 25,000 naira to 30,000 naira. If I go with my daughter, it is more. I still have to get SSS (State Security Service) clearance to see him in Maiduguri before going to Biu to see him.

When he was asked to give the names of two people he would like to visit, he gave the names of myself and his father. And they said we are allow to see him once a month. But the head of the prisons in Biu told me that whenever I come to see George, I must pass through the Maiduguri office for clearance. It is a day’s journey by road to Maiduguri. Then another four hours drive to Biu. Although I can go through Kano, but I am made to go through Maiduguri, because they say I have to report to the Maiduguri Superintendent of Prisons where I have to sign in to say I’m on my way to Biu. At Biu, I have to see the superintendent of prisons. If he is not there, I don’t see my husband. The last time I was there I had to wait for an extra day because the superintendent was not around. I can go by air and take Ebube with me, but I don’t have the resources to pay for the flight ticket and provide good hotel accommodation where the baby can be comfortable. So I travelled alone by road. When I got into the prison, they said “Hello, Mrs. Mbah” and then gave me the rules:

1. Don’t tell him any bad news. He may get upset and if he gets upset, he refuses to eat and if he refuses to eat, he falls sick and if he falls sick, we have a problem on our hands because we have a responsibility to keep him alive.
2. Don’t tell him you came by road or that you stayed in Biu. When he hears you came all this distance by road, it will upset him.
3. Tell him you are fine and that your daughter is fine.
4. Don’t tell him what is happening on the outside.
5. You don’t cry. If you do, we will stop the meeting.
   But the first time I went thee, I cried, I’m only human.
   I didn’t know what to expect. George has done a lot to keep me going because his spirit
   is unbroken.
   He said I should not beg government because he has been incarcerated wrongly. We are
   in the right.
   His attitude is that they can only imprison his flesh, not his mind.
   He tells me: I can think, I can dream. Try very hard so they don’t incarcerate you as well.
   You are on the outside, but you may be imprisoned by putting a halt to your life and
   activities. If you do, you will be in prison also.”

How have you been coping?
No matter how exposed or confident you are, when such a thing happens to you, like a loved one
is picked up, you don’t know where he is, you don’t know how to contact him, the first thing
that happens to you is that you are enveloped with a total cloud of helplessness.
   It is a terrible thing. Nobody can reach you, you don’t know how to reach out. It is a
terrible, terrible thing.
   I think the body of journalists can help in breaking that wall.
   Somebody is picked up, you go to the Defence (Ministry), no answer; you go to DMI, no
answer; you go to SSS, no answer.
   Even when you get to the exact place where he is, no answer.
   Where else can you go? You are confronted with these problems all alone.
   The NUJ (Nigeria Union of Journalists) can help in breaking down that wall for you. At
least, there should be an information network.
   Living without George has not been easy. Before his arrest, I had a lot of research
consultancy jobs in firms and various organizations.
   But it’s all gone. Some of my friends have also gone.
   But my philosophy is that anybody who does not want to see me now is not a friend.
   If you are a person of conviction, I don’t need you. I only feel bad when the people who
should know better are ready to be bought over.
   I realize that poverty is pervasive, cutting across economic groups, but there are some
things that one should hold up against out of conviction.

How has his conviction affected your attitude towards journalism?
My husband is a born journalist. I think that makes him happy. When he comes out, I will not in
any way try to influence what he does with his life. My children can also aspire to be whatever
they want to become. If Ebube grows up and says she wants to study journalism, I’ll encourage
her. My policy is whatever you do, do it well.

Sri Lankan Supreme Court Strikes Down Broadcasting Bill
By Edetaen Ojo

Fifteen “Citizens”, including incorporated bodies, of the socialist Republic of Sri Lanka have
won their legal challenge of the constitutional validity of a Bill by the Sri Lankan authorities
to regulate broadcasting.

In a unanimous decision delivered last month, three judges of the Supreme Court of Sri
Lanka, including Chief Justice G.P.S. de Silva, ruled that proposed law entitled: “Sri Lank
Broadcasting Authority Bill” as a whole was inconsistent with Article 10 of the Constitution.

The court said since the proposed Authority created by the Bill to regulate the
establishment and maintenance of broadcasting stations and provide for the issuance of licences
for that purpose lacked independence and was susceptible to interference by the minister, both
the rights of freedom of speech and freedom of thought are placed in jeopardy.

It observed that “The ministers with his unbridled power to make regulations, is placed
in a position where he might, through ‘guidelines’, interfere with the presentation of
programmes and thereby undermine the principles of fairness, which is at the heart of the
responsible broadcasting.

The Sri Lanka Broadcasting Authority Bill was published in the Government Gazette of
March 21, 1997 and was placed on the order papers of parliament on April 10.

By their petitions dated April 15 and 16, 15 citizens, including incorporated bodies,
invoked the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to determine whether the Bill or any its provisions
are inconsistent with the Constitution. They attacked the constitutional validity of the Bill on
many frontiers.

Clause 7 (1) of the Bill States that from the appointed date, no person shall establish or
maintain:

(a) a broadcasting station for the provision of radio broadcasting services; or (b) a
television broadcasting station for the provision of television broadcasting services, except under
the authority of a licence issued in that behalf by the Authority.

The court endorsed the requirement for licensing saying, “Having regard to limited
availability of frequencies, and taking into account of the fact that only a limited number of
persons can be permitted to use the frequencies, it is essential that these should be a grip on the
dynamic aspects of broadcasting to prevent monopolistic domination of the field either by the
Government or by a few, if the competing interests of the various sections of the public are to be
adequately served. If the fundamental rights of freedom of thought and expression are to be
fostered, there must be an adequate coverage of public issues and an ample play for the free and
fair competition of opposing views. The imposition of conditions on licences to ensure that these
criteria should be observed do not transgress the right of freedom of speech, but they rather
advance it by giving listeners and viewers the opportunity of considering points of views, of
thinking for themselves, and making personal choices”.

But it stressed that while a regulatory authority is, for the reasons explained, necessary, it
is imperative that such an authority should be independent.

The court noted that clause 3 of the Sri Lankan Broadcasting Authority Bill states that
the administration, management and control of the Authority shall be vested in a Board of
Directors consisting of six ex-officio and five other members appointed by the minister and that
five of the ex-officio members are secretaries to ministers or their representatives.

Besides, it observed, clause 3(4) provides that “An appointed member of the Board may
be removed from office by the ministers, by order published in the Gazette”…

The court therefore held that “Having regard to the composition of the Board of
Directors of the Authority, the lack of Security of tenure in office either of the Chairman or of
the appointed members, and having regard to the power of the minister to give directions which
the Authority is obliged to follow, the Authority, it was said by learned counsel for one of the
petitioners is ‘no more than an arm of the Government’ We agree that the Authority lacks the
independence required of a body entrusted with the regulation of the electronic media which, it
is acknowledged on all hands, is the most potent means of influencing thought”.

It noted that the ministers may interfere with commercial advertisements and thereby
infringe the right of the public to have information to enable them to make independent
judgments on what they may choose and also on a legally unacceptable discriminatory basis
deprive certain broadcasters of income from sponsorship that might adversely affect the viability
or economic feasibility of their enterprises.

The court ruled that since interference with broadcasting by the minister through the
Authority is a real, and not a merely speculative possibility or likelihood, the submission of
several learned counsel that the proposed Sri Lankan Broadcasting Authority is not an independent body had merit.

In its view, in the circumstances, a licencee may be unable to discharge the duty of impartiality referred to in the first schedule of the Bill.

Media Briefs

MRA, ARTICLE 19 Issue Joint Report on Nigeria

The Media Rights Agenda (MRA) and ARTICLE 19, the London-based International Centre Against Censorship, will release early in July a joint report on the state of media freedoms in Nigeria, with proposals for reform.

The report will focus on the various legal and administrative measures which Nigeria’s military authorities have adopted since November 1993 in a bid to suppress critical voices within the Nigerian media. It will outline the patterns of harassment and intimidation of journalists, other media workers as well as media institutions.

It is scheduled for release at the time of the meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) which opens in London on July 10, and will form the basis of presentations by the two organizations to the Commonwealth body.

The report, the first to be produced jointly by ARTICLE 19 and MRA, will, according to the two organizations, mark the beginning of a programmed of cooperation and collaboration between them in promoting the right to freedom of expression, including media freedom, in Nigeria as part of a wider objective of bringing about respect for human rights and democracy.

CBA holds Seminar on Broadcasting

A one-day seminar focusing on broadcasting issues within the Commonwealth is scheduled to hold at the Broadcasting House in Edinburgh, Scotland on October 24.

Organised by the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA), the seminar is being planned to coincide with the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM), also taking place in Edinburgh in October.

Two African leaders, South African President Nelson Mandela and President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, have been invited to participate in the seminar.

The occasion is expected to be used to heighten awareness on issues affecting the media in the Commonwealth.

Journalism Training Programmes

Ten broadcast and print journalism professionals in the United States will travel to four continents, including Africa, in the coming months as part of the Knight International Press Fellowship Programme.

The Professionals are joining 55 other Knight International Press Fellows who since 1994 have travelled to more than 40 countries to work with newly independent media organizations.

The fellowship programme, which is administered by the International Center for Journalism (ICFJ) in Washington D.C., awards long-term fellowships based on the commitment and qualification of applicants and the needs of partner organizations in other countries. This is
the eight group of fellows chosen since the programme was launched in late 1993 with a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Fellows will conduct a variety of print and broadcast journalism training programmes in 13 countries. Several fellows are already in the field.

The Washington-based International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ) is inviting applications for the Freedom Forum/ASNE International Journalism Exchange which begins in the United States in October.

Each year, 10 top editors of daily newspapers around the world are invited to the U.S. to participate in the five-week professional training programme.

The core of the programme is four-week stay at a U.S. newspaper where participating editors can observe all aspect of producing a U.S. daily and are invited to share ideas with the host newsroom’s staff about cultural and journalistic affairs.

The programme begins with three days of seminars in Washington D.C. addressing issues in today’s American newsroom. Participating editors then depart for individual placements at host newspapers ranging from small dailies in the heartland to large city papers.

After the conclusion of their newspaper assignments, the editors reconvene in New York City for group discussions on current newsroom issues around the world and programme evaluation.

Priority is given to editors from countries in the developing world, including the new democracies of the former Soviet republics, Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Applications are on for journalists interested in participating in one of the next year’s sessions in the Wolfson College Press Fellowship Programme at Cambridge in the United Kingdom.

The programme, launched in 1982, enables established journalists to join the Wolfson College for periods of 12 weeks during which they enjoy the privileges of full membership of the College.

The programme is open to established journalists from any medium and from any country, although in order to gain full benefit from the period in Cambridge, it is expected that applicants should have good command of English.

Each press fellow is expected to pursue a plan of special study or enquiry or to follow up special interests related to his or her journalistic work during the tenure of the fellowship.

The College does not impose a set pattern for these special studies as the aim is to allow participants as much freedom as possible so that they may gain maximum benefit from the opportunity provided by the fellowship. But the College selects applicants who will make a significant contribution to journalism.

Press fellows are however expected not to be under any pressure to contribute news stories or features to their organizations while they are at Wolfson.

There are three periods in each academic year and they run from September to December (Michaelmas Term), January to April (Lent Term), and April to July (Easter Term). Applicants are expected to suggest a choice of periods in the order in which they prefer to be considered.

The Knight International Press Fellowship Programme is seeking applications from potential partner institutions.

Partner institutions are selected on the basis of their commitment to the principles of independent media and their ability to work a broad range of local and regional media outlets and media professionals.

Partner institutions can be university journalism departments, media training centres, newspaper groups or radio and television networks.
All fellow expenses are covered by the Knight International Press Fellowship Programmed. The next deadline for applications is July 15.

The Department of Journalism and Mass Communication of the New York University in the United States offers a Master of Arts degree programme designed to prepare students for careers as professional journalists.

Three parallel programmes of study allow student to concentrate on newspaper, magazine, or broadcast journalism.

Department facilities include four computerized newsrooms and a fully equipped broadcast floor.

**Nigerian Government Releases 3 Detained Journalists**

Three journalists detained without charge for between two months and one year regained their freedom last month following their release by Nigeria’s military authorities.

Godwin Agboroko, editor of *The Week* magazine who was arrested on December 18, last year and Ladi Olorunyomi, Project Officer for the Independent Journalism Centre and wife of Dapo Olorunyomi, the self-exiled deputy editor-in-chief of *The News* magazine, who was detained on March 20, were both released on May 6.

But George Onah, the defence correspondent of the *Vanguard* Newspaper who has been detained since May 15, last year was only released this May 14, exactly one year later.

They were all held at the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI), a military detention facility at Apapa in Lagos.

Onah was first arrested on May 10, last year over a story he wrote for his Newspaper on the reshuffling of military officers. He was released later that day but rearrested five days later and detained following his refusal to disclose his source.

Agboroko was arrested over a story he wrote in the December 23, 1996 edition of *The Week* magazine entitled “Aso Rock on the boil: Axe dangles over Army Chief”. He was initially detained at the headquarters of the State Security Service (SSS) at Ikoyi in Lagos but was transferred to the DMI 23 days later following his refusal to disclose his source.

Agboroko said upon his release that we was leg-chained throughout his stay at DMI and even had to take his bath in chains.

It is still unclear why Olorunyomi was arrested and detained.

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The Media Rights Agenda (MRA) is an independent, non-governmental organization established in August 1993 for the purpose of:


b. Providing protection and support for journalists and writers engaged in the lawful pursuit of their professional duties.

c. Promoting the highest standards of professionals ethics, integrity, training and conduct in the journalism profession; and
d. Bringing about conductive social and legal atmosphere for the practice of journalism, and in particular, ensuring the protection of the journalist’s right not to be compelled to work against his or her conviction or disclose sources of information.

In pursuing its objectives, the MRA seeks to ensure compliance by governments and other private or governmental organisations with relevant provisions in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Africa Charter on Human and People’s Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and other international human rights instruments.

The MRA is a component of FEDERC FOUNDATION which is registered under Nigerian Law.

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