



Committee to Protect Journalists

June 3, 2015

President Muhammadu Buhari
State House, Abuja
Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
C/O:
Senior Special Assistant to the President
Special Adviser to the President

Via email

Your Excellency,

The Committee to Protect Journalists is writing to congratulate you on your recent victory in Nigeria's presidential election. As Nigeria prepares to enter a new chapter in its history, we urge you and your administration to take steps to ensure that journalists are able to work freely and openly in the country without fear of reprisal of any form.

In your inaugural speech on May 29, you identified insecurity and pervasive corruption in Nigeria to be among your immediate concerns. You also recognized the country's "vibrant" press and appealed to the media to exercise "its considerable powers with responsibility and patriotism." It is our belief that a patriotic press is also a critical press. To achieve your objective in tackling the challenges Nigeria faces, it is vital that your government prioritize press freedom so that journalists may ask questions and expose corruption at all levels of society without fear of harassment or intimidation. Nigerians and the world must be left without any suspicion or uncertainty about the transparency of your government.

As Nigeria aspires to strengthen its democracy, your government must show that it can tackle Nigeria's challenges, including the fight against the Boko Haram insurgency and the use of terror tactics, but can do so without compromising democratic principles, whose core elements include press freedom and freedom of expression. The success of the democratic government you now lead will depend largely on the guarantee that journalists are free to inform the society about their commonwealth.

We welcome your public assurances that you will not allow authorities to abuse the trust of the Nigerian people. We are encouraged by your promise to take disciplinary steps against security forces who commit human rights violations, but there is a long way to go.

Security forces are the most frequent perpetrators of violations against the press, according to the Lagos-based International Press Centre, which

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[found](#) that Nigerian police and security forces were responsible for 24 of at least 32 cases of attacks on journalists between November 2014 and February this year. No one has been brought to justice, the IPC said. CPJ has also [documented](#) other physical attacks, threats, and intimidation of local and international journalists seeking to cover the news.

In a weeklong siege in June 2014, soldiers and agents of the Nigerian State Security Service disrupted the operations of nearly a dozen independent newspapers under the guise of fighting terrorism, according to CPJ [research](#). Federal troops across the country seized and destroyed newspaper deliveries, confiscated editions, and took over media vehicles. No public apology was forthcoming, nor any compensation given for the loss in newspaper sales incurred by news organizations, distributors, transporters, vendors, advertisers, and other stakeholders.

CPJ has also documented a worrisome number of work-related murders of journalists in Nigeria. Since 1992, at least 10 Nigerian journalists have been killed in direct relation to their work, while another nine journalists have been killed under unclear circumstances, CPJ research [shows](#). The country is second only to Somalia in terms of Africa's worst record of unpunished murders of journalists. In 2014, Nigeria ranked 12th on CPJ's [Impunity Index](#), which spotlights countries where journalists are slain and their killers go free. President Goodluck Jonathan's government [showed no resolve](#) in finding the killers of these journalists, but we ask that you make this a priority of your administration.

Nigeria retains outdated laws on criminal defamation, publishing false information, and sedition, which authorities have used to persecute journalists for their reporting. In 2010, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights [called on](#) member states to repeal criminal defamation laws or insult laws, which impede freedom of speech, and to adhere to the provisions of freedom of expression articulated in the African Charter and other regional and international instruments. In a [landmark ruling](#) in December 2014, the African Court on Human and People's Rights found that prison sentences for criminal defamation were disproportionate and should be used only in restricted circumstances.

Still, despite growing international consensus that journalists should never face criminal charges for their professional work, Nigerian authorities continue to persecute the media. In December, two journalists with the Abuja-based *National Waves* magazine were arrested and [charged two months later](#) with criminal defamation, according to news reports. They had published a report in the magazine that alleged fraudulent dealings between an oil magnate and the Bauchi State government, news [reports](#) said.



Committee to Protect Journalists

CPJ, an independent nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide, believes that the use of criminal laws against journalists for reporting news or opinion is wrong and has a deeply chilling effect on the press as a whole. Journalists are critics—not criminals.

On March 17, before the elections, you [told the Nigerian Press Organisation](#) in Abuja that if you won the presidency, “the Nigerian media will be free under our [All Progressives Congress] government.” You also told the journalists, “The health of Nigeria’s democracy rests partly on you. Without a robust and thriving media, the masses would have no voice.”

We, too, believe that a society cannot thrive without a free and open press. This is why we are dismayed that on May 29, the day commemorating Nigeria’s democracy and coinciding with your inauguration and that of Nigerian state governors, Joseph Hir, a journalist with the independent *Daily Trust*, was viciously attacked, allegedly by supporters of the Nassarawa State governor, a member of your political party, who stood a short distance away taking his oath of office, according to news [reports](#). Hir told CPJ the attack followed repeated threats he had received over a recent [story](#) he wrote that questioned the political relevance of Nassarawa State in the national affairs of your political party, the All Progressives Congress.

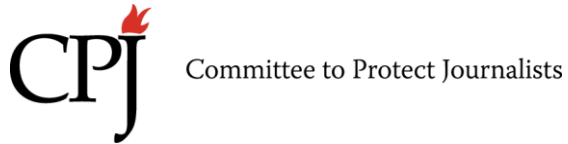
Mr. President, we are aware of the significant challenges your administration faces, which are problems not of your making but which you are now required to solve. The peaceful transition of power in Nigeria has generated unprecedented good will and support, and we join those many voices in wishing you well.

As you assume the responsibilities of your office, we ask that you place press freedom at the top of your agenda and follow your pledge to address media freedom with meaningful action. We respectfully urge you to demonstrate your commitment to freedom of the press by working toward the repeal of all laws that criminalize defamation in Nigeria. We also ask that your administration prosecute the killers of journalists and that you ensure that police and security forces refrain from carrying out attacks, detentions, or intimidation of the press and that those who do face the full consequences of the law.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Hir', is written below the text.



Joel Simon
CPJ Executive Director

CC List:

Garba Shehu, Senior Special Assistant, President Muhammadu Buhari

Femi Adesina, Special Adviser, President Muhammadu Buhari

Lai Mohammed, National Publicity Secretary, All Progressives Congress

Pansy Tlakula, African Union Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression
and Access to Information

David Kaye, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and
Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director General