

THE PRESIDENT'S NEWSLETTER

Vol. 3 No. 1, 2024

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HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN
CAMEROON (2016-2023)

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*"I ONLY CARE ABOUT CHARACTER &
COMPETENCE AND NOT LOCAL
GOVERNMENT OF ORIGIN!"*

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EHOLOR AKA ULTIMATE EQUAL

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OMOBOLANLE'S DEATH
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ENDANGERED DEFENDERS

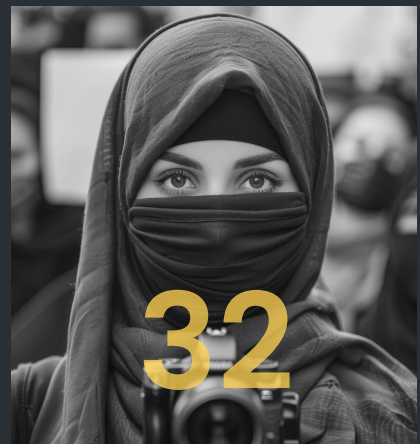


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Cover Photo

The cover photograph of the newsletter features the late Mrs. Omobolanle Raheem of blessed memory. All other images used are the property of their respective owners. Additional image sources include Wiki Commons, Freepik, and Adobe Stock.

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Editor's Note

Human rights lawyers and defenders across the globe have consistently paid a heavy price for their commitment and resilience as relevant government institutions relentlessly attempt to silence and penalize them for their advocacy. The arbitrary harassment and violence against human rights defenders particularly lawyers and journalists not only deplete their ability to fulfill their professional duties but also have a dire impact on their services. In addition, it sends a frightening message of intimidation to their colleagues and aspirants of the bar. Women make up a vital part of the economic and social fabric that holds their communities together, yet their work is rarely valued at the same level as men's work. Much of this has to do with what opportunities are available to them. Women are disproportionately likely to be poor, under-educated, employed in low-wage or unpaid work, and subject to dismissal for getting married or having children. In many industries, female workers are systematically denied their rights to regular pay and regular working hours; equal pay for equal work; permanent contracts; safe and non-hazardous work environments; and freedom of association. Egregious abuses, including sexual violence, harassment, and forced pregnancy tests, are all too common.

This edition highlights areas in practice that endanger lawyers including land, property, environmental law, child protection cases, politically related cases, public interest cases, human rights litigation, and anti-corruption cases. Lawyers face heightened endangerment in the discharge of their duties as a result of the nature of their profession or areas of specialty. The work spotted the most endangered states for lawyers in Nigeria including Kaduna, Edo State, and River State. Furthermore, the topics considered in this edition include a global analysis of the assault and harassment of lawyers and journalists, the risk of endangerment and digital security for lawyers in Nigeria, lawyering and parenting etc. A significant finding of this work is the absence of gender policy within the legal and journalism profession resulting in increased victimization and low representation. To balance this, this edition proffers gender balancing in our Rules of Professional Conduct and incorporating flexible work hours arrangements.

No doubt a healthy man is a wealthy man. This edition explores the health benefits of bananas and their nutrient content. This edition also covered an insightful interview with Dr. Patrick Osagiewangbon Eholor, the founder of One Love Foundation, a philanthropist, and a human rights defender who has been more than instrumental in the pursuit of justice and fairness locally and internationally. The edition aims to evaluate the existing protective measures for lawyers, journalists, and defenders to encourage, identify, and investigate threats and hold suspected perpetrators accountable. This edition tends to offer immediate practical support to defenders, policymakers, and researchers.

President Aigbokhan, LLB, BL, LLM, FCAI
Editor-in-Chief

Assault and Harassment of Human Rights Lawyers and Defenders: Global Overview

Human rights defenders are individuals, groups, and organs of society that protect universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms. Human rights defenders seek the promotion and protection of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights as well as the rights of members of indigenous communities. The definition excludes individuals or groups who commit or propagate violence in the name of enforcement of fundamental human rights. Human rights defenders are often involved in constructive criticism of negative government policies and actions.

However, the government and its agencies view this in a negative light. The principles of freedom of speech, expression, independence of mind, and free debate on government's policies and actions are fundamental and proven to be an effective method of promotion of human rights and good governance, which is essentially the aim of human rights defenders. They play a crucial role in helping to draft appropriate legislation and drawing up national plans and strategies on human rights.



¹⁸ Jan 21, Cl.- Linda Díaz Romero was a social leader and was part of the Association of Peasants and Farmers of Villa San Roque. Community and social organizations reported that on the night of this Tuesday, January 19, armed men arrived at the leader's home and ended her life.

Díaz Romero was a candidate for Cáceres city council in 2015 and was recognized for her work in the community. "She advocated for food sovereignty and supported alternative agricultural and food production methods to feed the local population," said human rights activist Gustavo Mestre Cubillos.

Gunmen were reported to have repeatedly shot the social leader and she was taken to the Caucasian Regional Health Center where she sadly died.

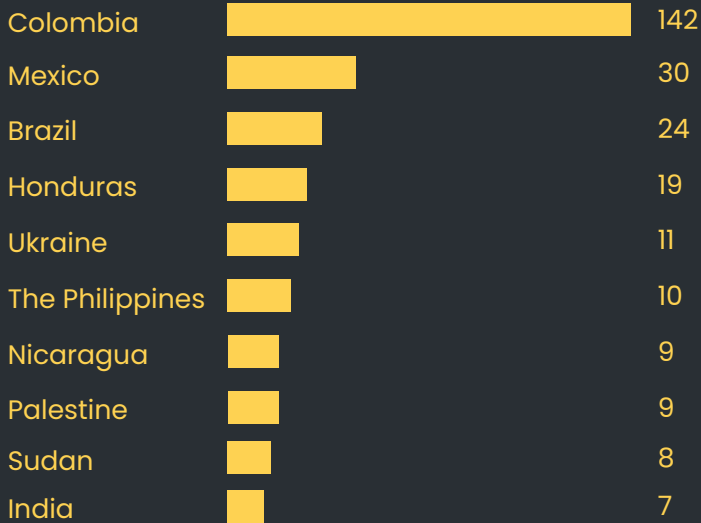
Image Source: www.colombiainforma.info

There is little awareness and acknowledgment of the legislative and advisory roles defenders play in society. Several human rights lawyers and defenders work to protect the rule of law and defend the defenseless. Yet across the globe, these human rights lawyers and defenders are intimidated, attacked, harassed, silenced, and murdered in the course of fulfilling their duties, especially in endangered countries like Colombia, Mexico, the Philippines, Afghanistan, Brazil, India, Pakistan, Poland, Cameroon, and Nigeria. However, these issues call for immediate attention as the majority of human rights lawyers and defenders continue to be permanent victims of extra-judicial killings, assault, harassment, and bans in the course of their practice.

For decades, Colombia has been a dangerous country for human rights defenders to carry out their vital work. Despite government measures to protect human rights defenders and the signing of a peace agreement in 2016, this situation has not changed and may worsen. The 2010 report¹ (by Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawler (A/HRC/46/35), notes that, according to documents from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), between 2015 and 2019, Colombia was the country with the highest number of killings of human rights defenders in the world². Some of the names of the human rights defenders killed in Colombia include Gerardo León, Edwin Antonio Indaburu, Luis Alfredo García Chavarría, Gonzalo Cardona Molina, José Grasisquier Toro Ledesma, José Robinson Quino Bonilla, Fredman Herazo Padilla, William Antonio Rodríguez Martínez, Linda Díaz Romero, and José Abadía Parra.³

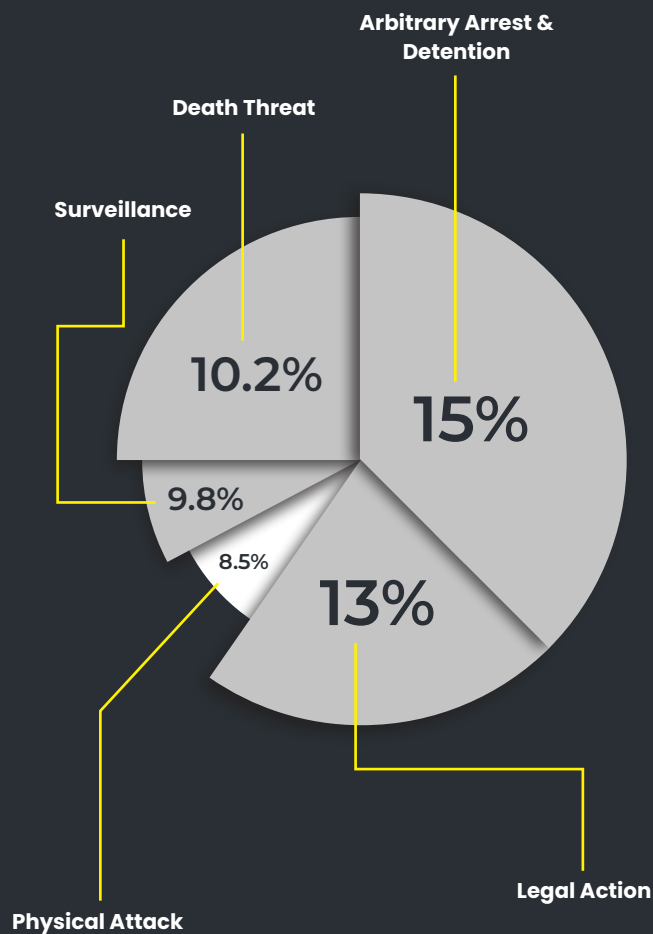
Killings of human rights defenders, 2023

*Top 10 Countries only

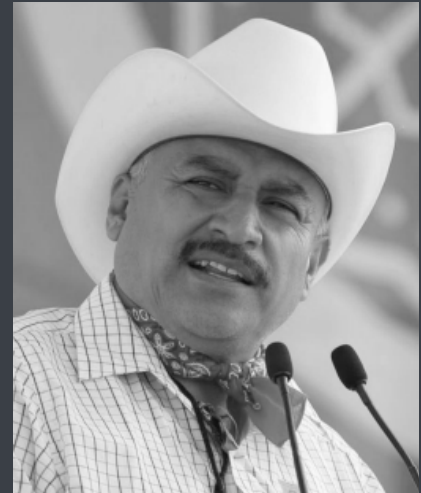


Most Reported Violations against HRDs

Those are the 5 most frequently reported violations by HRDs globally. The data below indicates the percentage breakdown of each of those violations across the five regions.



Source: <https://hrdmemorial.org>



**Indigenous Rights Defender
Murdered: The Tragic Saga of Rojo
Valencia**

Rojo Valencia's life epitomized the enduring struggle for indigenous rights in Mexico. As a staunch defender of the Yaqui tribe, he tirelessly opposed projects threatening their ancestral lands. Valencia's advocacy, however, invited reprisals, pushing him into hiding to safeguard his life.

In 2016, tensions peaked with protests against the Aguaprieta gas pipeline, pitting the Yaqui community against authorities and outsiders. Tragically, confrontations resulted in fatalities, including Yaqui members being struck by passing vehicles. Despite risks, Valencia remained resolute, seeking to formalize blockade tolls to ensure community benefits from resource extraction. Yet, this noble effort attracted criminal attention, ultimately leading to his untimely demise.

Valencia's murder, discovered weeks after his disappearance, reverberated throughout Mexico's indigenous rights community, underscoring the peril faced by those challenging powerful interests.

As the count of slain indigenous rights defenders climbed, Valencia's name joined the roster of those who sacrificed for justice. His legacy, however, inspires continued resistance for indigenous rights and environmental justice in Mexico and beyond.

Image Source: ¹⁰HRD Memorial 2021 Report



Pedro Josse Velasco Tumiña

Indigenous defender, leader, spokesperson of the Movement of Indigenous Authorities of the South West (AISO)

Image Source: www.frontlinedefenders.org

“Pedro Jose Velasco Tumiña, a human rights defender, received death threats for almost a year from July 2021 for advocating against the abuse of an Irish Company Smurfit-Kappa on the community land of the Misak and Nasa indigenous people. The indigenous people were making moves to repurchase the land earlier sold. Mr. Pedro Jose Velasco Tumiña who traveled to Dublin to communicate the distress of the people to the company received a death threat upon his arrival in Colombia. The protest against the Irish Company rose as a result of the negative influence of Smurfit-Kappa’s use of the land in the country.”

Lawyers and defenders are continually faced with threats, assault, and harassment. The state charged with the responsibility of protecting them has turned a blind eye toward their plight without investigating and prosecuting those responsible for the perils suffered by defenders. On the contrary, in some cases, the government employs its agents to further increase the burden of defenders. Adil José Meléndez Márquez, a lawyer who had represented native communities and farmworkers in symbolic cases of land restoration, as well as victims of fraud or crimes committed by paramilitaries, police, or the army, received recurrent death threats and survived three murder attempts.

Zoraida Hernández Pedraza, who had defended victims of human rights violations and advised farmers and descendants of indigenous communities on land restoration cases, had faced several threats. Ever since her involvement as an advisor in the peace process, the threat to her life and that of her family increased, compelling her into exile. Similarly, in the case of Germán Romero Sánchez, he had been the target of repeated attacks, since 2019. The attacks are connected to his activity as a lawyer as he intervenes in cases where high-ranking army officers are being arraigned. However, in the year 2022, he was forced

into exile due to the risk exposure arising from the cases. Colombian lawyers also face threats when they offer legal advice to protesters. This was the case of María Alejandra Garzón Mora, who was victimized in the street by plainclothes police officers during a public demonstration.

In Asia-Pacific Regions, which includes Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and the Philippines, human rights lawyers have been obligated to endure, fight, and consolidate notwithstanding the constant intimidation, random arrest, long-term detention, house arrest, kidnapping, disappearance, stigmatization, and death threat. In India, the government uses brutal laws to hush critics especially human rights lawyers by restricting freedom of expression both offline and online.

Also, the government made use of massive illegal surveillance devices like (Pegasus spyware) against human rights lawyers, where all their phone activities, including emails, messages files, contacts, location information, and even video and audio records using the phone's built-in microphone and camera are monitored. Thus, violating their rights to privacy, non-discrimination, data protection, and cyber security. In addition, the government has also used the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) to intimidate human rights lawyers, defenders, and other diplomatic critics of the government⁵. By 2021, 23 human rights lawyers and defenders were murdered in India⁶."



Zoraida Hernández

Zoraida Hernández Pedraza has worked as a lawyer and human rights defender for almost two decades.



Sudha Bhardwaj

Sudha Bhardwaj is a human rights lawyer, with a focus on protecting the rights of adivasi (indigenous) people in the state of Chattisgarh.

Image Source: www.frontlinedefenders.org

On 28 October 2018, human workers' and children's rights activists and lawyer Sudha Bhardwaj, was attacked and arrested in line with a public conference ordered by Dalit and Adivasi rights groups. The arrest was made under India's draconian counter-terrorism law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Sudha Bharadwaj was arrested by the Pune Police alongside others on a suspicious claim that they were involved in a conspiracy to eliminate the prime minister. She was attacked with the aid of state-sponsored armed vigilantes⁷. The Indian police officers also arrested A. Murugan under the UAPA on charges of "prompting" two women towards 'Maoist ideology' as against the Advocate's Act 1961. As a defence lawyer, Murugan was notorious for taking up cases of alleged Maoists⁸. The Bar Council of India is silent and failed in its role to defend and safeguard the rights of lawyers as they are continuously exposed by government and state-sponsored surveillance tools like Pegasus generated by a transnational network of surveillance capital in the service of powerful governments.

In a brazen act of discrimination, the Taliban are seeking to exclude all women from participating in the legal system, including judges, prosecutors and lawyers. Those dismissed include more than 250 female judges, more than 10 percent of the female judiciary before the Taliban came to power, as well as hundreds of female lawyers and prosecutors. Security threats have driven many female judges to flee the country or into hiding. Female lawyers are unable to renew their licenses, a requirement imposed by the Taliban, and therefore are unable to practice law within the de facto system. These and other restrictions on women's participation in public life constitute

serious human rights violations. According to reports, as a result of these measures, numerous women lawyers are suffering from severe mental health problems. Not only have these women lawyers been put at risk and their livelihoods threatened, but the valuable services they provided, especially to the other women, have been largely lost⁹.

Although, the year 2019 witnessed a decrease in the murder of human rights lawyers, 4 human rights lawyers were killed. In one of the murders, which occurred on the 3rd of September 2019, the Taliban member captured Abdul Samad Amiri, the acting head of the office of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission's (AIHRC) office in Ghor province, while he was traveling on a bus from Kabul to Ghor province. On the 5th of September 2019, he was murdered in an execution-style, where he was shot four times in the back.

On May 20th, 2020, human rights lawyer Mohammed Ibrahim Ebrat from Kalat city was attacked and shot by two unidentified gunmen while returning from Ramadan prayers; the bullet struck his head and he died on May 28th, 2020. Prior to the attack, he had received several death threats from the Taliban government, who had insisted that he cease his human rights activities. He reported these threats to the police, but no investigation was launched¹⁰. Also in August 2020, some gunmen abducted Asmatullah Salaam in Andar district, Ghazni state. Later his body was found dead the next day with evidence of torture. However, before Eid ul-Adha (31st July), he had received a message from the Taliban inviting him to a meeting¹¹.

It is essential to note that the lack of responsibility for assaults and harassment against human rights lawyers has increased the danger lawyers face and encouraged the perpetrators of this evil.¹² Regrettably, female human rights lawyers are not spared. They have been attacked, harassed, compelled to relocate, and even abandon their profession. These Women have campaigned for years for equal rights and participation in public spaces including peaceful governance but to no avail.

On the other hand, the government has failed to respond to and address complaints of threats and early warning of assaults and harassment against human rights lawyers and defenders. Also, the state mechanism for the defense of human rights lawyers and defenders including the Joint Commission for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, has not been put into operation.



The lack of responsibility for assaults & harassment against human rights lawyers has increased the danger lawyers face and encouraged the perpetrators of this evil



Yauheni Pylachanka

Yauheni Pylachanka is a Belarusian lawyer specialized in criminal defense with a focus on official misconduct and economic crimes.

²⁰Image Source: clinics.law.harvard.edu



Natalia Matskevich

Natalia Matskevich was disbarred by a decision of the Bar Association of 27 October 2021.

²¹Image Source: ostwest.space

In Europe, Human Rights Lawyers are mostly faced with governmental limitations, criminal prosecution, and police harassment. Particularly, lawyers who defend immigrants have continued to face criminalization in Cyprus, France, Greece, and Italy including Malta. Likewise, in Belarus, advocates from all sectors of society have been oppressed. Since August 2020, Belarusian governments have persistently pressured lawyers to advocate against human rights violations and defend their clients in political-related cases. In addition, lawyers have faced personal harassment such as threats, arbitrary detention, raids, and revoked licenses, administrative and criminal charges.¹³

Hundreds of citizens were imprisoned by security forces in Belarus following the presidential election which the incumbent president, Alexander Lukashenko, claims to have won. Countless lawyers, including Aliaksandr Pylchanka, Yulia Levanchuk, Natalia Matskevich, Maxim Znak, Lyudmila Kazakliya Salei, and Liliya Vlasova, were faced with banishment and/or imprisonment for their work with opposition political members. Additionally, on 15th October 2020, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus suspended Mr. Pylchanka and Natalia Matskevich's licenses to practice law pending the result of a disciplinary case against them. The Belarusian Ministry of Justice justified the suspension of the two lawyers, stating that they had made statements in the media that "damaged the reputation of lawyers and the legal profession.". However, their suspension was the result of an appeal filed in the case of Viktor Babaryka and Maria Kareznikava." Another case is that of government lawyer Dmitry Raevsky, whose license was revoked by the Belarusian government for allegedly making inappropriate comments about the work of his colleague.¹⁴" Also was the case of Dmitry Layevsky a government lawyer who was stripped of his attorney's license by the Belarus government for allegedly making some inappropriate comments about the works of his colleagues. At least about 26 other lawyers have previously been banned or suspended in retaliation for advocating against the current wave of suppressions in Belarus. Nevertheless, in November 2021, mechanisms were put in place increasing the Ministry of Justice's power over the miniature and dependent status of the Belarusian lawyers.

In Africa, human rights lawyers and defenders across the region have continued to pay a heavy price for their commitment and resilience with the authorities seeking to silence and penalize them for their work. In Libya, militias and armed groups ramped up their attacks on human rights lawyers and defenders through kidnappings and threats to life and family. In Nigeria, human rights lawyers have been harassed, threatened, and blackmailed. The assault against most lawyers in Nigeria varies from terrorist attacks, arrests, office raids and closure, torture, petitions, court's threat of dismissal or contempt proceedings, torture, detention, and harassment to mention a few. In addition, the harassment against lawyers in Nigeria is mostly orchestrated by the arms of the government including their learned brothers. The most common threat or harassment in Nigeria is the threat to disbar lawyers.

The disturbing trend of killing lawyers in Port Harcourt, Nigeria is not history. So, on December 17, 2020, Mr. Tamuno Igbikibebima, a lawyer working for the Nigerian National Hydrocarbons Monopoly Corporation, was at his home

Society will be left in total anarchy if the assault and harassment of lawyers are not addressed and terminated completely.



Iniebhe Effiong

In 2022, Nigeria lawyer Iniebhe Effiong who was representing a colleague in a libel suit filed by the Akwa Ibom Governor was convicted of contempt of court and sentenced to one month imprisonment by Chief Justice Ekaette Obot without a chance to defend or purge himself of the contempt. He was subjected to inhumane treatment even while in custody. To date, his appeal action for the violation of his fundamental human rights is being frustrated at all stages.

Image Source: ²²Iniebhe's X Profile

in Rumuigbo, Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria, standing at the gate of his house with his mobile phone when a Toyota Camry pulled up next to him. From the car, a young man armed with an AK-47 rifle ordered him to get in the car. The young man nevertheless openly said he had received orders to kill him. However, with the help of a crowd that approached the scene, they were tracked down, captured and handed over to the Nigerian Police.¹⁵ In early April 2019, Promise Frank Igwe a lawyer in Port Harcourt, received a phone call inviting him to meet an undisclosed person at a rendezvous, in a bar in the Ozuobba community in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State. On Friday morning at about 10 am while he waited for the undisclosed person some unknown gunmen dressed in black came down from a vehicle and reportedly shot Promise Frank Igwe four times in the chest killing him on the spot and taking only his telephone set¹⁶. Similarly, in Imo State, the former chairman of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) in Owerri, Ndionyenma Nwankwo, was macheted to death in February 2021 in his office. However, the principal suspect – his driver remains at large¹⁷. The following month, in March 2021, Frank Onwuachi, Chair of the NBA in Otuocha, near Onitsha, was similarly murdered.

In other parts of Nigeria, the confidentiality of legal professionals and human rights defenders is compromised and condemned; on 19th July 2024 there was a procession led by the All Progressive Congress Youths of Edo State led by Mr Tony Adun (aka Tony Kabaka). During the procession, one Mr Eric Imariagbe (aka Baroko) attacked a lawyer – Mr Israel Idahosa because he wore a cap bearing the name of Mr Asue Ighodalo the Edo State PDP party governorship candidate for the 2024 election; as he descended on the lawyer Mr Tony Kabaka shouted at him to stop and called him to order. Furthermore, the electronic devices of lawyers are attacked and lawyers lack the technical capacity to un-tap them. Lawyers are consistently harassed offline and online. The consequences of these attacks as earlier discussed are too numerous to enumerate. It has led to the loss of competent legal practitioners and the gradual erosion of confidence in the legal profession. It poses the question on everybody's lips, "Who will defend the defenders?" This ugly trend needs to be tackled at the earliest as the legal profession, which was once held in high esteem is being reduced to naught.

All arms of government must collaborate to ensure the independence of the legislature and defend the rights of lawyers. Society will be left in total anarchy if the assault and harassment of lawyers are not addressed and terminated completely. They are the defenders of the society, and they need to exercise their duties freely without

The Perilous Struggle of Human Rights Defenders in Cameroon (2016–2023)

By President Aigbokhan, Esq.²³ and Simon [Anonymous]²⁴

Human rights defenders are persons, who individually or in association with others, act to promote or protect human rights and freedoms

Nestled in the heart of Africa, Cameroon boasts of stunning natural and human resources, a rich cultural tapestry, and a vibrant population. Yet beneath this picturesque facade, a stark and often overlooked struggle unfolds daily to wit, the harrowing plight of Human Rights defenders in this diverse and complex nation.

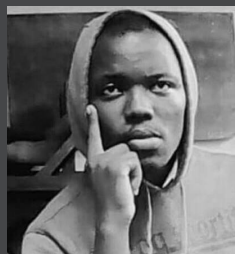
The insurgency that began in the Northern part of Cameroon in April 2015, and the declaration of war on the English-speaking part of Cameroon in November 2018, have dramatically altered the lives of Human Rights Defenders in these areas, as well as the entire country. Several human rights defenders have fallen victim to the dehumanizing treatment by either the security or the armed groups. leading to the brutal assault, arrest, detention, and even cold-blooded murder of some of the defenders.

The government of Cameroon has consistently suppressed the efforts of Human rights defenders in the country often accusing them of tarnishing the image of the country before the International Community. The authorities employ tactics ranging from harassment, internet shutdown in the English-speaking part of the country, outright arrest and violence, detention, and even the brutal killing of some of these defenders in an attempt to silence those who dare to expose human rights violations in the country.

Human Rights Defenders in Cameroon have been under serious and constant threats from government officials and security agents. They have been victims of physical attacks, intimidation, arrest, torture, and assassinations. Apart from outright threats and killing of these Human Rights Defenders, there have been reports of the government fabricating charges against these categories of persons. The hallmarks of these tactics not only restrict their freedoms but also sends a chilling message to others contemplating Human Rights advocating.

Human rights Defenders who take up and champion the cases of minority groups and communities like individuals or indigenous groups, confront additional challenges due to societal prejudices and discrimination as is the case

Over the years, there have been several reports of the dehumanization of Human Rights defenders in Cameroon



Tsi Conrad

He is a filmmaker and photographer sentenced in 2018 to serve 15 years on multiple charges including secession, hostility against the state, and spreading false news.

²⁵Image Source: www.cpj.org



Thomas Awah, Jr.

He is a journalist and activist detained in Cameroon since 2017. He is serving an 11 year prison sentence for reporting on protests in the Anglophone region.


²⁶Image Source: cameroonnewsagency

of the Anglophones in Cameroon. Notwithstanding, the plight and desperate predicament of Human Rights Defenders in the Anglophone Regions of Cameroon, their struggles have remained largely unnoticed and have received little or no attention internationally. The lack of awareness exacerbates the vulnerability of Human Rights Defenders and hinders efforts to hold perpetrators accountable.

Accordingly, on the 17th day of July 2019, Barrister Sang George Ndang was brutally kidnapped at his home by unknown gunmen and released after some weeks. There is a special case of Barrister Nicodemus Amungwa Tanyi who has been a victim of several assaults on his person. On the 31st of May 2018, Barrister Amungwa was arrested at Groupement Territorial de la Gendarmerie, Service Central de recherches Judiciars (State Defence Secretariate), Yaounde. It took the intervention of the Cameroon Bar Association and the international rights group before he was released. In July 2019, an element of the Gendarmerie in Yaounde arrested him and severely assaulted him before he was detained for weeks. On the 31st of May 2021, Barrister Amungwa Nicodemus was again arrested and detained as he went to visit his client who was detained in one of the detention facilities in Yaoundé.

Similarly, on 4th June 2021, Barrister Vitalise Legenju Nkemgong was shot in the leg leaving him with an almost 95% permanent incapacity. On the 11th day of January 2022, Barrister/Senator Henry Kemende Gamsay was shot dead at Nkwen Bamenda in the evening hours. He died before he was even rushed to the hospital. On the 2nd of February 2022, Barrister Simon Mutagha Acha was abducted by gunmen and taken for three days before he was released. On the 1st of May 2022, Barrister Patrick Yong Fang was arrested by unknown gunmen at the entrance to his house, severely beaten, and taken to an unknown location. He was released after two days in detention.

Other lawyers arrested and detained include Barrister Tafah Perter who was on the 9th of September 2023 abducted around his office and detained for four days before he was released. Also, Barrister Fabien Kengue was arrested on the 15th day of March 2023 after taking part in a televised debate on human rights abuses in Cameroon. Abdul Karim Ali, a human rights defender promoting peace and denouncing cases of human rights violations perpetrated by the Cameroon military against civilians also suffered arbitrary arrest and detention severally by the government of Cameroon and more recently, he has been detained since his last arrest on the 11 August, 2022. Similarly, Barrister Robert Fon Nsoh was arrested on the 3rd day of February 2017 in Bamenda, the Regional headquarters of the North West Region of Cameroon. He was immediately transferred to Secretariate D'Etat a La Defense for interrogation. He was tortured and subjected to inhuman treatment so he could confess to Trump-up charges of inciting insurrection



Journalists and media agents have also suffered their fair share of brutalization by the Cameroonian Government in their fight against human rights violations

levied against him. This lawyer stood his ground and was later released after two weeks of horror. Similarly, Barrister Harmony Bobga Mbuton who faced attempts at being arrested fled to the United States. Barrister Fru John Nsoh who was very vocal in the Anglophone war was arrested but he successfully escaped to the United States of America. Barrister Francis Sama who died on the 20th day of June 2020 in very suspicious circumstances in Yaounde was the former President of the Cameroon Bar Council and legal adviser of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), the foremost opposition party in Cameroon.

Far back as the 20th Century, the Cameroonian Government has continually targeted Human Rights Defenders and this has continued with little or no change. In a memorandum dated 20 March 1985, Anglophone lawyer and President of the Cameroon Bar Association wrote that the Cameroonian government led by Paul Biya was unconstitutional and announced the former Southern Cameroons should become independent as the Republic of Ambazonia. Dinka was incarcerated the following January without trial. Three years later, he escaped to Nigeria.

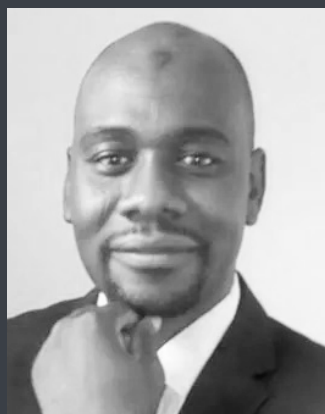
Journalists and media agents have also suffered their fair share of brutalization by the Cameroonian Government in their fight against human rights violations. The Director General of the number one Radio Television station in Cameroon, Amadou Valmuke is one of such victims. No clear charges have been levied against him and since his detention in July 2016, he is still behind bars, He has not been charged and he has not been tried. So also Mr. Tsi Conrad who was a freelance journalist caught and detained by the Biya Regime in Yaounde, in December 2017. He has been languishing in jail since then till date. Thomas Awah Junior serving as a correspondent for the Messenger Newspaper and who doubled as a newscaster for a local radio called Afrik2 was arrested, assaulted, and detained by security officers since January 2017 and has since been in detention till date. Mancho Bibixy who works with Abakwa FM, a local radio in Bamenda, was arrested at his home and transferred to the Yaounde Maximum prison on January 17th, 2017, and has been in detention without trial to date.

Samuel Ajiaka Abuwe alias Samuel Wazizi was arrested in Buea on August 2, 2019, and accused of speaking critically on the air about the authorities and their handling of the crisis. He was later transferred to Yaounde. He was severely tortured and died in prison. For over 10 months, the government refused to make any statement about his whereabouts, and till today, his body has never been surrendered to the family despite several demands to that effect. On the 20th of May 2020, Kingsley Njoka was arrested and tortured in Douala by security forces for covering events of the war in the English part of Cameroon. He was immediately transferred to Yaounde where he has since suffered detention till date. On the 12th of September 2023, one Anye Nde Nsoh was shot dead in the city of Bamenda by unknown gunmen.

The editor-in-chief of the Post Newspaper was arrested and detained after he published an article fearing an imminent Coup D'Etat in Cameroon after Gabon and his newspaper were banned. On the 17th of January 2023, Solomon Mbani Zogo alias Martinez Zogo, was brutally kidnapped by unknown persons from his car and his body was discovered on the 22nd of January 2023 in an advanced decomposition stage and heavily mutilated. He was a journalist on a local radio station called Amplitude FM. Another human rights defender, a francophone priest, Jean Jaque Ola was shot dead in Yaounde on the 2nd of February by unknown gunmen.

The unwavering commitment to justice and enforcement of human rights by human rights defenders in Cameroon comes at the expense of their freedom, life, and career. Publishing this article not only offers a platform for their stories to be heard but also advances our understanding of the formidable challenges facing Human Rights Defenders in the region. The perils of Human Rights Defenders by the Cameroonian government cannot continue to be swept under the rug. It is pertinent that this menace is curbed by both national and international collaborations as the future of the nation is hanging by a thin thread. The international community has a significant role to play

in this fight against the violation of human rights defenders in Cameroon. This can be done by legal intervention and support, providing resources, training, and advocacy efforts to amplify their voices and protect their rights. The Cameroonian Government must be held accountable for its actions to suppress Human rights defenders and failures. This includes ensuring that perpetrators of human rights violations against human rights defenders are held accountable and brought to book no matter their status. Laws should be enacted and properly implemented to protect human rights defenders and prevent infringement of their fundamental human rights.



Ahmed Abba, a Radio France International (RIF) journalist was arrested in July 2015 after reporting on activities by the armed group Boko Haram in the Far North Region of Cameroon was also a victim. He was held incommunicado for 10 months before finally being tried and sentenced to 10 years under the Anti-Terrorism Laws for failing to report acts of terrorism to the authorities of Cameroon.

²⁷Image Source: www.cpj.org

We must continue to raise awareness of the challenges faced by human rights defenders in Cameroon through media coverage and advocacy campaigns to achieve positive change. Conclusively, it is advisable to address the root of the problem by promoting reconciliation and dialogue between the different groups in Cameroon including the government, security forces, armed groups, and minority communities to resolve the underlying tensions and reduce conflict. This will create a safe environment for human rights defenders to carry out their responsibilities and promote political stability.

Endangered Lawyers: The Nigeria Experience

It is a sad reality that the brutalization of lawyers is becoming very rampant in Nigeria, and Nigerian lawyers are fast becoming endangered species. Nigeria has endured and continues to endure the recurrent loss of lawyers, magistrates, and judges due to extrajudicial killings, kidnappings, harassment, and molestations despite their dedicated efforts to fulfill their duties. A society that respects and upholds its legal system not only sustains its stability but earns higher ratings in democratic governance evaluation. The core components of democracy are inherently legal, emphasizing the nexus and dependency of democracy to a significant extent on the legal framework. Put differently, democracy is largely hinged on the rule of law. It is trite that the law recognizes the pivotal role lawyers play in upholding democracy. Lawyers maintain, observe the rule of law, promote, and foster the cause of justice²⁸.

It is no news that police brutality ranks high among the leading causes of death in several parts of the world especially Nigeria²⁹. The rising trend of harassment of lawyers by the Nigeria Police Force poses a grave threat to Nigeria's democracy. The attack against lawyers ranges from terrorist attacks, arrests, office closure, petitions, threats of disbarment or contempt proceedings, and even death. Endangered areas of law include environmental law, child defilement, fundamental human rights, land law, and politically related cases. The most endangered states for lawyers are Kano, Edo State, and River State. Most of the identified stakeholders or channels of threat are security agencies, colleagues, clients, judges, and political office holders. There have been multiple reports of lawyers being victims of attack, harassment, and assault initiated by their fellow learned brothers. The execution of lawlessness against legal practitioners is often through the police, civil defence, armed vigilantes, and government agencies.

On 1st day of April 2023, it was reported that three legal practitioners namely, Jerry Aondo, Dr Sobere Nelson, and Odum Eyiha who are attached to Tuduru Ede's Chamber, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria, were putting together their Election Petition in a hotel in Port Harcourt, Rivers State when they were arrested by the Nigeria Police Force. The legal practitioners who are representing Tonye Cole of the All Progressives Congress (APC) challenging the outcome of the March 18, 2023, gubernatorial elections were held at NPF Intelligence and Surveillance Unit, Ogunabali, Port Harcourt.³⁰ Similarly, a lawyer in Nigeria after securing bail for his client at the Federal High Court was whisked away by men of the EFCC at the Federal High Court premises in Uyo³¹. Also, Mr. Douglas Ogbuankua alleged that he was brutalized by men of the State Security Service when he followed his client to the police station for bail processing.

The assassination of Barnabas and Abigail Igwe, legal practitioners in Onitsha was reported in 2002. However the course of their death is still unknown but prior to their murder, it was believed that had received direct threats from senior officials in the Anambra state government, face to face and through telephone calls on personal mobile phones. The lawyers had condemned the state government's failure to pay the salaries of government workers for several months and had given the government a 21-day ultimatum to pay the salary arrears or resign³².

The death of the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Chief Bola Ige, who was murdered in his house at Bodija, Ibadan, Oyo State on the 23rd day of December 2001 is a classic example that lawyers are all endangered in Nigeria. Furthermore, on 21 November 2022, a member of the NBA Ahoada Branch, Mr. Nathan

Akatakpo, was killed by unidentified assailants in front of his house in Ogbo community, Ahoada East Local Government Area, Rivers State. Also, it was reported that the client he was defending was murdered a day earlier, which clearly shows that Mr. Akatakpo was murdered for defending the rights of his client in court³³.

Other lawyers who have been murdered in the course of their duty line include Eguno Dafiaghor and Samuel Ekuwangi who were killed in Delta State in March 2014 on their way to court for a ruling by unknown gunmen who were dressed in mobile police uniform³⁴. Adeola Adebayo in Ikole-Ekiti in 2018, Emeka Agundu in Enugu in 2018, Frank Okwuachi in Otuocha near Onitsha in 2021, Kenechukwu Okeke in Nkpor, Anambra State in November 2021, Ndionyenma Nwankwo in 2021 and Stephen Eke in Karu on 18 November 2022. We also recall the abduction of President, Customary Court of Appeal of Imo State, Justice Ambrose Egu, together with Senior Magistrate Pauline Njemanze in 2010; the abduction of Justice Chioma IHEME-Nwosu, JCA in Benin City and several other lawyers, magistrates, and judges who have been abducted, harassed, molested and/or killed in the line of duty.



On August 28, 2016, Ken Asuete a lawyer in Rivers State, who also was a counsel representing All Progressive Counsel (APC) in Rivers State before the 2015 presidential election, unfortunately met his end on the night of 28th of August 2016, when some unknown men confronted him along Onuchiolu Road in Aluu, Ikwere LGA on the outskirts of Port Harcourt, the State capital, when he went to pick his neighbor who had escaped from suspected kidnappers killing him in his car. However, the APC accused the state government and the PDP for the murder of Atsuete because it was believed that Ken Atsuete had vehemently worked against the PDP to uncover their use of a fake court order restraining the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) from releasing the result of Tai Local Government Area in the last rerun election³⁷.

³⁸Image Source: vanguardngr

In 2018, Toyo Jimmy, Esq. David Amaefula, Esq. and Pius Udo-Inyang, Esq. working with the law firm of Messrs Rickey Tarfa & Co. were detained in police custody, according to the official statement issued by their Branch Bar (Unity Bar). Their arrest is not unrelated to their legal duties of accompanying Senator Dino Melaye to the police station. Indeed, Mr. Amaefula and Udo-Inyang are not the only lawyers who have been caught in the unblessed webs of police cruelty and harassment. However, other lawyers have suffered similar fate in recent times. In April 2018, Mr. Dayo Abudu, a Lagos lawyer, was allegedly beaten up by three police officers, his clothes torn, and his phone smashed by the police officials. Also, the story of Miss. Chiamaka Nwangwu is not completely different from that of Mr. Abudu. Miss Nwangwu was molested and nearly stripped naked by some police officers at the 3-3 Division of the Anambra State Police Command. In 2018, a young lawyer was severely beaten up and was later detained by the police for taking a picture of his client while in handcuffs in Uyo.

The office of a senior lawyer Kingsley Obamogie, SAN was sealed in 2021 by officials of the Edo State Government whom he has filed several suits against for nonpayment of waste disposal fee. In December 2021, the Kano State Government sealed the office of a Senior Advocate of Nigeria after securing judgment against the Governor in a contentious political case. The head office of FOI Counsel, a law firm assisting low-income citizens to challenge government impunity particularly COVID-19 restrictions was brought down in September 2021 and a new building for a supermarket was established. Sub-nations like Edo, Rivers State, and Kano states are known for open and hidden victimization of lawyers.

A Black woman with her hair styled in a bun, wearing a black lawyer's robe with a white collar and a white tie, stands in a library. She is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is filled with bookshelves filled with books, creating a professional and scholarly atmosphere.

When lawyers as pillars of the society are threatened, democracy and the rule of law is equally threatened.

These efforts are to ensure that public or adverse political interest lawyers lose their office space or comfort needed to receive their clients and prepare for court sessions to challenge the government's dubious initiatives. In other parts of Nigeria, the privacy of legal professionals and rights defenders are compromised and attacked. The phones of lawyers are hacked and they lack the technical capacity to un-tap them.

In June 2021, Aver Shima was arrested by officials of EFCC for giving legal advice to a client in her official capacity. Coming to her rescue was Justin Gbagir the chairman of the Nigeria Bar Association, Makurdi branch and he was arrested, brutalized, and hospitalized. The imbroglio led to a serious surgical operation for the lawyer. In October 2021, Jacob Obasi was beaten to a coma by the police for intervening in an attack on a citizen by the men of the Nigerian police. In December 2021, Temitope Oyedipe was arrested on the premises of the Osun State High Court by officials of the Economic Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). The lawyers were arrested after proceedings and whisked away. His only offence is that he held a brief on behalf of his colleague in a garnishee proceeding of the anti-graft agency. In 2014, Ola Adeola a female lawyer was murdered in Lekki, Lagos State by her domestic staff. In February 2021, Nwankwo Ndiennyema a male senior lawyer was also allegedly murdered by his driver. In September 2021, a male legal practitioner Darlington Odume was allegedly killed by assassins. Also, is the case of Omobolanle Raheem, a lawyer who was shot by a Police Officer on a stop and search duty in her husband's vehicle on the 25th of December, 2022 in Ajah Area, Lagos State.³⁵

The increased occurrence of harassment of lawyers by the Nigeria Police Force underscores the threat to Nigeria's democracy because when lawyers as pillars of the society are threatened, democracy and the rule of law is equally threatened. Democracy is largely dependent on the success of the legal system which is dominated by

lawyers. Hence, this clearly shows that lawyers are acute stakeholders in the sustenance and survival of Nigeria's democracy. The ceaseless assaults on lawyers by police officers should be taken seriously by all lovers and recipients of freedom and equality.

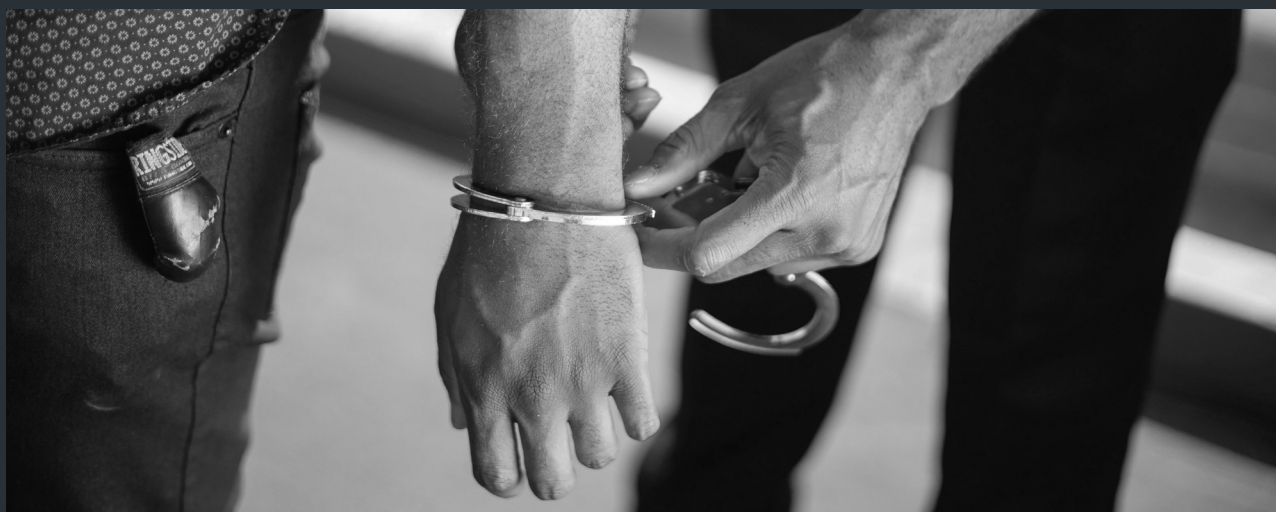
It is imperative that citizens, government, political agencies, and all lawyers take action and necessary measures to compel the Nigerian Police Force to cease its brutality and harassment of lawyers to prevent imminent anarchy and chaos. There is an urgent need for the review of remand powers since it seems that some judicial officers abuse these powers for punitive purposes against lawyers. We need to initiate national and international discussions for measures to protect lawyers in Nigeria. The first bus stop is the advocacy of an independent bar.

We are grateful for the past and present administration of the NBA in Nigeria. A federal judge was sanctioned in the last NBA-NEC meeting for bullying a lawyer in the open court. Only an independent and fair Bar can have such an item on the agenda for deliberation. There is also an urgent need to domesticate the U.N Basic Principles on the Roles of Lawyers 1990 to curb this menace in our country.³⁶ Nevertheless, the brutality and harassment of lawyers by the Nigeria Police force is alarming, and it needs urgent intervention by the government and the Nigeria Bar Association.

Furthermore, lack of proper orientation is one of the main reasons the police keep harassing lawyers. The Inspector General of Police needs to raise the standard of recruitment in the Nigerian Police Force and also facilitate proper training for the Nigerian Police Force. Once a country gets it right on the twin pillars of democracy i.e. the rule of law and the respect of human rights, other vices like corruption, kidnapping, and armed robbery will be tamed. The society works better when lawyers and security agencies work closely as partners without harassment and intimidation. An advocate must fearlessly uphold the interests of his client by all fair and honorable means and must do so without regard to any unpleasant consequences to himself or any other.

Image Source: File: 230125-N-DK722-1012 - Nigeria Navy, Police Force conduct VBSS Training during Obangame Express 2023.jpg - Wikimedia Commons. (2023, January 24). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:230125-N-DK722-1012_-_Nigeria_Navy,_Police_Force_conduct_VBSS_Training_during_Obangame_Express_2023.jpg

Harassment of lawyers by Law Enforcement Agencies in Nigeria: a spotlight on 2023



Harassment, as defined by the Cambridge dictionary is an illegal behavior towards a person that causes mental or emotional suffering, which includes repeated unwanted contact without a reasonable purpose, insults, threats, touching, or use of offensive languages. The Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act VAPP 2015 further characterizes harassment as "engaging in a pattern of conduct that induces fear of harm or impairs the dignity of a person." This issue has become prevalent in Nigeria, particularly with respect to lawyers. Despite the esteemed status of lawyers as ministers in the temple of justice, incidents of harassment of lawyers by security agencies are on the rise in Nigeria.

There have been numerous reports nationwide of lawyers being harassed unnecessarily in the course of fulfilling their professional duties. Accordingly, in December 2023, a legal practitioner, Mr. Olumide Sonupe, faced a distressing situation while processing bail for a client at a Lagos police station. He was subjected to assault by the police, leading to his subsequent detention and necessitating hospitalization.³⁹ On September 26, 2023, Mr. Douglas Ogbankwa experienced a similar situation with the Department of State Services (DSS) officers in Benin City. His ordeal unfolded when he insisted on being present during his client's statement-taking process, and he was resisted because according to DSS, lawyers need not be present during the exercise as against the provisions of Administration of Criminal Justice Act of 2015 upon attempting to leave the premises, he alleged he was beaten. Sharing his distress on his social media platform, he revealed, "I am presently scared for my life as the man holding the gun said if I come to the DSS office again, they will gun me down."

⁴⁰Moreover, early the previous year, we saw the arrest of three lawyers by the Police in Rivers State. Their apprehension was related to the lawful preparation of a petition against the outcome of the Rivers State election.⁴¹ Unconfirmed reports also surfaced regarding attacks on a lawyer by the Area Commander of Owerri (Fire Service) of the Nigeria Police and an assault on another lawyer by the DSS in Markudi.⁴² In January 2023, a High Court in Ibadan took substantive steps in awarding a compensation of 27 million naira against officials of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) for the assault of two lawyers who had visited the Civil Defence headquarters to secure the release of a client but were instead subjected to physical violence by the agency's officers. More recently, the Nigerian Bar Association Benin Branch (Lion Bar) condemned the alleged assault of Benson Sarah Uhunoma



Photo: Saheed Olugbon

The list of such degrading instances is infinite and has become a growing concern. Consequently, in January 2024, the lawyers of the NBA Lagos branch took to the streets to protest against the harassment and police brutality against lawyers⁴³.

Esq., a lawyer and corps member serving at the Ministry of Justice, Edo State. Miss Sarah was assaulted by a police officer leading to various degrees of injuries. Her only offence was making inquiries about the arbitral arrest and detention of her 11-year-old nephew. The list of such degrading instances is infinite and has become a growing concern. Consequently, in January 2024, the lawyers of the NBA LAGOS branch took to the streets to protest against the harassment and police brutality against lawyers.

Legal Provisions on Harassment and Assault in Nigeria and Role of Lawyers in the Society

Various laws in the country prohibit assault and harassment precisely the 1999 Constitution of The Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended. Very Importantly, Section 34 (1) of the 1999 Constitution provides that “every Nigerian Individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person and accordingly (a) No person shall be subjected to torture or inhumane or degrading treatment.” Section 351 of the Criminal Code also stipulates that any person who unlawfully assaults another is guilty of a misdemeanor and is liable, if no greater punishment is provided, to imprisonment for one year. Section 2 of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015 criminalizes physical injury, and Section 14 also prohibits emotional, verbal, and psychological abuse, while Section 18 prohibits intimidation as well. Thus, there is no paucity of laws in relation to harassment in Nigeria. But this has not helped to abate the rate of harassment, intimidation, and assault on lawyers in Nigeria.

The indispensable role of lawyers and the legal profession in our society cannot be overemphasized. Their multifaceted contributions are:

- Represent individuals, firms, or organizations in legal matters. They adeptly present their clients' cases in court, engage in negotiations for settlements, and ensure the protection of their clients' rights and interests. Their dedication to maintaining fairness, transparency, and adherence to the principles of justice is fundamental.
- Safeguard individual rights and civil liberties. They actively challenge unjust laws, provide defense against unfair government actions, and advocate for the preservation of fundamental rights. This commitment extends to upholding the very fabric of democratic values.
- Adviser: Lawyers play advisory role to their clients, government, organizations, and institutions.
- Legislative advocacy: Lawyers by argument in court, research and legislative briefs assist to enhance the law and policy, actively participate in shaping the legal landscape. They work towards influencing the creation,

amendment, or repeal of laws, engaging in lobbying efforts, and leveraging their legal expertise to contribute to the formulation of public policy.

This prompts some critical questions: what becomes of a society where members of the bar succumb to intimidation and assault by law enforcement agencies, unchecked and continuously over time? What fate awaits a society where lawyers, due to fear of harassment and assault, are unable to freely represent their clients? Your guess is as good as mine and it raises concerns about the erosion of justice and the potential unraveling of a society where the pillars of legal representation are compromised.

Impact of Harassment of Lawyers on the Society

The harassment and assault of lawyers by law enforcement agents can have significant and far-reaching consequences on the legal system, the rule of law, and society as a whole. Some potential impacts include:

1. **Undermining the Rule of Law:** Harassment and assault of lawyers in Nigeria erode confidence in the legal system and the rule of law. In a society where lawyers who are key players in upholding justice face intimidation or violence, it can undermine the public's trust in the legal system and the rule of law.
2. **Chilling Effect on Legal Practice:** Lawyers may become reluctant to handle cases against law enforcement agencies or cases that challenge the government if they fear humiliation. This can impede their effectiveness in legal practice, limiting the pursuit of justice and the protection of individual rights.
3. **Diminished Access to Justice:** Harassment of lawyers may discourage individuals from seeking legal representation or pursuing legal remedies. This could result in diminished access to justice for those who are already vulnerable or marginalized.
4. **Alters Fair Trial:** Lawyers are essential for ensuring fair trials. Harassment and assault can compromise the ability of lawyers to effectively represent their clients, potentially leading to unfair judicial processes and outcomes.
5. **Erosion of Human Rights:** The harassment and assault of lawyers can be indicative of broader human rights abuses within a society. If lawyers are not free to operate without fear of persecution, it raises concerns about the overall state of human rights and civil liberties.
6. **Deterioration of Professional Standards:** Continuous harassment of lawyers may lead to the erosion of professional standards within the legal profession in Nigeria. Lawyers may find it difficult to uphold ethical obligations and provide zealous representation when facing threats or violence. The nobility of the profession is gradually deteriorating. A profession once held in high esteem is being reduced to nothing by the continuous harassment of legal practitioners by law enforcement and security agencies.
7. **Potential Escalation of Violence:** If harassment persists without adequate redress, it may lead to an escalation of violence and tensions between legal professionals and law enforcement agencies, creating an adversarial relationship that is detrimental to the overall stability of society.

Possible Causes of Strained Relations and Recommendations

While an attempt to pinpoint the precise cause of the strained relationship between legal practitioners and law enforcement agencies remains elusive, it is evident that immediate action is imperative to address this discord. Speculatively, there seems to exist an adversarial dynamic between lawyers and law enforcement officers. This could stem from the perception that enforcement officers might resent lawyers for intervening on behalf of clients, especially those deemed suspects or guilty by law enforcement officers. Successfully aiding such clients could be seen as undermining the efforts invested by law enforcement officers in their work. Consequently, while it appears

If harassment persists without adequate redress, it may lead to an escalation of violence and tensions between legal professionals and law enforcement agencies, creating an adversarial relationship that is detrimental to the overall stability of society.



that law enforcement aims to hold suspects accountable and pursue justice, lawyers, on the other hand, may be seen as working in opposition to those goals. On the flip side, law enforcement agencies have, at times, functioned as instruments manipulated by the government and powerful individuals including fellow lawyers to influence the outcome of investigation or relay action or prosecution. Unfortunately, lawyers, in their pursuit to safeguard clients and society, become inadvertent victims of potential nefarious agenda.

Our recommendations are as follows;

1. Investigate Complaints: There should be independent bodies or mechanisms to investigate complaints of harassment against lawyers and creation of specific penalties for law enforcement agents engaging in such conduct. Creation of multi-stakeholder platforms involving legal professionals, law enforcement agencies, government representatives, and civil society to address the root causes of the aggression between law enforcement agencies and lawyers and find collaborative solutions. It was a commendable effort by the then NBA President, Mr. Olumide Akpata in 2022 who called for a maiden hybrid town hall meeting in conjunction with law enforcement agents to address the harassment of lawyers. We recommend that the NBA should continue in this feat and not relent to secure the future of the legal profession.

2. Training on rule of Law: there should be comprehensive training for law enforcement agents on the importance of the rule of law, respect for human rights, and the role of lawyers in the justice system. Law enforcement officers must understand that lawyers are only carrying out their legal duties, hence personal sentiments on the case should be kept at bay.

3. Advocacy: The NBA must strive to advocate for the rights and safety of their members, and to actively engage with relevant authorities to address harassment issues. Cogent steps should be taken beyond media outcry and talks. As suggested earlier, independent committees should be established in every State Bar Association, where lawyers can report incidences of harassment and assault. These committees will also be in charge of pursuing the investigation and prosecution of suspects.

4. Hold Perpetrators Accountable: As difficult as this might be, law enforcement agencies, need to be protected from the whims and caprices of government and higher-ups who seek to use them as tools to frustrate the efforts of lawyers. We must ensure that law enforcement agents found guilty of harassing or assaulting lawyers face appropriate disciplinary and legal consequences.



The legal profession should strive to avoid compromises on this point. Offenders should be made to face the full wrath of the law. The fundamental human rights of the common man must be respected and properly implemented. If the ordinary man on the street is respected, nobody including lawyers would be subjected to harassment and assault. The goal is to create an enabling environment of seamless relationship between the organs of government and ensure a stable government where a better foundation for the respect of the rights of citizens is laid.

Photo Source: Kaizenify (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Protesters_at_the_end-SARS_protest_in_Lagos,_Nigeria_54.jpg). The color is changed to greyscale by FOI Counsel NG, https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcodeCameron_Edy

"I only care about character and competence and not local government of origin!" – Chief Dr. Patrick Osagie Eholor aka Ultimate Equal



Can you tell us about yourself?

My name is Chief Dr Patrick Osagiewangbon Eholor. I am from Oredo Local Government Area. My mother is from Ovia North East Local Government Area. My great-grandfather is one of the great prime ministers of the Bini Kingdom and my father is Chief Eholor, a very popular chief who would not agree with the most popular opinions, my father was a very simple and friendly man. Most of the things I do are inherited from my father. I have been in Canada for 35 years of my life, I was denied so many opportunities in Nigeria, and I struggled to even attend primary and secondary schools

which I couldn't finish in Nigeria for financial reasons. I went to an adult school and worked very hard before I invested in real estate. I followed a path in my life that whatever I suffered, I would not allow people to suffer it and that is one of the desire why I came up with ONE-LOVE FOUNDATION

I feel people can be taught how to hate but they cannot be taught how to love, and I feel the only way I can be happy is to love people or to prevent people from going through what I have been through. I have suffered a lot of injustice, if I don't have light if I don't have a good motorable road, if I can't have a proper education, they are all injustice. It is not only physical assaults that are an injustice to me. There are a lot of people who have been denied their rights, especially what is enshrined in our constitution. When I went through these things in my life, I said to myself, whatever you have been through, I will ensure that nobody else suffers it. "It is an injustice not to have a proper education"

For this reason, I opened One Love Foundation, a registered organization. I have seen myself getting into unnecessary trouble, I don't have a problem with anybody but I always see myself in trouble with the government for one thing or the other and the press was not also friendly. I believe because of the poverty and

hardship, the media often sells out. This is why I am now a publisher and also a writer. In a day I write so many articles and I don't know how it happens.

It will interest you that about 20 years ago, I was the one that brought government attention to the Benin Lagos road. The BBC came in there and interviewed me and then the government spent over 300 billion and there was not much difference. I have fought numerous anti-corruption fights. Talking about the tribunal judge Umar Danladi when he assaulted a security guard, I dragged him to the floor and that if a judge can act like this, if you can't trust a messenger, you can't trust his message so, he must step down.

It will also interest you to know that when Umaru Musa Yar'adua was alive, may his soul rest in peace. I was the one who pushed for the passage of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), that every government institution should be compelled to accountability and transparency on how money was spent. A few days ago, because of the accident that happened along Ugbo road, I took the state and federal government to court, complaining that a lot of people have died there, comparing how people died in Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Russia, there is less casualty there but over here, 40, 50 die in an accident and these are

avoidable. I wrote Godwin Obaseki and told him, your condolence we don't accept it anymore, fix the road, invest in the government road, get the money back to them and that's why I said I got myself into unnecessary trouble.

I have known you for at least 25 years, I know you not as a human rights activist but as a real estate investor, how do you combine being a successful businessman with being a human rights defender because from that time till now, you have never had a better yesterday?

It's easy; it's very easy to combine both jobs. I am a humanist, it's like when you hear someone say I have a calling from GOD, I am a pastor. I believe that your legal profession does not stop you from being a human. The hardest job anybody can ask for is to be nice and be kind, the job is available but nobody wants to take it. I want to be nice, I want to be kind, I want to be good and become great, I don't want to be great and become good, so, it became inborn in me as I am doing my real estate till today which I am known for, I still have the human face to people. I still feel that people have the right to have a tattoo on their body, it is your body, people have a right to own a laptop, and people have the right to own an iPhone 15 pro max if they can afford it. I recently went to China, and every little kid has this. My little son who is three years old is already learning to code because he is a privileged child, because his father can afford to buy him a computer, having a computer doesn't make you a criminal. Yes, we know there are


cyber-criminals, there are yahoo boys. Where are there no yahoo boys? There are Yahoo boys in America, there are thieves in America, if there were no thieves, there wouldn't be police, if there were no migration, there would be no need for immigration, if there were no drugs, there would be no need for customs. It has been happening before now and it will continue to happen. What we have to do is to try and see how the crime will not be more than the decency in the society that is always the difference. There must always be crime, there must always be drugs, there must always be prostitution, and there must always be the good, the bad, and the ugly so compiling my activism with my business doesn't affect me at all.

What's the percentage between your business and activism?

I think I can call it 50/50 because, over the years, it has not affected me, I have been donating money to the churches, mosque, in-fact I am a free thinker. I know there is an omnipotent but I don't go to church like you do, I believe also there is a deity that we have neglected. We embrace foreign things, even Christianity, and the Islamic religion, are all foreign, I can categorically tell you that our lord and savior Jesus Christ is not a Nigerian but from the Middle East, Saudi Arabia just like Prophet Mohammed, which then is an African God?

So let me come to the issue you have raised now, do you believe that there is heaven?

No, I don't want to believe in



If you have a judge in your court and you are a judge in your court, there will never be justice



heaven and hell, there is none. It might sound crazy but what is heaven? White people have been able to tell us that when you don't behave yourself, you will go to hellfire after death. Those who died along Ologbo road, because of explosion, because they went to siphon fuel, they burnt to death. Was that not what they told us that would make us behave ourselves? Which other heaven or hell are they going to, after roasting here like corn, are they now going to enter heaven because they roast themselves? For me, I don't believe in heaven or hell but I believe that one day we will die, whether we are going to meet our maker, I am not experienced to tell you that but I don't believe in heaven or hell.

Do you believe there is a soul and a body?

I believe there is a soul, and I believe the soul will depart from us one day and that's why even if you cannot believe in anything if you wake up, you must know that there is a greater being and I believe in that greater being, that architect of the Universe, that when we sleep, somebody owns us and one day, that person that owns us will take us back. Whether he is putting it in hell fire and crushing it or putting it in heaven and giving it chocolate milk, I don't know, I can't tell you that.

After the local government election, you addressed the media that you were harassed and you went further to mention names, how far has that gone?

I am somebody who doesn't stop when I am fighting. I fight for

good reasons. The first election we did for local government in 1999, Idahagbon won in Egor, and Lucky James won in Etsako Central because it was conducted by an unbiased empire, which was the INEC, not because they were good, they were not perfect, but Ibori, Igbiniedion and the rest of them connive that they cannot allow the INEC to continue to conduct local government election because they didn't want the local government to have their autonomy to treat them as slave. If you have a judge in your court and you are a judge in your court, there will never be justice that is why they always say they win 18 over 18. Immediately after that election, I wrote a petition to the Senate and House of Representatives that we must amend our constitution.

In Canada and America, the people that gave us democracy, state or federal don't conduct local government because local government is very close to the people. It is the local government themselves, Oredo, Ovia North East, and Ikoba-Okha that will conduct their local government but they will be supervised by the state and federal umpires. That means there will be a local government independent election commission that is how it is supposed to be. The state will have their own, the federal and the local government will have their own, and that is true federalism. It will also interest you to know that I have been fighting local government autonomy, and judicial autonomy when I am not a lawyer, I did it for them, and these are everything I have done. You can go and confirm because they are all in the public records

You released a video and you stated that the Chief of Staff and the Secretary to the Edo State Government are harassing you. What is the update?

The SSG did not harass me or assault me physically or otherwise, the truth is the truth, and if the truth shall kill, let them die. The SSG was my staff, a master is a master. The Chief of Staff was my dog handler. They are both my boys and I expected them to have respect for me as a Father or an uncle, that is why I called them out. The harassment was attempted by the Chief of Staff, I only added the SSG to it because I reported Osaigbovo Iyoha (Chief of Staff) to Osarodion Ogie (SSG) before this local government election, and he didn't do anything which is why I combined them. To be truthful, Ogie did me no wrong, it was Iyoha who was secretly raising boys to humiliate me but it was revealed to me. The police investigated my allegation of threat to life. I just wanted it to be out there that my life was being threatened, and in case anything to me, he should be held responsible.

What is the state of Human Rights Defenders in Edo State?

There have been issues among lawyers and they have not been representing themselves well. When Douglas Ogbankua was arrested, I submitted a petition with the DSS and also with Human Rights Radio (Brekete). My argument is that if a lawyer who has the right to defend his client said "My client cannot make a statement without my presence, that is what Douglas did and he

walked out and they descended on him and beat him and I said that if you can beat a lawyer then we cannot trust a suspect in your custody and that is where I have been interested because you can also beat me because I am always in trouble, I park my brush, towel when I am leaving the house, I don't know if I am going to jail because of the kind of work I do. But lawyers must wake up. Lawyers are not waking up. Lawyers are also law enforcement officers, they are supposed to be enforcing the law, but some of them have reduced the bar, that is why the police don't have respect for them and it ought not to be so in an ideal society.

Is it the gap in lawyering that has given you so much to do and tell us about your ongoing fight with the Benin Bar Chairman of the NBA?

I don't have an ongoing fight with him, I think he was misguided, lawyers are supposed to be role models in our society. What happened was that there was a scheme going on with the Commander of the EFCC, who has some selective lawyers, I don't want to mention their names, about 6-8 of them including two women. If you go there as a lawyer, they will disrespect you. The cartel takes the cars, and jewelry bought with criminal money, they will sell, share with the EFCC and they will take their own. When I got a hold of it, I wrote about it, instead of the NBA Chairman commending me, he made a mistake and told my family that I am a litigant who has never won a case and I said no, you cannot attack me, the last

time I know, he has never won a case in a Magistrate court or High court or Appeal court, he has never been to Supreme Court, he is only there because his father was the owner of a Hotel and he cannot even manage it as a prodigal son besides he has no wife at home and the last time I know, someone was sleeping with his wife at Akenzua after which she ran to America with his children but I am married to a supermodel.

By the grace of GOD, I didn't go to a four-corner world of institution, none of my children are B-graded, they are A and A+, so I am blessed with that. He has since apologized but I refused the apology and flew to Abuja to complain to the NBA president that he must resign from the Committees he belongs in, in the Edo State Government. He is a Benin man, I don't bring people down but I cannot allow you to bring me down. He said he didn't do it that the P.R.O. did because he was overzealous and then got him into trouble. He swore that he never did but are you going to allow me to fold my hands to allow someone to insult my beautiful wife and beautiful children? No, I would rather defend.

What is in your tool kit for the lawyers/defenders association?

1. Lawyers must know the essence of why they went to school.
2. Lawyers must also know that people have the right not to make a statement
3. And the lawyer also has to do something for the sake of justice, every divisional police in the state is supposed to be visited by a

magistrate judge to see if anybody is being unlawfully detained for more than 24 hours. The lawyers if they are champions of justice, must monitor compliance

4. Speak against lawyers working with EFCC to extort yahoo boys or criminals

What is in your tool kit for human rights defenders?

You know there are people who can do more than what I am doing, fortunately for me, I have been consistent and I have not been lazy, I have never been a government apology or relied on the government. By the grace of GOD, this place I am living in now was bought 28 years ago for seven thousand naira that will tell you for how long I have had money. When Oshiomhole came here when he wanted to be the governor, he was amazed that someone could have so much influence and wealth, and yet he was humble. The reason people are deprived and are sold out easily from activism is stomach infrastructure, the Edo people say "Elephants are crying that the hunters want to finish us, the children of the hunters are also crying, daddy, where is the meat". Most of the human rights defenders supposedly want to build houses and buy cars, they are speaking grammar but their children are hungry. If the human rights children are hungry, they sell their rights.

What is your advice for Edo state as it concerns the incoming election?

My advice for the governor of Edo state, who is my brother, my friend,

whom I have not seen face to face for seven years but we have been writing and talking in the face of newspapers. I am not going to say he is doing well when he is doing very poorly. My advice is that he has one hour, he might not be able to complete all he started but for the sake of GOD, fix our road because he is going to be remembered for two things, what he broke or what he made, that is my advice for the governor.

What is your advice for public citizens?

For our citizens, who are clapping for governors who dug boreholes for Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand Naira and commissioned it with Eight Million Naira, it is your money. For you who have the right to vote, but not exercising it, you cannot complain. For those who voted and it did not count, don't give up. We shouldn't give up, we should continue to press further. Things are no longer the way they used to be, we are evolving, and we will get there but we shouldn't give up on ourselves. There should be consistency, perseverance, speaking truth to power, live free or die.

Edo 2024, what do we expect, what should the citizens look out for?

What you look out for is a re-change, the PDP and APC have failed abysmally. We should not be loyal to our party, we should be loyal to our country Nigeria, and our conscience because Usman Dan Fodio once said, that "conscience is an open wound only the truth that can heal". We should be the

change we are asking for. We should ask ourselves, the party PDP we want to vote for, what has it done for us, and the party APC I want to vote for, what has it done for us lately? If the answer is nothing, then swipe. When we continue to do one thing, we will continue to get the same result, we should try the Labour Party and see what they can do. It is not a perfect party, you cannot be perfect than the creator the Almighty GOD but if you do one thing continuously and you are getting the same result, you must try something else and that is why the English say "you should get out of that box and do something else"

Edo 2024, Edo Central Zoning. What is your take?

My take is that, we talk about equity and justice, I don't have a problem with equity and justice but I have a problem with rotation. I don't care whether the Governor of Edo State 2024 is Etsako, Isan, or Afemai, so long he is an Edo citizen, who has competence and character, who can govern us as Edo governor not as Isan or Benin or Ekpoma. Don't forget that some of the best governors we had were Samuel Osaigbovo Ogbemudia and Ambrose Ali, may their souls rest in peace. We have about 68 percent of the vote from Edo South, we voted for Ali, and we voted for Osariemhen Osunbor, even though his tenure was short. The idea of it is Isan's turn, with respect to my Isan friend, with respect to my Etsako friend, I don't buy it all, I buy into character and competence. He who the cap fits, let him wear it.



Female Lawyer: Workplace, Parenting and Professional Conduct

By President Aigbokhan, Esq. & Osazuwa Osazogie, Esq.



Women make up a vital part of the economic and social fabric that hold their communities together, yet their work is rarely valued at the same level as men's work. Much of this has to do with what opportunities are available to them. Women are disproportionately likely to be poor, under-educated, employed in low-wage or unpaid work, and subject to dismissal for getting married or having children. In many industries, female workers are systematically denied their rights to regular pay and regular working hours; equal pay for equal work; permanent contracts; safe and non-hazardous work environments; and freedom of association. Egregious abuses, including sexual violence, harassment, and forced pregnancy tests, are all too common.

Most married women and nursing mothers in the legal profession struggle to manage their professional responsibilities especially if their children are still very young. This challenge is also noticeable among women in journalism, the legal profession, or other careers with significant social impact. The legal profession demands a great extent of time and commitment, and as such, there is a competition between the demands of the workplace and parenthood thereby placing female lawyers in a tight corner. Female lawyers are often expected to juggle multiple responsibilities including managing their jobs, household and as well as striving for success at their workplace. This is coupled with time constraints, harassment, and overwhelming work expectations. This multitasking nature often leads to an overwhelming workload, resulting in a trade-off between family and career.

Statistics reveal that approximately 58 percent of women in the legal profession have encountered or witnessed sexism first hand including being subject to sexist comments from male colleagues. Alarming, about 46 percent chose not to report such incidents for fear of adverse effect on their career. Some young female lawyers (married and unmarried) experience significant levels of sexual harassment in law firms. Instances vary from sexist jokes to inappropriate sexual comments creating an unhealthy, unprofessional work environment. This pervasive issue has driven a lot of female lawyers away from the profession and contributed to broken homes. According to ALM Law International 2019, sexual harassment and bullying were higher at large law firms at about 53 percent, compared with small law firms and medium-sized law firms which are 42 percent and 40 percent respectively. Section 46 of the VAPP law 2015 defines sexual harassment as an unwanted conduct of a sexual nature or other conduct based on sex or gender which is persistent or serious and demeans, humiliates, or creates a hostile or intimidating environment and this may include physical, verbal, or non-verbal conduct. Similarly, the United Nations describes sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. People, particularly women and girls, face sexual harassment in all spaces, from online, to the streets, to their homes, to their places of work. The Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act, 2015, specially criminalizes sexual harassment and penalizes offences such as rape, infliction of physical injury on a person, willfully placing a person in fear of physical injury; offensive conduct (which may be sexual in nature), economic abuse, intimidation, and emotional, verbal and psychological abuse. Likewise, the Criminal Code from sections 351 to 361 of the Act made provisions

for sexual harassment. However, there is a high rate of sexual harassment in workplaces in Nigeria and there is a shortage of legislation that specifically covers workplace sexual harassment in Nigeria save the National Industrial Court Rules 2017. Section 11(b) of the Legal Practitioners Act 2007 did not define sexual harassment but condemns conduct incompatible with the status of a legal practitioner, which can lead to the name of the lawyer being struck out of the roll or suspended. It is trite that where abuse of the right of another in the workplace is proven, sexual harassment is established. Rule 26 (1) of the Rules of Professional Conduct 2007 provides that lawyers shall treat one another with respect, fairness, consideration, and dignity, and shall not allow any ill feeling between opposing clients to influence their conduct and demeanor towards one another or the opposing clients.

Gender inequality is a significant challenge faced by female lawyers. They are often underpaid or not recommended for promotion in their law firms. Female lawyers who work part-time jobs or flexible schedules are rarely promoted to partner or appointed into the judiciary, because they are often overlooked and are sometimes erroneously perceived as less dedicated to their firm. Additionally, married women and nursing mothers tend to have heavier burdens with child care and household responsibilities than their male counterparts disrupting their work life and household obligation balance. Also, most female lawyers are given the office-related task to handle limiting their opportunities for courtroom and legal representation. This gender bias leads to the perception that female lawyers are more efficient with research and less active with court proceedings disadvantaging their prospective for senior roles. Additionally, some female lawyers are subjected to hostile work environments compelling them to leave the practice of law for less demanding jobs. Unfortunately, this workplace discrimination persists in the legal profession where women are often placed on a different career path than their male counterparts making it more challenging for both married and unmarried female lawyers to advance in their careers. Balancing parenthood and a legal career can be very demanding, especially for a public interest lawyer. Female lawyers without domestic support spend more time on housework and attending to the children affecting their career focus. This imbalance can strain relationships and lead to an increase in divorce rates or broken homes of female lawyers more than their male counterparts. It is important to note that, most young female lawyers have slightly higher divorce rates than their male counterparts which are about 10 to 7 percent respectively. Most law firms grant only three month maternity leave which is inadequate for nursing a baby. In addition, some female lawyers decline to travel out of jurisdiction for legal matters because of security reasons and this equally creates a bad impression on their capacity and ability to discharge their duties.

The orientation of the legal profession is largely controlled by men in nearly every jurisdiction restricting the active participation of female lawyers in the conduct of affairs of the legal profession. This is the root of the problem and the reason why little or no attention is given to female lawyers. To address these issues, we recommend that law firms should adopt progressive office management and equal gender policy. For instance, male lawyers should be given the opportunity to partake in reasonable paternal leave. Female lawyers should be given the benefit of the doubt and not easily judged by parenthood in the discharge of their duties. It is no news that law firms would rather employ single female lawyers than married or nursing mothers regardless of their qualifications or experience. This discriminatory act needs to be stopped. In addition, law firms should make provision for formal and informal mentorship opportunities for young female lawyers, especially on how to balance work, personal, and professional life.

There should be more encouraging measures of performance and capacity other than the billable hours model and the workplace made more flexible to accommodate childcare and other family needs. It is also essential to raise awareness about sexual harassment in the legal profession and encourage victims of sexual harassment to speak out. We recommend the strict enforcement of the National Industrial Court Rules on areas of sexual harassment in the workplace including the prohibition of verbal words or physical conduct of a sexual nature against colleagues. Conclusively, the Rules of Professional Conduct should be amended to explicitly prohibit sexual harassment in the legal profession, and promote inclusivity and fairness to achieve an equitable and more supportive legal profession.

Harassment and killings of journalists in Nigeria: 2020–2023

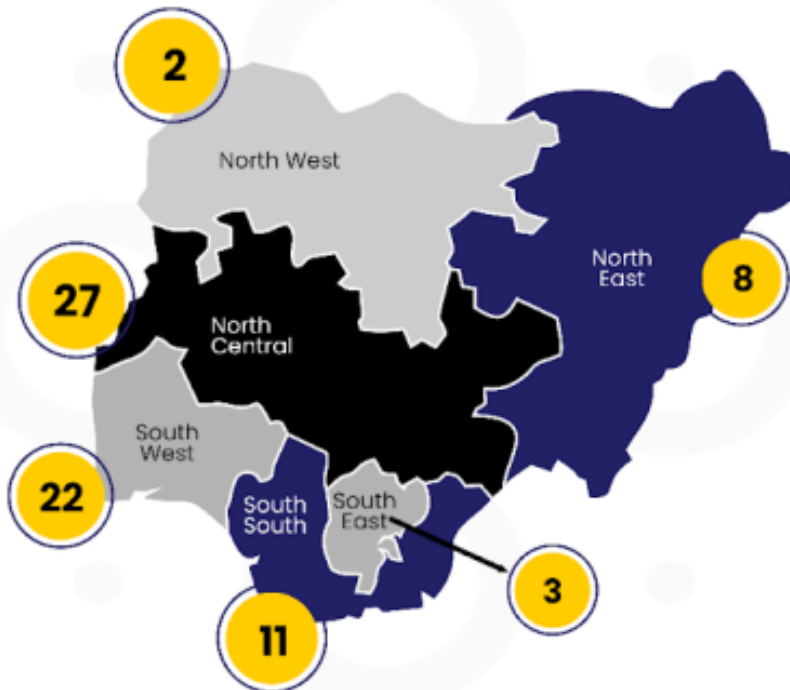


It is widely believed that the Society consists of fundamental pillars of estates including the Clergy, the Nobles, the commoners, and the fourth estate represented by journalists. An informed citizenry is said to be the cornerstone of a thriving democracy, and journalism, on the other hand, functions as the bridge between ignorance and knowledge. Historically, journalism has been instrumental in facilitating social changes by shedding light on various societal issues ranging across civil, economic, political, health, religious, and a host of others. With information, citizens are stimulated to take a necessary course of action in a bid to address such issues. This underscores the pivotal role that journalists play in providing citizens with accurate information to make informed decisions. Journalists are instrumental in holding those in authority accountable and promoting transparency.

Unfortunately, this fundamental pillar of society has been the subject of attacks in Nigeria. Journalists have been made to face physical assault, abduction, battery, gun attacks, threats to life, robbery, unlawful detention, suspension or termination of employment, censorship, harassment, and even death. The perpetrators of these heinous acts comprise the military, the police, politicians, DSS, political supporters, hoodlums, etc.

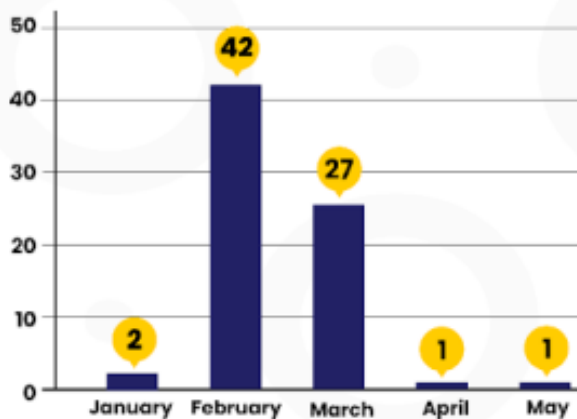
In 2023, Nigeria was ranked 123rd on the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) global press freedom ranking index out of 180 countries. This came as no surprise considering the rampant harassment targeted at journalists across the country. According to the Press Attack Tracker updated by the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID), 74 cases of press attacks were recorded in 2023⁴⁴. The ICIR (International Centre for Investigative Reporting) in an article published on its website revealed that at least 39 Journalists were harassed in 2023 by state and non-state actors.⁴⁵ In 2022 the International Press Centre (IPC) reported that 66 Nigerian Journalists suffered diverse forms of attacks across the country.⁴⁶ ARTICLE 19, an international human rights organization reported that 60 journalists were attacked from January to October 2020, 3 of whom were killed⁴⁷.

These journalists are constantly humiliated, threatened, assaulted, and in extreme cases murdered in the course of discharging their harmless duties. There have been several reports of such incidents and yet little or nothing has been done to address this raging menace. In September 2023, the body of Hamisu Danjibga, a journalist at the Voice of Nigeria, who made extensive reports on the state of insecurity in Zamfara was discovered in a septic tank three days after he was declared missing. Within that same period, the lifeless body of Yusuf Mubaarak, a 27-year-old Journalist was found in Kwara State. Reports also surfaced of the harassment of one Yakubu Mohammed, Editor of WikiTimes in September 2023 by officials of the Nigeria Police Force. This was due to a report by the



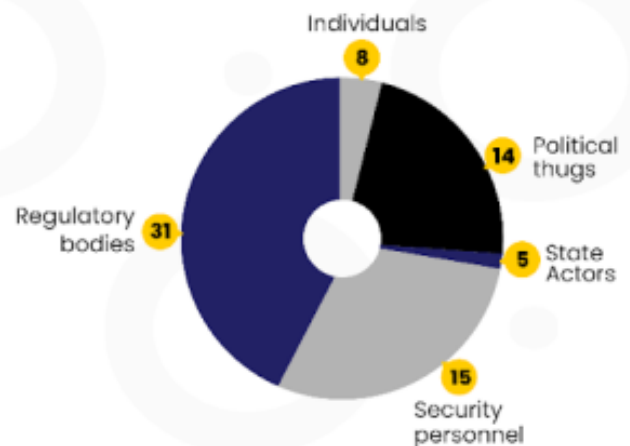
GEOPOLITICAL ZONE

This shows the number of attack on journalists that happened in different geopolitical zones across Nigeria from January till date.



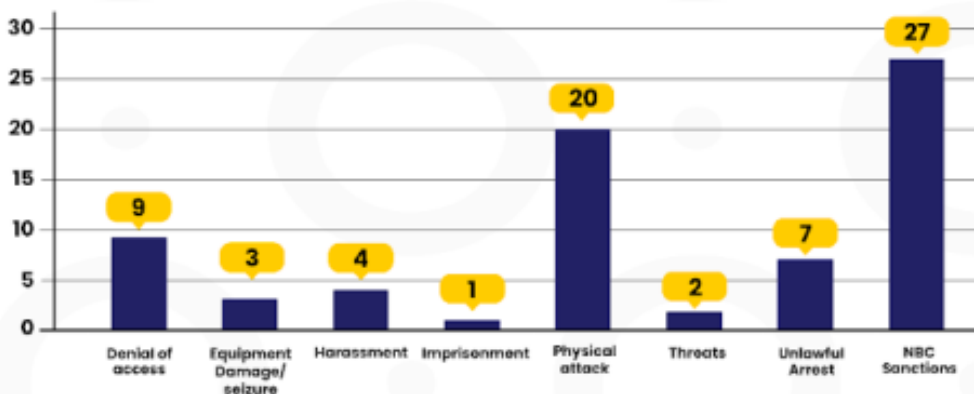
TOTAL NUMBER OF ATTACKS

This shows the total number of attacks on journalist that happened from January 2023 till date. The chart shows the number of attacks that happened each month.



PERPETRATORS OF ATTACK ON THE PRESS

This shows the number of perpetrators of different types of attacks on journalist that happened from January till date.



CATEGORIES OF ATTACK ON THE PRESS

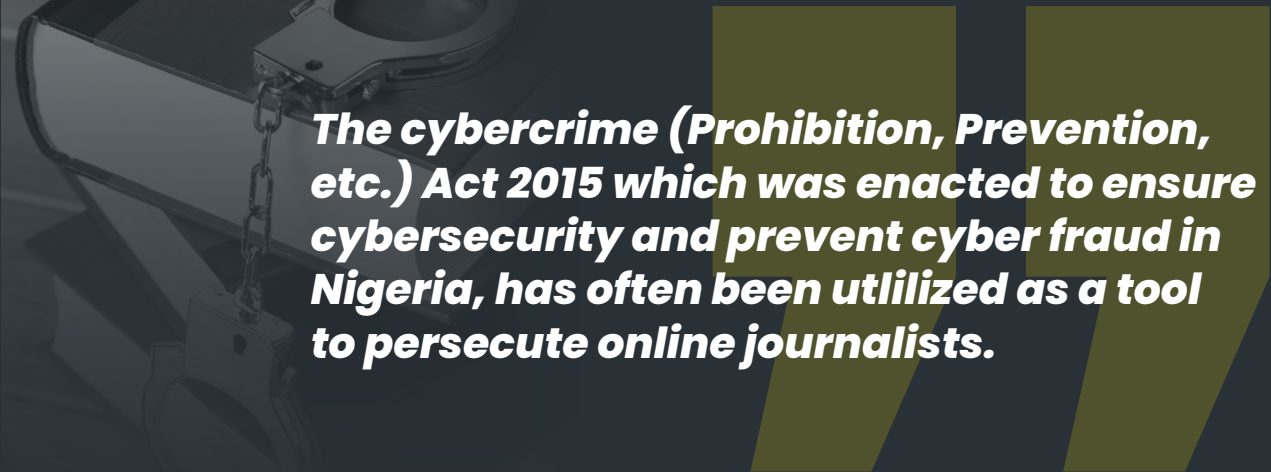
This shows the categories of attacks journalist faced while carrying out their assignments from January till date.

Journalist wherein he exposed financing of terrorism and illegal mining in Bauchi State. In May 2023, a reporter at Premium Times was arrested and had his phone seized by security operatives for recording a tussle between a woman observing the proceedings at the Supreme Court and a Police Officer.

Similarly, in September 2023, a reporter with the ICIR was attacked by Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) officers. He was beaten up and had his ID card seized while trying to record the officers forcefully grabbing the steering of a motorist and deflating her tyres. Eti-Inyene Godwin Akpan was compelled to flee the country in 2021 owing to the harassment and threats received because of his records of violence that took place at the Lekki Toll Gate on October 20, 2020. A reporter named Onifade Emmanuel Pelumi, who had covered the unrest around the END SARS protests in Lagos, was later found dead in a mortuary on October 30, 2020. He was said to have been last seen alive in Police Custody.

More alarming is the fact that Nigeria has enacted several legislations that restrict the freedom of the press and have been used by state actors to clamp down on journalists from time to time. As an illustration, the Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015 which was enacted to ensure cyber security and prevent cyber fraud in Nigeria has often been utilized as a tool to persecute online journalists⁴⁸. The law has frequently been manipulated and exploited by the government to silence online constructive criticism and dissent. Journalists have been arrested and charged on the grounds of cyberstalking, cyber terrorism, publishing false news, causing annoyance, insult, hatred, etc⁴⁹. The Official Secrets Act 1962 has also been criticized for its use by the government to victimize journalists and media outlets. **The media houses and regulatory bodies are not left out.** Consequently, the National Broadcasting Commission established to regulate the broadcasting industry has been accused severally of being a puppet in the hands of the Government to witch-hunt private media houses. Laws of defamation, sedition, contempt, Section 29 of the Correctional Service Act, Freedom of Information Act, Terrorism(Prevention &Prohibition) Act, and The Nigerian Communication Commission Act 2003 amongst others have also been deemed to constitute the body of repressive media laws in Nigeria⁵⁰.

There appears to be a lack of legal framework and safeguard policies for the protection of Journalists in Nigeria. Besides the general right stipulated in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guaranteeing the freedom of expression including the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference afforded to the citizens of Nigeria, journalists are left unprotected and open to danger. Nigeria stands as one of West Africa's most perilous and challenging environments for journalists, who often suffer monitoring, attack, and arbitrary arrest. ⁵¹The Director General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, succinctly stated that "Crimes against journalists has an enormous impact on society as a whole because they prevent people from making informed decisions." He added that "when attacks against Journalists go unpunished, the legal system and safety frameworks have failed everyone." One of the impacts of the harassment and killings of Journalists in Nigeria is diminished press freedom. The erosion of press freedom will undermine a crucial aspect of democratic governance which is a free and diverse press.



The cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015 which was enacted to ensure cybersecurity and prevent cyber fraud in Nigeria, has often been utilized as a tool to persecute online journalists.



Attacks on Journalists create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation within the media community resulting to self-censorship. Hence, Journalists would be reluctant to pursue stories that may be deemed controversial or critical of powerful entities, regardless of how important the exposure of such happenings might be. This would in the long run limit the breadth and veracity of information available to the public. **It also fosters a lackadaisical attitude to work, significantly impacting the effectiveness of journalism on governance in the country and globally.**

While Section 39 of the Constitution entrenches freedom of speech as a fundamental human right of Nigerians, attacks on journalists create a chilling effect on this freedom. In the circumstance where the mouthpiece of the people faces threats or violence, uncontrolled and unchecked, it sends a message to other members of the society that expressing their views may come at a personal cost. This will in turn deter individuals from expressing dissenting opinions or engaging in open constructive criticism. Notwithstanding the direct attacks on journalists, broader intimidation tactics such as surveillance or even online abuse directed at those who express dissenting views contribute to the atmosphere of fear, suppressing the willingness of individuals to participate in open discussions, and limiting the diversity of perspectives in public discourse.

The perils and continuous attack on journalists is an outright disregard for fundamental human rights and principles that underpin democratic societies, particularly the principles of freedom of expression and the right to information. Targeting journalists poses a multifaceted threat to human rights, encompassing direct harm to individuals, a breach of freedom of expression, and a compromised right to information.

Attacks on Journalists not only deprive society of a crucial mechanism for resolving complex and societal issues but would lead to heightened tension. Journalists serve as conduits for information. They help to uncover and disseminate information that fosters transparency, facilitates dialogue, and promotes a deeper understanding of different perspectives. When journalism is curtailed via censorship, intimidation, or other restrictive measures, essential issues may go unaddressed. Constructive dialogue reduces and the potential for misunderstanding and polarization increases. This lack of coverage can contribute to a sense of frustration, as important topics remain in the shadows without proper scrutiny or public discourse resulting to misinformation, rumors, and ultimately social tensions. Unresolved issues fester and contribute to the atmosphere of mistrust, and discontent among various segments of society.



The Way Forward



1. Legal Protection- The importance of implementing legal frameworks to protect journalists in combating the humiliation and killing of journalists in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Laws must be enacted to protect the freedom of the press and vest journalists with the right to carry out their duties without fear or bias. Accordingly, reform of repressive media laws should be carried out and any offending sections and laws should be expunged or repealed.



2. Legal Defense Fund- Establishing a dedicated financial resource to support the legal defense and protection of journalists under attack is essential. This fund should assist journalists who are unjustly imprisoned, charged, harassed, or attacked in the course of discharging their duty. Access to the legal defense fund should be controlled based on some criteria such as financial need, severity of the attack, and importance of the work.



3. Legal Support Services: Another recommendation is the collaboration with media associations in Nigeria. It is advisable that the NUJ⁵² should collaborate with legal experts, law firms, or organizations like FOI⁵³ Counsel with specialization in media laws for the provision of legal assistance to deserving journalists.



4. Journalists' Safety Training- There should also be training Programs designed to equip journalists with the knowledge, skills, and strategies necessary to navigate hazardous situations. This training should cover physical safety measures including situational awareness, conflict de-escalation strategies, self-defense techniques, and First aid training. Additionally, they should be provided with digital security training on best practices for cyber security to protect their online presence and data, safe communication methods, encryption tools, and how to respond to cyber threats effectively. **Journalists must ensure they discharge their duties within the ambit of the law and effectively to avoid any fault finding on their part.**



5. Promotion of Media Literacy and Conducting Public Support Campaigns- The public should be incorporated through enlightenment on the roles and importance of journalists in the society, particularly in Nigeria. We must cultivate a sense of responsibility and solidarity in respect to the protection of journalists.



6. Accountability- Conclusively, persons or institutions responsible for attacks on journalists must be held accountable. Cases of attacks should be thoroughly investigated and prosecuted to deter future incidents and uphold the pillars of governance, democracy, and society.

15

Most Vicious Oppressors of Lawyers and Law Profession in Nigeria

#EndangeredSpecies | By Sylvester Udemezue

The legal profession in Nigeria is currently facing challenges and is in dire need of attention and solutions. However, the crux of the challenge is the apparent lack of acknowledgment of the plight of lawyers. Hence, the problems continue to linger and escalate. It appears that Lawyers have no one and nowhere to turn to, for aid. What do you think, please? Tell me I missed it! In the meantime, check these out:

1. Policemen and women, officials of EFCC, ICPC, and other law enforcement agencies victimize Lawyers by outright brutalization and arrest. Although some lawyers are to be partly blamed for this situation. The fact that lawyers and the police (law enforcement agents) share the blame 50-50 shall be illustrated in the subsequent paragraphs.

2. Judges and justices of courts also oppress lawyers. They feel no remorse in publicly abusing, insulting, and denigrating lawyers, and in some cases, without even affording the lawyers an opportunity to be heard. Judges/justices sometimes call lawyers unprintable names without giving particulars of the "professional misconduct" allegedly committed by the lawyers, making them feel hopeless, useless, fruitless, hapless, and helpless. What is the purpose of fair hearing if judges can convict lawyers for "professional misconduct" without any opportunity of being heard and without giving particulars of the charges against them? With due respect to my Lords, it is a violation of the rule of law, fair hearing, fundamental human rights, and due process to convict a suspect without a prior charge or informing him/her of the particulars of the offence or professional misconduct allegedly violated and without offering him/her an opportunity of a making a defence. Further, our courts and lawyers contribute to the delay of cases pending in their court thereby making Nigeria's administration of justice system the slowest (and arguably the most debased) in the world.

3. Custom officials, NSCDC officials, NDLEA officials, and other law enforcement agencies frequently victimize lawyers by publicly beating up, brutalizing, and locking lawyers up, just for doing their professional jobs. Looking at the most recent scenario where in a viral video, some brainless custom officers are seen rough-handling, assaulting, and molesting a lawyer who had gone to the customs office on behalf of his client whose car was (allegedly) impounded and detained by the custom officials. Even the admonition by a fellow custom officer to his colleagues, that "this man is a lawyer; this man has done practically nothing" could not deter or dissuade the irresponsible, scatterbrained, and power-drunk officers. This is how low the legal profession has sunk in Nigeria; no one has any regard or respect anymore for lawyers. Anyone can treat lawyers and the legal profession without respect, as they please, and go scot-free or unchecked. Yes, why not?

Whatever a lawyer can do, (a policeman thinks) he too can; so what is the need for lawyers anyway? The Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) has done little or nothing except release official statements to address this grave disrepute and disrespect to lawyers and the legal profession. The NBA is presently viewed as only a toothless bulldog — a barking dog that never bites, full

of noise and no action. The most frustrating part is lawyers chanting "The Bar has spoken; The Bar Has spoken"! Of what relevance is it when the Bar "speaks" without action? The majority of the members of the Bar are jobless, hopeless, and therefore hungry, frustrated, and disillusioned. They are tired of chanting and believing empty-stomach speeches. The NBA is advised to start taking reasonable actions contrary to empty words of promises and speech. There is a saying "Let your actions speak louder than your words". This is the demand of the members of the Bar! The era of "The bar has spoken" is in the past; let us stop living in the past, in past glory. Let us face reality and wake up from our slumber now, lest the profession get finally destroyed while the NBA goes about "speaking"

4. The general public constantly and unrestrainedly mistreat lawyers by calling them "liars". There is a popular misconception that all lawyers are liars. This is absurdly unacceptable and false. Assuming but not conceding that lawyers are liars, I can tell you that non-lawyers are even greater liars — indeed the most mischievous and barefaced lies are told by non-lawyers who also are the worst hypocrites of the highest order. They label lawyers as liars and still sponsor your favorite children or wards to be lawyers. Does this mean they sponsor their kids/wards to be liars? They call lawyers liars and still beg lawyers to represent them in legal matters. If lawyers are liars, then since the clients, non-lawyers pay them for their services, they are equally guilty as sponsors and promoters of lies and accordingly the principal liars! Put differently, if lawyers are liars, then clients and non-lawyers are accessories after and before the fact. Hence, non-lawyers are partners in the lying business and therefore equally guilty with the lawyers. Why then the kettle call the pot black?

5. Many law firms oppress and exploit lawyers by treating them as expendable resources, used and discarded at will. Most law firms are unscrupulously selfish, making huge profits from clients but paying lawyers peanuts and still contributing to persecuting other lawyers.

6. The NBA contributes to the oppression of lawyers by extorting lawyers, manipulating lawyers' intelligence, shortchanging lawyers, and collecting annual Bar Practice Fee (BPF) but refusing, failing, or neglecting to do anything to promote the welfare and economic advancement of lawyers. The NBA Leadership has been a great impediment to the growth of lawyers often engaging in empty displays of grandeur, self-serving actions, and insincere gestures aimed at pleasing the masses and onlookers. NBA leaders perpetrate poor governance, enable lawlessness, promote impunity, and turn a blind eye to corruption. NBA Leaderships have no remorse for the pitiable plight of lawyers in Nigeria. How have they shown any concern? They actively condemn other bad leaders, instead of correcting their iniquity! The NBA is advised according to the bible to first remove the log of wood in your eyes, so you can see clearly to correct others. Charity begins at home!

7. The Nigerian government oppresses and cheats lawyers by subjecting them to the lowest pay and unfair treatment among other professionals in Nigeria's public service. To illustrate this point, some law corps members are posted to secondary schools to teach instead of being posted to legal parastatals where they will be more effective and productive. Emphatically, Section 66(3) Nigerian Police Force Establishment Act 2020 requires that every Police Station in Nigeria must have posted to it, no less than one lawyer whose job is to monitor compliance with human rights at the police station. This provision has not been religiously enforced. Additionally, the government has refused to establish law departments in local government areas in Nigeria.

Non-lawyers oppress lawyers by stealing their briefs, under the pretext that they can deliver legal services including impersonation

8. Lawyers often oppress fellow lawyers in Nigeria. It is no news that lawyers employ their professional colleagues, and then refuse to pay salaries, or refuse to impart experience but allow their learned colleagues to wallow in abject lack and penury. There is no unity and cooperation at the bar. This can be seen in the detestable act of lawyers accepting a brief of gross inadequate, grossly undercharged fees that a reasonable lawyer would refuse. It is unimaginable that a non-lawyer would prepare a Deed of Assignment (for land sold for N100,000,000) and hand it over to a lawyer to sign and seal for a consideration of N10,000. Furthermore, lawyers engaging in charge, and Bail, and jankara practices continually bring the legal profession to disrepute in the eyes of the common man.

9. The lawyer's family, relatives, friends, and dependents constantly, although ignorantly, oppress the lawyer. First, they all believe the lawyer is wealthy, well-to-do, and well-paid. So, when they seek legal assistance from the lawyer, they expect him to charge them less. They introduce familiarity, close ties, or personal relationships into the professional scene. The more the lawyer tries to clarify the challenge, the more their anger escalates. They believe without justification, that the lawyer is lying or simply self-centered and thereby rebranding him a "bad" case. One can only wish they had an idea of the economic hardship lawyers endure or recognize the oppression many lawyers face in the society as discussed in this commentary. However, they remain ignorant and indifferent. They are mostly concerned about what they would gain from the lawyers and nothing more.

10. Clients oppress and victimize lawyers by withholding lawyers' professional fees, even after the lawyer has faithfully rendered legal service, denying them well-deserved briefs, undercharging them, and paying less than the agreed fees. Further, it is unimaginable that clients now prefer to give briefs to EFCC, police, OPC Arewa Youths, IPOB, and employ massob, omo n'ile, NURTW, old SOJAs, ex-militants, area boys and louts, etc.

11. Non-lawyers oppress lawyers by stealing their briefs, under the pretext that they can deliver legal services including impersonation thereby leaving the majority of lawyers jobless, hopeless, disenchanting, disillusioned, disappointed, and frustrated.

12. Regulators in the law profession oppress lawyers by neglecting lawyers, subjugating lawyers, and ignoring and refusing to tackle the pressing challenges of lawyers in Nigeria. They are only concerned about disciplining lawyers for professional misconduct. They don't appear to give a hoot about why some lawyers engage in unprofessional conduct and about what can be done to halt the ugly trend. It is imperative to explore solutions to enhance the living conditions of lawyers. While disciplining lawyers for misconduct is important, equal attention should be given to the reasons lawyers engage in unprofessional conduct, to curb this ugly trend. It is advisable to adopt the criminology approach, in addition to the criminal

Legal institutions should prioritize the growth and progress of their graduates and their impact in the society

law approach by addressing the root of the problem. When the cause is removed the effect reduces. Thus, improving the welfare and economic advancement of lawyers would reduce the prevalence of misconduct among lawyers.

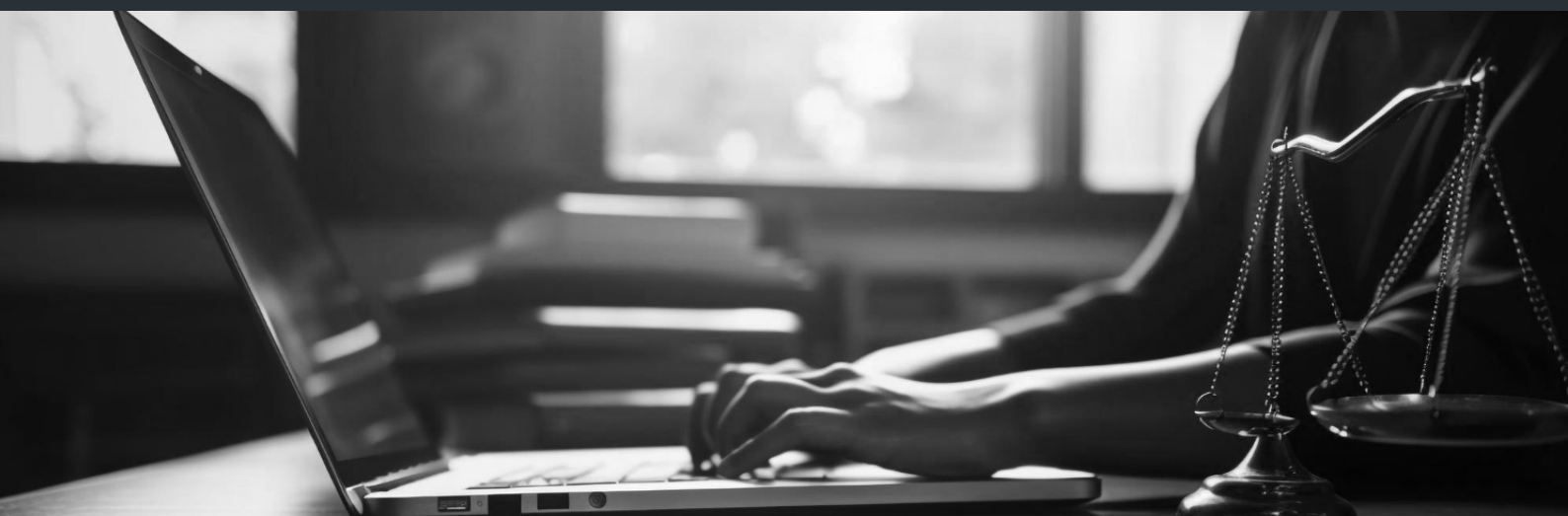
13. Unknown gunmen, kidnappers, killers, and terrorists act as agents and tools of oppression by killing, kidnapping, maiming, and terrorizing lawyers.

14. Law institutions in Nigeria are also oppressors of lawyers. They continue to train and produce more Lawyers, doing little or nothing to help improve the economic plight of the existing lawyers and the Legal profession. Legal institutions should prioritize the growth and progress of their graduates and their impact in the society. Thus, they need to regulate the non-stop incorporation of lawyers into the society, until there is a positive outlook for existing legal practitioners and the legal profession. Furthermore, consider a scenario where a university assigned a quota to admit not more than 100 law students, goes ahead and admits over 400 law students. At the time of admission into the Nigerian Law School, it becomes a tussle. In the circumstance that the Nigeria Law School denies some law students admission because of inadequate facilities and unauthorized increase in quota, these universities and their quota-overshoot law graduates begin to publicly criticize, slander, and tarnish the Nigeria Law School. It is recommended that the necessary legal institutions establish more law school campuses as proposed by then Senator Smart Adeyemi.

15. Nigeria's National Assembly oppresses lawyers in Nigeria and facilitates the destruction of the legal profession. It is unprecedented that the Senate would pass a Bill establishing more law school Campuses without measures for the improvement and maintenance of the existing campuses. Meanwhile, the Senate has no business in establishing more law school campuses. It is an administrative decision to be taken by the Council of Legal Education, based on expediency and need. Indicating the appalling conditions at the Nigerian Law School, Yenagoa Campus, Governor Nyesom Wike says even slaves should not be allowed to use the facility⁵⁴.

Being aware of the deplorable state of the campuses, the first step taken was the consideration of establishing additional campuses without reconstruction of the existing campuses. In my opinion, the decision to pass a Bill establishing more campuses is not a smart decision in the prevailing circumstances. The existing seven Campuses of the Law School can conveniently admit up to 10,000 law students if adequately and smartly upgraded. Firstly, it is recommended that the existing campuses be rehabilitated and maintained to meet the required standard. Presently, the Abuja campus currently takes care of up to 1,500/1,600 students while the Lagos Campus takes up to 1,300/1,400 students. Likewise, the upgrade of the other five (5) campuses will definitely increase the number of admitted students. No additional law school Campuses should be established save by the Council of Legal Education & NLS; they (CLE/NLS) wear the shoes; only they know where it pinches.

Protecting Lawyers: Navigating the Risk of Endangerment and Digital Security



The world is rapidly transforming into a global village as a result of the widespread use of the internet. This digital phenomenon is readily available to the aged, young, educated, uneducated, persons living with disability, professionals, government agencies, law firms, organizations, and the world at large. Internet users contribute and consume vast amounts of information from various sources. A lawyer is actively involved in research, gathering information, study, and dissemination of information via the internet. Nigerian law firms having in their control and possession personal, business-sensitive, and commercially-sensitive information makes them an attractive target for cybercriminals. There is a flagrant breach of digital security of lawyers, journalists, and human rights defenders by government agents and even criminals in the society. They manipulate information and communication technologies from behind the scenes to steal information, destroy documents, and manipulate communication online. In Edo State, there is a rapid increase in Information Technology related criminal charges against human defenders. In August 2019, a 59-year-old lawyer Mr. Francis Ogedegbe was arraigned before the Magistrate Court sitting in Benin City by the Edo State Government for allegedly publishing fake news on his Facebook page concerning Edo University, Iyamo. In June 2019, Ugebrease Edoghogho, a female community journalist was charged to court by the Edo State Government for breach of justice and public peace because she took a photograph outside the court premises with her Techno phone. The two accused persons were discharged and acquitted with the support of ⁵⁵FOI Counsel.

The government employs spyware to monitor lawyers and defenders who are advocating against corruption and other illegal activities in the country. The computer system of the founder of FOI Counsel Mr. President Aigbokhan, was invaded twice by hackers through phishing-tailored mails and messages that led to the inaccessibility of his email and other social media accounts and consequent loss of information. The cyber-attack came via a link shared in a message sent through LinkedIn which he opened and later deleted and suddenly he discovered that his system began to malfunction. He lost a lot of documents of high-impact value. In his second experience, he was called on the phone on the 6th day of November 2019 by a hacker who recommended that he join a conversation on WhatsApp page (NBA⁵⁶ WHATSAPP). He told him to join the discussion via a link which he ignored and he was delivered from another digital attack. To his chagrin when he shared his experience with some lawyers, he discovered that some person's phone had been hijacked through the process and millions of Naira had been scammed in the process. Also, on the 13th day of November 2019 @ 15:10 hours, WAT the Twitter handle of FOI Counsel was blocked as a result of unusual activities. The unusual activities referred to is the simple campaign for the auditing of the NBA's account.

On 25th June 2023, an unknown blog post was found on FOI Counsel's website. A few days later, the website was down with the homepage showing either the white screen of death or the index page for a few hours and it then became fully apparent that there was a hideous attempt to hack the website. The IT team contacted its host provider who offered a scan of the website and a restoration of a stable website backup; the scan result did not show any malware or virus but instead some suspicious files that needed to be removed even after the files were removed and backup restoration done, the attacks continued. The most interesting thing about the attacks is the unrelenting nature of the attackers. Between the months of August and September 2023, the organization witnessed 2,500 attempted attacks from locations such as Africa, Asia, Europe, and one local attempt from Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Cyber-attacks on lawyers ranges from phishing attacks, malware, ransomware, viruses, Trojan horse, spyware, and worms. Phishing attacks which is the most common type have become much more sophisticated, with attackers becoming more convincing in their impersonation of actual business contacts. There has also been an increase in Corporate Email Compromise, which involves hackers using phishing campaigns to acquire business email account passwords from employers and employees. On the other hand, Malware hackers gain access to networks, steal data, or destroy data from the computers of lawyers. Malware is usually spread by malicious website downloads, spam emails, or connecting to infected computers or gadgets. Trojan horse, is a type of malware that appears useful or harmless but contains hidden code designed to exploit or damage the system on which it runs. Lastly, Ransomware is used to encrypt a firm's data, preventing it from being used or accessed, and then the hackers demand ransom from the lawyer to unlock the data.

There is a need for increased digital security for lawyers in Nigeria. These incidences seemed to be rising; a preliminary survey by FOI Counsel has shown that more victims of breaches of digital security are widespread in the legal community and lawyers are apprehensive of using the internet for their legal services due to concerns of covert monitoring and censorship by government and other criminal elements. It is believed that lawyers lack digital security expertise making them perfect victims. The strategic assault and harassment of lawyers and human rights defenders, by government agents and authorities using the spyware device calls for urgent attention and proactive measures. Digital equipment is used to monitor lawyers' online activities especially those involved in combating government corruption and other illegal activities. In addition, the electronic and digital devices



of lawyers are hacked and infected with spyware devices. Messages are sent to their phones tailored to infect them with spyware. An Israeli cyber-surveillance company NSO Group, introduced Pegasus, a spyware that silently infects devices and has access to all written communications and web searches, even passwords of the infected device, and returns them to the client, while also providing access to the phone's microphone and camera, turning it into a mobile spying device that the target unwittingly carries with them. One of the downsides is the fact that it is believed to eventually turn into a powerful spying device that is used as a tool against journalists, politicians, lawyers, and other persons of interest, invading their privacy and personal space

The Pegasus Project exposed the government of illegal and subjective surveillance use of Pegasus spyware where some human rights lawyers, defenders, and journalists' phone numbers were compromised by monitoring all their phone activities, including emails, messages files, contacts, location information, and even record video and audio using a phone's inbuilt microphone and camera.

It is pertinent to note the presence of legislations for the protection of digital information and the punishment of violators of digital security in Nigeria. Some examples are the Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention) Act 2011, the Data Privacy Protection Act, and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999. Section 37 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 specifically provides for the right to privacy⁵⁷. The legal practitioner has a sacred duty of confidentiality to his clients. Any unauthorized disclosure of information by the lawyer amounts to professional misconduct. In view of this duty, the consequences of the breach of the digital security of the lawyer are apparent. There are multiple reports of hacks of the computer systems and phone numbers of lawyers leading to the loss of clients' data. Even in circumstances where the lawyer uses digital security tools, the online hackers find a way to bypass the same. This is unacceptable and brings the lawyer and legal profession to disrepute. Ultimately it leads to distrust, loss of clients, and financial loss

The use of the internet is unavoidable and legal practitioners must learn and use digital security tools, secure mobile devices with strong passwords, and install and update security updates regularly. It is recommended that cyber and digital security training be provided for legal practitioners as well as safe browsing habits to minimize the risks of cyber threats. Lawyers should make a shift from the conventional areas of law and explore technology and cybersecurity law to broaden their knowledge of the same. Law firms must start to prioritize cyber securing rather than just profitability and a larger clientele base. Firms should implement a password and multiple-factor authentication policy by mandating lawyers to change passwords after a certain period and such passwords should contain characterizations consisting of numbers, letters, and special characters, not to be easily guessed. Lawyers and other staff should be encouraged to use at least a two-factor authentication password. All hardware including mobile devices and computer systems that contain the firm's valuable data and confidential information should be encrypted every time data is transmitted into or outside of the firm.

By implementing these proactive measures and staying vigilant against potential threats, lawyers can enhance digital security and reduce the risk of surveillance and cyber-attacks.



Omobolanle's Death and Justice Served

On December 25, 2022 Mrs. Omobolanle Raheem, a lawyer and real estate expert, was tragically shot and killed by a police officer in Lagos. According to reports, the incident happened around 11 a.m. as Mrs. Raheem was attempting to make a U-turn. The officer, Mr. Drambi Vandí, who was an Assistant Superintendent of Police from the Ajiwe Police Division, fired at her vehicle. Mrs. Raheem was subsequently rushed to a hospital, where she was confirmed dead. Mr. Drambi Vandí was subsequently taken into custody, and legal proceedings ensued. On October 9, 2023, Justice Ibironke Harrison of the Lagos State High Court sentenced Drambi Vandí to death by hanging for the murder of Omobolanle Raheem. The verdict was delivered after a thorough trial in which the prosecution presented compelling circumstantial evidence against Vandí. The prosecution's case included testimony from 11 witnesses, comprising a pathologist, eight police officers, and two eyewitnesses. During the trial, Vandí was the sole witness for his defense. He contested the allegations, claiming that the ammunition shortfall was due to miscounting in his absence and that the bullet presented in court was not his. However, Justice Harrison dismissed his defense, citing the overwhelming circumstantial evidence presented by the prosecution.

The judge noted that while no eyewitness directly saw Vandí pull the trigger, the evidence clearly indicated his guilt. Key points in the judgment included the fact that Vandí's ammunition was found to be short by two rounds, and the bullet that killed Mrs. Raheem was traced back to his AK-47 rifle. The court concluded that the shooting was deliberate, not accidental, as Vandí did not claim to have fired the shot to scare the occupants into compliance nor did he suggest it was an accidental discharge.

Justice Harrison pronounced the sentence with the words, *"I hereby pronounce that you Drambi Vandí, shall be hanged by the neck until death. May God have mercy on you."* This sentence underscored the gravity of the crime and the court's commitment to delivering



justice. The family of Omobolanle Raheem, represented by their counsel Olakitan Bolu Agbaje, expressed satisfaction with the verdict. While acknowledging that the judgment could not bring back Mrs. Raheem, the family found solace in the fact that justice had been served. The verdict provided them with a sense of closure and reaffirmed their faith in the judicial system. On the other hand, the lead defense counsel, Adetokunbo Odutola, indicated that the defense team would consider their next steps upon receiving the Certified True Copy (CTC) of the judgment, suggesting that an appeal might be contemplated. The sentencing of Drambi Vandí to death by hanging for the murder of Omobolanle Raheem marks a significant development in the quest for justice in cases of police brutality in Nigeria.

This case highlights the critical need for comprehensive police reform and accountability to prevent such tragic incidents in the future. The judgment serves as a reminder that law enforcement officers must be held to the highest standards of conduct and accountability to ensure the safety and trust of the citizens they are sworn to protect.

FOI Counsel Marks International Day for Endangered Lawyers



KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THE LAWYERS

FOI Counsel celebrated the International Day for Endangered Lawyers with a round table conversation on the 24th of January 2024. Speaking at the event, the founder of FOI Counsel, Mr. President Aigbokhan stated that the most endangered countries for lawyers today are China, Iran, Honduras, Philippines, Colombia, Mexico, Pakistan, Egypt, and Cameroon. In Africa, Cameroon has replaced Egypt in the ranking. He further remarked that after journalists, legal practitioners are the next most threatened professionals and urged lawyers to prioritize their safety and promptly report any threat in the course of discharging their duties.

He classified threats to defenders to include both online and physical attacks. The attacks were further categorized to include intimidation, harassment, random arrest, kidnapping, contempt proceedings, detention, stigmatization, cyber-attacks, preposterous accusation, revoked practice license, administrative or criminal charge, increased taxation, cyber-attacks, and professional ban. Since 2010, the International Day of the Endangered Lawyer has been observed on 24th January in cities, countries, and continents around the globe. This date was chosen as the annual International Day of the Endangered Lawyer because, on the 24th of January, 1977, four lawyers and a co-worker were killed at their address at Calle Atocha 55 in Madrid, an incident that came to be known as the Massacre of Atocha.

However, the International Day for Endangered Lawyers is coordinated by a network of national, and international organizations including the bar associations. Furthermore, the purpose of the International Day of Endangered Lawyers is to draw the attention of government officials, international institutions, civil society, the media, and the general public to the plight of lawyers in a particular country and to create awareness about the dangers, threat, and perils encountered by lawyers in carrying out their legal duties. The first-ever International Day for Endangered Lawyers was dedicated to Iran in 2010, then Turkey in 2012 and 2019, Spain in 2013, Basque in 2014, 2015 to Philippines, 2016 to Honduras, 2017 to China, 2018 Egypt, 2020 Pakistan, 2021 Azerbaijan, 2023 Afghanistan, 2022 and 2024 to Colombia. This dedication was based on the very challenging circumstances faced by the lawyers in the respective countries⁵⁸.

Nevertheless, the annual commemoration of the International Day for Lawyers has taken a particular focus this year owing to the distinct challenges predominant in Afghanistan. This year's report also makes references to other African countries that commonly face the same threats and challenges the Afghanistan lawyers are facing and in some respects are even at a greater threat⁵⁹.

International Day for Endangered Lawyers is a day set aside to reflect on the courage, resilience, sacrifices, and commitment of human rights defenders particularly lawyers in their pursuit of justice, fairness, and equality. It serves as a reminder of the crucial role that lawyers play in advancing democracy, accountability, and the rule of law in their respective jurisdictions and fields of practice while highlighting the challenges they face and the collective responsibility to protect and support lawyers⁶⁰.

Health Tips

The Healthy Benefits of Bananas

Medically Reviewed By Jabeen Begum, Md On December 08, 2023

Written By Joan Raymond, Shawna Seed

Bananas grow from a tropical flowering plant. They're soft, sweet, and a convenient source of some important nutrients. They have origins in Southeast Asia. People have grown bananas since ancient times, and their health benefits have been promoted for more than a century. One medium banana has about 110 calories and is packed with important nutrients like potassium, magnesium, and vitamin B6.

Today, bananas are grown in more than 150 countries in tropical climates, including Africa, South and Central America, China, and India. There are hundreds of types. The dessert banana (Cavendish) is the most popular variety in North America and Europe.

Bananas are versatile as well as tasty. You can eat them raw, mixed into your favorite smoothie, or in a peanut butter-banana sandwich, banana bread, or muffins

The table below shows the amount of each nutrient in a medium-sized. It also shows how much an adult needs of each nutrient, according to the 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans Trusted Source. Requirements vary according to the individual's sex and age.

Nutrient	Amount in one medium banana	Daily adult requirement
Energy (calories)	105	1,800–3,000
Carbohydrate in grams (g)	27, including 14.4 g of sugar	130
Fiber (g)	3.1	25.2–33.6
Protein (g)	1.3	46–56
Magnesium (mg)	31.9	320–420
Phosphorus (mg)	26	700
Potassium (mg)	422	4,700
Selenium in micrograms (mcg)	1.9	55
Choline (mg)	11.6	425–550
Vitamin C (mg)	10.3	75–90
Folate (mcg DFE)	23.6	400
Beta carotene (mcg)	30.7	No data
Alpha carotene (mcg)	29.5	No data



Banana nutrients

Bananas provide vitamins and minerals, including:

Vitamin B6: A medium banana gives you about a quarter of the vitamin B6 you should get each day. It helps with metabolism. It plays an important role in brain development during pregnancy and infancy, as well as immune system health. B6 can help you sleep better, may help you lose weight, and may improve your brain health.

Magnesium: This mineral helps control your blood pressure and blood sugar and keeps your bones strong. It also helps your nerves and muscles function and boosts your immune system. A banana gives you 8% of what you need.

Fiber: One banana provides about 3 grams of fiber, which is roughly 10% of the recommended daily amount. Fiber can reduce your risk of colorectal cancer, lower your cholesterol, help keep your blood sugar normal, and help you maintain a healthy weight.

Vitamin C: You should shoot for 75 to 90 milligrams per day. With about 10 milligrams, your morning banana can get you well on your way. Vitamin C helps protect you from the damage caused by harmful molecules in your body called free radicals. These form in reaction to the food we eat as well as cigarette smoke, pesticides, and other potentially harmful things. Vitamin C also helps your immune system work well and can help you heal.

Vitamin A: This vitamin is good for your vision and might help protect you from cancer.

Heart benefits

Bananas are best known for containing potassium, which is a big player in heart health. This vital mineral and electrolyte carries a small electrical charge, causing nerve cells to send out signals for your heart to beat regularly and muscles to contract. Foods with potassium help protect against hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis) and high blood pressure.

A medium banana gives you about 450 milligrams, which is about 10% of what you need every day. Potassium-rich foods also help you get rid of more sodium when you pee and relax the walls of your blood vessels, both of which help lower your blood pressure.

Digestive Health

Despite their sugar content, bananas have a low glycemic index (GI) value of 51. (Glycemic index is a measure of how fast a food causes your blood sugar to rise.) Their fiber – which helps with digestion – is the rea-

son for this. Bananas contain a type of fiber called pectin, which can play a part in controlling how quickly you digest carbohydrates.

There's also evidence that probiotics can help with the annoying diarrhea people get after taking some antibiotics.

Green, or unripe, bananas are a good source of resistant starch, which is a type of carbohydrate that isn't digested in your small intestine. Instead, it ferments in your large intestine and feeds good bacteria in your gut. Resistant starch can make you feel fuller, which helps with weight loss. It's also good for dealing with constipation. Resistant starch can also lower cholesterol and reduce the risk of colon cancer. Because most people don't like to peel and eat green bananas – they're hard to chew – the unripe fruit is being used in flour and other food products.

Weight control

Eating low-GI foods may promote weight loss. Fiber, like that found in bananas, can also help you control your weight.

It's no secret that the right amount of fiber in your diet is good for you. An average-size ripe banana gives you 3 grams of it. That's about 10% of what you need each day. Most of the fiber in bananas is what's called soluble fiber. It can help keep your cholesterol and blood pressure in check and help ease inflammation.

In general, foods that are high in fiber make you feel full without extra calories. That also makes them a good choice if you want to shed a few pounds.

Cancer prevention

One study found that children who ate bananas and oranges regularly and drank orange juice, had a lower risk of childhood leukemia. Various compounds in bananas have shown promise against breast, cervical, colorectal, esophageal, liver, oral, prostate, and skin cancers. But more research is needed.

Memory and mood help

Bananas contain tryptophan, which is a beneficial amino acid. In your body, it gets converted to serotonin, which boosts mood. Many other substances in bananas are known to fight cognitive decline, which can cause memory loss.



VALIANT DEFENDERS



Gerardo León
Columbia



Abdul Samad Amiri
Afghanistan



Promise Frank Igwe
Nigeria



Samuel Ajiaka. A
Cameroon



Chief Bola Ige SAN
Nigeria



Anye Nde Nsoh
Cameroon



Gonzalo Cardona M.
Columbia



Ibrahim Ebrat
Afghanistan



Martinez Zogo
Cameroon



Jean Jacques Ola B.
Cameroon



Barnabas and Abigail Igwe
Nigeria

Afghanistan

Nasser Khalid
Toryali Rustam Khel
Bangladesh
Golam Rabbani Nadim
Shahidul Islam

Brazil

Nawir Brito de Jesus
Samuel Cristiano do Amor Divino
José Inácio Guajajara
Valdemar Marciano Guajajara
Raniel Barbosa Laurindo
Rodrigo Hawerth
Raimundo Ribeiro da Silva
Luís Fernando de Jesus Santana
Gilson Silva da Rosa
Lindomar Dias de Souza
Ilson Xiriana
Angelita Prororita Yanomami
Bernadete Pacifico
Venâncio Xirixana
Nhandesy Sebastiana Gauto
Nhanderu Rufino Velasque
Tymbektodem Arara
José Carlos dos Santos
José Alberto Moreno Mendes
Josimar da Silva Pereira
Agnaldo da Silva
Ana Paula Costa Silva
Aldecy Viturino Barros
Lucas Santos de Oliveira

Cameroon

Martinez Zogo
Jean-Jacques Ola Bebe

China

Sun Lin "Jie Mu"

Colombia

Mariela Reyes Montenegro
Cristian Fernández Salinas Chocué
Jaime Álvarez Romero
José Humberto Sierra Soto "La Gata"
Samuel Sabi Dorado
José Isaías Yandi Pacho
Alfredo Arrieta Vitola
Arley Jaramillo Monsalve
Berna Nastascuás Paí
Edilsan Andrade Avirama
José Antonio Santiago Pérez
Jorge Adolfo Cárdenas Fajardo
Yeisson Jácome Jácome
Milton Rocha Peña

India

Ramakrishna
Shashikant Warishe
Washim Sajad
Sarbudeen
Sendhu Munda
Nalla Ramakrishnaiah
Mohammad Haroun Mian

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Obedi Karafuru

Ecuador

Eduardo Mendúa

El Salvador

Marleni del Carmen Reyes

Eswatini (fmr. "Swaziland")

Thulani Rudolf Maseko

Guatemala

Nicolasa Lopez Méndez
Victoria Méndez Agustín
Sonia Janeth Guevara
Doris Aldana
Francisco Gonzalo Velásquez Gómez
Noe Gómez Barrera

Honduras

Aly Domínguez
Jairo Bonilla
Omar Cruz Tomé
Ricardo Arnaúl Montero
Santos Hipólito Rivas
Javier Rivas
Benigno Maldonado
José Gilberto Martínez Cardona
Amílcar Vieda
Naún Ismael Chacón

Rwanda

John Williams Ntwali

Sudan

Mohammed Ahmed Kudia
Khamis Arabab
Khidir Sulieman Abdelmageed
Abd Elrazeg Adam Mohammed
Tareg Hassan Yagoub Elmalik
El Sadeg Mohammed Ahmed Haroun

Ahmed Mohamed Abdella
Bahjaa Abdelaa Abdelaa

Paraguay

Arnaldo Benítez Vargas

Peru

Cristino Melchor Flores
Santiago Contoricón Antúnez
Quinto Inuma Alvarado
Benjamín Flores Ríos

Philippines

Danny Malinao
Arije Velasco Salvador
Alex Dolorosa
Crispin Tingal Jr.
Cresenciano Bundoquin "Cris"
Roly Fausto
Emelda Fausto
Rey Almarío Belan
Maria Saniata Liwliwa Gonzales
Alzate
Jude Thaddeus Fernandez

Thailand

Bounsuan Kitiyano

Ukraine

Denys Sosnenko
Pete Reed
Bodgan Bitik
Arman Soldin
Svitlana Klymenko
Yuriy Holovin
Victoria Amelina
Olha Ochkas
Anthony Ihnat "Tonko"
Emma Igual
Serhiy Shalyhin

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Isaúl Nemesio Zambrano
Miguel Estrada Reyes
Rolando Mauno Zambrano
Anonymous
Constantino Silvestre Pacheco Luis
Abisaí Pérez Romero
Alfredo Cisneros Madriga

& countless others

Source: HRD Memorial 2021 Report



No amount of space can capture the full story of every slain defender and lawyer who sacrificed their lives for others. Though they may no longer be with us, their bravery and sacrifice will never be forgotten. Their legacies of freedom, the rule of law, and human rights will endure and inspire future generations. Their unwavering commitment to justice and equality remains a shining beacon of hope for all.



About Us

FOI Counsel is a law group established primarily to provide legal assistance to NGOs and the media seeking for information, under the Freedom of Information Act 2011. We are also, the first Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Litigation-specialized firm in Africa. As the demand for our services increased we billowed into four thematic areas of work and these are:



FOI Advocacy & Litigation

We focus on ensuring transparency and accountability in government processes. This includes challenging government agencies that have refused to disclose information and litigating on behalf of individuals and organizations seeking to obtain government-held information.



Human Rights Litigation

We protect the fundamental rights of individuals and groups who have been subjected to violations involving a wide range of issues such as discrimination, police brutality, and freedom of speech, among others, and seek to bring justice to those who have suffered harm through legal means.



Land reforms & rural development

We promote equitable access to land resources and support the sustainable growth of rural communities. This involves advising on land ownership and tenure, supporting land-based livelihoods, and advocating for policies and programs that support rural development and the rights of rural communities.



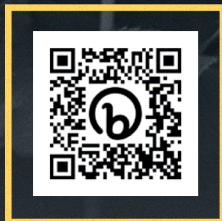
Research & Policy Advocacy

We empower change and justice through in-depth analysis of laws, precedents, and regulations, and effective advocacy strategies to shape policies and promote equitable outcomes in society.

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