

**BRIEF BY SHUAIBU USMAN LEMAN, NUJ NATIONAL SECRETARY AT THE 2016 INTERNATIONAL DAY TO END IMPUNITY FOR CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALIST, NOVEMBER 2, 2016, ABUJA.**

It is disheartening to note that, for the last decade, Africa has recorded some of the highest levels of violence targeting journalists in the world. These statistics constitute an indictment of the poor record on democracy and rule of law in most African countries. The lack of transparency, corruption and politics of exclusion often result in frustrations and violent rivalries, creating dangerous environments in which independent journalists become easy targets for powerful forces intent on suppressing dissent and evading public accountability.

The Media is classified as an essential service. It operates round the clock and at all times. Its special place is well recognized in any society. Known as the Fourth Estate of the Realm, it moulds public opinion and serves as the watch dog of society. It is a veritable source of information, education and entertainment. It serves as a bridge between Government and the governed while at the same time building support for Government programmes.

The Media affects people's perspectives, and generally shape lives. Its agenda- setting role and ability to reach a large number of people at the same time confirms its indispensability in building a healthy and progressive society. An evolving nation and democracy like Nigeria needs the media to build and maintain institutional framework and integrity.

Work activities in the sector follow a stressful pattern of hard work and round the clock regime. The hazards of work in the sector are well known and documented, the world over. The following facts are regrettably obtained in the media industry in Nigeria:

- 0- That highly skilled persons now shun employment in the media industry due to low pay and poor staff welfare condition.
- 1- That the long hours of work , tight time lines and electromagnetic radiation emitted from the equipment being used, combine to create an unhealthy work environment which is replete with stress induced ailments like hypertension, diabetes and ulcer.
- 2- That Journalists are exposed to accidents and injuries from high voltage equipment while maltreatment of Producers and Journalists

in the hands of overzealous security agents, political thugs and disgruntled elements in society are regular occurrences.

- 3- That Media workers in countries like South Africa and United Kingdom are celebrated. This is made possible by the attention, consideration and funding given by relevant authorities to the sectors. This is however not so in Nigeria despite the invaluable services being rendered by the sector which also provides the window through which other nations view and assess the country.
- 4- That the glamour associated with the sector has been eroded by the shabby treatment and poor remuneration of workers. And in many instances outright refusal to pay salaries.
- 5- That there is wide disparity in the Salary Package of workers in the Media when compared with other Federal Government Agencies like the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), National Examination Council (NECO), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Medical & Health Sector and the Banking and Oil sectors.

Added to these issues raised, many acts of impunity are a constant reminder of the failure of governments to uphold their international obligation to protect the lives and liberties of their citizens, including journalists. The systematic failure to address the ever increasing numbers of unresolved murders of journalists and other media workers feeds into the sense of impunity and encourages further violence against the media.

In addition to attacks on journalists, instigated or tolerated by the authorities, journalists are now facing a new, ruthless and non-state players in the form of armed militant groups such as Boko Haram in the North East, various groups in the Niger Delta, Kidnap gangs all over the country and various Freelance armed actors. These groups sometimes designate journalists as 'legitimate targets' for daring to report independently on the conflict ors crimes in which they are involved.

Boko Haram had on many occasions staged deadly attacks on public events and premises, with the sole aim of causing the deaths of the unsuspecting public and media professionals covering them. This new security situation increases risks to journalists' safety at work. It also means that journalists, their organisations and employers must develop new strategies to overcome these security challenges.

In addition, election periods in Nigeria and other violent demonstrations also constitute very dangerous assignments and moments for more safety consciousness and concerns for upholding ethical journalism.

Acts of impunity against Journalists clearly show that we need to be more proactive in working towards stemming the ominous tide of endless killing of journalists that is excruciating for families, worrisome for social relations and unacceptable to us as professionals - considering that notorious criminals and fraudsters are mostly accorded the right to remain alive to continue with their crimes. These ugly bloody scenarios cannot be completely extricated from our poor democratization profiles, lack of rule of law and transparency, corruption, politics of exclusion by successive administrations that often result in frustrations, violent rivalries and the indiscretion of some leaders, individuals and institutions that view journalists more as liabilities than assets.

The real danger is that those responsible for maltreating, maiming or killing journalists usually face no punishment. This increases levels of unresolved murders, nourishing the sense of impunity that encourages further violence against the press. These represent the primordial and irreconcilable dynamics in the evolution of the modern Nigerian society.

We must therefore respond and act together to build the awareness of government and decision makers on the safety of journalists and their support to ethical journalism in Nigeria. This will assist greatly in putting forward proposals for strengthening the judicial system to protect journalists and help end impunity.